GENERAL REVELATION
AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

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General revelation’s noticeable impact on biblical interpretation has resulted from applying a broader definition of general revelation than is justifiable. Considerations for prohibiting general revelation from including such matters as science, mathematics, literature, and music include the following: (1) “General” cannot refer the content of the revelation; (2) biblical references to general revelation limit it to information about God; (3) sin distorts human discoveries of the non-Christian world in secular fields; and (4) general revelation is readily accessible to all, not just to specialists in various fields. Hermeneutics deals with the principles of biblical interpretation. Unwarranted definitions of general revelation have led to widespread attempts to integrate general with special revelation, a step that is unwarranted because truth exists in varying degrees of certitude, all truth does not possess the same authority, all truth does not fall on receptive ears, and general revelation does not include the fields of secular study. The emergence of integrative efforts has coincided with a growing tentativeness in biblical hermeneutics because of the integration of secular disciplines with biblical hermeneutics. Psychology’s promotion of self-love provides a good example of the adverse effects of general revelation and integration on biblical hermeneutics.

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In recent years, the field of general revelation has had a significant impact on methodology in biblical interpretation. An investigation of how that has happened divulges interesting information about the relationship between general revelation and biblical hermeneutics and whether or not that relationship is a healthy one. First in order of business in such an investigation must come definitions of general revelation, hermeneutics, and terms and expressions relevant to them.

DEFINITIONS

General Revelation

Its scope. Demarest and Lewis define general revelation—sometimes
referred to as natural revelation—as “the disclosure of God in nature, in providential history, and in the moral law within the heart, whereby all persons at all times and places gain a rudimentary understanding of the Creator and his moral demands.”

Demarest adds, “General revelation, mediated through nature, conscience, and the providential ordering of history, traditionally has been understood as a universal witness to God’s existence and character.” He lists the sources of man’s knowledge of God through general revelation as a reminiscent knowledge of God, an intuitional knowledge of God (John 1:9; Rom 1:19, 32; 2:14-15), and an acquired general knowledge of God (Ps 19:1-6; Acts 17:22-31; Rom 1:19-21).

Erickson notes that the traditional loci of general revelation are nature, history, and the constitution of the human being. His initial definition of the field coincides with that of Demarest and Lewis: “[G]eneral revelation is God’s communication of himself to all persons at all times and in all places.” But he


5Erickson, *Christian Theology* 1:153.
follows it up with a description that muddies the water somewhat: “It is general in two senses: its universal availability (it is accessible to all persons at all times) and the content of the message (it is less particularized and detailed than special revelation).” Note the added connotation attached to the word “general” in reference to the content of general revelation. By applying the term “general” to the content of general revelation, he introduces an entirely new arena of subjects. That second sense opens the door for him to incorporate a wide variety of subjects as parts of general revelation. He does this later a number of times, as when discussing the harmful effects of sin on man’s ability to receive general revelation: “Thus, sin produces relatively little obscuring effect upon the understanding of matters of physics, but a great deal with respect to matters of psychology and sociology.”

Its limitations. That second sense of “general” and the consequent widening of the realm of general revelation are beset by several problems. (1) The first is that the added meaning of “general” is contrary to the original and more traditional sense of general revelation, i.e., it is the revelation that comes to all people at all times and in all places. Certain data that Erickson would class as general revelation have come to light only recently and have not been available at all times, neither are they at present available to all people in all places. Some of the principles

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As an illustration of the breadth of general revelation when “general” is applied to the content of revelation, John D. Carter and Bruce Narramore reason, “If all truth is God’s truth, there is a basic unity between all disciplines. This unity is the basis for all attempts at integrating one’s Christian faith with academic and professional pursuits” (The Integration of Psychology and Theology [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979] 14). In such reasoning as that, they fall prey to the criticism of C. L. Deinhardt who writes, “A reading of these books [including that by Carter and Narramore] and related literature will show that the task of integration tends to be approached without substantial clarification of the writer’s position on general revelation” (“General Revelation As an Important Theological Consideration for Christian Counselling and Therapy,” διδασκαλια [Fall 1995]:50). Without thorough analysis, one could include just about anything he wants under the heading of general revelation.

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Erickson, Christian Theology 1:173; cf. 72, 378-79.
of mathematics and astronomy, for example, would not qualify as general revelation because their discovery came after many generations of humans had inhabited the earth. Also, those principles remain hidden to significant portions of people alive today, so they cannot qualify as general revelation. The same limitations apply to fine creations of art and music. Those have not always been neither are they currently available to all men everywhere. It is therefore contradictory to posit that double sense to the term “general” when speaking of general revelation because the two senses mutually exclude each other. To be classed as revelation, truth revealed to certain people and not to others would have to be some sort of special revelation.

(2) The second reason for the impossibility of a broad extension of the expression “general revelation” is a biblical one. The various passages so often cited as scriptural grounds for the existence of such revelation unite in projecting one grand subject of that revelation: God Himself. A sampling of the usual passages will reflect this:

Ps 19:1-6—“The heavens proclaim the glory of God and the expanse declares the works of His hand. Day to day utters speech and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech and there are no words where their voice is not heard. Their measuring-line has gone out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world; in them He has set up a dwelling-place for the sun. And it comes forth from its canopy like a bridegroom. It rejoices like a hero who runs a race. It goes forth from the end of the heavens, and its orbit to their ends; and nothing is hidden from its heat.”

9Throughout this article, translations of Scripture are by the author.
In other words, the created order attests the divine glory, i.e., the external manifestation of God’s inner being and attributes. Showers summarizes his detailed examination of Ps 19:1-6 as follows: “David’s statements in Ps 19:1-6 imply that there are no time, language, or geographical limits on this revelation of knowledge concerning God through the heavens. Regardless of historic time of life, language, or geographical location, every human being has been exposed to it.”

Rom 1:19-21—“Because what is known of God is manifest among them: for God has manifested it to them. For the invisible things of Him are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and godhood, so that they might be without excuse; because though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God nor were they thankful, but they became vain in their reasonings and their foolish heart was darkened.”

In effect, the Romans passage says that nature communicates a universal revelation of God, including His invisible qualities such as His eternal power and divine nature.

Acts 14:15, 17—“And saying, ‘Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of passions like yours, preaching that you turn from these vain things to the living God who made heaven and earth and the sea and all things which are in them. . . . Although He did not leave Himself without a witness, doing good, giving rain from heaven and fruit-bearing seasons, filling your hearts with nourishment and gladness.’”

Paul preached that God is creator of all and the providential provider of life’s necessities.

Acts 17:24-28—“God . . . made the world and all things in it. . . . He is the Lord of heaven and earth. . . . He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things. . . . He made from one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined the appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation.

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12C. L. Deinhardt (“General Revelation” 50) uses Rom 1:19-21 to conclude that God is the one revealed, not some abstract “truth.”


14Ibid.
. . . He is not far from each one of us. . . . In Him we live and move and exist. . . . We also are His offspring.”

The apostle also proclaimed God as creator and sovereign of the universe, as self-sufficient, as the source of life and all good, as an intelligent being who formulates plans, as immanent in the world, and as the source and ground of human existence.  

15Ibid.
Those illustrations suffice to show that the content of general revelation deals with God and various aspects of His being and activities. Any efforts to widen the scope of general revelation to include information or theories about aspects of creation, man, or anything else besides God do not have support from the Bible, which limits the scope of general revelation to information about God.

Gangel includes science, mathematics, literature, music, and the like as parts of natural [i.e., general] revelation. He states that the humanities as well as the hard sciences are part of God’s revelation. Both opinions are unwarranted. God’s general revelation divulges information about God, but that is all.

Someone might cite Rom 2:14-15 to prove that general revelation also includes man as its subject, but those verses are in a context dominated with accountability to God and His moral standards. Someone else might say that because people understand God, they understand man who was made in His image, and would thereby justify concluding that general revelation deals with the human makeup. That conclusion overlooks the damage inflicted on man by the fall and the consequent defacing of God’s image in man. It is a major flaw to include characteristics of humanity in the scope of general revelation’s content.

(3) A third reason for not broadening the scope of general revelation to include science, math, literature, music, and the like is that biblical teaching indicates that man’s invariable response to general revelation is negative. Romans 1:18 reveals that men “suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” For human discoveries to

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16Bruce A. Demarest and Richard J. Harpel express it this way: “Rather, general revelation performs the limited function of enabling all persons to know that God is and something of what He is like” (“Don Richardson’s ‘Redemptive Analogies’ and the Biblical Idea of Revelation,” BSac 146 [July-September 1989]:335 [emphasis in the original]).


18Ibid.


20Demarest and Harpel, “Don Richardson’s ‘Redemptive Analogies’” 335-36.
be categorized under the heading of general revelation, those discoveries must be objects of rejection by the non-Christian world, not revelations of truth.

Many heathen religions have derived false conclusions about God from general revelation. Whatever elements of apparent truth that remain couched within those religions are merely incidental. The broad thrust of their worship is a rebellion against God. Mbiti proposes the exactly opposite view of heathendom. He has several suggestions about the relationships between African traditional religions and Christianity. They include an overlapping of Christianity and non-Christian African religions, a large degree of compatibility of African traditional religions with Christianity, Christianity as fulfillment and savior of those traditional religions, and those religions as an enrichment for the Christian presence in Africa. Contrary to the biblical appraisal of human reaction to general revelation, he pictures African traditional religions as largely positive responses to what God has revealed of Himself to all people in all places and at all times. That contradicts what the Bible says about those responses.

Likewise, to suggest that discoveries of the secular Western mind are direct results of positive responses to general revelation is to contradict what Scripture says about unregenerate mankind’s response to that revelation.

(4) A fourth problem with broadening the scope of general revelation relates to how that revelation is accessed. Knowledge of general revelation is a common possession of all people. It is not something they must seek to discover. It is not hidden truth such as the mysteries of special revelation revealed to the apostles and prophets. It is information that is common knowledge to all. As Bookman has written,

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\text{[G]eneral revelation is truth that is manifestly set forth before all humanity (Rom. 1:17-19; 2:14,15); it is truth so clear and irrefutable as to be known intuitively by all rational beings (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:19); it is truth so authoritative and manifest that when people, by reason of willful rebellion, reject that truth, they do so at the cost of their own eternal damnation (Rom. 1:20; 2:1, 15).}
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If man’s discovery of information comes at any time late in history, it cannot be general revelation. If it comes as a result of human ingenuity, it cannot be general

\footnote{1}{I differ with Demarest and Harpel who state that “the meaning of the exchanged peace child [i.e., in Don Richardson’s redemptive analogies] is a non redemptive content mediated by general revelation” (“Don Richardson’s ‘Redemptive Analogies’” 337). That practice was rather an integral part of the tribe’s religion in their rebellion against God.}


General Revelation and Biblical Hermeneutics

General revelation is the common possession of all people of all time and in all places. It is divinely generated revelation imposed on the whole human race and impossible for mankind to avoid.

Common grace and God’s providential acts. If human discoveries in medicine, science, and the like through the centuries are not part of God’s general revelation, how does one account for them? Another look at God’s common grace and His providential acts may explain their origin. Someone might ask, “Are not these synonymous with general revelation?” Yes, common grace and providence do overlap with general revelation to some extent, but the latter in particular also operates beyond the boundaries of general revelation. God causes His sun to shine on the evil and the good and brings rain on the just and the unjust (Matt 5:45), but He does not do so in equal amounts at all times. Some benefit more and some less from His common grace exhibited in various places according to His providential wisdom, not as a part of general revelation. God’s providence has allowed many Americans to grow up in a land where His Word is freely proclaimed, but not so with those who grew up in the U.S.S.R. earlier in the twentieth century. God’s providence provided for the healing of Epaphroditus in Phil 2:27, 30, but it did not provide for the healing of Paul in 2 Cor 12:7-10. His providential actions are not the same toward all people at all times and in all places. Though God’s providential acts can be a part of His general revelation, they also can differ in their effects from His general revelation. God’s providential acts allow for a much larger span of interpretive variation than general revelation.

The content of general revelation is quite restricted. The discerning recipient of general revelation must observe its boundaries carefully in whatever use he makes of it. General revelation is the vestibule for special revelation, but it can never override special revelation. Before general revelation can be meaningful, a providential act of God is necessary to remove a person’s blindness to the truth of general revelation. That is the act of regeneration, which unites a person’s

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24 Demarest attributes man’s attainments in math, logic, and ethics to God’s common grace (General Revelation, 27), but he does not distinguish common grace from general revelation.

25 The Wesleyan tradition prefers to refer to prevenient grace that enables a person to believe rather
ability to reason as God reasons and thereby receive the truth of special revelation, which in turn enables a person to view general revelation in its proper light. General revelation alone cannot produce a natural theology as Thomas Aquinas proposed that it could. Blindness of the unregenerate prohibits it.

*Biblical Hermeneutics*

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In commenting on current efforts to integrate general and special revelation, Deinhardt writes, “The way the task of integrating the ‘truths’ of science and nature with Scripture is typically stated in contemporary Christian counselling literature is more in keeping with the Thomistic conception of general revelation with its Greek seeking after ‘truth’ than with the Reformed tradition and its pessimism regarding the fallen nature’s ability to perceive truth adequately from general revelation without special checkpoints in place” (“General Revelation” 51).
In a 1996 *JETS* article, I expressed my dismay over the confusion generated by current hermeneutical trends. Confusion of definitions is a significant part of that problem. I will not revisit that issue in this essay, but will simply state what has been a longstanding definition of the term “hermeneutics,” that it is the discipline that deals with the principles of biblical interpretation. In light of this definition, the present essay purposes to discuss the relationship of general revelation to the rules of interpretation that guide the exegete in his analysis of the biblical text. Before that discussion, however, an examination of the proposed integration of general and special revelation is necessary.

**INTEGRATION OF GENERAL AND SPECIAL REVELATION**

“All truth is God’s truth” is a maxim that has frequently echoed through the ranks of evangelicalism in recent decades. That refers to truth whether its source is special revelation or general revelation. As one has put it, “[T]here is but one knowledge of God.” In the eyes of some, that unchallengeable proverb has created an absolute necessity that evangelicals be about the business of integrating general revelation with special revelation or, in other words, “one’s Christian faith [based on the Bible] with academic and professional pursuits.”

As a result, academicians on evangelical campuses across the United States are currently expending enormous amounts of energy in attempts to harmonize discoveries in whatever their secular disciplines may be with the teachings of Scripture, or, probably more properly stated, in attempts to harmonize the interpretation of Scripture with discoveries derived from their own secular disciplines. Before advancing to probe that movement’s impact on hermeneutics, I want to suggest several flaws in such an integrative enterprise.

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28Ibid., 243-44, 247-49.

29E.g., Gangel, “Integrating Faith” 102, and John D. Carter and Bruce Narramore, *Integration of Psychology and Theology* 13-14. D. A. Carson has written, “[A]ll truth is God’s truth, and what he has disclosed of himself in the Word (theology) or in nature is all of a piece” (“The SBJT Forum: How Does One Integrate Faith and Learning?,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology (SBJT)* 1/3 [1997]:76. Scott Hafemann adds, “The mantra chanted on all these campuses is the fundamental maxim, ‘All truth is God’s truth’ (the *sola scriptura* of Christian education) and its corollary in regard to practice, ‘The Integration of Faith and Learning’” (Ibid., 79). An exception to the seemingly almost universal embracing of “all truth is God’s truth” as incontrovertible is Deinhardt, who writes, “The prevalence of this maxim among Christian writers could make one think it is a quotation from Scripture, with very likely a long history of theological treatises about it and biblical exegeses supporting its use in justifying ‘truth’ being drawn from science, nature, psychology, etc. But I have yet to find the text in the Bible” (“General Revelation” 51).


(1) First, though all truth is God’s truth, truth exists in varying degrees of certitude. The absence of objective proof for a proposition that medical science, for example, may advance leaves that proposition open to question. Though it may be quite true, acceptance of that truth must be only tentative. Time and further developments in medicine may show that the proposition was only partially correct or perhaps even totally inaccurate. An article in a recent issue of the Los Angeles Times illustrates the tentative nature of scientific theories and discoveries. The article began,

In a major confirmation of Einstein’s theory of gravity, astrophysicists have seen evidence that space gets dragged around by spinning objects like the train of a wedding dress circling a twirling bride. If correct, the findings—announced Thursday at a meeting in Colorado—pin down one of the final predictions of Einstein’s theory, which forms the bedrock of physicists’ understanding of all large-scale events in the universe.32

Note the tentative nature of this major discovery: “if correct.” In contrast, a statement of propositional truth in the Bible has the highest degree of certitude for anyone convinced of the inerrancy of Scripture.

In elaborating on the nineteenth-century conflict between Darwinism and theology, John D. Hannah has written, “The error of that century of clergyman was not that science and Scripture are not contradictory, but that the 19th-century form of scientific theory (i.e., developmentalism) was as infallible as Scripture. It warns us that, however impressive are the theories of our brilliant men of science, Scripture, not the former, is forever true.”33 He points out “the qualitative gulf between special and general revelation.”34 In the words of scientist Taylor Jones, “[T]he Word of God is inherently more reliable than science,” and “[I]t is easier to interpret the meaning of Scripture than it is to interpret the meaning of nature.”35

(2) Second, though all truth is God’s truth, all truth does not rest on the same authority. Diehl makes a special case to prove the objective authority of general revelation, but in his admission that propositional revelation has “a certain advantage” over nonpropositional revelation, he in essence concedes the point that


34Ibid.

general revelation falls short of special revelation in authority. Researchers in various secular disciplines have proven themselves absolutely brilliant in many of their remarkable findings. We marvel at the unbelievable advances in the field of electronics as the twentieth century draws to a close, with such conveniences as computer technology, television transmission, internet services, e-mail communications, and the like. Their conclusions deserve to be called truth. But truth about electronics is still unfolding because an expert who knows everything there is to know has not emerged. No final authority—living or dead—exists in that field, not even Bill Gates. On the other side, when it comes to Scripture, propositional truth about God and every other subject covered therein is absolutely authoritative.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{39}}\text{Diehl, “Evangelicalism and General Revelation” 448.}\]
Third, though all truth is God’s truth, all truth does not fall on receptive ears. Truth from general revelation retains its truthful status only when received by nonexistent infallible humans. Sin has distorted man’s ability to receive truth. If the vessel for receiving truth has a depraved mind, whatever it does by way of processing and reproducing that truth will be lacking. It may lack more in some instances than in others, but a blinding by sin will always exist.

Theological authorities have varied among themselves regarding what areas that blindness affects. Kantzer has put it this way:

> The noëtic effect of sin is not uniform through the entire range of human knowledge. In some areas the unbeliever may think as clearly or even more cogently than the believer (Luke 16:8). From this variableness there is evident a law of proportional rationality: the nearer a man gets to the vital core of his obedience to God, the greater is the corruption of his thinking due to sin.

Erickson speaks of the partial removal of that blindness in certain areas: “Thus, sin produces relatively little obscuring effect upon the understanding of matters of physics, but a great deal with respect to matters of psychology and sociology.” Demarest recognizes a distinction between common grace and special grace in the matter of enlightenment when he writes, “Whereas Scripture indicates that the human mind is enabled by common grace to intuit eternal, changeless principles, including fundamental truths about God, only special grace enables the sinner to perceive redemptive verities.” Though these authorities may disagree over how sin blinds the minds of the unregenerate, they all agree that it does so.

In response, some may argue that sin blinds the mind of the exegete of Scripture too, but at least two factors distinguish biblical interpretation from interpretation of general revelation. One is the propositional nature of the truth of Scripture, a property that general revelation cannot claim. The other is the promise to the believer of the Spirit’s illumination of Scripture (cf. John 16:13; Rom 8:14; Deinhardt observes that Christian-counseling writers prescribe no special qualifications, spiritual or otherwise, for those who garner truth from science, psychology, and human experience (“General Revelation” 51).

Kanter, “Communication of Revelation” 67 [emphasis in the original].

Erickson, Christian Theology 1:173.

Demarest, General Revelation 194.
Fourth, probably the major flaw in an integrative watchword that all truth is God’s truth derives from wrong assumptions about the range of general revelation, however. As proposed in discussion under the previous heading of “General Revelation,” information and discoveries originating in secular fields do not belong in the category of God’s revealed truth. They therefore have no basis for a ranking alongside God’s special revelation. They may appear to be beneficial to one or another generation and thereby earn at least temporarily the designation of truth, but they must always be tentative because they lack the certitude and authority of God’s revealed truth. They are not on a plane with the body of truth in the Bible and are therefore unworthy of being integrated with it.

INTEGRATION AND HERMENEUTICS

Though integration of Scripture with almost every field of secular studies has been proposed, probably among evangelicals the field of Christian psychology has in recent years pursued that process more vigorously than others. At a point in the not-too-distant past, Christians viewed psychology as Christianity’s enemy, largely due to the anti-God stances of outstanding secular psychologists. Since about 1960 and especially since the 1980s, the relationship between the two has changed radically. Evangelical Christians have turned en masse to psychology as evidenced by such things as radio talk shows, Christian literature, and new graduate and undergraduate programs in Christian institutions of higher learning. The popularity of James Dobson and his Focus on the Family organization is a conspicuous illustration of the radical change that has come about in evangelical attitudes toward psychology.

Interestingly, a radical shift in evangelical perspectives on biblical hermeneutics has occurred during that same time period. The roots of the change go back to the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant. Liberal theologians and exegetes have shown the effects of Kant’s dualistic philosophy for many generations, but in the last thirty to forty years, evangelicals have begun to manifest the same characteristics in the principles of hermeneutics they apply. A landmark work that helped set the tone for the change was Anthony C. Thiselton’s Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description, released in 1980. By giving an evangelical slant to Gadamer, Ricoeur, and others, Thiselton served as a catalyst.


for a change in the whole complexion of the evangelical interpretive enterprise. Was it coincidental that two such significant changes in evangelicalism, one in the integrative emphasis and the other in biblical hermeneutics, occurred almost simultaneously, or is there some connection between the two? The following discussion will provide a probable answer to that question.

_Connections between Integration and Recent Hermeneutics_

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Several links between evangelical integration and hermeneutics will show a kinship between the two trends.

Tendencies toward tentativeness in biblical interpretation. One affinity between the two fields in recent developments is of a more indirect nature. In defense of their integrative enterprise, Carter and Narramore have written,

> All conflicts between theology must, therefore, be conflicts between either the facts of Scripture and the theories of psychology, the facts of psychology and our (mis)interpretation of Scripture, or between the theories of psychology and our (mis)interpretations of Scripture.

Note how their analysis places what they would refer to as general revelation on the same plane as special revelation and their expressed openness to correct a human misunderstanding of either one with a proper understanding of the other.

That raises the issue of how certain an interpreter of Scripture can be about his conclusions. Guy raises the same issue of uncertainty. Acknowledging that the Bible reveals ultimate truth about man and his existence, he warns that humans are prone to the same errors and inaccuracies in their interpretation of Scripture as they are in their observation and interpretation of the data of general revelation.

> He goes on to note that assumptions about truth revealed in the Bible need not take precedence over assumptions about science since both are plagued by error and...
In essence, those writing from an integrationist perspective question the reliability of grammatical-historical interpretation of the Bible in yielding certainty about the meaning of propositional revelation.

\footnote{Ibid., 30.}
That same tentativeness about biblical interpretation has emerged in recent hermeneutical discussions among evangelical biblical scholars. For instance, McCartney and Clayton have written, “An individual interpreter must, in humility, always hold as tentative his or her perceptions of the divine meaning, subject to the Holy Spirit’s directing of the church.” That principle stands in an interesting contrast to Luther who held that it was possible to be certain about the meaning of Scripture.

Another example of recent tendencies toward uncertainty comes from Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard who advocate treating all predictive prophecy tentatively. Their reason for this is their view that readers do not know whether it will be fulfilled literally.

Osborne demonstrates a further proclivity toward tentativeness among hermeneuticians: “To this extent theological constructions tend to be tentative and provisional. . . .” He explains,

> We do not simply move from Bible to theological assertions, and those assertions are not automatic reproductions of biblical truths. Rather, all decisions are filtered through a network of tradition and preunderstanding, which itself exerts tremendous influence upon our interpretations and choices. To this extent each decision we make is provisional and we must establish a continual dialogue between tradition and biblical text in the spiral upward to truth.

Further, he states, “Since neutral exegesis is impossible, no necessarily ‘true’ or final

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49 Cited by ibid., 94.
52 Ibid., 308.
interpretation is possible.53

Silva, in beginning a chapter on “Determining Meaning,” states, “The truth of the matter is that, at least in some cases, our discussion will lead to greater uncertainty; I take comfort, however, in the fact that such a development could be interpreted, if we may trust Socrates, as the clearest proof of progress.”54

53Ibid., 412.

54Moisés Silva, Biblical Words and Their Meaning, rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 137 [emphasis in the original].
One might even venture to say recent trends in hermeneutics focus on how much an interpreter cannot know with certainty more than on how much he can learn with confidence from the text. Contemporary hermeneutical authorities tend to open the door to seemingly endless possibilities of meaning for a single text. Yet traditional grammatical-historical interpretation seeks the one meaning that is correct and settles on that meaning with conviction and certainty. Terry has said, “Its [i.e., the grammatico-historical method’s] fundamental principle is to gather from the Scriptures themselves the precise meaning which the writers intended to convey.” Later in the same work, he adds, “A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that words and sentences can have but one signification in one and the same connection.” His explanation of the traditional method does not anticipate the uncertainties that have become the theme of current hermeneutical theorists.

Parallel developments among evangelical integrationists and hermeneutical authorities are obvious. Both emphasize the possibility of errors in Bible interpretation, thereby opening the door for interpretive corrections originating in a secular field of investigation. With so much attention to the subjective inclinations of the interpreter, current hermeneutical trends have in effect invited secular fields to reinterpret the Bible in terms that they dictate. That is exactly the invitation that integrationists welcome. Beyond the chronological parallels between the emerging of integrational emphases and changes in evangelical hermeneutics, therefore, the two phenomena show an indirect relationship to each other that must be more than coincidental.

**Direct impact of integration on hermeneutics.** The relationship between integration and hermeneutics is not only indirect. A most direct correlation exists between the emergence of integrative efforts and the change in evangelical hermeneutics. Earlier discussion called attention to the significant influence of Anthony Thiselton’s volume on hermeneutics. The subtitle of that work—“New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description”—reflects an attempt to merge the secular field of philosophy with biblical hermeneutics. In his persuasive arguments that hermeneutics properly pursued must incorporate self-understanding as the starting point for NT interpretation, Thiselton cites many philosophers and NT scholars affected by secular philosophy who are by no means friendly toward evangelical Christianity. That is exactly what philosophy does—focus on man’s reasoning capacity as its principal object rather than on the Scripture to be

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56Ibid., 205.
Throughout his book, Thiselton is critical of anyone who practices a “pre-Kantian” type of interpretation. At one point he concludes, “We cannot put the clock back to the era before Kant. Objectivity is not the same as objectivism, and the relevance to hermeneutics of the Cartesian model of knowledge must not be assumed without question and accorded a privileged position.” He makes Kant’s dualistic philosophy a part of the hermeneutical task whereby an interpreter must first of all cope with his own subjective realm of reality before tackling the realm of meaning attached to the biblical text. He endorses Gadamer’s observation that “[t]raditional hermeneutics . . . limits the horizon to which understanding belongs, and pays insufficient attention to human facticity.” It amounts to “naive objectivity” to think that one can escape his own prejudgments and arrive at a final conclusion regarding the meaning of a text.

Thiselton ridicules the Reformers on this point, since they did not have the “benefit” of Kant’s philosophy. One wonders how the church’s interpretation of Scripture accomplished anything worthwhile prior to the time of Kant. The integrationist must entertain a sort of camouflaged disdain for meaning extracted from the Bible prior to the “enlightenment” and its provisions of techniques for synthesizing the Bible with discoveries of modern philosophy.

Another indication of integration’s direct influence on evangelical hermeneutics appears in Erickson’s analysis of the traditional “single-meaning” or “single-intention” view of hermeneutics. His second problem with that view relates to an understanding of authorial intention. He advocates the existence of a significant reservoir of unconscious material in every human personality, including the writers of Scripture. He criticizes Hirsch and Kaiser for defending the single intention of each author as being based on “a pre-twentieth-century understanding of

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58 Ibid., 304.
59 Ibid., 304, 315.
60 Ibid., 316-17.
Erickson proposes that evangelical hermeneutics must incorporate elements of psychology discovered by a non-Christian psychologist if it is to yield an adequate understanding of the biblical text. That is integration of the first order, a process that produces profound differences in biblical hermeneutics and amounts to significant deviations from a grammatical-historical approach to the Bible. An exegesis that probes a biblical author’s subconscious meaning—i.e., “depth psychology”—is a recent addition to evangelical hermeneutics. The traditional method had no provision for discovering an author’s unintentional intention.

In another connection, Erickson supports using an integrative motif in formulating theology. His choice of an integrative motif is the magnificence of God. He cautions against letting that central interpretive motif affect the interpretation of passages where it is not relevant, resulting in eisegesis rather than exegesis. Yet, in spite of Erickson’s cautionary words, any time one comes to a passage with a preconceived meaning in mind, he cannot help but impose an eisegesis on that text, even when that motif is allegedly irrelevant. Though he does not make the connection, Erickson’s integrative motive in handling the biblical account of creation imposes the results of science onto the biblical text, with substantial weight being given to geological evidence. In connection with the conflict between the Bible and geology, he also mentions the conflict between the Bible and the behavioral sciences, noting that the prime area of tension between general revelation and Christianity today relates to the doctrine of man. He suggests that psychology is useful in supplementing biblical revelation and enhancing our understanding of what conversion, regeneration, and sanctification involve and of what the image of God in man consists of. One can only conclude that, consciously or unconsciously, Erickson’s integrative motif must also include geology and psychology.

The Effect of Integration on Hermeneutics—An Illustration

The effect of integration on hermeneutics has been widespread. Many illustrations present themselves, but one that has received perhaps the greatest...
notoriety is psychology’s insistence on trying to promote self-love, self-esteem, and self-worth from Scripture. Some view Lev 19:18—“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”—as though it were a command to love yourself, and others view it as setting forth a desirable and necessary part of the emotional health of every person. How does that integrationist preunderstanding of the verse compare with its grammatical-historical interpretation?

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A simple reading of Lev 19:18—cited by Jesus Christ as the second greatest commandment (Matt 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33)—divulges that the command pertained to loving others, not oneself. The “as yourself” part of the command only furnishes a comparison of how Jesus’ disciples are to love others. The psychological rejoinder to that straightforward meaning is that a person should love himself; otherwise, he cannot love others. That, however, reads an integrative motif into the verse once again. The “as yourself” phrase says that a person does love himself, not that he should love himself. Furthermore, the psychologist errs when saying that the inevitable self-love is “appropriate self-love, self-care, and self-appreciation.” On the contrary, it is rather a person’s natural compulsion for his own welfare in every facet of life. That compulsion does not have to be learned and may have to be dispensed with as a requirement of Christian discipleship (Matt 10:37-39; 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24; 14:26-27; John 12:25).

