

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY

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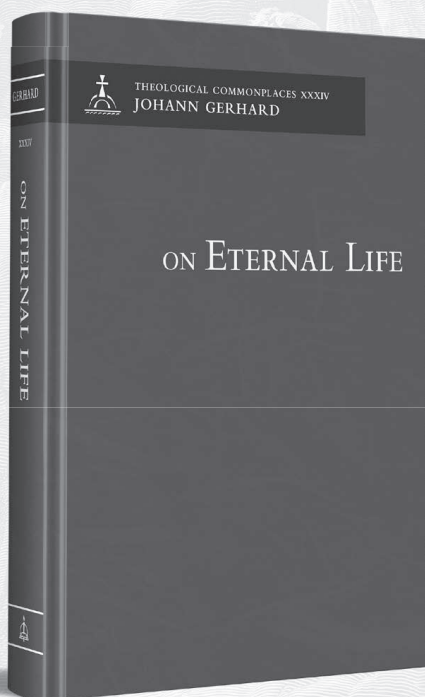
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“Salvation or eternal life is the completion and fulfillment of our faith because ‘now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face’ (1 Cor. 13:12). Now we walk by faith, but then by sight’ (2 Cor. 5:7). In eternal life, sight will succeed faith, and fruition will succeed hope, which is the fulfillment and completion of both.” — from the Introduction



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Trinity and the Bible

Carl L. Beckwith

Robert Jenson in 2004 asked the following question: “Is the doctrine of the Trinity in the Bible?”¹ Most Lutherans confidently and without hesitation answer yes. A harder question, one answered with less confidence and slight hesitation, pastors included, is this: *How* is the doctrine of the Trinity taught in the Bible? That question is harder because, as Jenson showed, many biblical scholars regard the Trinity as “an absurd doctrine” that has nothing to do with the Bible.² They contend that the Bible knows nothing of what Nicaea or Chalcedon confessed.³ Donald Juel, for example, longtime professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, asserts, “The New Testament contains no doctrine of the Trinity.” If the Bible contains no doctrine of the Trinity, where did it come from? Juel explains, “Full-blown trinitarian faith is a later, creative interpretation of the biblical witness by the church.”⁴ Juel’s position, shared by too many biblical scholars, both conservative and liberal, frees a person from any trinitarian reading of Scripture and assigns the doctrine to the creativity and Platonic interests of the early church fathers.

Not all biblical scholars think this way. Francis Watson, professor of New Testament at Durham University, laments what he calls the “scholarly anti-trinitarianism” of our day. Most academics, Watson explains, assign the doctrine of the Trinity to church historians and systematic theologians and insist that it is not a serious pursuit for the biblical scholar. Watson continues: “To present a paper on so useful a topic as ‘the doctrine of the Trinity and the Old Testament’ would be regarded as an outrage and a provocation at most gatherings of scholars of the so-

¹ Robert Jenson, “The Trinity in the Bible,” *CTQ* 68 (2004): 195.

² Jenson, “The Trinity in the Bible,” 196, “Some historicists take the supposed post-biblical status of the doctrine of the Trinity as liberation from what they anyway regard as an absurd doctrine. Others will say things like I used to, that while the doctrine of the Trinity is indeed not in Scripture, it is a proper development from things that are in Scripture—and indeed I might still say this in certain contexts, but have come to see that it is but a small part of the truth.”

³ Robert Jenson, “The Bible and the Trinity,” *Pro Ecclesia* 11, no. 3 (2002): 329, “The usual supposition is that the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Chalcedonian Christology which follows from it, are not in the Bible, and certainly not in that bulk of the Bible we call the Old Testament.”

⁴ Donald Juel, “The Trinity and the New Testament,” *Theology Today* 54 no. 3 (1997): 313. Despite Juel’s statements and his peculiar use of the word “doctrine,” his article provides good insights on how the New Testament presents the doctrine of the Trinity.

called ‘Hebrew Bible.’” What about the New Testament? Surely that would be a serious scholarly pursuit, right? Watson continues:

In the field of New Testament scholarship, one is expected to distinguish sharply between the nontrinitarian or at best proto-trinitarian conceptuality of the New Testament writings and a later patristic theology whose Platonizing tendencies are said to lead to systematic misreading of the scriptural texts.⁵

Why is it hard for so many Christians to explain *how* the Bible teaches the Trinity? Put simply, they lack resources. Many biblical commentaries in our day discuss the Trinity only when critiquing and dismissing the mistaken trinitarian exegesis and judgments of the church fathers. It is true that church historians and systematic theologians write about the Trinity, but rarely do they write about the exegesis that led the church to confess the indivisible oneness and irreducible threeness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Things were not always like this. Before Augustine wrote his influential work on the Trinity, he read commentaries on the Old and New Testament by his predecessors. Augustine explains:

The purpose of all the Catholic commentators I have been able to read on the divine books of both testaments, who have written before me on the Trinity which God is, has been to teach that *according to the scriptures* Father and Son and Holy Spirit . . . are not three gods but one God.⁶

It is sometimes forgotten how often the church fathers insisted on Scripture alone for their faith in the Trinity.⁷ Didymus the Blind, for example, begins his great work on the Holy Spirit by insisting that only proof-texts (*testimonia*) from the Scriptures will suffice to teach the unity and distinction of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁸ He then proceeds to offer one of the most helpful and detailed readings of Scripture on the Trinity in the early church.⁹ Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa, in his arguments with

⁵ Francis Watson, “Trinity and Community: A Reading of John 17,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1, no. 2 (1999): 168.

⁶ Augustine, *The Trinity* 1.7, trans. Edmund Hill, *Works of Saint Augustine* I/5 (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), 69. Hereafter I cite the series as WSA by part and volume number.

⁷ Cf. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 1.41, in *Corpus Christianorum: Series latina*, 168 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 1953–), 32:30 (hereafter CCSL): “Faith will stagger, if the authority of the divine scriptures wavers” (*titubabit autem fides, si diuinarum scripturarum uacillat auctoritas*).

⁸ Didymus the Blind, *On the Holy Spirit* 2, in *Works on the Spirit*, trans. Mark DelCogliano, Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, and Lewis Ayres (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 143–144; Didyme l’Aveugle, *Traité du Saint-Esprit*, ed. Louis Doutreleau, *Sources Chrétiennes* 386 (Paris: Cerf, 1992), 144.

⁹ A principal proof-text for the fathers and reformers was the baptism of Christ. Johann Gerhard once quipped, “If you do not believe the Trinity, accompany John to the Jordan and you

those who undermined the divinity of the Holy Spirit, insists that Scripture alone determines what we believe and confess about the Trinity. When opponents undermine our faith in the Trinity, we answer them with the Scriptures. Gregory continues:

We will answer with nothing new, nothing of our own making, to those who summon us to do such things. Rather we will make use of the testimony of the divine scripture concerning the Holy Spirit, through which we have learned that the Holy Spirit is divine and is called so. So then, if they themselves allow this and do not contradict the God-inspired utterances, then let them—so eager for battle with us—explain why they are not fighting against the scripture, but against us. We ourselves say nothing besides what [scripture] says.¹⁰

During the sixteenth century, several Roman Catholic apologists insisted on the necessity of the church's tradition for the doctrine of the Trinity. Johann Eck and Johann Cochlaeus both argued that Scripture only implicitly taught the Trinity and that the authority of the church established it as an article of faith. Luther adamantly rejected this and insisted that the faithful believe the doctrine of the Trinity not because the church tells us to, not because the fathers taught it, but because it is revealed "with the greatest clarity" in both the Old and New Testaments.¹¹

will see it." See Johann Gerhard, *On the Most Holy Mystery of the All-Hallowed and Ineffable Trinity*, Exegesis III, § 81, in *On the Nature of God and On the Most Holy Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Richard J. Dinda, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), 338. This appears to be Gerhard's own paraphrase of a long quotation from Epiphanius as quoted by Martin Chemnitz in his own discussion of the baptism of Christ. Martin Chemnitz, *Harmoniae Evangelicae*, chap. 17 (Geneva: Sumptibus haeredum Iacobi Berjon, 1628), 190. Cf. Epiphanius, *Panarion*, 62, 5.1–6.5 (Against Sabellians), in *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Books II and III De Fide*, trans. Frank Williams, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 126–127.

The troparion for Epiphany used in the Orthodox Church still expresses this conviction. It begins, "When You, O Lord were baptized in the Jordan / the worship of the Trinity was made manifest." Frances Young, in reference to this troparion, writes, "But in scholarly circles no one has imagined for a very long time that such a revelation might have been in the minds of any of the Gospel writers as they told the story of the baptism. The modern consciousness of historical difference has excluded such dogmatic readings." Frances Young, "The Trinity and the New Testament," *The Nature of New Testament Theology*, eds. Christopher Rowland and Christopher Tuckett (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 286.

¹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit* 3, in *Early Christian Writings: On God*, ed. Andrew Radde-Gallwitz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 272; *Adversus Macedonianos: De spiritu sancto*, in *Gregorii Nysseni Opera*, ed. Werner Jaeger (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 3.1, 90 (hereafter GNO): ἀλλὰ ἀποχρησόμεθα τῇ τῆς θείας γραφῆς περὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος μαρτυρίᾳ.

¹¹ Georg Major and Johann Faber, *Disputation on the Mystery of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation of the Son, and on the Law* (1544), in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), vol. 73, 488–489, hereafter AE. Cf. John Eck, *Enchiridion of Commonplaces: Against Luther*

Didymus, Gregory, Augustine, and Luther confessed the Trinity because of their commitment to Scripture; many biblical scholars in our day reject the trinitarian reading of Scripture because of their commitment, such as it is, to Scripture. What does this mean? It means that the fathers and reformers regarded and therefore read the Scriptures differently than many biblical scholars and theologians today. Raymond Brown, one of the most accomplished biblical scholars of the twentieth century, admits this. He regards any valuing of patristic exegesis *as exegesis* a failure. He continues, “I think we must recognize that the exegetical method of the Fathers is irrelevant to the study of the Bible today.”¹² And with that move, the Trinity loses. Let me explain.

If the Nicene confession of the Trinity and the Chalcedonian confession of the two natures and one person of Christ rested on exegesis for the fathers, indeed was only confessed because of how they regarded and read the Scriptures, if that exegesis is no longer relevant, deemed fanciful and misguided, then so too are the results of that exegesis. You cannot have one without the other and still claim to be a biblical theologian. Liberal biblical scholars and theologians do not regard this as a problem. Remember, they think the doctrine of the Trinity absurd. As Gregory of Nazianzus reminds us, false teachers “must have something to blaspheme or life would be unlivable.”¹³ The problem rests with those who continue to confess these doctrines but are unsure how Scripture reveals them and are therefore unable to teach the faithful from Scripture or to defend these doctrines with Scripture. This leads to two further problems. First, we risk reducing the Trinity to an article of faith that proves our orthodoxy but has little to do with our Christian faith and life. Second, when doctrine, any doctrine, is detached from Scripture, it always becomes false doctrine. This is especially a problem for those who take the Scriptures seriously and wish to confess the Trinity according to Scripture. The forgotten exegesis of the church

and Other Enemies of the Church, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 45–47.

¹² R. E. Brown, “The Problems of the *Sensus Plenior*,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 43 no. 3 (1967): 463: “Despite the serious attempt in our times to vindicate the exegesis of the two great exegetical schools of antiquity, Alexandria (Origen) and Antioch (Theodore of Mopsuestia), I would judge the attempt to give great value to patristic exegesis *as exegesis* a failure. I am not saying that the patristic study of Scripture is without importance—far from it, for it is the source of much of our theology. The Church Fathers accomplished a true hermeneutic task: they made the Scripture of an earlier and largely Semitic period speak meaningfully to a later Greco-Roman world. Perhaps at no subsequent period in the history of Catholic Christianity has the Bible been so much the focus of attention as it was in the patristic period. But while appreciating the rich patristic legacy in theology and spirituality drawn from the Bible, I think that we must recognize that the exegetical method of the Fathers is irrelevant to the study of the Bible today.”

¹³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 31.2*, in *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick Williams and Lionel Wickham (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 117.

fathers, medieval schoolmen, and Lutheran reformers is too often replaced with an insufficient or false reading of Scripture. The current enthusiasm for the eternal subordination of the Son among conservative evangelicals is a clear and troubling example of this.

The following essay focuses on these two further problems. I begin by showing how the church fathers and Lutheran reformers thought about the Trinity and the Christian life. Here we see that for them the doctrine of the Trinity was no mere article of faith. Part two turns to Scripture. Luther thought the faithful and especially those studying sacred theology needed to know how Scripture teaches the Trinity.¹⁴ Only by knowing this can we detect and refute false and improper statements about the Trinity. I will focus on John 5:19 for the Son and John 16:13 for the Holy Spirit, two especially difficult texts that were consistently read one way by pro-Nicenes, including our Lutheran fathers, but are now read in an anti-Nicene way by conservative evangelicals who teach the eternal subordination of the Son.

Part I: Trinity, Baptism, and the Christian Life

When I teach the Trinity in a conservative, non-Lutheran setting, I begin with a provocative question. I ask my students to imagine for a moment that the doctrine of the Trinity disappeared, that it no longer belonged to orthodox Christianity. I then ask them how this would affect their liturgy or order of worship on a typical Sunday morning and how it would affect their day-to-day lives as Christians. These further questions make some uncomfortable as they realize that very little changes for them. When little or nothing changes, then it would seem the Trinity has been reduced to an article of faith, used when needed to prove our orthodoxy, but otherwise regarded as irrelevant to our Christian identity. When I put these same questions to the fathers and reformers, however, I get a very different response. For them, everything changes, such that nothing recognizably Christian remains. Let me give some examples. I will start with the familiar.

In the Small Catechism, Luther writes: “In the morning, when you rise, make the sign of the cross and say, ‘In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.’” Likewise, “In the evening, when you retire, make the sign of the cross

¹⁴ Luther, *On the Last Words of David* (1543), AE 15:303–304. Luther also makes this point at the beginning of Georg Major’s disputation on the Trinity in 1544. He notes how the devil always seeks to attack and confuse the articles of faith. The devil had already done this with Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and justification. The same thing was happening with the Trinity. Luther continues, “And so it is expedient for Christians, and especially for those who are studying sacred theology, that they should know how to quench those fiery darts [Eph 6:16]. And as this is a matter set beyond our understanding, it behooves us to be fortified with Sacred Scripture, that we might know how to detect and dismiss slanders and to refute falsehoods because the heretics think that the Holy Scriptures are on their side” (AE 73:473).

and say, ‘In the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.’” (SC VII 1, 4).¹⁵ The same sign of the cross, the same divine name and confession of the Trinity placed upon you at Baptism, begins and ends your day. Here, Luther explains, we daily repent and put to death the sins and lusts of the old Adam that the new man would emerge, cleansed and righteous, living forever in God’s presence (SC IV 12). Here we find our life in Christ by the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father, daily remembering and participating in the promises and benefits of our Baptism and the saving work of the Trinity.¹⁶

Luther offers a fuller description in the Large Catechism. He describes the Christian life as daily Baptism, as the slaying of the old Adam and the resurrection of the new man, and insists that this defines our whole life (LC IV 65). This is why, in Baptism, declares Luther, “every Christian has enough to study and practice all his life” (LC IV 41).¹⁷ How do you daily study and practice your Baptism?¹⁸ By first knowing that Baptism is not based on your faith, but that your faith is based and built upon your Baptism.¹⁹ Knowing and confessing this frees you to live confidently and boldly in the certain promises and benefits of Baptism: “victory over death and devil, forgiveness of sin, God’s grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with his gifts” (LC IV 41).²⁰ The new man not only reposes in his Baptism but also honors it, embellishing and adorning it with good works.²¹ For Luther, as long as sin, death, and devil oppress you, you have need of your Baptism and the saving work of the Trinity. Here, in Baptism, we rightly know ourselves and the Trinity who saves; here we worship and glorify the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit.²² Elsewhere

¹⁵ Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 352–353.

¹⁶ Cf. Luther, *Babylonian Captivity* (1520), AE 36:59–60.

¹⁷ Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 441.

¹⁸ Elsewhere Luther expresses this in terms of doctrine and life. We study what Baptism is, what it means for us, and we put it to use, practicing and living in it, throughout our Christian lives. See Martin Luther, *Sermons on Holy Baptism* (1534), in *Martin Luther on Holy Baptism*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia, 2018), 55–59. Hereafter cited as Mayes.

¹⁹ Luther, *Sermons on Holy Baptism* (1534), Mayes, 53: “My being baptized is not my work, nor that of him who gave it to me, for it is not described as mine or the priest’s or any man’s, but Christ my Lord’s Baptism, and neither my cleanness nor yours may add a thing to it. It is not for me or any man to sanctify and cleanse Baptism, but we are all to be sanctified and cleansed by Baptism. Thus I will not base Baptism on my faith, but, on the contrary, my faith will be based and built on Baptism.”

²⁰ Tappert, *Book of Concord*, 441–442.

²¹ Luther, *Sermons on Holy Baptism* (1534), Mayes, 57–59.

²² Cf. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545), AE 8:145; WA 44:685.32: “In Baptism the voice of the Trinity is heard.” Luther, *Fifth Sermon on Holy Baptism, On Sexagesima Sunday* (1538), Mayes, 93: “Therefore, whoever wishes to be saved, let him cling to Baptism, in which we are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There are three persons, the true God, who baptizes us. Man adds nothing to it.” Luther, *Second Sermon on Holy Baptism* (1539), Mayes, 109: “In the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” that is, in the stead of the whole Trinity.

Luther puts it this way: “I am baptized, instructed with the word alone, absolved, and partake of the Lord’s Supper. But with the word and through the word the Holy Spirit is present, and the whole Trinity works salvation, as the words of baptism declare.”²³ Trinity, Baptism, the Christian life, they all go together for Luther. To talk of one is to talk of the other.

The *Formula of Concord* also emphasizes these points. It states (FC SD II 15–16):

[W]e should thank God from our hearts for having liberated us from the darkness of ignorance and the bondage of sin and death through his Son, and for having regenerated and illuminated us through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.

And after God, through the Holy Spirit in Baptism, has kindled and wrought a beginning of true knowledge of God and faith, we ought to petition him incessantly that by the same Spirit and grace, through daily exercise in reading his Word and putting it into practice, he would preserve faith and his heavenly gifts in us and strengthen us daily until our end.²⁴

Here the Formula, like Luther’s catechisms, construes right understanding of the Trinity with Baptism, and Baptism with the Christian life. It is in the faith of our Baptism, its promises and benefits, that we daily exercise through the reading of the word and in living the Christian life. These insights by Luther and the Formula are especially remarkable when we recall the insignificance of Baptism for the Christian life as taught throughout the medieval and late-medieval period. Although Baptism freed you from the guilt and punishment of original sin, it became of no value once you sinned. As Luther himself recalls, “I was brought up in the error of thinking my Baptism was useless to me.”²⁵ If it is the case that Baptism and Trinity inform each other, as our catechisms and the Formula contend, might it also be the case that an impoverished understanding of Baptism accompanies an impoverished understanding of the Trinity and to impoverish one or the other threatens the purity of the Gospel? Is it only a coincidence, for example, that those teaching the eternal

Then you know that it is God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit who is baptizing you; I am only supplying my hands for the purpose and speaking the words. Otherwise it is not my Baptism, but God’s Baptism. Therefore, you are baptized by God, not baptized by me. . . . [T]he Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is our baptizer.”

²³ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–1545), AE 8:264; WA 44:773.4–6.

²⁴ Tapert, *Book of Concord*, 523.

²⁵ Luther, *First Sermon on Holy Baptism* (1539), Mayes, 104. See *Third Sermon on Holy Baptism* (1539), Mayes, 113: “The pope made laws, and my Baptism was forgotten.” For Luther’s description of Rome’s improper understanding of Baptism, see *Sermons on Holy Baptism* (1534), Mayes, 15 and 50–51; *Sermons on Holy Baptism* (1538), Mayes, 63–64, 73, 77–78; and *Babylonian Captivity* (1520), AE 36:57–74.

subordination of the Son in our day also find Baptism insignificant and useless for the Christian life?

There is a further thing to note about the statement from the Formula. Notice how the concordists paraphrased Titus 3. They did not say we are regenerated and renewed but that we are regenerated and *illuminated* through Baptism and the Holy Spirit.²⁶ Their construal of Baptism and illumination highlights an important point of emphasis by Scripture and the fathers. The Bible describes the unregenerated and unrenewed state as darkness and the regenerated and renewed state as light (Eph 5:8; Acts 26:18). Believers alone are those who have been enlightened (Heb 6:4; 10:32), while unbelievers are darkened in their understanding (Eph 4:17–18)—indeed they dwell in a darkness of their own making (Rom 1:21–32; 2 Cor 4:4). Peter tells us that God called us, the faithful, out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9). John says that this light is Jesus (John 8:12), the true light, which enlightens everyone (John 1:9). This enlightenment or illumination, this move from darkness to light, belongs to our new birth, our regeneration by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5–7). For this reason, the church fathers often describe Baptism as illumination, indeed, even substituting one word for the other.²⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, writes:

Illumination is the splendor of souls, the conversion of life, the conscience's appeal to God. Illumination is help for our weakness, the renunciation of the flesh, the following of the Spirit, communion with the Word, the improvement of the creature, the destruction of sin, participation in light, the dissolution of darkness. It is the carriage that leads to God, dying with Christ, the perfecting of the mind, the bulwark of faith, the key of the kingdom of heaven, a change of life, the removal of slavery, the loosing of chains, the renewal of our complex being. Why should I go into further detail? Illumination is the greatest and most magnificent of the gifts of God.²⁸

²⁶ FC SD II 15–16 in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche*, 12th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 877: “et per baptismum et spiritum sanctum regeneraverit atque illuminaverit.”

²⁷ Augustine, *Sermon* 135.1 (WSA III/4, 346): “Wash your faces, be baptized, in order to be enlightened and to see, all you who couldn’t see before.” Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 61, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, trans. Leslie William Barnard (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1997), 67: “And this washing is called illumination, as those who learn these things are illuminated in the mind.” See also Cyprian of Carthage, *To Donatus* 4, in *On the Church: Select Treatises*, trans. Allen Brent (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006), 52–53.

²⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.3, in *Gregory of Nazianzus on the Trinity and the Knowledge of God*, trans. Christopher Beeley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 108. For the pastoral use of this text, see Johann Gerhard, *Handbook of Consolations*, trans. Carl L. Beckwith (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 29.

Gregory goes on to describe Baptism as a gratuitous gift, undeserved grace, a seal of God's promises (*Or* 40.4). He encourages the faithful, as Luther does, to make use of their Baptism, to practice it. When the devil attacks, Gregory writes, defend yourself with your Baptism (*Or* 40.10). He continues:

Say [to the devil], confident in the seal of baptism, . . . "I have put on Christ, I have been transformed into Christ by baptism. You should worship me." He will depart [from you], I know clearly, defeated and shamed by this, as from Christ the first light, so he will depart from those illumined by him. Such are the gifts of [baptism].²⁹

Baptism, its benefits and promises, informs the whole of the Christian life. It is our defense, our place of refuge, when faced with trial and temptation. It is also our teacher and protector when it comes to faith, worship, and prayer. Gregory of Nyssa writes:

[W]e are baptized as it has been handed down to us, into *Father and Son and Holy Spirit*, and we believe as we are baptized—for it is fitting that our confession be of one voice with our faith—and we give glory as we believe, for it is not natural that worship make war against faith, but as we believe, so also we give glory. Now since our faith is in *Father and Son and Holy Spirit*, faith, worship, and baptism accord with each other.³⁰

We believe, we worship, and we glorify Father, Son, and Holy Spirit according to our Baptism. All of this proceeds for the fathers and reformers from their Christ-centered, trinitarian reading of Scripture. Exegesis produces these sentiments—not creative analogies and certainly not Platonism.

Although the modern way of reading Scripture presents itself as more critical, more advanced, or more sophisticated than premodern readings, it proceeds from theological judgments.³¹ The exegesis of the fathers and reformers also proceeds

²⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.10, in *Festal Orations*, trans. Nonna Verna Harrison (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 106–107. For a similar use of Baptism, see Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermon on the Baptism of Christ*, in *Baptism: Ancient Liturgies and Patristic Texts*, ed. André Hamman (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 1967), 136.

³⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Letter* 24.8, in *Gregory of Nyssa: The Letters*, trans. Anna M. Silvas (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 194.

³¹ See Brian Daley, "Is Patristic Exegesis Still Usable?: Reflections on Early Christian Interpretation of the Psalms," *Communio* 29 (2002): 191: "Modern historical criticism—including the criticism of Biblical texts—is *methodologically* atheistic, even if what it studies is some form or facet of religious belief, and even if it is practiced by believers. Only 'natural,' inner-worldly explanations of why or how things happen, explanations that could be acceptable to believers and unbelievers alike, are taken as historically admissible. So God is not normally understood to count as an actor on the stage of history; God's providence in history, the divine inspiration of Scriptural authors and texts, even the miracles narrated in the Bible, are assumed to be private human

from theological judgments. The issue between modern biblical interpretation and premodern biblical interpretation is not whether we can read the Scriptures apart from theological judgments—we cannot and should not; rather the issue is which theological judgments proceed from Scripture and which stand apart from Scripture. Herein lies one of the notable differences between modern biblical interpretation and patristic interpretation. Modern readings of Scripture are fascinated with method. From the modern perspective, if you get the method right, you get the meaning right. Method guarantees meaning. Method is also transferable. It may be employed by believer and non-believer alike.

