

## EVANGELICALS AND CATHOLICS TOGETHER<sup>1</sup>

John F. MacArthur, Jr.  
President and Professor of Pastoral Ministries

*A recent document entitled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," signed by a number of prominent evangelicals, has neglected the wide doctrinal breach that separates evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism. It declares the unity of the two participating groups, emphasizes their common faith, allows for doctrinal differences, but states that the two nevertheless have a common mission. A fatal flaw in the document is its assumption that a common mission is possible in spite of the doctrinal differences. The alleged common mission is in effect a contradiction of the truths treasured among evangelicals. Reasons given by evangelical signers of the agreement are hollow and unconvincing. The statement in effect reverses what the Protestant Reformation advocated regarding sola Scriptura and sola fide. The position of the Reformers regarding justification, which was quite biblical, was pronounced as anathema by the Roman Catholic Council of Trent in 1547. Other essential biblical doctrines have been denied by Roman Catholic pronouncements, even recent ones. Unity with Roman Catholicism is not a worthy goal if it means sacrificing the truth.*

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March 29, 1994 saw a development that some have touted as the most significant development in Protestant-Catholic relations since the dawn of the Reformation. A document titled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium" was published with a list of more than thirty signatories—including well-known evangelicals Pat Robertson, J. I. Packer, Os Guinness, and Bill Bright. They were joined by leading Catholics such as John Cardinal O'Connor, Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, and Catholic scholar Peter Kreeft.

A team of fifteen participants led by Richard John Neuhaus and Charles Colson drafted the twenty-five-page document. Neuhaus is a former

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<sup>1</sup>The source of this essay is the volume entitled *Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994). It is adapted and used here by permission.

Lutheran minister who converted to Catholicism in 1990 and has since been ordained to the priesthood. Like Colson, he is an influential author and speaker.

Colson explained that "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" resulted from a series of meetings sponsored by Neuhaus a few years ago in New York. The original purpose of the meetings was to discuss tensions in Latin America between Protestant missionaries and Catholic officials. "In some countries the Catholic Church was using political power to suppress Protestant evangelistic efforts; Protestant missionaries were being persecuted for their faith," Colson said. "On the other side, some evangelicals were promoting the gospel by calling the Catholic Church the 'whore of Babylon;' the Pope, the 'antichrist,' and the like."<sup>2</sup>

Colson says he and others at the meetings "were moved by the words of our Lord, calling us to be one with one another as He is one with us and with the Father, in order that the world might know, as Jesus prayed, that 'Thou didst send me.'" Colson added, "We were agreed that the scripture makes the unity of true Christians an essential—a prerequisite for Christian evangelism."<sup>3</sup>

The lengthy statement of accord that resulted has been praised in both the secular and Christian press as a landmark ecumenical agreement. Especially notable is the fact that the Catholics who signed are not from the liberal wing of Catholicism. Signatories on both sides are conservatives, many of whom are active in the pro-life movement and other right-wing political causes. Historically, evangelicals and conservative Catholics have opposed ecumenical efforts.

An article in *Christianity Today* praised the accord for bringing conservatives into the ecumenical movement: "For too long, ecumenism has been left to Left-leaning Catholics and mainline Protestants. For that reason alone, evangelicals should applaud this effort and rejoice in the progress it represents."<sup>4</sup>

But does this new accord really represent progress, or are the essentials of the gospel being relegated to secondary status? Is the spirit of the Reformation quite dead? Should we now rejoice to see conservative evangelicals pursuing ecumenical union with Roman Catholicism?

The list of Protestant signatories to the document is certainly impres-

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<sup>2</sup>"Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Comments from Chuck Colson and Prison Fellowship Ministries," news release from Prison Fellowship dated 15 June 1994.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Timothy George, "Catholics and Evangelicals in the Trenches," *Christianity Today* 38/6 (May 16, 1994) 16.

sive. Some of these are men who have given their lives to proclaiming and defending Reformation theology. J. I. Packer's work is well known through his many valuable books. His book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, in print for several decades, has introduced multiplied thousands to the Reformed emphasis on divine sovereignty. He has capably defended the key Reformation doctrine of justification by faith in several of his books. His book *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* is an able defense of the authority of Scripture. Few in our generation have been more effective advocates of Reformation theology than Packer.

Charles Colson is one of evangelicalism's most capable writers. Many of the recurring motifs in his writings over the years sound very much like echoes of Reformation themes—the sovereignty of God, the lordship of Christ, and the authority of Scripture. In fact, several of the teachers whom Colson himself names as his mentors are men whose ministries are closely aligned with the ideals and objectives of the Protestant Reformation.

Both of these men surely understand the gulf that divides Roman Catholicism from the evangelical faith. It is not a philosophical or political difference, but a theological one. And it is not a matter of trivia. The key difference between evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism is a difference over the *gospel*. The issues that separated the Reformers from the Roman Catholic Church go to the heart of what evangelicals believe about salvation.

Many people assume that with signatures from men of this stature on it, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" must be a trustworthy document, not a compromise of Reformation distinctives. But is that a safe assumption to make?

"Evangelicals and Catholics Together" is an object lesson on the importance of biblical discernment. But it is much, much more than that. As the pressure mounts for evangelicals to succeed in the political realm and fight for cultural morality, they capitulate to the new ecumenism. This may become one of the most hotly contested issues of the decade. The future of evangelicalism may hang in the balance.

#### WHAT DOES THE DOCUMENT SAY?

"Evangelicals and Catholics Together" is a lengthy document. Unfortunately, it is impossible to reproduce the entire text here. But here are some of the highlights:

##### *A Declaration of Unity*

The document begins with this: "We are Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics who have been led through prayer, study, and discussion to

common convictions about Christian faith and mission. This statement cannot speak officially for our communities. It does intend to speak responsibly from our communities and to our communities."<sup>5</sup>

Later in the Introduction, the document states, "As Christ is one, so the Christian mission is one. That one mission can and should be advanced in diverse ways. Legitimate diversity, however, should not be confused with existing divisions between Christians that obscure the one Christ and hinder the one mission" (2).

"Visible unity" is the stated goal (2). The document quotes John 17:21, where the Lord Jesus prayed "that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me." Then this follows: "We together, Evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples" (2).

At this point the document's drafters are very explicit about who they believe is included in Christ's prayer for unity: "The one Christ and one mission includes many other Christians, notably the Eastern Orthodox and those Protestants not commonly identified as Evangelical. All Christians are encompassed in the prayer, 'May they all be one'" (2).

The section that follows has the heading "We Affirm Together." It includes this:

All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ. Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have not chosen one another, just as we have not chosen Christ. He has chosen us, and he has chosen us to be his together. (John 15) However imperfect our communion with one another, we recognize that there is but one church of Christ. There is one church because there is one Christ and the Church is his body. However difficult the way, we recognize that we are called by God to a fuller realization of our unity in the body of Christ (5).

Similar declarations of unity—and appeals for more visible manifestations of unity—are included in every section of the document.

### *A Statement of Common Faith*

The document highlights areas of common faith between

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<sup>5</sup>"Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium" (29 March 1994) 1. All page numbers refer to the 25-page version of the document as originally distributed by Prison Fellowship. Hereafter quotations from this document are cited in parentheses with a page number only.

Catholics and evangelicals. It affirms the lordship of Christ as "the first and final affirmation that Christians make about all of reality" (5). It identifies Christ as "the One sent by God to be Lord and Savior of all" (5). It declares that the Scriptures are divinely inspired and infallible (6). And it affirms the Apostles' Creed "as an accurate statement of Scriptural truth" (6). The Apostles' Creed is reproduced in its entirety as a part of the document.

The pact also includes this statement about salvation:

We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ. Living faith is active in love that is nothing less than the love of Christ, for we together say with Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (Galatians 2) (5).

Although that statement has been celebrated as a remarkable concession on the Catholic participants' part, it actually says nothing that has not been affirmed by the Catholic Church since the time of the Reformation, as will be shown below. The real issue under debate between Roman Catholicism and historic evangelicalism—justification by faith *alone*—is carefully avoided throughout "Evangelicals and Catholics Together."

#### *A Statement of Doctrinal Differences*

Those who drafted the accord did acknowledge other important areas of doctrinal difference between Roman Catholicism and evangelicalism. Further, they correctly observed that real unity cannot be achieved merely by glossing over Catholic-evangelical differences. In fact, near the end of the Introduction, they state, "We reject any appearance of harmony that is purchased at the price of truth" (4).

In a section titled "We Search Together," they said, "We do not presume to suggest that we can resolve the deep and long-standing differences between Evangelicals and Catholics. Indeed these differences may never be resolved short of the Kingdom Come" (9).

How are differences to be addressed? They "must be tested in disciplined and sustained conversation. In this connection we warmly commend and encourage the formal theological dialogues of recent years between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals" (9).

The document continues,

We note some of the differences and disagreements that must be addressed more fully and candidly in order to strengthen between us a relationship of trust in obedience to truth. Among points of difference in doctrine, worship, practice, and piety that are frequently thought to divide us are these:

- The church as an integral part of the Gospel, or the church as a communal consequence of the Gospel.
  - The church as visible communion or invisible fellowship of true believers.
  - The sole authority of Scripture (*sola Scriptura*) or Scripture as authoritatively interpreted in the church.
  - The "soul freedom" of the individual Christian or the Magisterium (teaching authority) of the community.
  - The church as local congregation or universal communion.
  - Ministry ordered in apostolic succession or the priesthood of all believers.
  - The Lord's Supper as eucharistic sacrifice or memorial meal.
  - Remembrance of Mary and the saints or devotion to Mary and the saints.
  - Baptism as sacrament of regeneration or testimony to regeneration.
- This account of differences is by no means complete (9-10).

The document even acknowledges the solemn importance of many Catholic-evangelical differences. The signers expressly confess that some of the differences are so profound that they impinge on the Gospel itself:

On these questions, and other questions implied by them, Evangelicals hold that the Catholic Church has gone beyond Scripture, adding teachings and practices that detract from or compromise the Gospel of God's saving grace in Christ. Catholics, in turn, hold that such teachings and practices are grounded in Scripture and belong to the fullness of God's revelation. Their rejection, Catholics say, results in a truncated and reduced understanding of the Christian reality (10-11).

### *A Mandate for Common Mission*

But the theme that runs like a thread through "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" is identified by the document's subtitle: "The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." The primary motivation behind the accord is the desire to eradicate differences that supposedly "obscure the one Christ and hinder the one mission" (2). How this can be done without *resolving* doctrinal matters that affect the Gospel is not explained.

But the gospel is clearly *not* the driving concern of "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." The "one mission" envisioned by the accord places temporal goals alongside—and in effect ahead of—eternal ones. Much of the document focuses on "the right ordering of society" (12). The longest section, "We Contend Together," states that "politics, law, and culture must be secured by moral truth" (12). The mandate they assume is cultural and temporal, not spiritual and eternal.

Therefore the catalog of issues which the document's signers "contend together" for is made up of religious freedom, right-to-life issues, moral education, parental choice in education, anti-obscenity laws, human equality, a free-market economy, esteem for Western culture, pro-family legislation, and a responsible foreign policy.

Another section, "We Witness Together," deals with evangelism. No attempt is made to outline the *content* of the Gospel message. Indeed, since the document already lists key elements of the Gospel as points of disagreement, consensus on this would seem utterly impossible. Nevertheless, as if oblivious to the insurmountable difficulty this poses, the document unequivocally calls for evangelicals and Catholics to demonstrate "the evidence of love" toward one another that "is an integral part of [our] Christian witness" (20).

Beyond that, it gives no positive guidelines for *how* Catholics and evangelicals can "witness together." Instead, the primary concern of this entire section on evangelism is to "condemn the practice of recruiting people from another community for the purposes of denominational or institutional aggrandizement" (22).

The document states unequivocally that our witness is *not* toward people already in the "Christian community." That is, evangelicals are not supposed to proselytize active Roman Catholics (22-23). This is labeled "sheep stealing" (22). Signers of the document believe that such "attempt[s] to win 'converts' from one another's folds . . . undermine the Christian Mission" (20). Besides, proselytizing one another is deemed utterly unnecessary, because "we as Evangelicals and Catholics affirm that opportunity and means for growth in Christian discipleship are available in our several communities" (22).

Much of the controversy regarding "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" stems from this statement:

"In view of the large number of non-Christians in the world and the enormous challenge of our common evangelistic task, it is neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources for one Christian

community to proselytize among active adherents of another Christian community" (22-23).

### THE FATAL FLAW

But it is another statement in the section "We Witness Together" that betrays the document's fundamental weakness:

There are, then, differences between us that cannot be resolved here. But on this we are resolved: All authentic witness must be aimed at conversion to God in Christ by the power of the Spirit. Those converted—whether understood as having received the new birth for the first time or as *having experienced the reawakening of the new birth originally bestowed in the sacrament of baptism*—must be given full freedom and respect as they discern and decide the community in which they will live their new life in Christ (24, emphasis added).

The document acknowledges "a major difference in our understanding of the relationship between baptism and the new birth in Christ. For Catholics, all who are validly baptized are born again and are truly, however imperfectly, in communion with Christ" (23). But how "major" is this difference? Signers of the accord evidently did not feel it was anything fundamental. "*There are,*" after all, "*different ways of being Christian*" (22, emphasis added). The temporal, cultural, political issues are so compelling that the Gospel must be ameliorated to whatever degree necessary to achieve a superficial "Christian" morality.

So people who believe they are "born again" because they were baptized Catholic "must be given full freedom and respect" to remain Catholic. That is, they should not be approached by evangelicals and told that no amount of sacraments or good works can make them acceptable to God.

Having declined to address the profound difference between the evangelical message of justification by faith *alone* and the Roman Catholic Gospel of faith plus works, the document here simply treats that difference as an optional matter of preference.

It is not. Catholicism places undue stress on human works. Catholic doctrine denies that God "justifies the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5) without first *making* them godly. Good works therefore become the ground of justification. And Scripture says that relegates people to an eternal reward that is reckoned not of grace, but of debt (v. 4). As thousands of former Catholics will testify, Roman Catholic doctrine

and liturgy obscure the essential truth that we are saved by grace through faith and not by our own works (Eph. 2:8-9). It has trapped millions of Catholics in a system of superstition and religious ritual that insulates them from the glorious liberty of the true Gospel of Christ.

Adding works to faith as the ground of justification is precisely the teaching Paul condemned as "a different gospel" (cf. 2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6). It nullifies the grace of God. If meritorious righteousness can be earned through the sacraments, "then Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21). "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law" (Rom. 3:28).

Furthermore, justification by faith *plus* works was exactly the error that condemned Israel: "Pursuing a law of righteousness, [they] did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works" (Rom. 9:31-32). "For not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). Throughout Scripture teaches that "a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus . . . since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified" (Gal. 2:16).

Yet ignoring the gravity of this defect in the Roman Catholic system, evangelical signers of the document in effect pledge that none of their evangelistic work will ever be aimed at guiding Catholic converts out of Roman Catholicism—with its daily sacrifices, meritorious sacraments, confessional booths, rosary beads, fear of purgatory, and prayers to Mary and the saints. The document insists that "opportunity and means for growth in Christian discipleship are available" in the Catholic Church (22). Therefore winning a Catholic to the evangelical faith is nothing but "sheep stealing"—a sin against the body of Christ.

Having declared all active Catholics "brothers and sisters in Christ," and having given *de facto* approval to baptismal regeneration and justification by faith plus works, the accord has no choice but to pronounce Catholic Church members off limits for evangelism.

### A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION?

Signers of the document nonetheless hailed what they had done "as historic." Some applauded it as a major step toward healing the breach caused by the Reformation. Catholic signatories said the document had even circulated inside the Vatican, where it was

received with great enthusiasm. *Christianity Today* ran an editorial welcoming the new ecumenism as a reflection of the changing pattern of American church life. Two major agency heads from the Southern Baptist Convention were signatories to the document. One of them wrote me to say this accord fulfills the whole intent of the Reformation!

But not all evangelicals responded so warmly. Many see the document as confusing, misleading. Some have said it sells out the Gospel. Evangelicals who are former Catholics have called the accord a betrayal. Missionaries taking the Gospel to predominantly Roman Catholic nations read it as an attack on their ministries. Evangelicals in Latin America fear that the pact will be used as a weapon against them.

Even some Catholics have taken exception. Christians United for Reformation (CURE) featured on their weekly radio broadcast a dialogue with a leading Catholic apologist who agreed with CURE's assessment: the document muddles and simply sweeps aside the important doctrinal differences that prompted the Reformation. CURE scrambled to produce an alternative document that would affirm Catholic-evangelical cobelligence on moral and political issues without validating Roman Catholicism as authentic Christianity.

I am convinced that "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" is a step in exactly the *wrong* direction. It contradicts the very truths it professes to stand for. It expresses a wish for unity but threatens to split the evangelical community. It claims to reject the appearance of harmony purchased at the price of truth, but it treats precious truths thousands have died for as if they were of negligible importance. It calls for the removal of tensions that supposedly hinder the testimony of the Gospel, then renders the Gospel moot by suggesting that perhaps "the sacrament of baptism" is efficacious for spiritual regeneration. It condemns moral relativism and nihilism, yet it attacks the very foundation of absolute truth by implying that all forms of "Christianity" are equally valid. It calls for a clearer witness, but it denigrates evangelism among active Catholics as "sheep stealing"—while unduly elevating the importance of social and political issues. It is, frankly, an assault *against* evangelism. It suggests that "the right ordering of society" takes precedence over discerning between true Christianity and "a different gospel." It sets aside personal salvation in favor of national morality. It is nothing but the old ecumenism with moral conservatism rather than radical politics as its real agenda.

In an age already prone to reckless faith and lacking in biblical

discernment, this accord seems fraught with potential mischief. It blurs doctrinal distinctives and therefore inflames the very worst tendencies of modern religion. It falls lock-step into line with our culture's minimalist approach to truth issues. Far from signaling "progress," it may mark the low point of post-Reformation evangelicalism.

That may seem like a harsh judgment of a document endorsed by so many stellar evangelicals. But quite honestly, one of the most distressing aspects of "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" is that men of such caliber would lend their support to an effort that camouflages the lethal errors of the Roman Catholic system. Having studied both the document and the different rationales for signing given by various signatories, I am convinced that no matter how noble the motives, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" is a grave mistake, and it poses profound dangers for the future of evangelicalism.

#### WHY WOULD KNOWLEDGEABLE EVANGELICALS SIGN THIS ACCORD?

I wrote to the men I know personally who signed the accord and asked them to explain their position. Most responded with very gracious letters. Virtually all who replied explained that their signatures on the document do not necessarily indicate *unqualified* support, and they admitted they have concerns about the document. Most said they signed in spite of concerns because they wanted to express support for evangelical-Catholic alliances against social and moral ills. Some said they hoped the document would open the door for more dialogue on the pivotal doctrinal issues.

I must confess that I find all such explanations unsatisfying, because both the public perception of the accord and the language of the document itself send the signal that evangelicals now accept Roman Catholicism as authentic Christianity. That grants an undeserved legitimacy to Roman Catholic doctrine.

Moreover, the document confuses Christendom with the true church. It makes the unwarranted and unbiblical assumption that every breach of unity between professing Christians wounds the body of Christ and violates the unity Christ prayed for. The reality is that the true body of Christ is far less inclusive than the document implies. The document wants to include "many other Christians, notably the Eastern Orthodox and those Protestants not commonly identified as Evangelical." Who could this latter group include besides theological

liberals? Yet Eastern Orthodoxy and most Protestant liberals would side with Rome in rejecting justification by faith alone. Having abandoned the true faith for "another gospel," these groups are not entitled to be embraced as members of Christ's body (Gal. 1:9).<sup>6</sup>

The evangelical signers of the document—particularly those who have studied Reformation theology—surely are aware that official Roman Catholic doctrine is antithetical to the simple Gospel of grace. So why would theologically informed evangelical leaders sign a document like this? Here is what some of them say.

One writes,

This document is not about theology or doctrine. From the outset we admit that there are doctrinal differences that are irreconcilable and we specifically identify many of these. This document is about religious liberty (i.e., the right of all Christians to share their faith without interference from church or state), evangelism and missions (e.g., not only the right but the responsibility under the Great Commission of all Christians to share Christ with all nations and all people), and the need all Christians have to cooperate, without compromise, in addressing critical moral and social issues, such as abortion, pornography, violence, racism, and other such issues.

In our battle for that which is good and godly, we must stand with those who will stand at all.<sup>7</sup>

Another signer wrote,

Why did I sign the recent statement 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium'? I did so because the document—though by no means perfect—presents an unusually strong combination of basic Christian truth and timely Chris-

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<sup>6</sup>This is by no means meant to imply that none who identify with these groups are truly saved. There are undoubtedly people within Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy who really do trust Jesus Christ alone for salvation without realizing that their evangelical faith is a wholesale departure from official Catholic and Orthodox Church doctrines. Yet the Catholic Church's anathemas against anyone who affirms justification *sola fide* (see section below on "The Reformers' firm stance on justification") amounts to an automatic excommunication of all who sincerely trust in Christ alone for salvation. Such people—though they may call themselves Catholic—are officially sentenced by Rome to eternal damnation. Hence the expression "evangelical Catholic" is something of a contradiction in terms.

<sup>7</sup>Most quotations from the document's signatories are from personal letters. Their comments are cited anonymously unless quoted from published sources.

tian response to the modern world.

Another suggested,

To non-Christians and the non-believing world who know nothing about Christianity and who may think Protestants and Catholics worship a different God, this affirmation should be a great testimony to the Lordship of Christ and the truth of His Word.

And one well-respected evangelical leader wrote,

It was and is in harmony with the two-pronged approach to Rome that I have pursued for three decades: maximizing fellowship, cooperation, and cobelligence with Roman Catholics on the ground, at grass roots level, while maintaining the familiar polemic against the Roman church and system as such. The document is not official, it is ad hoc and informal, and is designed to lead honest cobelligence against sin and evil in evangelism and community concerns.

Here are some other reasons evangelical signers give to justify their support for the document. All of these are taken verbatim from letters these men wrote or papers they have circulated:

- I think the document is correct in saying that the scandal of conflict between Christians often has overwhelmed the scandal of the cross.
- I also thought the document's stand for life (especially in protest against abortion) and against the "relativism, anti-intellectualism, and nihilism" that are rampant today are exactly the stands that all Christians should be taking.
- The document is clear about what it is *not* trying to do. It is not put forth as an anticipation of church union, it does not hide the fact that real differences continue to divide Catholics and evangelicals, and does not hide the fact that conditions outside North America are often different from those here.
- We have differences, but on the ancient creeds and the core beliefs of Christianity we stand together. Christianity is besieged on all sides—by a militant nation of Islam, by pantheists who have invaded many areas of life through the New Age Movement, and by aggressive secularism of Western life.
- If we are to reverse the surging tides of apostasy in Western

culture and resist the advancing forces of secularism, then it is absolutely vital that those of us who share conservative, biblically-based views stand together, that we make common cause. Regardless of one's Christian tradition or even past prejudices, should we not affirm John Paul II and Mother Teresa for their uncompromising and stirring defense of the sanctity of human life?