Yet the integrationists will not give up. Narramore, even though he admits that psychologists have wrongly used Lev 19:18 to support self-love, undertakes a word study of agapa (“I love”) in the verse to prove biblical support for loving oneself. He concludes, “Agape love is a deep attitude of esteem and respect. This is the basic meaning of biblical self-love.” He arrives at his conclusion by assigning two of the secondary meanings of agapa to its use in Lev 19:18, meanings that are totally inappropriate to any context where “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” appears. That practice is hermeneutically unjustifiable.

He and other integrationists also choose to bypass NT evidence that specifically repudiates self-love as an indicator of the arrival of the last days and their accompanying grievous times (2 Tim 3:1-2). So intent on integrating Scripture with secular psychological dogma that self-esteem is vital for mental and emotional health are they that they leave no stone unturned to find some Scripture they can force into supporting that teaching. Narramore cites “the entire fabric of divine

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69 Cf. Seamonds, Healing Grace 141-42.
70 E.g., ibid., 142.
71 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 223.
74 Narramore, You’re Someone Special 21-22.
75 Ibid., 37.
76 Ibid., 38.
78 E.g., Narramore, You’re Someone Special 22. Narramore states the driving motivation behind his efforts to find biblical support for self-love: “[U]nder the influence of humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, many of us Christians have begun to see our need for self-love and self-
In particular, he uses man’s creation in the image of God for that purpose, citing 1 Cor 11:7 and James 3:8-10. But he never notices that those verses relate to how a person views others, not how he views himself. The approach that purposes to find a predetermined meaning is devastating to grammatical-historical hermeneutics.

Such will be the case in every integrative effort. Psychology’s insistence on promoting self-esteem is only one example. Fallacious hermeneutics will be the avenue to corrupting the accurate meaning of the text every time someone tries to impose the conclusions of secular studies on the Bible.

GENERAL REVELATION AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS SUMMARIZED

This study commenced with definitions of general revelation and biblical hermeneutics. It has devoted primary attention to general revelation because of the common error of classifying discoveries of man in secular fields as part of God’s general revelation. The biblical guidelines to general revelation limited its scope to revelation about God that is available to all men in all places and at all times, and therefore to extend its scope to encompass discoveries in various fields of secular investigation is unwarranted. The conclusion about hermeneutics was that it is the discipline that deals with the principles of biblical interpretation.

The next part dealt with the proposed integration of general and special revelation based on the maxim “all truth is God’s truth.” Four flaws in the theoretical

estem” (ibid., 22). In doing so, he commits the error commented upon by Deinhardt: “There is a lack of attention given to the need to evaluate specific claims of psychology and psychotherapy regarding their validity, reliability and empirical soundness as ‘science’” (“General Revelation” 51).

“Narramore, You’re Someone Special 22-24.

“About two decades ago, J. Robertson McQuilkin predicted the following: “My thesis is that in the next two decades the greatest threat to Biblical authority is the behavioral scientist who would in all good conscience man the barricades to defend the front door against any theologian who would attack the inspiration and authority of Scripture while all the while himself smuggling the content of Scripture out the back door through cultural or psychological interpretation” (“The Behavioral Sciences under the Authority of Scripture,” JETS 20 [1977]:37). His prediction has proven to be quite accurate.
The final section of the above discussion developed several relationships between integration and hermeneutics. First was the tentativeness in biblical interpretation that has paralleled the development of the integrative movement and the recent changes in evangelical hermeneutics, departures from a traditional understanding in both areas that came at the same time. The next section showed the direct impact of integrating biblical hermeneutics with philosophy and psychology in producing recent changes in evangelical hermeneutics. Changes in biblical hermeneutics actually resulted from an integrative process. Then followed a specific example to show how integration has resulted in drastic alterations to traditional grammatical-historical hermeneutics.

In other words, general revelation and hermeneutics are unhappy bedfellows for anyone who wants to maintain strict consistency in applying grammatical-historical hermeneutics to the text of the Bible. Milton Terry anticipated this unhappy alliance many years ago when he wrote,

Others have attempted various methods of ‘reconciling’ science and the Bible, and these have generally acted on the supposition that the results of scientific discovery necessitate a new interpretation of the Scripture records, or call for new principles of interpretation. The new discoveries, they say, do not conflict with the ancient revelation; they only conflict with the old interpretation of the revelation. We must change our hermeneutical methods, and adapt them to the revelations of science. How for the thousandth time have we heard the story of Galileo and the Inquisition.

Terry continues,

Hasty natures, however, indulging in pride of intellect, or given to following the dictum of honoured masters, may fall into grievous error in either of two ways: They may shut their eyes to facts, and hold to a delusion in spite of evidence; or they may become the obsequious victims of ‘science falsely so called.’ That certainly is a false science which is built upon inferences, assumptions, and theories, and yet presumes to dogmatize as if its hypotheses were facts. And that is a system of hermeneutics equally false and misleading which is so flexible, under the pressure of new discoveries as to yield to the putting of any number of new meanings upon an old and common word.

In following Terry’s advice, this study concludes that what is or what is alleged to be general revelation should have no effect on rules for interpreting the

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81 Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics 533.
82 Ibid., 534.
Bible, because the moment it does so, it distorts those rules and hinders a quest for true meaning through grammatical-historical principles. The reasons it does so are three in number: too broad a definition assigned to general revelation, an oversimplified view of truth, and attempts to integrate disciplines whose natures are wholly incompatible because one has views of truth that are suspect and the other does not.
ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS
AND BIBLICAL EXPOSITION

William D. Barrick
Associate Professor of Old Testament

Ancient manuscripts have been the subject of many books, journal articles, and essays, but few have dealt with their relationship to biblical exposition. Yet the expositor has a vital role in preserving what those ancient manuscripts of the Bible contribute to an accurate knowledge of Old and New Testaments. Few works on systematic theology deal with the important doctrine of preservation, yet Scripture itself deals extensively with that doctrine. To do his part in implementing that doctrine, the expositor must examine his text in the original languages, identify the text’s original statement, and expound that original text. He must practice the doctrine of preservation by participating in that preservation.

* * * *

Nineteen ninety-seven marked the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The impact of these scrolls on Bible translations, textual criticism, and biblical exposition is still being assessed. The scrolls are part of a larger body of ancient manuscripts that the footnotes and margins of a number of current Bible translations cite in support of their renderings of the OT. The ancient versions to which those footnotes refer include the Samaritan Pentateuch (4th century B.C.), the biblical manuscripts from Qumran (3rd century B.C.–1st century A.D.), the Greek Septuagint (3rd–2nd centuries B.C.), the Aramaic Targums (1st–4th centuries A.D.), the Syriac Peshitta (1st–2nd centuries A.D.), and the Latin Vulgate (ca. A.D. 400).

Those manuscripts have been subjects of many books, journal articles, and essays. Many of the published items deal with the significance and history of the ancient manuscripts. Various scholarly journals contain a large number of technical

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1 Dating the Samaritan Pentateuch is not an easy matter. It may date from as early as the fifth century B.C. or as late as the second century B.C. See Emanuel Tov, Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress; Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1992) 82-83.

articles on the application of ancient manuscript evidence to the textual criticism of both the OT and NT. One area of application often goes unnoticed, however. That is the area of biblical exposition or preaching. How do the ancient manuscripts affect the exposition of the biblical text? What effect might those manuscripts have upon present-day expositors of God’s Word? What is the expositor’s responsibility in light of those manuscripts?

**THE EXPOZITOR IS ACCOUNTABLE FOR HIS ROLE IN THE PRESERVATION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT**

The accountability of biblical expositors goes beyond the integrity they must demonstrate in their interpretation of the Word. It involves the integrity of the Scriptures themselves. The expositor who does a magnificent job of interpreting and explaining the Scriptures may yet sow a seed of doubt about the actual text or may even indulge in unwarranted emendations of the text. The commentaries and modern translations he utilizes in sermon preparation may affect his treatment of the biblical text. Many of those sources have sought to recover the original text so that they might translate or interpret the Scriptures more accurately.3

The Bible expositor’s goal should be the accurate presentation of God’s written revelation. That accuracy relates directly to the degree to which the expounded text conforms to what God originally revealed. Thus the Bible expositor becomes an active participant in the determination, transmission, and preservation of the biblical text. In order to place the expositor’s role in proper perspective, an adequate understanding of the doctrine of the preservation of Scripture is necessary.

**Biblical Indications of the Doctrine of Preservation**

Traditionally the church has declared its belief that the preservation of the Scriptures is the result of God’s providential activity. The Second London Confession (1677) made the following declaration: “The Old Testament in Hebrew . . . and the New Testament in Greek . . . being immediately inspired by God, and by his singular care and Providence kept pure in all Ages, are therefore authentical; so as in all controversies of Religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them.”4 The

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3Harold Scanlin, *The Dead Sea Scrolls & Modern Translations of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1993), is a recent evaluation of the effects the Qumran manuscripts have had on a number of English translations. Among the translations evaluated were the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the New English Bible (NEB), the Revised English Bible (REB), the New American Bible (NAB), the Jerusalem Bible (JB), the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), the New Jewish Version (NJV), the New International Version (NIV), the Good News Bible (GNB), and the New King James Bible (NKJV). Individual translation projects have also published explanations of their procedures in utilizing evidence from ancient manuscripts. Cf. Kenneth L. Barker, ed., *The Making of the NIV* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); Bruce M. Metzger, Robert C. Dentan, and Walter Harrelson, *The Making of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

belief that God’s written Word has been preserved without undue alteration is the basis for confidence in the teachings of the Bible.

Like the Second London Confession, W. Graham Scroggie attributed the preservation of Scripture to the providence of God. God must have a role in the preservation of His Word if it is to be kept inviolate. The active preservation of the Scriptures is necessary because the sinful nature of mankind is antagonistic to God and His Word. Such antagonism breeds both contempt for Scripture and the neglect of Scripture. It is fully within the capacity of sinful mankind to allow the Word to perish and to alter its wording intentionally or unintentionally.

The Great Omission. Is the doctrine of the preservation of Scripture still a part of the evangelical creed? If so, what is its importance? In his book Christian Theology, Millard J. Erickson entitled the chapter on biblical inspiration, “The Preservation of the Revelation: Inspiration.” However, the chapter does not deal with biblical preservation. In fact, Erickson’s volume does not treat the doctrine of the preservation of the Scriptures anywhere. The chapter title indicates that Erickson believes that preservation relates in some way to inspiration. Apparently, he would attribute preservation to divine action. Erickson defined inspiration as the “supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers which rendered their writings an accurate record of the revelation.” If preservation is accomplished by inspiration, then it too must stem from divine intervention.

Elsewhere, Erickson refers to Scripture’s permanence, citing Matt 5:18 as his proof-text. The only mention he gives to biblical passages dealing with addition to and subtraction from Scripture (e.g., Deut 4:2; Prov 30:5-6; Rev 22:18-19) is in the context of a discussion concerning the biblical canon’s composition.

Lewis Sperry Chafer’s Systematic Theology is among the few theologies to dedicate any space at all to the topic of the preservation of Scripture. There it merits a separate, though brief, chapter. Chafer defines the matter in the following fashion:

The Bible is eternal in its own right. It abides because of the fact that no word Jehovah has spoken can be removed or shaken. In fact, it is by means of His written Oracles that God announces His binding declarations concerning the “all things” which cannot be shaken. The Scriptures are the legal instrument by which God obligates Himself to execute every detail of His eternal covenants and to fulfill every prediction His prophets

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1W. Graham Scroggie, Is the Bible the Word of God? (Chicago: Moody, 1922) 14-16.
2Millard J. Erickson, Christian Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 199.
3Ibid.
4Ibid., 203.
5Ibid., 211.
Chafer quotes Ps 119:89, but does not discuss its specific contribution to the doctrine of the preservation of Scripture. Unfortunately, he does not discuss human responsibility or textual criticism as they relate to preservation. The vast majority of the theological resources utilized by pastors fall short in discussing this important doctrine. That omission in theological literature is a disturbing reflection on what must be taking place in Bible college and seminary classrooms. When a large body of Christian literature ignores an aspect of biblical theology, one can rest assured that it is also getting short shrift academically. If this omission is not corrected, future expositors may be unable to define the doctrine and unaware of their role in the preservation of God’s written Word.

**The Biblical Definition.** A definition of preservation as it relates to the Scriptures is best derived from the Scriptures themselves. The presentation of the biblical witness concerning preservation in Chart 1 reveals: (1) that God preserves His Word forever, (2) that God preserves His Word unchanged, and (3) that God preserves His Word primarily in heaven. Psalm 119:89 is the key biblical reference. God’s revelatory Word is fixed firmly in heaven. Regardless of what might happen to His Word on earth, it is securely preserved in His mind. The primary residence of God is heaven, so it is only logical that the psalmist would define the presence of the eternal Word as the divine abode.

Chart 2 presents the flip side of the preservation of Scripture. God is the chief operative in preserving His Word unchanged in heaven. On earth, however, God’s people are responsible for preserving and transmitting the Scriptures. A series of repeated prohibitions in Scripture defines the accountability for preservation on

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11Ibid.
12Ibid., 1:124.
earth. It should be obvious to the reader that God does not prohibit something that is impossible for an individual to do. When He prohibits lying, it is because an individual is capable of lying. If no one could tell a lie, God would not need to prohibit lying. That God prohibits the addition to and subtraction from His Word is testimony to the fact that His people can and, at times, do add to His written Word or subtract from it. Whether these passages refer to text or to canon, the bearing on the doctrine of preservation remains the same. The responsibility for preservation in this world rests squarely upon human shoulders.14

**Chart 1: Biblical Descriptions of Preservation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Extent</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ps 119:89</td>
<td>forever</td>
<td>Yahweh’s word</td>
<td>settled</td>
<td>in heaven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:152</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yahweh’s testimonies</td>
<td>founded</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 40:8</td>
<td>forever</td>
<td>Yahweh’s testimonies</td>
<td>stands</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:18</td>
<td>till heaven</td>
<td>(every) “jot or tittle” of the law</td>
<td>not ever pass</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24:35</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jesus’ words</td>
<td>not ever pass</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 16:17</td>
<td></td>
<td>(every) “tittle of the law”</td>
<td>(not) fail</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Pet 1:23, 25</td>
<td>forever</td>
<td>the incorruptible word of God</td>
<td>abides</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Isa 40:8 = 1 Pet 1:25

**Note:** Isa 40:8 (1 Pet 1:25) and all gospel references may refer to fulfillment rather than to preservation

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It is significant that the dictation was from prophet to scribe, not from God to the prophet. Dictation was involved, but not mechanical inspiration.
the Word will see to its preservation. It is certain that our present text of the Book of Jeremiah is longer than the original portions that had brief abstracts of Jeremiah’s earlier prophecies. The additions doubtless included the doom of the godless king. After the Israelites broke the Ten Commandments, the Lord rewrote them and gave them to Moses (cf. Exod 31:28; 32:15-16; 34:1; also 1 Peter 1:25). Theodore Watts-Dunton wisely said, “When murdered Truth returns she comes to kill” (so Lewis).\(^{16}\)

The evidence of Scripture is that God might, on occasion, allow a portion of His written Word to be destroyed (Exod 31:18–34:28; Jeremiah 36). At times He might choose not to restore what was lost. According to 2 Kgs 22:8-10 (cf. 2 Chron 34:14-16), God allowed the priests to misplace the entire five books of Moses\(^{17}\) for at least fifty years. The Lord sovereignly orchestrated the recovery of those books at the right time. The recovered revelation sparked Josiah’s revival.

In yet another passage it is evident that at least two words dropped from the text and have yet to be recovered over two thousand years later. The Hebrew grammar and context of 1 Sam 13:1 indicate that some numbers have been lost.\(^{18}\) Such examples are evidence that the preservation of Scripture on earth is not some sort of perpetual miracle. Even John William Burgon refrained from attributing the preservation of Scripture to such a miracle:

That a perpetual miracle was wrought for their [the Scriptures’] preservation—that copyists were protected against all risk of error, or evil men prevented from adulterating shamefully copies of the Deposit—no one, it is presumed, is so weak as to suppose.\(^{19}\)

Rather than acting openly in some miraculous fashion to preserve His written Word, God has placed the responsibility into His people’s hands. That responsibility falls primarily upon pastors and teachers whom He commands to preach and teach the Word (Acts 10:42; 16:10; 1 Tim 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2; 4:2). The example of the careful transmission of Scripture by the prophets and apostles is a


\(^{17}\)For a discussion of the various views concerning the content of the Book of the Law that influenced Josiah’s reforms, see Paul R. House, 1, 2 Kings, vol. 8, The New American Commentary, E. Ray Clendenen, ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 382-84.


worthy model to be followed by modern expositors (cf. 2 Cor 4:2; Gal 3:16). It may be concluded, therefore, that the Bible expositor must be among those accountable for the preservation of God’s written revelation on earth.

THE EXSPOSITOR MUST BE ACTIVE IN THE PRESERVATION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The accountability of the expositor in regard to the preservation of Scripture goes beyond merely believing that one is accountable. He must also actively involve himself in the actual preservation of the biblical text. Expositors must involve themselves in at least three activities: (1) examining the biblical text in the original languages, (2) identifying the original text, and (3) expounding the original text.

The Expositor Must Be Active in Examining the Text in the Original Languages

Those who believe in verbal, plenary inspiration ought to be in the forefront of scholarship in the biblical languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek)—if not as students and teachers, then at least as encouraging patrons. Expositors of the Scriptures must approach the text as it has been preserved. They must fully support any alteration they might make in the text. Exegesis is the explication of what the text says, not what one wishes the text might say. Every interpretation must be rooted and grounded in the original languages. Ultimately, reading the text in translation is not a viable substitute.

One who made it his life’s work to interpret French literature, but who could only read it in an English translation, would not be taken seriously; yet it is remarkable how many ministers of religion week by week expound a literature that they are unable to read save in translation!21

Exposition must start with the text. The expositor must read it, interpret it, and expound it within its syntactical, lexical, literary, historical, social/cultural, geographical, and theological contexts.

Just as a sentence is more revealing than a single word, so the examination of a writer’s syntax and style is that much more important to a biblical commentator. It is not surprising that fewer books have been written on this subject than on vocabulary, because whereas students of vocabulary can quickly look up lists of words in concordances and indices, in the field of syntax the study is more circuitous. There is no help


except in a few selective grammars and monographs, so that the worker really must work his way through all the texts in Greek.22

It is reported that an old prospector summed up his life in the following words: “I spent five years looking for gold and twenty years looking for my burro.” Striking expository gold has about the same ratio of labor to results. For every nugget the expositor finds, he can expect to spend hours, days, weeks, or months looking for it. The expository examination of the Scriptures is not for the lazy or the quitter. It is a labor of love requiring commitment and perseverance.

According to the biblical testimony itself, even the individual inflection of its words is significant and authoritative (cf. Gal 3:16). The expositor must, therefore, assume that the author (or Author) made deliberate choices for phrases, words, and inflections in order to best convey the divine intent. The concept of deliberate, intelligent selection of words and inflections is sufficient justification for the expositor to concern himself with the problem of what was originally written. It made a difference to the author (or Author); it should make a difference to us.

Cicero somewhere has written of the scientia iuris: res enim sunt parvae, prope in singulis litteris atque interpunctionibus verborum occupatae (“knowledge of law: the matters are indeed small, mainly occupied with individual letters and also the punctuation of words”). Delete the prope and you have a fair description of the matter of textual criticism. Whether Euripides wrote δεῖ (“it is necessary”) or χρή (“it is fitting”) in a given passage is hardly of metaphysical import. But we must assume that he made a choice between them. This is sufficient justification for concerning ourselves with the problem. It made a difference to the poet; it should make a difference to us. This planet, I do not doubt, shall never want for people to despise such problems and those who try to resolve them. Such contempt is founded upon the remarkable premise that one who manifests a concern for minutiae must of necessity be both indifferent to and unequal to profound problems. The Greeks, on the contrary, in their simplicity had contrived a word to express this reverence before even the smallest truth; and that word is φιλαλθήσεις (“love of truth”). The sacred writer speaks not idly when he reminds us that ὁ ἐξουθενῶν τὰ ὀλίγα κατὰ σμικρὸν πεσεῖται (“the one despising the little things shall fall because of the insignificant”).23

Many examples could be cited to demonstrate how important it is for the expositor to examine the biblical text in its original languages. In the NT, Matt 1:16 illustrates the significance of the gender of a relative pronoun. The verse is part of the genealogy of Christ. The association of Christ with the lineages of Joseph and Mary is expressed by a relative pronoun (“by whom,” NASB). The English is ambiguous because of its lack of gender in such pronouns. Therefore, from the English translation alone the expositor cannot determine if the antecedent is Joseph

22Ibid.
23Robert Renehan, Greek Textual Criticism: A Reader (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1969) 134 [English translations added].
or Mary. The Greek, however, is very clear. The Greek pronoun is feminine in gender. Mary is the proper antecedent. Christ’s lineage is linked directly to Mary rather than to Joseph. The text indicates that Mary was the only human parent of Jesus Christ.24

In the OT account of Jacob meeting Esau after many years of separation from him, some English translations have utilized identical phrases in Gen 33:9 and 11 (“I have enough” in KJV and NKJV; “I have plenty” in NASB). In the Hebrew text, however, Esau said, “I have much,” but Jacob said, “I have everything.”25 The narrator of the event recorded that Jacob intentionally chose a term different from the one his brother Esau used to describe the extent of his possessions. It is the expositor’s responsibility to draw his audience’s attention to that fact and to explain its significance.

Although the carefully worded Hebrew original of Gen 33:9 and 11 can be adequately translated, elements of the Hebrew text in other passages are more difficult to translate. Isa 24:17-18 is just such an example. The NASB reads,

Terror and pit and snare
Confront you, O inhabitant of the earth.
Then it will be that he who flees the report of disaster will fall into the pit,
And he who climbs out of the pit will be caught in the snare.

The Hebrew highlights the three terms at the beginning of verse 17 by alliteration and assonance. “Terror and pit and snare” (יִרְעָם יֹבֶן יָבַע, pahad wāḇahat wāḇāḥ) are first identified in verse 17 and then employed in special wordplay in verse 18.26

The context is one of judgment in the eschatological Day of the LORD (see esp., vv. 18b-23). The rhetorical paronomasia involves the forms of the words rather than their meanings. Their sounds as they are pronounced build to a crescendo and culminate in the onomatopoeic force of the third and final term פָּח (pāḥ) that

sounds like a trap snapping shut on its victim. Neither of these elements is available to the reader of the translations. The three like-sounding terms produce a cumulative effect that heightens the reader’s or listener’s interest and personal involvement in what is being said.

Walter Kaiser very appropriately employed the words of a Jewish poet from Poland as a reminder of the importance of reading the OT in its original Hebrew. Hayim Nachman Bialik (1873-1934) said, “Reading the Bible in translation is like kissing your bride through a veil.”27 The expositor must be wedded to the biblical text and enjoy it without any unnecessary veil intervening to distort his clear view and enjoyment of its God-breathed beauty.

**The Expositor Must Be Active in Identifying the Text’s Original Statement**

Textual criticism is the technique of restoring the original readings of texts. It has often been criticized heavily because of the excesses of some of its practitioners. Such opposition, however, is not a recent development. The Helvetic Concensus Formula (1675) made the following declaration:

> Therefore we can by no means approve the opinion of those who declare that the text which the Hebrew Original exhibits was determined by man’s will alone, and do not scruple at all to remodel a Hebrew reading which they consider unsuitable, and amend it from the Greek Versions of the LXX and others, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Chaldee Targums, or even from other sources, yea, sometimes from their own reason alone; and furthermore, they do not acknowledge any other reading to be genuine except that which can be educed by the critical power of the human judgment from the collation of editions with each other and with the various readings of the Hebrew Original itself—which, they maintain, has been corrupted in various ways. . . . Thus they bring the foundation of our faith and its inviolable authority into perilous hazard.28

The integrity and purity of the Hebrew OT and the Greek NT as they are presently preserved are not in any “perilous hazard.” Due to the extraordinary care with which the Massoretes transmitted the OT Hebrew text, a minute portion of the text is subject to question.29 In the NT the expositor only needs to give attention to

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textual critical matters in about one-half of one percent of the text.\textsuperscript{30}

A detailed examination of the theories and practices of the textual criticism of the OT and NT must be left to another time. Bible expositors must look into the biblical text with a determination to know the truth of God’s Word. In the translations and commentaries that they consult they will find discussions of textual critical matters. It is necessary that they remember the true nature of the different pieces of evidence.

(1) The ancient versions are human translations, not primary manuscripts. These include the Greek Septuagint and its daughter versions (Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus), the Aramaic Targums, the Syriac Peshitta, and the Latin Vulgate.\textsuperscript{31}

(2) The Samaritan Pentateuch covers only the first five books of the OT. In addition, it gives evidence of having been modernized, supplemented, and altered in ways that prevent it from being a solid witness to the original text of the Pentateuch.\textsuperscript{32}

(3) The manuscripts from Qumran may include popularized Hebrew versions “developed to meet the requirements of a particular audience.”\textsuperscript{33}

(4) All ancient manuscripts and versions must themselves be subject to careful textual criticism. They were all humanly produced and may contain scribal errors of both the unintentional and intentional kind.

(5) In the terms of legal a priori evidence, the Massoretic Text of the OT must remain as the accepted text unless there is evidence of equal authenticity and antiquity to the contrary.\textsuperscript{34}

At regular intervals in the church’s calendar the Lord’s Table or commu-
tion is observed by individual congregations of believers. At the time of partaking of the bread, the pastor traditionally recites the words of 1 Corinthians 11:24 in something akin to the KJV: “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.”\(^{36}\) Is the text correctly preserved and transmitted by the traditional observance of this ordinance? The expositor with a good foundational knowledge of the contents of Scripture should question the text utilized in the ordinance. John 19:31-36 records that the soldiers came to break Jesus’ legs, but when they saw that He was already dead they did not do so. According to the text, “these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, ’Not one of His bones shall be broken’” (v. 36, NKJV).

If John 19:36 is authentic and accurate, how can “broken” be correct in 1 Corinthians 11:24? Further investigation in the gospel accounts reveals that Christ Himself did not use “broken” either. Matthew reported that the words of Christ were “Take, eat, this is My body” (26:26, NKJV). Luke’s Gospel says, “This is My body which is given for you” (22:19, NKJV). Therefore, if the self-witness of Scripture means anything, it must be obvious that “broken” in some of the Greek manuscripts of 1 Cor 11:24 is an erroneous reading. It may be classified as an addition to the original text by human hands. Those who made such an addition are subject to God’s judgment because they did not rightly preserve His written Word (cf. Deut 4:2; 12:32; Prov 30:6; Rev 22:18-19). The pastor or expositor who continues to propagate the corrupted Word in the public observance of the Lord’s Table will be held accountable for actively perverting the Scriptures rather than preserving them.

The Expositor Must Be Active in Expounding the Original Text

It is not sufficient merely to examine the original biblical text and to identify what the reading of the text should be. It is the responsibility of the expositor to expound the text faithfully.

Consider the example of Isa 24:17-18 that was discussed above. The expositor who has the elements of the Hebrew text clearly in mind can bring out the imminent demise of those who live under the judgment of God. Those who are subject to God’s judgment might flee from the fearful consequences, but they will only fall into a pit. If they manage to pull themselves up out of that pit and resume their flight, they will step into a snare or trap—WHAM! (The sense of the last part of this statement could be further emphasized by clapping the hands together with force.) There is no excuse—there is no escape. Be sure your sins will find you out. When they do, it will be too late.

An exposition of 1 Cor 11:23-26 prior to observing the Lord’s Table gives an expositor the opportunity to define and illustrate the authority by which the church observes the ordinance. The church’s authority for the ordinance is derived

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\(^{36}\)The NKJV follows the same text with a marginal note observing that the Nestle-Aland Greek NT (26th ed.) and the United Bible Societies’ Greek NT (3d ed.) omit “broken.” The NASB has “This is My body, which is for you” with a marginal note mentioning that “Some ancient mss. read is broken.” NIV’s translation is the same as NASB for this phrase.
from the written revelation of God, not from human opinion or directives. Today, as in the past history of the church, it is the responsibility of believers to observe the ordinance in the form in which it was received from Christ Himself (1 Cor 11:23). No individual or assembly has the authority to alter what the Lord Himself has delivered to the church. That holds true for the scribes copying the Greek manuscripts, the editors compiling Greek NT editions, the translators, and the expositors.

**CONCLUSION**

The biblical doctrine of the preservation of Scripture consists of two parts: (1) God preserves His Word unchanged forever in heaven and (2) He gave His people the privilege and responsibility of preserving it on earth. The second part of the doctrine of the preservation of Scripture applies to the Bible expositor. The doctrine is not just an article of faith; it is something to be practiced. The expositor must participate in the preservation of God's written Word. He will be held accountable by a holy and omniscient God for any adulteration of the biblical text. He must diligently examine the original language of the biblical text. To the best of his ability, he must identify its original wording. He should tolerate no emendation or alteration without undeniable evidence of equal authenticity and antiquity. Then he must expound the text with integrity, accuracy, and enthusiasm.
ISRAEL’S MISSION TO THE NATIONS
IN ISAIAH 40–55: AN UPDATE

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Associate Professor of Old Testament

In describing Israel’s relationship to the nations, Isaiah 40–55 represents three loci of tension: either divine blessings for Israel alone or for the entire world also, Israel as either an active witness or a passive one, and either the nations as subject to Israel or as coequal with Israel in their standing before God. Israel’s mission to the world is either centripetal (inward moving) or centrifugal (outward moving). Biblical scholars have debated which it is. Attempts to explain fluctuation in the prophet’s message between the two possibilities have included elimination of certain passages, consideration of redactional layers, redefinition of terms, and pointing out external circumstances in the prophet’s time. A correct understanding does not consist in explaining away one side of the tension, but in recognizing God’s future restoration of the nation as a means of extending redemptive benefits to the nations, His blessing of the nations after their judgment, and His use of Israel to rule the nations at the same time that His chosen people are a vehicle to bless the nations.

* * * *

Both the beginning and end of Scripture emphasize a concern for people of “every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Rev 14:6), forming a grand envelope structure framing the entire story of Scripture. Genesis 1–11 provides an overview of the origins and early history of all humankind, and Revelation ends the canon with a book in which God’s purposes are equally related to the whole created order.¹

Then a new development takes place at Genesis 12 with the call of Abraham. Clearly related to God’s dealings with the nations and placed specifically in the context of the disintegration of human society and dispersion of the nations in Genesis 11, the call of Abraham shifts the focus of attention from the entire created order to God’s election of and dealings with a chosen people.² Yahweh establishes

²Ibid.
a covenant with the nation of Abraham (Israel). By means of this unilateral agreement, the Lord details the way in which He will bless all peoples.