The church fathers do not think this way. They are pastors, not academics. They focus on the reader of Scripture, his measure of faith and spiritual maturity, always emphasizing the need for purification.³² Gregory of Nazianzus puts it simply: “Where there is purification there is illumination.”³³ For the fathers, no faith means no understanding. One of Augustine’s favorite verses, cited perhaps more than any other, is Isaiah 7:9 (Vulg.): “Unless you believe, you will not understand” (*nisi credideritis, non intellegitis*). No method alone, no matter how carefully and clearly worked out, no matter how attentive to grammar and history, brings a proper understanding of Scripture. Luther thought this too. Proper interpretation requires more than grammar and languages, as indispensable as these are.³⁴ The wise interpreter must know the meaning of Scripture and that meaning centers in Jesus Christ. We focus on the Son, Luther explains, that we might know him and through him the Father and the Holy Spirit. Luther continues: “To him who has the Son Scripture is an open book; and the stronger his faith in Christ becomes, the more brightly will the light of Scripture shine for him.”³⁵

interpretations of events, interior and non-demonstrable, rather than events or historical forces in themselves.”

³² Cf. Didymus the Blind, *On the Holy Spirit* 277, in DelCogliano, 227: “If anyone wishes to read this book, we ask he purify himself of every evil work and all wicked thoughts, so that he may be able, once his heart is enlightened, to understand what we have said [about the Trinity].” Augustine begins his *De Trinitate* by saying it is difficult to contemplate God and for this reason our minds must be purified and nursed back to health by the righteousness of faith (*De Trinitate* 1.3–4).

³³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 39.8, in Harrison, 85. There are no shortcuts for Gregory. In an oration on the spiritual immaturity of his opponents, Gregory asks, “Why do you then try to mold other people into holiness overnight, appoint them theologians, and as it were, breathe learning into them, and thus produce ready-made any number of [church] Councils of ignorant intellectuals?” (*Oration* 27.9, in Williams, 32).

³⁴ In a letter to John Lang in 1517, Luther complains that Erasmus knows his grammar and languages but is a lousy theologian: “I see that not everyone is a truly wise Christian just because he knows Greek and Hebrew” (AE 48:39–40). For more on this point, see *Martin Luther’s Basic Exegetical Writings*, ed. Carl L. Beckwith (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017), xiii–xiv.

³⁵ Luther, *On the Last Words of David* (1543), AE 15:339.

Although the fathers and reformers have many things to say about the proper reading and interpretation of Scripture, they focus less on method and more on the reader of Scripture, especially what makes a person a good reader of Scripture. The shift from method to person places Christ at the center of our reading of Scripture, and this sort of reading is only brought about by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace. We might say we read as we worship, and we worship in accordance with our Baptism. And if that is true, we can say with Nesteros, one of the desert fathers, that “true knowledge [of the Scriptures] is possessed only by true worshippers of God.”³⁶

Part II: The Forgotten Exegesis of the Church

John 5:19 reads, “Amen, amen, I say to you, the Son can do nothing from himself [ἑαυτοῦ] except what he sees the Father doing. For whatever he does, these things [ταῦτα] the Son does in like manner [ὁμοίως].”³⁷ This verse appears with regularity in the trinitarian debates only after the explicitly anti-Nicene council of Sirmium in 357. The bishops at Sirmium produced a statement of faith that condemned all substance words on scriptural grounds, specifically *homoousios* (“of the same substance”) and *homoiousios* (“of like substance”).³⁸ The Son’s birth or generation, which they repeatedly state is beyond understanding, conveys for them the Son’s subordination to the Father, who is greater in honor, dignity, glory, and majesty.³⁹

Responses to the Sirmium manifesto came from both pro-Nicenes and anti-Nicenes. Basil of Ancyra and George of Laodicea, who embraced the term *homoiousios* but rejected *homoousios*, used John 5:19 to show the *likeness* of Father and Son according to substance or being.⁴⁰ Hilary of Poitiers, a committed Nicene

³⁶ John Cassian, *Collationes* 14.16, in *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* (Vienna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, n.d.), 13:418: “etenim uera scientia non nisi a ueris dei cultoribus possidetur.”

³⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are the author’s translation.

³⁸ Hilary wrote his *De Synodis* against the *blasfemia* of Sirmium and the *blasfemantes* there gathered. See *De Synodis* 10 and 70, in *Patrologia cursus completus: Series latina*, 217 vols., ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1844–1864), 10:487 and 527 (hereafter PL). For a translation of the creed and discussion of it, see R. P. C. Hanson, *Search for the Christian Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 343–347.

³⁹ The language of Sirmium 357 appears again in the surviving fragments from Palladius of Ratiaria, a Latin Homoian opposed by Ambrose of Milan and condemned at Aquileia in 381. See Palladius, *Apologia* 347v in Roger Gryson, *Scolies ariennes sur le concile d’Aquilée*, Sources Chrétiennes 267 (Paris: Cerf, 1980), 318. See also the anonymous *Sermo Arrianorum*, preserved by Augustine, and his debate with Maximinus the Arian in Hippo around 426/427. Both texts are in *Arianism and Other Heresies*, WSA I/18. I discuss these texts below.

⁴⁰ Basil convened the synod of Ancyra before Easter 358 in response to the Sirmium manifesto and to George’s report of an emerging alliance between the Homoians and the Heterousian

theologian, also responded and used John 5:19 to show the equality and inseparability of Father and Son and their unity of nature and power. According to Hilary, his Arian opponents understood John 5:19 to grant a likeness of power (*virtus*) but to deny a likeness of nature (*natura*).⁴¹ Hilary regards the distinction between nature and power as philosophically confused and scripturally wrong. He contends that we know the truth of something, what it is, “from its nature and power.”⁴² Power is intrinsic to nature such that power exhibits the sort of nature a thing is by the things it does or the works it produces. When John 5:19 says that Father and Son do the same works in like manner, it indicates for Hilary that they have the same power by which they do the same works and therefore they possess the same undifferentiated divine substance.⁴³

Hilary’s correlation of nature and power is a significant point of emphasis for pro-Nicene theologians and informs a key exegetical insight used throughout the church’s tradition.⁴⁴ Pro-Nicene writers observed how questions of identity arose when Jesus did things belonging either to God alone or at the very least to some being greater than a mere man. When Jesus forgave the sins of the woman with the alabaster jar, those who witnessed this began to say among themselves, “*Who* is this, who even forgives sins?” (Luke 7:49). When he forgave the sins of the paralytic, the scribes declared in their hearts, “He is blaspheming! *Who* can forgive sins but God alone?” (Mark 2:7). When he rebuked the wind and calmed the sea, the disciples, filled with fear, said to one another, “*Who* then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41, emphases added). Jesus’ actions, his activities or works, raised questions of identity for those around him. The fathers pursued this insight, gleaned from Scripture, to argue that if Jesus did things belonging only to God, like

interests of Aetius. Basil wrote a synodal letter with anathemas, which Epiphanius preserves in his *Panarion*. This letter constitutes the earliest statement of what scholars refer to as Homoiousian theology. George wrote a letter in 359 following the drafting of the so-called Dated Creed, which Basil signed. Epiphanius produces the letter attributed to George immediately after Basil’s synodal letter. For the references to John 5:19 in these two letters, see Epiphanius, *Panarion* 73.8.4, 73.9.5, 73.11.2 (Basil) and 73.18.2–8 (George) in *Epiphanius III: Panarion haer.* 65–80. *De fide*, ed. Karl Holl and Jürgen Dummer, *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* 37 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985), 278, 280, 282, 290–291. Hereafter GCS.

⁴¹ Hilary of Poitiers, *De Synodis* 19 (PL 10:495); cf. *De Synodis* 75 (PL 10:529).

⁴² Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 5.3 (Sources chrétiennes 448:102). See *De Trinitate* 9.52 (Sources chrétiennes 462:124) for Hilary’s sequence of nature, power, and operation. Cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Contra Eunomium* 2.32, in *Fathers of the Church*, trans. Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 180: “If power and substance are the same thing, then that which characterizes the power will also completely characterize the substance.”

⁴³ Hilary of Poitiers, *De Synodis* 19 (PL 10:495). Cf. Hilary, *De Trinitate* 7.15.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 7.26–27; Didymus the Blind, *De Spiritu Sancto* 74–109.

forgiving sins or exercising power over nature, then he must be God. They used the same insights for the Holy Spirit.

The correlation of activity and identity stands at the heart of pro-Nicene trinitarian exegesis and its medieval and Reformation reception. Gregory of Nyssa states this succinctly: “If we perceive that the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one, differing or varying in no respect whatsoever, we must deduce the oneness of their nature from the identity of their work.”⁴⁵ Oneness of work or activity indicates oneness of nature. Didymus the Blind writes, “Those who have a single activity also have a single substance. For the things of the same substance—ὁμοούσια—have the same activities, and things of a different substance—ἐτεροούσια—have discordant and distinct activities.”⁴⁶ By observing how Scripture assigns certain works to God alone (so-called divine prerogatives) and further ascribes these unique works to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Nicene theologians showed how Scripture dogmatically teaches the indivisible and undifferentiated nature and power of the divine persons.

This pro-Nicene insight informs medieval and Reformation trinitarian exegesis. Thomas Aquinas, for example, writes, “the clearest indication of the nature [*natura*] of a thing is taken from its works [*ex operibus eius*]” because “different work [*alietas operationis*] indicates different nature [*alietatem naturae*].”⁴⁷ Luther uses the same exegetical insight. He writes,

Christ gives grace and peace, not as the apostles did, by preaching the Gospel, but as its Author and Creator. The Father creates and gives life, grace, peace, etc.; the Son creates and gives the very same things. To give grace, peace, eternal life, the forgiveness of sins, justification, life, and deliverance from death and the devil—these are the works, not of any creature but only of the Divine Majesty. The angels can neither create these things nor grant them. Therefore these works [*opera*] belong only to the glory of the sovereign Majesty, the Maker of all things. And since Paul attributes to Christ [the same and equal power with the Father (*eandem et aequalem cum Patre potestatem*) to create and give all this, it follows that he] is truly God by nature [*sequitur eum esse vero et natura Deum*].⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Eustathium* 6e, Silvas, 241, rendering ἐνέργεια as “work” rather than “operation.”

⁴⁶ Didymus the Blind, *On the Holy Spirit* 81 (DelCogliano, 168).

⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 1466 and 1912, trans. Fabian Larcher (Lander, Wyo.: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013), 2:70, 250, translation altered. See also *op. cit.* 1:171.

⁴⁸ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1535), AE 26:31; WA 40/1.80b.25–81b.22, translation slightly altered in bracketed section. For more examples from Luther, see *Martin Luther's Basic Exegetical*

Where did the fathers, schoolmen, and Reformers get this idea? Was this part of their misleading, creative exegesis? Did it come from Plato? No, once again, it was Jesus. In John 10, Jesus tells his opponents that the works [τὰ ἔργα / *opera*] he does bear witness about him (John 10:25). Jesus' opponents are mad because he referred to himself as the Son of God. Jesus continues, "If I am not doing the works [τὰ ἔργα / *opera*] of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works [τοῖς ἔργοις / *operibus*], that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father" (John 10:37–38). Similarly, when John the Baptist's disciples come to Jesus, asking if he is the one, Jesus answers by pointing to his works: "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matt 11:4–5). He points to his works, to what he does, to indicate who he is, as foretold in Isaiah 35 and 61.

Basil of Ancyra and George of Laodicea stand between the strong subordinationist position of the Arians gathered at Sirmium in 357 and Hilary's pro-Nicene insistence on the undifferentiated nature and power of Father and Son and therefore the correlation of activity and identity as seen above with Gregory of Nyssa, Didymus the Blind, Thomas Aquinas, and Martin Luther. Basil and George differentiate Father and Son in terms of power. They contend that the Father acts with supreme authority (ἀυθεντικῶς) and the Son subordinately (ὑποταγικῶς), and this indicates for them likeness rather than sameness of nature and power—hence *homoiousios* rather than *homoousios*.⁴⁹ Basil and George argue that the Son is the true Son of God, *like* the Father in divinity and activities, but this likeness retains difference and subordination. Basil and his colleagues therefore reject Nicaea's *homoousios* because it obscures the difference between the Father and the Son in authority (ἐξουσία) and therefore essence or divinity.⁵⁰ This anti-Nicene position, as we will see shortly, finds support in the *ESV Study Bible*. Before I turn to that, let me briefly sketch the interpretation of John 5:19 from Augustine to our Lutheran dogmaticians to show the remarkably consistent pro-Nicene reading of this verse and its use to interpret other difficult verses in the Gospel of John on the Holy Spirit.

Writings, 217–218 (Lectures on Galatians); 367–368, 371 (Sermons on Gospel of John); and 431–432, 444–445, 460 (Last Words of David).

⁴⁹ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 73.9.5 (Basil of Ancyra) and 73.18.4–5 (George), in GCS 37:279–280 and 37:290–291.

⁵⁰ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 73.11.9–10; GCS 37:283–284. Cyril rejects the position taken by Basil. In a lengthy discussion of the common works of the Father and the Son, Cyril denounces the use of ὑποταγικῶς for the Son and insists on the equal ἐξουσία of the Father and the Son. See Cyril of Alexandria, *De sancta Trinitate dialogi*, *Dialogus* 5 (Sources chrétiennes 237:334, 336): ἐνεργὸν ἐπ' ἀμφοῖν οὐχ ὑποταγικῶς ἀλλ' ἐν ἐξουσίᾳ τῇ θεοπροπέῃ κατοψόμεθα τὸν Υἱόν.

From Augustine to the Lutheran Reformers

Augustine's mature explanation of John 5:19 appears in *Tractate* 20 from his commentary on the Gospel of John.⁵¹ He begins, as Hilary did, by stating that the Son's equality rests in his eternal generation and personal relation to the Father. The Father begets the Son; the Father is not from the Son but the Son is from the Father.⁵² Therefore, when the Son says he can do nothing from himself (*a se*), he indicates that he works *as he is* and he always is in relation to the Father.⁵³ Augustine explains:

Since the Son's power (*potentia*) is from the Father, therefore the Son's substance (*substantia*) is from the Father; and since the Son's substance is from the Father, therefore the Son's power is from the Father. In the case of the Son, power is not one thing and substance another, but power is the same thing that substance is—*substantia* that he is (*ut sit*) and *potentia* that he is able to do (*ut possit*). Therefore, since the Son is "from the Father," for this reason he said, "The Son is not able to do anything from himself" (*a se*). Since the Son is not "from himself" (*a se*), he is not able to do "from himself" (*a se*).⁵⁴

When Scripture declares that the Father makes all things through the Son, it reveals for Augustine the inseparable working of the Father and the Son as they are, which means according to mode of origin and the ordering of the divine life.⁵⁵ With this in mind, the careful reader of Scripture will understand John 5:19 to mean the Son does nothing *from himself* because the Son is not *from himself*. Augustine uses these same insights for the Holy Spirit. John 16:13 states that the Spirit will speak nothing from himself. For Augustine, the Spirit does not speak from himself because he is not from himself.⁵⁶ He speaks *as he is*, and he is from the Father and the Son. These

⁵¹ Cf. Carl L. Beckwith, "Augustine's Mature Understanding of John 5.19 and the Doctrine of Inseparable Operations," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 73 (2022), 195–232.

⁵² Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* 20.4 (CCSL 36:205).

⁵³ Cf. Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* 39.4 (CCSL 36:346). Father and Son are always said *ad aliquid* ("with respect to something"). Augustine explains, "Truly God the Father is Father *ad aliquid*, that is, to the Son; and God the Son is Son *ad aliquid*, that is, to the Father."

⁵⁴ Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* 20.4 (CCSL 36:205).

⁵⁵ Cf. Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia Didactico-Polemica sive Systema Theologicum*, I, 9 (Wittenberg: Johannis Ludolphi Quenstedii, 1691), 327, thesis 17: "The real distinction of the divine persons arises from their order, both in subsistence and in activity. And yet we must distinguish between order of nature, order of time, order of dignity, and order of origin and relation. We ascribe no order of nature to the divine persons because they are *homooousios*, of the same nature and essence. Nor do we ascribe an order of time because they are consubstantial and coeternal, nor an order of dignity because they are of the same honor. But we do ascribe to them an order of origin and relation because the Father is from no one, the Son is from the Father, and the Holy Spirit is from both."

⁵⁶ Augustine's concise language derives from Didymus the Blind. See Carl L. Beckwith, "Augustine's Use of Didymus the Blind on John 5:19," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 31 (2023), forthcoming.

seemingly ordinary expressions from Scripture convey for Augustine the mode of origin and eternal relation of the divine persons.⁵⁷ More importantly, these phrases pattern the speech of the faithful to confess, according to Scripture, the indivisible oneness and irreducible threeness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who work inseparably according to their indivisible nature, power, and will.⁵⁸

Thomas Aquinas repeats these insights from Augustine. John 5:19 and 16:13 show for him that mode of origin and the distinguishing characteristics of the divine persons inform their works. The Son does nothing from himself because he is not from himself. He acts as he is. As the Son's being is from the Father, so too his power is from the Father—a statement taken from Augustine's *Tractate* 20.⁵⁹ Thomas writes, “Just as the *Son does not act from himself* but from the Father, so the Holy Spirit, because he is from another, that is, from the Father and the Son, *will not speak from himself*.”⁶⁰ For Thomas, the Son acts as he is, as the one eternally begotten from the Father; the Spirit speaks as he is, as the one eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Our Lutheran fathers repeat these pro-Nicene insights on John 5:19 and 16:13.⁶¹ Johann Brenz, co-worker with Luther, and Aegidius Hunnius, signer of the Formula of Concord, summarize the Augustinian reading of John 5:19 in their respective commentaries on John. Brenz begins by restating the pro-Nicene exegetical insight that common works indicate common essence, power, and will.⁶² He further insists, as Augustine and Thomas before him, that the divine persons work as they are. He writes, “Whatever the Father does, he does through the Son,

⁵⁷ Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* (CCSL 99.1–5) and *De Trinitate* 2.5 (CCSL 50:85–86).

⁵⁸ Cf. Ambrose, *De Fide* 4.7.74, in *Ambrosius von Mailand: De Fide*, ed. Christoph Marksches, *Fontes Christiani*, 3 vols. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 2:514. After quoting John 5:19, Ambrose writes, “There is in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, through the unity of the same substance, as we say, the same will and power both to do and not to do.”

⁵⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 749 (Larcher, 1:281): “*The Son cannot do anything from himself*, for the Son's power is the same as his nature. Therefore the Son has his *posse* from the one he has his *esse*; and he has his *esse* from the Father (John 16:28)” (my translation). Thomas's comment paraphrases Augustine, *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* 20.4 (CCSL 36:205).

⁶⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 2103 (Larcher, 2:328–329).

⁶¹ For another example of how our Lutheran fathers receive and clarify the insights of the church fathers and Thomas Aquinas, see Carl L. Beckwith, “Wordy Dogmatists and Endless Distinctions: Early Modern Lutheran Christology,” *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 62 (2002): 31–51.

⁶² Johannes Brenz, *In D. Johannis Evangelion* (Hagenau: Johann Setzer, 1529), 85r–85v: “Sed Deum ita patrem suum esse dixit, quod omnia sua opera, Dei patris sint opera: hoc est, quod eiusdem sint essentiae, potentiae, gloriae: adeoque plane unus Deus. . . . Non potest, inquit, filius a se quicquam facere [John 5:19]: hoc est, patris & filii eadem est potestas, eadem voluntas, eadem operatio: patris & filii opera communia sunt.”

who is the Word. Whatever the Son does, he does from the Father.”⁶³ The Father works as the Father of the Son and therefore always through the Son; the Son works as the Son of the Father and therefore always from the Father.

Similarly, Aegidius Hunnius insists that the Father and the Son work inseparably because of their indivisible essence and power. To separate the working of the Father and Son would be to divide their common *ousia* and *potentia*.⁶⁴ Why, then, asks Hunnius, does John 5:19 say the Son can do nothing from himself? Although some sixteenth-century Lutherans read this verse according to the economy, the logic of this text, as shown by the pro-Nicene tradition, deals with theology and the eternal relation of Father and Son.⁶⁵ Hunnius insists on this point. The Father is the principle of origin; he is from no one. The Son is begotten of the Father and receives his divine majesty and all that he is through eternal generation. Does this make the Son less than the Father? Hunnius says no. The Son is God as the Father is God—this indicates their unique and indivisible oneness—and the Son is eternally from the Father—this indicates their unique and irreducible relation.⁶⁶

These pro-Nicene insights are repeated by the seventeenth-century dogmaticians. Johann Andreas Quenstedt, the so-called “bookkeeper of Lutheran orthodoxy,”⁶⁷ summarizes, in his typical and remarkable way, Augustine and the best insights of the Latin tradition on John 5:19 and 16:13. The works of the Trinity toward creation are one and accord with the order and personal properties of the divine persons. Quenstedt explains, “Since the Father has his essence from himself, he acts from himself, the Son acts and works from the Father, and the Holy Spirit

⁶³ Johannes Brenz, *In D. Iohannis Evangelion*, 85v–86r: “Quicquid enim pater facit, per filium, qui est Verbum, facit. Quicquid filius facit, a patre facit.”

⁶⁴ Aegidius Hunnius, *Commentarius in Evangelium de Iesu Christo, secundum Ioannem*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Johann Spies, 1595), 226.

⁶⁵ For two examples, see the doctoral disputations of Theodor Fabricius (AE 73:447) and Georg Major (AE 73:496). John Calvin also reads this verse according to the economy.

⁶⁶ Aegidius Hunnius, *Commentarius in Ioannem*, 227: “Si vero ad Christum, qua Deus est, haec determinatio referatur, sicut ratio consecutioque textus arguit: tum sciendum, hisce respici ad principatum originis, qui penes Patrem residet. Solus enim Pater a nullo est, sed a semetipso. Filius vero a Patre est genitus, & per hanc generationem aeternam Pater omnem suam Maiestatem divinitatis ei communicavit essentialiter. Quamvis ergo Filius non minus est verus Deus, quam Pater, & proinde ratione essentiae divinitatis & maiestatis (quae una est omnium trium personarum) nulla differentia inter Filium & Patrem, quandoquidem non alia, sed eadem divinitate Filius, Deus est, qua Pater est Deus, eodemque cultu & honore ab Angelis & hominibus adoratur: tamen ratione originis tribuitur Patri hic primatus & praerogativa hypostatica, quod ipse a nullo est, Filius vero a Patre est. Ita haec determinatio nihil derogat divinitati Filii, sed tantum personalem quandam originis principatum notat, interim essentialem unitatem aequalitatemque non tollens aut convellens.”

⁶⁷ Isaac Dorner, *Geschichte der protestantischen Theologie* (Munich: J. G. Cotta, 1867), 530; Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology*, trans. George Robson and Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1871), 2:109.

acts and works from both.”⁶⁸ Quenstedt then quotes John 5:19 and uses the verse to show that mode of origin informs the inseparable and undivided works of the Trinity. He writes, “The Son, just as he is not from himself, but has his essence from the Father by eternal generation, so also he has not the power of working from himself nor does he act from himself, but from the Father.” What about the Holy Spirit? Quenstedt, as a good pro-Nicene, appeals to John 16:13. He continues, “In the same sense, as the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son, he does not speak from himself, but those things, which are of Christ, he receives and announces, as it is said in John 16:13.”⁶⁹ For Quenstedt, John 5:19 and 16:13 show that the Son works as he is, as the one from the Father, and the Holy Spirit works as he is, as the one from the Father and the Son.⁷⁰

Anti-Nicenes and Modern Evangelicals

The pro-Nicene reading of John 5:19 and 16:13 has been abandoned by some evangelicals in our day. These writers adopt an anti-Nicene exegesis for these verses to teach the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father and the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. Indeed, it is remarkable how similar the exegesis and preferred patterns of speech are between these modern evangelicals and the anti-Nicenes of the early church. The clearest anti-Nicene statement on John 5:19 and 16:13 from the early church appears in an anonymous Arian sermon (*Sermo Arrianorum*) that dates to the late fourth or early fifth century. The sermon begins with a creedal summary insisting that the Son creates and redeems “at the will and command of

⁶⁸ Quenstedt, *Systema Theologicum*, I, 9 (p. 328, thesis 21): “Addenda tamen regulae Augustinianae haec clausula; *Servato ordine & discrimine personarum*, quia enim Pater a seipso essentiam habet, ideo etiam a se agit, Filius a Patre, & Spiritus S. ab utroque agit & operatur, Ioh. V. 19. *Non potest Filius a se facere quicquam, nisi quod viderit Patrem facientem. Quaecunque enim ille fecerit, haec itidem & Filius facit.*” For further discussion of the Lutheran addendum to Augustine’s rule, see Carl L. Beckwith, *The Holy Trinity, Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics 3* (Fort Wayne: Luther Academy, 2016), 328–334.

⁶⁹ Quenstedt, *Systema Theologicum*, I, 9 (p. 328, thesis 21): “Filius, sicut non a seipso, sed a Patre per aeternam generationem essentiam suam habet, sic quoque a seipso operandi potentiam non habeat, aut a seipso agat, sed a Patre. Eodem plane sensu, quo Spiritus S. propter suam a filio processionem, non a seipso loqui, sed de illis, quae Christi sunt, *accipere & annunciare* dicitur Ioh. XVI. 13.”