- [The document states] "All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ." Isn't "accepting Christ as Lord and Savior" what it means to be saved?
- The issue addressed is not theology. The primary issues addressed are missions, evangelism, societal concerns, and religious liberty.
- I believe the document represents the ultimate victory of the Reformation!

There, in the words of the evangelical signers themselves, is complete a list of their arguments as I can assemble. To those must be added, of course, the arguments contained in the document itself.

But all those reasons ring hollow in view of everything the agreement surrenders.

#### WHAT IS COMPROMISED BY THE AGREEMENT?

Notice that a common theme that runs through the signers' arguments is the protest that "this document is not about doctrine." After all, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" explicitly disavows any intent to seek resolution of any doctrinal differences (24). All those who signed point to the document's long list of doctrinal differences as proof that no crucial doctrine was compromised.

But the incredible naivete of that perspective is unworthy of any of the men who attached their signatures to this document. Far from safeguarding evangelical distinctives, the document relegated them all to the status of non-essentials. By expressly stating, "Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ," the document suggests that none of the differences between Catholics and evangelicals involve any doctrines of eternal significance.

Yet that was the whole point of the Reformation. Rome viewed the Reformers as apostates and excommunicated them. The Reformers became convinced that Rome's deviation from biblical doctrine was so serious that the Papal system represented false Christianity. Both

sides understood that the doctrines at stake were fundamental. "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," while acknowledging that *all* those doctrinal differences still exist, simply assumes without discussion that none of them makes the difference between authentic Christianity and "a different gospel." That assumption itself is a monumental doctrinal shift—abandoning more than four hundred years of evangelical consensus. So it is disingenuous to suggest that the document "is not about doctrine."

In fact, one might argue that the document is *against* doctrine. By downplaying or denying the importance of crucial doctrinal distinctions, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" amounts to a virtual assault against discernment. The sort of Christianity it proposes—broad fellowship based on the barest possible confession of faith—will provide a hothouse environment for reckless faith.

The *Christianity Today* editorial I mentioned earlier includes this welcome caveat: "Lest anyone be carried away by the ecumenical euphoria of the moment, it needs to be stated clearly that the Reformation was not a mistake." But quite unaccountably, the editorial also assures readers that the accord as it stands sufficiently safeguards the essential doctrines of the Reformation: "Both the formal and material principles of the Reformation—that is, the infallibility of Holy Scripture and justification by faith—are duly affirmed in this statement."<sup>8</sup>

That language may be unfamiliar to some readers, but "the formal principle" and "the material principle" are terms most students of Reformation doctrine will immediately recognize. One excellent textbook on Reformation doctrine says this: "Historians have frequently referred to the doctrine of *sola scriptura* as the *formal* principle of the Reformation, as compared to the *material* principle of *sola fide*."<sup>9</sup> The *formal* principle has to do with the form, or the essence, of the theological debate between Rome and the Reformers: the sufficiency of the Scriptures alone (*sola Scriptura*). The *material* principle defined the matter in question: whether sinners are justified by faith alone (*sola fide*) or by faith plus works.

The truth is, *Christianity Today's* endorsement notwithstanding, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" utterly compromises both the formal and the material principles of the Reformation.

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<sup>8</sup>George, "Catholics and Evangelicals" 16.

<sup>9</sup>Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988) 82. Ironically, George is also the author of the *Christianity Today* editorial.

*Sola Scriptura—the Formal Principle*

Notice that the *Christianity Today* editorial identifies the formal principle of the Reformation as "the infallibility of Holy Scripture." But the actual issue under debate in the Reformation was the *sufficiency*, not the *infallibility*, of Scripture. From the beginning of the Reformation, Catholics and Protestants have agreed on the questions of biblical inspiration and infallibility. Even in Luther's day, church officials "were in perfect agreement with him" on biblical infallibility.<sup>10</sup> What the papists objected to was Luther's doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. In Luther's own words, *sola Scriptura* means that "what is asserted without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as an opinion, but need not be believed."<sup>11</sup>

Catholicism flatly rejects that principle, adding a host of traditions and Church teachings and declaring them binding on all true believers—with the threat of eternal damnation to those who hold contradictory opinions. In Roman Catholicism, "the Word of God" encompasses not only the Bible, but also the Apocrypha, the Magisterium (the Church's authority to teach and interpret divine truth), the Pope's *ex cathedra* pronouncements, and an indefinite body of church tradition, some formalized in canon law and some not yet committed to writing. Whereas evangelical Protestants believe the Bible is the ultimate test of all truth, Roman Catholics believe *the Church* determines what is true and what is not. In effect, this makes the Church a higher authority than Scripture.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council affirm that "it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the [Catholic] Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed," but "sacred tradition [transmits] in its full purity God's word which was entrusted to the apostles."<sup>12</sup> "Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence."<sup>13</sup>

How does "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" address the issue of biblical authority? As *Christianity Today* pointed out, the document expressly affirms "that Christians are to teach and live in obedience to the divinely inspired Scriptures, which are the infallible Word of God" (6). But the document lists the question of the Bible's *sufficiency* as one of the disputed issues: "The sole authority of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) or Scripture as

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 82-83.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>12</sup>*Dei verbum*, 9 (emphasis added). All citations from the Vatican II documents are quoted from Walter M. Abbot, S. J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: America Press, 1966).

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

authoritatively interpreted in the church" (10).

The manner of framing that statement implies that the difference between evangelicals and Catholics has to do with the question of who is authorized to interpret Scripture. It implies that evangelicals allow for individuals to interpret the Bible according to their personal preferences while Catholics insist on following the hierarchy of Church authority. But that is a gross misstatement of the issue.

Evangelicals certainly believe in interpreting Scripture correctly. That is why they have creeds and doctrinal statements. But evangelicals believe that creeds, decisions of church councils, all doctrine, and even the church itself *must be judged by Scripture*—not vice versa. Scripture is to be interpreted accurately in its context by comparing it to Scripture (1 Cor 2:13; Isa 28:9-13)—certainly not according to anyone's personal whims. Scripture itself is thus the *sole binding rule of faith and practice* for all Christians. Protestant creeds and doctrinal statements simply express the churches' collective understanding of the proper interpretation of Scripture. In no sense do the creeds or pronouncements of the churches constitute an authority equal to or higher than Scripture. Scripture always takes priority over the church in the rank of authority.

Catholics, on the other hand, believe the infallible touchstone of truth is the Church itself. The Church not only infallibly determines the proper interpretation of Scripture, but also *supplements* Scripture with additional traditions and teachings. That combination of Church tradition plus the Church's interpretation of Scripture is what constitutes the binding rule of faith and practice for Catholics. *De facto*, the Church sets herself *above* Holy Scripture in rank of authority.

Therefore the real point of disagreement between evangelicals and Catholics regarding *sola Scriptura* is not the question of *who* should interpret Scripture but whether Scripture alone is a sufficient rule of faith and practice.

"Evangelicals and Catholics Together" not only misrepresents *sola Scriptura*, but it also consigns the whole issue to the status of secondary, non-essential point of disagreement. In that regard, it represents a major victory for Rome and a sorry defeat for the Reformation.

#### Sola Fide—*The Material Principle*

The other great plank in the Reformers' platform—the material principle—was justification by faith alone. *Christianity Today's* contention that *sola fide* was "duly affirmed in this statement" is mystifying. In the entire twenty-five-page document, not one reference to *sola fide* appears anywhere! Yet this is what Martin Luther called "the article of the standing or falling church." In other words, Luther believed—and the rest of the Reformers were

of one accord on this—that the test of authentic Christianity is the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Rome disagreed, declared the doctrine a damnable heresy, and pronounced a series of anathemas against anyone who dared to side with the Reformers.

It is surely significant that in "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" the issue of justification—the doctrine that launched the Reformation—is not even mentioned in the list of points of disagreement! Are the drafters of the document satisfied that evangelicals and Catholics now agree on this issue? Indeed, where justification is mentioned, it is given as a point of *agreement*: "We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ" (5).

What is wrong with that? many evangelicals will ask. So what if it leaves out the disputed word *alone*? After all, the phrase "justification by grace through faith" is certainly biblical as far as it goes. It may not be a full discourse on the doctrine of justification, but is it not really adequate? Does it not seem like theological nitpicking to insist on technical precision in an informal statement like this?

But it is *not* nitpicking to fault this statement. For five hundred years the question of whether people are justified by faith *alone* has been the main point of theological dispute between Catholics and evangelicals. Both sides have taken rather clearly defined positions on the issue. Any document that purports to bring Catholicism and evangelicalism into harmony *must* address this fundamental disagreement. The difference is so crucial that it cannot and should not merely be glossed over with ambiguous language.

In fact, it does not overstate the case to say that on the matter of justification the difference between the Roman Catholic view and that of Protestant evangelicalism is so profound as to constitute *two wholly different religions*. Error at this point is damning heresy. If one view represents authentic Christianity, the other certainly cannot. They are antithetical. There is no common ground here.

The doctrine of justification by faith has been something of a focus in my personal study for the past few years. It rose to prominence as a major point in the so-called "lordship controversy"—a debate between evangelicals about the role of good works in the Christian life. That debate was sparked by several prominent evangelicals who insisted that people can be saved by accepting Jesus as Savior—even if they choose to defer obedience to His lordship indefinitely. Justification by faith was the issue on which they staked their claim. If we are truly justified by faith *alone*, they reasoned, all good works must remain optional for Christians. That position, known as *antinomianism*, I rejected on biblical grounds.

But the lordship controversy launched me on a very profitable study of

justification by faith from both the biblical and the historical perspectives. As I read what the Reformers had to say about justification, I gained a new appreciation for their biblical thoroughness. I also began to see in a clearer light than ever before how vitally important it is to be absolutely sound on the doctrine of justification by faith. Luther did not overstate the case when he called justification the article by which the church stands or falls. A right understanding of justification is the only safe course between the Scylla of works-righteousness and the Charybdis of radical antinomianism.

### *The Reformers' Firm Stance on Justification*

The Roman Catholic Church defined its views on justification at the Council of Trent. That Council began its work in 1545 and continued for nearly twenty years. The doctrine of justification was high on the Council's list of priorities. The canons and decrees on justification were written in 1547 at the Council's sixth session.

Trent was the Catholic Church's answer to the Reformation. In 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the castle church at Wittenberg, attacking the sale of indulgences, he "cut a vein of mediæval Catholicism."<sup>14</sup> The bleeding continued for at least three decades. The Council of Trent was a desperate attempt to stanch the flow.

Philip Schaff described the work of Trent:

The decisions of the Council relate partly to doctrine, partly to discipline. The former are divided again into Decrees (*decreta*), which contain the positive statement of Roman dogma, and into short Canons (*canones*), which condemn the dissenting views with the concluding "*anathema sit*" ["let him be damned"]. The Protestant doctrines, however, are almost always stated in exaggerated form, in which they could hardly be recognized by a discriminating Protestant divine, or they are mixed up with real heresies,<sup>15</sup> which Protestants condemn as emphatically as the Church of Rome.

So rather than replying to the Reformers' teaching, Trent often attacked straw men of its own making. Bear that in mind during the discussion below regarding some of the Council's pronouncements about justification. Sometimes the view they condemn is merely a caricature of Reformation teaching.

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<sup>14</sup>Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1910) 7:160.

<sup>15</sup>Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 1:94.

On the other hand, many of Trent's decrees sound quite evangelical. For example, the Council of Trent explicitly denied that anyone can be justified by good works apart from grace: "If anyone says that man may be justified before God by his own works . . . without the grace of God through Jesus Christ—let him be anathema" (*Trent*, sess. 6, canon 1).<sup>16</sup>

The council also affirmed that "God justifies sinners by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (*Trent*, sess. 6, chap 6) and that "we are said to be justified by faith because faith is the beginning of human salvation" (*Trent*, sess. 6, chap. 8). It also stated that the *meritorious* cause of justification is "our Lord Jesus Christ, who . . . merited justification for us by His most holy passion on the wood of the cross, and made satisfaction for us unto God the Father" (*Trent*, sess. 6, chap. 7).

So when the recent "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" document stated that "we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ," *it was saying nothing that the Roman Catholic Church has not consistently affirmed for the past 450 years.*

If that is true, why did the Reformers object so strenuously to the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine of justification? The dispute had to do with the very nature of justification. The Reformers said justification is an act of God whereby the believing sinner is *declared* righteous. The Council of Trent argued that justification is a process that actually *makes* the sinner righteous. Here is Trent's definition: "[Justification is] Not remission of sins merely, but *also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man*, through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts by which an unrighteous man *becomes righteous*" (*Trent*, sess. 6, chap. 7, emphasis added).

Certainly all true evangelicals believe that the believer's "inward man" is renewed and sanctified in the salvation process. But, as we shall see momentarily, evangelicals are careful to distinguish between *justification* and *sanctification*. The distinction must be drawn in order to make clear that it is Christ's righteousness imputed to us—not something in the "inward man"—not even an infusion of divine grace—that makes us acceptable to God. *This is the essential theological difference that underlies every other point of disagreement between Catholicism and evangelicalism.* Only if this issue is settled can there ever be any real spiritual unity between Rome and evangelicals.

According to Trent, justification is a lifelong process (*Trent*, sess. 6, chap. 10). Perseverance is not guaranteed (*Trent*, sess. 6, chap. 13); but "those who, by sin, have fallen from the received grace of justification may be again

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<sup>16</sup>Quotations from the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent are cited in parentheses as *Trent*.

justified . . . through the sacrament of penance" (*Trent*, sess. 6, chap. 14). The council also stated that justification must be preserved through good works, which are energized by the grace of God infused into the believer (*Trent*, sess. 6, chap. 16).

What consistently comes through in Trent's pronouncements is a clear and definite repudiation of the doctrine of justification by faith *alone*. According to the Council, "unless hope and love are *added to faith*, it neither unites a man perfectly with Christ nor makes him a living member of His body" (*Trent*, sess. 6, chap. 7, emphasis added). In the Catholic scheme, justification means that God's grace pours forth into the sinner's heart, making the person progressively more righteous. It then becomes the sinner's responsibility to preserve and increase that grace by various good works. The system mixes works with grace, so that justification is not *sola fide*, by faith alone. And it makes justification an ongoing process, never an accomplished fact.

Here are the Council of Trent's own words:

- If anyone says that *by faith alone* the sinner is justified, so as to mean that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification . . . let him be anathema (*Trent*, sess. 6, canon 9).
- If anyone says that men are justified either by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ alone, or by the remission of sins alone, to the exclusion of the grace and love that is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Spirit and is inherent in them; or even that the grace by which we are justified is only the favor of God—let him be anathema (*Trent*, sess. 6, canon 11).
- If anyone says that the righteousness received is not preserved and also not increased before God *by good works*, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not a *cause* of its increase, let him be anathema (*Trent*, sess. 6, canon 24).
- If anyone says that the guilt is remitted to every penitent sinner after the grace of justification has been received, and that the debt of eternal punishment is so blotted out that there remains no debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened—let him be anathema (*Trent*, sess. 6, canon 30).
- If anyone says that the Catholic doctrine of justification set forth in this decree by this holy Synod derogates in any way the glory of God or the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and not rather that the truth of our faith and the glory of God and of Jesus Christ are rendered more illustrious—let him be anathema (*Trent*, sess. 6, canon 33).

Trent also declared that the *instrumental* cause of justification (the

means by which it is obtained) is not faith, but "the sacrament of baptism" (*Trent*, sess. 6, chap. 7). The Council also said justification is forfeited whenever the believer commits a mortal sin (*Trent*, sess. 6, chap. 15)—clearly making justification contingent on human works. So according to Trent, justification is neither procured nor maintained through faith; works are necessary both to begin and to continue the process.

The Reformers objected to Trent's pronouncements solely on biblical grounds. They filled many thick volumes with Scriptural proofs against Rome's position. But since the Council of Trent's rulings were deemed infallible and those who questioned them threatened by the Church with eternal damnation, the breach between Rome and the Reformers was in effect made irreparable.

### *The Biblical Doctrine of Justification*

The Reformers' objections to the Catholic Church's stance on justification may be summed up in four biblical arguments.

First, Scripture presents justification as *instantaneous, not gradual*. Contrasting the proud Pharisee with the broken, repentant tax-gatherer who smote his breast and prayed humbly for divine mercy, Jesus Himself said that the tax-gatherer "went down to his house justified" (Luke 18:14). His justification was instantaneous, complete before he performed any work, based solely on his repentant faith. Jesus also said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). Eternal life is the present possession of all who *believe*—and by definition eternal life cannot be lost. The one who believes immediately passes from spiritual death to eternal life, because that person is instantaneously justified. "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). A few verses later we read, "Having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him" (v. 9). Those verses put justification for the believer in the past tense, not the present or the future. Justification occurs in an instant. At the first moment of faith it is already an accomplished fact: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

Second, justification means the sinner is *declared righteousness, not actually made righteous*. This goes hand in hand with the fact that justification is instantaneous. There is no process to be performed. Justification is a purely forensic reality, a declaration God makes about

the sinner. Justification takes place in the court of God, not in the sinner's soul. It is an objective fact, not a subjective phenomenon. It changes the sinner's status, not his nature. Certainly at the moment of conversion the sinner's nature *is* changed miraculously; old things pass away and all things are made new (2 Cor 5:17). But the actual changes that occur in the believer have to do with *regeneration* and *sanctification*, not justification. Again, it is absolutely vital to keep these ideas separate. Regeneration is a spiritual quickening in which the sinner is born again with a new heart (Ezek 36:26; John 3:3); sanctification is a lifelong process whereby the believer is conformed to the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). But *justification* is an immediate decree, a divine "not guilty" verdict on behalf of the sinner. This is inherent in the meaning of the word *justify*. The word itself (*dikaio* in the Greek) means "to declare righteous"; the sense it conveys is the exact opposite of the word *condemn*.

Third, the Bible teaches that justification means righteousness is *imputed, not infused*. Righteousness is "reckoned," or credited to the account of those who believe (Rom 4:3-25). They stand justified before God not because of their own righteousness, but because of a perfect righteousness outside themselves that is reckoned to them by faith (Phil 3:9). Where does that perfect righteousness come from? It is God's own righteousness (Rom 10:3), and it is ours in the person of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:30; cf. Jer 23:6, 33:16). We are united to Christ by faith—we are "in Christ"—and therefore accepted by God in His beloved Son (Eph 1:6-7). Christ's own perfect righteousness is credited to our personal account (Rom 5:17, 19), just as the full guilt of our sin was imputed to Him. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). So once again we see that the ground on which we stand before God is the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to us by faith, and not (as the Catholic Church teaches) the imperfect righteousness that is wrought by God's grace infused into us. The point is that the only merit God accepts for salvation is that of Jesus Christ; nothing we can ever do could earn God's favor or add anything to the merit of Christ.

Finally, Scripture clearly teaches that we are justified *by faith alone, not by faith plus works*. "If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Rom 11:6). Contrast that with Trent's ruling:

If anyone says that by the said sacraments of the New Law<sup>17</sup> grace is not conferred through the act performed [*ex opere operato*, lit., "the work worked"] but [says] that faith alone in the divine promises is sufficient for the obtaining of grace, let him be anathema" (*Trent*, sess. 7, canon 8).

In other words, grace is received not by faith but through works—specifically, through the Roman Catholic sacraments.

But again, the Bible says, "By grace you have been saved *through faith*; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; *not as a result of works*, that no one should boast" (Eph 2:8-9, emphasis added). The only correct answer to the question "What must I do to be saved?" is the one the Bible gives: "*Believe* in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31).

For what does the Scripture say? "And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But *to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness*, just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom *God reckons righteousness apart from works*" (Rom 4:3-6, emphasis added).

None of this renders good works, obedience, or sanctification optional in Christian living, as I have argued at length in two other books.<sup>18</sup> But it does mean emphatically that works play no role in justification. Works of righteousness and religious ritual can never make anyone acceptable to God. For that, we must depend wholly by faith on the merit of the Lord Jesus. Any system that mingles works with grace is "a different gospel" (Gal 1:6), a distorted message that is anathematized (v. 9)—not by a council of medieval bishops, but by the very Word of God that cannot be broken.

### *Other Essentials of the Faith*

"Evangelicals and Catholics Together" compromises and obfuscates several other essential evangelical truths. Notice, for example, that fourth from the end in the document's list of "differences and disagreements" is this:

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<sup>17</sup>"New Law" refers to the Council of Trent's canons and decrees on the sacraments. The seventh session established seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, order, and matrimony—then pronounced the usual anathema on anyone who says that there are more or less than these seven sacraments (*Trent*, sess. 7, canon 1).

<sup>18</sup>*The Gospel According to Jesus*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word, 1992) esp. 90-121, 242-43.

"The Lord's Supper as eucharistic sacrifice or memorial meal" (10). Here it treats another fundamental doctrine as though it were a peripheral matter.

Roman Catholicism teaches that the communion wafer is transformed through a miracle into the literal body of Christ and the wine is transformed into the literal blood of Christ. Trent stated, "The whole Christ is contained under each form of the communion elements" (*Trent*, sess. 13, canon 3). Therefore, whoever participates in the Mass actually eats the flesh of Jesus Christ, and the priests who partake of the wine actually drink His blood. This is the doctrine known as *transubstantiation*.

Its corollary is the teaching that every time Mass is said, the sacrifice of Christ is offered over again. "A true and real sacrifice" is offered to God in the Mass and "Christ is given to us to eat" (*Trent*, sess. 22, canon 1). Rome believes that the "Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again."<sup>19</sup>

That nullifies the crucial biblical truth that

we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*. And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered *one sacrifice for sins for all time*, sat down at the right hand of God" (Heb 10:10-12, emphasis added).

There is no more need for daily sacrifices or an intercessory priesthood.

In fact, those things have encumbered the Roman Catholic system with pure idolatry. Each Mass features the holding up of the consecrated wafer ("the host") and the bowing and worshipping the communion elements by all present. The Council of Trent ruled,

If anyone says that in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ the only begotten Son of God [in the form of the wafer], is not to be adored with the worship of *latria* [worship due God alone], also outwardly manifested; and is consequently neither to be venerated with a special festive solemnity, nor to be solemnly borne about in procession according to the laudable and universal rite and custom of Holy Church; or is not to be proposed publicly to the people to be adored and that the adorers of it are idolaters—let him be anathema (*Trent* sess. 13, canon 6).