In the remainder of the Old Testament, a degree of tension exists between Israel and the nations, that is, between the fact of Israel’s election and the concept of world mission. Throughout her history Israel had to grapple with the reality that she was related to all the nations through creation and that God had also called her to be separate from them. The Abrahamic Covenant, which gives Israel an exalted place in God’s program for the world, promises that Israel will be a channel of blessing to “all peoples on earth” (Gen 12:3). In His choice of Israel to be His elect people, Yahweh bestows on them both blessings and responsibilities. He promises to give His elect people a position of power and prominence in the world. Yahweh intends to utilize Israel as His servant nation to carry out His plan for all humanity.

In Exod 19:4-6, Yahweh presents Israel with a unique and sobering challenge (before revealing to them the Law, i.e., the Mosaic Covenant). Doubtless, their conformity to the Law would have caused them to be a distinct nation among the pagan nations of the world. However, that distinctiveness was not an end in itself. From the very outset, this divinely-intended distinctiveness carried with it worldwide implications. By conducting their lives in conformity with the demands of the Law, the nation of Israel would have been able to function as God’s servant nation, representing God and His character before the surrounding nations of the world.

Various aspects of her national existence also contributed to Israel’s consciousness of her distinctiveness. Jacob and his descendants enjoyed a separate existence in Egypt (in the land of Goshen—Gen 46:31-34) for a number of years. By means of the Law, Yahweh clearly demonstrated that Israel’s relationship with Him demanded a moral and ritual distinctiveness (Lev 11:44-45; 19:2). Prior to their entrance into Canaan, Yahweh instructed His chosen people to exterminate all the inhabitants and to avoid every pagan custom in order to maintain their uniqueness. As the nation of Israel developed, certain Gentiles enjoyed divine redemptive benefits only by virtue of their access to Israel.

This tension between Israel’s election and her worldwide witness reached a climax in Isaiah 40–55. In the years leading up to Isaiah’s prophetic ministry, the nation of Israel often failed to live in accordance with her God-given function, i.e., serving as Yahweh’s servant nation. As a nation she became characterized by covenant rebellion. The northern ten tribes (also called Israel) were soon to go into Assyrian exile, and the southern two tribes (Judah) would be left alone in the land. In Isaiah 1–39 Yahweh delivered His stinging indictment against the nation Israel (focusing on the southern kingdom): divine judgment is coming because of your covenant treachery! As with any nation that refused to submit to Yahweh’s sovereignty (cf. Isaiah 13–23), Israel’s covenant Lord promised to punish her

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arrogance. However, Israel’s disobedient conduct was especially reprehensible. As God’s covenant partner, God’s chosen nation had become like an adulterous wife.

In chapters 40–66 the prophet Isaiah looked to Israel’s more distant future. What will happen after God’s judgment on His covenant nation is completed? Is God through with His obstinate and stiff-necked people? Will He allow them to remain forever in exile, cut off from any enjoyment of promised covenantal blessings? The prophet Isaiah answered these (and other) fateful questions in chapters 40–55. In these chapters he envisioned the nation of Israel in the midst of the Babylonian exile. He introduced this section by telling God’s exiled people that their punishment for covenant treachery had satisfied the demands of God’s wrath. The prophet comforted God’s people by promising them that God would bring them back to their beloved land of promise. In the face of Israel’s skepticism, Isaiah described Yahweh as the one and only true God who is willing and able to bring to pass this promise. Unlike the “do-nothing” pagan gods, Yahweh alone is able to predict and bring to pass events, a case in point being His call of Cyrus several decades before his birth. As the prophet addressed God’s people who are depicted as being in the midst of exile, Isaiah had to deal with the other nations of the world. How will Yahweh treat those nations that resist the accomplishment of His intentions? How will the restoration of Israel to national and international prominence affect the Gentiles? Is there any potential for Gentile participation in any of God’s abundant blessings on Israel?

More specifically, does the prophet Isaiah give God’s chosen people a new and unique commission to be missionaries to the Gentiles? Or is he an ardent nationalist who only has Israel’s welfare in view? A clear understanding of Isaiah’s depiction of Israel’s relationship with the nations depends on asking the right questions. What are the primary issues in this discussion? What terms accurately describe the potential interpretive options? In order to understand better the tension between “nationalism” and “universalism” in Isaiah 40–55, this article seeks to provide a summary and a historical survey of this debate.

**A SUMMARY OF THE DEBATE**

Only a clear presentation of the constitutive issues and a comprehension of the terminology common to this debate will produce a precise and accurate understanding of this realm of theological discussion.

*Foundational Issues: Potential Points of Tension*

Certain passages in Isaiah 40–55 affirm that the nations who fight against Israel will be defeated (41:11-13; 49:25; 51:22-23; 54:15-17), are expendable as a ransom for Israel’s sake (43:3-4), will come before Israel in chains, lick the dust off Israel’s feet, and even eat their own flesh (45:14; 49:23, 26a), while Yahweh addresses Israel in intimate terms. On the other hand, Yahweh calls upon the nations to turn and be saved (45:22-23), appoints the servant as “a light of the nations”
(42:6; 49:6), and declares that His salvation will reach to all peoples who wait to receive His instruction and deliverance (42:4, 23; 49:6; 51:4-6). The nations will be amazed at the salvation which the Lord has accomplished for Israel (41:5; 42:10-12; 45:6; 52:10), and recognizing Yahweh as God, they will run of their own accord to serve Israel, God’s witness people. In light of this tension scholars have repeatedly asked a probing question concerning this section of Isaiah: “What relationship does Israel have with the nations of the world and what does God have in store for these two entities?” Isaiah 40–55 brings to the fore at least three related loci of tension with regard to Israel and the nations as represented in Figure 1: extent, function, and relationship.

**Figure 1: Three Related Loci of Tension in Isaiah 40–55**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Israel Only</th>
<th>Israel and Nations Equal</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passive Witness</td>
<td>Active Witness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nations Subject to Israel</td>
<td>Israel and Nations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Extent**—Are divined blessings for Israel alone or for the entire world?

**Function**—Is Israel commissioned to be an active or passive witness?

**Relationship**—As recipients of divine blessings, are the nations still subject to Israel or are they coequal in their standing before God?

How comprehensive are Yahweh’s redemptive promises (extent), what is Israel’s role in any provision of divine blessings to non-Jews (function), and what is the relationship of Israel to the nations which become the beneficiaries of those promises (relationship)? In other words, does the prophet offer salvation to the entire
world, and if so, will those non-Jewish peoples still be subject to God’s chosen people? And what role does Israel play with regard to this extension of salvation to the Gentile world? Does Isaiah regard Israel as commissioned to bring salvation to the nations as an active participant, or does he view Israel simply as a passive witness? Finally, is the nation of Israel the primary beneficiary of divine blessings or has God promised to bless equally all peoples, whether Jew or Gentile? Do God’s chosen people occupy an exalted position in a yet future period of God’s domain, or will they share equally their blessedness and prominence with the nations?

**Terminology**

Scholars who have wrestled over the years with Isaiah’s depiction of Israel’s relationship with the nations have sought for descriptive terms that represent the key issues in this debate. Certain terms are necessary to provide objective boundaries for this discussion, whether or not one agrees that the chosen terms satisfy the breadth of the discussion.

Two positions form the outer parameters for the debate concerning Israel and the nations in Isaiah 40–55. Did the prophet possess a missionary spirit according to which he exhorted God’s chosen people to become “a nation of world-traversing missionaries” (referred to as universalism in the context of this debate)? Or was Isaiah an intensely nationalistic prophet who sought to preserve the faith and integrity of the Israelites scattered among the nations and to encourage them with the hope of their restoration at the nations’ expense (referred to as nationalism or particularism).

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1. T. K. Cheyne, *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1895) 244. This use of “universalism” predates the theological discussion that deals with the question, “Are the heathen really lost?” For further comment on the problems caused by disparate uses of the term “universalism,” see n. 6.

2. Herbert G. May defines “theological universalism” as “belief in one God who is to be worshipped by all peoples, Jew and Gentile alike. It comprehends a single world religion and a common religious culture; it implies a single cultus” (“Theological Universalism in the Old Testament,” *Journal of Bible and Religion* 16 [1948]: 100). Against the OT backdrop of divine blessings promised to Israel, this term concerns itself with the question of whether the nations of the world will also share in those privileges. Two kinds of universalism are considered below: centripetal universalism (movement toward the center—the nations attracted to Yahweh by means of Israel’s devotion to Yahweh) and centrifugal universalism (movement away from the center—the outward movement by Israel to confront the nations with Yahweh’s expectations).

3. Nationalism or particularism can be defined as that “tendency in religion according to which a certain group enjoys a special privilege in relation to God which sets it apart from the rest of humanity” (Julian Morgenstern, “Universalism and Particularism,” *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, I. Landman, ed. [New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Company, 1943] 10:357). “Nationalism” defies a fixed definition, but draws its nuance from its historical and cultural setting (Deryck C. T. Sheriffs, “‘A Tale of Two Cities’—Nationalism in Zion and Babylon,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 39 [1988]: 19). Sheriffs suggests that in a general sense “nationalism” is an “ideology, that is, a set of ideas used to express a nation’s aspirations by an influential group within it” (ibid.). It is an ideology that unifies the smaller elements (clans, tribes, villages, cities) in a greater whole, the nation-state.
nationalism/particularism/exclusivism)?

In their purest forms, the terms “universalism” (God’s redemptive blessings available for all peoples regardless of ethnicity) and “nationalism” (God’s redemptive blessings reserved for Israel alone) contribute to the issue of extent. In other words, to whom are divine redemptive blessings given? As was stated earlier, the matter of extent is only one of the significant issues at stake in the prophet’s message concerning Israel and the nations. If the nations will receive redemptive blessings akin to those originally promised to Israel, by what means does this take place (function)? Once the nations become recipients of these blessings, is there a total merging of Israel with the nations or will the Gentiles be subject to God’s chosen people for a time (relationship)?

Vogels categorizes Israel’s role and mission with regard to the world as either centripetal (inward moving) or centrifugal (outward moving) universalism. Centripetal universalism is found in biblical texts that attribute to Israel the role of being a sign and witness, of attracting others. The attracted nations come to the “center,” to Israel (Zion, Jerusalem), to receive instruction and revelation (e.g., Psalm 87; Isa 2:2-3; 25:6ff.; 55:3b-5; Mic 4:1-2.). Centrifugal universalism describes Israel’s active involvement in bringing God’s redemptive message to the world. This latter set of terms concerns the questions of extent and function, but does not directly contribute to the issue of relationship. Does this “centrifugal universalism” result in total equality for Israel and the nations, or will there still exist some manner of Jewish priority and distinctiveness of identity?

Since the common bipolar descriptive terms only partially delineate the issues relevant to the debate, the interpreter must ask additional questions concerning

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6This debate surrounding nationalism and universalism is complicated by the disparate use of these terms. This is especially true for universalism. Does “universalism” signify Israel’s active participation in the preaching of the gospel to the world, the nations’ free acceptance of divine blessings, or simply the nations’ recognition of Yahweh’s sovereignty? Regardless, this is not the meaning of the universalism so frequently referred to in contemporary discussions. The universalism in recent discussion, in one way or another, denies that the “heathen” are really lost. For a survey of this debate, see Millard Erickson, “The State of the Question,” Through No Fault of Their Own? The Fate of Those Who Have Never Heard, W. V. Crockett and J. G. Sigountos, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 23-33. In the present work “universalism” does not refer to the spiritual lostness of the nations, but rather to the extent of the offer of divine salvation. At issue is the question, “Is redemption only for Israel or does Isaiah teach that it is for all nations?”

7It is not the purpose of this article to delineate the blessings that Israel and the nations will share equally and those that have a more direct impact on Israel. In light of OT references to a restored national presence for Israel, the millennial restoration of the Jerusalem Temple, and indications of an Israelite functional priority during the millennium, it appears that Israel will directly participate in certain blessings, blessings which will less directly impact the nations. For example, the fulfillment of land promises to Israel will impact Gentiles also during the millennium.

the issues of extent, role, and relationship.

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE DEBATE

Several works delineate the history of scholarship with regard to this discussion (nationalism versus universalism in Isaiah 40–55, see below). For the sake of completeness, this article will survey the earlier stages of discussion, albeit briefly. It will devote more attention to the last half of the twentieth century in order to highlight the more recent developments with regard to this issue.

The following description frames the debate with the two polar positions (nationalism and universalism) only to provide structure. Divergent answers to the issues of extent, role, and relationship will make apparent a certain degree of diversity within each general position. This survey of interpretive options considers two issues: Isaiah’s depiction of Israel’s relationship to the nations and several attempts made to explain the fluctuation between universalism/nationalism and blessing/subjugation in the prophet’s message.

Isaiah’s Depiction of Israel’s Relationship to the Nations

Isaiah as a Missionary Prophet (Centrifugal Universalism)

Prior to 1950, most biblical scholars agreed that in Isaiah 40–55 the prophet envisioned the extension of salvation to the nations. The New Testament (Acts 13:47), certain Reformation writers, and several scholars from the critical era (nineteenth-twentieth centuries) perpetuated this view. According to them, the

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9 It is noteworthy that the debate concerning nationalism-universalism also rages outside Isaiah 40–55. H. Wheeler Robinson (The Religious Ideas of the Old Testament, Studies in Theology [London: Duckworth, 1913] 206) and T. W. Manson (The Teaching of Jesus: Studies of Its Form and Content, 2d ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1948] 181) identify a great contrast between the message of Isaiah and that of Ezekiel. They contend that Isaiah teaches nationalism and presents the concept of a saved remnant while Ezekiel conveys universalism and sets forth a saving remnant.

10 Paul quotes Isa 49:6b in an attempt to convince the Jews of Antioch Pisidia that God was indeed behind the extension of redemptive blessings to the Gentiles (apart from any process of proselytism).


prophet teaches that Israel will become a missionary to the nations of the world. Isaiah is regarded as the father of Jewish missionary activity\textsuperscript{13} and is called the “missionary prophet of the Old Testament.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Isaiah’s introduction of centrifugal universalism.} In the early part of this century, Volz argued that the prophet demonstrates a peculiar advancement in the biblical presentation of God’s plan for the world.\textsuperscript{15} After describing Israel’s function as a passive witness to the nations, Isaiah looks forward to “the eschatological turning point” at which time “the propagation of God’s kingdom should be carried out in an intentional and active fashion by Israel.”\textsuperscript{16} Volz titles his treatment of the first three servant songs with the heading “the founder of mission,” and identifies the missionary outreach of Israel as the central concern of these songs.\textsuperscript{17} In a later volume, Volz asserts that the readers of the first servant song stand “at the origin of mission, at the source of world missionary activity.”\textsuperscript{18} In general, the prophet presents “… the divine missionary intention and the God-ordained missionary duty of Israel.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{The theological foundation for centrifugal universalism.} Monotheism and God’s election of Israel serve as the theological foundation for this view of the prophet Isaiah.\textsuperscript{20} From the belief that Yahweh is the only God, the prophet implies that all nations must know Him and that Israel’s duty is to make His name known to the ends of the earth.\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Volz2} Ibid. All English translations of foreign articles are by the author of this article.
\bibitem{Volz3} Ibid., 149.
\bibitem{Volz5} Ibid.
\bibitem{Rowley1} H. H. Rowley (\textit{The Faith of Israel: Aspects of Old Testament Thought} [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957] 185) argues that for the prophet “universalism was the corollary of monotheism, and the world-wide mission of Israel the corollary of her election.”
\bibitem{Rowley2} Rowley (\textit{The Missionary Message of the Old Testament} [London: Carey, 1944] 50) cites Isa 45:21 ff. as one of several passages where the appeal to the world rests firmly upon the truth of monotheism.
\end{thebibliography}
Jacob asserts that God’s election of Israel (in Abraham) leads of necessity to a missionary duty. Israel’s commission to be holy (distinct from other nations), as well as the regular presence of external military threats, hindered the outworking of this responsibility. The concern to be unique and the need to defend herself against invading armies forced Israel to have an inwardly focused perspective. From the time of the conquest of Canaan until the sixth century B.C. (the time of “Deutero-Isaiah” [according to the critics]), this missionary duty was only centripetal. Though Jacob understands that the final triumph of Yahweh over all the peoples belongs to the eschaton, he argues that Isaiah once again brings to the forefront Israel’s compelling missionary duty. In addition to Israel’s power of attraction (Isa 54:1-3), the elect nation will exercise a more active mission by means of her role as the light of the nations and, less directly, through the Servant’s ministry. In fact, by sacrifice and death, the Servant rediscovers the election and its indispensable corollary, the mission.

Others echo that understanding of the prophet’s explanation of the transition from passive to active witness. Torrey asserts that Isaiah’s new truth involves the inclusion of the whole Gentile world, side by side with Israel, in the family of the one God. Manson writes that the prophet exhorts Israel “to conquer the world . . . by spiritual power . . . to bring men under the sway of Jehovah . . . to attract individual men and women to voluntary acceptance of Israel’s King as their king.”

Debate concerning terminology. In the last several decades of this century, certain scholars have preferred the terms “centripetal-centrifugal” rather than “nationalism-universalism” to describe the development of Israel’s function in God’s program. Besides the works by Vogels cited above, Dussel takes that position, contending that in contrast to the centripetal preaching common in the OT (with...
Jerusalem as center), the servant songs preach centrifugal universalism that knows no boundaries. All nations and islands are worthy of God’s mercy. This in more recent times Wodecki finds biblical legitimization for worldwide missions throughout the book of Isaiah. Not only is Isaiah, to use Martin-Achard’s description, “the outstanding missionary prophet,” but Wodecki contends that the motif of universalism is central to the entire book of Isaiah. There is a gradual deepening of this motif as one moves from the first to the second half of the book. According to Wodecki, in the first half of Isaiah (chaps. 1–39) the majority of passages speak generally of the acceptance of belief in Yahweh by the foreign peoples and of their pilgrimage to Zion. In the second part (chaps. 40–55) the servant (whom Wodecki identifies as the Messiah) will bring God’s law and teaching to the most distant peoples, and God’s people will function as His witnesses before those nations. Looking forward to the New Testament, Wodecki argues, “[T]he book of Isaiah constitutes an extremely important means for realizing God’s plan of salvation. It appears as a prepared prelude to the missionary instructions of Christ . . . and its realization in the missionary activity of the universal Church.”

Feuillet, Gélin, and Regodón contend that the servant songs delineate a decentralized universalism which constitutes a departure from the customary royal mediation found in antecedent Scriptures (e.g., Psalm 72). These scholars prefer the descriptive term “decentralized universalism” over the customary pair, centripetal–centrifugal universalism, in order to avoid any connotations of

33Ibid., 100.
34Ibid., 101 [emphasis added].
proselytism in this anticipated mission of Israel. Regodón maintains that the prophet did not explicitly intend to discuss universalism, but that this perspective is a consequence of his announcement of deliverance for Israel. He places the emphasis on mediation rather than centrality. He explains, "In this sense it is a universalism of mediation: the salvation of Israel will be such that it will reach the nations one way or another." Consequently, he suggests that Israel’s mission consists of being a passive witness for its own existence and thereby, the greatness of Yahweh. According to Feuillet, this decentralized universalism is one “where the Temple no longer plays any role,” and “where the Davidic Messiah has no place and where the chosen people have only the role of a passive witness to God, the eschatological Savior.” Feuillet highlights the differences between the message of Isaiah 40–55 and that of the servant songs, primarily seen in the transition from emphasis on Israel’s mediation to the ministry of the messianic servant figure.

Although somewhat limited by the nationalistic aims of Isaiah 40–55, Feuillet argues that decentralized universalism “truly attains its most perfect expression with the songs of the Servant.” He argues that Israel is not without connection to the extension of divine redemption in the eschaton nor do they mediate that redemption. According to Feuillet, Yahweh will make Israel to be a bērît ‘am (cf. Isa 42:6; 49:8), “that is to say, the point of departure of a new union or alliance with humanity, simply by restoring the chosen people.” Isaiah 44:3-5 describes this new unity of Jews and Gentiles where pagans join themselves to the chosen people. Feuillet asserts that in this description “[w]e have there quite simply the realization of the universal

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36Regodón, “El Universalismo de Los Cantos del Siervo” [“The Universalism of the Songs of the Servant”] 75.
37Ibid., 75. Vogels (God’s Universal Covenant 131) also affirms that “all nations will share in [Yahweh’s salvation] through the mediation of the servant.”
39Ibid., 709.
40Ibid., 710. The following points highlight a few of those differences:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isaiah 40-55</th>
<th>Servant Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The iniquity of God’s people is expiated.</td>
<td>1. Expiation for Israel’s sin yet awaits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Political and religious salvation are connected.</td>
<td>2. Political and religious salvation are unrelated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Literal captivity and liberation</td>
<td>3. Spiritual captivity and liberation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Israel’s salvation occasions the conversion of the Gentiles.</td>
<td>4. The servant’s ministry occasions the conversion of the Gentiles.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41Ibid.
42Ibid., 709.
43Contra Feuillet, the present author concludes in another work (Michael A. Grisanti, “The Relationship of Israel and the Nations in Isaiah 40–55” [PhD dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993] 78-90) that only Israelites are in view in Isaiah 44:1-5.
promises which have to do with the numerous descendants of the patriarchs and the participation of the nations in the privileges of the chosen people (Gen 12:2-3; cf. Isa 51:2-3).44 Decentralized universalism contends that the ministry of the servant figure replaces Israel in her mediatorial role.

Isaiah as a Nationalistic Prophet (Centripetal Universalism)

In the 1950’s the tide of scholarly consensus began to turn away from a universalistic understanding of the Isaiah 40–55. The other primary alternative for depicting Israel’s relationship to the nations describes Isaiah as a strident prophet of nationalism, only preaching of Israel’s glorious future. As with the preceding alternative (Isaiah as a missionary prophet), a spectrum of views exists among those who contend that Isaiah primarily addressed Israel’s redemptive destiny. In general, all those who argue that Israel’s national future is the primary agenda of Isaiah 40–55 affirm (to varying degrees) that any “universalistic” emphases are secondary or peripheral. Regardless, they all make a careful distinction between the terms “proselytism,”45 “universalism,”46 and “mission.”47 Beyond that, proponents of a more nationalistic perspective fall into two categories: those who affirm that Isaiah offers no salvation for the Gentiles and those who maintain that the prophet Isaiah picks up a motif from earlier biblical material (e.g., Exod 19:4-6) and reminds the nation of her divine commission to be a passive witness to the pagan nations of the world.

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45They are careful not to confuse proselytism (the incorporation of individual Gentiles into the community of Israel) that always existed in Israel’s religious traditions with some kind of a missionary commission. Martin-Achard (A Light to the Nations 5) writes, “In a certain sense Jewish proselytism is a private enterprise undertaken by individuals and concerned with particular persons, while the concept of mission involves the belief that the whole community has a task to fulfill on behalf of all mankind.”

46In defining universalism, Martin-Achard (A Light to the Nations 5) “asserts that the God of Israel is the Lord of all the earth, but does not propose that the Chosen People should take any particular action towards converting the nations to Him.” Universalism merely refers to the extent of God’s program, not to the actual extension of redemptive blessings to anyone outside of Israel.

47Albert Gélin (The Religion of Israel, J. R. Foster, trans. [New York: Hawthorn, 1959] 79) concludes that the Bible sets forth a concept of universalism that does not precisely develop into a missionary attitude, that is, human participation in converting the races of the world. An earlier passage from the same volume clouds his attempt to distinguish between these terms (universalism versus mission). There he writes, “The call to proselytize is the particular message of the Second Isaias (Isaias 45.22-4; 44.5)” (ibid., 72). As a result of Isaiah’s prophetic ministry, Israel moves from a witness function (drawing a few into the Jewish fold by their testimony to God’s character) to a missionary focus (active proselytizing), Israel’s role was to cause the Gentiles to recognize Yahweh’s glory (by their restoration to the land). This would serve as the starting-point for a massive conversion of Gentiles to Yahweh (ibid., 83-84).
Any “Universalistic” Tendencies Are Merely Peripheral

Unlike those who regard monotheism and universalism as Isaiah’s primary themes, Martin-Achard maintains that the “heart of the prophet’s message is by no means the declaration that there is only one God and that He is the God of the Jews; it is the proclamation that God’s People will be restored to its own land thanks to the merciful intervention of Yahweh.”48 He also argues that the prophet’s chief concern “is not the salvation of the Gentiles but the liberation of his own people and its triumphant return to Jerusalem; the heathen are scarcely more than an instrument in the hands of Israel’s God.”49 Stuhlmueller affirms that the prophet “did not announce the conversion of the Gentiles to Yahweh, only their admiration for the way that Yahweh was bringing his elect people out of their midst.”50 Further on he argues that any universalistic tendencies derive from the fact that the prophet “was addressing himself to Israel and exclusively to their salvation. . . . He saw the world implications of what Yahweh would be doing for his chosen people.”51 Sheriffs suggests that the prophet presents a Zion-centered form of nationalism deliberately composed as a polemic against the competing Babylon-centered nationalism enveloping the Judean exiles. Consequently, the polemic slant of the prophet’s ideology of nationalism is intended to convince the Israelites rather than convert Babylonians. Isaiah intends to catch the attention of God’s chosen people and support positive affirmations of a return to the Judean cult-center and its worship.52

Certain scholars who view Isaiah as a prophet of nationalism suggest that the various universalistic terms employed by the prophet53 simply function much like a hymnic style of utterance.54 For example, the psalmist urges “all the earth” (Ps 96:1) and the “families of nations” to sing to Yahweh and to ascribe Him glory (cf. Psalm 98). De Boer contends that all the references to distant regions or peoples by Isaiah (cf. 41:1-5; 42:4, 10-12; 43:9, 20; 45:22; 48:14; 49:1; 51:5) are rhetorical expressions for totality.55 All nations are invited to the court of judgment to witness Yahweh’s victory. However, these nations are only offered the opportunity to view God’s redemption, not the chance to participate in it. These universal terms in no

48Martin-Achard, A Light to the Nations 12.
49Ibid., 13. He also affirms that “it is not a matter of conversion but of the homage due by the whole of creation to Yahweh for what He has wrought on His people’s behalf” (ibid., 16).
51Ibid., 102.
52Sheriffs, “'A Tale of Two Cities'—Nationalism in Zion and Babylon” 54.
53These scholars refer, for example, to the prophet’s use of “isles” (41:1), the “ends of the earth” (42:10), the “distant people” (49:1), and so on, calling the nations to give heed to Yahweh’s purposes and to praise the God who has redeemed Israel.
54Martin-Achard, A Light to the Nations 16.
way indicate Israel’s function as a missionary nation.

The Basic Argumentation

N. H. Snaith was one of the first to argue that the prophet is essentially nationalistic in attitude. He is actually responsible for the narrow and exclusive attitude of post-exilic days. . . . The whole prophecy is concerned with the restoration and exaltation of Jacob-Israel, the Servant of the Lord, the Righteous Remnant, and any place which the heathen have in the new order is entirely and debasingly subservient.  

De Boer also firmly contends that

Second-Isaiah’s only purpose is to proclaim deliverance for the Judean people. . . . Foreign nations are but mentioned as peoples to be conquered, in whose hands the cup of wrath will be put, li 23; or as the instrument of Yhwh to deliver his people; or, in rhetorical manner of speaking, to be witness of Yhwh’s glory. Yhwh’s glory will be shown only in his elected people, raised up from their humiliation.

According to Orlinsky, the nations are either Yahweh’s instrument of punishment for His erring people or helpless witnesses to God’s exclusive love and protection of His people, just like the heavens and the earth and the mountains.

No Salvation for the Gentiles

Schoors contends that there is no offer of Gentile salvation in Isaiah 40–55 when he writes, “There is some universalism in them [Isaiah’s prophecies], in this sense that Yahwe is considered the creator of the universe, of all nations and kings, of the ends of the earth. But there is no expectation of salvation on behalf of the Gentiles. The salvation announced in the genre of salvation words is meant only for Israel.” More recently, Whybray concludes that “the general context of Deutero-Isaiah’s otherwise extremely consistent line of thought makes it most probable that nothing more than a submission of the nations to Yahweh’s universal


55De Boer, Second Isaiah’s Message 90.


sovereignty is envisaged."

**Israel Is a Passive Witness to the Nations**

Several posit that Isaiah 40–55 contains a commission for Israel to be a passive witness. In other words, Israel is not commanded to do missionary work, but to serve as a sign of God’s glory among the nations.\(^6\) Israel has no other mission to the heathen than to be the chosen people. Martin-Achard argues that “it is by means of the *life* of His people that the God of Israel produces the light of the world” (i.e., Gentiles—Isa 49:6).\(^6\) By its very existence in the world, Israel will assume its mediatorial function of representing Yahweh to the world. Gottwald explains that the ministry of the Servant is

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hardly the evangelizing, missionary commission which has traditionally been assigned
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in turning the peoples politically subject to him to support of the Yahweh cult. . . . The
establishment of the universal Yahweh cult will be a triumph of imperial policy and of
national conversion. The conversion will, however, not be due so much to what Israel
says as to what Israel is.\(^6\)

Oswalt writes that

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Israel’s function is that of witness as opposed to proselytizer. . . . Israel, by its life and
words, is to demonstrate what God is like and what he is doing. Beyond this, it is God
who will do the drawing and the bringing of the nations to himself. . . . If Israel will
simply be the Israel of God, the nations will be drawn to him.\(^6\)
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McKnight contends that “Judaism never developed a clear mission to the Gentiles
that had as its goal the conversion of the world,” nor is there “evidence that could
lead to the conclusion that Judaism was a ‘missionary religion’ in the sense of


\(^{62}\)Robert Martin-Achard, “La Signification théologique de l’élection d’Israel” [“The Theological
Meaning of Israel’s Election”], *Theologische Zeitschrift* 16 (1960):341 [emphasis added]. This point
is part of Martin-Achard’s argument for a collective identification of the servant.

\(^{63}\)Norman K. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms of the Earth: Israelite Prophecy and International
this passive witness of Israel to the historical time of Deutero-Isaiah (6th century B.C.).

aggressive attempts to convert Gentiles.”

**ATTEMPTS AT EXPLAINING FLUCTUATIONS IN THE PROPHET’S MESSAGE**

In their investigation of Isaiah’s message, many scholars have encountered a tension between the motifs of nationalism/universalism and subjugation/blessing. Why do certain passages appear to offer redemptive blessings to all peoples and others focus on Israel alone? How can Gentile nations be promised both subjugation and blessing? Many interpreters do not regard the motifs as complementary concepts and resolve this tension in one of several ways delineated below.