⁷⁰ Quenstedt, *Systema Theologicum*, I, 9 (p. 328, thesis 21): “A seipso ergo non facit filius, ut Pater, cum non a seipso sit, sed a Patre, a quo ut essentiam ita quoque omnipotentiam habet. Paucis; ἀδύνατον, impossibile est, ut Filius quicquam faciat, quod non viderit facientem Patrem, ob ὁμοουσίαν Filii cum Patre & originem Filii a Patre.” Quenstedt, *Systema Theologicum*, I, 10 (p. 416, thesis 7): “Utut enim actio ipsa essentialis sit & agendi principium etiam unum & idem, modus tamen & ordo agendi distinctus est, pro distincta ratione ea, qua tres personae principium istud seu essentiam divinam habent. Qui enim Pater a se essentiam habet, ideo etiam a se agit. Filius autem a Patre agit & operatur & Spiritus S. a Patre & Filio. Pater operatur per Filium & Spiritum Sanct. sed non contra.”

the Father,” a phrase repeated throughout the sermon’s opening section to underscore the eternal subordination of the Son to the Father (1–9). The second section presents several theses that concisely state the distinction and difference of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who differ in nature, power, and work (10–31). Here the author uses John 5:19 and 16:13 to teach the subordination of the Son to the Father and the Holy Spirit to the Son. After stating that the Son is subject to the Father and the Holy Spirit to the Son, the author writes, “*The Son can do nothing from himself* [John 5:19] but awaits a sign from the Father for every detail. *The Spirit does not speak on his own* [John 16:13] but awaits the Son’s command for everything.”⁷¹ The final section of the sermon condemns the Nicene faith and any use of *homoousios* (32–34). The author concludes that Scripture shows the Father commands the Son and the Son obeys. This indicates that the Son stands beneath the Father and in subjection to him (34). The Son’s obedience and subjection does not belong to the assumption of flesh, to the economy, but is true of the Son before the incarnation, to theology proper (34).

Modern proponents of the eternal subordination of the Son repeat these sentiments.⁷² Bruce Ware, professor of systematic theology at the Southern Baptist Theological seminary, argues that “an authority-submission structure marks the very nature of the eternal Being of the one who is three. . . . The Father possesses the place of supreme authority [T]he Son submits to the Father just as the Father, as eternal Father of the eternal Son, exercises authority over the Son. And the Spirit

⁷¹ *Sermo Arrianorum* 20 (WSA I/18, 135; CCSL 87a:167). Augustine preserves this work at the beginning of his refutation of it. See *The Arian Sermon and Answer to the Arian Sermon* in *Arianism and Other Heresies* (WSA I/18, 133–171).

⁷² Modern proponents of the Son’s eternal subordination also appeal to 1 Corinthians 11:3 and 15:28. See, for example, the *ESV Study Bible*, ed. Lane Dennis and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2008), 2206 and 2214. Likewise, Maximinus the Arian, whom Augustine debated in Hippo around 427, and Palladius of Ratiaria, a Latin Homoian condemned at the council of Aquileia (381), use these verses to teach the Son’s eternal subordination. For Maximinus, see *Conlatio cum Maximino* 10 (CCSL 87a:392–393; WSA I/18, 192); for Palladius, see *Gesta Episcoporum Aquileia Adversum Haereticos Arrianos* 39 (Roger Gryson, *Scolies ariennes sûr le concile a’Aquilée*, 358). For the pro-Nicene understanding of 1 Corinthians 11:3, see Ambrose, *On the Christian Faith* 4.3.28–33, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, 14 vols., ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1952–1957), 10:265–266 (hereafter *NPNF2*); Augustine, *De Trinitate* 6.10 (WSA I/5, 212); and Johann Gerhard, *On the Nature of God*, Exegesis II, § 195, in *On the Nature of God and On the Most Holy Mystery of the Trinity*, 191. For the pro-Nicene understanding of 1 Corinthians 15:28, see Ambrose of Milan, *On the Christian Faith* 5.13.153–15.187 (*NPNF2* 10:303–308); Augustine, “Question 69: On the meaning of 1 Cor 15:28,” in *Miscellany of Eighty-Three Questions* (WSA I/12, 121–128); and Luther, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 15 (1534), AE 28:124–126, 141. See also Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951), 2:390–391.

submits to both the Father and the Son.”⁷³ John Starke, co-editor with Ware for a book on the eternal subordination of the Son, uses John 5:19 to show the Son’s subordinate working. He writes, “The Father initiates, and the Son obediently responds, since the Son does only what he sees his Father doing, and the power to do it comes from his Father (John 5:19).”⁷⁴ Ware and Starke’s preferred language for the Trinity echoes not only the language of the Arian sermon but also the anti-Nicene position of Basil of Ancyra and George of Laodicea. As noted above, they argue that the Father acts with supreme authority (αὐθεντικῶς) and the Son acts subordinately (ὑπουργικῶς).⁷⁵ Palladius of Ratiaria, an Arian opponent of Ambrose of Milan, similarly argued that the Father alone possesses “a unique and supreme authority” (*unica ac summa auctoritate*) and that the Son does only what the supreme authority of his Father commands him to do.⁷⁶

This anti-Nicene language and these theological concerns regrettably appear in the ESV and *ESV Study Bible*. Recall that Basil of Ancyra rejected Nicaea’s *homoousios*, in part, because it obscures the difference between the Father and the Son in terms of authority (ἐξουσία) and therefore essence or divinity.⁷⁷ The ESV shares this anti-Nicene concern and overcomes it by adding the word “authority” to several verses in the Gospel of John.⁷⁸ For example, according to the Greek, Jesus says in John 16:13 that the Holy Spirit “will not speak from himself” [οὐ γὰρ λαλήσει ἑαυτοῦ]; the ESV, on the other hand, states that the Holy Spirit “will not speak on his own *authority*.” Similarly, Jesus states in John 12:49, according to the Greek, “For I have not spoken from myself [ὅτι ἐγὼ ἐξ ἑμαυτοῦ οὐκ ἐλάλησα], but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment, what I should say, and

⁷³ Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 21.

⁷⁴ John Starke, “Augustine and His Interpreters,” in *One God in Three Persons*, ed. Bruce Ware and John Starke (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 169–170. Augustine explicitly rejects the idea of the Father initiating a work that the Son completes. See Augustine, *Sermon* 135.3 (WSA III/4, 347): “These people [the Latin Homoians] who don’t understand and walk around with eyes still unopened, they are in the habit of saying, ‘The Father did it by giving the order, the Son by carrying it out.’” See further *Sermon* 126.9 and in *Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* 20.7 and 20.9. It is difficult to understand how the Father initiating an act that the Son obediently responds to avoids positing an interval or delay between the willing of the Father and the Son. Pro-Nicenes reject this idea. See, for example, Gregory of Nyssa, *Ad Ablabium* (GNO 3.1; 49.6–7, and 51.19–20). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work “jointly, inseparably, and mutually,” and this means there is no delay or interval “in the movement of the divine will from the Father through the Son and to the Holy Spirit.”

⁷⁵ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 73.9.5 (Basil) and 73.18.4–5 (George); GCS 37:279–280 and 37:290–291.

⁷⁶ Palladius, *Apologia* 346r (Gryson, *Scolies*, 312).

⁷⁷ See note 50.

⁷⁸ On the use of ἐξουσία in the Gospel of John, see William Weinrich, *John 1:1–7:1, Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 162.

what I should speak.” The ESV, however, has Jesus say, “For I have not spoken on my own *authority*, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.” Why add the word “authority” to these verses? The answer is found in the *ESV Study Bible*. It explains: “*Not . . . on my own authority* indicates again that the supreme authority in the Trinity belongs to the Father, and delegated authority to the Son, though they are equal in deity.”⁷⁹ Note the insistence on supreme authority. This was the phrase used by Palladius, Basil of Ancyra, and George of Laodicea to distinguish the Father and the Son.

For Basil of Ancyra and those who agreed with him, their understanding of the Father’s supreme authority and the Son’s eternal subordination entailed the rejection of Nicaea’s *homoousios*. Hilary of Poitiers agreed. To teach the Son’s eternal subordination rejected the faith of Nicaea. Bruce Ware does not agree. He writes, “To deny *homoousios* and the full deity of the Son is unthinkable for those who advance this position [the eternal subordination of the Son]. So the charge that our position entails its denial is weighty, serious, and grave, but a charge that we reject altogether.”⁸⁰ Basil and his colleagues thought the two positions incompatible. Hilary and the pro-Nicenes thought the two positions incompatible. Bruce Ware does not. From a historical perspective, Ware’s position is partly Nicene and partly anti-Nicene. He uses Nicene words with anti-Nicene meanings. Our dear Martin Luther warned us about this sort of thing when he said that “error lies in meaning not words.”⁸¹

Conclusion

Does the Bible teach the Trinity? Yes. How do we know this? By meditating upon the Scriptures with the faithful who have gone before us, by remembering with gratitude the history of God’s church and our identity and place in that history—in short, by studying and practicing our Baptism. Basil of Caesarea writes:

As we are baptized, so also do we believe; as we believe, so also do we sing the doxology. Since, then, baptism has been given to us by our Savior in the name

⁷⁹ *ESV Study Bible*, 2050. This teaching appears throughout the *ESV Study Bible*. See also the notes for John 3:35; 5:19; 14:28; Matthew 28:18; Mark 10:40; Acts 2:33; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 15:28; Ephesians 1:4.

⁸⁰ Bruce Ware, “Does Affirming an Eternal Authority-Submission Relationship in the Trinity Entail a Denial of *Homoousios*?” in *One God in Three Persons*, 248.

⁸¹ Luther, *Disputation on the Divinity and Humanity of Christ* (1540), AE 73:269; Luther, *Disputatio de divinitate et humanitate Christi* (1540), WA 39/2:109a.21–22. Cf. Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate* 2.3 (Sources chrétiennes 443:278): “Heresy arises from the understanding not from scripture; the explanation, not the text, is to blame.” Faustinus, *De Trinitate* 1.1 (PL 13:38): “The Arian impiety, when called upon to confess the divine faith, asserts many things with the same words as we use but not with the same sense.”

of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we offer the confession of our faith in accordance with our baptism, and in accordance with our faith we also sing the doxology, glorifying the Holy Spirit along with the Father and the Son.⁸²

My friends, practice your Baptism, and as you do, meditate upon the Scriptures and delight in the faithful labors of the fathers and reformers. Confess and teach that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work inseparably as they are according to their indivisible nature, power, and will. Confess and teach that there is no supreme authority or delegated authority, no eternal subordination, no superiority or inferiority in the divine being of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Take your stand with Gregory of Nazianzus, who, speaking to those awaiting Baptism, entrusts to them the confession of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He continues:

This I give you as a companion and protector for all your life, the one divinity and power, found in unity in the three, and gathering together the three as distinct; neither uneven in essences or natures, nor increased or decreased by superiorities or inferiorities; from every perspective equal, from every perspective the same. . . . Each God when considered in himself; as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Spirit; each preserving his properties.⁸³

May we with Gregory and all the faithful claim this confession as our companion and protector throughout our lives.

⁸² Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 159, in *Loeb Classical Library*, trans. Roy Deferrari (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 2:395–397, translation slightly altered. For similar language, see also Basil, *Ep.* 91, 125, and 210.

⁸³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.41 (Harrison, 136–137; SC 358:292): “οὔτε ἀνώμαλον οὐσίαις ἢ φύσεσιν οὔτε δὲ αὐξομένην ἢ μειουμένην ὑπερβολαῖς καὶ ὑφέσεσι, πάντοθεν ἴσην.” Cf. Gregory, *Oration* 31.9 (Wickham, 123; Sources chrétiennes 250:392–393): “No, the language here gives no grounds for any deficiency, for any subordination in being [Ἄλλ’ οὐκ ἐλλείψεως ταῦτα ποθεν, οὐδὲ τῆς κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν ὑφέσεως]. The very facts of not being begotten, of being begotten, and of proceeding, give them whatever names are applied to them—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit respectively.”

Christ as the Author and Content of the Scriptures

David P. Scaer

Three stories famously told about Karl Barth typify the question of whether theology can be based on an inspired Bible without a historically grounded Christology. Carl F. H. Henry relates how Barth responded to a question on whether the resurrection of Jesus happened in history. Rather than answering the question, he responded that he appeared to the disciples, for whom it had significance.¹ A similar story surfaced at the time of the inquiry into the theology of the St. Louis seminary in the 1970s, claiming Barth was heard to have said that a photograph could not have been taken of Jesus' resurrection. Maybe so, but before and after, photographs of the place where Jesus' body lay could have been taken. Henry noted that Barth "refused to ground Christian faith in objective history and objective knowledge."² At another occasion at the University of Chicago, where Barth was to receive an honorary degree, he was asked what the greatest theological truth was. He responded, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Such an answer presumes the prior conviction that the Bible is a revelatory word of God. The angel's words, "Come, see the place where he lay" (Matt 28:5–6),³ to look at the empty tomb, still invite us to examine the evidence, which "the other disciple" accepted (John 28:20). In finding the orderly condition of the burial clothes in the tomb, he believed that Jesus had risen from the dead (John 20:2–9). Historical evidence matters for faith. Barth could be on both sides of the historical question so that he could answer yes and no to the factuality of the resurrection. For him, history was subsumed into revelation, a view characteristic of neoorthodoxy in general, and thus biblical history (*Historie*) was insulated within revelation and made immune to critique. In this way of thinking, faith in Christ comes from confronting him in the Bible as a supernaturally revealed book and not from confronting him in the historical person of Jesus.

¹ Carl F. H. Henry, "Cross-Currents in Contemporary Theology," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 11.

² Henry, "Cross-Currents in Contemporary Theology," 5.

³ All Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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Lutheran Orthodoxy held that the Scriptures have *autopistia* [“credibility on the basis of themselves”] in that they testified to themselves as the word of God.⁴ Standing as it is, the *autopistia* is an argument in a circle that does not require historical grounding. Without having addressed radical nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical criticism on its own terms, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod was unprepared to address Rudolf Bultmann’s radical demythologizing when it found an entrance into the faculty of Concordia Seminary (St. Louis) in the 1950s.⁵ Demonstrating the Bible’s historical reliability belongs to the discipline of apologetics, which is used to convince unbelievers that it is factually reliable, and thus what it says about Jesus cannot be ignored. Whether faith is created by it is another question.

Many have denied the necessity of a historical Jesus and thus a christologically founded Bible. Barth saw Christ as the Word of God and accordingly did not engage in historical criticism. His attention was on Christ as the revelation of God and not Jesus of Nazareth as a historical figure who by the working of the Holy Spirit is confessed as the Son of God. Barth interpreted the Bible christologically, but it is a Christology without historical dimensions. Theology for him did not begin with a historically defined Christology, that Jesus really lived, died, and rose again and thus the man Jesus of Nazareth determined what we should believe. For Barth, there was no “something” behind the word spoken or written that gives that word its substance. While Luther held that the Bible was throughout christological, including the Old Testament, many if not most Evangelicals do not.⁶ Notger Slenczka, a Lutheran professor at the Humboldt University in Berlin, sees no Christology in the

⁴ Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 1, *A Study of Theological Prolegomena* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 296–300. Unlike the classical Reformed and now Evangelical view, the Spirit works through and not alongside the Scriptures. For Johann Gerhard, the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (Scripture’s *autopistia*), was one of *three* arguments for the authority of the Scriptures. Another of these arguments included the testimony of the ancient church. See Johann Gerhard, *On the Nature of Theology and On Scripture*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes, trans. Richard J. Dinda, rev. ed., *Theological Commonplaces, Exegesis I* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), 59–60, § 36.

⁵ See Olav Valen-Sendstad, *The Word That Can Never Die* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966).

⁶ The Lutheran christological interpretation of the Bible is evidenced in the reformer’s messianic interpretation of the Old Testament that became more intense as he worked with the text. For a recent and convincing discussion of this, see Eric T. Lundeen, “Luther’s Messianic Translations of the Hebrew Bible,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 24–41. See also a study on the Christology of the Old Testament in G. K. Beale, “Finding Christ in the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 63, no. 1 (March 2020): 25–50. Beale favors typology, which because of its nature does not impose on the Old Testament something that was not intended by the authors, as is evident when he writes: “This [Beale’s] approach does not read in christological ideas where they are not present but develops the original meaning of the Old Testament” (23).

Old Testament and favors deeding it over to the Jewish community as the Hebrew Bible. Any question of its christological content would be become moot.⁷

For his task as a preacher, the pastor in preparing his sermons assumes he has in front of him a historically reliable biblical text along with the kind of Christology proposed in the Nicene Creed. Without the former, the preacher will find himself expounding texts that may not be true to fact and would have reason to look outside the biblical texts for something to preach. On the other hand, while he may recognize the inspired character of the biblical text, he may have difficulty in locating its christological content in the assigned text and so he may look for other biblical texts. In returning to favored passages, he creates a mini-canon. He may hold that Christ is the content of the Scriptures, but has difficulty in locating Christ in some texts. Commitment to biblical authority at least helps guarantee that its christological content will be recognized.

Biblical infallibility is not subject to historical critique; however, the Bible's divine content is approached through its human character, which is open to literary critique. To err is human. This does not mean that everything human beings do is fraught with error. An administrative assistant prone to error in writing letters will soon be replaced. We might be living in an age of electronic inerrancy, such as in financial and credit card statements. Apologetics assumes the trustworthy character of the biblical documents and defends what is challenged. Historical criticism works with the same data but begins at the opposite pole, and the most radical criticism assumes that the biblical narratives lack authenticity until proven otherwise. Both apologetics and historical criticism work with historical evidences rather than abstract doctrines. Critical methods do not have a uniform method in analyzing the biblical data. There is no once-and-for-all critical method. For example, some hold that only those biblical events with parallels in non-biblical literature probably happened. Others take an opposing view that only those that are unique and without parallel in non-biblical literature really happened. Most methods fall in between the two extremes. Lack of agreement on one historical method fueled the search for the historical Jesus, which began in the eighteenth century. When people determine in

⁷ Ludger Schwenhorst-Schonberger, "Marcion on the Elbe," *First Things* 288 (December 2018): 21–26.⁸ Robert W. Jenson argues that since without the faith of the church there would be no Bible, what the church believes cannot be separated from a historical-critical study of the Bible: "The final reason that one cannot interpret the Bible independently of the church and its dogma is that without these there is no such book." He goes on to say, "The modern attempt to interpret Scripture 'historically' has been intrinsically self-defeating and has now defeated itself, since it has curiously supposed that to interpret the Bible historically we must abstract from the history for whose attestation the church assembled this collection in the first place, the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ." Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune God, Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59. Historical critique belongs to the human experience in that on basis of past experiences we find some things to be more probable than others.

Scripture what is probable and what is not, this is based on prior philosophical principles that are assumed and not proven. A biblically reported event can be historically examined and found to have taken place, but a positive historical conclusion cannot by itself determine God as its cause.⁸ Historical apologetics especially in regard to the resurrection narratives is not unknown to the biblical writers.⁹

In preparing his sermon, the preacher assumes the integrity of the biblical text (i.e., the inerrancy) and the christological content. This is necessary for creating and confirming faith, which is the sermon's purpose. Robert D. Preus (1924–1995) typically introduced his sermons, which were unexcelled in magnificent Christology, with an ode to the inspiration and inerrancy of the text, but without relating one to the other. For some, an inerrant text may be christological, but not necessarily so. Along with their commitment to biblical inspiration, some theologians of Lutheran Orthodoxy also held that the Logos, the hypostatic Word, "is the heart and content and meaning of the prophetic Word; He is the heart and purpose of all the Scriptures,"¹⁰ but Preus notes that they refuse to show "how Christ is present in the Word of Scripture and how Scripture brings Christ to us."¹¹ Abraham Calov went so far as to equate Christ with the Bible: "The Word of Scripture and the Word of Christ, Old Testament as well as New Testament, are identical,"¹² a view about which Luther was adamant. Just as Christ is the sole content of the Scriptures, he is the subject of all theology. Without the Spirit's inspiration, the Scriptures would not be the word of God, and without Christ they

⁸ Robert W. Jenson argues that since without the faith of the church there would be no Bible, what the church believes cannot be separated from a historical-critical study of the Bible: "The final reason that one cannot interpret the Bible independently of the church and its dogma is that without these there is no such book." He goes on to say, "The modern attempt to interpret Scripture 'historically' has been intrinsically self-defeating and has now defeated itself, since it has curiously supposed that to interpret the Bible historically we must abstract from the history for whose attestation the church assembled this collection in the first place, the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ." Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune God, Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 59. Historical critique belongs to the human experience in that on basis of past experiences we find some things to be more probable than others.

⁹ Matthew in refuting the deniers of the virgin birth and the resurrection (Matt 27:57–66; 28:12–15) with the intent that his Jewish hearers would abandon their leaders resembles a modern apologist. Luke is the critical historian in describing how he dealt with sources (Luke 1:1–4). Paul's listing of the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor 15:5–7) would have been useless, unless they were known to the Corinthians. Though the English "apologetics" is derived from the Greek work *apologia*, Luke does not use it in the modern sense. For Luke, it is arguably synonymous with his Gospel (Luke 12:11; 21:13). Paul uses *apologia* in a judicial sense in defending the conduct of his life (Acts 22).

¹⁰ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:270.

¹¹ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:374.

¹² Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:373–375.

would not be worth reading.¹³ Biblical inspiration and Christology are often presented separately. A deceased colleague required students to place one Bible passage on every page of a sermon to give it the ring of “thus saith the Lord.” Similarly, mere inclusion of the word *Christ* in a sermon does not make it christological. It can be a covering for false doctrine as with Harry Emerson Fosdick’s hymn “God of Grace and God of Glory.” Its second stanza, “Lo, the hosts of evil round us Scorn the Christ, assail His ways!” (*LSB* 850), seems to describe the Christus Victor theme that God conquers Satan, until one learns that Fosdick was the leading modernist preacher of the first half of the twentieth century and believed in neither devils nor Christ’s deity. His hymn’s title, “God of Grace,” had no Reformation meaning for him.

A pastor’s weekly challenge is forging a sermon that is biblically dependent with christological substance. When the search for an adequate Christology fails in what he finds to be the barren places of the Old Testament and even parts of the New Testament—for example, the Sermon on the Mount and the Book of James—he can find a reservoir of more suitable passages often found in John and Paul’s writings. Coming up empty-handed, he may go to the Small Catechism, which by frequent citation becomes a functional authority. Maybe this is not a *homoousion* with the Confessions matching the Bible in authority, but it is surely *homoiousion*.¹⁴ A sermon is made christological by a transfusion from the Lutheran dogmatic tradition into the biblical texts and so comes to resemble a dogmatics lecture without the preacher coming to terms with the text. Pastors are faced every week with the staggering task first of having to come to terms with the biblical texts and then putting the findings into an intelligible and convincing sermon. Inspiration of a text and its inerrancy are givens, but locating its christological content is the challenge.

Faced with a variety of interpretations from the commentaries, a pastor can find relief in Paul’s definition that “the gospel,” which he must preach, is that Christ was put to death for our sins and raised for our justification (Rom 4:25). Yet for Paul this was only the beginning of the gospel (1 Cor 15:3–4) and not its totality. “Gospel” in the New Testament refers to the entire narrative, written or proclaimed, of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (Matt 24:14; 26:13; Mark 1:1; 13:10; 14:9) and not the bare bones pronouncement that sins are forgiven. The gospel for which Paul was set aside had to do with Christ’s descent from David and his resurrection (Rom 1:1–4; 2 Tim 2:8). Compare this with what was proposed by the pre-1974 faculty

¹³Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:373–375.

¹⁴In his influential *The Christian Faith*, Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher proposed that just as the New Testament took precedence over the Old Testament, so the confessional documents of what he calls the Evangelical Church, the Lutheran and Reformed, take precedence over the Gospels. Schwienhorst-Schonberger, “Marcion on the Elbe,” 23.

majority of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, that the gospel was hardly more than the proclamation that sins were forgiven. Historical details of Christ's life were incidental.¹⁵

LCMS events in the 1970s gave reason for some to make common cause with the Evangelicals, who took the lead in opposing radical historical criticism. Evangelicals require prior allegiance to the canon as a constitutional requirement of God's covenant.¹⁶ Providence as evident in its preservation for two thousand years is reason enough to trust God. Testimony of the Spirit and not the Bible's christological content causes it to be recognized as authoritative.¹⁷ A heightened interest among Evangelicals and Lutherans in liturgy, the historical creeds, and the early church fathers may spring from an awareness that a theology defined solely by biblical inspiration may be lacking in a historically grounded Christology.¹⁸ Apostolic church fathers accepted the Scriptures as the word of God, and in their allegorizing they interpreted them christologically. The historical-grammatical method analyzes a text's grammatical structure and acknowledges its historical character, but does not in every case locate its christological content or the law-gospel theme so essential to Lutheran preaching. When an acceptable christological meaning cannot be extricated from the text, the law and the gospel paradigm is recruited as the key to interpretations.¹⁹ Affirming the historical character of a biblical narrative is essential for any form of Christianity defining itself according to the *incarnatus est* of the Nicene Creed. Without this, its narratives would be hardly

¹⁵ The Faculty of Concordia Seminary St. Louis, Missouri, *Faithful To Our Calling, Faithful To Our Lord*, part 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, [1973]), 23.

¹⁶ Michael Horton argues that just as a constitution undergirds a community, so the Scriptures undergird the church as a covenant community (*The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011]). See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 77: "Our ultimate conviction that words of the Bible are God's words comes only when the Holy Spirit speaks *in* and *through* the words of the Bible to our hearts and gives us an inner assurance that these are the words of our Creator speaking to us" (emphasis original). See also, Johann Gerhard, "We therefore believe the canonical Scriptures because they are the canonical Scriptures, that is, they have been brought about by God and written by the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (quoted in Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:305). Cf. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 50, 54–64.

¹⁷ Luther's commitment to the christological principle, as it was defined for him by Paul, led him to reject Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation as fully canonical, though they were still included in his translation of the New Testament.

¹⁸ Recent conversions to Catholicism and Orthodoxy may also belong to the search for a more christologically defined security needed for faith. See Mickey L. Mattox and A. G. Roeber, *Changing Churches: An Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran Theological Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011). Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible published by Baker Book House under the Brazos Press logo and the Ancient Christian Commentary series published by InterVarsity Press are doing just this.