In other words, the host—the transubstantiated wafer—is deemed

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<sup>19</sup>*Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Vatican II), 47.

worthy of the kind of worship reserved only for God.

On the other hand, Mary, the saints, and relics are objects for *veneration*, which is supposed to be something less than *worship*—but practically it is difficult to see any meaningful difference. Indeed, the word *venerate* originally meant "worship"—from a Latin, rather than Anglo-Saxon root.

Mary is practically vested with attributes of deity. The Church teaches—with no biblical warrant whatsoever—that she is sinless, that she "was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory," and that "she was exalted by the Lord as Queen of all."<sup>20</sup> The current Pope is well known for his devotion to Mary. He and millions of other Catholics pray to Mary daily—as if she were omniscient. She is said to have a "saving role" because of her heavenly intercession and is deemed "Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adjutrix [words meaning "Helper," "Benefactor"], and Mediatrix"<sup>21</sup>—all roles mirroring those ascribed in Scripture to both Christ and the Holy Spirit. Vatican II specifically ordered "that the cult, especially the liturgical cult, of the Blessed Virgin, be generously fostered" and that "exercises of devotion toward her . . . [as well as] decrees issued in earlier times regarding the veneration of images of Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and the saints, be religiously observed."<sup>22</sup>

The Second Vatican Council stated at least one thing accurately:

When Christians separated from us [Protestants] affirm the divine authority of the sacred Books, *they think differently from us*. . . . According to Catholic belief, an authentic teaching office plays a special role in the explanation and proclamation of the written word of God.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, in Catholicism, the plain sense of Scripture apart from the authoritative interpretation of the Church has no relevance whatever. So Catholics can quote and affirm 1 Tim 2:5: "There is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." But "they think differently from us" about whether God speaks directly to people through the plain sense of His Word. According to Roman Catholicism 1 Tim 2:5—and every other verse of Scripture—is subject to the Church's infallible interpretation. The Scriptures do not speak for themselves as the Word of God. *The Church* determines what the Bible means, and *that authoritative*

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<sup>20</sup>*Lumen Gentium* (Vatican II), 59.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>23</sup>*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 21.

*interpretation* becomes the infallible Word of God.

Thus—ironically—the section of the Vatican II document that asserts Mary's "saving role" as intercessory Mediatrix *begins* by quoting 1 Tim 2:5!<sup>24</sup>

In a popular edition of the Vatican II documents, a footnote after the word *Mediatrix* explains,

The Council applies to the Blessed Virgin the title of Mediatrix, but carefully explains this so as to remove any impression that it could detract from the uniqueness and sufficiency of Christ's position as Mediator (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5).<sup>25</sup>

Of course, simply *denying* that their violation of 1 Tim 2:5 does not resolve the obvious contradiction between ascribing to Mary an ongoing "saving role" as intercessory "Mediatrix" and Scripture's plain meaning. But that does not matter in Catholicism, since authoritative truth is not determined by the plain sense of Scripture, but by the church's teaching authority. If the Church says Mary's "saving, mediatorial role" does not encroach on Christ's uniqueness as sole Mediator between God and men, Catholics are supposed to believe it with unquestioning faith.

That is reckless faith. Evangelicals must continue to oppose it.

### IS UNION WITH ROME A WORTHY GOAL?

Should evangelicals wish to see the Protestant Reformation undone? Certainly not. The Reformation was not a tragedy but a glorious victory. The result of the Reformation was not a breach in the true body of Christ but the recovery of the gospel of grace from the near obscurity it had fallen into under Catholic abuses. Protestants who doubt that ought to study church history.

Some claim the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s brought Rome and evangelicals closer together doctrinally. They say Rome further reformed herself and opened the door for ecumenical rapprochement. But Vatican II only solidified the stance Rome took against the Reformation. Rome declared

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<sup>24</sup>*Lumen Gentium*, 60.

<sup>25</sup>Abbot, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II*, 91. Catholic apologist Karl Keating says any contradiction between 1 Tim 2:5 and Mary's "saving role" as "Mediatrix of all graces" is "illusory" [Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on "Romanism" by "Bible Christians"* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), 278]. The inescapable fact Catholic apologists must deal with, however, is that multitudes of Catholics "venerate" Mary with a devotion that far outdoes their "worship" of Christ.

herself "irreformable."<sup>26</sup>

It would certainly be wonderful for the Roman Catholic Church to repudiate her opposition to justification by faith and abandon her extrabiblical doctrines. Yet nothing suggests that it might happen. All the dialogue between evangelicals and Roman Catholics has not brought Rome one hair's breadth closer to a biblical position on any pivotal doctrinal issue. Nor is there any sensible reason to think that *more* dialogue could accomplish this. On the contrary, changes in Rome's doctrinal position have never been a matter for discussion.

The fact is that the Colson-Neuhaus accord became possible not because Roman Catholicism moved closer to the evangelical position, but because the evangelical drafters of the document either downplayed, compromised, or relinquished all the key evangelical distinctives. "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" capitulated precisely where the Reformers stood firm. Far from being an incentive for Rome to reconsider her position, this document grants an unwarranted stamp of legitimacy on the Roman Catholic system. It makes it harder than ever for doctrinally-minded evangelicals to mount an effective polemic against Rome's "different gospel."

Now is the time when evangelicals must carefully reexamine how dearly they hold their doctrinal convictions. We ought to pause and ask ourselves if we really are willing to consider all who recite the Apostles' Creed as true members of the body of Christ. Either the Protestant Reformation was all a big mistake, or we must be willing to stand with the Reformers. Are we ready to concede that the thousands of martyrs who gave their lives to oppose the tyranny and false doctrine of Rome all died for an unworthy cause?

These are not minor issues. Nor will they go away if evangelical leaders merely keep silent. Other treaties and more doctrinal compromise will follow "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." Those who hold biblical convictions will find themselves forced either to make peace with enemies of the gospel or to take a clear and vigorous stand against Rome's "different gospel" and against ecumenical homogeneity.

Someone who had heard of my stand against "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" asked, "Don't you want to see Christian unity?" I certainly do want to see *true* Christian unity. Remember, however, that the unity our Lord prayed for goes hand in hand with His request that we be sanctified in the *truth* (John 17:17-21). The familiar principle in 2 Cor 6:14-17—though it certainly applies to marriage—is actually far broader, encompassing all forms of spiritual union:

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<sup>26</sup>*Lumen Gentium*, 25.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you."

Unity at the expense of truth is never a worthy goal. "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" gave lip service to that principle but failed to follow through.

To those who ask "Don't you want to see unity?" I ask in return, "Are you willing to allow souls to be led into darkness by false religion and error?"

"Evangelicals and Catholics Together" practically demands that evangelicals regard all active Catholics as true Christians and refrain from "proselytizing" them. To accede to that request is to capitulate to reckless faith.

I have heard testimonies from literally hundreds of former Roman Catholics who affirm unequivocally that while they were in the Catholic Church they did not know Christ at all. They were blindly following the religious system, attempting to earn grace and work their way into divine favor. They actively partook in the sacraments and ceremonies and rituals, but they had unregenerate hearts. Hardly a Sunday evening passes without at least one or two former Roman Catholics giving a testimony to that effect from our church baptistery. None of these people passed from death to life until they abandoned their blind faith in the Roman Catholic system and embraced the message of God's free grace.

For evangelicals to sign a pact labeling such conversions "sheep stealing" is in my mind unconscionable. And for the document to declare that "it is neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources for one Christian community to proselytize among active adherents of another Christian community" (23) is incredible. By the document's own definitions, that puts all churchgoers who are Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or liberal Protestant off limits for evangelism.

But *most* "active adherents" of those communities simply do not know Christ as Lord and Savior. The christ they worship is not the One who offers full salvation freely to those who trust Him. Most of

them are feverishly trying to earn divine favor for themselves through good works and religious ritual—as if Christ had never said, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Those people desperately need to hear the liberating message of the gospel of grace. For evangelicals to sign a document agreeing to place them off limits for evangelism is a gross act of betrayal.

Ecumenical unity with Roman Catholicism is not essential to the furtherance of the kingdom of God. Evangelism of Roman Catholics is. To waive the latter goal in pursuit of the former is a serious mistake. One wonders what the evangelical leaders who signed "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" were thinking when they approved such strictures against evangelizing Catholics.

Do the evangelical signers of the document really intend to follow the path it lays out? Let us fervently pray that they will not. Those who pursue that course will find that they have traded away their evangelical birthright for a mess of ecumenical pottage. Rather than honoring our Lord, they will dishonor Him. Rather than clarifying the gospel for a watching world, they will be substituting a muddled message. And rather than steering people to the small gate and the narrow way, they will be pointing multitudes to the wide gate and broad way that lead to destruction.

## REDISCOVERING PASTORAL MINISTRY<sup>1</sup>

Richard L. Mayhue  
Senior Vice President and Dean  
Professor of Pastoral Ministries

*Current unbiblical changes beginning to overtake the church could injuriously mark the 21st century church if they continue unchecked. A growing number of respected evangelicals believe that the contemporary redirection of the church toward being less biblical and more acceptable to society will ultimately lead to a Christ-condemned church. However, by using Scripture to answer the questions "What is a pastor to be and do?" and "How can contemporary ministry be shaped by biblical mandates?", the church can be revived and obediently realign herself with God's revealed purposes for the bride of Christ. In this manner, it is possible to achieve a biblically balanced, complementing relationship between understanding God's will for the church, engaging in relevant pastoral ministry, and preparing a new generation of pastors for ministry as outlined by God's Word.*

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"Crossroads." "Transition." "Crisis." "Uncertainty." "Restlessness." These unsettling words express the pessimistic perception voiced by many evangelicals regarding the immediate state of the church and pastoral ministry. Few would disagree that a call for redirection has come to the evangelical church as the twenty-first century rapidly approaches. However, there is no current consensus on which route the church should take to get back on track.

Consider, for example, John Seel's 1992 survey of twenty-five prominent evangelical leaders.<sup>2</sup> The leaders expressed their less-than-optimistic views on the general state of American evangelicalism at the end of the twentieth century. Eight dominant themes emerged from their responses:

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<sup>1</sup>This essay in a slightly different form appears in the forthcoming volume *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry* (Dallas: Word, 1995) 3-18.

<sup>2</sup>John Seel, *The Evangelical Forfeit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 48-65.

1. Uncertain identity—A widespread confusion over what defines an evangelical.
2. Institutional disenchantment—A perceived ministry ineffectiveness and irrelevance.
3. Lack of leadership—A lament over the paucity of leadership in the church.
4. Pessimistic about the future—A belief that the future of evangelicalism hangs in the balance.
5. Growth up, impact down—A confusing paradox without immediate clear explanations.
6. Cultural isolation—A complete arrival of the post-Christian era.
7. Political and methodological response provides the solution—A drift toward unbiblical approaches to ministry.
8. Shift from truth-orientation to market-response ministry—A redirection away from the eternal towards the temporal in order to be viewed as relevant.

David F. Wells has reached essentially the same conclusion:

I have written this book because, like the students who participated in our survey, I believe the vision of the evangelical church is now clouded, its internal life greatly weakened, its future very uncertain, and I want something better for it. I want the evangelical church to be *the church*. I want it to embody a vibrant spirituality. I want the church to be an alternative to post-modern culture, not a mere echo of it. I want a church that is bold to be different and unafraid to be faithful, a church that is interested in something better than using slick marketing techniques to swell the numbers of warm bodies occupying sanctuaries, a church that reflects an integral and undiminished confidence in the power of God's Word, a church that can find in the midst of our present cultural breakdown the opportunity to be God's people in a world that has abandoned God.

To be the church in this way, it is also going to have to find in the coming generation leaders who exemplify this hope for its future and who will devote themselves to seeing it realized. To lead the church in the way that it needs to be led, they will have to rise above the internal politics of the evangelical world and refuse to accept the status quo where that no longer serves the vital interests of the kingdom of God. They will have to decline to spend themselves in the building of their own private kingdoms and refuse to be intimidated into giving the church less and other than what it needs. Instead, they will have to begin to build afresh, in cogently biblical ways, among the decaying structures that now clutter the evangelical landscape. To succeed, they

will have to be people of large vision, people of courage, people who have learned again what it means to live by the Word of God, and, most importantly, what it means to live before the holy God of that Word.<sup>3</sup>

The Master's Seminary acknowledges these alarming trends, believing that decisions made in this decade will reshape the American evangelical church for much of the century to come. Thus, the future direction of the contemporary church is a legitimate pre-eminent consideration. Unquestionably, the late twentieth-century church faces a defining moment.<sup>4</sup> The real contrast in competing ministry models, however, is not the "traditional" versus the "contemporary," but rather the *scriptural* compared to the *unscriptural*.

### THE MOMENT OF DECISION

Having arrived at the proverbial "fork in the road," evangelicals must decide between two alternatives. The first is an approach to ministry that is characteristically, but not necessarily exclusively, need-based, man-centered, consumer-driven, and culturally defined. These emphases generally depend on and change with the latest directions in the behavioral sciences, which after attempted integration as alleged co-equals with Scripture, supposedly provide a scientifically validated, relevant ministry for our contemporary computer/media-oriented society.

The second option features a redemptively centered, God-focused, biblically defined, and scripturally prioritized ministry. The Master's Seminary champions this latter model which looks to the sufficiency of Scripture as the revelation of past, present, and future works of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit which have the utmost relevance—now and forever. The church must look

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<sup>3</sup>David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 214-15; cf. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "The Evils of the Present Time" in *An All-Round Ministry* (reprint, Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, 1983) 282-314.

<sup>4</sup>Four of the top five books in *Christianity Today's* "Reader's Choice" Book-of-the-Year survey addressed these issues with a strong call for a return to a God-centered, biblically based ministry ("1994 Book Awards," *Christianity Today* 38/4 [April 4, 1994]:39). These four books are Charles Colson, *The Body* (Dallas: Word, 1992); David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); John F. MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993); Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity In Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993).

to the Scriptures and address the challenge of "Shaping Contemporary Ministry with Biblical Mandates."

Arguably, no time in church history has more closely approximated the first-century beginnings of the church than now. Our ancient brethren faced a pagan, pre-Christian, and pre-modern culture. Similarly, the contemporary church encounters a pagan, post-Christian, and post-modern world. The essential biblical model of ministry of the first century has never been more appropriate than it is today.

This essay attempts to balance the tensions between temporal and eternal considerations and between divine and human factors in ministry. God's character, God's revelation, and God's will have not changed, although time and culture have. How should a balanced ministry reconcile the two sides? We reason that the timeless should define any particular moment in time, not the reverse. Christ has been and will remain the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4), the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), and the Great Shepherd (Heb 13:20). Pastors will always be His under-shepherds and laborers in the church which He purchased with His own precious blood (Acts 20:28) and continues to build (Matt 16:18).

Pastors assume a huge responsibility when they accept the overwhelming task of exhorting and reproving on Christ's behalf (Tit 1:9). Paul's word about this stewardship to the Corinthian church almost two thousand years ago is sobering:

Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy. But to me it is a very small thing that I should be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted; but the one who examines me is the Lord. Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God (1 Cor 4:1-5).

The late twentieth-century church in general and pastors in particular face the following very crucial questions. What is the pastor to be and do? How should the church respond to a rapidly changing culture? What does God consider relevant? How concerned is Christ with the traditional and/or the contemporary? Are the Scriptures an adequate basis of ministry today? What are a pastor's ministry priori-

ties? Under whose authority does a pastor stand? How shall we distinguish between the God-called pastor and the counterfeit? Who defines the need for ministry—God or men? What direction does Christ want for His church in the twenty-first century? And foremost of all, when we stand before the Lord of glory and give account of our stewardship, "What will we say?" and, far more importantly, "What will He say?"

We submit that God will use His Word as the benchmark by which He commends or condemns our labors in His church. He will not inquire whether a ministry was "traditional" or "contemporary," but will ask, "Was it biblical?" Our ministry will either be in accord with His will or contrary to it. This Scripture expresses Christ's reference point for rightly building the church. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17).

### THE CHURCH ON THE WRONG WAY

We could reasonably expect that after two thousand years of existence, the church should know and understand exactly what God intended her to be. Yet just the opposite seems to be true.<sup>5</sup>

It appears that the way of religion in American culture has become the way of the church—a wrong way. Jeffery Sheler concludes that culture is having its sway with Christianity instead of Christianity having a more decided influence on culture:

The social critics among us, and the consciences within us, increasingly wonder if we have lost our moral compass and forsaken our spiritual heritage. Yale professor Stephen Carter, in his recent book, *The Culture of Disbelief*, blames this cultural decay on what he believes has been a growing exclusion of religion from public life. "We have pressed the religiously faithful . . . to act as though their faith does not matter,"

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<sup>5</sup>This confusion is not as apparent when one reads standard theology offerings or specific volumes dealing with the theology of the church, such as Gene A. Getz, *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1974); Alfred F. Kuen, *I Will Build My Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1971); John MacArthur Jr., *Body Dynamics* (Wheaton: Victor, 1982); Earl D. Radmacher, *What the Church is All About* (Chicago: Moody, 1978). The problem arises in volumes that deal with translating one's theology into contemporary practices in the church or in those that ignore Scripture when establishing practices in the church.

Carter argues.<sup>6</sup>

Francis Schaeffer called this phenomenon "the great evangelical disaster." He succinctly summarized the situation:

Here is the great evangelical disaster—the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth. There is only one word for this—namely *accommodation*: the evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age. First, there has been accommodation on Scripture, so that many who call themselves evangelicals hold a weakened view of the Bible and no longer affirm the truth of all the Bible teaches—truth not only in religious matters but in the areas of science and history and morality. As part of this, many evangelicals are now accepting the higher critical methods in the study of the Bible. Remember, it was these same methods which destroyed the authority of the Bible for the Protestant church in Germany in the last century, and which have destroyed the Bible for the liberal in our own country from the beginning of the century. And second, there has been accommodation on the issues, with no clear stand being taken even on matters of life and death.<sup>7</sup>

Encouragingly, the recent years have seen an increase of books calling the church back to the primacy of God and Scripture. They strongly warn that the church is slowly, but surely, being culturalized. For example, David F. Wells, the Andrew Mutch Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has recently written a landmark analysis of American

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<sup>6</sup>Jeffery L. Sheler, "Spiritual America," *U.S. News and World Report* 116/13 (April 4, 1994):48.

<sup>7</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1984) 37. Also see Harold Lindsell, *The New Paganism* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987) 211-32, where he asserts that the West is now in a "post-Christian" era of paganism, and then discusses the role of the church in this type of culture. For a decisive analysis of the battle between fundamentalism and liberalism in the early 1900s see J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992). George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), provides a historical background to Machen's era. James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987), discusses the profile of late 20th-, early 21st-century evangelicalism. For further reading consult John Fea, "American Fundamentalism and Neo-Evangelicalism: A Bibliographic Survey," *Evangelical Journal* 11/1 (Spring 1993):21-30.

evangelicalism in the 1990s in which he notes,

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THEOLOGY from the life of the Church, and the orchestration of that disappearance by some of its leaders, is hard to miss today but, oddly enough, not easy to prove. It is hard to miss in the evangelical world, in the vacuous worship that is so prevalent, for example, in the shift from God to self as the central focus of faith, in the psychologized preaching that follows this shift, in the erosion of its conviction, in its strident pragmatism, in its inability to think incisively about the culture, in its reveling in the irrational.<sup>8</sup>

Wells argues that it was the influential and liberal preacher, Harry Emerson Fosdick, who popularized the twentieth-century ministry philosophy that begins with man's needs rather than God's will.<sup>9</sup> He traces the lineage forward to Norman Vincent Peale and then to Robert Schuller.<sup>10</sup> It further appears that Schuller has now significantly influenced Bill Hybels, currently the most visible evangelical proponent of a "church the unchurched" philosophy of ministry.<sup>11</sup> In a sense, Fosdick's philosophy of ministry lives on long after his death.

Noted historian George Marsden warns evangelicals of the encroachments of humanism on the church. He concludes that "while fundamentalists and their evangelical heirs have erected doctrinal barriers against theological liberalism, more subtle versions of similar sub-Christian values have infiltrated behind their lines."<sup>12</sup>

John MacArthur sees the church becoming like the world.<sup>13</sup> In

<sup>8</sup>Wells, *No Place* 95.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 178. It is most interesting that Leith Anderson, et. al., *Who's in Charge?* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1992) 100, identifies Fosdick as his mentor. Anderson, who is widely read and respected by a large segment of evangelicalism, also points to Fosdick as a preaching model in *A Church for the 21st Century* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1992) 213-14.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Bill Hybels on several occasions has been a prominent speaker at Robert Schuller's institutes for pastors. Like Fosdick, Hybels has a penchant for "needs based" preaching to reach the consumer in the pew as is evident in Bill Hybels, et.al., *Mastering Contemporary Preaching* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1989) 27.

<sup>12</sup>George Marsden, "Secular Humanism Within the Church," *Christianity Today* 30/1 (January 17, 1986):14I-15I. A "Christianity Today Institute" included this article under the title of "In the Next Century: Trends Facing the Church."

<sup>13</sup>John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993). Almost two decades ago, MacArthur wrote of the dangers then facing the church in "Church Faces

a positively provocative fashion, he compares the many similarities between the decline of the church in England during Spurgeon's time a century ago and the faltering American church in our day. MacArthur notes the parallel path and common distinction of spiritual deadness shared by the liberal modernists of a century ago and evangelical pragmatists today. They both have an unhealthy aversion to doctrine.

Os Guinness provides several probing analyses of the modern church and evangelicals.<sup>14</sup> They include *The Gravedigger File*, *No God but God*, and *Dining With the Devil*. In these three works he writes about the secularization of the church, idolatry in the church, and the modern church growth movement, respectively.

"Selling Out the House of God?", a recent *Christianity Today* interview of Bill Hybels, illustrates the tensions existing in today's church.<sup>15</sup> The increase of probing, hard questions that pastors want to ask this very visible, "consumer" oriented church pastor about his ministry basis and style occasioned this article. Our fear is that if the next generation takes the path Hybels now travels, it will eventually arrive at the same destination as the modernist movement did earlier this century in America.

Consider this recent warning:

Evangelical pastors and theologians can learn from the mainline experience of placing relevance above truth. We must avoid the lure of novelty and soft sell, which, we are told, will make it easier for moderns to believe. Methods may change, but never the message. . . . We are called to be faithful stewards of a great and reliable theological heritage. We have truths to affirm and errors to avoid. We must not try to make these truths more appealing or user friendly by watering them down. We must guard against a trendy "theological bungee-jumping" that merely entertains the watching crowd.<sup>16</sup>

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Identity Crisis," *Moody Monthly* 79/6 (February 1979):123-26.