**The Elimination of Certain Passages**

Later additions by a glossator/editor could account for the conceptual tension in Isaiah 40–55. Since Duhm argues that the nations’ salvation excludes the possibility of their submission to the exalted Israel, DeBoer also contends that Duhm was one of the first to propose that a glossator positioned the texts which envisage the submission of the nations.

Torrey suggests that the prophet sought to present a new truth, “the inclusion of the whole Gentile world, side by side with Israel, in the family of the One God.” This message, however, met with resistance and occasioned the insertion of certain texts that envision Israel’s domination of the nations.

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65 Scot McKnight, *A Light among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991) 117. Instead of a missionary religion, McKnight argues that Judaism was “a light among the nations—a ‘light’ because Judaism was fully assured that truth was on its side; ‘among the nations’ because Jews were thoroughly woven into the fabric of the Roman world.”

66 J. Lindblom (*Prophecy in Ancient Israel* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1962] 401-2) epitomizes this approach to the tension in his remarks: “It is, in the opinion of the present author, difficult to imagine that the prophet proclaimed at the same time conversion or salvation of the Gentiles and their subjugation or annihilation.”


69 Torrey (ibid., 119-20) writes: “The prophet’s large-hearted view of the Gentile world, giving the heathen an equal share with the chosen people in the blessings of the Coming Age, and reserving for the elder brother, Israel, only the added glory and privilege of the leader and benefactor . . . must have been unacceptable to many of those who held fast to inherited notions. . . .”

70 According to Torrey (ibid., 119-20), “To have a portion with the great and divide the spoil with the strong was hardly enough; there must be such exaltation above the former oppressors as to make it clear that the relative positions have been reversed. This feeling finds expression in certain insertions
A Consideration of Redactional Layers

Several scholars contend that the compositional history of these chapters explains the conceptual tension in the received canonical text. Dion argues that Isaiah 40–55 has five layers of redaction and he suggests that the first stratum contains a primitive universalism which is refined in the following redactions. The primitive nature of the prophet’s universalistic conceptions at the time of the first stratum explains whatever nationalism is present in those chapters. 71 On the other hand, Cañellas suggests that “several of the ‘nationalistic’ passages in Isaiah 40–55 [e.g., 42:13; 47:3f.; 49:26; 51:22 f.] carry the stamp of a retouching that came from the hand of a strict nationalistic spirit.” 72

A Redefinition of Terms

For certain writers, only the precise definition of the significant terms (e.g., Israel, nations) can resolve the tension between the bipolar motifs: universalism and nationalism. Halas, who concludes that the prophet teaches no nationalism whatsoever, 73 but only salvation for all, argues that the terms “nations” and “Israel” have no ethnic connotations and signify ungodly and godly individuals respectively (whether Jews or Gentiles). 74 The prophet’s message is that the nations (ungodly Jews and Gentiles) will experience judgment, while Israel (godly Jews and Gentiles) will enjoy God’s redemptive benefits.

Hollenberg contends that Isaiah is a purely nationalistic prophet by suggesting that “nations” is a flexible term, at times meaning “Gentiles” and at other times the “crypto-Israelites.” According to Hollenberg, “Crypto-Israelites are those scattered Jews who have been able to accommodate themselves to an existence in the midst of Gentiles.” 75 In his delineation of various passages in Isaiah 40–55, “nations” means “Gentiles” whenever the destruction or the submission of the nations is in the text, made at an early date.” Consequently, these nationalistic passages are not part of the prophet’s original message. By “early date,” Torrey refers to a time in the post-exilic period soon after the completion of “Deutero-Isaiah’s” prophetic ministry.


73Ibid., 162.


75D. E. Hollenberg, “Nationalism and ‘the Nations’ in Isaiah XL–LV,” VT 19 (1969):26-29. In other words, at times the prophet uses the term “nations” to refer to the children of Israel who had become so swallowed up within the nations that he can describe them as foster children (49:22 f.).
view, and it means “crypto-Israelites” whenever salvation is promised to the “nations.”

**The Situation in the Prophet’s Time**

Several scholars posit that the conditions external to the prophet occasioned the fluctuation between the motifs of universalism/nationalism and blessing/subjugation. Bewer maintains that Israel’s resistance to a universalistic message encouraged the prophet to appeal to the nation’s pride by returning to a nationalistic ideology.

Lindblom argues that the instability of Isaiah’s time caused this variation in motifs. As Israel’s circumstances changed, so did the prophet’s declarations to them.

Hempel suggests that the prophet’s reference to the retributive “cup of reeling” (51:22 ff.) and the enslavement of Egyptians (45:14 ff.) are manifestations of his falling back into the vengeful hatred felt by many Jews as a consequence of their recent subjugation at the hands of the Gentiles. He writes that during the exilic period, when an abundance of hate against Babylon and Edom had accumulated, “Deutero-Isaiah does not indeed escape this danger [of lapsing back into vengeful hatred] when he, in maintenance of belief in the election of the people (e.g., the Davidic dynasty (55:3), and Jerusalem, promises the retribution reflected in drinking the cup of reeling (51:22 f.) and the enslavement of Egypt.”

Begrich contends that the prophet merely inserted universalistic material into the preexisting nationalistic traditions. Since Israel’s nationalistic hope was so integral to their traditions, the prophet made no efforts to peel away the obsolete centripetal motifs. He suggests that

In view of these existing realities it might be more accurate to recognize that Deutero-Isaiah received a previously established tradition and that he was not able to single out parts that he did not like. . . . The only thing that remained for him was to shift this tension under the dominant point of view of the glorification of Yahweh. One cannot deny that this adoption of a wider reference was equivalent to an independent tradition

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76Ibid., 27-29.


78J. Lindblom, *The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah: A New Attempt to Solve an Old Problem*, Lunds Universitets Arsskrift N.F. Avd. 1. Bd 47. Nr 5. (Land. C. W. K. Gleerup, 1951) 67. Lindblom later asserts that the tension between these motifs is humanly incomprehensible and will only be resolved one day by God Himself.

Along with Begrich, Gelston argues that this nationalistic material represented an inherited tradition which the prophet was unable to transcend or repudiate. Stuhlmueller separates the message of Second Isaiah from that of the servant songs. Because of the pejorative treatment of the Gentiles in other passages (Isa 40:15-20; 41:11; 43:3, 8-13; 44:9-20), many of the prophet’s expressions about the nations’ recognizing Yahweh (40:5; 42:12; 52:10) are to be regarded as merely stylistic and exaggerated ways of presenting the wondrous work of Yahweh within Israel. Of three passages that seem to refer to Gentile conversion, two are explained away and the third (45:22) is ignored. An extraordinary leap toward universalism is made in the servant songs (whether written late in what Stuhlmueller calls “Second Isaiah’s” ministry or by his disciples), only to be ignored by the post-exilic community.

Finally, Blenkinsopp also identifies developments toward universalism in Isaiah 40–66, which were occasioned by changing historical and social circumstances. In chapters 40–48 the prophet depicts the Gentiles being admitted as proselytes to a confessional community (as opposed to a nation-state). In the next section (chaps. 49–55) Cyrus is given the task of repatriating the dispersed Jews. Having failed in this task, the responsibility reverts to the exilic community and its prophetic representatives. Due to its ethnic and cultural mixture, the post-exilic community sought to accommodate these new peoples (chaps. 56–66).

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81 “Surely it is truer to say that the prophet discerned in moments of high vision the glorious fact that Yahweh’s salvation was for all the world, while at other times he sank back to a more traditional and superior attitude towards the Gentiles” (A. Gelston, “The Missionary Message of Second Isaiah,” *SJIT* 18 [1965] 316. Georg Fohrer (*History of Israelite Religion*, D. E. Green, trans. [Nashville: Abingdon, 1972] 327), argues that besides the prophet’s emphasis on universalism, his preaching also contained “questionable nationalistic and materialistic elements” (because of his reliance on earlier prophets).

82 Isaiah 44:5 refers to the conversion of scattered Jews and the universalistic elements in 51:3-8 are reductively removed.


86 Ibid., 85-86.

87 Ibid., 90-98.
The Recognition of Israel as God’s Servant Nation

All of the above approaches address the conceptual tension in Isaiah 40–55 by unnecessarily explaining away one of the bipolar themes, rather than retaining both sides of the tension. As Christensen contends, “The dialectic within the prophetic literature of the OT in terms of nationalism and universalism is part of the very structure of the canon itself. It is not to be removed by scholarly reconstruction of the biblical text, nor is it to be explained away by semantics.” Recognizing the nation of Israel as God’s chosen instrument of blessing the nations offers a possible resolution of the conceptual tension in the prophet’s message.

First of all, the prophet Isaiah intentionally emphasizes God’s future restoration of His chosen people as well as the extension of redemptive benefits to the nations. Through the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12) Yahweh chose Abraham’s descendants as a special people for Himself. There He promised to bless this special people and proclaimed His intention to bless all nations of the world through them. Yahweh constituted them as a nation by means of their Exodus from Egypt and His provision of the Mosaic Law. Yahweh gave Israel this legal code so that she, by living in accordance with its demands, might be a nation distinct from all other nations around her. As Exod 19:4-6 explains, by so doing the chosen people would function as a “treasured possession,” “a kingdom of priests,” and “a holy nation.” Yahweh intended that Israel function in a mediatorial or representative role before the nations. The prophet Isaiah built his argument upon this foundation.

Isaiah’s primary message for God’s people is that Yahweh intends to deliver them from Babylonian exile and restore them to great power and glory in their homeland. Yahweh’s intervention on their behalf will have obvious worldwide implications.

As part of His promise to restore His chosen people, Yahweh reassured His children that He would intervene on their behalf as a Warrior (41:8-10; 13-14; 42:13), totally annihilating Israel’s enemies (41:11-12, 15-16; 49:25-26b). He would use Israel as an instrument of divine judgment against the nations. Like a threshing sled rips apart the stalks to release the grain, Israel will decimate the Gentiles that refuse to submit to Yahweh (41:15-16). This divine judgment upon the nations was likened to the transformation of an oasis to a desert (42:15). Because He values His...
people so highly, Yahweh promised to give nations as ransom for Israel (43:3b-4).  

Secondly, the blessing upon the nations chronologically follows their judgment/subjugation. After Yahweh crushes all those Gentiles who stand in opposition to the extension of His kingdom throughout the earth, as the uncontested Sovereign of the universe He will also offer His redemptive benefits to the Gentiles who will submit to Him (45:22-25). He will liberate the nations from oppression and enable them to live in a world where His equity and justice are commonplace. Whether the Messiah or some form of national Israel serve as the referent of the servant figure in the servant songs, Israel clearly exercises a prominent role in the realization of Yahweh’s intentions for the entire world.

Finally, Israel functions as Yahweh’s vehicle to bless the nations at the same time as she holds a place of priority over them. After judging recalcitrant Gentiles, the Lord will sovereignly cause the nations to expedite the return of scattered Israelites to their homeland (43:5-7; 49:22-23a). These surviving Gentiles will bring tribute to Israel and be subject to her (45:14; 49:22b), recognizing Israel’s role as God’s servant nation. They will care for Israel as parents care for their child (49:22b). Nations that do not know Israel will hasten to her because of her relationship with Yahweh (55:5). And after the Lord opens the floodgates of divine blessings for both Jews and Gentiles, Israel will function as “the mediatory nation at the head of the nations.”

Bremer suggests that Israel’s relationship with the nations has always been dialectical. God’s chosen people are both set apart from the nations and chosen by God to mediate blessing to the nations. He writes, “Israel is at once the people of the exodus and the people of reconciliation. Israel is set apart, and Israel brings blessing. And the blessing is not to be distinguished from the separation. It is precisely as the

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90In Isaiah 43:1-7 Yahweh promised to do all that is necessary to accomplish the deliverance of His chosen people. Egypt, Cush, and Seba are nations He will give as ransom as part of His deliverance of Israel from any threatening, destructive force.

91The prophet Zechariah also affirms that only those “survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem” (Zech 14:16) will worship before the Lord and keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

92Whether the servant figure represents an individual or a collective entity, this figure has an intimate relationship with Israel. The prophet calls the servant “Israel” (49:3) and presents the servant as the epitome of all that Yahweh desired that Israel be. In another work (Grisanti, “The Relationship of Israel and the Nations” 185-96), the present author argues that the Servant in Isaiah 40-55 is a mediatorial Davidic figure who comes to be known as the Messiah.

93Oehler (Theology of the Old Testament 501-504, 516-21) argues that this interplay between subjugation and blessing will occur simultaneously as well as consequentially. God’s judgment upon the wicked nations occurs in a punctiliar fashion, wiping out those Gentiles that resist His intentions. However, the subjugation of the nations to Israel continues throughout the remainder of history. In this sense, not only does God’s blessing upon the nations follow His judgment upon them, but is also co-existent with their subjugation to Israel.

94Ibid., 518.
people of the separation that Israel bears the blessing.”⁹⁵ It is Israel, as God’s chosen, separate nation, that God will use as His vehicle for mediating redemptive blessings to the nations of the world (e.g., New Covenant provisions). Isaiah’s emphasis on Israel’s blessing alongside the nations’ subjugation is just another manifestation of the divinely established dialectic in Israel’s relationship with the nations. It is as God’s chosen people that Israel serves as His agent of blessing upon the nations. The redemptive meeting between Yahweh and the nations depends on the existence of Israel in the midst of the nations. By living for Yahweh the chosen nation lives for the world.

Several nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars have recognized that the prophet envisages the salvation of the nations as well as the exaltation of Israel over the nations.⁹⁶ In his discussion of Israel’s relationship with the nations, Ringgren emphasizes that “there is an important restriction on this universalism: Israel is the dominant nation, and the Gentiles will serve Israel and its God.”⁹⁷

More recently, Van Winkle asserts that

the salvation of the nations does not preclude their submission to Israel. The prophet does not envisage the co-equality of Jews and Gentiles. He expects that Israel will be exalted, and that she will become Yahweh’s agent who will rule the nations in such a way that justice is established and mercy is shown. This rule is both that for which the nations wait expectantly and that to which they submit.⁹⁸

Oswalt maintains that blessing and judgment coming upon the Gentiles are coordinate rather than mutually exclusive concepts (not either-or, but both-and).⁹⁹ He writes, “To those who come in submission and acceptance he [God] offers a blessed parent-child relationship. But, to those who insist on taking his gifts by force, he shows nothing but implacable hostility.”¹⁰⁰ Zion is at the same time a source of life and a source of death to the nations.

Both divine judgment and blessing will come upon the nations of the world. The Gentiles will enjoy these blessings by virtue of Israel’s mediatorial function and at the same time they will be subject to God’s chosen people.

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⁹⁹Oswalt (“The Mission of Israel to the Nations” 85-105) traces this coordination of these motifs throughout the prophets.
¹⁰⁰Ibid., 89.
CONCLUSION

In his recent overview of “the nations” as a biblical motif, Christensen affirms that the study of the nations within the canonical tradition of ancient Israel leads inevitably to the primary tension between the concepts of nationalism and universalism. On the one hand, particularly within the prophetic literature, there are passages which express the narrowest self-interest and even hatred for Israel’s enemies among the nations. But alongside these stand passages expressing an exalted vision of worldwide salvation for “the nations.”

Isaiah 40–55 contains passages that manifest both sides of this tension. The customary descriptive terms, “nationalism” and “universalism,” do not sufficiently reveal the constitutive issues in this debate. The role of Israel in Yahweh’s extension of redemptive benefits to the nations as well as the consequent relationship of Israel and the nations demand attention in addition to the issue of the extent of those redemptive blessings.

Assertions that the prophet is the “missionary prophet of the Old Testament” or that he is an ardent nationalist without any concern for the nations frame this debate. Between these two extremes, the prophet Isaiah neither depicts Israel as a nation of world-traversing missionaries, nor does he exclude the nations from participation in divine redemption. Consonant with relevant antecedent Scriptures, the prophet argues that God’s special dealings with His chosen people not only benefit Israel, but also carry significance for all nations. Isaiah underscores Israel’s role in providing a witness to the nations. This witness function is not in the New Testament sense of bringing the message of Yahweh to the nations, but “in the sense of being a people of God whose life shall draw nations to inquire after Yahweh” (cf. Isa 2:1-4; 43:10-11). It is as God’s chosen people that Israel can exercise a mediatorial role with regard to the nations. Isaiah’s fervent desire for Israel is that they will respond to God’s intervention on her behalf and carry out her role as God’s servant nation before the world.

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102 Elmer Martens, God’s Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).
THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE IN COUNSELING

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A belief in Biblical inerrancy entails an affirmation of Scripture’s sufficiency for understanding and resolving the non-physical problems of man. Counseling that is truly Christian must be Christ-centered, church-centered, and Bible-based. Various contemporary approaches to counseling question the sufficiency of Scripture, namely the two-book, the no-book, and the filtering device approaches. All three join in affirming that the traditional biblical resources for dealing with man’s problems are not enough. They fail to take into account, however, the finiteness of man’s knowledge, the depravity of human nature, and the sufficiency of Scripture. Psalm 19:7-11, 2 Timothy 3:15-17, and 2 Peter 1:2-7 affirm clearly the sufficiency of Scripture and Christ in dealing with man’s problems. Secular psychological principles are unnecessary and may even be harmful in trying to understand and help people.

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The Chicago statement on biblical inerrancy states that “the authority of Scripture is a key issue for the Christian Church in this and every age. Those who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are called to show the reality of their discipleship by humbly and faithfully obeying God’s written Word. To stray from Scripture in faith and conduct is disloyalty to our Master. Recognition of the total truth and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture is essential to a full grasp and adequate confession of its authority.”

As a Christian, I wholeheartedly agree with every aspect of this general statement on biblical inerrancy and authority. For me, the inerrancy of Scripture and the authority of Scripture are like Siamese twins—they are inseparably joined to each other. Holy Scripture, being God’s law and testimony, is true and should therefore serve as our standard for all matters of faith and practice (Isa 8:19-20). God’s Word being both truthful (John 17:17) and authoritative calls us to humble and faithful obedience in every area of which it speaks. There is no authority that is higher than that in Scripture. Wherever and on whatever subject the Scriptures speak, one must regard them as both inerrant and authoritative.

As a Christian, it is precisely because I affirm the preceding convictions

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1This essay is adapted from the chapter “What Is Biblical Counseling?,” Totally Sufficient, Ed Hinson and Howard Eyrich, gen eds. (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House 1997). It is used by permission.
that I believe in the sufficiency of Scripture in the area of counseling. Scripture is not silent about its own sufficiency for both understanding man and his non-physical problems and for resolving those problems. To me, those issues are crystal clear. And because this is what I understand Scripture to be teaching about itself, my profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior compels me to submit to this sufficiency teaching. As I see it, doing anything less would make me disloyal to my Master.

Many in our day and previously have affirmed the inerrancy and authority of Scripture in matters of faith and practice, but have not affirmed the sufficiency of Scripture for understanding and resolving the spiritual (non-physical) problems of man. They believe that we need the insights of psychology to understand and help people. In essence, they believe that when it comes to these matters, the Bible is fundamentally deficient. They believe that God did not design the Bible for this purpose and so we must rely on extrabiblical, psychological theories and insights. For many Christians, the Bible has titular (given a title and respected in name) rather than functional (actual, practical, real, respected in practice) authority in the area of counseling. They acknowledge it to be the Word of God and therefore worthy of our respect, but when it comes to understanding and resolving many of the real issues of life, they give it limited value.

A DEFINITION OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELING

Christian Counseling Is Christ-Centered

The attitude that many Christians have toward the Scriptures was vividly illustrated by a person who came to interview me about the kind of counseling I did. This person was traveling around the United States questioning various Christians who did counseling about their views on what constitutes Christian counseling. In the interview, I said I believed that any counseling worthy of the name “Christian” should be conscientiously and comprehensively Christ-centered. It will make much of who and what Christ is, what He has done for us in His life and death and resurrection and in sending the Holy Spirit, what He is doing for us right now in His session at the Father’s right hand, and what He will yet do for us in the future.

In Christian counseling, the Christ of the Bible will not be an appendage, a “tack on” for surviving life in the “fast lane.” He will be the center as well as the circumference of our counseling. Understanding the nature and causes of our human difficulties will include understanding ways in which we are unlike Christ in our values, aspirations, desires, thoughts, feelings, choices, attitudes, actions, responses, and other aspects of our lives. Resolving those sin-related difficulties will include being redeemed and justified through Christ, receiving God’s forgiveness through Christ, and acquiring from Christ enabling
The Sufficiency of Scripture in Counseling

power to replace unchristlike (sinful) patterns of life with Christlike, godly ways of life.

In his book on *Our Sufficiency in Christ*, John MacArthur tells a story about a man who was shut out of a house on a cold night. He suffered some unpleasant consequences during the ordeal, all of which he could have avoided had he known the key to the house was in his pocket. Dr. MacArthur writes,

That true story illustrates the predicament of Christians who try to gain access to God’s blessings through human means, all the while possessing Christ, who is the key to every spiritual blessing. He alone fulfills the deepest longing of our hearts and supplies every spiritual resource we need.

Believers have in Christ everything they will ever need to meet any trial, any craving, any difficulty they might ever encounter in this life. Even the newest convert possesses sufficient resources for every spiritual need. From the moment of salvation each believer is in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) and Christ is in the believer (Colossians 1:27). The Holy Spirit abides within as well (Romans 8:9)—the Christian is His temple (1 Corinthians 6:19). “Of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (John 1:16). So every Christian is a self contained treasury of divinely bestowed spiritual affluence. There is nothing more—no great transcendental secret, no ecstatic experience, no hidden spiritual wisdom—that can take Christians to some higher plane of spiritual life. “His divine power has granted us *everything* pertaining to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us” (2 Peter 1:3, emphasis added). “The true knowledge of *Him*” refers to saving knowledge. To seek something more is like frantically knocking on a door, seeking what is inside, not realizing you hold the key in your pocket.

No higher knowledge, no hidden truth, nothing besides the all-sufficient resources that we find in Christ exists that can change the human heart.

Any counselor who desires to honor God and be effective must see the goal of his efforts as leading a person to the sufficiency of Christ. The view that man is capable of solving his own problems, or that people can help one another by “therapy” or other human means, denies the doctrine of human depravity and man’s need for God. It replaces the Spirit’s transforming power with impotent human wisdom.¹

For Christian counseling to occur, the people doing the counseling must be individuals who are conscientiously and comprehensively Christian in their outlook on life. Truly Christian counseling is done by people who have experienced the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, who have come to Christ in

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¹John MacArthur, Jr., *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Dallas: Word, 1991) 27, 72. In the last paragraph quoted, MacArthur is referring to attempts to help people based on secular humanistic theories, techniques, and therapies. He is not referring to the kind of counseling being described in this chapter, as is evidenced from many of his other writings, from his co-editing a book titled *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, as well as from the facts that the church he pastors has a very active counselor training and counseling ministry and that The Master’s College, of which he is the president, has an undergraduate major in biblical counseling and a graduate program leading to an MA in biblical counseling.
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repentance and faith, who have acknowledged Him as Lord and Savior of their lives and who want to live lives of obedience to Him. Their main concern in life is to exalt Him and bring glory to His name. They believe that because God did not spare His own Son (from the cross) but delivered Him up (to the cross and death) for us (on our behalf as our substitute), He will freely give us—through Christ—all that we need for effective and productive living (for transforming us into the likeness of His Son). Truly Christian counseling is done by those whose theological convictions impact, permeate, and control their personal lives and their counseling theory and practice.

**Christian Counseling Is Church-Centered**

Another major distinctive of truly Christian counseling that I mentioned to my interviewer was that it will be *conscientiously and comprehensively church-centered*. The Scriptures clearly teach that the local church is the primary means by which God intends to accomplish His work in the world. The local church is His ordained instrument for calling the lost to Himself. It is also the context in which He sanctifies and changes His people into the very likeness of Christ. According to Scripture, the church is His household, the pillar and ground of the truth, and the instrument he uses in helping His people to put off the old manner of life (pre-Christian habit patterns and lifestyles, ways of thinking, feeling, choosing, and acting) and to put on the new self (a new manner of life, Christlike thoughts, feelings, choices, actions, values, and responses—Eph 4:1-32).

Even a cursory reading of the New Testament will lead a person to the conclusion that the church is at the center of God’s program for His people. Jesus Christ, who proclaimed that He would build His church (Matt 16:18), invested in it authority to act with the *imprimatur* of heaven (Matt 18:17-20) and ultimately revealed that His plan was to fill the world with local bodies of believers (Matt 28:18-20).

When trying to capture and project his conception of the role of the church in God’s program and with God’s people, John Calvin made this impassioned assertion:

> Because it is now our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn from the simple title “mother” how useful, indeed necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels (Matthew 22:30). Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives. . . . God’s fatherly favor and the especial witness of spiritual life are limited to his flock, so that it is always disastrous to leave the church.²

This statement about the church by John Calvin was not specifically directed toward the issue of counseling. It does, however, indicate Calvin’s perspective on the importance of the church in the lives of believers. His view concurs with the ideas that the church is responsible for providing counseling and that Christians are responsible for seeking care and guidance for their personal lives. Calvin’s study of the Scriptures convinced him that the nurture, edification, and sanctification of believers was to be church-centered. I wholeheartedly agree with this emphasis because I believe this is the unmistakable teaching of Holy Scripture.

Christian Counseling is Bible-based

As I continued to explain my views on Christian counseling, I told my visitor that truly Christian counseling will be conscientiously and comprehensively Bible-based, deriving from the Bible its understanding of who man is, the nature of his main problems, why he has these problems, and how to resolve them. For counseling to be worthy of the name of Christ, the counselor must be conscientiously and comprehensively committed to the sufficiency of Scripture for understanding and resolving all of the non-physical personal and interpersonal sin-related difficulties of man.

QUESTIONING THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

At this point, the individual who had come to ask about my views on Christian counseling responded by saying, “Well, what you’re saying about all of these things is nice, but what do you think should be done when people have really serious problems?”

Now, consider what this person—who claimed to be a Christian—was implying by that question. She was implying that the factors I had mentioned might prove helpful with people who have minor problems, but certainly they are not enough for resolving the really serious problems of life. She was intimating that the approach I had described was rather simplistic. She was suggesting that the resources that God prescribes in His Word for ministering to needy people are not adequate. She was insinuating that the substantial insights necessary for ministering to people with major difficulties must come from sources other than the ones I had mentioned.

Unfortunately, at least from my perspective, her views represent the opinions of many professing Christians. In a book entitled, *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, Douglas Bookman describes the way many professing

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Any Christian who sets out to counsel another individual is aware that the counsel offered must be true. Counseling is by definition and impulse a helping ministry. It assumes that someone is confronted with some measure of confusion, disappointment, or despair and that a second person who endeavors to help by analyzing the counselee’s situation, sorting out the issues involved, and then offering helpful and healing advice and direction. But the efficacy of all that the counselor undertakes to do is dependent at least on this one thing: that his analysis and counsel is true. Thus, any thoughtful consideration of the ministry of counseling must begin with the most basic of all philosophical questions, that question articulated by a Roman procurator two thousand years ago, “What is truth?”

Ever since its genesis as a distinguishable discipline almost four decades ago, the school of thought and ministry broadly known as Christian Psychology has been convulsed by the issue of its own epistemological construct. (That is, where ought/may Christians to go to find the truth necessary to help people who are hurting?) Because that discipline grew up largely within the broad limits of evangelical Christianity, there has been a universal acknowledgment of the veracity of Jesus’ answer to the question of truth when, as He addressed His heavenly Father in prayer, He stated simply, “Thy Word is truth.”

But for most that answer alone has not sufficed. The persuasion continues—articulated, justified, and applied in various ways—that there is truth that is at least profitable and perhaps even necessary to the counseling effort. This truth is to be discovered beyond the pages of Scripture. Christians who are thus persuaded are anxious to affirm Jesus’ simple but profound declaration, yet they feel compelled to qualify that affirmation with the proposition that Scriptural truths may (or even must) be supplemented by truths that have been discovered by human investigation and observation. This persuasion lies at the heart of the integrationist impulse of Christian Psychology.

By all accounts, this integrationist tendency is rather recent in origin. Throughout much of the twentieth century a spirit of mutual mistrust and even contempt existed between the worlds of secular psychology and Christian theology. But that hostility began to thaw in certain circles sometime in the middle of this century, and by this last decade of the twentieth century there exists an obvious attitude of reconciliation between Christianity and psychology in many quarters. Indeed, many devotees of Christian psychology evidence a greater measure of fraternity with the secular psychological community than with those Christians who are compelled by their theology to reject the discipline of secular psychotherapy.

The Two-Book Approach

Bookman then proceeds to delineate several ways in which Christians who do not believe in the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling actually do regard and use God’s Word in counseling. One approach to the integration issue

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is called the two-book or the general versus special revelation approach. The argument that is often used to support this theory is that God reveals truth to us in two primary ways: through “nonpropositional truth deposited by God in the created order of things” which “must be investigated and discovered by mankind” and through “the propositional truth recorded in Scripture.” The idea is that since all truth is God’s truth it really does not matter where that truth is found. Those who hold to this view believe that “the truth accurately derived from the consideration of the natural order of things (general revelation) is just as true as that derived from Scripture. When applied to the area of counseling, the proponents of this approach affirm that “any defensible truth that is derived by means of psychological research into the order of mankind is truth derived from general revelation, thus truth derived from God, and thus truth as dependable and authoritative as truth exegeted from Scripture.”

A representative quote from Harold Ellens, a defender of this two-book view, clearly illustrates the thrust of this position. He asserts,

Theology and Psychology are both sciences in their own right, stand legitimately on their own foundations, read carefully are the two books of God’s Revelation. . . .

Wherever truth is disclosed it is always God’s truth. Whether it is found in General Revelation or Special Revelation, it is truth which has equal warrant with all other truth. Some truth may have greater weight than other truth in a specific situation, but there is no difference in its warrant as truth.

In another publication, Ellens gives additional information about the nature and rationale for the two-book perspective. In keeping with this idea that general and special revelation are complementary, serving different purposes and being equally authoritative, he makes the following comments:

I believe the Bible to be an internally coherent testimony of the believing community throughout a 2000 to 3000 year period regarding the mighty acts of God’s redemption in the community’s experience. I believe that testimony is normative and authoritative for us in matters of faith and life because it is a warrantable testimony and is God’s universalized truth. This does not, however, force me to agree that the Bible is authoritative truth in matters which are not the focus and burden of that spirit-inspired, redemptive testimony of the historic believers. Moreover, because the Bible is a testimony incarnated in the human fabric of historical and cultural material, just as God’s testimony in the Son of God himself was incarnated in that same human stuff, it is imperative that its human limitations and historical anomalies be differentiated from its redemptively revelational material. Jesus, for example, . . . spoke quite erroneously in terms of a three-storied universe, an imminent second coming, and the like.