¹⁹ Each parable is unique, and no one key interprets all. They are extended metaphors or, as someone called them, figures. If a parable has only one point of comparison, why are they so long?

different from ancient mythologies. Gospel narratives and discourses could easily be regarded as having sprung from the imaginations of the followers of Jesus.²⁰ In the light of past LCMS controversies, the historical character of the Gospels must be affirmed along with recognizing that the evangelists were theologians in their own right, as was Jesus.²¹ Unless the Gospels are also understood both historically and theologically, the critical role in constructing a Christology is limited to the epistles and, for some preachers, to the Lutheran Confessions. For Lutherans, Scripture effects faith by its inspired character,²² but also “derives its power from its contents, Christ,”²³ who speaks not only in the New but also in the Old Testament.²⁴

Both Lutheran and Reformed theologians related the Bible’s inspired character to its christological content in holding that inspiration was a trinitarian act,²⁵ and so logically it was also christological. A trinitarian origin for the Scriptures would account for their perfection, but does not explain how it is christological in regard to Jesus’ incarnation and humiliation.²⁶ If inspiration is ascribed to Christ, as it must

²⁰ For an easily readable proposal of this position, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), esp. 332–339.

²¹ By allegorizing, the early fathers recognized the christological character of the Bible. Coming to terms with the christological content is accomplished by locating the literary method of each evangelist. Not only may the writer of the first Gospel have been unaware of his own method, but the second and third evangelists may not have recognized the techniques of the Gospels from which they borrowed. Soon after they were written, the Gospels blended as if they were one Gospel. Just as there was one word of God, so there was one Gospel. Tatian produced a Gospel harmony in the second century, as did John Calvin and Andreas Osiander in the sixteenth. See David L. Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 40–41, 181–184, 306. If Mark was the third Synoptic Gospel, it may have been created as a harmony. Its contents were seen as so similar to what could be found in Matthew and Luke, it was largely ignored until the nineteenth century.

²² Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:371–375. “The power of the Word is due to its divine origin (it is inspired by God) and to its divine nature (it is the word of very God). . . . Inspiration is so vital to the character of the Scriptures that without it, it would no longer be the Word of God but a mere human word.” (375)

²³ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:373.

²⁴ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:373.

²⁵ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:275. For the dogmaticians, inspiration is “an act of the triune God whereby He communicates to men that which He wishes written for men’s sake.”

²⁶ Inspiration understood apart from Christology is characteristic of Reformed theology already with Ulrich Zwingli, for whom God’s unity precedes his trinitarian existence. Zwingli, *Fidei Ratio*, as translated by Gottfried W. Locher, *Zwingli’s Thought: New Perspectives*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 172: “I believe and know there is only one God. He is by nature good, true, mighty, just and wise. He is the creator and sustainer of all things visible and invisible. There are the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons, but they have one simple being.” Locher notes that beginning theology with the divine unity, as Zwingli, Calvin, and Karl Barth do, tends toward modalism. Preus notes that Melancthon, Chemnitz, and the earlier dogmaticians began with the doctrine of the Trinity under which the attributes are subsumed. Johann Gerhard, who is followed by Johannes Quenstedt, begins with the attributes and proceeds to the Trinity. Preus says that since all of the divine attributes belong to the triune God, the earlier

be, it must be ascribed also to his human and not only to his divine nature. Such a view would also involve his humiliation. After all, the words which are recorded in the Gospels and which must be believed were spoken by Jesus of Nazareth. With this view, a theology beginning with this Christology is not faced with explaining how an infinite God became incarnate or could speak in ordinary words. So in reading the Scriptures, one confronts not a bare word of a transcendent God but a word about Christ spoken by him. Each of the Gospels begins in this way, and this might be a key to understanding an inspired text as a christological one.

John begins with the “Word” who is with God and only then is identified as God (John 1:1–3). Luke begins with those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the “Word” (Luke 1:2), an often unrecognized slice of Johannine theology in the third Gospel. Mark titles what he writes as “the gospel of Jesus Christ” (Mark 1:1), in other words, an account of what Jesus said and did. By beginning with a genealogy, Matthew builds upon God’s redemptive activity in Israel’s history, which is continued in Jesus. Israel’s christological history is traced back from Abraham (Matt 1:1–17). By calling his Gospel “the book [Bible] of the genealogy [genesis] of Jesus Christ” (Matt 1:1), Matthew asserts the same authority for his book about Jesus Christ that was possessed by the Old Testament Genesis. Inspiration is not simply the work of the Spirit or the Spirit of the Son of God, but the Spirit of Christ who was crucified and raised.²⁷ Incarnation and humiliation belong to the Spirit’s inspiration.

Coming to terms with a totally christological and yet inspired Scripture distinguishes Lutheran theology from Reformed theology, which can be described as pneumatological, a religion of the Spirit. Since the Reformed deny the *genus maiestaticum*,²⁸ for them the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Son of God according to the divine nature but not the Spirit of Jesus according to his human nature.²⁹ For Lutherans, the Spirit who speaks through the prophets, *qui locutus est per prophetas*, is the Spirit who proceeds not only from the Father but from the Son, *filioque*, through whom alone the Father is accessible. Christ’s resurrection according to the Scriptures, *et resurrexit tertia die secundum Scripturas*, acknowledges their christological character.

method is preferable, but the latter was more logical (Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, vol. 2, God and His Creation [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1972], 54–55). No mention is made of whether Gerhard and Quenstedt were influenced by the Reformed model.

²⁷ John 16:13–15; Rom 8:9; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11.

²⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 324–27.

²⁹ Also Zwingli. “It does not divide his person to say that the human nature is in one place and the divine nature is ubiquitous” (cited in Locher, *Zwingli’s Thought*, 176).

According to Robert Preus, Hunnius and Gerhard spoke of Christ as the author of the Scriptures but did not connect his authorship with their inspiration by the Spirit,³⁰ leaving two valid theological conclusions side by side. Christ's words by which the world will be judged (Matt 7:24–28) and which the disciples are to preserve (Matt 28:16–20) are God's words (Matt 5:2). Words spoken by the apostles will be those spoken by the Spirit of the Father (Matt 10:20), a passage some Lutheran dogmaticians did not apply to biblical inspiration. By not coming to terms with how the words spoken through the apostles by the Spirit of the Father were those first spoken by Jesus, they saw inspiration as an internal act ignoring its historical dimension.³¹ Thus the historical witness of the apostles becomes an accompanying, subsidiary factor but not intrinsic to biblical inspiration. A christological view of inspiration requires that the words inspired by the Spirit are the words of Jesus, to whom the Father entrusted them.³² Since Jesus as God's mouth (cf. Matt 5:2) speaks the words by which man lives (Matt 4:4), Jesus speaks the words of God as his own, and in this speaking he gives the Spirit (John 16:13–15).³³

³⁰ Robert D. Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* (Mankato, Minn.: Lutheran Synod Book Co., 1955), 29. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:34.

³¹ So Quenstedt. "[The writers] were inwardly enlightened by the Spirit with a supernatural light; and they were inwardly supplied by the Holy Spirit with all that was necessary for their writing, both with respect to the content and with respect to the very words." Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:273. See also his *The Inspiration of Scripture*, 19: "Inspiration is generally defined by the dogmaticians as the act whereby God conveyed to men both the content of that which He wished to be written for man's sake and the very words expressing that content." For Calvin, the Spirit's inward inspiring of the Bible was parallel to his inward testimony to convince the reader that it was true, a belief that persists among the Reformed. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 2:235. "The two issues—testimony of the [S]pirit and inspiration—are, therefore, intimately related in Calvin's theology despite their formal separation."

³² Oral words were inspired, but these theologians did not discuss how they took on written form. Matthew 10:20 would have been a good place to begin. Here Jesus speaks of "the Spirit of your Father," when "my Father" might be expected and preferred, since the apostles are told that their words will be God's. "Your Father" suggests the disciples knew that Jesus was the Son of God (Matt 16:16), and that they had been authorized and invited by him to address his Father as their own Father—"Our Father" (Matt 6:9). They are already gathered as a community with the Lord's Prayer and a creed that Jesus was God's Son as liturgy. All this had happened not through an inward, mystical activity of the Spirit but through and because of the preaching of Jesus (Matt 11:27). Here the insight of the Augsburg Confession V 2 is right on target: "Nam per verbum et sacramenta donatur spiritus sanctus." (See Loveday Alexander, "Ancient Book Production and the Circulation of the Gospels," in *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences*, ed. Richard Bauckham [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 71–105.) There can be no quibble here. However, if the Scriptures were dictated by the authors to scribes, as is most likely the case, the written word was first the oral word and so this may be a distinction without a difference.

³³ "He opened his mouth" (Matt 5:2) is reminiscent of Isaiah's "for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (Isa 40:5). What the Lord's mouth has spoken the Spirit accomplishes: "For the mouth of the LORD has commanded, and his Spirit has gathered them" (Isa 34:16).

Inspiration given by Jesus in his ministry is sealed in his giving of the Spirit in his crucifixion (Matt 27:50; John 19:30). This is followed by a formal confirmation after the resurrection (John 20:22). Luke culminated Jesus' giving of the Spirit at Pentecost with the terms laid down by the resurrected Jesus (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:33).³⁴

Jesus' authority is both derived from the Father (Matt 28:18) and also inherently his (Matt 7:28–29). The Spirit gives to the disciples what he takes from the Son and what originally and always belongs to the Father.³⁵ In inspiring the disciples, the Spirit does not give new data to the disciples but causes them to remember what Jesus said during his ministry. Apostolic memory flushes out a full understanding of inspiration (John 14:26). In inspiring the Scriptures, the Spirit is not autonomously sovereign but dependent on Jesus. He ratifies the words Jesus has spoken (John 20:22). In Luke, the Spirit empowers the witness of the disciples to what they have seen Jesus do (Luke 24:49). In Matthew, inspiration applies to the words Jesus spoke, and in Luke it centers on his acts. In John, inspiration covers both words and deeds (John 21:25). So far as the Gospels are concerned, inspiration originates in the man Jesus, who shared in our history (*homo factus est*) and thus should not be seen as an internal, almost mystical process.³⁶ To make an accommodation with the Orthodox communion, some Anglican and Lutheran

³⁴ Preus notes that inspiration for the Lutheran dogmaticians applied also to the preached word of the apostles and prophets, but they “would not have broadened inspiration to include the whole historical process that antedated the writing of the various Scriptures or the research the writers may have done or the traditions and sources and other writers may have used” (*The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:276). Perhaps this assessment is too broadly stated. Putting aside how Moses came across his materials, the prophets who followed him drew from the Pentateuch and later prophets took from the earlier ones. Some were chosen by others, for example, Moses and Joshua and Elijah and Elisha. There was a kind of prophetic succession. Writers of the New Testament were not blank slates which needed to be supernaturally informed of the commonly held beliefs of the early communities, but they were immersed in the traditions which came from Jesus and which were in every sense the Spirit's words.

³⁵ “For [the Spirit] will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14–15).

³⁶ A comparison between Matthew 28:20 and Acts 1:1–2 shows how the Spirit's words are first Christ's and then the Spirit's. In Matthew, the disciples are to preserve all the words Jesus commanded without a specific reference to the Holy Spirit, though with the crucifixion the Spirit has begun eschatological judgment (Matt 27:50–53; cf. Acts 2:17–21). In Acts, Jesus gave commands to the apostles through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2). Dissimilarities complement each other. Matthew's readers already know that the Father's Spirit will speak through the apostles (Matt 10:20). At the Gospel's conclusion, the words which must be preserved are those of Jesus. In Acts, the teachings commanded by Jesus are given through the Spirit: “after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles” (Acts 1:2). Within the context, this commandment refers to Luke's Gospel, in which the words of Jesus are recorded (Acts 1:1). For both Matthew and Luke, Jesus' words given to the eleven are characterized as command (not law, as in “law and gospel”). Matthew's disciples (Matt 20:17) become Luke's apostles (Acts 1:2), whom Matthew has already identified as apostles (Matt 10:2).

churches allow for the elimination from the creed of the *filioque*, but this is a crucial doctrine for a complete teaching of biblical inspiration. What God does in the world (*opera externa*) reflects what he is in himself (*opera interna*). Words spoken by Jesus are the Father's, but the Father's words are necessarily also the Son's. Words entrusted by the Father to the Son are already his, because he is the Son, and words spoken by the Spirit are the Father's given to the Spirit by the Son. The Spirit's inspiration of the Scriptures reflects and affirms the trinitarian doctrine that the Son is begotten by the Father and that the Spirit proceeds from both.³⁷ The Son is the source of the Spirit's procession because the Son is in the Father, without whom the Father would not be the Father.³⁸ Words inspired by the Spirit are the words of God, not only because they are first the Father's words and then are also the Son's. With the crucifixion, the Son's words are given to the church by the Spirit's inspiration as the words of Jesus.³⁹ Remove the *homo factus est* and the *filioque* from the Spirit's inspiration of the Scriptures, and they are no longer inherently christological and become a bare word of God. With the crucifixion and resurrection, God's word is recognized as the gospel to be preached to all the world (οἰκουμένη, Matt 24:14; κόσμος, 26:13; πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, 28:20). By its being given from the cross as an apocalyptic event, inspiration promises judgment on all who ignore the gospel (Matt 27:50–53; cf. 7:24–27).⁴⁰ What the Spirit inspires is completely, essentially, and inherently—not partially or incidentally—christological. The one who has the Spirit is conceived by the Spirit (Matt 1:20; Luke 1:35), endorsed by the

³⁷ Jesus' giving the Spirit cannot be identified with the *filioque*, but Robert W. Jenson says, "For it is the very function of the trinitarian propositions to say the relations that appear in the biblical narrative between Father, Son, and Spirit are the truth about God himself" (*Systematic Theology*, 1:150).

³⁸ See Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:149–151. Since the Spirit proceeds from the Son, and not only from the Father, he is distinguished from the Son, whose origin is only in the Father. This answers the question of how the begetting of the Son is different from the procession of the Spirit, a question that mystified the dogmatists: "Quid sit nasci, quid processus, me nescire sum professus" (What "being begotten" is, what "proceeding" [is], I have admitted that I do not know).

³⁹ Paul's determination to define his theology by the crucifixion also applies to how he understands God's word. "The word of the cross" is the word of God (1 Cor 1:18; 2:2). Biblical inspiration is defined by the crucifixion and resurrection events, which supply its content. These events define what the Spirit does. Matthew locates the giving of the Spirit in the death of Jesus (Matt 27:50), as does John (John 19:30), who includes a specific giving of the Spirit by Jesus to the apostles after the resurrection (John 20:22). A double giving of the Spirit is not a problem, if crucifixion and resurrection are seen as two sides of one event. The Spirit who is active in establishing the apostolic ministry (Matt 10:1, 20; John 20:22) is the Spirit who accompanies Baptism and Eucharist and forms the community of believers (Acts 2).

⁴⁰ The loud voice of Jesus, the tearing of the temple curtain, the earthquake, the splitting of the rocks, the opening of the tombs, the resurrection of the saints, and their entry into the Holy City and appearing to many are events of the end times. See Kenneth L. Waters Sr., "Matthew 27:52–53 as Apocalyptic Apostrophe: Temporal-Spatial Collapse in the Gospel of Matthew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 489–515.

Spirit (Matt 3:16; Luke 3:22), and accomplishes his work by the Spirit (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20). As the Father's Son, he gives the Father's Spirit to the church as his own Spirit (Matt 27:50). Also Paul, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men" (Eph 4:8). The Spirit is the gift and the giver.⁴¹ Understanding inspiration taking place in history and for the New Testament in the history of Jesus rather than only as an internal process allows for that history in which inspiration is given to be historically examined with the understanding that the method employed does not have a prior disposition against inspiration. Will Durant's definition that the study of history is more of an art than a science is reason enough to hold that no historical method is ultimate. Like Solomon's rivers flowing into and returning from never full seas, one method replaces another in a perpetual cycle.⁴² Recognizing that inspiration like other divine matters is not historically demonstrable,⁴³ the Word's assuming flesh (John 1:14) invites historical inquiry of words that the Word made flesh spoke.⁴⁴ Resolving biblical events and words seen as being at odds with one another belongs as much to the historical task of biblical studies as it does to the theological task.⁴⁵ A doctrine of inspiration without a thorough Christology assumes a transcendental God accessible only through the Spirit's inspiration. In this case, the Spirit's inner testimony becomes the proof of his inspiration of the Scriptures. Study of the historical data in the biblical documents is assigned only a supportive role. Christology becomes a subcategory of inspiration rather than inspiration being a derivative of Christology. Many methods claiming to be historical have an ideological bias (e.g., social, narrative, feminist, and

⁴¹ In commenting on the Holy Spirit as the gift of God, Jenson says that this is both a subjective and objective genitive: "the Holy Spirit is God given by God" (*Systematic Theology*, 1:147).

⁴² There is no certain agreement that Jesus was a revolutionary (Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus* [1863; reprint, New York: Random House, 1972], 194–196); a disillusioned mystic (Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* [1906; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1968]); or a peasant cynic (John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* [San Francisco: Harper, 1991]). Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 421–422: "The historical Jesus was, then a peasant Jewish Cynic. His peasant village was close enough to a Greco-Roman city like Sepphoris that sight and knowledge of Cynicism are neither inexplicable nor unlikely." We add: nor proven. Quests for the historical Jesus seem to be directed by the zeitgeist, and so their conclusions are predictable.

⁴³ Critical methods may allow for the Spirit's inspiration, but in some the Spirit is understood as the Spirit of the community and not as he is confessed in the Nicene Creed as the one "who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified" or "who spoke by the prophets." Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), whose popularity is attested by many editions, may be more typical of critical approaches in making no mention of the Holy Spirit at all as a factor in the production of the New Testament.

⁴⁴ This contrasts with the Reformed, who begin with God and move immediately to the Holy Spirit. For the role of the Holy Spirit in Zwingli's theology, see Locher, *Zwingli's Thought*, esp. 178–180.

⁴⁵ Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 1:352–353.

ethnic criticisms), and so they are not strictly speaking historical methods. Rather than asking historical questions, they subject the biblical documents to predetermined cultural, literary, and usually philosophical standards. Those who avoid examining the Scriptures as historical documents are caught between what the late Robert Jenson calls a fundamentalism of their own and a historical agnosticism.⁴⁶ Apart from our conviction in an inspired Scripture, it is hard to ignore N. T. Wright's raw historical argument that the resurrection may be the best possible explanation for the fate of the body of Jesus of Nazareth.⁴⁷ Inspiration is derivative of Christology. In God's sending of the Son as the redemption, he also gave us the Spirit through whom the Scriptures are inspired. Different views on God and Christ separating Lutherans from the Reformed are reflected in different views not only of the sacraments but also of biblical inspiration. Here Jenson says it well:

Christology is not the content of the proclamation merely as a passive object, that *about* which the proclamation speaks. That he is risen, and so can himself speak now in the church, is part of what is narrated. It is the Father whose word is the gospel, but the Son, who is the content of the gospel, is not a mere object but himself speaks in his church, and that he speaks is part of what the Father says.⁴⁸

Some years ago, I proposed that inspiration should be seen as inherent in the apostolic office, the task Jesus gave the apostles.⁴⁹ Here I go one step back in history from the apostolic office to the person of Jesus himself, who can only be understood in terms of the one who was *incarnatus* and then *homo factus*. He is not only the content of the Scriptures but their author.

⁴⁶ Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:172. "A remarkable feature of many proposals of narrative or structural or reader-critical exegesis is their fundamentalism. The proposers, no longer believing in the Resurrection to which the Bible bears witness, nevertheless persist in supposing that the book itself must somehow be a blessing, if only we can find an unthreatening way to read it."

⁴⁷ N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, vol. 3, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

⁴⁸ Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 1:175.

⁴⁹ David P. Scaer, *The Apostolic Scriptures* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971).



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Critical Theory and Intersectionality: The Abolition of Man

Peter J. Scaer

Introduction: The Abolition of Man and the End of Times

Our Lord compares the last days to those of Noah and the flood, when people were marrying and being given in marriage (Matt 24:38). His disciples surely assumed that those nuptials would include a bride and groom. Right up until the moment that sulfur met Sodom, people were buying and selling. So also will it be at the end of time (Luke 17:28–29), at least for those who bear the mark of the beast (Rev 13:17). The Thessalonians over-anticipated the eschaton. But when men win beauty pageants and break records in women's sports, we can hardly doubt that we are living under what Paul called a "wicked deception" and a "strong delusion" (2 Thess 2:10–11).¹ More than just bumpy, the road to Mount Zion leads downhill to what C. S. Lewis called the Abolition of Man.²

Setting the Table for Chaos

The lawlessness of the sexual revolution paved the way for our present delusions. Divorce, cohabitation, and a hook-up culture has taken its toll. Hedonism leads to cruelty and chaos, as we see in what Bernard Nathanson labeled the "silent screams of abortion,"³ and what Mary Eberstadt calls the primal screams of a generation that has grown up without fathers or extended family.⁴ Many have no sense of belonging and are ruled by what Allan Bloom called "a psychology of

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man; or, Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1944).

³ *The Silent Scream*, narrated by Bernard Nathanson, directed by Jack Duane Dabner (American Portrait Films, 1984), 28 min. This short movie highlights the narration of an abortion as it is observed in real-time by ultrasound.

⁴ Mary Eberstadt, *Primal Screams: How the Sexual Revolution Created Identity Politics* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2019).

separateness.”⁵ Natural bonds have been severed. Where might a child go if he has no father, if his grandparents are at war, or, if because of divorce, his uncle is no longer his uncle? As Eberstadt notes, “The plain fact is that the relative stability of yesterday’s familial identity could not help but answer the question at the heart of identity politics—*Who Am I?*—in ways that many men, women, and children cannot answer it anymore.”⁶

Living in an Unreal World

We are residents of what Anthony Esolen calls the Unreal City. We not only believe in things that are false, but, as Esolen puts it, “We believe in *falsehood*.”⁷ Two men get married; no eye blinks. Drag Queen Story Hour is offered to the tykes; parents smile. A young woman not only appropriates a whole new set of personal pronouns, she creates her own, which they (or Ne or Ve or Ey or Ze or Xe) will insist upon. Do not chuckle. Listen to what Ze says and offer your *homologō*, or you will be fired, fined, or canceled.⁸

Log on to the internet to find a list of seventy-two genders, but the true number is legion. This ideology is taught to children of tender age via the Genderbread Person and the Gender Unicorn.⁹ No longer fringe, this is the dogma of our secular religion, the doctrine of demons (1 Tim 4:1).

Gender dysphoria has always been a thing, most often among a very small percentage of boys who, if allowed to grow up, would grow out of it.¹⁰ But now it spreads like a contagion, which physician and gender dysphoria researcher Lisa Littman has labeled “rapid-onset gender dysphoria” (ROGD).¹¹ In 2007, there was only one pediatric gender clinic; now there are hundreds. Our best hospitals treat

⁵ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 118.

⁶ Eberstadt, *Primal Screams*, 61.

⁷ Anthony Esolen, *Sex and the Unreal City: The Demolition of the Western Mind* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2020), 9.

⁸ To understand the present-day threats on our religious liberty, including the dangers to our schools, adoption agencies, and Christian businessmen, see Ryan T. Anderson, *Truth Overruled: The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015).

⁹ The Genderbread Person is an illustrated version of the Gingerbread Man which is neither male nor female, and teaches that one’s gender may differ from the sex that has been supposedly assigned at birth. It was developed by Trans Student Educational Resources (TSER). See The Genderbread Person, accessed February 23, 2022, <https://www.genderbread.org/>. See also The Gender Unicorn, accessed February 23, 2022, <https://transstudent.org/gender/>. The Gender Unicorn, commonly taught in schools, serves the same purpose.

¹⁰ For this story, see Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*, 1st American ed. (New York: Encounter Books, 2018).

¹¹ For the full story, see Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2020).

confused children with puberty blockers and hormones, leading to mutilating surgery and a lifetime of regret. Parents who seek to save their children from the madness may well lose custody or be jailed. All of this is done with the approval of those who operate the levers of our culture. Some bury their heads; others seek the path of least resistance, while many smile and nod. Two plus two equals five.

To the fallen first couple, our Lord asked, “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9). Upon return, our Lord may ask, “Who are you?” Or maybe, to those of us who knew better, he may query, “Why were you silent?”

How Did We Get Here?

In *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, Carl Trueman asks a simple question. How did we get to a place where it seems meaningful to say, “I am a woman trapped in a man’s body?”¹² Our grandfathers and their grandfathers’ great-grandfathers would have laughed at the notion. History knows no such precedent. St. Paul called homosexual behavior an affront to natural law (Rom 1:18–32), but he never met a pagan unable to tell the difference between a man and a woman.

How did we get here? It’s been a long time coming. Trueman offers a timeline that begins with Rousseau, who posited that ethical discourse is based not on truth but on personal sentiment, and that authenticity depends on living out our inner desires and feelings.¹³ He speaks of the Romantics, including Shelley, who asserted that happiness is the object of morality.¹⁴ Trueman further describes how Darwin’s doctrine of natural selection robs humanity of any inherent dignity or destiny. He explains how Marx strips away the institutions of humanity, including family and church, turning all of life into a political struggle.¹⁵

Trueman then takes us to Freud, who sexualized all of life, even childhood. Freud argues that when we condemn sexual perversion, we are merely “giving way to an unmistakable view of disgust.” But, Freud adds, “The limits of such disgust are, however, often purely conventional: a man who will kiss a pretty girl’s lips passionately, may perhaps be disgusted at the idea of using her tooth-brush, though there are no grounds for supposing that his own oral cavity, for which he feels no disgust, is any cleaner than the girl’s.”¹⁶ The implications are clear. Any cavity will

¹² Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 19.