<sup>14</sup>Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983); Os Guinness and John Seel, eds., *No God But God* (Chicago: Moody, 1992); Os Guinness, *Dining with the Devil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

<sup>15</sup>Michael G. Maudlin and Edward Gilbreath, "Selling Out the House of God?" *Christianity Today* 38/8 (July 18, 1994):20-25. Contrast Hybels' approach with the far more biblical course recommended by Bill Hull, *Can We Save the Evangelical Church?* (Grand Rapids: Baker/Revell, 1993). Douglas D. Webster, *Selling Jesus: What's Wrong With Marketing the Church?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992) provides an insightful analysis of the contemporary church's market orientation.

<sup>16</sup>James V. Heidinger II, "Toxic Pluralism," *Christianity Today* 37/4 (April 5, 1993):16-17.

Interestingly, this clear call to a biblically sound ministry does not come from the conservative wing of evangelism. Rather, it is a warning to evangelical churches from one who is attempting to bring revival within the liberal, main-line United Methodist Church. He cautions the church to avoid the "user friendly" route of church ministry because the end is predictable: within a generation or two, churches will lose their spiritual direction and life.

### IDENTITY CRISIS

Due to a confusing maze of cultural attractions, the natural corollary to the church's spiritually disastrous detour from the biblical mainstream is a corresponding loss of pastoral identity and consequent debate over how to revise ministerial training. It is not surprising then, as the church succumbs to cultural and secular pressures, that biblically defined pastoral roles and the scripturally oriented content of ministerial training have experienced a serious challenge also.

#### *Pastoral Identity*

This confusion is not entirely new to the church. As early as the first century, Paul felt compelled to articulate carefully the role of the pastor. All succeeding generations have experienced this tension too, with the corresponding need to reaffirm the biblical absolutes of ministry. Culbertson and Shippee notice this ongoing tension:

Pastoral theology is for the most part a field without a clear definition: its precise meaning and component parts seem to vary widely from one denomination to the next and from one seminary to the next. The how-to of pastoral care and the component elements in the process of clergy character formation seem to be equally slippery. In all three fields, however, constitutive material seems to be taught either from a strictly scriptural base, or from a base of modern psychological and sociological theory as it has been appropriated by the church, or through a combination of scripture and modern scientific insight but rarely does the teaching of pastoral formation make direct reference to the fascinating history and tradition of the early church.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Philip L. Culbertson and Arthur Bradford Shippee, *The Pastor: Readings from the Patristic Period* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) xi.

H. Richard Niebuhr documented the confusion that prevailed during the early and middle twentieth century.<sup>18</sup> Thomas Oden updated the dilemma into the 1980s.<sup>19</sup> He laments that the entire twentieth century has evidenced confusion over the role of the church and the pastor.<sup>20</sup> Oden strongly calls for a return to Scripture in order to understand the pastoral office and role:

Scripture provides the primary basis for understanding the pastoral office and its functions. We will treat Scripture as the church's book, rather than as the exclusive turf of the historian or social theorist. Pastoral wisdom has lived out of the key *locus classicus* texts that have enjoyed a rich history of interpretation long before the advent of modern historical research. We are free to learn from and use that research without being handcuffed by some of its reductionist assumptions.

Pastoral theology lives out of Scripture. When the pastoral tradition has quoted Scripture, it has viewed it as an authoritative text for shaping both its understanding and its practice of ministry. We do not put Scripture under our examination, according to criteria alien to it, in order to understand ministry. Rather, Scripture examines our prior understandings of ministry. It puts them to the test.<sup>21</sup>

### *Ministerial Training*

Redefining the church inevitably leads to redefining the pastoral role. The latter reorientation then spills over into pastoral training at the seminary level. Predictably, a seemingly endless flood of current literature is calling for radical restructuring of seminary education.

In 1990 *The Atlantic* published a striking general assessment of American seminaries. This comprehensive study concluded,

If they are to succeed, this generation of seminarians must, of course, be educationally and spiritually sound, politically aware, as conversant with demography as they are with morality. They must be sensitive to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, but they must not drive us up still another wall with their convictions. We have been flogged enough; we

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<sup>18</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956) 51.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983).

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, x-xii.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

know our shortcomings. When our future clerics speak, we want to hear powerful yet measured voices bringing out the moral dimension of life, and not only the politics of the left wing of the Democratic Party or the right of the Republican, masquerading as religious belief.

We want them to be people who in some tiny way reflect the mercy and goodness of God we want to know, not only His judgment. We want them to be people who see the goodness in us that we have yet to unleash, the potential within us to transcend our differences. In the end, I think, we are looking for those who will help us find that voice deep within us which is not our own, but calls us to do what is right.<sup>22</sup>

"Consumer-appeal" in both ministry and pastoral training clearly marks the conclusion to this quoted article and reflects much of the current literature.

A 1993 study commissioned by seven well-known American seminaries concluded,

The church, in order to maintain relevancy to its constituency, has had to devise new ways of 'doing' ministry or be faced with closing the doors. . . . This report . . . calls for a major restructuring of the seminary—form and function.<sup>23</sup>

If we carry the consumer paradigm to its logical conclusion it will be brilliantly consistent with prevailing contemporary theories but sadly unscriptural. In effect it reasons, "What the people want, the church should provide. What the church provides, pastors should be trained to deliver." Taking it one step further, the ultimate result will be that "What pastors are trained to deliver, i.e., what the people want, the church will provide. When the church provides what the people want, people will want more." This will eventually create a virtually unstoppable cause and effect cycle that will render the American

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<sup>22</sup>Paul Wilkes, "The Hand That Would Shape Our Souls," *The Atlantic* 266/6 (December 1990):59-88.

<sup>23</sup>Carolyn Weese, "Standing on The Banks of Tomorrow" (Granada Hills, CA: Multi-Staff Ministries, 1993):3, 53. Other recent pieces include Michael C. Griffith, "Theological Education Need Not Be Irrelevant," *Vox Evangelica* 20 (1990):7-19; Richard Carnes Ness, "The Road Less Traveled; Theological Education and the Quest to Fashion the Seminary of the Twenty-First Century," *The Journal of Institute for Christian Leadership* 20 (Winter 93/94):27-43; Bruce L. Shelly, "The Seminaries' Identity Crisis," *Christianity Today* 37/6 (May 17, 1993):42-44; Timothy C. Morgan and Thomas S. Giles, "Re-Engineering the Seminary," *Christianity Today* 38/12 (October 24, 1994):74-76.

church impotent and thus condemned by Christ.

However, before seminaries capitulate, they should study the history of seminaries and seminary education in America. Notable among many are Andover Seminary and Princeton Seminary, founded in 1807 and 1812, respectively.<sup>24</sup> Both started strong with seemingly unshakable biblical foundations, but with time and for various reasons, each succumbed to the demand to go beyond the Scriptures for both their doctrine and their practice. Conservatives agree that they long ago outlived their usefulness to the gospel ministry, because they shifted away from their initial high view of God and the Scriptures.

Any given seminary might effectively change many things to make itself more useful to the church and ultimately the cause of Christ, but its emphasis upon biblical truth as the core of the curriculum should never change. David Dockery, Vice President for Academic Administration at Southern Seminary, recently summed up seminary education for a new century like this:

We want to be able to teach the Scriptures in a creative and relevant way that models for our students that the Bible is normative and authoritative for the contemporary church—for their lives individually and for the church corporately. The Bible is an ancient document that is written to specific people in specific times in specific context. It nevertheless transcends those times and contexts because it is inspired by the Spirit of God, so it is both a divine and human document. It is a time-related document as well as an eternal document. Therefore, it speaks beyond its context and we want faculty who live out of deep commitment to the full truthfulness and complete authority of God's inspired word.

Biblical authority is a much maligned and misunderstood concept in our contemporary world. People ask how can you believe that a book written 2,000 years ago has authority and relevance where we are now? The answer is because of its source. Its source is not just in the prophets and the apostles; it is in God Himself, who has actually breathed out this

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<sup>24</sup>Steven Meyeroff, "Andover Seminary: The Rise and Fall of an Evangelical Institution," *Covenant Seminary Review* 8/2 (Fall 1982):13-24, and Mark A. Noll, "The Princeton Theology," in *The Princeton Theology*, ed. by David F. Wells (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 14-35, present convincing accounts of these two institutions. George C. Fuller, "Practical Theology: The State of the Art," in *Practical Theology and the Ministry of the Church*, ed. by Harvie M. Conn (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1990) 109-28, adds to the discussion.

Word to us to study, to believe, and obey.<sup>25</sup>

### TAKING A BIBLICAL APPROACH

At The Master's Seminary, we unequivocally believe that Paul made an absolute assertion with undeniable implications when he wrote to Timothy, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17). This passage not only teaches a high view of Scripture's authority, but also its sufficiency, especially in formulating ministry plans and priorities. It demands that we begin with God and the Bible rather than man and culture in order to understand God's will in ministry.

The ministry tensions, problems, and questions that our generation faces are not new as these biblical examples indicate. Malachi indicted Israel because they exchanged the glory of God for the way of the culture. Paul confronted the Corinthians and condemned the Laodicean elders. Jeremiah and Ezekiel warned against the proliferation of false shepherds in the OT, as did Peter and Jude in the New.

The contemporary pastor must pay close attention to the lessons of biblical history, for they will surely be repeated in his generation. Therefore when we ask, "What is a pastor to be and do?" we must look to God's Word for answers and not to the latest fads or theories that find their source more in society rather than in Scripture, or primarily in culture not Christ.

To be biblically specific, God has given several defining passages explaining who a pastor is to be and what a pastor is to do, e.g. 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:6-9; 1 Pet 5:1-5. But perhaps the most explicit books in the NT regarding the work of the ministry are 1 and 2 Thessalonians. A careful analysis of these "pastoral" epistles leads to this basic "ministry description." A pastor's primary activities include:

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|----|--------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | Praying      | 1 Thess 1:2-3; 3:9-13 |
| 2. | Evangelizing | 1 Thess 1:4-5, 9-10   |
| 3. | Equipping    | 1 Thess 1:6-8         |
| 4. | Defending    | 1 Thess 2:1-6         |

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<sup>25</sup>David Dockery, "Ministry and Seminary in a New Century," *The Tie: Southern Seminary* 62/2 (Spring 1994):20-22.

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| 5.  | Loving      | 1 Thess 2:7-8    |
| 6.  | Laboring    | 1 Thess 2:9      |
| 7.  | Modeling    | 1 Thess 2:10     |
| 8.  | Leading     | 1 Thess 2:10-12  |
| 9.  | Feeding     | 1 Thess 2:13     |
| 10. | Watching    | 1 Thess 3:1-8    |
| 11. | Warning     | 1 Thess 4:1-8    |
| 12. | Teaching    | 1 Thess 4:9-5:11 |
| 13. | Exhorting   | 1 Thess 5:12-24  |
| 14. | Encouraging | 2 Thess 1:3-12   |
| 15. | Correcting  | 2 Thess 2:1-12   |
| 16. | Confronting | 2 Thess 3:6, 14  |
| 17. | Rescuing    | 2 Thess 3:15.    |

Paul exemplifies the *character* of a pastor and how that character relates to ministry *conduct* (1 Thess 2:1-6). He describes the *nature* of pastoral leadership in terms of a mother (2:7-8), a laborer (2:9), a family member (2:10), and a father (2:11-12). Though these texts do not exhaust the subject, they unmistakably point to Scripture as the appropriate source from which to answer contemporary questions about ministry.

Christ's letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2—3 raise the relevant question, "If Christ were to write a letter to the American church in 1995, what would He say?" While this inquiry is purely hypothetical and will not happen because the time of written, divine revelation has passed, the first-century truths of Revelation 2—3 are still applicable to the twentieth-century church because they represent the unchanging mind of Christ in regard to His church. We know what He would *commend* and what He would *condemn*.

The bottom line is simply this: Will we seek to be fruitful in ministry by depending on the power of God's Word (Rom 1:16-17; 1 Cor 1:22-25; 1 Thess 2:13) and God's Spirit (Rom 15:13; 2 Tim 1:8) or on the power of man's wisdom? Consider how Paul instructed the Corinthian church, whose curious preoccupation with their culture paralleled the contemporary evangelical church's comparable fascination:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has

chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:26-31).

## REDISCOVERING PASTORAL MINISTRY

The Master's Seminary remains convinced that God's Word provides the timeless defining paradigm for the nature and particulars of pastoral ministry. Scripture outlines what God wants a pastor to be and what God wants a pastor to do. Contemporary ministry in any generation needs to be shaped by biblical mandates.

We set before our peers the assertion that Christ must build His church His way (Matt 16:18).<sup>26</sup> If we desire to see God-pleasing fruit in our ministry, it must come from planting the good seed of God's Word in the rich soil of diligent pastoral labor according to the Scriptures.

For those who would question the content or conclusions of this essay, please do not misinterpret the discussion above. The statements in this essay are *not* calling for:

- a user *unfriendly* church
- a culturally *ignorant* church
- a seeker *insensitive* church.

We have no desire to "*unchurch the unchurched*" or to promote an irrelevant dinosaur of a church.

On the other hand, neither do we want to substitute the latest theories in sociology and psychology for the truth of Scripture. We do not want to confuse the common sense benefit of demographic statistics and analysis of culture with the far more important understanding of God's will for the church—both for Christians and non-Christians. We ardently desire to let the important consideration—God and His revealed will in Scripture—be the major focus.

A significant segment of evangelical churches and a growing proportion of evangelical literature seem to be distancing themselves from biblical priorities. Unbiblical imbalances among contemporary evangelicals are showing up in growing tendencies toward:

1. Overemphasis on man's reasoning and a corresponding underemphasis on God's revelation in Scripture.

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<sup>26</sup>John MacArthur, Jr., "Building His Church His Way," *Spirit of Revival* 24/1 (April 1994):21-24.

2. Overemphasis on human need as defined by man and a corresponding underemphasis on God's definition of man's need.
3. Overemphasis on earthly relevance and a corresponding underemphasis on spiritual relevance.
4. Overemphasis on the temporal side of life and a corresponding underemphasis on the eternal.
5. Overemphasis on satisfying contemporary culture and a corresponding underemphasis on God's pleasure.

Because of these escalating trends, the church is increasingly in danger of equating religion with Christianity, and making "going to church" equal with salvation. The church increasingly substitutes human power for God's power, and replaces talk that centers on God directly with mere peripheral talk about Him. The church increasingly confuses emotion with worship in Spirit and truth, and looks toward the cleverness of man's words rather than the power of the gospel. If the evangelical church remains on its present course, we fear that by popular demand the next generation may replace true Christianity with an impotent, idolatrous religion as did the ancient churches of Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea.

More could be written on these present dangers and deceptions facing the evangelical church and ministry. However, we conclude by urging all of Christendom, both in America and around the world, to rediscover pastoral ministry as outlined in Scripture. Here you will find ministry that is biblically based, *not* demographically defined; Spirit led, *not* market driven; Christ centered, *not* man directed; and God focused, *not* consumer oriented.

### BEING ABOUT THE FATHER'S BUSINESS

As Jesus engaged in His Father's work, so must we. An anonymous writer vividly captured the essence of pastoral stewardship before the Lord with this exhortation to do God's work God's way according to God's Word:

Stick with your work. Do not flinch because the lion roars; do not stop to stone the devil's dogs; do not fool away your time chasing the devil's rabbits. Do your work. Let liars lie, let sectarians quarrel, let critics malign, let enemies accuse, let the devil do his worst; but see to it nothing hinders you from fulfilling with joy the work God has given you.

He has not commanded you to be admired or esteemed. He has never bidden you defend your character. He has not set you at work to

contradict falsehood (about yourself) which Satan's or God's servants may start to peddle, or to track down every rumor that threatens your reputation. If you do these things, you will do nothing else; you will be at work for yourself and not for the Lord.

Keep at your work. Let your aim be as steady as a star. You may be assaulted, wronged, insulted, slandered, wounded and rejected, misunderstood, or assigned impure motives; you may be abused by foes, forsaken by friends, and despised and rejected of men. But see to it with steadfast determination, with unfaltering zeal, that you pursue the great purpose of your life and object of your being until at last you can say, "I have finished the work which *Thou* gavest me to do."

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER IN EPHESIANS

James E. Rosscup  
Professor of Bible Exposition

*Ephesians in general and its "armor" passage (6:10-20) in particular devote a major focus to the importance of prayer in Christian life and ministry. The power in the armor is essential if believers are to win the battle against Satan and his demonic forces. The parts of the armor denote different spiritual aspects of Christian living that are also essential. None of the above can be appropriated without prayer modeled according to the principles of Scripture. Eleven considerations show prayer to be inseparable from victory in spiritual warfare. The uses of "all" in Eph 6:18 are a call to an "all-out" commitment to prayer and remind Christian soldiers of its crucial importance.*

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The urgent exhortation of Eph 6:10 presses home to each Christian: "be strong in the Lord." Each one must live in that power of God's armor (Eph 6:10-13). Through this means alone can the believer successfully encounter the devil and his demonic associates, who seek to prevail. A life based on such *power* finds expression in the six *parts* of the armor that the Christian should implement (6:14-17). The power represented by the armor relates vitally to *prayer* (6:18-20). The writer himself models prayer for his readers (1:15-23; 3:14-21). Later, he calls on *them* to pray in all things and for him as they realize God's power in their lives and demonstrate it in implementing the armor. In the two long passages of Paul's model, prayer is strategic in the realization of the wealth of Christians in Christ. Further, it is strategic in the closing of the epistle as it climaxes the call to live in God's power, possessing His whole armor and letting that power permeate every part of the armor.

This study spotlights the summons for Christians to use the power of God's armor. The parts of the armor specify the elements of that power, and prayer imparts effectiveness to the armor.

Rereading all thirteen of Paul's epistles with a special eye for references to prayer is a rich experience. Checking these references against a list found in the Society of New Testament Studies monograph by Gordon P. Wiles (*Paul's Intercessory Prayers*)

[Cambridge: University Press, 1974] Appendices I and II) has also been helpful. Wiles includes lists classified into categories of prayer: doxology, praise, blessing, cursing, worship [actually, worship should be involved in all things in life], hymns, thanks, boasting, petition for self, intercession, and general prayer (297-99).

This writer's count of references to categories of prayer combined with Wiles' lists showed 56 verses in Romans and 42 in 1 Corinthians. The third highest total was in Ephesians with 31 verses. Romans has a total of 433 verses, and Ephesians only 155. Romans covers ten and a half pages in the *New American Standard Bible*, and Ephesians three and a half pages (Iowa Falls: World Bible Publishers, 1973). Despite being only about one-third the length of Romans, Ephesians has proportionately more than 55% as many verses directly related to prayer. Colossians also emphasizes prayer, devoting over 20 verses to it. Yet Colossians does not have as many separate longer passages on prayer as Ephesians (cp. Col 1:9-14 with Eph 1:15-23; 3:14-21; 6:18-20).

The relation of Eph 6:18-20 to the armor passage just before it in 6:10-17 is significant. This study will examine the nature of the connection between the two sections.

#### PRAYER AS EXEMPLIFIED IN EPH 6:10-20

Before he *exhorts* the readers to pray, Paul provides them with an *example* by modeling prayer for them. He blesses and praises God (Eph 1:2, 3, 6, 12, 14). Then he injects two bursts of intercession for them in chapters 1 and 3 while describing the spiritual wealth Christ has conferred on believers. The bounty that grace has bestowed, amounting to "all spiritual blessings" (1:3), leads Paul to these prayers. He is anxious for his readers to realize in daily practice the style of life such amazing riches make possible (1:15-23; 3:14-21).

Each intercessory labor exhibits features that Paul pled for before God. They are key items on his "prayer list." Both prayers reveal facets of paramount import for Christian living. They are also examples of how all Christians can make their prayers relevant in spiritual matters, whether for personal needs or for other Christians. The intercessions exemplify a passionate concern for spiritual progress, just as Paul prays elsewhere that Christians may please God "in all respects," being fruitful in every good work (Col 1:10). In the Colossians passage, Paul prays that God will fill believers with the knowledge of His will, His power, His steadfastness, His joy, and thanksgiving to Him (vv. 9-12). His burden is for them to be vitally concerned over spiritual matters. It is not for a physical relief from a broken arm, a new job, or sleep as a solution to insomnia. Though the latter burdens are also very important, they should intertwine with the

things Paul puts on his epistolary prayer lists. Christians should cast *all* their care upon God (1 Pet 5:7). Yet the life-shaping issues that Paul makes prominent should gain the pervasive place in their prayers. Sadly, they are all too frequently missing from a prayer bulletin, or pop up only here and there.

Does that sound familiar? Where imbalance exists, pastoral leaders must labor to remedy the imbalance through loving teaching, personal example, and emphases that draw together the different elements that are urgently needed in prayer.

In Ephesians, after his focus on wealth and a modeling of what prayer should be, Paul devotes his final three chapters to a lifestyle that matches this wealth. He emphasizes the need for it to be expressed in practical relationships. He shows how believers for whom he prays can translate their riches into a "walk" that reflects positive responses to what he has prayed for. Fond of that word "walk," Paul mentions it in 2:2, 10, returns to it in 4:1, then keeps it before the recipients through regular repetition (4:17; 5:2, 8, 15). Believers can behave in a manner consistent with the high privileges God has granted them. They can display this in a walk (or behavior) of unity (4:1-16), holiness (4:17-32), love (5:1-7), light (5:8-14), and carefulness to be filled with the Spirit (5:15—6:9). These are all descriptions of the same life, and are simultaneously true of a believer.

The five participles in 5:19-21 reflect what accompanies being "filled by the Spirit" (5:18). They include speaking to one another in edification, singing, rejoicing, giving thanks, and showing submission to other Christians. Paul narrows his focus in 5:22—6:9 to specific groups. Wives are to live in the submission of a Spirit-filled life true to the unity, holiness, love, and light, expressing this toward their husbands. Husbands are to love their wives, children to obey their parents, and parents to model the Christ-life to their children. Servants and their masters are to fulfill what is good to one another.

A "walk" of this many-splendored nature is "worthy" (4:1)<sup>1</sup> of the wonderful calling that Paul describes in chaps. 1—3. Such conduct manifests the benefits that Paul highlighted in his own prayers for the believers in earlier parts of the epistle.

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<sup>1</sup>Ajiv in Eph 4:1 had the basic root idea based on ancient scales with two arms, "to have equal weight with." It came to have the concept of one thing being a match to the other, appropriate, fitting, consistent, corresponding to. So it became a term for the practical Christian life displaying a resemblance or appropriate reflection of blessings God has given (e.g., 4:1; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:12).