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5 Ibid., 69.

Humanness radically conditioned him with cultural-historical limitations as regards issues that were not central to the single truth of God’s testimony in him, that is, that God is for us, not against us. Why are those who insist on inerrancy as the only foundation for authority in Scripture afraid to have a Bible that is at least as culturally bound as was the incarnate Son of God himself . . . ?

Sound psychological theory and practice genuinely enhance the patient’s personhood. God designed what that is. Christians perceive it to varying degrees. Full-orbed personhood may be achieved by patients to varying levels of functionality. Sound psychology, which brings the patient, for example, out of depression to emotional resilience and stability is just as Christian at that level as at the level affording the final stages of maturity. . . . Even if that deliverance from depression is done by a secularist, it is a Kingdom act and a Christian enterprise . . . .

What makes practice in the helping professions Christian is less the imparting of biblical information or religious practices to the patient, and more the enhancement of healthy functionality of the human as person: in the direction of completeness in body, mind and spirit. That practice of the helping professions that is preoccupied with the final step of wholeness, spiritual maturity, will short-circuit the therapeutic process and put the religious dynamic of the patient or therapist straight into the religious person’s pathology.7

The No-Book Approach

Another approach to the integration issue might be called the no-book approach, which suggests that we cannot really be sure our understanding of the Bible is accurate because our interpretive efforts are always colored by our own perspectives. Bookman explains this approach in this way:

All human knowledge is flawed by definition. There is no reason to be any more suspicious of science than of theology (i.e., of the theories and facts derived by human investigation than of supposed truths derived from Scripture) simply because Scripture is no less liable to the limitations of human participation than is any other truth source.

Regardless of the authority and/or veracity of the truth source, human knowing of truth can only approach greater and greater levels of probability; certainty is propositionally unthinkable.8

Though this viewpoint may seem incredulous to most Christians, it is likely to become the dominant view of so-called “Christian counseling” in the years ahead. This viewpoint already dominates post-critical hermeneutics and will most likely continue to filter down into the arena of pastoral and religious counseling.

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8Bookman, “The Scriptures and Biblical Counseling” 90.
The Sufficiency of Scripture in Counseling

The Filtering-Device Approach

Some Christians who are not comfortable with either of the previously mentioned perspectives assert that the Bible should be used as a rule book or filtering device for identifying counseling truth. According to the advocates of this view,

All truth claims that are the result of human cogitations, investigations, and theorizing must be subjected to the Word of God that alone will be allowed to pass judgment on the veracity and applicability of those truth claims. The Bible and the Bible alone will be granted the role of falsification; that is, if a truth-claim is discerned to contradict or compromise a truth established in Scripture, that competing truth-claim is to be adjudged false.9

Truth derived from the study of any segment of general revelation, whether psychology or any other field, is not as trustworthy as the truth found in Scriptures. This is the reason that the integrationist will filter psychological truth through biblical truth and will accept only that which is not contradictory to God’s special revelation.10

This view is sometimes called “spoiling the Egyptians”—a phrase from Exod 12:36 used in reference to what the Israelites did when they were delivered from their Egyptian captivity. This incident is used to illustrate and give some biblical warrant to the practice of accepting and benefitting from extrabiblical insights in the realm of counseling theory and practice. The idea is that since the Israelites did not reject the silver and gold that came from ungodly Egyptians (in fact, they were commanded by God to take all of the silver and gold they could get—Exod 3:21-22), we should not reject counseling theories and practices discovered and used by unbelievers.

Though proponents of these three major approaches to Christian counseling differ on some issues, they are all agreed on one major point: the traditional biblical resources for dealing with man’s problems are not enough; they simply are not adequate. We must use insights and ideas and techniques that are not taught by nor found in God’s Word. Bookman and others have written excellent resources that expose the errors of such thinking, and I recommend their writings to you for further illumination and refutation.11

9Ibid., 90.
THE SHORTCOMINGS OF EXTRABIBLICAL INSIGHTS

Limitations of Human Knowledge

I have three reasons for rejecting the idea that Christian counselors need extrabiblical insights to do truly effective counseling. The first reason is related to the finiteness of man’s knowledge. The fact that man is finite necessarily limits the extent and validity of his knowledge. Even Adam, the first man, was a finite human being who needed God’s revelation for a correct understanding of God, himself, what was right and wrong, what was true and what was false, what should be believed and what should not be believed (Gen 1:26-28; 2:15-17, 24).

An old fable about six blind men who all bumped into and felt different parts of the same elephant illustrates the futility of man’s attempts to find absolute truth by the usual means of intuition, reason or logic, or empirical research. As the story goes, one man approached the elephant from the front and grasped his trunk and said, “An elephant is like a fire hose.” A second blind man happened to touch one of the animal’s tusks and said, “An elephant is like a thick spear.” The third blind man felt the elephant’s side and said, “An elephant is like a wall.” The fourth blind man approached the elephant from the rear and, gripping its tail, said, “An elephant is like a rope.” The fifth man grabbed one of the elephant’s legs and said, “An elephant is like the trunk of a tree.” The sixth man who was a very tall grabbed one of the elephant’s ears said, “An elephant is like a fan.”

Which of these depictions of an elephant was correct? None of them! Why? Because each of them encountered or experienced only a limited portion of the whole elephant. Their knowledge of what an elephant was like was restricted and even erroneous because of the limitations of their experience and perception. And so it is and always must be with finite mortal man when it comes to the matter of discerning absolute truth apart from revelation from the living God, who knows all things and sees the whole picture clearly and perfectly.

A recent newspaper article reminded me of the futility of thinking that finite man can discover absolute truth apart from divine revelation. In the “tongue in cheek” article entitled “Education’s Duplicity, Uselessness,” Russell Baker writes,

Pluto may not be a planet. Can you believe it? Is everything we learn in school a lie?

This Pluto business is the last straw in the duplicity and uselessness of education. Now I have to deal with Plutonic revisionism, and I haven’t even recovered from the discovery that you should not eat a good breakfast.

“Always eat a good breakfast.” That’s what they taught us in school. They said it was good for us.

Well, you know it, I know it, we all know it: they were wrong. We now know a good breakfast is bad for you. Those eggs sunny side up, that crisp bacon, the butter-soaked toast covered with jelly—bad for you.

So now we always eat a bad breakfast because they say a bad breakfast is good for you.

And remember the milk? Remember paying the milk money and having milk served right there in the class room? What kind of milk was it?

Was it skim milk? Was it low fat milk? Hah! You know it wasn’t. It was milk with all the evil left in.

And they said it was good for you. Good for you! It was clogging your arteries and hastening your trip to the grave.

And they called that an education!

The older you get the clearer it becomes that education for the young may not only be useless, but downright dangerous.12

At this point in the article, Baker goes on to make a few more “tongue in cheek” remarks about the way what we once considered to be truth has been revised. And then having done this, he concludes with these words:

Many people become as irked as I do about the incessant need to keep up with today’s wisdom by abandoning or revising yesterday’s. And of course today’s wisdom will just as inevitably have to be abandoned or revised as the future bears down upon us.

You can bet the world has not faced the last revision of knowledge about Pluto, or about what constitutes a good breakfast. The revising of what we think of as knowledge goes on forever, and always has.

The truth about knowledge seems to be that its truth is only a sometimes thing, that what we accept as truth this year will have to be abandoned as the world turns.

This endless abandonment and revision is usually said to result from progress. But suppose progress is also an idea doomed to be abandoned. What if there is no such thing as progress, but only change?13

In this article, Russell Baker astutely identifies the tentative nature of our humanly discovered knowledge or “truth” as he asserts that “what we accept as truth this year will have to be abandoned or revised.” And why is humanly

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13Ibid.
discovered “truth . . . only a sometimes thing”? One reason is that man’s finiteness necessarily limits the extent and validity of his knowledge.

**Depravity of Human Nature**

A second factor that causes me to reject the idea that Christian counselors should welcome and depend on extra biblical insights and therapies connects to the biblical teaching about the **depravity of man’s nature** since the fall of Adam in Genesis 3. Any biblical discussion of how man comes to know truth must include a consideration of what theologians often refer to as the “noëtic”\(^\text{14}\) effects of sin. Scripture clearly teaches that sin has affected every aspect of man’s being. Man’s character, speech, and behavior have all been perverted by sin\(^\text{15}\)—as well as his emotions and desires, his conscience and will, his intellect, his thought processes, his goals and motives, the way he views and interprets life. None of man’s faculties has escaped the corrupting, corrosive, perverting, and debilitating impact of sin.

In reference to the cognitive, motivational and emotional aspects of man’s being, Scripture asserts that

- The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jer 17:9).
- The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understands . . . (Ps 53:2).
- For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. . . . Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. . . . For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. . . . And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind . . . (Rom 1:18, 22, 25, 28).
- The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God . . . (Rom 8:7).
- You were formerly alienated and hostile in your mind . . . (Col 1:21).
- To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their consciences are defiled (Tit 1:15).
- Out of the heart come evil thoughts. . . (Matt 15:19).

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\(^\text{14}\) The word “noëtic” is related to the Greek word *nous*, which in English means “mind.” This Greek word denotes “the seat of reflection, consciousness, comprising the faculties of perception and understanding, and those of feeling, judging and determining” (W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* [Westwood, N. J.: Revell, 1957] 69).

\(^\text{15}\) Cf. Rom 1:18-3:23; 8:8; 1 Kgs 8:46; Pss 14:1-13; 51:5; 58:3; Isa 53:6; 64:6; Eph 2:1-3.
In commenting on the noëtic effects of sin, Edward Reynolds wrote,

Look into the mind; you shall find it full of vanity, wasting and wearying itself in childishness, impertinent, unprofitable notions, 'full of ignorance and darkness'; no man knoweth, nay no man hath so much acknowledged, as to enquire or seek after God in the way whereby he will be found. Nay more, when God breaks in upon the mind, by some notable testimony from his creatures, judgments, or providence—yet they like it not, they hold it down, they reduce themselves back again to foolish hearts, to reprobate and undiscerning minds, as naturally as hot water returns to its former coldness. Full of curiosity, rash, unprofitable enquiries, foolish and unlearned questions, profane babblings . . . perverse disputes, all the fruits of corrupt and rotten minds. Full of pride and contradiction against the truth, ‘oppositions of science,’ that is, setting up of philosophy and vain deceits, imaginations, thoughts, fleshly reasonings against the spirit and truth which is in Jesus. Full of . . . fleshly wisdom, human inventions . . . of rules and methods of its own to . . . come to happiness. Full of inconstancy and roving swarms of empty and foolish thoughts, slipperiness, and unstableness. . . .16

What a clear description of the effects of sin on the mind of man! “But,” you may ask, “what does this teaching about the noëtic effect of sin have to do with whether or not Christian counselors should accept and use extrabiblical insights in their counseling efforts?”

The answer to that question is simple: Scripture teaches that the minds of unredeemed men have been adversely affected by sin and, as a result, even if they observe something accurately, they are likely to interpret it wrongly. Having the kind of mind (including all the cognitive, motivational, and emotional aspects previously mentioned) described in the previous verses, unregenerate—and even to some extent regenerate—men will tend to distort truth. The only way we can think rightly is to allow the Holy Spirit to renew our minds so that we will learn to look at, interpret, and understand life through the lens of Scripture (Pss 119:104; 36:9; Isa 8:19, 20; Rom 1:18-32; 12:2; Eph 4:23).

When he commented on the role that secular disciplines should play in biblical counseling, David Powlison vividly describes the noëtic impact of sin on man’s thinking processes:

Secular disciplines may serve us well as they describe people; they may challenge us by how they seek to explain, guide, and change people; but they seriously mislead us when we take them at face value because they are secular. They explain people, define what people ought to be like, and try to solve people’s problems without considering God and man’s relationship to God. Secular disciplines have made a systematic commitment to being wrong.

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This is not to deny that secular people are often brilliant observers of other human beings. They are often ingenious critics and theoreticians. But they also distort what they see and mislead by what they teach and do, because from God’s point of view the wisdom of the world has fundamental folly written through it. They will not acknowledge that God has created human beings as God-related and God accountable creatures. The mind set of secularity is like a power saw with a set that deviates from the right angle. It may be a powerful saw, and it may cut a lot of wood, but every board comes out crooked.17

Because of our finiteness and sinfulness, our understanding of man and his problems can be trusted only as our thoughts and insights reflect the teaching of Holy Scripture. We simply are not able to ascertain truth apart from Divine revelation. In another work, I wrote,

We have no standard by which we can evaluate whether something is true or false except the Word of God. Thus while we can be confident that whatever we share with our counselees from the Word of God is true, we should have a healthy skepticism about any theory or insight that does not proceed from Scripture. If it is not taught by the Word of God alone, it may be error.18

In his book Every Thought Captive, Richard Pratt explains man’s epistemological predicament apart from Divine revelation this way:

All that can properly be called truth, not just ‘religious truth’ resides first in God and men know truly only as they come to God’s revelation of Himself as the source of truth . . . (Psalm 94:10). . . . This dependence on God in the area of knowledge does not mean that men are without the true ability to think and reason. . . . Men do actually think, yet true knowledge is dependent on and derived from God’s knowledge as it has been revealed to man.19

“But,” someone may ask, “what about those statements that finite and sinful men make that seem to be a reiteration of concepts and ideas taught by Scripture? Must we regard these observations as false because the person did not get them from the Bible?” Those questions may be answered in several ways:

1. People may have been influenced by biblical teaching through various means and not even be aware of it, nor do they give the Bible credit for their insights. But even if this occurs, they will always depart Scriptural

teaching and put their own spin on it. They may, for example, talk about the importance of God, prayer, forgiveness, dealing with guilt, or taking responsibility, love, confession, or the spiritual dimension in life. On the surface, a person’s teaching on these concepts may seem very biblical, but on further investigation the theologically, biblically trained person will discover that not everything that sounds the same is the same. People may use the same words or seem to be presenting the same concepts that God does in His Word, but fill those words and concepts with completely different meanings. Inevitably, the Bible indicates that men will suppress, pervert, devalue, deny, and distort the truth even if it is staring them in the face (Rom 1:18; 1 Cor 2:14).

2. Extrabiblical statements that seem to reflect biblical truth must be regarded as false because, as Richard Pratt states, “They are not the result of voluntary obedience to God’s revelation. . . .”

3. “Beyond this,” Pratt continues, “the statements are falsified by the non-Christian framework of meaning and therefore lead away from the worship of God. If nothing else, the mere commitment to human independence falsifies the non-Christian’s statements.”

The Sufficiency of Scripture

My third reason for rejecting the idea that Christian counselors need extrabiblical insights to do effective counseling is that the Bible says God has given us—in our union with Christ and in His Word—everything that is necessary for living and for godliness (2 Pet 1:3). Scripture clearly says that it contains all the principles and practical insights that are necessary for understanding people and their problems (as we’ll see in a moment). So, apart from the question of whether it is possible to integrate the ideas of man with the truths of God’s Word is the issue of whether or not it is necessary. On this matter, I am convinced the Scripture’s own testimony about its sufficiency, adequacy, and superiority is abundantly plain.

To demonstrate the biblical accuracy of this third truth, I could cite numerous passages of Scripture, but for the sake of time and space, I will refer to only three representative passages: one from the OT and two from the NT. Psalm 19:7-11 makes numerous statements about the Bible that no one would ever consider making about the ideas of any man. This text makes assertions that set the Bible in a class all by itself—statements that unmistakably demonstrate the Bible’s sufficiency and superiority over any of man’s theories. Consider carefully what this passage declares about what Scripture is and what it can do, and then think of the counseling implications of these assertions. According to Ps 19:7-

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20 Ibid., 17.
21 Ibid.
1. Is *perfect* (whole, complete, sufficient, lacking nothing) and therefore able to restore (transform, renew, restore) the soul (the inner man, the real self)—v. 7.

2. Is a *sure* (trustworthy, reliable, dependable) witness and therefore able to make wise the simple (people who lack a proper understanding of life, of God, of themselves, of others)—v. 7.

3. Contains the precepts (principles, guidelines, rules for character and conduct) that are *right* (correct, in accord with what is just and good, appropriate and fitting) and therefore able to cause the heart (the totality of man’s inner non-physical self) to rejoice (to experience a sense of well being, serenity, tranquility, and peace)—v. 8.

4. Is *authoritative* (it gives mandates and directives that are always correct) and pure (clear, untainted with evil or error) and therefore able to bring light into man’s chaos and confusion, to replace man’s ignorance and lack of understanding with clear direction, perspective and insight—v. 8.

5. Is *clean* (uncontaminated, free from impurity, defilement) and *enduring* (permanent, unchanging, relevant, up to date, never outdated, never in need of alteration) and therefore able to produce the fear of the Lord (a wholesome and incredibly practical and positive reverence for God)—v. 9.

6. *Provides insights* about God, man, life, and everything needed for living and godliness that are altogether true (they correspond to and accurately reflect reality, they tell it like it really is) and righteous (they reflect that which is right, good and holy, that which is truly just and fair) and therefore lead men to understand and practice what is truly real and right—v. 9.

7. Being "more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold" is able to produce in us a kind of *prosperity* that is more valuable than all the material riches of the world—v. 10.

8. Being "sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb" is able to remove the sourness, acidity, and bitterness caused by sin and to produce in us a *sweetness* of life that surpasses anything the world can provide—v. 10.

9. Possessing all of the previously noted qualities, is able to infallibly *warn and protect* us from the numerous dangers and disasters of life caused by ignorance of what is truly right—v. 11.

10. Possessing all of the previously noted characteristics, is able to *preserve* us from temptation, sin, error, false teaching, and every other threat to the health and well being of our inner man—our thoughts, emotions, affections, and attitudes—v. 11.
Believing as I do in the inspiration and inerrancy and authority of the Scriptures, Ps 19:7-11 settles the sufficiency issue for me. If words mean anything, how could I come to any other conclusion? But there’s more—much more. And some of that “more” is found in 2 Tim 3:1-17. In the first thirteen verses of this chapter, Paul delineates a host of problems representative of what counselors often encounter in their attempts to help people. Many people who require counseling do so because they are struggling with difficulties that stem from one or many of the sinful attitudes, desires, and actions that Paul mentions in this rich passage.

Some people seek counseling because of problems that are associated with being “lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, lacking in self control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (vv. 2-4). Some individuals need counseling because they are “holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power” (v. 5). Some are struggling because they are “weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses” (v. 6). Many experience severe difficulties in their lives that are related to pride, opposition to and rebellion against God’s truth, ungodly thoughts, deceitful patterns of living, and people-relationships. Unpleasant, distressing difficulties that motivate people to seek counseling occur because they are “always learning and never able to come to the truth” or because they live in the midst of a society of people who are evil and hypocritical, people who are going “from bad to worse” (vv. 6-13). People need counseling either because they are personally experiencing and manifesting sinful attitudes, desires, and behaviors or they are personally suffering from the impact of associating with people who manifest the sinful patterns depicted in this passage.

Where do we turn for resources to minister to these kinds of people? What do we need for understanding and resolving their problems? Paul answers those questions in verses 14-17. At this point in his epistle, he turns from a description of the kinds of problems that people experience in this sin-cursed world to a description of the resources Christians have for ministering to the people he has just described in the first thirteen verses. In clear and unmistakable words, Paul tells us that Scripture contains the resources we need for ministering to people who live under a 2 Tim 3:1-13 society. In concise and direct terms, he extols the Bible’s total adequacy for ministering to people whose lives are characterized and/or affected by the things mentioned in verses 1-13.

**WHY IS SCRIPTURE ADEQUATE?**

Paul emphasizes the total adequacy of God’s Word in 2 Tim 3:14-17 in the following manner:
1. **It is holy or sacred** (v. 15). It is set apart from any other writing or literary production; it is unique; it is in a class all by itself. No other writing can compare with what is written in the Scriptures.

2. **It is able** (v. 15). It has power to do things to and in people. “It is,” as Jay Adams has written, “the Holy Spirit’s tool for working in the minds and hearts of men and women to make them like Christ. Being peculiarly associated with the Spirit both in its composition and in its use, the Bible is powerful, able to transform our lives.”

3. **It is inspired by God** (v. 16). Literally, the Greek word translated “inspired” means “God-breathed.” So Paul is telling us that the Bible is unique and able because its truths had their origin in God; they are not merely some man’s opinions or discoveries or insights. As Peter said, “No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet 1:20-21). That is why when quoting a portion of Psalm 2—a psalm written by David—the early Christians said that the truth found in this psalm came by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David (Acts 4:24-26). To the early Christians, the words of Scripture were authoritative and sufficient because, though coming through the agency of holy men, they ultimately had their origin in God.

4. **It is profitable or useful** (v. 16). It has utilitarian value; it enhances life; it is profitable in every way—for time and eternity, for our relationship with God and our relationship with our fellow man, for our spiritual and emotional and mental well-being, for our marriages and families, for our goals and motivations, for guidance and direction, for comfort and challenge, for preventing and resolving our inner and interpersonal problems, for all of life. It is useful for teaching; it is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to provide for us a standard of what is right and wrong, good and bad, true and false about all of the truly important matters of life. Scripture is useful for reproof; it is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to convict us of sin, to show us where and how we are wrong in our thinking, motives, desires, attitudes, feelings, values, actions, and reactions. It is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to bring us under conviction and motivate us to want to repent and change.

   God’s Word is useful for correction; it is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to point us in the right direction and correct our sinful thoughts, motives, feelings, actions, and speech. Scripture not only shows us where and how we need to change, but actually tells us how to change and what to change to. And Scripture is profitable for training; it is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to help us develop new patterns of

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The Sufficiency of Scripture in Counseling

4. It makes that which is unnatural—living righteously—natural and makes that which is difficult—living God’s way—easier. It helps us develop strength in the areas in which we are weak.

5. *It can thoroughly equip the man of God for every good work* (v. 17).

Through Scripture, the Holy Spirit thoroughly equips His servants—people of God—to do everything He wants them to do in the kind of society described in 2 Tim 3:1-13. Do God’s people need anything more than the Scripture to minister effectively to the people living in the world he has described? Is anything else really necessary? Absolutely not! Scripture can thoroughly equip every believer. In Scripture, Christians have everything they need to understand people and their problems and to help them resolve the same.23

John Murray draws the following conclusion from 2 Tim 3:15-17: “There is no situation in which we (as men of God) are placed, no demand that arises for which Scripture as the deposit of the manifold wisdom of God is not adequate and sufficient.”24

**OUR SUFFICIENCY IN CHRIST**

Perhaps there is no better summary of the Bible’s teaching about our complete sufficiency in Christ than the one given by the apostle Peter when he wrote that by His divine power God “has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). “Life” has to do with everything that we experience on the horizontal plain—in terms of what it takes to live effectively and biblically in our daily activities and relationships with our environment and other people. “Godliness” has to do with our relationship with God—with living a God-centered, God-conscious life marked by godly character and conduct.

Peter proceeds to define “everything pertaining to life and godliness” as “becom[ing] partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4-8, emphasis added). It involves being born again or from above, becoming a new creation in Christ Jesus, receiving from God a new nature with new dispositions, desires, interests, potential, and power; putting on the new self; and being renewed in the image of God (John 3:1-8; Rom 6:1-11; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 3:10; 1 Pet 1:23; 2 Pet 1:4). It involves the capacity to “escape the corruption that is in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Pet 1:4). It involves developing the qualities of faith, moral excellence, true knowledge, self control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly


kindness, and Christian love (2 Pet 1:4-7) so that you might live a useful life for Christ (2 Pet 1:8-10).

Life and godliness also involves being able to deal successfully with issues that are present in the lives of people who seek counseling. People who need counseling lack the qualities that Peter mentions in 2 Pet 1:4-7 and need help in developing them. It is interesting to observe that people whose lives reflect these qualities do not need much formal counseling. This passage is pregnant with counseling implications.

Notice that Peter says that God has, by His divine power, “granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3, emphasis added). Everything that is needed to develop this kind of life and acquire this kind of life and acquire the qualities in verses 4-7 has been granted to us by God. And how do we tap into these powerful, all-sufficient resources? Peter declared that these divine resources become ours through the true knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord and through the medium of His precious and magnificent promises (2 Pet 1:2-4). In other words, the repository of the everything we need for life and godliness is found in our glorious and excellent God and His precious and magnificent word (2 Pet 1:2-4).

Our sufficiency in Christ is found in a deeper, fuller, applicatory, life-changing knowledge of the glory and excellence of God and the magnificence and preciousness of His promises. According to Green, God has called us to share “something of His moral excellence in this life, and of His glory hereafter. . . . The triple agency of the promises, the power and the Person of the Lord regenerate a man and make him a sharer in God’s own nature, so that the family likeness begins to be seen in him.”

WORTHY OF FULL CONFIDENCE

In light of what we have learned from Ps 19:7-11, 2 Tim 3:15-17, and 2 Pet 1:3-7, I ask this question: Could God have stated more clearly the sufficiency of our resources in Christ and in His Word? What more could He have said to get the message through to us that we do not need any extrabiblical resources to understand people and their problems and help them to develop the qualities, attitudes, desires, values, feelings, and behavior that are proper for relating to and living before God in a way that pleases and honors Him.

A consideration of the truths presented in these three passages and many other sections of Scripture forces me to draw three conclusions:

1. The inerrant Bible to which Christians are committed as an authority in life teaches that God has provided for us in His Word whatever is true

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and necessary for successful living. It declares that God has given us, in
the Bible, everything we need for being in right relationship with God,
ourselves, and other people.

2. Because this is true, professing Christians have two options: either they
must yield to its teaching on this matter or they must abandon the idea
that the Bible is inerrant and authoritative. It is either inerrant and
authoritative and also sufficient or it is none of these things. If the Bible
claims to be sufficient in the ways and for the purposes previously
delineated and it is not, then you cannot say it is inerrant and
authoritative. Given what the Bible teaches about itself, you simply
cannot have it both ways.

3. This final conclusion is a natural concomitant of accepting the
truthfulness of the first conclusion: Because the Bible asserts its own
sufficiency for counseling-related issues, secular psychology has
nothing to offer for understanding or providing solutions to the non-
physical problems of people. When it comes to counseling people, we
have no reason for depending on the insights of finite and fallen men.
Rather, we have every reason to place our confidence in the sure,
dependable, and entirely trustworthy revelation of God given to us in
Holy Scripture. That is because it contains a God-ordained, sufficient,
comprehensive system of theoretical commitments, principles, insights,
goals, and appropriate methods for understanding and resolving the non-
physical problems of people. It provides for us a model that needs no
supplement. God, the expert on helping people, has given us in
Scripture counseling perspectives and methodology that are wholly
adequate for resolving our sin-related problems.

THE NEED FOR CAUTION

David Powlison has stated well the danger of including extrabiblical
ideas in the counsel offered to or by Christians:

Let us clarify first what we mean by counseling methodology. A counseling
methodology is a system of theoretical commitments, principles, goals, and
appropriate methods. It is a set of interconnected things; it is not a collection
of random and eclectic bits of observation or technique. A counseling methodology is
organized, committed way of understanding and tackling people’s problems.

Do secular disciplines have anything to offer to the methodology of biblical
counseling? The answer is a flat no. Scriptures provide the system for Biblical
counseling. Other disciplines—history, anthropology, literature, sociology,
psychology, biology, business, political science—may be useful in a variety of
secondary ways to the pastor and the biblical counselor, but such discipline can never
provide a system of understanding and counseling people.

God is the expert when it comes to people, and He has spoken and acted to
change us and equip us to help others change.\(^{26}\)

Secular psychology may play an *illustrative* (providing examples and details that, when carefully and radically reinterpreted, illustrate the biblical model) or provocative (challenging us to study the Scriptures more thoroughly to develop our model in areas we have not thought about or have neglected or misconstrued) function, but, because of man’s finiteness and falleness, the insights, methodologies, and practices of secular psychology are in many instances dangerously un biblical and dishonoring to God and harmful to people. Other aspects of secular psychology are at best neutral and therefore unnecessary.

None of the illustrations, observations, or details that secularists present are really necessary for the task of understanding and helping people. We already have all we need—the authoritative, indispensable, perspicuous, sufficient, and superior revelation of God in His Word (Isa 8:19-20). Why then would any Christian think that we must turn to or place our dependence on the extrabiblical theories or practices of men for understanding and promoting change in people?\(^{27}\)

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\(^{27}\)The purpose of this article has been to demonstrate that the Bible asserts its sufficiency for understanding and resolving the kinds of issues that counselors (Christian or non-Christian) deal with in their attempts to help people. It has not been my intention in this article to demonstrate how the Scriptures are sufficient, i.e., to provide specific examples of how they actually help to understand man and his problems and provide details about a biblical methodology for resolving the variety of problems that people encounter. For those who want to pursue this ‘how to’ aspect more fully I will list some representative resources: John F. MacArthur, Jr., and Wayne A. Mack, eds., *Introduction to Biblical Counseling* (Dallas: Word, 1994), chaps. 10-16, 20; I have developed many books and audio and video tapes of counseling courses plus tapes dealing with a biblical approach to counseling on a variety of specific issues (a catalog listing these materials is available by writing to the author at 21726 W. Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall, CA 91322); The Master’s College offers an undergraduate emphasis leading to a BA and a graduate program leading to an MA in biblical counseling (P.O. Box 278, 21726 W. Placerita Canyon Road, Newhall, CA 91322); Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation West has video tapes of several counseling courses, plus they offer numerous training courses (3495 College Avenue, San Diego, CA 92215); Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation East offers courses on biblical counseling and produces an excellent journal, *The Biblical Counseling Journal*, for biblical counselors (1803 East Willow Grove Avenue, Laverock, PA 19118); the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (NANC) sponsors conferences, produces a biblical counseling publication, and has audio and video tapes on numerous ‘how to’ issues (NANC, 5526 State Road 26 East, Lafayette, IN 47905); Jay Adams has written numerous books and produced many audio and video tapes on various biblical counseling issues (Woodruff, S. C.: Timeless Texts); Gary Almy, *Addicted to Recovery* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1994); Edward Bulkley, *Only God Can Heal the Wounded Heart* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1995); David Powlison, *Power Encounters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); Edward Welch, *Counselor’s Guide to the Brain and Its Disorders: Knowing the Difference Between Sin and Disease* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991) ; Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (1877; reprint, Pittsburgh: Solo Deo Gloria); William Playfair, *The Useful Lie* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1991); William Bridge, *A Lifting up of the Downcast* (reprint, Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1979); Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (reprint, Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1979); D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cure* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); Michael Bobick, *From Slavery to Sonship: A Biblical Psychology for Pastoral Counseling* (available
such as incest, homosexuality, transvestism, transsexualism, slavery to pornography and lust; depression; anxiety; anger; bizarre, schizophrenic behavior; drug abuse, including slavery to alcohol; and what secularists would call obsessive, compulsive disorders. You will find biblically based information on counseling and the problems of the past, self-esteem problems, chronic fatigue, demon possession, chemical imbalance, victimization, suffering, human defensiveness, women in menopause, women and PMS, confidentiality in counseling, crisis counseling, guilt, panic attacks, inordinate fears, psychological testing, ADHD, rebuilding a marriage after adultery, counseling various kinds of marriage and family problems, and many other counseling issues.
Those participating in Christological controversies that followed the Nicene Council sought to reconcile proper deity and true humanity in the Person of Jesus Christ, but in doing so, they often neglected the humanity of Christ. The Reformers did not solve the problem, but they restored a proper emphasis to Christ’s humanity. Subsequent to the Reformation, scholars tended to underplay His deity. Careful attention to the details of Phil 2:5-8 helps to state as well as the human mind can comprehend just what the kenosis involved and hence how His humanity and deity related to each other. He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, and humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death. He stooped to servanthood and death with all the sovereign free will of One whose choices are limited only by His own holy and loving will.