¹³ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 125.

¹⁴ Shelley says of marriage that, if a marital union brought more evils than benefits, then, “There is nothing immoral in this separation.” As found in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Poetical Works*, ed. Edward Dowden (London: Macmillan and Co., 1926), 42–43.

¹⁵ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 191.

¹⁶ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 17–18.

do. And the idea that some sexual behavior goes against nature, following the logic of Freud, becomes proof of homophobia, transphobia, or some other irrational fear.

Trueman contends that our society is a fusion of Marx and Freud, the intersection of equity and the sexual revolution. For centuries, the wise of this world have acted like wrecking balls; their philosophy is the new theology of deconstruction. In an eerily messianic autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche summed up his life's work as "the most profound collision of conscience, a decision that was conjured up against everything that had been believed, demanded, hallowed so far. I am no man. I am dynamite."¹⁷ In such a world, there can be neither piety nor gratitude, for there is neither God nor holiness.

The Abolition of Man: The Seat of Scoffers

C. S. Lewis saw all this coming. In *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis lectures about a textbook then circulating in the English schools, which he pseudonymously calls *The Green Book*, and bearing the subtitle, *The Control of Language: A Critical Approach to Reading and Writing*. The term "critical" is key, for it reflects a Marxist worldview that denies natural law and the dignity of man. This seductive critical movement questioned reality itself. Are there such things as beauty and truth, or is something simply what I say or think?

If someone says a waterfall is sublime, is he really speaking about the waterfall or only offering "a remark about his own feeling"?¹⁸ Lewis argues that if there are no criteria for beauty, neither is there truth. Indeed, in the church's liturgy and doctrine, we have seen an assault on both. If reality is a personal construct, there is no objective right or wrong—only instinct. And if there is only instinct, then "there is no ground for placing the preservation of the species above self-preservation or sexual appetite."¹⁹ In this, Lewis could have foreseen the justification for abortion, no-fault divorce, gay marriage, and all the rest.

The critic or nihilist does not see a thing, but sees through it. Once truth and tradition have been unmasked by the skeptics, all that is left is the will of the powerful, or as Lewis writes, "When all that says 'it is good' has been debunked, what says 'I want' remains."²⁰ As Lewis described the situation, "Traditional values are to be debunked and mankind to be cut into some fresh shape at the will (which must, by hypothesis, be an arbitrary will) of some few lucky people in one lucky generation

¹⁷ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Arnold Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 326.

¹⁸ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 2.

¹⁹ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 77.

²⁰ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 77.

which has learned how to do it.”²¹ Lewis’s prophecy has come to an all-too-literal fulfillment in sex reassignment surgery.²² Without the natural law, we are easy prey for the powerful, who may dice and splice us as they please.

Lewis warned us of a world in which thankfulness is replaced by a cynicism towards all who came before us. Appreciation leads to gratitude; however, the relativists teach us to see through things, which is the essence of the scoffer. To combat skeptical cynicism, Lewis urges us to embrace reality. He argues that the natural law, which he called the Tao, is evident throughout all history and all cultures. We need not think that something like marriage is simply a religious matter, particular to Christianity. Children do better with fathers. Marital law must reflect reality if it is to be just.²³ So our Lord asks, “What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion” (Luke 11:11–12)? Surely Christ knows that there are bad fathers, but his question is predicated on the idea that fatherhood, built into creation, is a good thing.

The Origins and Nature of Critical Theory: Gramsci and the Frankfurt School

Trueman has demonstrated that our present cultural crisis has deep roots. C. S. Lewis reveals that this form of deconstruction is a deeply spiritual matter. But how did this nihilistic philosophy take over our schools and infiltrate our institutions? To answer this question, we turn to Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937). Gramsci, an Italian communist, was incarcerated by Mussolini, during which time he wrote his influential *Prison Notebooks*.

Karl Marx pictured the world in dialectical terms, a struggle between the oppressed and the oppressors, the workers and the bourgeoisie. His goal was not equality but equity—from each according to his means, to each according to his needs—a dark and coercive imitation of early Christianity (Acts 2:44). Yet Marxism, while triumphing in agrarian Russia, was less successful among the industrial nations for which it was tailored.

What to do? While Marx concentrated his efforts on economics and politics, Gramsci recognized that culture comes first, beginning with educational systems that would no longer perpetuate the assumptions of Western civilization. To cut our

²¹ Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 77–78.

²² Of course, sex reassignment is impossible. Plastic surgery cannot create real and functioning sex organs. As Robert George notes, “Changing sexes is a metaphysical impossibility, because it is a biological impossibility.” See Robert P. George, “Gnostic Liberalism,” *First Things* 268 (December 2016): 35.

²³ For a book-length argument, see Sherif Girgis, Ryan T. Anderson, and Robert P. George, *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012).

ties to the past, Gramsci concludes, “It will be necessary to replace Latin and Greek as the fulcrum of the formative school.”²⁴ And replaced they were.

To attain hegemony, the cultural Marxists would infiltrate mass media, sports, and the entertainment industry. Rather than simply overthrow the church, why not work from the inside? Big business could be co-opted. Gramsci’s cultural Marxism inaugurated what would later be referred to as the long march through the institutions.²⁵ This new form of Marxism would manifest itself in critical theory.

The Frankfurt School, led by Max Horkheimer, brought critical theory to America. Critical theory posited that there is no such thing as universal truth, paving the way for your truth and my truth. Critical theory set about destroying pieties and deconstructing institutions—first and foremost the family. A good example of this can be found in the long form essay *Authority and Family*, in which Horkheimer deconstructs the patriarchal bourgeoisie family, claiming that a father’s leadership is purely functional, and boils down simply to his strength and earning capacity, and not much else.²⁶ In similar fashion, Wilhelm Reich claimed that the family “is the authoritarian state in miniature.”²⁷ The family is itself a source and teacher of oppression.

From critical theory arose all sorts of offshoots, including ethnic and gender studies, queer studies, postcolonial studies, and all those college programs that fall under the umbrella of so-called grievance studies. Those who have attended the Society of Biblical Literature are well aware of how this works. When you wear the glasses of queer theory, queer is all you see. So much for David’s friendship with Jonathan, the centurion who cared for his servant, or the beloved disciple who rested his head in our Lord’s bosom. A hammer sees only nails. Critical philosophy not only blinds us to truth, but also tunes the heart towards cynicism and resentment. While Christianity is based on a life of forgiveness and gratitude, critical theory is ever hungry for grievances. As Carl Trueman notes, “Today, political discussion is dominated by talk of hate speech, microaggressions, and so on, all of which rise out of a culture in which psychological categories give the fundamental shape to what is understood to be oppressive.”²⁸ Or to put it in sports terms, if you want to play

²⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: ElecBook, 1999), 185.

²⁵ The phrase seems to have been coined in 1967 by German political activist Rudi Dutschke, who said, “Revolution is a long complicated process in which people have to change, and such change is effected only by a long march through the institutions.”

²⁶ Max Horkheimer, “Authority and the Family,” in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, by Max Horkheimer, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell et al. (New York: Continuum, 2002), <http://freudians.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Horkheimer-Authority-and-the-Family.compressed.pdf>.

²⁷ Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, ed. and trans. Mary Higgins and Chester M. Raphael (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970), 30.

²⁸ Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, 239.

offense, claim that you are offended, which is the death of both charity and, for that matter, humor.

Intersectionality: The Marriage of Critical Race Theory and Gender Ideology

Gramsci's version of cultural Marxism now enters culture via two of its children: gender ideology and critical race theory. Abigail Shrier calls critical race theory and gender ideology siblings, noting, "While critical race activists are teaching kids that they are largely defined by their skin color, gender activists are teaching kids that there are a great many genders, and that only they know their true gender."²⁹ We may well consider critical race theory and gender ideology to be two pews in the one church of the woke, whose dogma cannot be questioned. As Shrier notes, "Just as families who object to racial indoctrination in schools are told that their denials are proof of racism, young women who object to biological males participating in girls' sports are told that their objections are proof of transphobic bigotry."³⁰ No Christian church is so dogmatic, so swift to excommunicate.

According to the concept of intersectionality, we are defined by our sex, sexual preferences, and race, and we are accordingly categorized as either oppressors or oppressed. A gay white woman is doubly oppressed for being gay and a woman, but is an oppressor inasmuch as she is white. Transgenderism becomes an avenue for social status. A gay man may be very wealthy indeed, but he is considered oppressed in comparison to an unemployed white man from rural West Virginia. Asians are more difficult to categorize, sometimes labeled among the oppressed, but at other times said to be "white adjacent." The oppressor above all oppressors is the cisgender white man. Being a Christian only makes it worse, since Christians—by virtue of being Christians—benefit from societal hegemony, as is argued by Khyati Y. Joshi in *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America*.³¹ But perhaps a caveat is in order. The voice of the black person matters, but only if he supports the ideology of the secular left. Thus, Amazon deleted a best-selling documentary on Clarence Thomas, and did so at the start of Black History Month. Diversity may include skin color and sexual orientation, but never allows for actual diversity of thought.

This world of intersectionality is fundamentally at odds with Christian moral teaching. The world is in desperate need of good fathers, and yet intersectionality teaches that patriarchy is the problem. Same-sex marriage robs a child of either a

²⁹ Abigail Shrier, "Gender Ideology Run Amok," *Imprimis* 50, nos. 6/7 (June/July 2021), <https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/gender-ideology-run-amok/>.

³⁰ Shrier, "Gender Ideology Run Amok."

³¹ Khyati Y. Joshi, *White Christian Privilege: The Illusion of Religious Equality in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2020).

mom or dad, and yet intersectionality extols the LGBTQ+ ideology. According to biblical teaching, we are all sinners in need of grace, but according to intersectionality, some bear more or less guilt by simple virtue of skin color. Thus, some are told to repent of sins they have not committed, while others are vindicated, because their violence is perpetrated in the name of social justice and equity.

The Church and the Great Awakening

How has this new secular religion affected our churches? Mainline denominations are all-in, flying the rainbow flag alongside that of BLM, celebrating the LGBTQ+ revolution, even up to the point of transgender bishops and drag queens teaching Sunday school. Instead of teaching justice, people are called to be social justice warriors. Inequality must be addressed by further inequality, and natural law is abandoned, along with the God of creation.

But what of our conservative, Bible-believing churches? Are we, by virtue of our belief in natural marriage and biblical sexuality, immune to the contagion of wokeness? By no means. Conservative churches are becoming noticeably quieter on the issues of rainbow pride. At Summit Church, Southern Baptist President J. D. Greear sent shockwaves through his church body, saying, “We ought to whisper about what the Bible whispers about, and we ought to shout about what it shouts about. And the Bible appears more to whisper when it comes to sexual sin compared to its shouts about materialism and religious pride.”³² And this was a sermon on Romans 1:24–27!

Indeed, woke culture has infiltrated many conservative Christian colleges. For example, at Wheaton, Professor Larycia Hawkins was fired for refusing to uphold the school’s teaching on Christ as the only Savior. In response, Sheila Caldwell, head of Wheaton’s office of diversity, complained that Hawkins had been “pressured to stay in her place in the American caste system.”³³ Why are Bible-believing schools susceptible to woke theology? As Gerald McDermott notes, the implementation of woke ideology is the path of least resistance, especially for risk-averse college administrators. But at what price? McDermott asks, “But what if their anti-racism solution to racism is racism itself? And what if, to avoid criticism, evangelical colleges embrace a secular gospel that has nothing to do with true kingdom

³² Quoted from a sermon on Romans 1:24–32, delivered January 27, 2019, at The Summit Church in Durham, North Carolina. It can be found at <https://summitchurch.com/message/how-the-fall-affects-us-all/>.

³³ Gerald McDermott, “Woke Theory at Evangelical Colleges,” *First Things*, October 19, 2021, accessed February 23, 2022, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/10/woke-theory-at-evangelical-colleges>.

diversity?”³⁴ To McDermott’s questions, we add another. What good is salt if it loses its saltiness? As we have seen, institutions that have forsaken their heritage simply do not bounce back. How will you make them salty again (Mark 9:50)?

Our Lord calls us to be as wise as serpents. For Bible-believing Christian institutions, critical race theory is often the Trojan horse that brings in all of critical theory. As Carl Trueman notes, “The moral preoccupations of secular progressive America now focus on two basic issues: race and LGBTQ+ rights.”³⁵ For those who take our Lord’s words on marriage seriously, it is not an option to promote gay marriage. Race, on the other hand, “provides a perfect opportunity for Christian leaders to place themselves (for once) on the ‘good’ side of a moral debate that is generating turmoil in the wider society,” and, as he puts it, to stand in solidarity with the church’s “cultured despisers.”³⁶

Public displays of self-flagellation and self-loathing offer a means to raise our social credit score and to separate ourselves from those who cling to their Bibles. And so, churches often take up critical race theory to avoid taking the less-popular side on issues within the culture. Trueman writes, “Let me put it bluntly: Talking in an outraged voice about racism within the boundaries set by the woke culture is an excellent way of not talking about the pressing moral issues on which Christianity and the culture are opposed to each other: LGBTQ+ rights and abortion.”³⁷ St. Paul’s words ring in the ears: “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10).

Practically speaking, one good way to assess Christian groups addressing racism is to ask whether they ever speak about the racial component at play with abortion, whether they are willing to speak about school choice, or whether they talk about how the rainbow pride robs children of fathers. That is to say, if only the voice of wokeness is allowed, then it really is not about race at all. If a Christian group is unable or unwilling to speak about black-against-black crime or the number of police officers who have been killed in the line of duty, then something is amiss. Often, when judging such trees, it is the fruit that you *do not* find—the dog that *does not* bark. This is not to claim some sort of special wisdom or knowledge, but simply to note that when legitimate dissent is not allowed, the truth is not present.

³⁴ McDermott, “Woke Theory at Evangelical Colleges.”

³⁵ Carl R. Trueman, “The Failure of Evangelical Elites,” *First Things*, November 2021, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2021/11/the-failure-of-evangelical-elites>.

³⁶ Trueman, “The Failure of Evangelical Elites.”

³⁷ Trueman, “The Failure of Evangelical Elites.”

Critical Race Theory and Racism

Racism is real, and it is a sin of partiality. Lest anyone be misled, critical race theory has nothing to do with Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision, which was based on natural law and the biblical truth that we have all been created in God's image. King envisioned a world where we would be judged by the content of our character not the color of our skin; critical race theory focuses on nothing but race. King spoke of equality; critical race theory, drawing from its Marxist roots, demands equity. King's vision was that of people joining arms together, while critical race theory offers a raised fist for the struggle against the oppressors. King spoke of reconciliation and forgiveness, but critical race theory knows no forgiveness, only the original sin of racism for which there is no cure—only struggle sessions and cancellation.

Critical race theory is not simply a tool, but a worldview, incompatible with Christianity. John McWhorter, a contributing editor for *The Atlantic*, says that with critical race theory, we are witnessing “the birth of a new religion.”³⁸ Its well-paid clergy include the likes of Ibram X. Kendi, Robin DiAngelo, and Jemar Tisby. This religion's original sin is racism, for which there is no cure or forgiveness. Orthodoxy is strictly enforced, and confession is mandatory. Consider the observation of Andrew Sullivan, a self-identified homosexual, who was forced out of his position at the *New York Magazine*: “They seem to believe, and this is increasingly the orthodoxy in mainstream media, that any writer not actively committed to critical theory in questions of race, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity is actively, physically harming co-workers merely by existing in the same virtual space.”³⁹ The list of the canceled is a long one.

Voddie Baucham has led the charge against critical race theory in the Southern Baptist Convention, warning of “Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe.”⁴⁰ He, too, sees critical race theory as a new religion, one at odds with Christianity. It is a religion with no forgiveness, and a reckoning of sin that depends on skin color. Baucham has also coined the term “ethnic Gnosticism,” in which oppressed groups are thought to have special knowledge or wisdom. According to Baucham, ethnic Gnosticism assumes three things, the first of which is that there is a so-called black perspective. Second, white people must elevate and heed black voices. And finally, the narrative offered by black voices must be taken as truth. These ideas are well in

³⁸ John McWhorter, *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2021), 24.

³⁹ Andrew Sullivan, “See You Next Friday,” *Intelligencer*, July 17, 2020, accessed February 23, 2022, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/07/andrew-sullivan-see-you-next-friday.html>.

⁴⁰ Voddie T. Baucham Jr., *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021).

line with the Marxism of critical theory, in which the narrative becomes the truth, even if that narrative goes against the biblical narrative.

In *Awake, Not Woke: A Christian Response to the Cult of Progressive Ideology*, Noelle Mering puts it this way: “According to the woke, it is not the weight of the argument but the skin color, gender, or sexuality of the speaker which determines the rightness or the wrongness of her speech.”⁴¹ Ethnic Gnosticism has a silencing effect, not only in boardroom discussions, but in the church. What does Walther, Luther, or St. Paul have to offer, as they are numbered among the historical oppressors? And what about those of us who are pastors and teachers? Surely we do well to listen, but are we not called to speak what our Lord has spoken to us? Or will the prophetic voice also be canceled? Thus, it is important to see how critical race theory has been popularized among us.

Ibram X. Kendi

Critical race theory’s leading light, Ibram X. Kendi, teaches that it is not enough not to be racist, you must be anti-racist.⁴² For Kendi, the question is not whether racism took place, but *how* it took place. Racism is everywhere assumed. This is how it works. Suppose two men walk into the store: one black, one white. If the store owner serves the white person first, he is clearly racist for privileging the white man. If he serves the black person first, he is clearly racist for not wanting the black person to linger in his store. Do not even begin to say, “I am not racist.” As Kendi puts it, “The claim of ‘not racist’ is a mask for racism.”⁴³

According to Kendi, we must work towards *equity*, which calls for redistribution, to be forced if necessary. Kendi’s approach is clearly Marxist. He says, “To love capitalism is to end up loving racism. To love racism is to end up loving capitalism.” He expounds, “Capitalism is essentially racist; racism is essentially capitalist. They were birthed together from the same natural causes, and they shall die together from unnatural causes.”⁴⁴ This is ironic coming from a man who has himself become quite wealthy promoting critical race theory.

Many are easy prey, for racism is real and is a matter of sinful partiality. And God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11). But Kendi does not deal with specific racist acts, for which we may be called to repentance, but systemic racism.

⁴¹ Noelle Mering, *Awake, Not Woke: A Christian Response to the Cult of Progressive Ideology* (Gastonia, NC: TAN Books, 2021), 153.

⁴² Kendi’s birth name was Ibram Henry Rogers.

⁴³ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019), 9.

⁴⁴ Ibram X. Kendi, appearing on the podcast *Democracy Now*, “How to Be an Antiracist: Ibram X. Kendi on Why We Need to Fight Racism the Way We Fight Cancer,” https://www.democracynow.org/2019/8/13/ibram_x_kendi_class_race_capitalism.

What is racism? In what may appear to be a tautology, Kendi writes, “Racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities.”⁴⁵ But in this word salad, beware of inequity, which, according to Kendi, occurs “when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing.”⁴⁶ Thus, if the crime rate is higher among a certain people group, it is a sure sign of racism. Nowhere does Kendi argue for this proposition; rather, he simply assumes it, making further discussion impossible. What might he say to the Tiger Mom phenomenon and the success of Asian Americans?⁴⁷ How is it that 61 percent of Nigerians over the age of 25 have graduate degrees compared to 32 percent of all those born in the United States?⁴⁸ If students do well on a math test, is it simply a matter of race, or are there other factors, including whether a student studied hard and whether his family is intact?

Various groups succeed in all sorts of disparate ways. While those who populate tiny suburbs find themselves at the top of the social ladder, others who populate the hills of Appalachia are not faring as well, even though they are said to share ethnicity. What cultural factors are at work? How might the Wisdom of Solomon play into one’s success? What role do our individual choices play? Statistically, having a father at home has a much greater impact than anything to do with race. But Kendi dismisses the idea with a red herring, claiming that it is wrong to suggest that “two bad parents would be better than one good one.”⁴⁹ Again, this is not to suggest any special personal wisdom in these matters, but only to note that a system that does not allow honest discussion is nothing but an ideology based on power.

How then does Kendi plan to build a more equitable world? “The only remedy to racist discrimination is anti-racist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination. The only remedy to present discrimination is future discrimination.”⁵⁰ Injustice is met with injustice. But then, we must ask, who defines what is and is not discrimination? First, it is the voice of the marginalized, which must be heard and cannot be questioned. Every claimed microaggression becomes a trip wire that stifles all discussion in the minefield of intersectionality. Since microaggressions are defined by the one who claims grievance, they can never be known in advance, and they can never be gainsaid.

⁴⁵ Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, 18.

⁴⁶ Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, 18.

⁴⁷ See Amy Chua, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011). The Tiger Mom phenomenon is largely a Chinese-American phenomenon which involves strict and purposeful parenting that leads to a child’s academic success.

⁴⁸ Molly Fosco, “The Most Successful Ethnic Group in the U.S. May Surprise You,” OZY, last modified June 7, 2018, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.ozy.com/around-the-world/the-most-successful-ethnic-group-in-the-u-s-may-surprise-you/86885/>.

⁴⁹ Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, 185.

⁵⁰ Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, 19.

Second, it is the priesthood consisting of people like Kendi who define the terms, profiting greatly. Though these are called microaggressions, they come at a steep price. Misgender someone, and you may well be fired.

Intersectionality and Religious Liberty

Kendi, as do nearly all critical race theorists, engages in intersectionality, wrapping together ideas of race and sexual identity. He writes, “To be anti-racist is to reject not only the hierarchy of races, but race-genders. To be feminist is to reject not only the hierarchy of genders, but of race-genders. To be truly anti-racist is to be feminist. To truly be feminist is to be anti-racist.”⁵¹ Indeed, there is no room for the Bible-believing Christian in Kendi’s world. The one who is anti-racist must not consort with the homophobic or transphobic.

No friend to Christians suffering for their faith, Kendi claims that to be a “queer antiracist” is to see religious freedom laws for what they are, namely, “as taking away the rights of queer people.”⁵² Jemar Tisby, Kendi’s colleague and the author of *The Color of Compromise*, likewise exhibits no sympathy for Christians who seek to live their lives according to their Christian beliefs.⁵³ In an interview with Phil Vischer of VeggieTales fame, Tisby said, “Religious freedom . . . is really code for white Christians being able to do what they want to do,” to which he added, “It doesn’t really include Muslims or Jewish people or other religions.”⁵⁴ This claim is patently false, but places Tisby on the side of our cultured despisers.

Robin DiAngelo’s Grift

While Kendi is anti-racism’s intellectual leader, Robin DiAngelo—who herself is white—has been its most successful evangelist. Her work *White Fragility* took America by storm, finding its way into corporate boardrooms and church Bible studies. DiAngelo offered a class at Coca-Cola, telling employees that they would have to learn to “be less white.”⁵⁵ DiAngelo is paid a pretty penny for telling people that they are racist. Those who raise a hand in disagreement are told they are not qualified to speak. She writes, “We must be willing to consider that unless we have

⁵¹ Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, 189.

⁵² Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*, 197.

⁵³ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church’s Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

⁵⁴ Phil Vischer, *Holy Post Episode 422: The Church’s Complicity in Racism with Jemar Tisby*, 2020, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j84RWjr8lM8>.

⁵⁵ Mairem Del Río, “Coca-Cola Asks Its Workers to Be ‘Less White’ to Fight Racism,” *Beaumont Enterprise*, May 7, 2021, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.beaumontenterprise.com/business/article/Coca-Cola-Asks-Its-Workers-to-Be-Less-White-to-15979661.php>.

devoted intentional and ongoing study, our opinions are uninformed, even ignorant.”⁵⁶ This is key to critical race theory’s success. It encourages criticism of everything except itself.

In DiAngelo’s world, if you feel ashamed, frightened, or angry at being called a racist, you are exposing your white fragility. If you argue, that means you have yet to deal with your internalized racism. If you are silent, you are hiding your racism. Silence is violence. As John Hudlow explains it, “In fact, *White Fragility* is a barrage of psychological manipulation techniques—an effort to convert sympathetic white progressives into dedicated social justice warriors.”⁵⁷ These are not so much conversations as sweat sessions.

John McWhorter in *Woke Racism* points out contradictions that are meant to put would-be opponents in a corner. For instance, you must strive to understand the experiences of black people, but if you claim to understand, that only reveals your racism. You must be multicultural, but you may not culturally appropriate. You are racist for moving out of a black neighborhood, but if you move into one, it is an act of racist gentrification. If you do not date people of other races, you are racist, but if you do, then you are engaging in a racist act of fetishizing. Test scores must be adjusted so that colleges have racial balance, but to say that a group needs to have those test scores adjusted is racist. And so it goes. Flip a coin. Heads or tails, you are a racist. It is a no-win situation—except, of course, for those who are paid well to offer the anti-racist training.⁵⁸

Cultural Artifacts: Black Lives Matter

Surely, black lives do matter. But we should not be naïve. Black Lives Matter was founded with a definite ideology in mind. Patrisse Cullors, a co-founder of BLM, said, “The first thing, I think, is that we actually do have an ideological frame. Myself and Alicia in particular are trained Marxist organizers.”⁵⁹ We should take Cullors at her word.

BLM’s founding document is littered with Marxist phrases.⁶⁰ It speaks of our “collective efforts” and fighting for “our collective freedom.” Friends are called

⁵⁶ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 8.

⁵⁷ John Hudlow, “Read with Your Eyes Open: A Critical Review of ‘White Fragility,’” *Curious*, August 19, 2020, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://medium.com/curious/read-with-your-eyes-open-a-critical-review-of-white-fragility-11735455ec09>.

⁵⁸ McWhorter, *Woke Racism*, 8–9.