Paul has more to say when he arrives at the last of his crucial words in the letter (6:10). He draws this walk befitting such great wealth into a focus that realistically characterizes what form it takes in the world believers face. It is a *hostile* world. All the decent things that God stands for are pitted against the ugly evils used by those who march under the black banner of "the prince of the power of the air" to oppose God and His people (2:2). Those whom God called to the wealth (chaps. 1—3) and the walk (chaps. 4—6) are in a deadly warfare (6:10-20). To cope with this, Paul urges the *power*, the *panoply*, and the *prayer*. The third item is the principal focus of this discussion.

### THE POWER IN THE ARMOR

To be victorious, believers need the power of being "strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might" (v. 10). They must have "the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left," as 2 Cor 6:7 describes. Or, as 2 Cor 10:4 defines, "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but mighty before God. . . ." Nothing other than *God's power* is able to win, a theme frequent in Scripture, and the power is intermeshed with prayer.<sup>2</sup> For Christians go up against the ranks of devilish legions in the heavenlies and across international areas who influence and target believers to attack (6:12). These are demonic powers. The devil is ready to take advantage of any opening to assail those in Christ's church (4:27). They are desperately in need of "strength" (6:10), because they are in peril in having to contend with the enemy's *methodeia* (meuodea), his "cunning stratagems" (v. 11).

How do Christians secure the only power sufficient to win against sinister odds so great? They appropriate weaponry that God supplies. They "put on" or "take." This is in a welcoming trust, receiving what God makes available in grace to be utilized. "I take, He undertakes" has been a winning theme for Christ's people in conflict. Believers made strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might

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<sup>2</sup>Scripture emphasizes God's strength in various ways: believers need it (1 Cor 16:11); God is believers' strength and shield (Ps 28:7; cf. Ps 46:1; Isa 40:29); they are to pray for strength (Ps 31:2), realizing that God is their strength (Ps 31:4); God girds them with strength for battle (2 Sam 22:40; Pss 18:39; 61:3); He guides men in His strength (Exod 15:13; Deut 8:17); they can celebrate His giving of strength (e.g., Ps 138:3; Phil 4:13; 2 Tim 4:17). Strength relates to the main aspects of prayer: praise/thanks (Pss 59:16-17; 81:28), petition (Pss 31:2; 86:16; 105:4; 119:28), intercession (Isa 33:2; Eph 3:16), affirmation of love or trust (Exod 15:2; Pss 18:1; 73:26), and confession (Psalm 51).

receive ability to stand their ground as spiritual soldiers, no matter what onslaught the devil and his hordes may mount. They can stop the forces of wickedness personally as individuals and corporately as a church.

They are to "stand, therefore" (v. 14). In the imperative "stand," Paul presses his main exhortation in this section on warfare. "Receive" in v. 17 is subordinate to this in the flow of thought, though coordinated with "stand," and expresses a trustful receptivity toward God who is sufficient to make the stand effective.

As part of the unified Word of God, Eph 6:10-20 repeats much of what Jesus taught in His Upper Room Discourse.<sup>3</sup> There, John 15:7, 8 fulfills a vital service in teaching a close relationship between a *Word*-filled life and a *prayer*-filled life and its fruitfulness. Paul, a good disciple of Jesus, is saturated with His mind (cf. 1 Cor 2:16) and reflects it in many facets of Eph 6:10-20. See Exhibit C (76, all exhibits located at the end of this article).

### THE PARTS OF THE ARMOR

Six pieces<sup>4</sup> of military equipment make up the panoply or list of armor.<sup>5</sup> These are drawn from Paul's knowledge of Scripture and

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<sup>3</sup>Comparisons are also frequent between Psalm 18 and Eph 6:10-20, between Jesus's teachings in Matt 4:1-11 and parallels with Eph 6:10-20, and between 2 Cor 6:2, 6-7 and Eph 6:10-20. In the last passage, Paul draws together salvation, the Spirit, truth, the Word, God's power, weapons, and righteousness. He relates these to the ministry (v. 7), just as he wanted Timothy, a pastor, to "fight a good fight" (1 Tim 1:18).

<sup>4</sup>Prayer in Eph 6:18-20 is not a *seventh* piece of armor, but a *saturation* in all pieces of armor. The reasons for this conclusion are: (1) Paul uses no figure after v. 17; (2) "and" is used before four of the six pieces, but absent with prayer, and the fourth, though having no "and," has three figures before it and two after it; (3) no genitival form appears with prayer as it does in five of the six figures of speech; (4) no part of the body is used with prayer as with the others; (5) Paul repeats prayer, mentioning it five times (vv. 18, 19), which he does with no part of the armor; (6) verbal action is no longer combined with a reference to a part of the body after v. 17. Some say that prayer is a seventh piece, as E. K. Simpson (*Ephesians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957] 143), but later reverses himself (153). Andrew Lincoln says it is not (*Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990] 451).

<sup>5</sup>The armor is the "armor of light" (Rom 13:12), as fruit is "fruit of light" (Eph 5:9) and "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22), light emphasizing the *nature* of it and the Spirit the *Person* (Source). We might well refer to the armor as the "armor of the Spirit," who is prominent in the close context of Ephesians (6:17-18).

sensitivity to Roman military dress in connection with this. See Exhibit A (73-74). He must regard the *few* parts of armor that he specifies as representative of *all* aspects in the Christian life. Many key words that surprisingly do not appear here are strategic elsewhere in the letter—e.g., grace, love, joy (5:20), goodness (5:9). God's grace is abundant in all of His provisions (e.g., 1:3-14; 2:8-9). So is love (1:4, 5; 2:4-6; 4:14-16; 5:2; 6:23). Paul also refers earlier to humility, gentleness and patience (4:2), holiness (4:24), and kindness (4:32).

Paul begins his list of key elements in 6:10-18 with two that characterize the "fruit of light" against facets of darkness (5:9). These two are the belt of *truth* and the breastplate of *righteousness* (6:14-15). A third word in 5:9, *goodness*, has been prominent in the context as well (4:28, 29; 6:8).

Why does Paul put truth *first*? Other Scriptures sometimes mention it before righteousness (Isa 48:1; Zech 8:8), but righteousness also appears before truth (Eph 4:24; 5:9; 1 Tim 6:11). Word order with such terms is flexible. Truth is certainly appropriate, wherever it occurs. The Christian has entered the realm of God's truth by being identified with Him in opposition to all influences blossoming from the devil's lie. So truth is as fitting as any word to begin the armor. Standing for truth against the tempter's falsehood was the issue for the first man and woman in the *creation* context (Gen 3:5). Truth was again the crux for Jesus in His *conflict* with the tempter before His public ministry (Matt 4:1-11). Truth was also the issue when the deceiver captured Ananias and Sapphira in the infant *church* (Acts 5:3). Truth is ever the point that the unsaved miss when they listen to the father of lies (John 8:44).<sup>6</sup> Truth is the point of issue in the Christian's struggle against the devil and those who peddle his lies (1 John 4:1-6).

The call to put on armor comes in a context that has made a practical stance in truth crucial (e.g., 4:15, 24). Truth works as a defensive weapon in the battle, standing staunchly against what is false. But it also takes the offensive in ministering positively to help and foster growth in others (4:3, 15, 25, 28). Truth adds fragrance to life through whatever is "pleasing to the Lord" (5:9, 10). In Phil 4:8, truth is first in a list of six positive qualities.

Why does Paul in naming parts of the human body begin with the girded loins? It is because belting the armor securely permits freedom in movement of the feet and legs. And as they are free and

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<sup>6</sup>It is instructive to check a concordance on the frequent use of "true" and forms of it in the Gospel of John.

able to keep good balance, agility, and speed, so it goes with the upper part of the body (cf. John 8:32, "the truth shall make you free"). The Christian stays upright. Everything in life depends on a basic commitment to God's truth (cf. 4:21, 24). With truth, a believer makes a viable stand against the enemy.

The second piece of armor, righteousness, is often linked with truth in God's Word.<sup>7</sup> Righteousness is a matter on which the Spirit of truth (John 16:13) convicts the unsaved (John 16:8-11). This is the same Spirit as in the armor passage (Eph 6:17, 18). Righteousness is the absolutely necessary benefit that God has imputed once for all to everyone who believes (Rom 3:21—5:21). It is also a character quality He continually imparts in practical living (e.g., Rom 6:1-22; 8:1-17).

The third piece of armor, after truth and righteousness, is fittingly "the preparation of the gospel of peace." In the gospel people agree with God's truth, by which they take their stand against error and stand in unity; they also stand for righteousness that is pitted against unrighteousness. In the gospel a person believes to righteousness (Rom 10:10). The same gospel ministers to confer peace with God (Rom 5:1)—amity in place of enmity—and just as surely, the gospel fosters the peace of God (Phil 4:7). The center of that gospel is Christ. He *is* the believer's peace (Eph 2:14). He also *established* peace (v. 15), and He *preached* peace (v. 17). Those who have received His gospel message are to live as peace-makers (Matt 5:9). In this, they bear witness to how God gives peace with Himself, bidding others who hear and be reconciled (2 Cor 5:19-21). They also can have a daily, peaceful composure that reflects God's sufficiency to cope with any circumstance (Phil 4:6, 7). One of the slickest tricks the devil employs—i.e., one of his arrows in Eph 6:16—is to gain an advantage (Eph 4:27) and replace peace by creating discord in a believer's heart or between believers.

The "preparation" of the gospel of peace for the feet may refer to a firm foundation, the solid footing (Ps 18:36) that provides stability (Pss 18:33; 37:31; Hab 3:19).<sup>8</sup> Or, better, it can mean a God-imparted, steadied composure that flows from such a gospel to give one the ability (or, preparedness) to stand true to the gospel.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>E.g., Ps 119:142; Isa 48:1; Zech 8:8; Eph 5:9.

<sup>8</sup>So Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974) 2:797-99; and much earlier, A. F. Buscarlet, "The 'Preparation' of the Gospel of Peace," *Expository Times* 9 (1897-98):38-40.

<sup>9</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians* 448-49: in the OT and other literature, the term nowhere actually

How fitting that after truth, righteousness, and the preparation of the gospel the fourth weapon is the shield of faith (Eph 6:16). Faith is the instrument by which the unsaved came into salvation ("through faith," 2:8). Faith continues to be of paramount importance in the lives of the saved. Paul writes, "We walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor 5:7). Though he does not include "love" as in his armor passage in 1 Thess 5:8, what he says here is consistent with his point that faith "works through love" (Gal 5:6). To Paul, love and faith go together (Eph 6:23). He would concur with John that faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4, 5). He also agrees with Peter (1 Pet 5:8) that steadfast resistance to the devil is by faith.

Here in Ephesians 6, faith is a spiritual shield, no doubt because it defensively wards off fire-tipped arrows that the devil's emissaries shoot at Christ soldiers. The devil and his demons often use people to inflict hurt, or they can work directly on a believer. Arrows of all sorts strike at God's people—arrows that wound by disunity (Eph 4:2, 3); unholy anger in thought or words (4:25 ff.); sexually permissive thoughts, words, or acts (5:3-7); the temptation to indulge in drunkenness (cf. 5:18a); attitudes that assault joy, thanksgiving, and submission (5:19-21); unloving attitudes and acts instead of a husband's Christ-like love (5:22 ff.), and on and on. The arrows of the enemy are many.

Faith is crucial, then. No wonder the Christian needs it to resist these attacks. Pastors as well as those in their flocks face the same danger. God offers them the same weaponry. By faith, believers such as those in Hebrews 11 have not only staged defensive victories, but have made offensive advances to carry out God's cause. Most references to faith in Ephesians deal with positive advances.<sup>10</sup>

After the above four weapons comes the piece of armor called "the helmet of salvation" (6:17). This may mean the helmet of protection that salvation is, because the wealth is illimitable (chaps. 1—3, especially 1:3). Or, Paul may mean the helmet as the protection which salvation supplies. Either idea points to salvation as protective.

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denotes "firm footing; its more usual sense is readiness, preparedness, or preparation (LXX Ps. 9:17; Wis. 13:12; Josephus, *Antiq.* 10:1:2 etc.)." Lincoln takes it as "readiness . . . for combat and for standing in the battle," a preparedness in harmony that the gospel of peace bestows. The emphasis is on the stand in battle, not readiness to speak the gospel, as the most effective means of combatting the enemy, as in A. Oepke, "podv," *TDNT* 5:312.

<sup>10</sup>Offensive victories through faith seem evident in Eph 1:13, 15; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 6:23; and often in Hebrews 11 (most of the examples at least).

Salvation is deliverance; salvation means deliverance. God in Christ supplies deliverance in the *past* sense, eternally clearing Christians from the penalty sin would exact. He also gives deliverance from sin's power in the *present* process of struggles (Rom 7:14-25; 8:1-39). And He will yet effect deliverance in the *prospective* anticipation, for He promises finally to set them free from the very presence of sin. Some day they will no longer have a sin principle within. They will be redeemed in the grandest completeness, glorified, totally monopolized by God's holiness (Rom 8:30; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

Paul is not through with the armor. Finally, he urges believers to take up a weapon in trustful receptivity. It is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph 6:17). The Word with its gospel is in a wonderful sense the Spirit's sword. The Spirit gave it in inspiration of Scripture. He penetrated believers' hearts with conviction (John 16:8-11) when He gave them the new birth (John 3:3-7). He uses the Word to nourish Christian growth, and ministers the Word through them in witness to the lost as well as in edifying other believers. Here, faith wards off the enemy arrows by the Word that the Spirit utilizes.

As in John 15:7, 8, Paul draws a close tie between God's Word and prayer. The Word is the sword *of the Spirit* (Eph 6:17), and Christians are to pray *in the Spirit* (v. 18). The Spirit teaches the Word that is God's will (cf. John 14:26; 1 Cor 2:12, 13), and helps the saved to achieve God's will in prayer (cf. Rom 8:26, 27).

It is important to observe that Christ Himself is every part of the armor to Christians (cf. Exhibit A). He is the *truth* (John 14:6; Rev 19:11), the truth and the Son that sets them free (John 8:32, 36). He wears a girdle of truth in Isa 11:4, 5. He also is their *righteousness*, whether imputed or imparted (cf. 1 Cor 1:30), and He has "put on righteousness like a breastplate" (Isa 59:17; cf. 11:4 f.). He is their *peace* (Eph 2:14) and the "good news," the gospel. He is the *Faithful One* toward whom faith is directed (Rev 19:11).<sup>11</sup> He is their *salvation* (Ps 27:1), and has worn "a helmet of salvation on His head" (Isa 59:17). So He has covered the believer's head in the day of battle—and that is

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<sup>11</sup>Hudson Taylor celebrated a new joy in his servant life when this concept in a letter by John McCarthy moved him: "How then to have our faith increased? Only by thinking of all that Jesus is and all He is for us; His life, His death, His work, He Himself as revealed to us in the Word, to be the subject of our constant thoughts. Not a striving to have faith . . . but a looking off to the Faithful One seems all we need . . ." (Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret* [Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.] 156).

relevant to Eph 6:10-17—evidently with a helmet (Ps 140:7). He is the *Word of God* (John 1:1; Rev 19:13) that the Spirit ministers. His mouth as the ideal Servant speaking His Word is "like a sharp sword" (Isa 49:2). Christ is the armor, and when Paul writes of this armor in a composite sweep, *personalizing* it, he says, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill its lusts" (Rom 13:14). Christians put on Christ when putting on the new man (person), who is created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Eph 4:24), created to good works (2:10).

Can anything be more important than this in the life to which God has called Christians? Can anything be more urgent than showing forth *Christ*, their "full armor," to the glory of God?

### THE PRAYER WITH THE ARMOR

Christ's being the essence in each spiritual aspect of the armor has a very close association with prayer. Prayer lays hold of *Him* in that Christians are to "be strong in the *Lord* . . ." (v. 10). The kind of prayer that thus draws on Him is prayer deriving its purpose, commitment, passion, values, and priority by the Word.<sup>12</sup> Paul brings out the cruciality of praying like this. Furthermore, other parts of the Word attest to it. Consider the following points that show this.

First, Paul underscores how vital prayer is by his own modeling. He does this in blessing and praise (1:2, 3, 6, 12, 14) and twice in being moved to intercession for others (1:15-23; 3:14-21). His prayer model reflects how the Word from God filled with blessings naturally returns in prayer to the God who blesses.

Second, in 6:17, 18 Paul's words about the armor connect without a break to the urgency of praying. Praying relates, being vital for every part of the armor. Although the armor passage does not mention prayer until 6:18-20, the rest of Scripture demonstrates prayer to be a saturating element in the armor, as reflected in Exhibit B1 (74; cf. also Exhibit B2, 75-76). That prayer should saturate each part of the armor—each aspect of life—is evident in Paul's fourfold use of the word "all" in v. 18. For example, Christians should be "praying at all times in the Spirit." The "all times" would include all the times they

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<sup>12</sup>For a fuller discussion of such prayer, see my "Prayer Relating to Prophecy in Daniel 9," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 3/1 (Spring 1992):47-71. E.g., God has a plan, will fulfill it, and "allows men the privilege of laboring together with Him by yearning and praying for the same wonderful ends (Jer 29:12)" (*ibid.*, 71).

express truth, righteousness, and the rest of the positive qualities.

Third, Scripture often lets readers look in on believers praying that God will strengthen them or exulting over His power realized through prayer (Ps 138:3; Acts 4:29-31). God's warriors live by power when they "Put on the gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer"—as the song "Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus" urges.<sup>13</sup>

Fourth, many examples in the Word of God emphasize the close tie with victories in battle or in other threats to prayer. Jehoshaphat and his people prepared through offering praise, and God overwhelmingly gave them triumph against invading masses (2 Chronicles 20). Daniel and his friends prepared to face a threat of death through a night vigil in prayer (Dan 2:17-23). Jesus faced His trials, saturating His lifestyle with prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12; Heb 5:7). Paul practiced in much prayer, both by night and by day (1 Thess 3:10). Scores of other such examples emerge in the case files Scripture supplies.

Fifth, as Lincoln notes, prayer "in the Spirit" (v. 18)—the Holy Spirit—links closely with the Word that the Spirit makes effective as a cutting edge, "the sword of the Spirit" (v. 17).<sup>14</sup> The two, God's Word to men and men's scripturally oriented prayers to God, combine in numerous passages (John 15:7, 16; Acts 6:4; cf. Eph 1:18; Phil 1:9; 4:6-8; Col 1:9-10; 1 Tim 4:5; 1 John 5:14-15; Jude 3, 20). Paul in the Ephesian letter has prayers that interweave references to riches consistent with the Word he spells out in context. For example, he has burst out in blessing (1:3) and praise (1:6, 12, 14), and prayed that the readers might realize the practical benefit of the riches in the Word (1:15-23; 3:14-21). In chaps. 1—3, he "frames" everything he writes in prayer, as Lincoln expresses it.<sup>15</sup> And in 6:18, prayer "in the Spirit" is, as Lincoln defines, "inspired, guided and made effective through the Spirit."<sup>16</sup> This is the Spirit who has been active in sealing believers (1:13-14), is building them as a household of God (2:22), and has revealed truth to them (3:5). This Spirit of prayer strengthens them with power (3:16), preserves unity among them (4:3), and fills them (5:18). This Spirit whose sword of power and penetration is the Word (6:17), through whom prayer will be fulfilled (v. 18), obviously fosters prayer that Christians will prevail in God's will in every spiritual aspect of the

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<sup>13</sup>*Hymns for the Family of God* (Nashville, TN: Paragon Associates, 1976) 616.

<sup>14</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians* 450-52.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 439.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 452.

armor (cf. Exhibit D, 77-78). This Spirit consistently assists the saints to pray *kat uen* (*kata theon*, "according to God," Rom 8:26-27), i.e., according to His will that His Word expresses.

Sixth, as noticed earlier, every facet that comprises the armor portrays what Christ manifests He is as He lives His will through the saints (cf. Exhibit A). Jesus, now in His people, wants to live out the grand values He so faithfully demonstrated while on earth (cf. Gal 2:20). He displayed in character and in action living portraits of practical truth, righteousness, and every spiritual aspect of the armor. He worshipfully bathed His every move in prayer to the Father. This is clear at strategic phases of His life (e.g., Mark 1:35; Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18).<sup>17</sup> Let those who testify with Paul, "To me to live is Christ" (Phil 1:21), show themselves to be "strong in the Lord," as Eph 6:10 says. Let them wage the warfare against Christ's enemies in Christ-like prayer. By being strong in the *Lord*, they can show they are in touch with *Him*, the Commander of the troops. They put on the armor of *God*, maintaining contact in prayer *with God*.

Seventh, the correlation prayer has with the armor is evident in other examples besides those from Jesus' life. Scripture flashes some of these before its readers in newsreel episodes. The Acts of the earliest Christian wearers of the armor records this example.<sup>18</sup> They were waging this warfare before and during the time of the writing of Ephesians. Grundmann captures this when he writes,

Every great decision in the apostolic period, and in the whole life of early Christianity is sustained by persistent prayer. . . . This persistence . . . is determined . . . by looking to Jesus. . . . As the Son, He sought to do the Father's work in an ever new experience of unity with the will and intention and nature of the Father, to receive power for this purpose, and to realize that He was hidden in the Father's hand. . . .<sup>19</sup>

The book of Acts, then, illustrates the inseparability of prayer and the armor (e.g., 2:42; 3:1; 4:24-31; 6:4).

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<sup>17</sup>Luke's Gospel, in sensitivity to Jesus's humanity, shows that Jesus prayed before several critical events: before the Spirit's descent (3:21-22), naming the twelve (6:12), the transfiguration (9:18), Peter's trial (22:31-32), and the arrest, trial and crucifixion (22:41-45).

<sup>18</sup>For a discussion of prayer in Acts, see Hermann Wang, "Prayer in the Acts" (Th.M. thesis, Talbot School of Theology, 1987). Wang sums up the essence in most of the references to prayer.

<sup>19</sup>W. Grundmann, "proskarterv," *TDNT*, 3:618-19.

An eighth factor leaves an impression in Ephesians. It recalls the way the power of God and prayer to God enclose the armor passage (6:10-13, 18-20). Paul's model prayers attest the close coordination between power and prayer. He *climaxes* his own prayer in 1:15-23 by pleading God's power for the believers. In 3:14-21, he *commences* his intercession with prayer for power. He seeks power from God, for "power belongs to God" (Ps 62:11). It is good always to remember in warfare that the Lord is the one by whom "I am saved from my enemies" (Ps 18:3). He is the God who "trains my hands for the battle" (Ps 18:34). Such power from the God of power comes through prayer to Him. So Markus Barth captures the conspicuous point of the matter: "Nothing less," he says, "is suggested than that the life and strife of the saints be one great prayer to God. . . ."<sup>20</sup>

Even a ninth factor bids for attention. Paul requested his readers to pray for power in his preaching—power released through forthright boldness (6:19-20). And if power for Paul emanated from prayer, then power for other believers to live successfully must also trace its efficacy to prayer—prayer to God. The closet is crucial to the combat.