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This passage in the Philippian Epistle has been so closely connected with certain problems of Christology that any discussion of it will be the more complete if prefaced by a brief historical survey in this particular field of Christian doctrine. Such a survey will serve to show the theological importance of the passage, why the

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1This article appeared originally in The Biblical Review 13/4 (October 1928):506-27 [abstract at beginning of the article added].

2Dr. Alva J. McClain’s teaching career spanned 43 years at Philadelphia School of the Bible (1919-1923), Ashland College and Seminary (1925-1927; 1930-1937), Bible Institute of Los Angeles (1927-1929), and Grace Theological Seminary (1937-1962). He served 25 years as the first president of Grace Theological Seminary and is best remembered for his classic work, The Greatness of the Kingdom. Dr. McClain graduated to glory in 1968.
attention of Christologists from the first was drawn to it inevitably, and how speculations regarding the Person of Christ have finally culminated in several theories, related in principle, which receive their name from a Greek word in the passage, and are based to a greater or less extent upon it.

The dreariest, most barren pages of church history deal with that period of Christological controversy which followed the Nicene Council. Having successfully repelled the Arian assault, the attention of the church had logically shifted to another problem—how to reconcile proper Deity and true humanity in the Person of the historic Savior, Jesus Christ. Over this question discussion ran the gamut of conceivable opinion. Men, according to their bias, became Apollinarians, Nestorians, Eutychians, Monophysites, Monothelites, Adoptionists, and Niobites, until at last they all but lost themselves in subtle distinctions and, bewildered by the dust of battle, actually “fought against their own side.” In the heat of conflict men not only lost their way, but also lost their tempers, and applied to one another certain offensive and unmusical epithets such as “Phthartolatrae,” “Aktistetes,” “Aphthartodecetics,” and “Ktistolators.” It was an unhappy age, of which Dr. Bruce appropriately speaks as “the era of anatomical Christology.”

And yet through all this strife, much of which seems so petty to the modern mind, there runs a sincerity of purpose that cannot be ridiculed. Men were bent upon a laudable undertaking—the rationalization of their faith. Primarily, therefore, the responsibility for these centuries of theological conflict may be laid upon the activity of the human mind in its passion for explanation. The pity was that men in their zeal for rationalization often lost sight of the historic facts of faith because they were willing to surrender what they could not immediately rationalize. Furthermore, yielding overmuch to the philosophic tendency of the age, they sought a metaphysical rather than a moral rationale for the Incarnation. As a result, the humanity of Christ was sadly neglected, and by some was reduced to a bare metaphysical shell in order to fit certain a priori notions of what Deity could or could not do.

It was left for the Reformation, and particularly for the leaders of the Reformed Church, to recall the minds of men once again to the real humanity of our Lord. To these men the Christ of faith was the Savior of the Gospels; one who had lived, suffered, and died; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, tempted in all points like as we are; a true Savior, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmity. Yet, with all this insistence upon the real humanity of Jesus, the Reformers yield nothing to the Socinian tendencies of their day. If to them He is “the man Christ Jesus,” He is also nothing less than “God over all blessed forever.” The veil of inadequate and mystifying Christological solutions is stripped away, and men are called back to the more simple faith of the early church. But this return to the primitive faith is also a return to the old problem which had exercised the Fathers, but was never solved by them: How can we reconcile true Deity and real humanity in the historic Jesus?
It may be said with assurance that the Reformed theologians did not solve this problem. Their chief contribution to a Biblical Christology was a determined insistence upon both the humanity and Deity of our Lord, and also a refusal to entertain as valid any view of His Person which failed to pay due regard to all the facts as set forth in the New Testament sources and confirmed by their own personal experience. This position was of inestimable value to the Christian church, not in forbidding further attempts to formulate a rational Christology, but in providing a sure foundation upon which men might work.

If prior to the Reformation the general tendency was to sacrifice the humanity of Jesus in the interest of certain conceptions of Deity, we may say that since the Reformation there has been a tendency in an opposite direction. Especially has this been true during the last seventy-five years, a period characterized by great critical activity. Like the blind man of the Fourth Gospel, this historical criticism began with “the man that is called Jesus,” next advanced to the point of recognizing Him as “a prophet,” and finally, in the case of some critics at least, fell down and worshiped Him.

Those who recognized Him as divine solved the inevitable Christological problem by having recourse to some form of kenosis theory. In becoming man the Logos “emptied himself” in some respect. Thus, the divinity was made to yield, or rather was adjusted, to the humanity. In adopting this principle of a kenosis as a point of departure in attempted explanation of Christ’s Person, men were on safe and Biblical ground, for the New Testament writings undoubtedly teach a kenosis of some kind in their doctrine of the Incarnation. Unfortunately, in the application of this valid principle, men failed to keep their eyes steadfastly upon the historic Person; the kenosis idea became a tool of theological bias, and was used for the construction of strange kenotic Christs bearing but a poor and partial resemblance to the Christ of the Gospel records.

This was the era of the modern kenotic theories, during which, as might be expected, searching and critical examination was given to every New Testament passage that possibly be utilized in their support. The Philippian passage naturally received most attention, being in fact the exegetical cornerstone of the whole kenosis idea. Certain extremists, it is true, simply ignored it in the construction of their Christological schemes; but all those who felt bound in any real sense to the New Testament records rightly understood that no formula could be regarded as valid which failed to gain the support of this important text. One having but a superficial acquaintance with the many different kenotic theories is not surprised, therefore, to find some diversity of opinion among interpreters. He will be scarcely prepared, however, for the actual situation.

Nothing beyond a cursory review of the astonishingly numerous interpretations of this Philippian passage is enough, as someone has suggested, to afflict the student with “intellectual paralysis.” This is especially the case in regard to that section (v.7) which speaks of the “self-emptying,” or kenosis, of Christ. Some
make of this a mere sken_sis; Deity was veiled, but was limited in no important or essential respect. Others think the self-limitation was real, though very inconsiderable. A third view holds that the Logos, in becoming man, retained full possession of His divine attributes, and that the kenosis consisted in His acting as if He did not possess them. Another school supposes that He actually gave up certain of His attributes, the ones designated by theologians as relative, such as omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Still others go farther in asserting that He gave up all the divine attributes, so that Deity was stripped to a bare essence. Finally, there are those who, excluding from the passage all reference to a pre-existent state, regard the kenosis as having taken place wholly within the earthly life of the man Christ Jesus.

Such a variety of interpretations might tend to discourage any further attempt were it not for one thing, namely, a hopeful conviction that much of this variety may have been caused by different theological viewpoints which interpreters brought with them to the passage. This is not to say, that we must begin with no assumptions. I feel quite sure that certain regulative presuppositions are essential to any worthwhile exposition of our Lord’s kenosis as set forth in this Philippian text. Some of these presuppositions I shall now attempt to state.

1. No interpretation can be accepted as valid which departs in any respect from the historic Person of the Gospel records. 2. Due consideration should be given to the whole stream of Biblical testimony which bears on the Person of Christ. If the Philippian text is worthy of attention, then other texts may not be excluded. 3. The interpreter will logically expect to receive his surest guidance from the writer of the passage, the Apostle Paul himself. 4. It is supremely important that the purpose and spirit of the passage with its context be kept constantly in mind. The writer of this passage is not composing a theological treatise; he is pleading with his Philippian converts for a life of love and self-forgetfulness—“not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others.” And as a powerful incentive to this holy end he holds up before their eyes the sublime Self-forgetfulness of the Son of Man, who on their behalf had “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.” 5. If metaphysical difficulties arise, they must yield to the moral requirements of the Incarnation. We ought to be, I think, well past that stage of human thought when such difficulties compelled men to choose between an “Absolute” who could not empty Himself, and a mere creature who had little or nothing of which he might empty himself. Better a thousand times give up our conception of an absolute God than admit he is incapable of any real “moral heroism.” For that matter, what God can or cannot do is a question to be settled by what we have good reason to believe that He has done. Therefore, no supposed metaphysical problems should be permitted to reduce the doctrine of our Lord’s kenosis to the point where it becomes a mere shadowy, docetic semblance.

The passage appears in the American Standard Version as follows: “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God,
counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross."

The first question concerns the phrase, “existing in the from of God.” Does it refer to a pre-existent state of Christ? To the casual reader such a reference seems perfectly natural, but some have denied it, affirming that the reference is limited to the earthly state of Christ. This was the position taken by certain interpreters, although for vastly different reasons; by some of them to vindicate their doctrine of an omnipresent body; by others to avoid a possible testimony for the Savior’s Deity. Various arguments were advanced in support of this interpretation.

It was said that the subject of the entire passage is named “Christ Jesus,” and that, even granting a pre-existent state, such a title would be inappropriate to designate the Logos prior to his Incarnation. To me this objection has little weight. Even common usage is against it; no one thinks it inaccurate, for instance, to speak of the “childhood of President Coolidge,” though strictly speaking, President Coolidge had no childhood. And the objection fails utterly when we find the Apostle Paul applying the historical Name to the Son of God in other passages where the reference to His pre-existent state is unmistakable. (Cf. Heb 11:26 and 1 Cor 10:4, “the rock was Christ.”)

Again, it has been argued that a disquisition upon the pre-existence of Christ is not within the scope of the Apostle’s purpose, that he is interested only in setting before his converts an example of unselfishness and true humility. To this we can heartily agree, insisting at the same time, however, that this very purpose of the writer is a strong argument for the reference to a pre-existent state. What an example to set before self-seeking Christians—the eternal Son stooping from Heaven to earth on behalf of men! Certainly, assuming that Paul believed in a pre-existent state, it would be hard to explain his failure to employ the idea in a passage like this one. As to the rather shallow objection that such an example would be beyond the power of men to imitate, we may answer that this is to miss the spirit of the passage altogether. The Apostle is not asking for any mechanical imitation of the precise act in which our Lord “emptied himself,” whatever that act may have involved. He is pleading that men shall have in them “the mind” which was in Christ Jesus, and which impelled Him so to act as the passage describes, in the interest of others. Moreover, to exclude the idea of pre-existence from the passage is to render obscure its meaning.

The early Christian church was familiar with this idea, and a reference to it in connection with the act of Incarnation would need no explanation. It was part of the common faith. But if we eliminate this idea, and make the “self-emptying” something that took place entirely within the earthly life of Christ, at once the plea of the Apostle becomes vague and unintelligible. To what particular act in His earthly life could the language of verses 6-7 be applied with any measure of certainty
beyond mere guess-work? And why is there no hint or clue to guide the reader in fixing upon it? True, His whole life was characterized by a constant and gracious “self-forgetfulness,” but the aorist tense here (eken_sen) seems to favor a definite act, once for all, and not simply a habit of living. The conclusion, to me, is compelling: The Apostle speaks of the one act which needed no explanation to the Philippian Christians, that sublime and voluntary act of Incarnation wherein the “Word became flesh and tabernacled among us” in servant-form. The high background of this act is set forth in the phrase, “existing in the form of God,” a phrase which not only refers to a pre-existent state, but also has somewhat to say regarding its character.

This pre-existent state is characterized as “in the form of God” (en morph_theou). The general meaning of morph_is external appearance, that form by which a person or thing strikes the vision. Our English word “form” scarcely expresses its full significance. Quite often we use this term to indicate the very opposite of reality, saying of something, that it is only a form, by which we mean that the external appearance of the thing is misleading and does not truly represent the inner substance or character. Thus, some have argued, Christ was a form of God; He was God-like, but not God. The word morph Seems to strike deeper than this. Lightfoot, Trench, Bengel, and others argue convincingly, against a number who think otherwise, that the morph_form is something intrinsic and essential as opposed to the sch_ma_form which is merely outward and more or less accidental. Following this idea S.G. Green, in his Handbook to the Grammar of the Greek Testament, defines morph_as the form which is “indicative of the interior nature.” It is indeed external form, that which strikes the eye, but as such it accurately represents the underlying nature from which it springs.

If this be the significance of the term, then to say that Christ Jesus was “existing in the form of God” is to affirm that He was very God manifesting Himself in some external form through which he could be known, probably to the inhabitants of Heaven, for what He truly was. This meaning of morph_in verse 6 is further confirmed by its usage in verse 7 where we are told that Christ took the “form of a servant.” Are we to understand from this assertion that He became a servant only in external appearance, and not in fact? Very few would be willing to accept such a representation; certainly none of those who wish to limit the word in verse 6 to mere external form. They have insisted more than once upon what we gladly accept, that the Savior was true man and in all respects a true servant of God on behalf of men. But if the phrase, “form of a servant,” can be taken to indicate a true servanthood, surely no one may consistently forbid us to find true Deity in the phrase, “form of God.”

Returning now to the general meaning of the word morph_an external form which strikes the vision, let us ask this question, Does the invisible God possess such a form? Are we to take the meaning literally, or is the reference only to those divine attributes in the exercise of which intelligent beings may know that God is
God? The latter idea is undoubtedly present, and is the important one, as I shall try to show below under a discussion of verse 7, but I do not believe that the more literal meaning should be excluded. “No man hath seen God at any time.” True, yet we read that “Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel” went up into the mountain, and “they saw the God of Israel.” And we have the cry of the prophet Isaiah, “Woe is me . . . for Mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts.” Whom and what did these men see? I am inclined to believe they saw the Son “existing in the form of God,” that form which strikes the vision and is at the same time no mere eidos, or superficial resemblance, but which is rather truly indicative of God’s inner nature and invisible substance.

The Apostle now proceeds to set before his Philippian converts the mind of Him who was originally existing in the form of God. This mind is revealed in two sublime self-renunciatory acts, the one described as a kenôsis, the other as a tapeînôsis. In the former He “emptied himself,” stooping from God to humanity; in the latter He “humbled himself,” stooping from humanity to death. The kenosis is further exhibited from two distinct viewpoints: First, from the pre-existent state of Christ—“He counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped”; and second, from his earthly state—“taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.”

The phrase, “being on an equality with God,” is exegetical and explanatory of the phrase, “existing in the form of God.” The only question is, whether these two phrases are exactly equivalent, or whether the former adds to the latter the important idea of actual historical manifestation. This second interpretation is very suggestive and is not lacking in considerations which support it, but I prefer the first as more in harmony with the entire viewpoint of this article. In the mind of the writer, then, to exist “in the form of God” is to be “equal with God,” whatever else may be in the latter phrase. Absolute equality with God was the possession of Jesus in His pre-incarnate state. But, when the need arose in the world for a Savior, He did not regard His being equal with God “a thing to be grasped” as a robber might grasp an object not his own. This “equality” with God was so surely and incontestably Christ’s own possession that he could with “royal un-anxiety,” lay it aside for a season for our sakes, being fully assured that it would return to Him once he had accomplished our redemption. In all this there is a blessed contrast between the mind of the Son and the mind of the great adversary of our souls. The latter once counted the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped as a robber grasps at that which is not his own. Being in the form of a servant, this “son of the morning” said in his heart, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . ., I will make myself like the Most High.” But the only begotten Son, “existing in the form of God” and possessing full “equality with God,” counted all this not a thing to be grasped, “but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.”

Here we have the positive side of the kenosis. There are not three steps, as
the Authorized Version seems to indicate, but only one step, in which the Logos “emptied himself.” This self-emptying act is further qualified by two participial phrases. The first exhibits the great ethical end of the kenosis: Christ emptied Himself to become a servant, the Servant of Jehovah. He therefore takes servant-form. But there are various servant-forms; angels are doulai theou. So the second clause specifies the nature of His servant-form: He took not on Him the nature of angels, but was made lower than the angels, “becoming in the likeness of men” (en homoi_matia anthr_p_n genomenos).

Such in general was the kenosis of our Lord, and we may now enquire whether it be possible to define more specifically its content. Of what primarily did the Son of God empty Himself when He entered upon His earthly history? The passage before us does not supply the details needed for a satisfactory answer. All it affirms is that Christ Jesus was originally existing in “the form of God,” and that at a certain point in time He emptied Himself, taking “the form of a servant.” Of His existence in servant-form we know somewhat, having the Gospel records to guide us. Regarding His existence in God-form our knowledge is more limited. If we could fix upon the exact significance of this phrase, “in the form of God,” the problem would be solved, because in the kenosis this “form” was exchanged to be in the form of a servant. If we knew all that it meant to be in the form of God, we would then know what our Lord gave up in order to take the form of a servant. Everything in fact depends upon how we define the “form of God.” I have already discussed to a limited extent the possible meaning of this phrase, and shall attempt now to investigate it more exhaustively.

In the first place, the form of God must not be identified with the essential nature of God. Many of the Fathers did so identify them, probably out of a desire to gain this Philippian passage as a witness to the Deity of Christ. The motive was praiseworthy, but in permitting it to sway their exegetical judgment they got into a Christological dilemma from which they were unable to extricate themselves without either admitting that God could cease to be God, or on the other hand explaining away the reality of the kenosis. In the main, as we might expect, they chose the latter way out. The form of God in this passage is not the nature of God. God-form certainly presupposes a God-nature, but is not essential to it. Verse 7 draws a similar distinction on the human side of the kenosis; there is here a servant-form and also a human-nature. A man may cease to be a servant, but he cannot cease to be a man. Likewise, Deity may change form, but not nature.

I have suggested above that this “form of God” may include a reference to the divine attributes. For it is through the exercise or function of these that, from an external viewpoint, God appears most truly as God. In this functioning we find, in the deepest sense, the morph_ of God. The Logos, then, in putting off this form, must have experienced to some degree a limitation as to His exercise of the divine attributes. The question is, What was the nature and extent of this limitation? He could not, as some suggest, have actually surrendered the divine attributes, for they
are functions potential in the very nature of God. Granted that the active functioning might cease for a time. Still the potentiality remains. To suggest that this might also be given up is to say that God may cease to be God.

But such an idea is repugnant to reason, and surely cannot be discovered in the Scriptures. On the contrary, our Lord during the days of His flesh very definitely asserts His possession of divine power when, referring to the laying down of His life, He declares, “I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” It will not do, either, to say, as some others have said, that the Logos gave up the use of the divine attributes during the period of His earthly life, though if interpreted rightly this statement might be accepted as a true account. It is better to say with Dr. Strong that Christ gave up the independent use of His divine attributes. This leaves room for those exhibitions of divine power and knowledge which appear during His earthly ministry, and at the same time modifies in no essential respect the doctrine of the real kenosis.

We may say, then, that the eternal Son, existing in the form of God—robed with the glory of Deity in its external manifestation, possessing and exercising all the incommunicable functions of the true God—counted not this being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but with loving condescension emptied Himself, taking servant-form; and as a result of this one act His whole earthly life became the life of a bond-servant, in which he does nothing, speaks nothing, knows nothing by Himself: but all is under the power and direction of the Father through the Holy Spirit. In this sense, during His earthly sojourn, the “external glory” was utterly laid aside. “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.” But there was another, an inner glory: and this glory, of which the external glory had been indicative, was still present, though veiled by the servant-form. He did not—it is not too much to say that He could not—empty Himself of this. And to those who came to know Him because their eyes were enlightened by the Spirit, His blessed inner glory became apparent in spite of the veil of flesh, so that they could witness that, “the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father) full of grace and truth.”

The two phrases, “in the likeness of men” and “in fashion as a man,” might seem to suggest an unreal, docetic view of Christ’s humanity if we were dependent upon these alone for our doctrine of the Incarnation. Fortunately we have the whole testimony of the Gospel records to guide us in the interpretation of these expressions, and this testimony affirms that the humanity of our Lord was real. The Apostle’s reason for speaking as he does in this text is not to insinuate that Christ was not true man, but probably to remind his readers that there is after all a difference between the man Jesus and man who is a sinner. Sinfulness is not a necessary characteristic of humanity, though it happens to be a universal characteristic of the humanity that we know. Because this last is so, men are in the habit of regarding sinfulness and humanity as correlative terms. Who has not heard that hoary-headed excuse for the sinner, “Well, he is only human”? We have here, I think, a sufficient explanation of
Paul’s use of such terms as “likeness” and “fashion” in his reference to Christ’s humanity; it is the guarded language of inspiration upon a theme where a misstep may invite confusion. (Compare the careful phrase in Rom 8:3).

To the New Testament writers Christ is a real man made “in all things like unto his brethren,” yet we are not to forget there is a difference; we are sinners, but He is “holy, guileless, undefiled, separated from sinners.” Aside from this there is no limit in His kenosis. He becomes partaker of “flesh and blood”; is born of a woman under the law; grows in wisdom and in stature; is often hungry and weary; meets temptation, not as God, but as man, “being tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin”; learns “obedience by the things which he suffered”; knows not the day of His second coming. Yet these limitations, self-imposed as they were, do not open the way for any dishonoring views regarding His trustworthiness as a teacher; they do not make of Him the fallible Jewish rabbi of modernism. Such inferences from the kenosis are hasty and superficial.

When He took upon Him servant-form, the Son of God came to be the perfect servant, to reveal the ideal servanthood. But the perfect servant must render a perfect service. Not many will care to affirm that our Lord failed at this point. He Himself could say: “I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things. And he that hath sent me is with me; he hath not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to him” (John 8:28-29). And again: “For I speak not from myself, but the Father that sent me, he hath given me commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak” (John 12:49). “Which of you convicteth me of sin?” (John 8:46). There is no room for fallibility here, whatever view we may take of Christ’s humiliation. On the contrary, as Bishop Moule has pointed out, the kenosis itself becomes the guarantee of His infallibility. Whatever He was before entrance into human existence, by His “self-emptying” He becomes the perfect bond-servant of Jehovah, who does nothing and speaks nothing from Himself, but speaks only what the Father “commands,” and does “always the things that are pleasing to him.” Therefore, in the days of His flesh, the Son of Man may be trusted without reserve in every statement He has been pleased to make, for His words are in every instance the very words of God.

The great ethical end of the kenosis was servanthood. This conception arose in the messianic prophecy of Isaiah; it was announced from the lips of our Lord Himself, “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”; it was exemplified throughout His whole earthly ministry, which might have been appropriately summed up in His own words, “I am among you as one who serveth.” This is a prominent idea in both steps of His humiliation as set forth in the Philippian text. In the first step, as God, He had emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant. Then, as man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death.

An impressive thought in both of these steps is the perfect freedom and voluntariness of the Son of God. No theory of the kenosis can be true which brings
The Doctrine of the Kenosis in Philippians 2:5-8

Him into an earthly state where it is impossible for Him to assert “equality with God.” Room must be left for a “voluntary perseverance not to assert equality, on the part of one who could do otherwise.” He assumed servant-form and died upon the cross for us, not because of any compulsion external to Himself, but according to the free and loving choice of his own will. “He was no Victim of a secret and irresistible destiny such as that which, in the Stoic’s theology, swept the gods of Olympus to their hour of change and extinction as surely as it swept men to their ultimate annihilation.” When He stooped to servanthood and death He did so with all the sovereign free will of One whose choices are limited only by His own holy and loving will. “He emptied himself.” “He humbled himself.”

This voluntary perseverance in that mind which led Him first to the kenosis and finally to the cross has an important bearing on the problem of His self-consciousness. It implies a certain continuity of self-consciousness throughout all the changes incident to His earthly state. He knew, while on earth, of His pre-existent state: He was aware of the mind which had actuated Him in exchanging the God-form for the servant-form: and He purposed to have “that mind in him” down to the last act in the great drama of redemption. “I know whence I came, and whither I go,” He says to the Pharisees. And drawing near to the hour of death, He repels all suggestions of any possible change in His own eternal purpose by declaring steadily, “But for this cause came I unto this hour” (John 8:14; 12:27).

But the writer of the Philippian letter will not permit us to forget that, even while our blessed Lord was acting in the manner of a sovereign (for such He was), He was also acting in filial obedience to the Father’s will. In humbling Himself, He became “obedient” unto death. Not that He was obeying death when He died—death had no claim upon Him—but in dying He was obeying the Father whose bond-servant He had come to be. The thought is that He obeyed God so utterly as to die. Does not all this take us back in memory to that moment of the ages when the Son, entering into the world, announces, “Lo, I am come; in the roll of the book it is written of me: I delight to do thy will, O God”? Does it not take us back to Gethsemane there to behold His agony and hear His triumphant cry, “Father, not my will, but thine be done”?

In the death of Christ there was a marvelous blending of sovereign choice and utter obedience. He humbled Himself unto death; yes, but He was also obedient unto death. Speaking of his approaching death, our Lord Himself blends these two things in a striking passage from chapter 10 of John’s Gospel. “I lay down my life,” He says, “that I may take it again.” “No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (“power” in each case in Greek is ξευθήναν [exousian (transliteration added)]. R.V., marg., “right”). Certainly this is sovereign choice. But let us read on: “This commandment received I from my Father.”

Several years ago, while I was engaged in a study of the Philippian Epistle, a letter came to me bearing news of the death of a friend and former classmate who
had laid down his life for Christ in foreign missionary service. He had been a brilliant student, was wealthy in his own right, and at the completion of the seminary course he was married to a beautiful and talented young woman. In this country he might have had everything ordinarily desirable to men—business success, comfort, ease, and luxury. But there was in him the mind of Christ; if I may dare to use the words reverently, he freely “emptied himself” of all these prospects, becoming a servant of the cross in Egypt. There, having given what he could in service, he was obedient “unto death.”

But the free obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ rises above all human comparison. He was indeed obedient unto death, but more than that, even unto the death of the cross. After all, the death of my friend was only a joyful “loosing away upward” to be with the Christ whose he was and whom he served. There were no pangs, no sting, in death for him. How different was the death of the cross! That was a “death of unimaginable pain and utmost shame, a death which to the Jew was a symbol of the curse of God, and to the Roman was a horror of degradation.” Nor was this all. It was a death in which all the pent up wrath of the law against human sin would fall upon the blessed head of Jehovah’s Servant, a death in which He must plumb the depths of “a soul that’s lost.” None of this was hid from His eyes. Having counted the cost, for our sakes “He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

NOTE

One determining factor in various interpretations of the Philippian passage has been the central problem of the Incarnation, namely, what is the relation of the divine to the human in the historic Christ? The Apostle Paul certainly must have known that his statement would raise this problem but, like other New Testament writers, makes no attempt to solve it. In the main, the writers of Scripture are content to assert the reality of the two natures in Christ, without attempting a rationalization of their doctrine. Perhaps it is wisdom to leave the matter as they left it. One hesitates to enter a field of controversy where so many well-intentioned men have slipped into errors ranging from an Apollinarian denial of any human soul in the Savior to the Nominalistic doctrine of two wills and two minds—in fact, two persons. But the church has been compelled to enter this field by reason of the deviations of those who oftentimes were numbered among her own sons. At Chalcedon (451) the church declared that in the Savior there are two natures, one divine and the other human. These two natures are perfectly and organically united in one Person, yet they remain distinct, each retaining its complete integrity. We must neither “confound the natures, nor divide the Person.” The seat of personality in this Person is the Logos, the eternal Son.

The main criticism of this formula, from the standpoint of the older psychology, was how Christ could have but one personality, if in Him there were two
distinct natures, namely, the human soul and the Logos-spirit. Did not the soul of a man constitute a personality in itself? The ancient church never wholly succeeded in answering this rather formidable objection, but nevertheless wisely refused to alter the formula. Her position is now being vindicated, I believe, by the latest pronouncements of modern psychology. The personality—also the mind—we are told, is not metaphysical, but is built up by the interaction constantly taking place between the living organism and its environment. I cannot, of course, accept this statement in toto. There is certainly a metaphysical basis for both mind and personality. But with this reservation, the account seems to be true, and may be of service in aiding us toward an understanding of the Person of Christ. The Logos, in becoming flesh, was united with a true human soul in the body born of the Virgin Mary. This soul on the human side provided a basis for the possible building up of a human mind and personality, and the building up process was perfectly normal in all respects, except that it took place around and in vital union with the Logos-spirit now emptied of His divine form. (Dr. Strong seems to suggest the above view of personality when he says, “Nature has consciousness and will only as it is manifested in person.” Systematic Theology, p. 695)
BOOK REVIEWS


Any reader familiar with the history of Puritan literature will quickly recognize William Ames’ *Medulla Theologica*, “The Marrow of Theology,” as one of the seminal works of Puritan theology. Eusden, in his opening comments, writes,

In a burst of enthusiasm Thomas Hooker (1586?-1647) of Hartford once recommended the *Marrow* and another of Ames’ works to fellow clergymen: “They would make him (supposing him versed in the Scriptures) a good divine, though he had no more books in the world” (1).


William Ames (1576-1633) was born in Ipswich, Suffolk, England, of a Puritan merchant family. He gained his formal education at Christ’s College, Cambridge, under the tutelage of William Perkins. He was suspended, but not expelled, from Christ’s College for failure to wear the surplice during college chapel exercises. After a brief time in Colchester, England, Ames moved to Leyden, Holland. It was there that Ames became involved with the Remonstrant controversies and distinguished himself as a Calvinistic theologian. From 1622 to 1632 he served
as professor of theology at the University of Franeker, obtaining the rectorship in 1626. His scholarship attracted students throughout Protestant Europe to the University. His influence on New England Puritanism is especially noteworthy. Poor health forced his removal to Rotterdam where he tragically died in 1633 at an early age. His family made the voyage to New England following his death, bringing with them Ames’ library which was to become the early foundation of Harvard’s library collection (cf. “Wm. Ames,” Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church [rev.] 44-45).