⁵⁹ Yaron Steinbuch, “Black Lives Matter Co-Founder Describes Herself as ‘Trained Marxist,’” *New York Post*, June 25, 2020, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://nypost.com/2020/06/25/blm-co-founder-describes-herself-as-trained-marxist/>.

⁶⁰ This BLM Statement of Beliefs was previously available at the blacklivesmatter.com website at <https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/>, but has since been taken down.

“comrades.” Intersectionality comes through loud and clear. Those who adhere to the document vow to “dismantle cisgender privilege” and “uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women.” BLM claims to be a “queer-affirming network” that aims to free people from “heteronormative thinking.” Following the path of intersectionality, they aim to “dismantle the patriarchal practice” and “disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure.” Perhaps they are right when they say that silence is violence. Christian groups that do not condemn this ideology should be called out.

Whatever one might say about BLM, this is not the language of Martin Luther King Jr., or of natural law. Theirs is not the vision of racial harmony, but radical revolution aimed at the heart of the family and of Christian teaching. In this bathwater, it is hard to find a baby.

Smithsonian: Aspects & Assumptions of Whiteness

Consider also the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History & Culture’s exhibition on “Aspects of Whiteness & White Culture in the United States.” According to the online document,⁶¹ elements of whiteness include the nuclear family, the idea that a father should be the family’s breadwinner, and any emphasis on the scientific method, which includes “objective, rational linear thinking” and “cause and effect relationships.” According to the Smithsonian exhibit, it is an aspect of whiteness to believe that “hard work is the key to success.” Whiteness is to include the primacy of Greco-Roman history, and the “Judeo-Christian tradition.” Indeed, white culture is to hold to the idea that “Christianity is the norm,” allowing “no tolerance for deviation from a single god concept.” Tragically, the exhibit takes aim at Christianity and the family, and, by denigrating such virtues as hard work, only hurts the people it claims to help. Some may say that the Smithsonian exhibition is an outlier, but its tenets have found their way into almost every institution.

Solomon and Officers of Diversity and Equity

In 2020, Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb established a cabinet-level position to promote equity and inclusion. Such offices can be found in many corporations and universities and are known by the acronym DARE, that is, Diversity, Anti-Racism, and Equity. The University of Michigan leads the way with 163 diversity officers.

An archived PDF of the document was accessed February 24, 2022, <https://uca.edu/training/files/2020/09/black-Lives-Matter-Handout.pdf>.

⁶¹ National Museum of African American History & Culture—Smithsonian, “Whiteness,” last modified November 30, 2021, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness>.

These are the judges and juries of every injustice, down to the smallest of microaggressions. Teachers and students must walk through a cultural minefield, with trip wires invisible.

This becomes all the more problematic when offices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion are established in church schools and universities. In such a world, judgments are no longer based on God's law, but on the ever-changing rules of the politically correct. It may be a microaggression to say that America is a melting pot, which is a denial of the importance of race. Likewise, you may be convicted of perpetrating a microaggression by saying that the most qualified person should get the job. Perhaps you wish to use pronouns that align with reality, or say something as simple as a man cannot become a woman. In such an environment, there can be no frank speech. As Anthony Esolen puts it, "Microaggressions warrant microattention."⁶² But they can bring down reputations and careers. Many simply silence themselves in hope of self-preservation, but the mob is relentless.

St. Paul's question to the Corinthians should ring in our ears. When we have difficulties and disputes, "Why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers?" (1 Cor 6:4–5). When our Christian schools employ diversity officers, are we saying that we are incapable of making moral judgments? Will we bow to the secular world, whose dogma will be our guide, and whose ideologues will be our judges?

Intersectionality Hurts Supposed Victims

Indeed, there is something grim about fostering resentment and teaching some people that their only road to success is through the behavior of others. Instead, we should talk about ideas that actually help people. This is what John McWhorter argues for in his work *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America*. His proposed solutions include ending the war on drugs, an emphasis on better teaching of reading, and getting beyond the idea that everyone must go to college.⁶³ Such ideas are up for debate, but that is precisely the point. The truth welcomes debate and recognizes that no person is the repository of all wisdom. Of course, as a church, we are blessed with certain resources.

There are tried-and-true ways to load the dice of life in our favor. The wisdom of Solomon applies still today, and to all people. Solomon summarized a life well lived in this way: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise

⁶² Anthony Esolen, "Pronouns, Ordinary People, and the War over Reality," *Public Discourse*, October 13, 2016, accessed February 24, 2022, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2016/10/17811/>.

⁶³ McWhorter, *Woke Racism*, 140–144.

wisdom and instruction” (Prov 1:7). He urges his son, “Drink water from your own cistern,” and then to “rejoice in the wife of your youth” (Prov 5:15, 18). Do you wish to avoid poverty? Solomon says, “Go to the ant, O sluggard” (Prov 6:6). Spend the day on the couch, and he warns, “Poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man” (Prov 6:11). If we want to help others, and ourselves, we need not rely on a worldly philosophy that is at odds with Christianity. Instead, we do better to turn to scriptural wisdom, which recognizes that we are all sinners in need of forgiveness, that we have all been created in God’s image, that we are all sons and daughters of Adam, and that there are tried-and-true ways to improve one’s lot in life. Instead of diversity training, we do better to talk about Paul’s fruits of the Spirit, about a life that is not marked by the endless dialectical struggle, but by “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22–23).

There is no doubt that Marx recognized true societal problems, as does the cultural Marxism of today. But their solution is predatory and makes the problem worse. As C. S. Lewis noted, an elite few end up benefiting. Or, as George Orwell put it, when it comes to the world of equity politics, some animals are always more equal than others.⁶⁴ And, we might add, those who lord it over you are called benefactors. And this has always been the way of Marxism, to take from God the position of the ultimate Benefactor.

How Shall the Church React?

Some would urge the church to stay out of politics. Supposedly, when we engage in the culture wars, we do harm to our reputation. We are told to stay in our lane. So, stay away from hot topics such as abortion and gay marriage, we are told. Should such thinking also govern the way Christians speak about murder, rape, and child pornography? If we are to follow in the way of the Good Samaritan, should we not fight those who offer children puberty blockers and hormones leading to mutilating surgery? The law is always a matter of imposing prohibitions on behavior that hurts the innocent. When we abandon the public square, we leave it to those who have no concern for the lives of the innocent.

While we may wish to change people’s minds about abortion, we wish first to save the children whose lives are being taken by it. If we followed the idea of identity politics, men would be silent about abortion, which is precisely what the enemy desires. We may well say that the Christian should be willing to suffer for his faith, but statements carry less weight when that very same Christian stands on the

⁶⁴ George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, 1st American ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1946).

sideline as his fellow Christians are fined, fired, and canceled for speaking simple truth.

The Abolition of Man and the Abolition of Christ: Genesis to Revelation

Before moving forward, we need to move one step beyond Lewis's analysis and ask why it is that the nihilists of critical theory seek the abolition of man. What is the essence of this spiritual warfare? As we know, the end looks like the beginning. The splendor of Eden is upgraded into a new creation of pure flowing water, with trees bearing the fruit of healing. Genesis 1 and 2 propel us to the final chapters of Revelation.

It should therefore not surprise us that Satan, in these last days, seeks to undermine the God of creation. In the assault of abortion, Satan aims to devour the Christ child. In his redefinition of marriage, he wishes to make meaningless the idea that Christ is the groom of his bride, the church. In his assault on patriarchy, he mocks our heavenly Father. The world is seeking now nothing less than the abolition of man, even as Satan seeks the abolition of *the* Man, Christ himself. In everything, Christ seeks communion, which is the goal of all creation. And in everything, Satan seeks to divide us from one another and from God.

He Who Endures to the End Will Be Saved (Matt 24:12–13)

Some would rather not talk about issues such as identity politics, the sexual revolution, rainbow pride, critical race theory, and intersectionality. But wokeness is the theology of our day. The theology of wokeness is especially insidious in that it elevates the lies of the secular world, and it has been largely successful in silencing the church. It is no fun to be called some version of racist, bigot, or homophobe. But we should not be surprised. Christ repeatedly said that we would be hated for bearing his name (Matt 5:11; 10:22; Mark 13:13). While we may be tempted to remain silent, Christ calls upon his disciples to confess (Matt 10:32–33). In an age of rainbow pride, Christ's words must ring in our ears, "Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26). Or, as James writes, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jas 4:4).

Mystical Union as Unifying Biblical Theme

Gifford A. Grobien

At the beginning of his first epistle, St. John declares the purpose of his writing, and the result that will come from hearing his epistle for those who heed and believe his message (1 John 1:1–10). He announces all that he has perceived and experienced, by which he has *κοινωνία*¹ with the Father and the Son, so that his recipients also have *κοινωνία* with him, and with the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). Those who hear and believe the testimony of Jesus also walk in the light, confess their sins, are cleansed of their sins by Jesus' blood, and have fellowship with God and with other Christians (1 John 1:5–10).

κοινωνία, as many have noted, is not the same as the English “fellowship,” if by fellowship is meant simply a social relationship between two or more people. Rather *κοινωνία* is a mutual sharing that two or more people have in a particular good, essence, or experience.² What is this mutual sharing, this *κοινωνία*, that St. John purposes for the Father, the Son, his recipients, and himself? This *κοινωνία* is of the divine life itself, a *κοινωνία* which evangelical dogmatists have traditionally labeled *unio mystica* or “mystical union.”

If this mystical union, this sharing in the divine life, is a purpose of the proclamation of the gospel as St. John declares, then the mystical union is indeed a unifying biblical theme. Does, however, the mystical union receive the attention—whether in the ministry, teaching, or study of our churches—that one might reasonably expect of such a unifying theme? If not, perhaps there is concern that attention to the mystical union will distract from the “central article” of justification. Not only is justification the central article, but justification is forensic—which, to many, may mean “not related to union.” Related to this is the connection of mystical union to good works. If the mystical union is primarily concerned with sanctification, then it is concerned with good works, and we do not want discussions over good works confusing justification. Too much attention on the mystical union

¹ *koinōnia*, “communion, fellowship.”

² See, e.g., Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. N. E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 1–5.

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could distract, confuse, or lead astray unwary or less capable Christians from the forensic, non-participatory nature of justification.³

However, this approach to good works is not only misguided, but contrary to the scriptural witness regarding good works. The scriptural teaching of good works is not just that Christians do good works, but that works should be taught, and they should be urged upon Christians. Furthermore, how good works are taught bears directly on justification. The mystical union as a unifying and comprehensive theme teaches the manner by which to understand good works rightly. Finally, the mystical union sets forth more than just a doctrine of good works, but underlies the holiness, splendor, and perfection of salvation in Christ. The mystical union is not limited to an instrumental knowledge about good works, but illuminates and characterizes the eternal glory of salvation. To set forth the scope of this glory, our Lord interweaves the mystical union throughout the Scriptures.

Clarifying the Dogmatic Concept “Mystical Union”

Our dogmaticians clarified the biblical teaching of mystical union, which had been blurred in the history of Christianity. Mystical union was for much of Christian history associated with mystical ascent, which was depicted in three stages: purification, illumination, and union with God. Gregory of Nyssa offers an early example of this thinking in his homilies on the Song of Songs. He challenges the immature Christian to purge himself of temptation and sin through impassibility, and in this purity to enter into a heavenly understanding of God, and by this understanding to be united to the ineffable divine nature.⁴ These three stages of purification, illumination, and mystical union are also famously iterated by Pseudo-Dionysius around the turn of the sixth century.⁵ While there were many variations on the theme, this process of purification, illumination, and union with the divine, in an ineffable yet intimate manner that surpasses perception and understanding, became standard for mystical theology in the medieval period.⁶

³ An early evangelical confusion of the relation of union to justification is found in Osiandrianism, which argues that a Christian's righteousness before God depends on his nature being changed due to its union with Christ's divine nature. The Formula of Concord rejects this error while distinguishing the true teaching of mystical union from it (FC SD III 54–58).

⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* 1.25, trans. Richard A. Norris, Jr. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 27.

⁵ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology* I, in C. E. Rolt, trans., *Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1951), 191–94.

⁶ Felix Vernet, *Mediaeval Spirituality*, trans. The Benedictines of Talacre, Catholic Library of Religious Knowledge, XIII (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1930), 86.

Luther studied mystical theology and had a certain appreciation for some German mystics' understandings of purification (also referred to as purgation). However, he clarified that purification came not through a meditative effort to become more virtuous, but by being conformed to the suffering of Christ.⁷ For the mystics, the beginning of such conformity comes in human preliminary efforts and initiative, but finds its fulfillment with Christ taking form in the Christian according to Christ's grace and initiative.⁸ Luther countered that nothing was accomplished by human initiative, but everything depended on the gift of Christ, that is, Christ taking up residence in a Christian through faith, and in this faith being formed by Christ, especially through suffering.⁹

Evangelical dogmaticians, expanding biblically on Luther's train of thought, explain the mystical union as the gracious union of the believer or believers with God, given by faith and without efforts on the part of the believer. The mystical union is distinguished from God's general union with all things, from the Son's personal union with the human nature, and from the sacramental union of the body and blood of Christ with the bread and wine. This union is not something to be attained through mystical ascent, but is the gracious fellowship of God with believers that God initiates and establishes through Baptism, faith, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Not only are some qualities communicated from God to the Christian, but God himself dwells in the believer.¹⁰

Accordingly, what is the biblical testimony regarding the mystical union, regarding *κοινωνία* with God, as one of the results and blessings of salvation, and how central or unifying is this testimony?

⁷ Dietmar Lage, *Martin Luther's Christology and Ethics*, Texts and Studies in Religion 45 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 49–55. See Luther's thoughts on Romans 8:29, on being conformed, passively. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans* (1515–1516), in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), 25:365–370, hereafter AE.

⁸ Lage, *Martin Luther's Christology and Ethics*, 79.

⁹ Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1531), AE 26:167–168, comments on Galatians 2:20.

¹⁰ FC SD III 54, 65; Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 2:86. Johann Quenstedt treats the topic comprehensively in “De Unione Fidelium Mystica cum Deo,” part III, chapter X in *Theologia Didactico-Polemica Sive Systema Theologicum* (1685). Salient points from Quenstedt, as well as Hollaz and Calov, are excerpted in English in Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, 3rd ed., trans. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1899, 1961), 481–486.

Mystical Union according to the New Testament

κοινωνία most simply has to do with the sharing of something with one another (Heb 13:16). The writer to the Hebrews asserts that the Son of God shares in the same human nature as men (Heb 2:14); Paul calls for the sharing of a gift of money with those in need (2 Cor 8:4; 9:13); catechumens are to share goods with their teachers (Gal 6:6). Communion may be not just of a thing, but also of an activity. Both may participate in the same activity, in which case such fellowship is called a partnership. Peter and Andrew are partners with the sons of Zebedee in their fishing enterprise (Luke 5:10); by sending gifts to Paul, the Philippians not only made Paul a partaker of their material goods, but they also became partakers of Paul's evangelistic work (Phil 1:5; 4:15). Those who show hospitality to heretics commune with them in their evil deeds (2 John 10–11). Paul warns Timothy not to commune with others in their sins (1 Tim 5:22). Paul emphasizes the significance of shared activity in 1 Corinthians 10:18–21, when he highlights that *food* sacrificed to idols *per se* is not anything. It is rather the act of offering to demons which one must avoid. One cannot with integrity commune at both the demonic altar and the divine altar. *κοινωνία* expresses a tangible partnership by which communicants share in a mutual thing, activity, or benefit.

Some of the most significant language in Scripture on *κοινωνία* Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:16: τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλάμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστίν; (“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?”).¹¹ The genitive case indicates the object or experience which is shared: in this case, the blood of Christ and the body of Christ. Drinking of the eucharistic cup is a common partaking—a communion—of the blood of Christ; eating the bread of the Lord's Supper is a common partaking—a communion—of the body of Christ. The church gathered together for the Lord's Supper partakes commonly of Jesus' body and blood. It is of the body and the blood which the church has common partaking. In this communion, they also commune with one another and are made one: “because there is one bread, we many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). Such a communion is not just an association of believers in association with Jesus and with God, but the common essence of communion is the body and blood of Christ himself. It is the mutual partaking of the body and blood of Christ which makes Christians into a communion.

Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 1:9, the call of the faithful God is for communion of his Son, Jesus: “God is faithful, through whom you have been called into the

¹¹ Unless otherwise marked, Scripture quotations are the author's translation.

communion of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Again, “of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” is genitive, indicating that in which Christians commune, and that which makes Christians a communion with one another. Jesus himself is the one of whom and in whom we have communion. Further, this communion comes about as the purpose and result of God’s calling.

This communion includes also the Holy Spirit, as Paul blesses the Corinthians at the conclusion of his second epistle to them: ἡ χάρις τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἡ κοινωνία τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος μετὰ πάντων ὑμῶν (“The grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit is with you all”) (2 Cor 13:14). Here communion is of the Holy Spirit; the Spirit is the one of whom the Corinthians partake.

Peter’s encouragement to the hearers of his second epistle, that through the glory and virtue of Christ they become *θείας κοινωνοὶ φύσεως* (“sharers of the divine nature”) (2 Pet 1:4), expounds on the significance of having fellowship with our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Peter’s recipients have received faith in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:1). Christ calls with his glory and virtue (cf. 1 Pet 2:9, where the connection between virtue and calling is also made in that the recipients are to proclaim the *virtues* of the one who *called* them), by which we receive precious and great promises, that is, we become sharers in the divine nature and escape the corruption of the world. *κοινωνία* with God is a gift received through faith. This divine power, in turn, grants us all things pertaining to life and godliness, whereby we are exhorted to add to faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, love, and charity.

The *κοινωνία* of a Christian with God is expressed by the dogmatic term *unio mystica*. *κοινωνία* also helps to define what is meant by union. *κοινωνία* requires that two distinct persons or things share together while remaining distinct. The mystical union is a union in which both the believers and God himself remain with their personal substances, not one in which one substance is dissolved, or a third substance is formed. It is not a dissolving of a human being into the divine nature such that the human nature or person is lost. Nor is it a blending of the human being with the divine nature resulting in a third substance, such as a demigod. Rather, believers share in the divine nature perichoretically, each nature interpenetrating the other, without either substance losing its substantial identity. The benefit of this union is the gracious communication of divine power needed for life and godliness, beginning with righteousness and incorruption, but also including other virtues such as those listed by Peter.

At the same time, the mystical union is not a personal union. In the mystical union, the divine nature does not become subject to believers such that it is possessed by their persons. Christ’s personal union is the union of the human and

divine natures under the one person of the Son, with the result that the Son's human nature is truly the Son's and can no longer be removed. The mystical union of the believer with the divine is not one in which the divine nature belongs to the person of the believer, but, rather, is graciously, substantially communicated with the believer. Through unbelief, this union could be lost.

Furthermore, there is no loss of personhood in Christian union with God. Rather, the unity is a communication of the divine nature to each Christian, to the church, which occurs precisely through the unique person of Christ, for the benefit of other human persons, believers in Christ. Such a communication is an intimate, interpenetrating sharing of the divine nature between persons. Jesus' remarks in his high priestly prayer in John 17:20–23 explain this:

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one. (ESV)¹²

According to Jesus' prayer, Christians are to be one, *καθώς*, "just as," the Father and Son are one. This "just as" cannot refer to a substantial sharing of natural divinity from eternity, as it does for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, because human beings are created and do not exist with the divine nature from eternity. This "just as" does not refer to a natural divine unity, but to a unity into which believers are graciously brought through faith so that they now share in a union with God which they once did not possess. He says, "The glory that you have given me I also have given to them, so that they be one just as we are one" (John 17:22).

Both John and Peter state that unity with God comes by the gift of Christ's glory to believers: Jesus has "called us by his glory and virtue, through which precious and great promises are given to us, that through these you become partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:3–4). The glory of Christ restores the very image of God unto us, the image lost in the fall and which belongs properly to Jesus, but which he shares with us. Paul explains, "When one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, contemplating as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into this image from glory to glory, accordingly from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:16–18). The glory of the Lord is unveiled to us by the Holy Spirit,

¹² Scripture quotations marked ESV are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

received through faith, who transforms us into this image of God in Christ. Likewise, Paul says, “You have stripped off the old man with his deeds, and have clothed yourselves with the new, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of the one who created him” (Col 3:9–10). The new man is being renewed in the image of Christ, so that even though our life is hidden with Christ in God, we shall appear in glory with him when he appears (Col 3:3–4).

Because we partake of the divine through our fellowship with Christ and his Spirit, we depend on the Son first becoming a man, first partaking of the human nature (Heb 2:14). Hebrews 2:9–11 proclaims:

And we behold the one who briefly was made lower than angels, Jesus, who because of the suffering of death has been crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God he might taste death on behalf of everyone. For it was fitting for him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, to make the author of their salvation, in leading many sons into glory, complete through suffering. For both the sanctifier and those being sanctified all are of one, for which reason he is not ashamed to call them brothers.

That Jesus suffers death on behalf of everyone is due to him being “of one” with all those whom he is sanctifying, that is, one in the human nature. This unity in humanity means all who are being sanctified are his brothers and are to be led into glory. In this case, this unity is due to his taking on the human nature. As Jesus is crowned in glory, so he also leads his church into glory.

The writer to the Hebrews continues: “Therefore because the children have communed of blood and flesh, he also likewise shares in these things, that through death he might overthrow the one having the power of death, that is, the devil, and release them who by fear of death through all their lives were subject to slavery” (Heb 2:14–15). By partaking of the human nature of flesh and blood, Jesus is able to suffer death, by which he redeems men from sin, death, and the devil, and further leads them into the glory in which he is crowned, having been made complete through this suffering. The Son takes on a share in the human nature, and brings his brothers into the share of the divine nature. See this theme similarly in Romans 8:3–4: “God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”; likewise in Galatians 4:4–6: “But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts.” This is to say that the great exchange depends on the great *κοινωνία* of God

in human nature, in which he shares the glory, immortality, and other virtues of his divine nature.

Mystical Union in the Old Testament

We have observed some of the New Testament witness to the mystical union as a significant theme of salvation in Christ. But what of the Old Testament? Is the mystery of the mystical union borne witness to prior to the New Testament, and, if not, can we consider it a unifying or significant theme of Scripture?

First, the doctrine of mystical union is set forth from the beginning in the institution of marriage. “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen 2:24). Paul explains that this saying, and therewith marriage itself, “is a great mystery, and I am speaking with respect to Christ and to his church” (Eph 5:32). Paul here further speaks of Christ’s relation to his church as one flesh, for we Christians are members of his body (vv. 30–31). Christ further loves the church as his own body, just as husbands are called to love their wives (vv. 28–29), and his loving union accomplishes his work of sanctifying, purifying, and glorifying the church, so that she is holy and without blemish.

In order to extol this sanctifying union, even centuries before Christ’s incarnation, the Holy Spirit gave us a rhapsody of the unifying love of the Son for his people in the Song of Songs. From the first verses, this theme is clear (1:2–4):

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.
Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love thee. Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee. (AV)¹³

The kiss itself is already an act of love expressing tender unity, demonstrating one’s mutual association with another. Even kisses by friends or family express the affection appropriate to the type of kiss. For Christ and the church, the acts expressed are those of marital love, for marital intimacy specially typifies the intimacy of Christ’s love for his people.

Christ’s love is better than wine, for it does not make the church drunk with passion, but cleanses soberly with the purification of blood. The name of Christ is poured forth upon us in the anointing of Baptism, a spiritual fragrance far more wonderful than earthly perfumes. The fidelity of this holy union is for the church,

¹³ Quotations marked AV are from the King James or Authorized Version of the Bible.

so the many virgins—those who are purified through faith and sanctified by Christ—love him. Thus it is for all the people of God as his church, his body, to be drawn into his bridal chamber, to be purified and sanctified forever. These who are made upright are the beloved of God.

Rich descriptions of the beauty of the love of the Lover and the Beloved follow as the Song progresses, depicting in figures—even the figures of natural, marital love—Christ’s loving union with his church. The Song culminates in 8:6–7:

Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised. (ESV)

The bridegroom, the Lord himself, is the seal upon the heart, a seal which not only protects his beloved from the strongest attack, but which engraves into the heart, and characterizes the beloved as holy and pure. The love and zeal of the Lord is stronger than death and the grave; indeed, this passage iterates the victory over death accomplished by our bridegroom who takes on our human nature in order to suffer death, thereby destroying sin in the flesh and defeating death, and to lead us into glory and holiness.

Furthermore, our bridegroom does not try to buy or sell love, but gladly sets aside the wealth of his house. He does not consider his divinity something to be clung to or grasped in protection (Phil 2:6), but he happily sets it aside in order to redeem, rescue, enliven, and purify his bride. His bride, then, is one whom he does not simply have pity on, but one with whom he desires to be united in love, figured beautifully as marital love in Song of Songs 7:5–12:

Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses. How beautiful and pleasant you are, O loved one, with all your delights! Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine. It goes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding over lips and teeth. I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields and lodge in the villages; let us go out early to the vineyards and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love. (ESV)

The intimate joy of marriage can be described as ecstatic in that each spouse finds love in the other. Their union is the aim of their love, yet their union also endues

their love with greater love, joy, and bliss, symbolized by the fruitfulness referred to in the passage. This ecstasy is not the false mysticism which imagines that a person loses himself or his concrete experience in the ineffable divine nature. Rather, this ecstasy is to act in love with the other, and to receive the fruits and blessings of this love. So we receive blessing and goodness from God's love for us, and also act in love toward him, and his whole body.