In the tenth place, each part of the armor interpenetrates with the whole and synchronizes with all the other spiritual aspects. For example, combatants for Christ live "truth" only with an accompanying commitment to live by "righteousness." Nearby in 5:9, truth and righteousness join *together* as parts in the composite "fruit of light." Goodness does also. This is consistent with the exemplary Messiah who is girded with truth and righteousness (Isa 11:4). Likewise, Christians do not fulfill their soldiery with truth and righteousness apart from the "preparation" of the gospel of peace. And they do not "fight the good fight of faith" (cf. 1 Tim 6:12) without wielding the shield of faith. Nor can any of these ethical qualities work in battle apart from the benefit that God gives in His "salvation," a veritable "helmet." Nor do believers war a good warfare detached from the Word of God which is the input in truth and righteousness and furnishes the "preparation" that the gospel assures. Likewise, each spiritual aspect that comprises the armor interrelates with the Spirit. He does His work in men, stirring the very breath and content of real prayer (cf. Exhibit D).

A question might arise as to why the writer (in 6:10-17) holds in reserve any mention of praying until v. 18? A natural answer is that

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<sup>20</sup>Barth, *Ephesians* 778.

he wanted first to allow descriptions of "the whole armor" (v. 11) to be put before the soldiers as a composite unity. He does not want to interrupt his listing. Once he gets through with all six aspects of armor, however, he bears down hard on prayer, because prayer is to permeate "the whole armor," every facet of it.

An eleventh point is relevant. Consider how believers should intercede for "all the saints" (v. 18). For them, appropriate prayer will be involved with whatever details are strategic to the saints for whom they pray. Among the items in such an involvement will inevitably be prayer that they live according to spiritual values denoted by the armor, matters like truth, righteousness, readiness of the gospel, faith, realities of salvation, and the Word of God. Relevant prayer should also focus on spiritual aspects in wielding the Spirit's sword, through which believers can manifest sensitivity to the other saints' needs. This relates to whatever helps them to stand and even drive back the enemies in verse 12 by God's power.

Prayer has a strategic role, then, in effectiveness for the conflict that believers face.

And what of ourselves? Do we fancy that we somehow will win in the battle where these early Christians could not, though we belittle prayer among our priorities? Do we possess power gained through some driving energy, polished skills, or trusted methods? Are we capable in ourselves where people of prayer before us have sensed an urgent need to throw themselves on God? How much more candid could Paul be than in Eph 6:10-20? We make fools of ourselves, setting ourselves up for mediocrity, emptiness, and disaster, if we do not insist to be much in prayer whatever the cost.

The prayer to which Paul summons Christians is marked in v. 18 by the repeated "all." What he is calling for is an "all out" commitment to prayer. "All" is a word that should arouse soldiers to a state of urgency.

*Prayer is for all situations* ("in every prayer"). Prayer can take various forms, such as praise, blessing, thanks, confession, petition, intercession, and affirmation, to name a few. In the last of these, Christians affirm something like "I love Thee, O Lord, my strength" (Ps 18:1).

*Prayer is for all seasons* ("at all times"). Scripture illustrates prayer at every conceivable time.<sup>21</sup> Spurgeon saw praying seven times

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<sup>21</sup>E.g., morning, noon, and night (Ps 55:17), seven times a day (Ps 119:164), midnight (Ps 119:62), before dawn (Ps 119:147), day and night (Ps 22:1-5; Neh 1:6; 1 Thess 3:10), three

a day in Ps 119:164 as "at every touch and turn."<sup>22</sup> Seven denotes a completeness in resorting to prayer, as habitual prayer recurs. Prayer at all times would permeate every part of the armor as a Christian lives in truth and righteousness during these times.

*Prayer is all in the Spirit.* Where proper, prayer is in the Spirit's power (v. 10), faithful to the Word which is His sword (v. 17; cf. John 15:7). Prayer in the right pattern draws from the Word its motives, which the Spirit produces in the believer. It gains its guidance from the Spirit and in every way can be touched with commitment to the Spirit's purposes.

*Prayer is in all steadfastness.* Paul uses two words to express this. One is translated as "being on the alert" (from *gryponē*, *agrypnē*). It refers to keeping awake, maintaining a watchful sensitivity. Alertness is essential in prayer so as to grasp what to pray in timely effectiveness and not be "asleep at the switch." The person praying is to keep this vigil "with all perseverance" (from *proskarthsiw*, *proskartēsis*). This is a quality of steadfast endurance, literally a "holding fast to." Early American cowboys, who took drastic measures to keep alert and hold fast to their work while guarding cattle at night exemplify this idea. They would rub tobacco juice in their eyes to make them smart, keep them open, and help the riders stay at their vigil even when weary. They did this in the interests of their boss and for the safety of the animals. Will we remain constantly steadfast in prayer for the high interests of our Lord and for the benefit of people, who are much more important than cattle?

*Prayer is for all the saints.* Christians in various collective ways can pray for many saints and conceivably, all-told, for everyone of them. Paul's letter has *all* saints in the church in view as Christ's building (Eph 2:11-21), body (3:1-13) and bride (5:29, 30). No *one* believer can necessarily know all the saints, certainly not all the needs arising at all times, even in a local fellowship. Paul probably intended a corporate coverage as all believers become involved. And each individual can pray sensitively about all the Christians he can be responsibly aware of and mention in a disciplined use of opportunities.

Paul also emphasizes his own sense of urgency for others' prayer (vv. 19-20). Every pastor ought to have many praying "on my

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weeks (Dan 10:2-3), ten days (Acts 1:3, 13; 2:1).

<sup>22</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 6 vols. (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1950) 5:429.

[i.e., his] behalf." Prayer for Paul is for him to have boldness with clarity in proclaiming the greatest message, the gospel.<sup>23</sup> It is crucial for any who speak God's Word to have prayer for God's help, whether they speak to many or to one. The Word going forth with God's power can pierce as "the sword of the Spirit" (v. 17; cf. Heb 4:12).

Such is the vital place of prayer in Christian life and ministry. God has made His moves to steer us to this priority. He could say as one says in the game of checkers when he has made his own move: "It's *your* move." And even when we make our move in prayer, we are taught by God's Word that *He* can be making *His* move again, working in us. Let us make the right move. We can do it the way God has made clear through Paul in Ephesians.

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<sup>23</sup>Paul seeks prayer not only for boldness, but for clarity (Col 4:2-4), rapid spread of the gospel and its being glorified (2 Thess 3:1), and protection from evil men (2 Thess 3:2).

**Exhibit A: God or Messiah Is Every Part of the Armor**

<i>The Image</i>	<i>The Spiritual Aspect</i>	<i>Scripture: God or Christ</i>
Belt	Truth	cf. Isa 11:5; John 14:6; 1:9
Breastplate	Righteousness	Is. 59:16, 17; cf. 11:5
Shoes	Gospel	Mark 14:9, death and passion of Jesus, the content of the gospel: 17:18; Rom 5:6, 8, 21; 8:34; 10:4; 11:16; Eph 3:8 (cf. D. R. Jackson, <i>Encyclopedia of the Bible</i> 2:780-781; 2:728, 730)
	Peace	Eph 2:14-16 Christ <i>is, made,</i> and <i>preached</i> peace
Shield	Faithfulness (as object of	Gen 15:1; 2 Sam 22:3, 31, 36; Pss 3:3; 5:12; 7:10, 13; 18:2, 30; 35:2; 84:9 (Messiah); 144:1, 2; Prov 30:5
Helmet	Salvation (deliverance)	Ps 27:1; Isa 59:17 (cf. v. 16); 1 Cor ope of salvation, cf. Gal 5:5)

*(Exhibit A continued on next page)*

Sword                      Word (*rhma*)                      Gospel, whole message Jesus or His servants speak, or a relevant 47; 6:63, 68; 12:47, 48; 17:8; Acts 5:20 n 10:8, 17 (gospel or whole word as the word that God uses in the word of His church); 1 Pet 1:25; 1 Thess rd cited by Paul)

**Exhibit B1: Aspects of the Armor Related to Prayer**

<i>Key Words in Warfare</i>	<i>Ephesians 6</i>	<i>Biblical Relation to Prayer</i>
Power	v. 10	Ps 119:28b; 138:3; Acts 4:24-31
Deliverance from evil	vv. 11, 13, 16, 17	Ps 119:41; Matt 6:13; Rom 10:13
Truth	v. 14	Pss 25:5; 69:13; 119:43; John 17:17
Righteousness	v. 15	Pss 5:8; 71:2; Phil 1:11
Gospel	v. 16	Rom 10:1; Col 4:2-4
Witness	vv. 19-20	Acts 4:24-31; Col 4:2-4
Peace	v. 15	Ps 4:6-8; Phil 4:6, 7; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Thess 3:16
Faith; Victory	v. 16	Pss 55:23; 119:42; 143:8; James 5:15; 1 John 5:4-5
Word of God	v. 17	Pss 119:17-18, 26, 32, 33-40
Spirit of God	vv. 17-18	Eph 6:18; Jude 20

**Exhibit B2: Spiritual Aspects in Ephesians Related to Prayer**  
(a partial list of prayers by believers or others on their behalf)

1:1; 5:17; 6:6	will of God	cf. Ps 143:8, 10; Col 1:9; 1 Thess 3:11; Phlm 22
1:2	grace	Acts 4:29-31; 2 Thess 3:18
1:4; 5:2, 25, 33	love	Eph 3:17-19; Phil 1:9; 1 Thess 3:12
1:6	praise	A part of prayer (e.g., Psalms 145—150)
1:7	forgiveness	Psalm 51
1:8; 5:15	wisdom, insight	Eph 1:17-18
1:13	salvation	Rom 10:13; Ps 143:9
1:16; 5:20	thanks	A part of prayer (Col 1:12)
1:16	mention of saints in	In Paul's prayer
1:18	hope	In Paul's prayer
1:19; 6:10	power	Eph 3:16; Col 1:11; Ps 138:3
2:10	good works	John 15:7-8; Phil 1:11; 2 Thess 2:17
3:7	one's spiritual gift	Eph 6:19-20
3:9	mystery (gospel)	Eph. 6:19-20; Col 4:3
3:12	boldness	Heb 4:16; Eph 6:19-20
3:17	faith	1 Thess 3:10
3:19	fullness	Eph 3:19
3:21	glory	Eph 3:21
4:1; 5:15, etc.	walk	Col 1:10
4:2	patience	Col 1:11
4:24	holiness	1 Thess 3:13
4:24; 6:15	righteousness	Ps 5:8
4:25; 6:14	truth	Ps 25:5
4:27	giving Satan no opening	Matt 6:13
4:29; 5:4	wholesome speech	Phil 1:9; Col 1:10
5:9	fruit	John 15:8; Phil 1:11

*(Exhibit B2 continued on next page)*

5:10	learning what pleases the Lord	Col 1:10
5:18	filling	Eph 3:19; Phil 1:11
5:19	joy	Col 1:11
6:12	victory vs. satanic hosts	Luke 22:31, 32; John 17:15
6:14-15	truth, righteous-	
	e (cf. earlier)	
6:17	Word of God	John 15:7
6:18	steadfastness	2 Thess 3:5

**Exhibit C: Spiritual Essentials in John 13—17 and Eph 6:10-20**

<i>Key Words</i>	<i>John 13—17</i>	<i>Eph 6:10-20</i>
Power from God	15:4-5, ability	v. 10
Prayer related to the Word	15:1, 16	vv. 18-20
Presence of evil one	13:2; 17:15	vv. 11, 13, 16; cf. 2:2;
Protection from evil one	17:15	vv. 10-17, esp. 11-13,
Truth	14:6, 17; 16:26, etc.	v. 14
Righteousness	cf. 17:15, 19	v. 15
Peace	14:27; 16:33	v. 15
Faith	14:1, 10-12; 16:9, 27, 30	v. 16
Salvation	14:6; 17:3	v. 17
Word of God	14:21; 15:3, 7	v. 17
Spirit of God	14:26; 15:26; 16:9-11,	vv. 17-18

**Exhibit D: Prayer in the Spirit**

(how prayer in the Spirit [6:18] relates to spiritual aspects of the armor and the entirety of 6:10-17)

<i>Spiritual Area</i>	<i>Spirit's Part</i>	<i>Ephesians 6 Verse Here</i>	<i>Other Scriptures</i>
Power	"by My Spirit"	6:10-11, 13	Zech 4:6; 1 Cor 2:4; Eph 3:16-17
Warfare (weaponry)	Spirit	6:11-17	Matt 4:1-11;
Truth ("fruit of light" in Eph 5:9 is "fruit of the Spirit" in Gal 5:22-23 and "armor of light in Rom 13:12)	Spirit of truth	6:14; 5:9	John 14:17, 26; 16:13; Eph 5:9; 1 John 4:6
Righteousness	Spirit convicts of righteousness	6:14; 5:9	John 16:8-11
Peace	Fruit of the Spirit	6:15	Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22; cf. John 7:37-39
Faith	Strengthened through the Spirit	6:16; 3:16-17	1 Cor 12:3; Acts 6:5; 11:24
Salvation	rebirth is by the Spirit	6:17	2 Cor 3:6, the Spirit quickens; John 3:3-7; 6:63
	sealing is by the Spirit or the Father	1:13-14; 4:30	2 Cor 1:20; cf. 5:5

*(Exhibit D continued on next page)*

Word of God, Sword of the Spirit	This word came via human channels, "carried along by the Holy Spirit"	6:17	2 Pet 1:21
	He is the Spirit of truth, righteousness, etc.	6:14	cf. above
	He uses the Word when He leads into testing		Matt 4:1-11;
	He reveals God's truths to men	3:5	1 Cor 2:10- 11
	He convicts concerning sin, judgment, etc.		John 16:8-11
Prayer in the Spirit	It is in His sphere, purpose, power, etc.	6:18	Rom 8:26- 27; Jude 20
Preaching effectively	He gives utterance	6:19-20	Luke 4:18; Acts 2:4; 4:8; 6:10; Rom 15:19 1 Cor 2:1-5; 12:8; 1 Thess 1:5; 1 Pet 4:10-11

## THE HERMENEUTICS OF PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM<sup>1</sup>

Robert L. Thomas  
Professor of New Testament

*Progressive Dispensationalism differs from Dispensationalism in a number of ways, one of them being in not viewing the time of the rapture to be as crucial. Progressive dispensationalists view themselves as a continuation of the dispensational tradition, but realize they are moving toward nondispensational systems. The movement's desire for rapprochement with other theological systems has involved a hermeneutical shift in its understanding of Scripture. It has replaced grammatical-historical interpretation with a system of hermeneutics called historical-grammatical-literary-theological. Several comparisons that illustrate the differences between the two hermeneutical systems relate to the function of the interpreter, the historical dimension, the "single-meaning" principle, the issue of sensus plenior, and the importance of thoroughness. The bottom line is that a choice between Dispensationalism and Progressive Dispensationalism amounts to a choice of which system of hermeneutics an interpreter chooses to follow.*

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A recent development related to the pretribulational rapture has come from a relatively new movement calling itself Progressive Dispensationalism (hereafter usually designated by "PD"). For the most part, progressive dispensationalists believe in a rapture prior to the future seven-year tribulation, but they do so in a rather tentative

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<sup>1</sup>This essay will also appear in the volume *When the Trumpet Sounds*, scheduled for release by Harvest House in July 1995.

fashion.<sup>2</sup> Their system could dispense with this doctrine without altering their position significantly.

A closer look at PD will clarify why its adherents do not hold the

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<sup>2</sup>E.g., Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993) 8-9; Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton: Victor, 1993) 317 n. 15; cf. Walter A. Elwell, "Dispensationalists of the Third Kind," *Christianity Today* 38/10 (September 12, 1994):28.

pretrib view to be crucial. The name "Progressive Dispensationalism" derives from the proclivity of its adherents to see the movement in the lineage of dispensational theology and from the understanding of dispensations as not being different arrangements between God and the human race but as successive arrangements in the progressive revelation and accomplishment of redemption.<sup>3</sup> An attempt at defining PD must remain vague because progressive dispensationalists themselves are still in the process of trying to define it. The title of a recent book, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (1993), reflects the uncertainty of those within the movement about definition.

### LINEAGE AND MEDIATING STANCE OF PROGRESSIVE DISPENSATIONALISM

The leaders in the movement<sup>4</sup> view themselves and their supporters as taking a further step in the continuing development of dispensational theology.<sup>5</sup> For example, Bock sees himself as combining two elements, one from what he calls Scofieldian dispensationalism and the other from so-called essentialist dispensationalism, into his system.<sup>6</sup> Advocates of PD, in other words, see themselves in the lineage of dispensational theology.

Yet they do so with a realization that they are moving toward theological systems that are nondispensational. Saucy's quest is for a mediating position between traditional dispensationalism and nondispensationalism.<sup>7</sup> In this quest, however, some of his PD associates

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<sup>3</sup>Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 48.

<sup>4</sup>For purposes of this article, Craig A. Blaising, Darrell L. Bock, and Robert L. Saucy—sometimes called "the father of Progressive Dispensationalism"—will receive major attention because of their key leadership roles among progressive dispensationalists.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., Craig A. Blaising, "Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition," *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. by Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 16-34; Saucy, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 9.

<sup>6</sup>Darrell L. Bock, "The Son of David and the Saints' Task: The Hermeneutics of Initial Fulfillment," *BSac* 150/600 (October-December 1993):442.

<sup>7</sup>Robert L. Saucy, "The Church as the Mystery of God," *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. by Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 150; idem, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* 9, 29.

have gone far enough to suggest to outside observers a nondispensational orientation in their systems.<sup>8</sup> Bock admits the closeness of his views regarding a present kingdom to those of George Ladd's historic premillennialism—a system adverse to dispensationalism—though claiming a distinction regarding the future kingdom.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the desire for rapprochement with theologians of other systems appears to be a primary motivation behind the emergence of PD.

#### HERMENEUTICAL SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PD

With PD's desire for rapprochement, however, has come a hermeneutical shift away from literal interpretation—also call the grammatical-historical method—that has been one of the ongoing hallmarks of dispensationalism.<sup>10</sup> In late twentieth-century writings, advocates of this developing theological perspective have shifted in the direction of nondispensational systems by adopting some of the same hermeneutical practices as found in these other systems. For whatever reason, proponents of PD sometimes call their hermeneutics by the name "grammatical-historical," but they mean something quite different by the phrase. Blaising and Bock confirm this difference:

... Evangelical grammatical-historical interpretation was ... broadening in the mid-twentieth century to include the field of biblical theology. Grammatical analysis expanded to include developments in literary study, particularly in the study of genre, or literary form, and rhetorical structure. Historical interpretation came to include a reference to the historical and cultural context of individual literary pieces for their overall interpretation. And by the late 1980s, evangelicals became more aware of the problem of the interpreter's historical context and traditional preunderstanding of the text being interpreted. These

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<sup>8</sup>E.g., Elwell, "Dispensationalists of the Third Kind" 28.

<sup>9</sup>Darrell L. Bock, "Current Messianic Activity and OT Davidic Promise: Dispensationalism, Hermeneutics, and NT Fulfillment," *Trinity Journal* 15NS (1994):70 n. 29; cf. Elwell, "Dispensationalists of the Third Kind" 28.

<sup>10</sup>See Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965) 20, 45-46, 86-90; J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1958) 11-12, 33, 60-61; Thomas D. Ice, "Dispensational Hermeneutics," *Issues in Dispensationalism*, Wesley R. Willis and John R. Master, gen. eds. (Chicago: Moody, 1994) 32. Ice points out the error of Poythress and Blaising in attributing a spiritualized hermeneutics to early dispensationalists such as Darby and Scofield. Dispensationalism has always practiced a literal method of interpretation (Ice, "Dispensational Hermeneutics" 37-38).

developments . . . have opened up new vistas for discussion which were not considered by earlier interpreters, including classical and many revised dispensationalists. These are developments which have led to what is now called "progressive dispensationalism."<sup>11</sup>

So the hermeneutics of PD represent a significant discontinuity in their alleged lineage of dispensationalism. The recent and more sophisticated "grammatical-historical" interpretation does not lead to dispensationalism in its traditional sense, but to PD.<sup>12</sup>

Blaising and Bock see the continued use of "grammatical-historical" in its traditional sense as running the risk of anachronism,<sup>13</sup> presumably because their analysis of consensus is that *all* agree on the new principles of interpretation.<sup>14</sup> This appraisal of current views on hermeneutics is open to serious question. No such unanimity in favor of new interpretive approaches exists. Even if it did, who is guilty of anachronism? Is it not those who have taken traditional terminology and read into it new connotations?

Recent additions that differentiate the hermeneutics of PD from traditional dispensational hermeneutics include rhetorical and literary matters, the history of interpretation, the matter of tradition, and the historical context of the interpreter.<sup>15</sup> The method advocates consideration of the problem of historical distance between the text and the interpreter, the role of the interpreter's preunderstanding, and methodological applications of the hermeneutical spiral.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Blaising and Bock in at least one place call the approach by the name "historical-grammatical-literary-theological,"<sup>17</sup> which, of course, is more sophisticated and therefore quite different from simple grammatical-historical hermeneutics. It emphasizes the subjective element in its reasoning and hence is more provisional in its conclusions.<sup>18</sup>

This is not the appropriate forum for evaluating recent developments in hermeneutics as a whole—the trends to which these authors

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<sup>11</sup>Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 35-36.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 58, 77.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>16</sup>Blaising, "Dispensationalism: The Search" 30.

<sup>17</sup>Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 77.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

refer<sup>19</sup>—but it is appropriate to compare perspectives regarding several of the new hermeneutical principles with traditional grammatical-historical hermeneutics. For purposes of comparison, Milton S. Terry and Bernard Ramm will furnish principles pertaining to traditional grammatical-historical interpretation in the following discussion.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>The *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* plans to publish my partial evaluation of recent developments in evangelical hermeneutics in one of its forthcoming issues (in 1995 or 1996). The title of the article is "Current Hermeneutical Trends: Toward Explanation or Obfuscation?"

<sup>20</sup>Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.); Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation, A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd. rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970).

COMPARISON OF OLD AND NEW  
HERMENEUTICAL MAXIMS

The following rules of interpretation will illustrate the acknowledged difference in approach to Scripture between PD and dispensationalism. They compare grammatical-historical-literary-theological interpretation with grammatical-historical interpretation.