Ames wrote The Marrow of Theology in 1623 with the first English translation appearing in 1638, posthumously. Eusden’s (Ph.D., Yale University) translation of Medulla adds to the many reprints of this classic Puritan text. Using the Third Latin Translation of Medulla (1629), Eusden offers the reader a comprehensible English translation. Following a brief overview of the historicity of The Marrow, the editor provides a concise biographical sketch of Ames. This overview is particularly helpful to readers uninitiated in Ames’ life and writings. Eusden further provides important background data on the intellectual influences that shaped and marked Ames’ theology. Discussion of Augustinian and scholastic roots; English Puritan heritages within the Reformed tradition; and distinctives within that tradition, particularly Ames’ use of Ramist logic, all provide important preliminary information for a reader before wading into the Medulla. This section of the text contains documentation and scholarly discussion helpful for further study or research. Unfortunately, such textual commentary and discussion is lacking in the actual translation of the text proper. Eusden concludes his preliminaries with an overview chart (71-73) which visually highlights the Ramist’s flow of Ames’ thinking as applied to theology.

The translation proper of the text follows the two-book structure. Book One focuses on theological conceptualizations and discussions in a systematic manner organized around theological themes. Book Two bridges theology into practical discussions of life and action with its emphasis on Christian piety, duty, and virtue. It is important that the reader recognize the balance between learning and devotion in the structure of Ames’ Marrow of Theology. Such a balance is important owing to Ames’ purpose in writing The Marrow of Theology. The reader should bear in mind that this work was a theological syllabus for his students. The Marrow was not intended to be purely theological, but practical as well.

The translation is readable and organized topically. The text is well-indexed and should provide the reader with ready reference in the event he is seeking a quick citation. This reviewer was disappointed with the lack of interaction and scholarly discussion in the translation proper. The use of footnotes and extensive cross-documentation in the text proper would have added significantly to the translation. Though such scholarly engagement occurs in the introduction of the book, it is completely absent in the translation. Such scholastic digression and interaction would be helpful to students reading Ames for the first time. Furthermore,
translation decision-making, historical contextualization, theological excursuses, and citation references for additional study would have added to the quality of this work. Although it is understandable that the translator might not have wanted to clutter the text with verbiage ad nauseam, or detract from the essential work, novice scholars would find the discussion particularly helpful.

Any student of American theological traditions, Puritanism, the theological curriculum of early American higher education, or the intellectual history of the early New England colonies, should consider this fine translation. No reading of Puritan literature is complete without a perusal of *The Marrow of Theology*. Eusben offers the modern reader a quality translation of this classic treatise.

This volume, the first of two on the book of Ezekiel, is another welcomed addition to the NICOT series. Written by Daniel I. Block, the John R. Sampey Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, the book cuts a wide berth in the quest to understand the prophet, his times, and his message. Unfolded by a detailed Table of Contents/Outline and supplemented with extensive indexes that include subjects, authors, Scripture references, and selected Hebrew words and phrases, the intricacies of the text open easily to the reader. Maps, charts, and graphs repeatedly intersect the text, providing additional elucidation of Ezekiel’s oracles.

After a lengthy treatment of the prophet himself and the circumstances surrounding his deportation to Babylon, Block turns his attention to the text, translating and then commenting on each pericope in detail, usually a verse at a time. His in-depth treatment is generally thorough, sprinkled with transliterated Hebrew terms where clarity and precision require them. He usually consigns the more technical matters to the footnotes.

The depth of analysis should not discourage pastoral investigation, however, for the author’s commentary is easy to read and filled with numerous sermonic insights, almost as though he were preaching the text. Individuals with minimal biblical language acumen will find it quite “user friendly” as well, with English translations accompanying most transliterated words. An occasional excursus provides further explanation of significant texts, such as the scribe scouring the city of Jerusalem for the righteous and marking their foreheads (Ezekiel 9 [310-14]) or Yahweh’s wife being stripped naked and allowed to go into captivity (Ezekiel 16 [467-70]).

This is a positive addition to the study of the book of Ezekiel. Though the cost is high, it is well worth the price, providing a valuable resource to pastors, professors and students wanting a more than superficial look into the text of this magnificent Old Testament prophecy.

This is the second volume of the author’s history of “Old Princeton.” For a review of the first volume, Princeton Seminary: Faith and Learning, 1812-1868 (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1994), see The Master’s Seminary Journal 6/2 (Fall 1995):241-42. The second volume takes the reader from the period just after the Civil War to the reorganization of Princeton in 1929. During this period there was a slow shift on two fronts: the Presbyterian Church was moving away from its theological foundations and embracing first critical views of Scripture and then a more liberal theology; Princeton Seminary itself was changing as the senior faculty began to retire and die. All of these changes Calhoun chronicles with great skill in both clarity of style and breadth of detail.

This volume contains a nearly 30-page subject index covering both volumes, and as with the first volume, the author has provided evidence of substantial research with over 80 pages of endnotes. There are two appendices, one listing a detailed bibliographic resource for the study of Old Princeton and the key personalities, and another providing a brief biographic sketch of various faculty members who served from 1812-1929.

The death of Charles Hodge in 1878 marked the end of an era at Princeton. Hodge had taught for over 50 years. Shunning any honor to himself or his work he stated:

All that can be said is that God has been pleased to take up a poor little stick and do something with it. What I have done is as nothing compared to what is done by a man who goes to Africa and labors among a heathen tribe, and reduces their language to writing. I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose the shoes of such a man (62).

Upon Charles Hodge’s death, his son, A. A. Hodge, became professor of theology, and although not the senior professor, he was “the real power at Princeton Seminary” (100). Calhoun describes the younger Hodge as “a theologian who could preach and a preacher who could teach theology” (ibid). He details how he and the young B. B. Warfield began to defend the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scripture against the higher critical views and liberalism which were already gaining strong footholds in the American denominations. A. A. Hodge’s sudden and unexpected death in 1886 (only eight years after his father) was traumatic for both Princeton and the conservative Calvinists within the Presbyterian church. Although Hodge would be succeeded by the brilliant B. B. Warfield as professor of theology, Warfield would never have the impact in the denomination that Hodge had, and his writings, although classics in scholarly defense of the faith, would never have the popular appeal that the younger Hodge’s did.

Calhoun describes the relationship of the seminary to Princeton College and reflects on the negative impact Woodrow Wilson (later president of the United
The Master’s Seminary Journal

States) had on the college when he became its president. Wilson stated that “Princeton is a Presbyterian college only because the Presbyterians were wise and progressive enough to found it” (272). Wilson, the first president of the school who was not an ordained Presbyterian minister, during his administration eliminated all the previously required biblical instruction and hired the first non-Christian faculty members. Calhoun rightly describes Wilson’s impact on the college (and indirectly the seminary) as a move from “Protestant establishment to established nonbelief” (ibid).

Most readers enjoy a book with a happy ending; however, the history of “Old Princeton” does not lend to such an ending. Calhoun describes the increasing tension within the faculty itself as men with varying commitments to the Scripture tried to work together. Calhoun calls the death of Warfield in 1920 “the end of an era” (326). The battle, which would find J. Gresham Machen as a lightning rod, would intensify until the reorganization of 1929 and the departure of Machen, Robert Dick Wilson, Oswald Allis, and Cornelius Van Til to form Westminster Theological Seminary.

This reviewer highly recommends this volume, as well as the first. Calhoun’s final chapter on “The Princeton Theology” (401-29) is an excellent summation of the institution’s distinctive theology. Calhoun writes, “Old Princeton ceased to exist in 1929, but through its history and literature it still inspires, instructs and encourages” (428).


This excellent biography is by the professor at Wheaton College who wrote the first full-length biography of the prayer warrior, E. M. Bounds, Man of Prayer (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991). Now he has provided the latest of about 60 chronicles on the famous evangelist, builder of Christian schools, and promoter of Christian books for the masses. The product is clear, vividly engaging, often stirring, and carefully documented. Dorsett has succeeded in finding new materials on Moody, and also in being candid about this leader’s weaknesses (warts and all) as well as his strengths.

A critic agreed with Moody supporters that Moody “reduced the population of hell by a million souls” (21). Moody said, “I would rather save one soul from death than have a monument of solid gold reaching from my grave to the heavens” (21). Dorsett puts an accent where some biographers have not. They focus on Moody’s evangelistic work. Dorsett does this but also looks at other work Moody did—racial reconciliation, showing the value of denominationalism, helping women
in ministry, showing a balance of career and family, putting a focus on both formal and informal education, his involvement in the Civil War, and his publishing efforts (23-24).

Dorsett cites F. F. Bruce, NT scholar and church historian, to the effect that Moody’s impact on people in his visits to Britain was not because of his appearance, delivery, or education. Rather, the effect “could not be put down to personal magnetism but must be ascribed to the power of God working through him” (25). Dorsett claims that apart from Billy Sunday and Billy Graham “no American has had the privilege of personally presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to as many people” as Moody (21).

Many illustrations in the book will touch ministers and others deeply. An example is Moody’s impact on Wilfred T. Grenfell, a medical doctor. When a man leading prayer in a meeting went on and on, Moody stood and asked the throng to join in a song while the man finished his personal devotions. Grenfell, unsaved and disgusted that the prayer seemed to have no end, had headed for the door but paused when Moody acted. He was saved as a result of Moody’s preaching. He turned from a lucrative London career to become a medical missionary, building clinics and hospitals, treating bodily needs, and doing evangelism in Labrador for around 40 years (d. 1940). Other examples point out Moody’s concern: for children needing Christ, women needing education, prayer, spending time with his wife Emma and their children, writing to his mother, and helping other ministers such as F. B. Meyer to be themselves, depending on the power of God.

Moody lived from 1837 to 1899, one of nine children in a poor family. The book recounts many touches of compassion and other spiritual values (cf. 33-34, 35, 84, 95, 98, 108, 161-62). At 17 Moody went from Northfield, Massachusetts to Boston, and worked as a shoe clerk. While there, the simple, caring witness of Edward Kimball, a Sunday School teacher, led to Moody’s salvation (46-49). J. B. Stillson, a Presbyterian evangelist, loaned Moody George Mueller’s A Life of Trust, which helped him to rely on God (63). Moody started an evening mission for children in “Little Hell,” an area of Chicago, lived sacrificially, and led many to the Lord as his work began.

He went on to YMCA work, ministering to Civil War soldiers and seeing great answers to prayer (cf. 95-96). He devoured Spurgeon’s sermons. He spoke at many Sunday School conferences, local churches, halls in England, Scotland, and Mexico and at schools he helped found. The most famous, of course, became The Moody Bible Institute.

Among Moody’s strong points according to Dorsett were his high view of Scripture, commitment, passion for souls, humility, prayerful dependence on God, much praise to God, boldness to seize ways to reach people, enterprising ability, organizing skill, willingness to take risks, disciplined devotion of about six hours a day to study (he was also weak in doing this on occasion, going without study or rest), learning to say no in limiting an already heavy schedule, vision to get
inexpensive books to people, selfless compassion to meet needs, and giving of his time to his family. His weaknesses included telling others what to do (bullying at times), abrasiveness, short temper, restlessness, pushiness as when he put pressures on his teenage son to be saved (later compensated for by showing interest in other aspects of his life) (322-23), dragging his feet at times, hiding from problems instead of acting promptly to make key decisions in crises as occurred at the schools. The book interweaves many evidences that Moody’s wife had a profound role in his success by her devotion to Christ’s cause and selfless acts that helped things work. Moody’s children paid high tribute to him after his death.

A good section discusses Moody’s “Secret of Power,” a simple reliance on God (242-44). However, the term “baptism” of the Spirit appears where the appropriate phrasing would be “filling in a new surge” or enablement.

Dorsett offers readers many views of Moody’s simplicity as on his buggy rides behind the horse “Nellie Gray,” his love for chickens, dogs, and horses, his sitting on granite juttings to watch the morning sun dissipate the mist, his talking with God to seek directions for months and years ahead (259-63).

The book has detail on Moody and his wife keeping their romance fresh in later years at their lovers’ retreat and on Moody’s words in his last hours. An appendix summarizes biographies on the man, entries in church histories, references in general works, sections in British and Canadian histories, and unpublished theses and dissertations. The biography’s indexes of persons, subjects, and places are helpful.

For teachers, pastors, other ministers, and Christian laity the book can quicken the heartbeat for God, enhance dependence on Him, and stretch the vision for what God can do through a servant yielded to Him. It is one of the better all-around biographies of a Christian leader, both fact-filled and refreshing, that this reviewer has read. He heartily recommends it for giving a new impulse to ministry.


Atlas of the Bible and Christianity is a delightful tool for studying the geographical aspects of both the Bible and church history. It contains 160 attractive, computer-generated maps and 50 full-color photos. Computer-generated block diagrams of Palestine (8), David’s capture of Jerusalem (32), and the Sea of Galilee (63) illustrate the actual topography. Dowley inserts artistic representations at key points. These include a cross-section through the Gihon Spring at Jerusalem (32), a drawing of Solomon’s Temple (37), and a typical medieval monastery (96). He arranges the atlas chronologically and divides it into five parts: The Geography of Palestine (8-12), Old Testament Period (13-54), New Testament Period (55-72), The
Early Church (73-112), and The Modern Church (113-54). A functional index (155) and gazetteer (156-60) round out the volume.

Dowley received his Ph.D. in church history from the University of Manchester and was also the editor for *Introduction to the History of Christianity* and *Eerdmans’ Handbook to the History of Christianity*. In the Bible half of the volume (8-72) Dowley utilized the expertise of Alan Millard (Rankin Professor in Hebrew and Ancient Semitic Languages, University of Liverpool). The remaining editorial consultants were David Wright (Senior Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History, University of Edinburgh) and Brian Stanley (Director of the North Atlantic Missiology Project for the University of Cambridge and Fellow of St. Edmund’s College). This volume is an American and English co-edition in cooperation with Angus Hudson Ltd. in London. The English origin shows up in the employment of British spellings.

The following select list of map titles represents the depth and breadth of *Atlas of the Bible and Christianity*:

- The Natural Vegetation of Palestine (11)
- The Battle of Ai (21)
- Ehud and the Moabites (26)
- The Campaigns of Tiglath-Pileser III (44)
- The Economy of Palestine, c. 10 BCE (54)
- Plan of the Monastic Settlement at Qumran (58)
- Jerusalem at the Time of Christ (including the route of Jesus’ last days in and around the city) (65)
- The Siege of Jerusalem, 70 CE (71)
- The Golden Age of the Church Fathers, 4th to 5th Centuries (76-77)
- The Barbarian Invasions, 4th and 5th Centuries (82)
- Nestorian Missions in Asia (88)
- Christianity in Russia c. 1050 (95)
- Heresies in Medieval Europe, 1160-1260 (104)
- The Hussites of Bohemia, 1419-1436 (112)
- Baptist and Methodist Churches in USA, 1850 (128)
- Missions to Africa (133)
- Worldwide Growth Rate of Christianity c. 1995 (138-39)
- Bible Societies Worldwide (142-43)

Specialized areas include Islam, Pentecostalism, 19th-century missions in Asia, Celtic missions, Gothic cathedrals, medieval Jews, Franciscan monasteries, pietism in Europe, Christianity in the American colonies, and African independent churches—just to name a few.

The majority of maps exhibit a high standard of excellence. Those few items that slipped by the editors include the misalignment of background, symbols,
and text on the relief map of Palestine (9). Unhappy layout choices show up in a few cases where someone might erroneously take a location title as the title for the map key (90, 91). The atlas generally gives Scripture references on the maps where such information is pertinent (18, 19, 30), but it sometimes omits them where they would have been helpful (28). A lack of time reference hampers the usability of some maps (14, 70).

Several omissions in the atlas are unfortunate. Among them is the omission of Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, and Daniel from the map of the prophets (41). In the map of Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah, the Water Gate is missing (50). The maps and the gazeteer omitted En-Rogel (1 Kgs 1:9). In a few places additional explanation would help to clarify unsupported declarations. This problem occurs in the claims that land “may lie behind the confrontation between Cain and Abel” (10) and that the Vikings “helped in the tenth century to rebuff the growing threat of Islam” (91). Stating that the ark was “recaptured” (27) is one example of an inaccurate choice of terms.

The atlas’ location of the Reed Sea crossing north of the Gulf of Suez (20) and denial of the unity of Isaiah (49) reveal its non-evangelical stance.

Fortunately, the infelicities, inaccuracies, and omissions are limited. This reviewer recommends the volume for church, academic, and personal libraries.


“If a waterfowl looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, but walks like a goose, is it still a duck? If it then honks like a goose and walks like a goose but still looks like a duck, is it a duck or a goose?” (147). Millard Erickson, who is Distinguished Professor of Theology at Baylor University’s Truett Seminary, and at Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon, asks this question and concludes that these postconservatives who make up the evangelical left have not yet surrendered “the right to be called evangelicals,” but he contends that evangelicalism is not “unlimited” (147). Erickson says that he does not wish to cause “alarm,” but he does wish to sound an “alert” regarding the theological deviations of the “evangelical left.”

He analyzes the evangelical left, first by a historical, and then a theological survey of the movement. He begins with a review of the history of evangelicalism, explaining its background in fundamentalism and how it developed into the new evangelicalism in the 1940's. He explains such features of new evangelicalism as the impact of Billy Graham, the role of Christianity Today, the leftward move of Fuller Seminary in the 1960's, and then concludes with a general survey of postconservative evangelicalism. It is probably nit-picking to note it, but Erickson reiterates the oft-
repeated mistake, first made by the early historian of fundamentalism, Stewart Cole, that the Niagara Bible Conference participants wrote a five-point creed in 1895. There was no such thing—actually they approved a fourteen-point creed in 1878. And Erickson generalizes that Curtis Lee Laws coined the term “fundamentalism” in “about 1910” (18). Actually, it was 1920.

In chapter two, “The Task and Method of Theology,” Erickson examines four different programs of theological methodology which represent the evangelical left. He notes one of the heroes of the movement, Bernard Ramm, and then focuses on the contributions of Clark Pinnock, Stanley Grenz, and James McClendon. He points out how these are explaining evangelicalism as a pietist movement, and how they have expanded the sources of theology beyond the Bible to historical theology, experience, and the thought-forms of contemporary culture.

In chapter three, the author explains some of the recent low-lights in the evangelical lefts’ doctrine of Scripture. Erickson analyzes Rogers’ and McKim’s historical work in which they try to prove that inerrancy is a relatively recent idea, as well as Dewey Beegle’s 1970’s attempt to promote a limited inerrancy doctrine of Scripture. He also notes the influence of Karl Barth on the evangelical left’s Bibliology.

“The Doctrine of God” is the topic of the fourth chapter in which Erickson explains the shocking innovations in the theology proper of postconservative evangelicalism. They have elevated what has been called “The Open View of God” over the classical understanding that God is omniscient and omnipotent. Many of the participants in the evangelical left (though thankfully not all) have concluded that not only does God not sovereignly control the details of the universe, but He does not, indeed cannot, even know many of the things that are going to happen in the future.

In his last major chapter, Erickson analyzes the recent aberrations in the doctrine of salvation seemingly stolen from liberalism and the cults by the evangelical left. Inclusivism, the idea that adherents to the other religions of the world may be saved in some way by Christ without actually becoming Christian—perhaps through general revelation—has become popular. Some of the evangelical left, such as Clark Pinnock, are also proposing that it may be possible for some to get into heaven by a “post-mortem encounter” with the gospel. And for those who finally reject the gospel, some postconservatives are teaching the annihilation of the wicked on the basis of the conditional immortality of the soul.

I recommend this book. It will be a handy tool for pastors who wish to warn their people about some of the dangerous doctrinal novelties within evangelicalism. Seminary and college students, as well as other informed lay people, will certainly profit from Erickson’s insightful analyses of these current peculiarities within the evangelical left.

The author is Professor of Theology at Baylor’s University Truett Seminary and at Western Seminary, Portland. He is perhaps best known by his work on *Christian Theology.*

This book “attempts to survey theological developments” (9) in the past twenty years on the issue of the eternal destiny of those who never hear the message of Jesus Christ. In the end, Erickson hopes “to come to a balanced and responsible viewpoint” (9). It is a compilation of doctrinal courses taught at Grace Theological Seminary (1995), a Master of Theology course taught at the *Faculdade Teológico de São Paulo* in Brazil (1994), W. H. Griffith Thomas lectures at Dallas Theological Seminary (1994), lectures at the International Theological Conference at the *Seminário Teológico Batista* in Brazil (1994), and messages given at a pastor’s continuing education seminar of the Middle East Baptist Conference in Ohio (1994).

The book has four sections. Part one (13-29) offers the reasons for the publication. Part two (33-139) surveys different positions (exclusivism of eternal destiny, inclusivism, universalism, and pluralism) from both Catholic and Protestant perspectives. Part three (143-232) deals with specific issues such as general revelation, postmortem evangelism, biblical requirements for salvation, how many will be saved, and annihilation. Part four (235-69) addresses practical applications to those incapable of faith (infants and mentally disabled) and implications for missions and evangelism.

The value of the book lies in sections one, two, and four. In part one Erickson provides seventeen reasons for writing on this subject. He points out the current confusion about and recent attention to (both scholarly and popular) the subject as two reasons. As another, he addresses the effects of globalization and how that has brought some criticisms of traditional exclusivism. The doctrinal implications of the study are the strongest and are the source of the majority of Erickson’s reasons. The areas impacted are the person of Christ, the Trinity, sovereignty, Scripture, authority, salvation, and truth, each one being discussed briefly and for the most part to the point.

Part two surveys different views regarding the destiny of those who have never heard. Here the reader finds good information on the history of each view and on contemporary thought. Erickson footnotes advocates of the views and occasionally interjects questions for further clarification. At the end of each chapter he evaluates arguments in support of a given view along both positive and negative lines. Readers will not always agree with the author’s opinion, for some of the positives simply commend effort while giving little or no biblical input. Erickson does include some biblical data. For example, his evaluation of Protestant exclusivism is alarming to this reviewer. He believes that passages such as Acts
16:31 and Romans 10:9-12 do not say Jesus Christ is the only name through which men might be saved. His criticism is that there is “too much deduction from other tenets” (63). He admits that “no other alternative is considered in those contexts,” but concludes, “[T]o say that those and only those who believe in Jesus will be saved is an illicit deduction” (63). In reference to the Great Commission Erickson thinks that too much has been “inferred” from that passage. “To be sure, Christ’s giving this confers an importance and urgency on the task of missions and evangelism. It is not stated, however, that this is because those to be evangelized cannot possibly be saved otherwise” (63). He does not consider passages such as John 8:24, 14:6, Acts 4:12, and Galatians 1:6-10. Even apart from these, Acts 16:31 (“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved”) and Romans 10:9-12 (“If you confess with your mouth Jesus . . . you shall be saved”) are clearly exclusive.

Part four contains valuable information about the salvation of infants and mentally handicapped. Several views gain clear mention (Pelagianism, sentimentalism, Ariminianism, probation of the infant, baptismal regeneration, and Calvinism). Relevant biblical principles receive fair treatment. The author’s own view appears on page 250.

Erickson’s section on the issues is a weakness of the book. In the chapter “Postmortem Evangelism,” he does finally conclude that scriptural proof “falls sadly short of demonstration” (175). And, in the chapter addressing the number that will be saved, he correctly says “they [believers] will be, when compared to the great number of unbelievers, a minority” (215). He also decides that annihilationism “cannot be sustained, philosophically, biblically, or theologically” (232). His arguments overall are logically based and philosophical in nature. More biblical exegesis would have been a great improvement.

A whole chapter discusses general revelation. Erickson recognizes its importance “for deciding between the positions of exclusivism and inclusivism” (143). However he nowhere defines general or special revelation. That will confuse the reader and leave him free to utilize whatever understanding he has on the subject. Erickson offers no help in this.

In his discussion on an “especially pertinent” (147) portion of Scripture, Romans 1:18-23, Erickson says v. 19 “refers to that which may be known (τις γνωστὸν)” (147). That is inconsistent with the context and meaning of the word which always means “what is known.” Furthermore, “what is known” is φανερόν (clear, evident) for God made it evident εφανέρωσεν (aorist tense). Erickson portrays a watered-down effect of sin, saying “one effect of sin on the human mind is to cloud the understanding, making spiritual truth difficult to perceive and understand” (158). Concerning an evangelistic strategy, he sees general revelation as a preparatory work in that “some have faith in God without having been exposed to the gospel” (158), yet are “still in need of the gospel” (158).

Those seeking to stay abreast of the literature on this subject may want to purchase this book. However, it does not convey a “balanced and responsible
viewpoint” (9). For a detailed biblical analysis of the issues, this reviewer suggests Through No Fault of their Own? The Fate of those Who Have Never Heard, ed. by William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos (Baker, 1991), Is Jesus the Only Savior? by Ronald Nash (Zondervan, 1994) and The Population of Heaven by Ramesh Richard (Moody, 1994).


The author, a former pastor of Spurgeon’s Metropolitan Tabernacle during the 1940's and 50's, has made a life study of the famous “Prince of Preachers” and has written several other works related to Spurgeon and his life. This latest effort is the author’s distillation of excerpts from The Sword and Trowel when Spurgeon was its editor (1865-1892), excerpts that reflect Spurgeon’s views on various issues of theology and ministry.

The Sword and Trowel, as Hayden points out, is almost “autobiographical” (8), for this is where Spurgeon dealt with the great issues (both religious and secular), printed his book reviews, and gave occasional information on his own personal and family life and the varied ministries connected with the Tabernacle. It is a vast wealth of information on the man and the era which unfortunately most biographers have tended to ignore (7). Part of the reason is perhaps that the volumes are not easily obtained, especially in the United States. Pilgrim Publishing of Pasadena, Texas, has reprinted some of them, but they have only seen fit to condense the material actually written by Spurgeon, and they have not yet completed even that part of the project.

Anyone who is interested in Spurgeon will profit from this work. All the chapters have something of both profit and interest. The chapters on “Calvinism and Arminianism” (115-22), “Inspiration and Translation” (103-14), “Revival and Renewal” (159-68), “Anglicanism and Romanism” (51-62), and “Suffering and Healing” (183-92) will make the reader wonder whether Spurgeon was writing in our own era. The final chapter, “Odds and Ends” (199-239), is something of an anthology giving Spurgeon’s observations on various issues and displaying his well-known humor and occasional sharp wit. One such observation was Spurgeon’s review of a particular book: “Many of our modern theological treatises are so devoid of real substance that we are reminded of the chicken-broth which the sick husband returned to his wife, with the urgent request that she would coax the chicken to wade through it once more” (229).

The parallels between evangelicalism in Spurgeon’s Victorian England and the present have been noted by many (most recently, see John F. MacArthur, Jr.,
Ashamed of the Gospel [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1993]). The observations of Spurgeon on the condition of the church in his day and his warnings to the church are for the most part ignored. The author has provided a service to this generation, bringing those observations and warnings to the modern reader.


This work, a collection of thirteen essays originally delivered at the Harvard Divinity School symposium on Ephesus (rendered “Ephesos” throughout the work), is part of the Harvard Theological Studies series (the present volume is number 41 in the series).

The layout and design of the book are well-conceived. There are an adequate subject index, a fine glossary, and frequent illustrations (both drawing and photographs) depicting various site diagrams and archaeological finds. A fine, annotated, pull-out map of ancient Ephesus is in the back of the book. The articles have footnotes, which this reviewer prefers over the current trend toward notes at the rear of a book.

The articles themselves reflect high scholarship, but in places a very low view of Scripture. For instance, the editor writing on “Ephesos in Early Christian Literature” states that “the Letter to the Ephesians is not a genuine letter of Paul’s” (122 n. 14). Elsewhere he states that the Pastoral Epistles are “deutero-Pauline,” composed “not earlier than the end of the first century, but probably as late as the fourth or fifth decade of the second century” (124). All the names of places and persons of the Pastorals are regarded as “fictional” (124); thus any use of these books to reconstruct a chronology of Paul’s life and ministry is erroneous. A letter to the Ephesians is posited by the editor, but he concludes that Romans 16 is that letter which later editors mistakenly attached to the end of that epistle (122-23). Such theories lead to rather dubious conclusions, such as Philemon and Philippians being written during an “Ephesian imprisonment” (122), a “rivalry” between Paul and Apollos (126), a “cult” of John the Baptist in Ephesus which thought of him as the Messiah (125), and questioning whether Revelation 2:1-7 was written to a church at Ephesus (133). The editor has consistently rejected inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture in his works (see “What is—and Is Not—Inspired,” Bible Review 11/5 [October 1995]:18, 48).

The other articles, though not friendly to conservative views of Scripture, are nonetheless helpful as background studies. White’s article on “Urban Development and Social Change in Imperial Ephesos” (27-80) is quite helpful. Friesen’s
article on the Emperor Cult in Ephesus and the Book of Revelation (229-50), while retaining some of the aforementioned flaws, does have a helpful discussion on the dating of Revelation. He adopts a traditional dating during the reign of Domitian as preferable (245-46) to a dating during the reign of Nero. Limberis’ article on the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 430) and the theotokos (Mary as “Bearer of God”) controversy is also very helpful.

All in all, this work reflects most of the current thinking in liberal circles as related to biblical studies. Those who can extract background and historical information as it relates to Ephesus will find useful bits and pieces. Those who are looking for sound interpretation of the text and helpful exegetical data will be as disappointed as this reviewer was.


This addition to books giving solutions to Bible problems comes from the Professor of Biblical Literature, Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon. Laney also authored *The Divorce Myth, A Guide to Church Discipline*, and *John* (Moody Gospel Commentary). In addition he has done Everyman’s Bible Commentaries on 1 and 2 Samuel, Ezra and Nehemiah, and Zechariah.

The work discusses many problems, usually with brevity. It passes over quite a number, as all such works do. Laney covers 1 and 2 Chronicles, for example, in two and a third pages. Among problems skipped are the tree of life, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Gen 3:15, 4:1, why God rejected Cain’s offering, the chronology of Abram in Genesis 11-12 and Acts 7, the identity of Melchizedek, Lot’s wife becoming a pillar, Joseph’s divining cup, the difference between sin and trespass offerings (Leviticus 4–5), and on and on.

Some sections in Bible books end early, as at Exodus 24, Leviticus 26, Numbers 22, Deuteronomy 24, and Joshua 11. Some Bible books have very few problems dealt with, as seven on Job, thirteen on the Psalms, seven on Proverbs, nine on Isaiah, and eight on Jeremiah.

But where Laney comments, he is usually insightful, and the book overall has many values. On Genesis 1 he sees the days as 24-hours in length, yet offers no help on the problem of time that the sciences demand. He interprets the “sons of God” (Gen 6:2, 4) as fallen angels, holds to a global flood, a curse on Canaan’s descendants, not Canaan or Ham personally (he does not give texts later that show Canaanites undergoing a curse). Laney disagrees with his former fellow-faculty member Ronald Allen, who says OT numbers are often deliberately exaggerated to bring glory to God. Laney feels this would be deceitful and takes the figures as
literal; he says that the God of miracles could provide for the many Israelites in the desert (43-44). Cf. Allen on numbers in “Numbers,” The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, ed. F. Gaebelein, 688-91.