Second, a clear expression of mystical union can be found in Leviticus 26:11–12, where the Lord says: “And I will place my tabernacle in your midst, and my soul will not despise you. And I will walk about among you, and I shall be your God, and you shall be my people.” Paul explains this (in 2 Cor 6:16) not simply as God placing his tabernacle among his people, but as the church herself being the temple of God. God's dwelling place is not a tent or building, but the souls of the church. Those among whom the Lord dwells are his temple. Even if Leviticus 26 refers only to the future indwelling of God in the New Testament, it indicates that the theme of mystical union is in God's mind much earlier. It also indicates, at the very least, that just as the tabernacle is a figure of Christ's body, so also its presence among the Israelites is a figure of the mystical union, of the divine presence made accessible in *κοινωνία* with his people.

Indeed, we see this particular language of God dwelling in the midst of his people to be their God, and for them to be his people, taking on a programmatic character in the Bible (Exod 6:7; 29:45; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:27). Even if one were to say that fellowship in the divine nature is only anticipated but not experienced in these instances, these indicate the intent and hope of God, and his eschatological view, as is clear from Haggai 2:5, 9: “My Spirit remains in your midst. Fear not. . . . The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of hosts” (ESV). The glory of the Lord is shared with his people by the presence of his Spirit, and this latter glory of the Spirit's dwelling, that is, in the temple of Jesus' body—and therefore also the church—is the place of peace and salvation.

This promise of the indwelling Spirit is well-known in Ezekiel 37:14 (in the valley of dry bones): “I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live” (ESV), as well as in 36:24–28:

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and

be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. (ESV)

There is, furthermore, the expectation of this *κοινωνία* with God in some psalms, such as Psalm 42, expressing the hope for the beatific vision: “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? . . . Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God” (vv. 2, 11, AV). How is this longing satisfied? How is this hope fulfilled? By the Divine Service, where the Lord has given himself among us: “These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise” (v. 4, ESV). Where the Lord dwells among his people, there also one pours out his soul and is consoled by his gracious presence, the salvation of his countenance. The tabernacle, the dwelling place of God among his people, is the location of *κοινωνία* with God.

The centrality and continuity of this theme of God dwelling within his people and being their God, and they his people, culminates in the Book of Revelation:

I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.’ . . .

And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. . . .

And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. . . .

The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in [the city]; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. (Rev 21:2–3, 9–11, 22–23; 22:3–5, AV)

At the consummation of the kingdom of the resurrection, the dwelling of God with man is perfected. The people of God are his bride, having been purified and sanctified. The glory of the Lord permeates this city, so much so that no other light or beauty is needed. The Lord himself simply is his own dwelling place—there is no temple—yet his glory illuminates all things. In particular, his people see the face of his glory, and he is the salvation of their countenance, as Psalm 42 anticipated. The glory of the Lord is the light and beauty of the city, penetrating and characterizing all people and things. The people of God are perfected as those among whom the Lord dwells in beatific union.

The Blessings of the Mystical Union

If the mystical union is an underlying biblical theme, what is the purpose of this theme? What is being communicated or witnessed to? Generally, we can understand that communion with another person inclines the two to become like each other. Communion is a convivial life, in which they share gifts, assets, honor, strengths, weaknesses, and limitations. We have already begun to see that communion with Jesus means that he shares his life and gifts with us, and purges us from our weaknesses and sins. He sanctifies us, and in the resurrection, grants us immortality and glory.¹⁴

Consider, further, for example, Romans 6:5–8: “For if we have been grafted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man has been crucified with him, that the body of sin might be abolished, that we should no longer serve sin. For the one who has died has been justified from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.” In being grafted into Christ in Baptism, we share in Christ’s death, such that our sin is already put to death, and we will also share in the resurrection of the body. Furthermore, because the body of sin is put to death, we are no longer enslaved to sin, but begin to be purged of sin and to do good works. In our union with Christ, the old is put to death, and the new is raised up with Christ.

Paul exhorts the Corinthians, on the basis of God’s promise that he dwells within them as a tabernacle, that they purify themselves from all defilements and bring holiness to perfection (2 Cor 6:18–7:1). In Philippians 3:9–10, he explains that he is found in Christ, having the righteousness of faith, in order to know Christ, the power of his resurrection, and the *κοινωνίαν* of his sufferings, in which he is conformed to Christ’s death, in order to attain to the resurrection. He is found in Christ through faith, by which he has fellowship with Christ’s suffering, death, and

¹⁴ John W. Kleinig, *Wonderfully Made: A Protestant Theology of the Body* (Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham Press, 2021), 120–121.

resurrection, that he also be conformed to these things. Participation of a person means to become like him and to be brought into a share of his activity.

Similarly, Colossians 3 states that our life is hidden with Christ. When Christ appears, we also will appear in glory. In the meantime, we put to death all vices, putting off the old man, and putting on the new man and all virtue, being renewed in knowledge after the image of Christ (v. 10). Having life in Christ means we share in and are renewed in his image, and are strengthened to purge the old man and his vices.

Similar statements can be found in Galatians 5:25: "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (AV); 1 Peter 4:13: "Even as you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, for in the appearance of his glory, exulting you will also rejoice"; Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; no longer do I live, but Christ lives in me. Yet the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God"; Ephesians 2:5–6: "God made us alive together in Christ, and raised us together and sat us together in the heavenly places in Christ"; and 2 Timothy 2:11–13: "If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; . . . if we are unfaithful, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself." This last phrase reminds us of the bond of marriage, as St. Paul says, "No man ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes it and cherishes it, as the Lord does the church" (Eph 5:29).

In summary, the mystical union blesses Christians by uniting them through faith to Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, so that they also participate in death to sin, resurrection to immortal life, and reigning together with Christ. Although this is hidden in the natural experience, the promises of these blessings are assured because of our union with him. Furthermore, because Christians are united to him, he empowers them with his holiness and spiritual gifts so that they put off the old man and his vices, and begin to put on the virtues of the new man and bear the fruits of the Spirit. This transformation from glory to glory will be completed in perfect glorification in the eternal kingdom.

Finally, John 17:21–23 offers further nuance to the sanctifying effect of the mystical union. Jesus prays "that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me" (ESV). The fruit of sanctification is, in this case, evidence of the redeeming and glorifying work of Christ. The love of God for his people is manifest in his union with them, in his sharing of glory with them, and in their love for one another. By living in this union, experiencing the love of God, and loving one another, Christians bear witness to God's love and his saving work.

Mystical Union and Justification

Because the mystical union is a central and unifying theme in Scripture, what are the implications of this teaching for theology and ministry? On the one hand, one might respond, quoting the introduction to Luther's *Psalm 51* (1532): "The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner. Whatever is asked or discussed in theology outside this subject, is error and poison."¹⁵ A strict interpretation of this claim might suggest that only sin and justification should be treated in theology, perhaps including some Christology for good measure. Mystical union, and whatever its fruits, would be outside the circle of theology and only treated in other disciplines.

But such a strict interpretation of Luther's comment, of course, does not correspond to the evangelical tradition. Theologians from Melancthon and Chemnitz to Gerhard, Quenstedt, and Pieper treat numerous topics other than sin, justification, and Christology in works titled, variously, *Loci communes rerum theologicarum* (*Commonplaces on the Facts of Theology*); *Loci Theologici* (*Theological Topics*); and *Christian Dogmatics*, which is another way of saying "true Christian teaching." Such other theological topics include the doctrines of God's persons, nature, and attributes; of creation; of angels; of good works; of the mystical union; of the church, ministry, and sacraments; and of the last things. Luther himself treated topics in theology other than sin, Christology, and justification; to our point, he treats the fruit of the mystical union—sanctification—in his 1539 treatise *On the Councils and the Church*:

Christian holiness, or the holiness common to Christendom, is found where the Holy Spirit gives people faith in Christ and thus sanctifies them, Acts 15 [:9], that is, he renews heart, soul, body, work, and conduct, inscribing the commandments of God not on tables of stone, but in hearts of flesh, 2 Corinthians 3[:3]. . . . That is called new holy life in the soul, in accordance with the first table of Moses. It is also called *tres virtutes theologicas*, "the three principal virtues of Christians," namely, faith, hope, and love; and the Holy Spirit, who imparts, does, and effects this (gained for us by Christ) is therefore called "sanctifier" or "life-giver." For the old Adam is dead and cannot do it, and in addition has to learn from the law that he is unable to do it and that he is dead; he would not know this of himself.

In accordance with the second table, He also sanctifies the Christians in the body That is the work of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies and also awakens

¹⁵ Luther, *Psalm 51* (1532), AE 12:311.

the body to such a new life until it is perfected in the life beyond. That is what is called "Christian holiness."¹⁶

The discerning learner from Luther here will recognize that sin, Christology, and justification, in a narrow sense, are not the only topics of theology, but rather that theology includes those topics which have significant bearing upon sin, Christology, and justification, and vice versa. It is in this way, as exemplified by Luther, that we should understand his own comments on Psalm 51. In this case, we recognize that true holiness is not reduced merely to good works or to obedience to the law. It is perhaps this distinction that we can see in Luther himself: to confuse theology with mere natural ethics was not only misguided, but a wicked error and breach of the theological office. Correlatively, teaching that in some way suggested, asserted, argued, or tempted people to believe that works contributed in some way to justification was above all to be rejected. Yet, from his comment, Luther clearly views true Christian holiness differently from following moral principles. Christian holiness is not merely about behavior, but about regeneration, new life, purification, and perfection worked by the Holy Spirit, received through faith, and part of the comprehensive understanding of salvation. As the basis for sanctification, the mystical union has more to do with this comprehensive account of holiness and salvation than a simplistic, isolated view of good works.

In fact, the mystical union is a central doctrine of theology because it teaches and communicates this very difference between an external natural morality and true Christian holiness. The mystical union properly integrates truly good works with Christology and justification, so that Christians will not fall into the error of confusing works with justification. In other words, to neglect the mystical union allows a deficiency in theological understanding to creep into one's confession and may tempt a Christian either into a dead faith with no fruits or into a legalism detached from faith.

Such a concern is at the heart of the argument of Article IV of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession. Here we rightly recognize that the heart of the dispute with the opponents is not *if* works relate to faith and justification, but *how* works relate to justification. In other words, the question is not if good works are a theological topic, but how they are a theological topic. As we confess throughout the second part of Apology IV, true, assenting, and trusting faith receives the Holy Spirit, who regenerates. Of natural necessity, this regeneration produces good works (e.g., Ap IV 124–126). Furthermore, the Scriptures often speak of love, works, and the promises of God together in the same passage. The theologian cannot ignore love and works, taught by Scripture, but rather rightly discerns that true love and

¹⁶ Luther, *On the Councils and the Church* (1539), AE 41:145–147.

works are the result and fruit of faith (Ap IV 154–155, 184, 188, 219, 248–253). When the proper relationship between faith and works is not continually taught and retained, one may fall into the error of depending on works for salvation, or having confidence in a dead faith, which is no faith at all.

For good works are to be done on account of God's command, likewise for the exercise of faith, and on account of confession and giving of thanks. . . . We therefore praise and require good works, and show many reasons why they ought to be done. . . . Although in this way good works ought to follow faith, men who cannot believe and be sure that for Christ's sake they are freely forgiven, and that freely for Christ's sake they have a reconciled God, employ works far otherwise. When they see the works of saints, they judge in a human manner that saints have merited the remission of sins and grace through these works. Accordingly, they imitate them, and think that through similar works they merit the remission of sins and grace. (Ap IV 189, 201, 203 [III 68, 80, 82])¹⁷

According to the Apology, good works must be taught, in accordance with the Scriptures, for the sake of God's command, to exercise faith, and to confess Christ's name and work before the world and praise him for these. Good works must be taught. But because unbelievers and hypocrites think that by these works they will be justified, works must be taught in their proper relation to faith, that is, as fruits of the Holy Spirit who indwells a believer. On the other hand:

Renewal and the inchoate fulfilling of the Law must exist in us If any one should cast away love, even though he have great faith, yet he does not retain it, for he does not retain the Holy Ghost [Paul] writes to those who, after they had been justified, should be urged to bring forth good fruits lest they might lose the Holy Ghost. (Ap IV 219–221 [III 98–100])¹⁸

Here we confess that if good works are not encouraged and exhorted, some run the real risk of losing their faith with hearts grown cold. It is not a question of teaching good works, but of the true, holy, and good manner of teaching good works, over against legalism or listlessness.

The mystical union is fundamental to the true, holy, and good teaching on good works. Rather than fear the mystical union as a threat to justification or peripheral to the theological task, we confess, as the Scriptures do, the mutually supportive and complementary character of justification and mystical union. Union with Christ, biblically understood, does not interfere with or contradict the doctrine of

¹⁷ W. H. T. Dau and F. Bente, eds., *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), 175, 177.

¹⁸ *Triglot Concordia*, 181.

justification. Union with Christ, participation in the divine nature through the indwelling of God, is a gracious gift of God through faith. Justification occurs logically prior to indwelling, although they both occur through faith (Gal 3:2; Eph 1:13). “Faith brings with itself the Holy Ghost and produces in hearts a new life. . . . there is now within through the Spirit of Christ a new heart, mind, and spirit within” (Ap IV 125 [III 4]).¹⁹ The mystical union, while it makes possible and communicates gifts of God for efforts in the new obedience and holiness, does not depend on these efforts and strivings. Indeed, in his lively spiritual work, Christ protects us from legalism, lethargy, and hypocrisy.

Furthermore, the significance of the mystical union goes beyond the concern over good works, but is central to conversion, sanctification, and glorification. Such comprehensive, Christian holiness includes the putting off of vices of the old and putting on the gifts, fruits, and virtues of the new life in the Spirit. Yet such activity comes from holiness enlivened and illumined in the Son, an ongoing transformation by the renewing of the mind, the conformity to the image of Christ, and the transformation from glory to glory. The mystical union is Christ’s spiritual work preparing and keeping us for everlasting life. *κοινωνία* grants us new spiritual life, communicating to us immortality in Christ. It breaks the power of death, and does not just impose outward behavior, but transforms our bodies from death to glory. While dim and hidden in this life, it is not only an eschatological hope. Through faith, by the indwelling of God, by the activity of the Spirit, this glorious purpose has begun and remains sure in Christ.

¹⁹ *Triglot Concordia*, 157.



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The Sanctity of Life in the Lutheran Confessions

Michael Salemink

Lutherans bring a distinctive accent to both Christianity and culture. Our enthusiastic appreciation for God's grace proves especially poignant where they intersect. The sanctity of life represents one such sensitive pressure point. Dialogues (debates, even!) about surprise pregnancies or terminal diagnoses often involve anxiety and anger, to which courageous and compassionate gospel joy and hope can apply salve and antidote. Indeed, celebrating the worth and purpose of every human being, particularly the vulnerable or marginalized "least of these," lies very near the heart of the Church's witness and mission. And the value God's love gives to all members of our race has occupied a significant place in Lutheran doctrine and practice since the beginning. The confessors who formulated the foundational documents that comprise the Book of Concord derived an advocacy for the sanctity of life from the Holy Scriptures themselves.

Martin Luther directly condemned abortion. His lectures on Genesis state, "How great, therefore, the wickedness of human nature is! How many girls there are who prevent conception and kill and expel tender fetuses, although procreation is the work of God!"¹ and, "For those who pay no attention to pregnant women and do not spare the tender fetus become murderers and parricides."² In his pastoral tract, "Comfort for Women Who Have Had a Miscarriage" (1542), he makes it clear that he considers a fetus both a human being and a precious treasure: "One must make a distinction between them [Christian mothers] and those females who resent being pregnant, deliberately neglect their child, or go so far as to strangle or destroy it."³ He then proceeds to speak at length of the possibility and promise of the child's everlasting salvation even before birth.

Martin Chemnitz, a prominent theologian and leader in the second generation of Lutheran reformers, likewise instructed against ending unborn lives. His *Loci*

¹ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45/1544–54), in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009–), 4:304, hereafter AE.

² Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45/1544–54), AE 5:382.

³ Luther, *Lectures on Genesis* (1535–45/1544–54), AE 43:247.

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Theologici comments and expands on Philip Melancthon's textbook *Loci Communes*, and in explaining the Fifth Commandment ("You shall not murder"), he writes, "Pertinent here also are those things which hinder conception, Gen. 38:9; likewise, the matter of destroying the fetus in the womb, Ex. 21:22."⁴ Even advocating abortion amounts to the same level of violation: "They who give aid or approval or add injuries of their own, whether by advice, command, betrayal, or false witness, are also involved in this first kind of homicide."⁵

Both Luther and Chemnitz contributed documents that became Lutheran Confessions. Luther authored the Small and Large Catechisms and the Smalcald Articles. Chemnitz not only participated in the committee that prepared the Formula of Concord, but he also proved instrumental in compiling the original Book of Concord as the authoritative canon of confessional texts. Neither Martin specifically references abortion in those writings, and in fact the Lutheran Confessions do not address it explicitly at all. However, the Book of Concord does profess the unambiguous conviction that God invests every human life with a paramount worth and purpose that unborn human beings and impaired human bodies also possess. For the confessional Lutheran fellowship, this conclusion proscribes abortion, euthanasia, embryocide, and other attempts to use death as a solution to suffering or difficulty.

The Lutheran Confessions highly prize and praise marriage, procreation, and parenthood. Rather than a matter of convenience or preference, childbearing represents the intention and directive of God himself. The Augsburg Confession (in its Latin edition) asserts, "God created human beings for procreation" (AC XXIII 5),⁶ and the Apology echoes it: "Genesis teaches that human beings were created to be fruitful" (Ap XXIII 7).⁷ The Large Catechism elaborates,

Therefore do not imagine that the parental office is a matter of your pleasure and whim. It is a strict commandment and injunction of God, who holds you accountable for it.

But once again, the real trouble is that no one perceives or pays attention to this. Everyone acts as if God gave us children for our pleasure and amusement. . . . But he has given us children and entrusted them to us precisely

⁴ Martin Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, trans. Jacob A. O. Preus, Chemnitz's Works 7–8 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2008), 8:738.

⁵ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, 8:738.

⁶ Friedrich Bente and W. H. T. Dau, eds., *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 61: "quia Deus creavit hominem ad procreationem." The German version omits this clause.

⁷ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand, et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 249.

so that we may raise and govern them according to his will; otherwise, God would have no need of fathers and mothers. (LC I 169–170, 173)⁸

Indeed, the vocation of childbearing and childrearing supersedes all other circumstances and callings: “God has given this walk of life, fatherhood and motherhood, a special position of honor, higher than that of any other walk of life under it. . . . But he distinguishes father and mother above all other persons on earth, and places them next to himself” (LC I 105).⁹ The very division of humankind into male and female serves this objective: “He created man and woman differently . . . to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God. God has therefore blessed this walk of life most richly . . . and endowed it with everything in the world in order that this walk of life might be richly provided for” (LC I 207–208).¹⁰ Rather than decline the opportunity or despise this privilege—especially once already set in motion—couples ought to desire and delight in it: “For this reason you should rejoice from the bottom of your heart and give thanks to God that he has chosen and made you worthy to perform works so precious and pleasing to him” (LC I 117).¹¹

The Confessions acknowledge that something about humankind has become deficient. The fall of our first parents ruined the original righteousness of the divine image in which God created our kind, and original sin now passes from parents to children. The Augsburg Confession marks the instant of conception as the occasion at which this uniquely human deficiency is transmitted: “Since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin” (AC II 1).¹² The Formula of Concord affirms that in this moment the individual offspring contracts not only the deficiency but also the humanity in which the deficiency inheres: “Along with human nature . . . original sin is transmitted through carnal conception and birth from father and mother through the sinful seed” (FC SD I 7).¹³ It takes care to specify that this does not take place at birth or at some other point after conception:

⁸ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 409–410.

⁹ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 400–401.

¹⁰ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 414. Ap XXIII 32, discussing 1 Timothy 2:15, speaks hypothetically about salvation through works, asserting that the works discussed in 1 Timothy 2:15 are quite different from self-chosen monasticism and other unscriptural religious practices: “Paul says that a woman is saved through childbearing. In contrast to the hypocrisy of celibacy, what greater honor could he bestow than to say that woman is saved by the conjugal functions themselves, by conjugal intercourse, by childbirth, and by her other domestic duties?” Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 252.

¹¹ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 402.

¹² Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 36.

¹³ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 533.

For after the fall human nature is not initially created pure and good and then subsequently corrupted by original sin. Instead, in the first moment of our conception the seed from which the human being is formed is sinful and corrupted. So original sin is not something in and of itself, or something independent inside or outside of human nature. (FC SD I 28)¹⁴

Original sin actually testifies to our humanity prior to birth (or even quickening), because recognizing the embryo as sinful entails recognizing the embryo as a human being and person.

In addition, God himself continues to bring forth human nature and human creature in and through this brokenness. “For God created not only the body and soul of Adam and Eve before the fall but also our body and soul after the fall, even though they are corrupted. God also still recognizes them as his own work, as it is written, Job 10, ‘Your hands fashioned and made me, together all around’” (FC Ep I 4).¹⁵ Even this severest deficiency of sinfulness does not decrease one’s value before God or negate one’s membership in the human race and species:

It is of course true that this creature and handiwork of God is tragically corrupted by sin

Here upright Christian hearts should remember the indescribable goodness of God, that God does not cast such a corrupted, perverted, sinful *massa* immediately into the fires of hell. Instead, out of it God makes and fashions human nature as it now is, so tragically corrupted by sin, so that he might cleanse, sanctify, and save it through his dear Son. (FC SD I 38–39)¹⁶

According to the Book of Concord, both our creaturely contingency and our sinful disposition leave every human being entirely at the mercy of almighty God. Gestating embryos and incapacitated patients in their weakness exhibit outwardly the invisible spiritual condition of helplessness that besets us all. Physical limitations testify that death delivers inabilities to every body and sin imposes them upon even the most apparently proficient among us:

Just as people who are bodily dead cannot on the basis of their own powers prepare themselves or dispose themselves to receive temporal life once again, so people who are spiritually dead in sins cannot on the basis of their own strength dispose themselves or turn themselves toward appropriate spiritual, heavenly righteousness and life. (FC SD II 11)¹⁷

¹⁴ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 536.

¹⁵ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 488.

¹⁶ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 538.

¹⁷ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 545.

This renders even apparently autonomous and otherwise able adults no better than unconscious and immobile people: “For this reason, Holy Scripture compares the unregenerated human heart to a hard stone, which does not yield when touched but resists, or to an unhewn block of wood” (FC SD II 19).¹⁸ And “in spiritual and divine matters, the mind, heart, and will of the unrebored human being can in absolutely no way, on the basis of its own natural powers, understand, believe, accept, consider, will, begin, accomplish, do, effect, or cooperate” (FC SD II 7).¹⁹ In significant ways, the more self-sufficient we act—apart from divine intervention—the worse we end up:

For although they can control their bodies and can listen to the gospel and think about it to a certain extent and even speak of it (as Pharisees and hypocrites do), they regard it as foolishness and cannot believe it. They behave in this case worse than a block of wood, for they are rebellious against God’s will and hostile to it. (FC SD II 24)²⁰

The decisive categorical difference for the Confessions does not consist in distinguishing between born and unborn or between intelligence and ignorance. Age, appearance, ability, and origin do not impair or improve favor with God. Instead, the dichotomy between God’s child and the devil’s captive constitutes the definitive classification of humankind: “Therefore there is a great difference between baptized and unbaptized people” (FC SD II 67).²¹ And, “Before we had come into this community, we were entirely of the devil, knowing nothing of God and of Christ” (FC SD II 37).²² This division, rather than any variances in size or time, reaches as deep as the separation of one kind of creature from another: “In order that no one might maintain that the substance or essence of the human being has to be laid aside, [Paul] declared himself what it means to lay aside the old creature and to put on the new. For he says in the following words: ‘Therefore lay aside lies and speak the truth.’ That is what it means to lay aside the old creature and put on the new” (FC SD II 81).²³

The confessors, in fact, do not disconnect human identity and dignity from redemption in Jesus Christ. They derive them directly from the paradigm of the Son of God’s incarnation. He assumed human nature and “was made man” before his birth, as the Smalcald Articles indicate: “The Son became a human being in this way:

¹⁸ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 547.

¹⁹ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 544.

²⁰ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 549.

²¹ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 557.

²² Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 551.

²³ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 559.

he was conceived by the Holy Spirit without male participation” (SA I 4).²⁴ The Formula of Concord goes into detail, quoting Luther:

“Wherever Christ is according to his divinity, he is there as a natural, divine person and he is also naturally and personally there, as his conception in his mother’s womb proves conclusively. For if he was the Son of God, he had to be in his mother’s womb naturally and personally and become human. But if he is present naturally and personally wherever he is, then he must be human there, too, since he is not two separate persons but a single person. Wherever this person is, it is the single, indivisible person, and if you can say, ‘Here is God,’ then you must also say, ‘Christ the human being is present too.’” (FC SD VIII 82)²⁵

So the Large Catechism can insist on infant Baptism in extended and impassioned fashion (LC IV 47–63), and its author also contends in the Smalcald Articles, “We maintain that we should baptize children because they also belong to the promised redemption that was brought about by Christ” (SA III V 4).²⁶ One senses that he would lay the same claim upon unborn ones if only the Lord God had given such a chance and a command.

Abortion, therefore, engages in the devil’s work of sinful disobedience. Any other embryocidal practices or substances do wrong as well. The Confessions find that the same holds true for suicide, even when assisted by a physician, as the Apology stipulates, “We ought to leave our body, too, for the gospel, but it would be silly to conclude from this that it is an act of devotion to God to commit suicide and to leave our body without the command of God. In the same way, it is silly to maintain that it is an act of devotion to God to leave possessions, friends, wife, and children without the command of God” (Ap XXVII 42).²⁷ The Large Catechism attributes the impulse to end one’s own life to Satan himself: “For because the devil is not only a liar but a murderer as well, he incessantly seeks our life and vents his anger by causing accidents and injury to our bodies. He crushes some and drives others to insanity; some he drowns in water, and many he hounds to suicide or other dreadful catastrophes” (LC III 115).²⁸ Hastening the death of a parent because of age or infirmity, even if he or she requests it, even if pity moves us entirely to understand the desire, and even if medical technology mitigates most of its obvious violence, forfeits the blessings and obligations of the Fourth Commandment: “You are also to honor them by your actions, that is, with your body and possessions, serving them,

²⁴ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 300.