*The Function of the Interpreter*

One principle that conspicuously distinguishes the two systems of interpretation relates to the role of the interpreter. Traditionally, the interpreter has sought to suppress any of his own viewpoints regarding what he thinks the passage should mean so as to allow the exegetical evidence from the passage under investigation to speak for itself. Terry writes,

In the systematic presentation, therefore, of any scriptural doctrine, we are always to make a discriminating use of sound hermeneutical principles. We must not study them in the light of modern systems of divinity, but should aim rather to place ourselves in the position of the sacred writers, and study to obtain the impression their words would naturally have made upon the minds of the first readers. . . . Still less should we allow ourselves to be influenced by any presumptions of what the Scriptures *ought* to teach. . . . All such presumptions are uncalled for and prejudicial.<sup>21</sup>

He adds,

He [the interpreter] must have an intuition of nature and of human life by which to put himself in the place of the biblical writers and see and feel as they did. . . . He must not allow himself to be influenced by hidden meanings, and spiritualizing processes, and plausible conjectures. . . . Such a discriminating judgment may be trained and strengthened, and no pains should be spared to render it a safe and reliable habit of the mind.<sup>22</sup>

Ramm puts the principle this way:

It is very difficult for any person to approach the Holy Scriptures free

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<sup>21</sup>Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 595 [emphasis in original].

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 152-53.

from prejudices and assumptions which distort the text. The danger of having a set theological system is that in the interpretation of Scripture the system tends to govern the interpretation rather than the interpretation correcting the system. . . . Calvin said that the Holy Scripture is not a tennis ball that we may bounce around at will. Rather it is the Word of God whose teachings must be learned by the most impartial and objective study of the text.<sup>23</sup>

The hermeneutics of PD are a bold contrast to this principle of seeking objectivity through repression of one's biases. Its relevant principle advocates the inclusion of one's preunderstanding in the interpretive process as a starting point. Leaders in the movement pointedly advocate allowing one's biblical theology and other elements of preunderstanding to influence interpretive conclusions. Blaising and Bock note this in a number of places and affirm it as a proper evangelical procedure of interpretation.<sup>24</sup> For example, Bock's preunderstanding in coming to Scripture includes the assumption that a NT appearance of several elements of an OT promise constitutes an initial or partial fulfillment of that promise as a whole.<sup>25</sup> This foregone conclusion with which he initiates his research is what ultimately leads him to conclude that Christ is presently ruling from the Davidic throne in heaven.

In the words of Blaising and Bock, "Each of us has our own way of seeing, a grid for understanding, that impacts what we expect to see in the text, the questions we ask of it, and thus the answers we get."<sup>26</sup> They apparently agree with McCartney and Clayton that preunderstanding, not interpretive methodology, determines the end result of interpretation.<sup>27</sup> This, of course, differs radically from the

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<sup>23</sup>Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* 115-16. Ramm also quotes Luther to emphasize this point: "The best teacher is the one who does not bring his meaning into the Scripture but gets his meaning from Scripture" (Ibid., 115, citing Farrar, *History of Interpretation* 475).

<sup>24</sup>E.g., Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, "Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: Assessment and Dialogue," *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. by Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 380; Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 58-61.

<sup>25</sup>Bock, "Current Messianic Activity" 72.

<sup>26</sup>Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 59.

<sup>27</sup>Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand, A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1994) 65; cf. Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation, Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 88.

quest of traditional hermeneutics for objectivity in hermeneutical investigations.

Though not as specific as Blaising and Bock, Saucy apparently shares this view of the hermeneutical role of preunderstanding. He writes, "The fact that earthly human ministry still has significance after the finality of Christ's coming leads to a second truth with hermeneutical implications. The application of Christ's fulfillment of the eschatological promises is progressive."<sup>28</sup> In coming to the NT, he assumes that it contains a progressive unfolding of the dispensations rather than seeing the church as a parenthesis. This, of course, colors his interpretation of many aspects of revelation regarding the church.

Quite clearly, the issue of preunderstanding distinguishes the hermeneutics of PD from principles of traditional grammatical-historical interpretation.

### *The Historical Dimension*

Another contrast between the two approaches to hermeneutics lies in an understanding of the meaning of "historical" in the expression "grammatical-historical." Traditionally, the historical dimension in interpretation has referred to the historical setting of the text's origin, as Terry describes:

The interpreter should, therefore, endeavour to take himself from the present, and to transport himself into the historical position of his author, look through his eyes, note his surroundings, feel with his heart, and catch his emotion. Herein we note the import of the term *grammatico-historical* interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

He states further, "Subject and predicate and subordinate clauses must be closely analyzed, and the whole document, book, or epistle, should be viewed, as far as possible from the author's historical standpoint."<sup>30</sup>

In support of history's importance, Ramm writes, "Some interaction with the culture and history of a book of Holy Scripture is mandatory,"<sup>31</sup> and "The interpreter must know *Biblical history*. . . . Every event has its historical referent in that all Biblical events occur in

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<sup>28</sup>Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* 32.

<sup>29</sup>Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 231 [emphasis in original].

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>31</sup>Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* 150.

a stream of history."<sup>32</sup>

Bock, on the other hand, advocates a multilayered reading of the text which results in a "complementary" reading (or meaning) that adds to the original meaning determined by the text's original setting. The "complementary" perspective views the text from the standpoint of later events, not the events connected with the text's origin.<sup>33</sup> He proposes a third layer of reading also, that of the entire biblical canon.<sup>34</sup> In essence, he sees three possible interpretations of a single text, only one of which pertains to the text's original historical setting. He refers to his method as a historical-grammatical-literary reading of the text.<sup>35</sup> He notes that "such a hermeneutic produces layers of sense and specificity for a text, as the interpreter moves from considering the near context to more distant ones."<sup>36</sup>

By thus ignoring the way the original historical setting "freezes" the meaning of a text, Bock concludes that the meaning of any given passage is not static, but dynamic. It is ever changing through the addition of new meanings.<sup>37</sup> In principle, Saucy indicates the same perspective. Though acknowledging that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in its original utterance had pre-Christian Judaism as its target,<sup>38</sup> he views the sermon as directly applicable to the church.<sup>39</sup> This can be true only if that portion of Scripture at some point received additional connotations that were not part of its original historical utterance. Adapting Saucy's words from another setting, this amounts to "a bending [of the text] that would have been quite foreign to the original readers [i.e., listeners]."<sup>40</sup>

For PD hermeneutics, "historical" has apparently come to incorporate not just the situation of the original text, but also the ongoing conditions throughout the history of the interpretation of that

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 154 [emphasis in original].

<sup>33</sup>Bock, "The Son of David" 445.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 445 n. 9. Blaising and Bock elsewhere call the three levels of reading the historical-exegetical, the biblical-theological, and the canonical-systematic (Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 100-1).

<sup>35</sup>Bock, "The Son of David" 447.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 447.

<sup>37</sup>Bock, "Current Messianic Activity" 71; cf. Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 64.

<sup>38</sup>Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* 87 (see also n. 24).

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 235.

text.<sup>41</sup> According to traditional hermeneutical principles, such a "bending" is impossible because the historical dimension fixes the meaning of a given passage and does not allow it to keep gaining new senses as it comes into new settings.

*The "Single-Meaning" Principle*

Closely related to the dimension that, according to the traditional method, fixes the meaning of a text in relation to its original historical surroundings is the guiding principle that a given text has one meaning and one meaning only. Terry states the principle thus: "A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that the words and sentences can have but one significance in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift out upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture."<sup>42</sup>

Ramm states the same another way: "But here we must remember the old adage: 'Interpretation is one, application is many.' This means that there is only one meaning to a passage of Scripture which is determined by careful study."<sup>43</sup>

The position of PD, however, is to refrain from limiting a passage to a single meaning, and to allow for later complementary additions in meaning, which of necessity alter the original sense conveyed by the passage.<sup>44</sup> These later alterations are in view when Blaising and Bock write, ". . . There also is such a thing as complementary aspects of meaning, where an additional angle on the text reveals an additional element of its message or a fresh way of relating the parts of a text's message."<sup>45</sup>

In part, Bock admits this characteristic of his hermeneutics:

Does the expansion of meaning entail a change of meaning? . . . This is an important question for those concerned about consistency within interpretation. The answer is both yes and no. On the one hand, to add to the revelation of a promise is to introduce "change" to it through addition.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup>Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 29-30.

<sup>42</sup>Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 205.

<sup>43</sup>Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* 113.

<sup>44</sup>Blaising and Bock, "Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church" 392-93.

<sup>45</sup>Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 68.

<sup>46</sup>Bock, "Current Messianic Activity" 71.

He tries to justify this change by calling it revelatory progress, but whatever the attempted justification, the fact remains that change is present.<sup>47</sup> This contrasts with traditional grammatical-historical hermeneutics' denial of the possibility of a passage's having multiple meanings.

Saucy practices the hermeneutics of multiple meanings also. Acknowledging the reference of "seed" in Gen 12:7 to the physical posterity of Abraham, he assigns the term an additional meaning by including Jews and Gentiles who follow Abraham's pattern of faith.<sup>48</sup> He finds that an original meaning of Psalm 110 received added meaning through Peter's sermon at Pentecost.<sup>49</sup> This leads him to assign two meanings to the OT throne of David: one a throne in heaven and the other a throne on earth.<sup>50</sup>

In other instances, however, he strongly opposes a reinterpretation of the OT, when it comes to equating the church with the new Israel.<sup>51</sup> Yet this is precisely what he has done in instances when necessary to fit his system of PD. One can but wonder why he does not treat these passages as he does Hos 1:9-10; 2:23 and make them an application of OT passages rather than an added interpretation of them.<sup>52</sup>

To theorize that the apostles assigned additional meanings to OT texts, as Saucy does,<sup>53</sup> cannot qualify as grammatical-historical interpretation, because in numbers of cases the meanings they added to the OT were beyond the reach of human recipients of those OT Scriptures. Yes, God knew all along that the passages would ultimately attain these added nuances, but the additions were unavailable to human interpreters until the time of the NT spokesmen and writers.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid. Progress in divine revelation is quite apparent in tracing through the books of the Old and New Testaments chronologically, but "progress" in the sense only of adding to what has already been revealed, not in any sense of a change of previous revelation. To change the substance of something already written is not "progress"; it is an "alteration" or "change" that raises questions about the credibility of the text's original meaning.

<sup>48</sup>Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* 42-43.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>51</sup>E.g., *ibid.*, 134, 211.

<sup>52</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 205-6.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 33

<sup>54</sup>Saucy himself illustrates the difference between divine and human perspectives in his defense of the validity of an offer of the kingdom to Israel prior to the prophesied cross of

It is an example of anachronistic hermeneutics to read NT revelation back into the context of the OT under the banner of grammatical-historical methodology. This method limits a passage to one meaning and one meaning only.

*The Issue of Sensus Plenior (i.e., "Fuller Meaning")*

The issue of whether to assign a fuller sense to a passage than grammatical-historical examination warrants is not too remote from the issue of the principle of single meaning. The practice of doing so has characterized Roman Catholicism for centuries,<sup>55</sup> and amounts to an allegorical rather than a literal method of interpretation. Terry strongly repudiates this practice: "He [the systematic expounder of Scripture] must not import into the text of Scripture the ideas of later times, or build upon any words or passages a dogma which they do not legitimately teach."<sup>56</sup> Recently Protestant evangelicals have begun advocating the incorporation of this "fuller meaning" too.<sup>57</sup> Remarks in the earlier discussion of "historical dimension" and "single-meaning" reflect the disharmony of *sensus plenior* with traditional grammatical-historical interpretation.

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Christ: "We suggest that the solution lies in the same realm as other problems related to the sovereign decree of God for history and the responsible actions of mankind. The idea that God could offer humankind a real choice and opportunity, knowing all the while that humankind would fail (and, in fact, having decreed a plan on the basis of that failure), is expressed in other passages of Scripture. In Eden, humankind was given a genuine opportunity to choose holiness, yet Scripture indicates that God's plan already included the sacrifice of Christ 'from the creation of the world' (Rev 13:8; cf. Ac 2:23; 4:28). Thus in this instance, a similar unanswerable question as that related to the offer of the kingdom might be posed: What would have happened to the death of Christ if Adam and Even had not sinned?" (ibid., 92). The analogy holds here too: the humanly discernible meaning of these OT passages was limited to the single connotation determined by grammatical and historical factors, the additional divine nuance being reserved for later NT revelation to humans. The answer to the question, "What would have happened to the added meanings if the NT writers had never penned new meanings to OT passages?" is also unanswerable. Would the meanings have remained unknown to men?

<sup>55</sup>Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* 40-42.

<sup>56</sup>Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 583.

<sup>57</sup>E.g., McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader* 162, 164; cf. William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993) 139, 145-50; Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics, The Search for Meaning*, co-authored with Walter C. Kaiser (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 267.

Facing the issue of "fuller meaning," PD comes down clearly on the side of incorporating it into hermeneutical methodology. Its delineation of "complementary hermeneutics," as described above, is clearly of this nature. Blaising and Bock explicitly refuse to limit textual meaning to a reproduction of what the author meant.<sup>58</sup> Regarding this issue they state, "These texts have a message that extends beyond the original settings in which they were given. Something about what they say lives on."<sup>59</sup> They deny the well-known maxim of "one interpretation, many applications," referring to later applications as added meanings that accrue to various biblical texts.<sup>60</sup> This opinion is in essence none other than an advocacy of *sensus plenior*, when they refer to a meaning beyond that determined by the historical circumstances of the text's origin.<sup>61</sup> When in referring to the possibility of later revelation's expanding of previous revelation, one means an addition to the original text,<sup>62</sup> it is tantamount to the principle of assigning a meaning beyond that yielded through grammatical-historical study.

In his expansion of the meaning of "seed" in Gen 12:7,<sup>63</sup> Saucy follows the same pattern of assigning a fuller meaning than called for by traditional hermeneutics. He also points out that Peter's preaching in Acts 2 added something to the meaning of Psalm 110 that was unrecognized in earlier interpretations.<sup>64</sup> All such interpretations of PD—of which there are many—fall into the category of historical-grammatical-literary-theological hermeneutics and are a distinguishing mark of this new system.

Saucy, on the other hand, sometimes takes NT uses of the OT not as fulfillments, but as new applications of the OT. He summarizes an extended discussion of how Hebrews uses the OT in these words: "In this connection it is important to recognize that the purpose of the

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<sup>58</sup>Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 64.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*; cf. also *ibid.*, 65-68.

<sup>61</sup>Bock elsewhere denies that this hermeneutical principle amounts to *sensus plenior* or spiritualizing interpretation, choosing to refer to it as "pattern" fulfillment or typological-prophetic fulfillment ("Current Messianic Activity" 69; cf. Blaising and Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* 102-4). Whatever name one applies to the practice, it still violates the strict standards of a consistent grammatical-historical interpretation.

<sup>62</sup>Bock, "The Son of David" 446.

<sup>63</sup>Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* 49.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

writer to the Hebrews is not to give us an interpretation of Old Testament prophecy. The book is rather 'a word of exhortation' (13:22). . . ."65 He also notes,

. . . The Scriptures frequently reveal different applications of similar language without implying a change in identity. The fact that the same phrase about God's son being called out of Egypt applies to both Israel and Christ does not make these objects identical (cf. Hos 11:1 and Mt 2:15).66

This principle of seeing the NT use of the OT as applications rather than as interpretations is more in accord with grammatical-historical practices. The fact that the added meanings supplied in the NT did not become discernible until provided by inspired NT writings means that the authority for such interpretations derives from the NT citation, not from the OT passages themselves. This being the case, the support for PD vanishes when evaluated by grammatical and historical criteria. Of course, God knew from eternity past that fuller meanings would eventually emerge, but so far as human beings were concerned, such meanings were nonexistent until the time that NT apostles and prophets disclosed them.

### *The Importance of Thoroughness*

The expression "hermeneutical hopscotch" describes a final characteristic of PD hermeneutics. Hopscotch is a game in which players choose which squares they want to hop into and avoid stepping in the squares that would lose the game for them. Hermeneutical procedures of PD resemble this game through a selective use of passages seemingly in support of their system—while avoiding others that do not—and through selective comments regarding the passages they cite. The following instances illustrate this fact.

Traditional grammatical-historical exegesis refrains from such passage selectivity. Ramm warns against the danger of *apparent* cross references—i.e., places where a word or words may be the same in two passages, but when equating the two misrepresents the meaning of one or both passages.<sup>67</sup> The practice to which this warning applies is

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 206.

<sup>67</sup>Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* 140-41. Terry also warns, ". . . We must avoid the danger of overstepping in this matter [i.e., the matter of using cross-references too

remarkably close to Bock's treatment of the words "light" and "sit" in some of Luke's writings.<sup>68</sup> He builds major doctrinal conclusions on the repetitions of these words in contexts that differ considerably from one another. Another instance of selectivity—this time of a thematic type—is Bock's survey of Luke's gospel and Acts to prove that Christ's promised kingdom rule presently exists. He selects scattered passages in the two books that allegedly prove his point, but omits those that are destructive to his theory, such as Luke 8:10 where Christ through His use of "mysteries" indicates He is talking about a kingdom unforeseen in the OT.<sup>69</sup>

Traditional grammatical-historical exegesis also refrains from making only selective comments regarding texts that are crucial to the point to be proven. Careful study of a passage is the way to obtain the one and only meaning of that passage.<sup>70</sup> Progressive dispensationalists do not exhibit "careful study" in their handling of critical texts. Regarding Rom 16:25-27, the three principal spokesmen fail to acknowledge another interpretation of the passage that refutes their use of it.<sup>71</sup> They consistently interpret "the Scriptures of the prophets" (lit., "the prophetic scriptures") (16:26) as referring to the OT. They conclude on the basis of this assumption that "the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past" (16:25) was made known in the OT. They nowhere in their major writings on the subject show an awareness that another very viable interpretation of "the Scriptures of the prophets" exists, i.e., that it refers to the utterances and/or writings of NT prophets.<sup>72</sup> This latter meaning would negate the conclusion they draw from the passage. Thorough-going grammatical-historical interpretation does not condone this kind of superficial treatment of texts, particularly when they are critical to support a doctrine being propounded.

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carelessly]" (Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 222), and "There may be a likeness of sentiment without any real parallelism [i.e., in regard to verbal parallels between separate passages]" (ibid., 223).

<sup>68</sup>Bock, "The Son of David" 447-48, 451-52.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. ibid., 449-54.

<sup>70</sup>Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* 113.

<sup>71</sup>Cf. Blaising and Bock, "Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church" 393 n. 8; Bock, "The Son of David" 456 n. 26; idem, "Current Messianic Activity" 84; Saucy, "The Church as the Mystery" 144.

<sup>72</sup>Cf. Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on Romans* (1977 reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1883) 504-5; James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Chicago: Moody, 1960) 254-55.

In the matter of hermeneutical hopscotch, then, lies another distinction between grammatical-historical interpretation and the methodology of PD. The five principles, of which this is the last, are not all that distinguish the two approaches, but they are sufficient to illustrate that significant differences exist.

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

The difference in hermeneutical methodology summarized above explains why PD is less clear-cut in its support of a pretribulational rapture of the church as well as of a number of other long-standing distinctives of dispensationalism. It is not the purpose of this essay to raise the question of how proper it is to apply the name "dispensational" to the new theological system. The discussion above has only sought to clarify wherein lies the basic difference between dispensationalism and PD.

By now it has become quite evident both from the self-assessment of progressive dispensationalists and from the comparison of illustrative hermeneutical principles that a choice between the two systems amounts to a choice between two systems of interpretation. If one endorses recent trends in evangelical hermeneutics, that person may very easily fit into the camp of PD or perhaps even into a theological system that is decidedly nondispensational. On the other hand, a choice of grammatical-historical interpretation must lead to dispensational conclusions.

In the latter case, a consideration of the hermeneutics of PD is beneficial in sharpening an appreciation for some of the finer points of the traditional method. Positive lessons from above comparisons include the importance of interpretive objectivity, of a passage's historical and cultural background, of limiting each passage to a single meaning, of avoiding the temptation to assign a "fuller meaning," and of thoroughness in letting each passage have its complete contribution to the totality of biblical revelation. Practicing these lessons will have a stabilizing and building effect in the growth of Christ's body.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Trent C. Butler, gen. ed. *Holman Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Holman, 1991. xxix + 1450 pp. \$34.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

"You can understand every word of the dictionary. The editors have fashioned it for you to read, not for scholars to be impressed" (ix). These words convey the purpose of this new Bible dictionary. The reader is immediately struck as he peruses the articles how well the purpose has been met. Each article is simply written and easy for the average Christian to grasp. Further, the volume has many pictures, charts, reconstructions, and maps that help the reader visualize what is being communicated by word. The dictionary styles itself as "user-friendly" (dust cover) and it lives up to its claim.

The strength of this dictionary is in the articles and helps dealing with the Bible backgrounds. A list of these appears on pages vi and vii in the table of contents. The articles on Bible history are generally trustworthy, except for the dating of the Patriarchs, Exodus, Conquest, and Judges. A chart on page 256 lists both the traditional dates (2000-1025 B.C.) and critical dates (1700-1025 B.C.) for these periods. The traditional dates assume a 1450 B.C. date for the Exodus, the critical dates using a 1290 B.C. date for the same event. Even though the chart gives both viewpoints, the written article supports the latter date (255-56). Other articles also presuppose the critical dating. The articles on Bible culture are very well done and very profitable for the beginning student. Twenty-two artist reconstructions picture things from the Tabernacle to a first-century winepress. These visuals, some of them full-page, are excellent learning tools for Bible readers. The internal maps and accompanying articles are valuable introductions to Bible geography.

However, the biblical and theological articles are uneven and some are misleading, particularly for the beginning Bible student. In the theological area, for example, there is an accurate discussion on the topic of revelation, but the corresponding article on inspiration concludes, "The Bible itself . . . has no theory of inspiration. Nevertheless, it emphatically declares itself to be the authoritative record of God's revelation" (704). Thus, the verbal inspiration position is labelled as only one theory among a number of theories, one that cannot claim biblical support. Also, the articles on the Bible contain many suspect statements such as, "We do not know who wrote the

completed Pentateuch" and "There is no reason why conservatives cannot use such symbols as P and H as a convenient shorthand to refer to certain blocks of material" (1091). Also, the dictionary has no clear statement of Isaiah's role in writing Isaiah 40-66 (717-18). Further, an elder in the Johannine community, not the apostle John, wrote the Johannine letters (807). These examples show that although the dictionary was not written for scholars to be impressed, it presents the conclusions of liberal scholarship in some of the biblical and theological articles.

The new work has many commendable features, but it cannot be recommended to the reader for whom it has been especially designed, the beginning Bible student. Although this dictionary is certainly "user-friendly," the caveat "buyer-beware" should also be applied.

John L. Carson and David W. Hall. *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994. 338 pp. \$32.95 (cloth). Reviewed by David C. Deuel, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

This volume contains the addresses given in London in 1993 at an international conference celebrating the 350th anniversary of the Westminster Assembly. Those Reformed groups that gathered saw themselves "in continuity with history" (4) and knew "the value of spiritual remembering" (ibid.).