Laney has a good discussion of Rahab’s lie as an ethical problem. He says, “What the Bible commends is Rahab’s faith, not her falsehood” (56). He provides three views on the long day in Joshua 10, takes a 1446 B.C. date for the exodus, says Jephthah offered his daughter to death but his rash plan did not follow God’s will, and God miraculously caused Samuel to appear bodily from the dead (1 Samuel 28). On 2 Sam 12:23 he seems to hold that David expects only to go to the grave at death, and does not mention Ps 49:14 as giving more of a hope for an afterlife (cf. also Ps 73:24 f.). In Job 19:25-27 Laney believes that Job expected to see His divine redeemer from the vantage point of a body resurrected from the dust.

The reader may have difficulty seeing the harmony when the book argues that the psalmists’ imprecations wish the very will of God to be done, and then sees the teachings superseded by new revelation for Christians (109). Not all will agree with his conviction that a historical king only and not Satan in any sense is in view in Isa 14:12-14 and Ezek 28:11 ff. In some instances, explanations only go part of the way and leave readers groping for information Laney does not supply. An example is in his over-simplifying Ezek 3:20-21 to the point of having only physical life and blessing, or death, in view. This does not explain the problem that many of the wicked live to a ripe old age (Ezekiel 14), while many of the righteous are permitted to die early. Things did not work out in the neat way that the present book generalizes, so it leaves readers longing for more help that faces the problem fully, rather than creating a bigger problem.

Comments favoring a literal fulfillment of the temple details (Ezekiel 40–46) are helpful. Laney also refers to the book he co-authors with John Schmitt, developing the subject in more detail (Messiah’s Coming Temple. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997).

On some passages Laney does not make a clear-cut choice, as on the identity of the twenty-four elders in the book of Revelation, whether they are humans or angels.

Given the fact that the book leaves out many problems and will be a disappointment on some that it includes, it does cover a number of the difficulties fairly well. So it is solidly worth having as one among several books that specialize on problems. Problems are easy to locate since Laney discusses them as they occur in the sequence of biblical books. An index of persons, places, and topics also furnishes some help in finding discussions.

The author, professor of New Testament at the University of Göttingen and former professor at Vanderbilt Divinity School, has struck upon a novel concept in early Christian studies. He argues from the concept that “the winners write the history,” and therefore the version of Christianity which appeared after the apostolic age and what is known to us today is “something strange” (xvi). He attempts to show “Jesus as hardly anyone still knows him today” (ibid.).

This book, simply put, is a contrivance in terms of both history and theology. The author rejects every tenet of the Christian faith. He presents Jesus as, at best, an eccentric, whose cleansing of the temple at the end of His ministry was designed to clear the way for a new temple to be put into place by God (32). The resurrection is a “chain reaction” (34) begun by a vision of the remorseful Peter and reinforced by similar “ecstatic experiences” (35) of other of the disciples and finally Jesus’ brother James. The author posits that after this “resurrection” the early Christians began to “create” the myth of a living Messiah who would return again.

The author also argues that the sources discussing Jesus are entirely “third hand” (61), none of which are the “products of eyewitnesses” (ibid). He acknowledges that we have “original documents in the truest sense” from Paul (ibid); however, he then goes on to declare only seven of the NT epistles of Paul to be authentic. He declares the book of Acts to be a fraud, containing only a few reliable traditions, but being neither chronologically accurate nor theologically representative of the teachings of either Paul or Jesus (62, 67).

From this point the author attempts to make the case that Paul was the first “heretic” in the church as he moved away from the central tenet of Christianity, the parousia or imminent return of Christ, to a more existential viewpoint whereby he wanted believers to “feel with him that through Jesus a veil has been removed from human eyes and that the golden sun of God’s dawning is warming their hearts” (84). However, other Christians conspired against Paul’s work and the author states,

Outwardly, Paul’s life and work—like that of Jesus—ended in fiasco. His further plans to extend his mission to Spain were thwarted by Jewish Christian “brothers.” He left behind almost nothing that lasted, and had not Luke painted an impressive portrait of him in Acts, and had not his various letters been kept from destruction by unknown helpers, the apostle to the Gentiles would have had no further history (103).

The untenable and honestly bizarre theories of the author in this book are almost too numerous to mention. The “non-authentic” letters of Paul, especially 2 Thessalonians, Colossians/Ephesians, and the Pastoral Epistles are said to be productions of various groups who sought to use Paul’s name, but who had abandoned his central message. His discussion of the canon (193-208) and the relationship of the Christianity of the first two centuries to the modern era (209-17) are a continuation of the same theories and are equally untenable and unsupportable to anyone who regards the Scripture as the inerrant Word of God, Jesus as God, the resurrection as


As a follow-up to George Marsden’s essential work, *The Soul of the American University* (Oxford, 1994), the latest salvo in the battle for Christian scholastic credibility within the academy is *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. Marsden is currently Francis A. McAnaney Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame. He is a recognized scholar and, in addition to the aforementioned titles, has authored several critiques of American fundamentalism. Written as a challenge to his critics, the latest book offers religious worldviews as an alternative to the secular ideologies that operate in the modern research university. He further offers a critique and analysis of the dominant thought structures that drive contemporary research, notably the decline of religious perspectives generally, and Christianity specifically. He proposes the last two as viable alternatives to those postulated and utilized within the academy.

The essential argument of *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* is that of Christian inclusion within the secular academy. Christian thought deserves to be considered as a theoretical structure which informs research. Central to the discussion is the ability of religious thought to serve as an intellectual basis for shaping research directions and offering interpretive insights into findings. His critiques of both scientific objectivism and postmodernist relativism as extreme interpretive frameworks are both accurate and descriptive of the schizophrenic nature of the operating research philosophies that exist on many university campuses.

Upon a review of this text, several observations emerge. Marsden’s work provides an excellent and accurate overview of the status of the modern academy with its operating, theoretical frameworks. He offers carefully poised responses and critiques from a Christian perspective. The thrust of the book is a scholarly polemic.
for inclusion of religious persuasions as a legitimate research tradition. However, methodological discussion of a “system” of Christian scholarship is largely absent. Marsden offers some suggestions in the later chapters which are helpful and encouraging, yet the book lacks extensive development of a Christian approach that integrates theological perspectives with research methodology. This is due to the polemical nature of the text and the desire to represent diverse theological and disciplinary perspectives in the argument (84).

Second, though the book recognizes and discusses the philosophic tensions between secular and religious scholarship, a latent tension exists within the broader evangelical community that will affect any scholarly discussion of the subject. Noll epitomizes this tension in The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind when he points an accusatory finger at fundamentalists (“The Intellectual Disaster of Fundamentalism,” chap. 5). Many thinking pre-millenarian dispensationalists took strong issue with that apparent broadside and felt Noll was guilty of the same pattern of exclusion and hypocrisy characteristic of many secular scholars. Additional interfraternal discussions and debates within evangelical-Christian scholastic communities are needed. Marsden’s own understanding of both fundamentalism and evangelicalism could offer much to this dialogue. While that was not the intended purpose of The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship, it is a necessary next step. The ramifications of this discussion are too important to ignore.

Finally, Marsden identifies several theological themes which might inform a scholar’s research. Discussion of the implications of such concepts as creation, incarnation, and the human condition have potential research ramifications for all academic disciplines. It was noteworthy to this reviewer that Marsden opted for an incarnational rather than a propositional approach to epistemological considerations. Discussion of revelation as an important theological concept, which would seem to be worthy of inclusion in his list, was notably absent (cf. Francis Schaeffer, He Is There and He Is Not Silent, Appendix One, “Is Propositional Revelation Nonsense?”).

The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship offers the reader a critical analysis of the present situation within the university. The author’s polemic is an important contribution to scholars who desire to inform research by their faith. It is also a critical call to fairness among scholars and institutions that seek to silence the voice of intellectual Christians. In the present flow of literature, it is time to begin formulating definitive systems of inquiry that take into consideration disciplinary methodologies and theological realities within a rigorous structure and system of inquiry. This reviewer hopes that further studies will move beyond disputations and toward the creation of research matrices that combine theological realities, academic disciplinary methodologies, and quantitative and qualitative research designs from a distinctively Christian perspective.

This second of the two-volume set covers Jeremiah 26–52, the first volume having been published a decade earlier. McKane, emeritus professor of Hebrew and Oriental Languages in the University of St. Andrews, pursues the prophecy of Jeremiah in typical ICC fashion. He leaves no aspect of intricacies in the text without comment; a plethora of detail greets the reader at every turn of the page. The author addresses questions relating to technical matters with thorough diligence.

The author’s acceptance of a liberal source criticism perspective dictates his notations throughout. He argues that the book “is the product of a long growth extending into the post-exilic period” (clxxii) and later adds that “the shorter text of Sept. is a witness to a more original Hebrew text than that of MT. Thus Sept. has substantial text-critical significance and rests on a Hebrew Vorlage shorter than MT” (clxxii-clxxiii). This, of course, leads him frequently to reject the accuracy of the current text, often extracting passages from their present context and somewhat arbitrarily re-inserting them into a later context.


Alec Motyer has lectured on the book of Isaiah during his entire teaching career at various educational institutions in the United Kingdom. From his own testimony, he had planned for many years to write this commentary and “planned to include everything in it! All the material—linguistic, exegetical, expository, introductory—appropriate to a lecture course and all the evaluative comments on specialist work and debate was to find a place in my commentary.” With the humility that is so evident throughout this excellent work, he concluded that “the world is not big enough to contain such a book, no publisher foolish enough to undertake it, nor am I competent to write it” (9).

In this reviewer’s opinion, however, Motyer has succeeded in fulfilling his original hopes in a far greater way than he acknowledges. It is difficult to control one’s enthusiasm while describing the merits of this commentary. It is as thorough as one could ever expect a one-volume commentary to be. It is analytical, with very valuable insights regarding the literary structure of the book as a whole as well as its
individual sections. It is **scholarly**, exemplifying a thorough familiarity with what has been written on “Isaianic literature,” as he often terms it (13). It is **evangelical** in the best sense of that term, not only defending the entire book as the work of Isaiah, son of Amoz (25-30), but fully recognizing its “evangelical” nature as embodying the gospel in the Old Testament. It is **theological**, recognizing that the book is more than simply the sum of its parts, but exhibits certain key theological truths that bind the entire sixty-six chapters into a theological as well as a literary whole.

How refreshing it is to read a commentator who recognizes that the “Messianic Hope” comprises the central theme of Isaiah. Motyer’s outline of Isaiah involves the three “Messianic portraits: the King (chapters 1–37), the Servant (chapters 38–55) and the Anointed Conqueror (chapters 56–66)” (13; cf. 13-16, 35, 287, 459). In his thorough discussions of the key messianic texts, Motyer unflinchingly defends their Messianic/Christological interpretations. He convincingly marshals the linguistic evidence for the “virgin” meaning of *almah* in Isa 7:14—a defense rarely seen today, even in professedly evangelical commentaries. He also argues eloquently that the context of chapters 7–11 demands that “Immanuel cannot be simply any child whatever. It is impossible to separate this ‘Immanuel’ from the Davidic king whose birth delivers his people (9:4-7) and whose complex name includes the designation *Mighty God* (9:6)” (86). He provides a thorough discussion of the “Servant Songs,” recognizing that from chapter 49 onward the “individual” interpretation of the Servant is inescapable. His comment on 53:9 (“his grave was assigned with wicked ones and with a rich one”) is illustrative of his insightful humility: “Like other enigmas of this Song, this too is written so that when the turn of events provides the explanation we shall know for certain that we stand in the presence of the Servant of the Lord” (436).

Unlike many evangelical commentators, Motyer is fully conversant with the most recent linguistic and literary insights that can be applied to biblical studies. He provides for each section under consideration a literary outline, often discerning in the text the presence of *chiasm*, or inverted parallelism. This literary device utilized so widely in both testaments often escapes the notice of commentators not familiar with it or not familiar enough with the Hebrew text. Note his treatment in this regard of 9:1-7 (98), 26:1-21 (212), and 49:1-55:13 (383). Motyer’s recognitions of these literary characteristics of Isaiah do not serve simply as examples of our author’s clever reconstructions, but further illustrate the unity of authorship in all sections of the book.

In regards to eschatology, Motyer may disappoint some. He appears to be closer to amillennialism than any other system, but he does not seem to carry any brief against a restored Israel reigned over by the Messiah in His second coming. His comments on 61:1-4 (499-501) clearly acknowledge a dual fulfillment in the first and second comings of Messiah—a view consistent with Jesus’ use of part of that passage in Luke 4:16-22 to describe His first coming.

The only real shortcoming of this truly superb commentary is the absence
of subject, author, and Scripture indexes. But that is a lack that could be supplied by one of Motyer’s students.

This reviewer has thirteen individual Isaiah commentaries on his shelves, not counting those in sets. Motyer’s will be the first of those he consults from now on.


Here is an entire book supporting a literal realization of details about a temple. The authors argue the naturalness of understanding Ezekiel’s description to depict a huge structure rebuilt during the future, earthly, millennial kingdom following Christ’s second coming. They correlate this with Israel’s regathering to its own ancient land, showing the plausibility of facets Ezekiel portrays in that setting. This they defend against other main interpretations seeing the temple as an ideal never fulfilled, or Herod’s temple, or the church as a temple today, or the ultimate New Jerusalem.

Both writers studied under Dr. Stanley Ellisen, former Professor of Biblical Studies at Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon. Laney is on the faculty at that seminary now, and Schmitt is the Executive Director of Messianic Temple Ministries. This effort promotes research on biblical prophecy and the temple. Schmitt includes pictures of models portraying the temple as the writers expect it to be, based on details of Ezekiel. These look at several distinct parts of the temple complex and its furniture.

The two see foreshadowing of the temple in the OT tabernacle. They include a short history of the temple concept, a sketch on attempts to rebuild a temple in modern times, and evidence supporting a future literal temple as sensible. If one is looking for a detailed case with evidence brought together for such a view, he will be somewhat disappointed. The work does not collect evidence to convince readers of this view in one place to show reasons for this interpretation, but it strings it out little by little as the writers take up different details, working through Ezekiel’s chapters. Some evidence for the view is discernible, but the popular nature of the book seems to keep the writers from opening up many details. As they look at different facets of the details, they do to some degree answer a few common objections to a literal temple in the future.

One example is in their viewing of the sacrifices of this temple as not expiatory and not conflicting with the book of Hebrews. They claim that Christ’s sacrifice was the fulfillment of the sacrifice idea, and is unrepeatable. They point out that even OT offerings were not expiatory, but memorials God led His people to
enact to point to the only sacrifice, Christ’s, which would be efficacious (Heb. 10:4). The future offerings, they reason, will look back to Christ’s cross as OT offerings anticipated the atonement He made.

As to fitting details of Ezekiel 40–48 into Palestine, the writers reason, as has often been done, that the land’s topography will change because of a massive earthquake (Zechariah 14). That will expand the area for Israel’s tribes to have land allotments and all the details to find their place.

Schmitt and Laney survey many details in a way that accords with their literal overall view. The book is highly informative about modern temple movements, i.e., fervent concerns to see the temple rebuilt (60-65). Here as in other chapters they document key statements from relevant literature. They argue that the church will be distinguished from Israel, that the church’s rapture will be pre-tribulational, that the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14 are literal Israelites who witness for Christ, and for conversions from all nations through this witness (Rev 7:9 ff.). They posit a thousand-year kingdom after the second coming (Rev 20:1-9), with Jerusalem as the center for people of the nations seeking knowledge from the Messiah in Jerusalem (Isa 2:2-4; cf. Zech 8:20). They cite other passages as well as Ezekiel’s in expecting a future literal temple (Isa 2:3; 60:13; Jer 33:18; Joel 3:18; Mic 4:2; Hag 2:7-9; Zech 6:12-15; 14:16, 20-21). They reason that this temple differs in a vast way from the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21–22, the church today, and other nonliteral views (80-81). Their idea is that sacrifices, as God uses Ezekiel to depict them, serve two primary purposes: (1) to remind God’s people of what Christ did in His atoning death [they do not say so, but this tangible expression is as the bread and cup serve as reminders today, not competing with but in concord with the glory of the cross]; and (2) to furnish opportunity for worship to Christ, as in the peace offerings (Ezek 43:27), i.e., as tributes to Christ’s redeeming work (118-19).

The work concludes by stating ways that knowing Christ can be a hope that encourages, comforts, motivates, and purifies. An appendix answers questions, then an index of subjects closes the book.

Here is a fairly good survey, with 21 photographs of Schmitt’s model, or sketches visualizing different details. It is a very readable survey integrating many aspects of the issue for those already persuaded of a literal fulfillment beyond Christ’s future coming. And it can serve to show those opposed to this interpretation many facets to enhance the concept of how such a view can fit plausibly in hermeneutical consistency. Those teaching or preaching on Ezekiel 40–48 can see how a literal view here flows consistently after a literal fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecies of Babylon conquering Judah (chaps. 1–24), his prophecies literally fulfilled in judgments on surrounding nations (25–32), and the literal report of a fall of Jerusalem (33).

Here is another splendid work by John Stott, former rector of All Souls Church in London and a preacher, evangelist, and expository preacher of the Scripture. *Guard The Truth* is a biblical exposition of 1 Timothy and Titus. Stott contends that “the true apostolic succession is a continuity not of order but of doctrine, namely the teaching of the apostles handed on from generation to generation” (12). Paul was concerned about the preservation of that doctrine and so he wrote the Pastoral epistles. Here he tells Timothy and Titus to “guard the truth.”

Stott believes in Pauline authorship of the Pastorals: “The most likely scenario is that Paul the apostle wrote the three Pastorals, toward the end of his life, addressing contemporary issues, and communicating through a trusted amanuensis” (34).

Here you have a deeply spiritual layman-preacher’s commentary showing the fruit of deep scholarship and diligent labor but without the technical terms or expressions. The sections are well outlined with numerous summaries in the paragraphs. It is a homiletical jewel if one wants to preach through these two epistles.

The author does not avoid the difficulties surrounding certain passages. Stott endeavors to give the reader the different options for the various positions so that he/she may weigh the evidence for all opinions. This is very helpful. He usually lands on the conservative side, though he waffles somewhat on 1 Tim 2:11-15 in his treatment of women in ministry.

Serious students of the Pastorals should consult the more extensive and critical works used by Stott. Nevertheless, this volume can be a useful tool in discipling lay leaders, especially lay elders and deacons. There is a study guide located at the end of the book for group discussion, which should prove very helpful.


OT students have needed a theological dictionary that would have greater depth than *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*, edited by Harris, Archer, and Waltke (Moody, 1980; 2 vols.). They also have needed a resource that is more evangelical than *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)*, edited by Botterweck and Ringgren (Eerdmans, 1974- ). Finally that resource is


The set has four main divisions: (1) “The Guide” (1:1-218) containing articles specializing in hermeneutics, textual criticism, OT history, literary approaches, narrative criticism, linguistics, principles for word study, OT theology, and instruction in how to use the set; (2) “Lexical Articles” (1:219–4:343) consisting of the main entries arranged by the Hebrew alphabet; (3) “Topical Dictionary” (4:345-1322) including cross-references to the entries in the lexical section and taking up major topics such as names of people and places, words, concepts, and events; (4) “Indexes” (5:1-834) covering semantic fields, Hebrew words, Scripture references, subject, and numbering systems (both Strong’s and Goodrick/Kohlenberger’s). The many cross-references keyed to the numbered lexical entries make the set’s abundant information easily accessible.

The introductory articles in volume 1 attempt to present the purpose and philosophy of the entire work. At times, however, the claims are a bit extravagant. An example is the claim that a “theological dictionary provides training in how to speak, and act, biblically” (1:44). That claim is followed almost immediately by a similar one: “the ultimate function of a good theological dictionary is not only to provide more information, but also to aid in the formation of faithful and competent disciples” (ibid.). In this reviewer’s opinion, such results would be difficult to evaluate. The lexical entries certainly do not always measure up to such high aims. Why should they? Theological dictionaries are not examples of homiletical exercises containing the proclamation of the divine Word together with pertinent applications to personal living. *NIDOTTE* is not an exception. This work will contribute greatly to the preparation of sermonic material, but it is not a collection of sermonic word studies.

One of the admirable aims of *NIDOTTE* is to allow “discussions of words in context” (1:104). The contributors claim to have studied each word “in its multiple literary contexts, taking account of the various genres in which it appeared” (1:123).
“The Guide” provides illustrations on integrating the various introductory articles with the other divisions of NIDOTTE in the performance of OT exegesis (1:206-18). It employs Ruth 1 and Ps 119:1-8 as the primary illustrations. It takes the reader through a series of six illustrated steps. In the illustration based upon Ps 119:1-8 the reader is enjoined to “study the first strophe exegetically and theologically by using the lexical entries in NIDOTTE” (1:217). Such instruction would appear to be a contradiction of an earlier caveat: “Word study is a step in the process of exegesis; it does not comprise the whole of the process” (1:171).

The six illustrated steps for the use of NIDOTTE omit any reference to syntactical analysis. This is the Achilles heel of word study theology. To be fair to the editors and contributors to NIDOTTE, the overall tone of “The Guide” runs contrary to the omission of thorough syntactical analysis. However, it devotes only three very brief paragraphs to this aspect of exegesis (1:165). At one point, it issues a caution against stopping at syntactical analysis without going to the “overall structure” of a passage (1:35). In order for NIDOTTE to deliver on the Exegesis promised in its title, it needs to include a major article on syntactical analysis alongside the introductory articles on textual critical analysis, literary analysis, semantic analysis, and discourse analysis.

NIDOTTE presents the OT student with many excellent lexical entries. Bibliographies for a number of entries are noticeably lengthy providing the reader with plenty of additional material for research (e.g., 1:241-43, 530-31, 593-35, 734-35; 2:604-5; 3:1033-34, 1171-73, 1180; 4:794-96, 1093-94). The interesting thing about these extended bibliographies is that they often conclude entries by the same contributor. Sometimes an occasional lengthy bibliography appears padded with too many commentaries (e.g., 3:375-77). Some entries are remarkable for the lack of adequate bibliographic entries. ___ (qds, “holy,” 3:887) is a perfect example (cf. also 3:1062; 4:19, 377). A thorough acquaintance with the dictionary results in an awareness of which contributors are dependable in supplying a bulky bibliography and which contributors skimp on bibliography. One index missing from NIDOTTE is an index of contributors that would identify all of the entries written by any one contributor. Such an index would help the reader locate all contributions by a favorite scholar and would enable a comparative study of all materials produced by one contributor.


A very helpful list of the different Hebrew terms for various kinds of vessels or containers appears in the entry on ___ (kly, “vessel,” 2:654-56). The
topical entry for “Offerings and Sacrifices” (4:996-1022) is outstanding both in its discussion and in the summarizing chart (4:1020-21). An otherwise well-written entry about “forgiveness” (____, slh, 3:259-64) is marred by an apparent Documentarian stance claiming that the term “occurs almost exclusively in exilic and postexilic literature” (3:263).

One of the advantages of so many entries by so many different contributors is that the reader, with the help of the excellent indexes, can eventually gather information from one entry that was lacking in another related entry. One example would be the failure of the entry on “flesh” (____, b_r) to commit to any interpretation of Job 19:26 (1:778). The entry on (hýh, “see, perceive, behold”), however, provides a more satisfying discussion of the problem (2:57-58).

Lexical entries, as in all dictionaries of this type, vary in quality, depth, and length. For a dictionary of OT theology, it was disappointing to find such a brief and shallow treatment of the Hebrew word for “God” (____ R, ’l_hîm, 1:405-6). The bibliography for this entry is even more stingy—only one reference (to another dictionary). ____ R occurs over 2,500 times in the OT. When its entry is compared, for example, with nearly six pages of entry (including almost a full page of bibliography) for “betroth” (____ R, ’r_) with its 11 occurrences (1:526-31), the imbalance is all too obvious. Such entries fail to live up to the high standards established in “The Guide” for providing a significant theological resource.

A few other omissions deserve a brief citation. In the entry for (byn), there is no reference to the significant semantic and theological occurrence of the verb in Ps 19:13, where it is used with reference to discerning error or secret faults (1:652-53). Discussion of “son” (____ b_n) could be improved with a greater discussion of the use of the term in wisdom literature (1:671-77). The entry on “live, life” (____, hyh, 2:108-13) contains no discussion of the use of the word in Gen 3:20-22, no reference to or discussion of Ps 133:3’s mention of “eternal life,” and an inadequate discussion of the equally significant Dan 12:2. Unfortunately, the entry for (‘l_m, “long time,” 3:345-51) also ignores Ps 133:3. The brief entry for “highway” (____, m_sillâ, 2:1003-4) ignores Isaiah 40:3 completely. (šwb, “repent, turn, return,” 4:55-59) should be a major entry, but is disappointingly brief in comparison to larger articles on less significant terms. Perhaps due to its brevity, the entry does not discuss Ps 19:8 (“converting?/restoring? the soul”). A discussion of the prepositions used with the verb would also be helpful.

For the present day and age, it is astounding that Eve gets such short shrift in NIDOTTE. She receives only eight lines in the “Topical Dictionary” (4:360). Treatment of the lexical aspects of her name is woeful (cf. 2:108 and 4:360).

The shortcomings found in NIDOTTE should not deter anyone from employing its volumes. The benefits far outweigh the occasional annoyances. Every serious student or teacher of the OT should include this work in his/her personal library. Only occasionally do Christians have the joyful opportunity of greeting such
a welcome contribution to OT studies. We owe a debt of thanks to all who had a part in its production.


“When the foundations are being destroyed, what shall the righteous do?” (Ps 11:3). Thus begins Gene Veith’s critique of the intellectual impact of postmodernism on culture. Unlike the plethora of contemporary “issues” books that take aim at symptomatic problems within society—issues such as political correctness, multiculturalism, decadence in art, or the capitulation of morals to the mass populace—Veith focuses on the intellectual headwater of the current flow of societal issues: the replacement of modernism with postmodernism as the dominant cultural worldview and the ramifications of such a paradigm shift to society, the arts, mass media, and religion.

Gene E. Veith, Jr. (Ph.D., University of Kansas) is Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at Concordia University–Wisconsin where he also serves as Associate Professor of English. *Postmodern Times* (1994) is the last in the Crossway Books *Turning Point* series which centers on issues impacting a Christian worldview. Veith contributed two previous essays, *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature* (1990) and *State of the Arts: Bezalel to Mapplethorpe* (1991) to the series. Other scholarly works include *Reformation Spirituality: The Religion of George Herbert* (Bucknell, n.d.), which was also his doctoral dissertation, and *Modern Fascism: Liquidating the Judeo-Christian Worldview* (Concordia, 1993).

*Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* follows a nearly identical pattern to what Francis Schaeffer referred to as “The Line of Despair” (Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1968] 15-16). Using the imagery of a staircase, Schaeffer argued that ideas in philosophy would in time make their way down to the arts. This would be passed down to mass culture, notably the media, and then to popular culture and society. The final step in the downward flow would be theology and ultimately the church. Veith takes the reader down the postmodernist staircase from the philosophic tenets of postmodernism, to its impact upon the several art mediums, to modern society and culture, and ultimately to religion and theology. His appraisal is both sobering and haunting for the church.

Unlike many philosophy texts, *Postmodern Times* is, by the author’s admission (xiii), not a technical discourse on the complexities and technicalities of postmodernism. It is a concise, easy-to-read manual that outlines first the essential
premises of postmodernist thought, and then sequentially the impact of such thought on the arts, society, and religion. The book is ideally aimed at college students who will have to deal with postmodernism within the academy. However, Christians concerned with societal trends, particularly intellectual issues, will benefit from it. Veith not only gives an accurate appraisal of postmodernism, but offers biblical responses that move beyond mere proof-texting at all levels. His section on “Deconstructing the Deconstructionists” is particularly poignant.

He draws a comparison between the fundamentalist–modernist controversies of the early part of this century, and the postmodernist–evangelical conflict that exists today. The difference, as Veith points out, is the earlier controversies had clear lines of demarcation. Christians today have largely failed to realize the extent of postmodernist incursions within their own circles. While evangelicals continue to focus on issues, limited attention is being drawn to the worldviews that give forth these issues. Postmodernism is not only an intellectual issue found in the university or the bohemian coffee house; it is found within our own homes by way of mass media, in the shopping malls we frequent, in the popular literature we read, and most tragically, within our own churches. The analogy of treating the “symptom” rather than the disease would seem particularly appropriate when discussing postmodernism and the outflow of this philosophy. Tragically, Christians have failed to recognize postmodernism as the dangerous philosophy it is, assuming it is only an intellectual problem for a few heady intellectuals or academics.

Thinking Christians will be well-served by this fine work. Though not a technical book, it offers a clear and concise analysis with a biblical rejoinder. Veith’s question, “When the foundations are being destroyed, what shall the righteous do?,” is answered in the next verse, “The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD is on His heavenly throne.” Christians have hope because of the existence of a sovereign God who is there and He is not silent. Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture is a welcome and much needed critique of a movement that will impact our society into the next millennium.


In the preface to the book, Dr. White states the purpose of Rethinking the Church: “It is the radical redesign of the church processes for dramatic improvement in the fulfillment of the church’s purposes and mission. . . . It is not about asking ‘How do I do this better?’ as much as it is about asking, ‘Why do I do this at all?’” (10-11).

The structure of the book follows an outline asking the reader to rethink the
basic purposes of the church. Seven chapters revolve around the theme of rethinking the church:

1. Rethinking the Foundational Questions
2. Rethinking Evangelism
3. Rethinking Discipleship
4. Rethinking Ministry
5. Rethinking Worship
6. Rethinking Structure
7. Rethinking Community.

John Emery White is the founding and senior pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. He also is visiting professor at several Southern Baptist seminaries and appears to be a voice for the Southern Baptist Convention. Dr. White is well read and has included unusually extensive references to other works for a book of this size. The select bibliography lists a number of helps for those interested in church renewal.

The work is commendable for the ease of style with which the author communicates. The ideas are clearly and persuasively presented. There is also a passionate plea for the salvation of the lost and the harnessing of the church’s resources to accomplish this task. There is also a passion to do church the right way (versus the Southern Baptist way). This book awakens stagnant and dying churches or at least calls them to take notice.

In all, however, the work is a clone or a condensation of the philosophies of Bill Hybels and Rick Warren. Hybelism, with some modifications, bleeds through most of the chapters. The section on evangelism ends with a dear saint saying, “So if rock ‘n’ roll is what it takes to get people back to church, all I’ve got to say is . . . ‘Let’s Boogie!’ . . . Besides the church doesn’t exist for my needs. It exists to win the world” (52). To which Dr. White adds, “That is rethinking the church” (52).

The church exists to glorify God as its primary purpose. Evangelism and the edification of believers is the means to that end. The author would help the readers by reminding them of this overarching purpose.