²⁵ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 632.

²⁶ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 320.

²⁷ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 284.

²⁸ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 455.

helping them, and caring for them when they are old, sick, feeble, or poor; all this you should do not only cheerfully, but also with humility and reverence, doing it as if for God” (LC I 111).²⁹

Promoting these evils incurs as much censure from the Book of Concord as participating in them. “We should not use our tongue to advocate or advise harming anyone. Furthermore, we should neither use nor sanction any means or methods whereby anyone may be mistreated” (LC I 188).³⁰ Even passively permitting them by ignoring or neglecting to oppose and intercede will not do:

In the second place, this commandment is violated not only when we do evil, but also when we have the opportunity to do good to our neighbors and to prevent, protect, and save them from suffering bodily harm or injury, but fail to do so. . . . Likewise, if you see anyone who is [innocently]³¹ condemned to death or in similar peril and do not save him although you have means and ways to do so, you have killed him. It will be of no help for you to use the excuse that you did not assist their deaths by word or deed, for you have withheld your love from them and robbed them of the kindness by means of which their lives might have been saved. (LC I 189–190)³²

Finally, the Lutheran Confessions clearly and unanimously declare that the grace of God in the forgiveness of Christ Jesus offers the only effective remedy. It delivers and redeems from the demonic deception and cultural pressure to use death as a solution. It releases, relieves, and heals from the guilt and grief of having taken part in embryocide, abortion, euthanasia, and other sins against the sanctity of life: “Scripture demonstrates in many places that there is no other sacrifice for original sin or any other sin than the one death of Christ. For it is written in Hebrews that Christ offered himself once and thereby made satisfaction for all sins” (AC XXIV 25–26).³³ And,

He has purchased and freed me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. He has done all this in order that I may belong to him, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. (SC II 4).³⁴

²⁹ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 401.

³⁰ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 412.

³¹ This word is included in the 1580 German Book of Concord but is omitted in Kolb and Wengert’s translation. See Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 412 n. 96.

³² Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 412.

³³ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 70.

³⁴ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 355.

And this alone treats and frees from the sufferings and difficulties that make these measures or any attempts to domesticate death attractive. Entrusting oneself and neighbors to the words and the ways of God as Father and Savior embraces the better way not only for survival but also for salvation: “God protects me against all danger and shields and preserves me from all evil. And all this is done out of pure, fatherly, and divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness of mine at all!” (SC II 2).³⁵

The formulators of the Lutheran Confessions probably did not debate abortion. Nor did their doctrinal documents directly address physician-assisted suicide. Nevertheless, the Book of Concord finds the Scriptural gospel relevant to the sanctity of human life and articulates the foundational principles from which present advocacy derives. The central contention remains the same: God’s grace in creating and redeeming regards human beings as special and precious from fertilization to forever. He forbids using death as a solution to difficulties like surprise pregnancy or terminal diagnosis. And He delights to bring forth faith and hope, love and joy even amid our weakness and wickedness. Christian faith—and confessional Lutheran doctrine—receives every human life as gift and privilege to share for all eternity.

³⁵ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 354–355.

Book Reviews

Messianic High Christology: New Testament Variants of Second Temple Judaism.
By Ruben A. Bühner. Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2021. 244 pages.
Hardcover. \$54.99.

It is of course no secret that our knowledge of so-called “Second Temple Judaism” has exploded in the last century. Not only the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls but also increased attention to other contemporary documents has increased our knowledge of Judaism “between the testaments” exponentially. This has necessarily given deeper insights into the messianic expectations of that era. It is also well-known that in the past several decades a number of scholars have pushed back against the critical consensus that the assertion of Christ as divine—so-called “high Christology”—arose late, a product of interaction with the wider Greco-Roman world. Popularizers of higher criticism continue to claim that Jesus “became” God only within the context of Christianity’s spread to the wider Mediterranean world. Ruben Bühner, a postdoctoral researcher for New Testament Studies at the University of Zurich and the University of Tübingen, intends to place these two areas of study in conversation with one another. He contends that the high Christology of the New Testament did not arise in a vacuum, but in interaction with the messianic hopes of Second Temple Judaism. In other words, earlier messianic language and expectations were taken up by the writers of the New Testament and reshaped in various ways as they expressed their high christological content. In this way, the New Testament authors participated in contemporary Jewish discussions and debates. The New Testament’s contentions about Christ, as dramatic as they may be, are still “in reach” (Bühner’s phrase) of Jewish messianic discourse.

To illustrate these contentions, Bühner sets side-by-side significant christological texts from the New Testament with significant messianic texts from Second Temple Judaism. The choice of these texts is by no means meant to be exhaustive, but representative of each genre. He thus deals with a Pauline text (Phil 2:6–11), two Synoptic texts (Mark 14:61–65; Luke 1:26–38), Revelation 4–5, and John’s prologue. Joined to these are texts from Qumran, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, the Psalter, and Isaiah (particularly the reception history of these biblical documents in the Second Temple era). Bühner’s careful exegesis provides important insights for any who would study these central New Testament texts, as well as for those who study the extrabiblical texts, yet it is focused on his primary argument.

It is important to understand what Bühner is *not* arguing. Bühner does not posit a “history of religion” connection between the various texts that he sets next to one another. The question of the extent to which the authors of the New Testament knew

the various documents of Second Temple Judaism he keeps open. Absent a direct quotation or clear allusion, he cannot be certain which of these documents were known by Mark or Paul, for example. Bühner's proposal is much more modest: the New Testament's articulation of "high" Christology—that is, the contention that Jesus of Nazareth is divine, included within the reality of the one God of Israel—took place within the wider context of messianic expectations in Second Temple Judaism. Bühner is also not contending that New Testament Christology is simply to be identified with Second Temple Jewish messianic expectations. He argues that it is a false alternative to force a choice between the "Jewishness" or the distinctiveness of New Testament Christology. Instead, he argues that New Testament Christology arose in dialogue with contemporary messianic discourse, yet there is something new here. The New Testament applied many of the motifs found around them but in a quantity never before seen, and connected them all with Jesus of Nazareth. Moreover, the notion of incarnation along with suffering and death were elements that made New Testament Christology very distinct and radically new. There is a tendency in Christian circles, particularly in preaching, to assume that *all* the Jews contemporary with Jesus were looking *only* for a temporal, militaristic messiah. Bühner's evidence demonstrates that this was by no means the case, and that our understanding of contemporary messianic expectations is in need of adjustment. Yet, New Testament Christology is not simply the climax of all previous messianic expectations, but combines certain ones together to speak of Christ. One path that Bühner does not believe the New Testament authors took was an explicitly "angelic" or "angelomorphic" Christology. Indeed, he asserts that Hebrews 1:4 was written against such notions, found within the wider messianic discourse of Second Temple Judaism. In this discussion, he mentions the significant texts in Revelation where Jesus *is* portrayed as an angel, but he does not treat them in detail. Superhuman figures (such as the Old Testament's "Angel of the Lord") do not, in his opinion, form a significant part of the New Testament's christological assertions, nor does theophanic language from the Old Testament.

Bühner challenges a number of scholarly assumptions with his work. First and most fundamentally, he challenges those in contemporary scholarship who assume that the divinity of Jesus was the parting of the ways between Second Temple Judaism and Christianity. He finds this assumption even among proponents of early high Christology, and it goes back even to Justin Martyr. Many scholars contend that Christians said of Jesus what no Jews were willing to say about their messianic hopes, in other words, that he is a *divine* messiah. Bühner argues that this eventually became the case, but only after the New Testament documents were composed. Within Second Temple Judaism, it was an open and hotly debated question whether the messiah was to be considered in some sense as divine. The "parting of the ways"

only took place later, as a Jewish reaction to the claims of Christianity. He also cautions scholars of early high Christology to avoid putting all the emphasis on one way of understanding Jewish monotheism in the first century. There are a variety of different ways to express the divinity of the one God of Israel, and a number of them are interacted with in the New Testament. When considering how divinity is expressed, each text should be dealt with on its own terms. Finally, he challenges the contention of many that high Christology could only have developed late. His collected body of Second Temple evidence demonstrates that a messiah who was divine in some way was expected by many in that era. Much of the theological material needed to formulate high Christology was already present in contemporary messianic discourse, and Bühner asserts that the New Testament's Christology can be understood best within that context. Moreover, his (albeit selective) examination of the New Testament evidence supports the contention that high Christology arose quite early. On what basis can scholars say that Jesus' place at the right hand of God in Mark 14:62 is somehow "lower" than his status as uncreated in John's prologue? As noted above, there are a variety of ways to express divinity, and each text should be taken on its own terms. Bühner thus argues against any kind of "divine pyramid" view of New Testament Christology.

Bühner's study will no doubt be of significant interest to those who are following the current discussion concerning the nature of New Testament Christology. Those who have followed these debates in the English-speaking world will find Bühner conversant with that literature, but also able to provide a window into the discussions happening in German-language publications through his extensive footnotes. Those who have an interest in the literature of Second Temple Judaism will find his application of the texts of that era to New Testament Christology to be both helpful and fascinating. Confessional Lutherans will notice that Bühner operates within the terms of the contemporary scholarly discussion, sharing many of its assumptions, even as he challenges aspects of that discussion. The actual christological assertions of the "historical Jesus" are left an open question, although he asserts that it is historically conceivable that a man could have claimed to be divine in his own lifetime, and was placed in the middle of inter-Jewish debates over the nature of the messiah, with a bloody end as the result. His is a historical investigation, done within the scholarly world, with the advantages and disadvantages found therein. The value of Bühner's work lies primarily in demonstrating, against much scholarly opinion, that the high Christology of the New Testament is a high Christology with its roots primarily in Jewish messianic expectations based on the Old Testament and expressed in Second Temple literature, not in the religious proclivities of the wider Greco-Roman world. Understanding the context of the New Testament, particularly the kinds of inter-

Jewish debates that were occurring while Jesus walked this earth, enriches our appreciation of the major texts of New Testament Christology. That Christ is divine is clearly attested by these texts, in many and various way. That no Jew expected the messiah to be divine is, according to Bühner's work, a false assumption. That Jesus of Nazareth is that messiah, that Christ who is divine, that is the claim that led to the death of Jesus and the "parting of the ways" between Jews and Christians, changing an inter-Jewish debate into a fracture that could not be healed.

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***Reading German for Theological Studies: A Grammar and Reader.* By Carolyn Roberts Thompson. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. xiv + 286 pages. Hardcover. \$45.00.**

This is a textbook that leads the student who already knows a language like Greek to reading twentieth-century academic German theology. The author is an adjunct professor at Abilene Christian University (Abilene, Texas). The preface and "How to Get the Most from This Book" make clear what students should expect: learning German takes a long time (vii, ix).

The book starts with an introduction filled with grammatical concepts. The lessons, then, are based on real theological readings (the Bible or other literature). This makes it necessary in lesson 1 already to deal with the subjunctive mood (19). This might frustrate some students, since a fuller discussion of the subjunctive is reserved for later. Rather than giving comprehensive coverage of topics one after another, she spreads out her teaching from lesson to lesson. This can be good for many students. One learns the main aspects of a concept and then refines his knowledge later. I like her explanation of commonly mistranslated phrases and constructions, like "indem," "es sei denn," and "erst." It is especially welcome how frequently she emphasizes the importance of having a complete understanding of the forms of words and of how each word functions within a sentence. Of course, a textbook of this kind cannot possibly be comprehensive, and the author does not claim to be absolutely complete. Students will have to use real dictionaries to supplement the textbook.

The texts chosen begin with the Bible. The Bible is a great place to start, since this is foundational for all real theology. One could wish, however, that the author had chosen to feature the 1912 and 1984 *Lutherbibel* rather than the 1942 and 2017 *Zürcher Bibel*. All the selected texts with one exception are from the twentieth century. By lesson 31, one is reading Karl Barth. Several of the readings feature theological encyclopedias and dictionaries. This is an excellent choice for graduate students and all future researchers, since there are so many excellent German

reference works, and they are often complicated and highly abbreviated. The author helps unravel such mysteries for her students. The answers to the exercises at the back of the book facilitate self-study. The grammar at the back of the book may be useful but it likely will not answer all of a student's grammatical questions. If it does not, there are free public domain grammars readily available, such as Carl Eduard Aue, *Elementary German Grammar* (London: W. & R. Chambers, 1897), at www.archive.org.

Being an editor and researcher of early modern Lutheran theology, I could wish that some time had been spent on German from before the twentieth century. The text does not even really introduce students to *Fraktur* and other common German typefaces. (What is introduced in lesson 45 as *Fraktur* is really an early twentieth-century kind of *Rundgotisch*—beautiful, but quite modern.) The author claims the book can be used as a self-teaching tool (x). For graduate students learning German for reading purposes, if they have already learned an inflected language like Greek or Latin, I would agree—this book can work. But in general, my advice is that you should always take a class with a real teacher for the first semester of a foreign language. You need a professor to answer the questions that your textbook does not answer.

Some students and teachers like to learn a language using real foreign texts from the very beginning. Others will find this procedure to be frustrating, since they have not learned enough grammar to make sense of it, even if glosses are given for every single word. The fact is, inductive language acquisition works well for small children since that is the only way they can learn their first language, and they spend hours every day absorbing the sounds of their mother tongue. Inductive language acquisition can take a long time, however. School children who move to a foreign country require a year before being able to communicate, even spending hours a day with the new language all around them. I think a deductive approach works best for adults, though I admit this may vary according to the individual. In my opinion, it is preferable to teach one concept at a time, with repetitive exercises that practice just the new and previously learned concepts and vocabulary. Then, after sufficient grammar has been learned, the student should be challenged with foreign language texts from the real world, which he must translate using the best grammars and dictionaries available. Yet I do not teach German as my profession, and people learn in various ways. Perhaps Thompson's approach will suit many students well. Considering the vast wealth of German theology that will never be translated, it is worth every effort to learn the language.

Benjamin T. G. Mayes

A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Midrash. Vol. 3. By Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck. Edited by Jacob N. Cerone, with an introduction by David Instone Brewer. Translated by Joseph Longarino. Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2021. 1056 pages. Hardcover. \$64.99.

This commentary is the third installment in the translation project of the monumental *Kommentar* of Strack-Billerbeck, edited by Jacob Cerone. The original project, developed by German scholars Hermann Strack and Rev. Paul Billerbeck, was published almost a century ago (1922–1928). Hermann Strack (1848–1922) was a scholar of Jewish antiquity, and Paul Billerbeck (1853–1932) was a Lutheran pastor. Both men were advanced in years by the time the project got underway, and Billerbeck had to see it to conclusion after the death of Strack on October 5, 1922.¹ Nevertheless, they shared an interest in the literature of Judaism, as well as an interest in Jewish mission, and stood as public opponents to the rising anti-Semitism of the period.

To what extent each contributed to the overall project is difficult to ascertain.² Though both were studied, it seems that Strack played a large role in the preparation of the earlier volumes; however, Billerbeck wrote much of the commentary connected with it. This work was not a commentary in the sense that it was the expression of a scholar's interpretation of a given biblical text. Instead, it was a collation of Jewish sources which, in the eyes of Strack and Billerbeck, may be brought to bear on the words, phrases, and concepts found in the New Testament. The intention of this work was to present "the beliefs, ideas, and the life of the Jews in the time of Jesus and earliest Christianity."³ Consequently, each verse of the New Testament is presented along with as many rabbinical and Midrash references as economically possible (xxvi).

The introductory notes by David Brewer are helpful in situating the work in its historical context and also for understanding the impulses which gave rise to the initial project (xxi–xxxix). After its publication in the 1920s through the early 1960s, this collection played an important role in the study of the New Testament and

¹ Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 4 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1922–1928), 2:vi.

² William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 2, *From Jonathan Edwards to Rudolf Bultmann* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 418–419.

³ Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 1:vi. "Nicht eine eigentliche Auslegung des Neuen Testaments, sondern das zu seinem Verständnis aus Talmud und Midrasch zu gewinnende Material wollten wir darbieten; den Glauben, die Anschauungen und das Leben der Juden in der Zeit Jesu und der ältesten Christenheit wollten wir objektiv darlegen."

Christian origins and may frequently be found in the reference section of many biblical studies.⁴

Two major stages of criticism have obscured the work, or at least made scholars highly conscious of its deficiencies, and so tended to avoid its use. First, Samuel Sandmel leveled specific criticisms at the project: the citations were removed from their context; the users, unfamiliar with rabbinic contexts, were given and readily made for themselves a distorted picture of Jewish life in the time of Jesus; the quotations are too long; the reality of first-century Judaism was anachronistically obscured; and the authors have a Christian bias (xxvi).⁵ Second, E. P. Sanders's major monograph, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, set off criticisms of the work as being theologically biased (xxvii).⁶

Brewer counters these claims point for point. He argues that one must, of course, pay attention to dating in order to use the text properly; that the citations are appropriate in length by virtue of the project's scope; and that there can be deficiencies in the work which should be taken into account (xxvi). While conceding that the work can be used inappropriately, Brewer also argues that the original compilers did not intend to develop a comprehensive theology of early Judaism, but rather to collect different possible views which may have existed in the time of Christ (xxx). The specialist and the non-specialist alike must beware of the pitfalls of such a resource (xxvi, xxx), but this need not mean we should discard the tool itself, only that we learn to use it with care. Brewer further makes the case that the complexity of dating need not mean that we abandon a resource simply because the dating of its textual sources is difficult (xxxii). This scholarly approach is commendable precisely because it refuses to collapse into false dichotomies, but seeks a mediating

⁴ A few examples will suffice: W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (London: SPCK, 1948), viii; Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), xi [initially published in German in 1957]; Archibald M. Hunter, *Paul and His Predecessors* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), 7. On the other hand, after sharp criticisms, one may readily note the absence of the Strack-Billerbeck commentary in major publications such as John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), xii–xiii; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), xiii–xiv. There are of course exceptions to this general decline in use. Joachim Jeremias continued to use the collection, possibly due to his connection with Billerbeck and the project overall. See Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), xiii; also James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), vii.

⁵ See also Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 8–11.

⁶ See also E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 42–44. Sanders found Sandmel's arguments persuasive and lambasted anyone who continued to use the famous commentary without independent knowledge of its sources.

approach that seriously attempts to locate the sources in their historical context (xxxiii–xxxvi).

Additionally helpful, if one elects to sift through the sources and employ the Strack-Billerbeck translation, is the editor's preface by Jacob Cerone. The editor offers a "user's guide" which helps discern the arrangement of the notes and quotations. The guide is important since the new translation does make certain alterations to the text. For instance, in the English edition, certain material originally in the body text has been moved to the footnotes (xiii). The reader may then use the guide to determine what he is reading as he sifts through the material and accurately determines its source. However, the number of sources and the space present a challenge that the editors do not entirely overcome. Cerone labors to provide internal reference consistency, but this consistency forces the reader frequently to flip to other pages, which becomes cumbersome. In order for the reader to use this commentary properly, due to the internal reference system, it seems necessary to collect all the volumes, rather than add only one to his library; for only with all the volumes in hand can he easily assess a given text.

The most significant and obvious benefit of this project is that the editors have made available a major reference work in English that previously required as a minimum a robust understanding of German to utilize. Whatever pitfalls the readership may fall into, the work itself is accessible to them in a way and with a scope that it previously was not. An additional benefit of the work in general is that cross references to Old Testament passages, phrases, and ideas may be readily found in any given entry, in addition to the post-biblical material drawn from the Talmud and the Mishnah. For example, in the notes on Galatians 3:8B (625) (the divisions of versification are those of the commentary), the authors provide a generous discussion of the Abrahamic blessing to the nations, which includes the original Hebrew text, the LXX translation, and a discussion of subsequent interpretations of the blessing. Set against Paul's exposition, these can be very illuminating. Likewise, if the reader examines the notes for Romans 14:13, "Not to cause a stumbling or an offense for your brother," one finds a discussion of a hypothesized underlying passage, Leviticus 19:14 ("You will not lay a stumbling block in front of a blind person") (360).⁷ This discussion includes reference to the Hebrew and Greek texts, as well as a discussion of subsequent texts that may also have the original (Lev 19:14) in view.

For readers who are unfamiliar with the sources themselves and do not have the time or interest to place them in their historical context, this translation project may not be useful. Preparation for Bible study or sermon work may be impaired, rather

⁷ All Scripture quotations are the author's translation.

than aided, by extensive forays into the dating of rabbinical literature. The attention properly due to those duties ought to prevent many from devoting themselves to endless rabbinical chronologies. This work certainly could be beneficial for those who wish to study rabbinical texts and their potential relations to the New Testament. Brewer and Cerone make clear that if one is willing to work hard, there can be real benefits for New Testament scholarship. The student who wishes to understand the relation between later Judaism and its first-century, Second Temple antecedent will do well to use these volumes to become acquainted with such literature, and move forward from the connections he finds in them to a deeper exploration of the complex history and development of the Jewish people and their literature.

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***How the Church Fathers Read the Bible: A Short Introduction.* By Gerald Bray. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022. 194 pages. Hardcover. \$24.99.**

Gerald Bray, the editor of multiple volumes in the Ancient Christian Commentary Series, is eminently qualified to write an introduction to patristic hermeneutics. Bray's pedigree aside, Lutheran interest in this book is piqued by his observation that we owe the adjective "patristic" and the designation of early Christian writers as "fathers" to two Lutherans: Johann Franz Buddeus and Johannes Gerhard, respectively (1). But *How the Church Fathers Read the Bible* is not just written for Lutherans. It is intended for anyone who values the Christian past and is dissatisfied with the methods and results of higher criticism.

Introducing a topic as vast as patristic biblical interpretation is no easy task. To assist the reader, Bray includes helpful summaries at the end of every chapter. The concluding chapters, containing several "case studies" and theses on how the church fathers read the Bible, are also helpful. However, given the brevity of this introduction, the interested reader will be disappointed to find neither a bibliography nor suggestions for further reading. Moreover, nearly the first third of the text is consumed with discussions of just who counts as a "father," language and translation issues, and other topics that are of interest to the scholar but should have been footnoted in an introductory work.

The book's greatest weakness is that Bray undermines his own chief argument (namely, that modern Christians can recover something of value from patristic exegesis) by taking for granted the interests and assumptions of the almighty "modern reader." For example, we are told that in the debate over Proverbs 8:22 during the Arian controversy, both parties were mistaken to refer the passage to

Christ. “In fact,” Bray writes, “as we now know, the verse is not about the Son at all but about the divine wisdom” (29). Similarly, Bray judges that Augustine was mistaken in his christological reading of the Good Samaritan, Origen was naïve to defend the historicity of Noah’s flood, and Basil of Caesarea was wrong to read the creation account literally. In a revealing paragraph, Bray states that many fathers indulged in a kind of exegesis that “fail[s] to meet the standards of interpretation that we would now expect” (103). Is it really inspiring to read that, despite these great shortcomings, patristic exegesis usually contains a “kernel of truth” worth recovering?

Bray also shows a deep personal distaste for allegory, advancing the contrived distinction between “allegory” and “typology” and lamenting that “even the greatest patristic interpreters” (by which he means the ones most akin to modern exegetical sensibilities) “could not resist finding parallels between the Old and New Testaments . . . whether those parallels made sense or not” (116). What is sorely missing here is a positive account of why such parallels did in fact make sense to the fathers, or why it was unthinkable for Athanasius that “the divine wisdom” might be something other than the eternal Son. There is useful information here for a novice in the field, but more compelling and inspiring introductions are readily available.

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Books Received

- Elmer, Robert. *Piercing Heaven: Prayers of the Puritans*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019. 336 pages. Hardcover. \$23.99.
- Engelsma, David J. *The Church's Hope: The Reformed Doctrine of The End*. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2022. 350 pages. Paperback. \$29.95.
- Gaffin, Richard B., Jr. *In the Fullness of Time: An Introduction to the Biblical Theology of Acts and Paul*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. 384 pages. Hardcover. \$33.49.
- Harrod, Joseph C. *40 Questions About Prayer*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2022. 272 pages. Paperback. \$20.99.
- Lim, Johnson T. K., ed. *What Has Ecclesiastes To Do With . . . ? Navigating Life's Unexpected Challenges in Disruptive Times*. Singapore: Word N Works, 2022. 245 pages. Paperback. \$30.00.
- Norton, John J. *Around-The-World Family: Stories of Adventure and Grace*. Irvine, CA: New Reformation Publications, 2022. 168 pages. Paperback. \$16.95
- Overdorf, Daniel. *Preaching: A Simple Approach to the Sacred Task*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2022. 240 pages. Paperback. \$20.99.
- Porter, Stanley E. and Benjamin P. Laird, eds. *Five Views on the New Testament Canon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2022. 304 pages. Paperback. \$24.99.
- Schreiner, David B. and Lee Compson. *1 & 2 Kings: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2022. 272 pages. Hardcover. \$32.99.
- Spencer, William David. *Three in One: Analogies for the Trinity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2022. 256 pages. Paperback. \$21.99.



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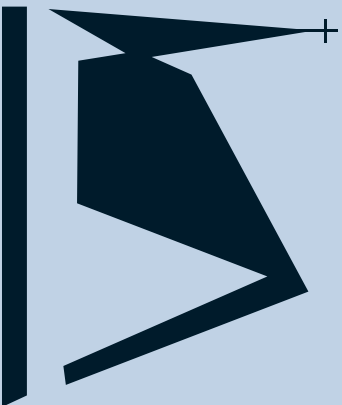
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