The present work has the following aims in commemorating the 1643 event:

1. To give thanks to God for the work of the Assembly;
2. To promote unity among Reformed churches around the world;
3. To advance the Reformed faith by focusing attention on the work of the assembly.

Objectives two and three reflect the assembly's denominational constitution, the churches of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) consisting of The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, The Christian Reformed Church, The Korean American Presbyterian Church, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, The Presbyterian Church of America, and The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.

Though much space is given to the history and character of the assembly, the book's primary focus is upon the assembly's enduring contribution: the documents it produced as an expression of theological conviction. These are the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Directory for Public Worship, and

the Form of Church Government. The original assembly conducted prolonged studies to generate these documents at the request of the English Parliament. The goal was to provide uniform statements of doctrine, discipline, worship, and government for the churches of England, Scotland and Ireland (ix).

In short, to read and ponder John Carson's preface to the volume is to understand, if just a little better, the relationship between five documents and the spirit of the Reformed tradition. The 1993 conference was indeed a celebration! The present volume which it generated records a blend of fascinating historical sketches, refreshing insights into familiar documents, and invigorating fellowship in an ancient city—all of which is encompassed by the eternal themes of the trumpet blasts of God's Sovereignty, Christ Pre-eminence, and the Holy Spirit's Application of Redemption (xii-xiii).

The book is enjoyable reading. For those unfamiliar with the Reformed tradition or those who simply want to know more about one of its foundational historical events, this book should prove helpful and interesting. But for those whose roots come closer to historical Reformation thinking, it will no doubt be a celebration, a spiritual remembering.

Eddie Gibbs. *In Name Only. Tackling the Problem of Nominal Christianity*. Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1994. 347 pp. \$14.99 (paper). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible.

This is a serious, heavily-researched book that defines kinds of nominality among church people. It also traces trends in nominality, characteristics of it, and a proposed method to reach the nominal.

Gibbs is Associate Rector for Discipleship at All Saints' Parish in Beverly Hills, California. He formerly was Robert Boyd Munger Professor of Evangelism and Church Renewal at Fuller Theological Seminary. He received his formal training at London University and Fuller.

Chapter 1 discusses the wide extent and complexity of nominality geographically and also in various religious traditions. Gibbs realizes the need to qualify remarks, but defines nominality in five different groups. He uses the 1980 definition of the Lausanne Congress in Thailand (cf. 23): a person who attends church regularly, but has no personal relationship with Christ; one who attends regularly for cultural reasons only; one who attends on occasions such as Christmas, weddings, etc.; one who seldom attends, but maintains a church relation for security, emotional or family ties, etc.; one who has no relation with any church and never attends, but thinks he is a Christian. Gibbs sees a variety of motivations influencing church

affiliation (spiritual, social, material).

Chapter 2 is an overview of cases in the OT and NT that in some sense may relate to nominality. The third chapter describes chief characteristics and causes of the problem. Characteristics include such matters as wanting to be known as Christians, professing ideals based on the teachings of Jesus, selectivity in beliefs as well as religious practices and moral conduct, and continuing to demand occasional ministries of the church. The causes are many: never hearing the gospel in the Spirit's power, undermining biblical authority through rationalism and empiricism, preaching the Word in a cold, abrasive, or judgmental way, insensitive and over-aggressive evangelism, unhappy church experiences, culturally irrelevant church services (they bore, offend or use outmoded words), infrequent ministerial contacts, failure to make people feel at home, unresolved personal conflicts, and institutional degeneration.

Chapter 4 tells how the church can set its house in order and renew the nominal. For example, suggestions are leadership improved in quality, authenticity and commitment; improved intercessory prayer; a life-enhancing worship experience; increased effort to increase the congregation's commitment; and aggressive but winsome evangelism.

Gibbs in chap. 5 sees need for heightened perception of highly diversified urban factors that foster nominality. Chapter 6 recognizes the influence of secularization on social structures and religious thinking and the urgency of providing answers to questions and giving people purpose and self-identity.

The final chapter moves from diagnosis to prescription. It proposes strategies to restore the lapsed, reactivate the faith for the nominal, bring some to true faith for the first time, and reach those who do not identify with any group of Christians.

The most practical section comes near the end and contains nine points. Some of these are creating opportunities to become a discipling community, providing support systems to enhance witness, developing relevant witness in a variety of spheres, utilizing full ministry potential, and growing leaders to enhance the success.

The book has much to provoke thought, although readers will have different reactions to some of Gibbs' categories. Some people he apparently regards as once having real faith may have had only an invalid professing faith, not a genuine saving one. However one views this, the solution in the final analysis is to help these know reality in Christ. Gibbs wisely concludes that believers can succeed not in human strength, but only by the Holy Spirit in an intimate walk with the Lord. "There will be no significant restoration of `nominal Christians' apart from the reproduction of `normative Christians,' . . . who are themselves growing . . . in Christ (Eph. 4:13)" (270).

Robert H. Gundry. *A Survey of the New Testament*. Third Edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994. 495 pp. \$24.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

Since 1970, Robert Gundry's *A Survey of the New Testament* has been a standard textbook used in college NT survey courses. In 1981, Gundry updated his textbook with a second edition that expanded and updated his bibliographies and improved the visual appearance with better maps and pictures. Now, he has provided a third edition which seeks to upgrade the textbook for beginning students of New Testament. Again, the bibliographies are updated and the visualization is modernized. But for the third edition, the chapters on the four Gospels have been completely rewritten. The second had a thirty-three page discussion of the backgrounds, theme, and outline of each of the Gospels, followed by a ninety-three page exposition of the life of Christ using the order of A. T. Robertson's *A Harmony of the Gospels*. The third edition has a twelve-page introductory overview of Jesus' public life and ministry. The exposition of each Gospel follows individually, not in a harmonistic fashion. Discussion of the four Gospels consumes one hundred and sixty-nine pages in this new edition. This is the major change in the third edition.

The new text retains the many commendable features of Gundry's first two editions. First, Gundry is concerned to get the beginning student reading the text of the NT. He asks the student to read the biblical passages before reading his discussions of them. Also, each chapter in the text begins with thought provoking questions so that the reader is guided in what to look for as he reads the biblical book. Second, in the first three chapters the author gives an excellent, succinct discussion of the political, cultural, and religious backgrounds of the NT. He keeps this material to a minimum so that the student can quickly get into the reading of the Bible itself. Gundry then weaves further background information to elucidate his discussions at the appropriate points. Third, the bibliographies are good guides for further reading. Fourth, Gundry is fair to opposing viewpoints on many issues of NT interpretation. Fifth, and most importantly, Gundry is staunchly orthodox in speaking of the person and work of Jesus Christ. Sixth, while some would quibble about his datings, Gundry supports with reasons the traditional authorship of the NT books. This textbook, for example, upholds Matthean and Johannine authorship of the Gospels attributed to them, as well as the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles and the Petrine authorship of 2 Peter, as the biblical text states.

Unfortunately, a number of weaknesses mar the presentation, particularly for the beginning student. Gundry accepts the position

that Mark was the first canonical Gospel written. He states, "Marcan priority enjoys considerable favor" (99). This presupposition controls his discussion of the Synoptic Gospels. He discusses Mark first and his discussions of Matthew and Luke assume that they have adapted Mark for their purposes. Further, Gundry advocates a measured use of form and redaction criticism as long as one does not reject the historicity of the underlying material. The individual units of the written Gospel material were true because they were based on the actual events and sayings of Jesus. The evangelists then tailored these earlier materials about Jesus to suit the needs of their own times, according to Gundry. He concludes, "Conservative scholars find good historical and theological reasons for full acceptance of the gospel records. . . . But measured by the purpose for which the gospels were written—to proclaim the good news about him [Christ] for evangelism and church life—the gospels merit our trust" (108). Finally, Gundry sees the 'kingdom' as "(1) a sphere of rule and (2) the activity of ruling" (114). For the author, the second predominates in Christ's earthly ministry so that in his discussion of individual Gospel passages, he uses "God's rule" instead of "kingdom of God/heaven." Thus, Gundry negates the aspect of the 'kingdom' having a realm.

Overall, this is a good NT survey textbook. The work on Acts and the Epistles is excellent. However, the student needs to be discerning in the chapters on the Gospels.

Alfred J. Hoerth, Gerald L. Mattingly, and Edwin Yamauchi. *Peoples of the Old Testament World*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994. 400 pp. \$29.99 (cloth). pp.). Reviewed by David C. Deuel, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

D. J. Wiseman's *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (Oxford: University Press, 1973) was a prototype for the present work. Yet not only does this volume "include developments and theories that have emerged since 1973," it also offers more information than most Bible dictionaries on the thirteen selected groups of peoples.

The book's preface chronicles the inception and growth of Wheaton College's interest in Near Eastern archaeology which led to a conference in 1989 focusing on "Peoples of the Old Testament World," the present work being an outgrowth of the papers presented. Many of the entries include personal research and secondary sources which postdate the conference.

In the foreword, Alan Millard candidly acknowledges both the gaps in knowledge about many of the peoples discussed therein as well as the priority of textual evidence over the other materials these peoples left behind. Guidelines like these for the use of historical tools

are too rare. They condition less methodologically informed readers to use the tool more thoughtfully.

One could have hoped for a consistent format for each entry, but the accident of discovery and the personal preferences of contributors mitigate against such uniformity. Bill T. Arnold's discussion of the Babylonians offers, in addition to a historical survey, topical discussions of culture, language, literature, art, science, and religion. This type of study lends itself to the needs of OT students better than the exclusively historical survey without topical discussion. In this regard, the entry on the Hittites by H. Hoffner is outstanding.

Hoffner's organization under the rubrics of Hittite material culture, society, and religion are most helpful. His additional discussion of "cultural and literary parallels to the Old Testament," although controversial in nature, draws together much of the previous discussion for comparative study. This is the primary focus and methodology implicit throughout the volume.

Peoples presented are the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, Hittites, Canaanites and Amorites, Phoenicians, Arameans, Philistines, Egyptians, Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites. With the exception of the Sumerians, all are named in the OT.

This tool will be helpful to pastors and teachers who need a more detailed presentation of the peoples in Israel's environs than is available in the standard Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias. The subject, author, and Scripture indexes make the book more suitable for reference and research.

Patrick Kavanaugh. *The Spiritual Lives of Great Composers*. Nashville, TN: Sparrow, 1992. 119 pp. \$12.95 (cloth). Reviewed by David C. Deuel, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

"Music has such spiritual qualities that we should not be surprised at discovering the strong faith many composers possessed" (Preface by Christopher Parkening). Biblical faith has historically held music in an exalted position. One only needs to consider the Psalms and the careful consideration given to music in worship and celebration in the biblical narratives to appreciate this point. Patrick Kavanaugh, Executive Director of the Christian Performing Artists Fellowship, himself a composer and director, describes the spiritual lives of a select group of the great composers. In this small and enjoyable volume he brings the reader face to face with twelve of the greatest composers of classical music *just as they were*. His candor is informed by original sources such as the composer's personal correspondence and journals.

Why would a pastor, Sunday school teacher, or other

committed Christian read a book such as this, beyond gaining a personal exposure to the artists (or a lot of sermon illustrations to be gleaned)? Contemporary Christian music artist Michael Card responds,

In this volume, the past we should never have forgotten is remembered, the heritage we never should have forfeited is recaptured, and the perspective now lost in Christian music is at last provided (dust jacket).

In addition, even a superficial acquaintance with classical music will engender questions of the sort, "What were the circumstances surrounding Handel's `Messiah'" or "Why did Bach initial his manuscript pages with S.D.G. (Soli Deo Gloria—`To God alone be the glory') after he had composed a piece?" For the first time the average reader can find answers to some of these questions. But the book promises something greater: an opportunity to enter the world of classical music for the sake of enjoyable listening. After even a brief introduction to the composers, listening to their works is a different experience. To even an uninitiated ear, their personal style and the age in which they composed become more clearly discernable. Knowing that Bach had personal contact with Martin Luther helps prepare one better appreciate his music.

The reviewer recommends reading this work in order to get acquainted with the men who produced much of the music which has shaped our culture. It is a prelude to the author's *A Taste for the Classics* (see next review). The short sections called "Recommended Listening" serve as a foretaste to the second work.

Patrick Kavanaugh. *A Taste for the Classics*. Nashville, TN: Sparrow, 1993. 224 pp. \$17.95 (cloth). Reviewed by David C. Deuel, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

A companion volume to the author's *The Spiritual Lives of Great Composers*, this work makes an appeal through a hands-on approach to both inexperienced and seasoned listeners of classical music. Kavanaugh wants to engage his readers in such music through listening programs, repertoire lists, and biographical insights, such as how composers influenced one another toward faith and artistry.

Chapter one is a backdrop for the remaining chapters, which deal with orchestra music, choral music, the concerto, opera, chamber music, song, and solo literature, respectively. The author sets forth a "simple approach" stressing "no expertise needed" (3). His basic framework provides an overview of musical periods and their characteristic features, and then distinguishes the primary categories of the music composed.

The book promises the following "essentials for understanding and appreciating classical music":

- the basic types of classical works, such as orchestra and choral music, opera, chamber music and song.
- the instruments that play and the voices that sing these works, and how they work together to create a magnificent sound.
- the greatest classical composers and their unique contributions to the world of music.
- some of the most popular and inspired works that have stood the test of time.
- enough of the basics of music theory to give better appreciation of what you hear.
- some fascinating facts and anecdotes from music history, with a basic framework for understanding the progression of musical periods.
- the most common musical terms one is likely to encounter.

The last two chapters chart a course for the reader—"Where Do We Go from Here?" and "A Lifetime of Listening—Your First Thousand Pieces." A list of the major composers followed by a selection of further reading about them follows. An extensive glossary serves for ready reference when the reader gets bogged down in "music-ese."

Kavanaugh's books will provide the entre to classical music for those who have wanted to understand and enjoy it, but have always found excuses not to. Both books are enjoyable reading without the sacrifice of content essential to informed engagement in classical music.

James D. Martin. *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar*. 27th ed. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993. 225 pp. \$29.95 (cloth). Reviewed by David C. Deuel, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

The venerable history of this grammar, now in its 27th edition, attests to its usefulness. With considerable modifications, the reviser has tailored it to the pedagogical preferences of the current generation of Hebrew students.

All grammars have in view an audience aspiring to learn a language. Many grammarians target a specific group, set up a list of objectives to achieve, then work toward those objectives in a series of lessons conducive to an academic period. Such is the case with the present volume.

The audience the revision targets knows little English grammatical terminology and must finish within a typical semester. The book is also written with the autodidact in mind—i.e., a careful

explanation of terms, modest lists of vocabulary, and exercises from composed Hebrew brief to moderate in length. For some (e.g., the autodidacts), the grammar may be too much; for others (those who want to know enough Hebrew to translate Scripture), not enough. Once the revision of Davidson's companion volume on syntax appears, the grammar will be even more attractive, providing the revisor, J. Gibson, maintains the continuity achieved in earlier editions of the two works.

Several matters would be helpful in the next revision. It is debatable whether including infinitives and participles in the same chapter is the best approach. Organizationally, that is more conducive to learning English rather than Hebrew. Would not participles be better understood with adjectives and demonstrative pronouns because of their syntactical attributive, predicative, and substantive formulations? Including weak verbs with their corresponding strong forms rather than saving them for the final chapters of the book would be an improvement.

Lamentably, the author retains "intensive" for the primary or code meaning of the piel/pual (D/Dp). He does have disclaimers, however—i.e., "so called" and "this may well not have been their original sense" (136). Yet this still leaves the matter confusing. Have we not grown weary of trying to intensify states and actions which need to be transitivised?

The transitional chapter entitled "The Next Step: Reading the Hebrew Bible" is helpful, but will likely mislead the student into believing he is ready to get into the text, particularly if he has to do so without the guidance of an instructor. Nonetheless, the final chapter does a nice job, better than most, of exposing the student to other tools.

R. E. Murphy. *Ecclesiastes*. Word Biblical Commentary. Dallas: Word, 1992. 170 pp. \$24.99 (cloth). Reviewed by David C. Deuel, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

Roland Murphy is best known for his books and articles related to wisdom literature. In the present work he provides another such treatment of a book some have labeled "The black sheep of the Bible." He does so with meticulous documentation of secondary source material and a broad understanding of wisdom literature.

In response to the tendency toward "excessive summarizing" (lviii), Murphy challenges the common understanding of the Hebrew term translated "vanity" and argues for the meaning "incomprehensible" (lix). His exegetical methodology is clear as he treats nine such "key terms" (lviii).

The author prefers to build his interpretation of Ecclesiastes' primary message on the work of A. G. Wright (not to be confused with

J. S. Wright, "Ecclesiastes," *EBC*, and the Ecclesiastes entry in W. Kaiser's *Classical Evangelical Essays on the Old Testament*).

Several helpful discussions, such as "Personification of Wisdom" (144-51), constitute the epilogue. In the author's discussion of A.N.E. parallels (143-44), one might have expected to see some interaction with the Ph.D. dissertation of Tremper Longman III on "Fictional Akkadian Autobiography."

Roland Murphy's commentary is a significant contribution to Ecclesiastes research. For those interested in serious study of Ecclesiastes in the original language, it is beneficial as a synthesis of previous research, to which Murphy, a seasoned scholar of wisdom literature, adds his own insightful contributions.

Iain H. Murray. *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994. xxii + 455 pp. \$27.95 (cloth). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Assistant to the Director of Libraries.

In a time when the church is often searching for "revival" and passersby can often see signs in front of churches announcing a "revival meeting" and many of the media preachers seem to portray "revival" as something that follows them around from city to city, Iain Murray has produced a marvelously helpful book that will serve to give "revival" and "revivalism" a proper historical and theological perspective.

Murray chronicles the revivals in America from the late colonial period to just prior to the Civil War. He shows how

Seasons of revival became "revival meetings." Instead of being "surprising" they may even now be announced in advance, and no one in the previous century had known of ways to secure a revival, a system was now popularized by "revivalists" which came near to guaranteeing results (xviii).

Murray begins his study in the time immediately after the "Great Awakening" in the American Colonies. He presents a picture of the men who were foundational in various smaller revivals and the "Second Great Awakening." Particularly notable is his discussion of the ministry of Samuel Davies, called by Dr. Lloyd-Jones "the greatest preacher America ever produced." Murray chronicles the various revivals in different colonial areas and offers a seemingly endless amount of historical detail. The amount of detail will be a hindrance to the casual reader, as the flow of Murray's work occasionally slows and nearly bogs down in the amount of factual data presented. The flow could have been improved if more of Murray's "sidebars" had

been reduced to footnotes. An additional help would have been the inclusion of some detailed maps to give the reader a better sense of the regions and occasionally obscure villages Murray refers to.

Throughout this work Murray attempts to demonstrate that true revival is an act of God's sovereignty in which the Holy Spirit does an unusual work in convicting men of sin and bringing about their conversion. Regarding the men God used in the various revivals he states,

A considerable body of men, for a long period before the Great Awakening, preached the same message as they did during the revival but with vastly different consequences—the same men, the same actions, performed with the same abilities, yet the results were so amazingly different!

The conclusion must be that the change in the churches after 1798 and 1800 is not explainable in terms of the means used. Nothing was clearer to those who saw the events than that God was sovereignly pleased to bless human instrumentality in such a way that the success could be attributed to Him alone (127-28).

The key thesis of Murray's work is that as Christians began to modify and abandon their Calvinistic theology and replace it with an increasingly Arminian one, the emphasis of *revival* as a working of a sovereign God shifted to *revivalism*, something that man could manufacture by the "proper use of ordained means" as promoted by Charles G. Finney (247-48). Though Murray thoroughly evaluates and criticizes Finney and his followers, other "evangelical Arminians" such as Francis Asbury come in for some favorable comments. Murray devotes three chapters to a thorough and highly critical examination of Finney, his theology, methodology and influence. However, the work ends on a positive note as Murray examines the ministry of James Waddell Alexander (the son of Princeton Seminary founder Archibald Alexander) and the "Layman's Prayer Revival" of 1857-58.

Murray presents an impressively documented history of American evangelicalism during the first half of the nineteenth century. Two appendices on revivalism in Great Britain and revivals in the South are very helpful, as is the very thorough index. This is clearly one of Murray's finest historical efforts and will be an important reference source in the study of revivals.

Ronald H. Nash. *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994. 188 pp. \$12.99 (paper). Reviewed by Trevor Craigen, Associate Professor of Theology.

Another book has come from the pen of a professor of philoso-

phy at Reformed Seminary in Orlando, Florida. This one, despite its simple title, is a critique of those schools of thought which refuse to view Jesus as the only Savior. Rejection of Christ as the only Savior surfaces in both pluralism and in inclusivism. Nash tackles these two views—or movements (or even convictions might describe them)—separately. His critique of the pluralism propounded by John Hick is followed by his critique of the inclusivism followed by Clark Pinnock and John Sanders.

The preface points to what should be correctly seen as a disturbing trend in colleges and seminaries, namely that a growing number of professors who hold and teach that the answer to the simple question in the book's title is a qualified one. Pluralists would answer with an outright "No!" and exclusivists with an outright "Yes!" but inclusivists would much rather prefer a "Yes, but . . . !"

In chapter one, Nash makes what frankly must be the only evaluation of pluralism: "To be a pluralist is unthinkable apart from a repudiation of the doctrinal heart of the historic Christian message" (18). Whatever may be the steps in the philosophical path Hick has followed, whatever may be the desire to appear more compassionate and tolerant, it becomes clear from the first six chapters that those who propound pluralism have not only emasculated Christian doctrine of its content and robbed the Scriptures of their authority as being propositional truth, but have also reduced God to being not God but something, or some term, to which no predicates apply. All of this is a devastating departure from biblical truth, yes, from orthodox Christianity. To reject it out of hand is the only correct action to take. As Nash remarks, "Any theory that so mishandles truth and logic cannot stand" (68). Listen, further, to this appropriate response: "Any Christians who would become pluralists must cease being Christians. They must also, for that matter, commit themselves to what amounts to a version of a non-Christian faith." Well said! This is a needed declaration after an examination of the proposals and propositions of pluralism.

Although Nash makes clear that inclusivists are not universalists, the effect of acknowledging that this might very well be accurate is not sufficient to detract from the serious concerns about what they do teach. The four chapters which interact with the reasoning of inclusivism leave the evangelical believer disturbed. What else can he be after being introduced to, or perhaps hearing again, of "The Particularity Axiom" (Jesus is the only mediator) and "The Universality Axiom" (salvation *is* intended to be available to all humans)? The mind and heart *is* troubled after hearing of "anonymous Christians" and "holy pagans," of "faith not theology, trust not orthodoxy," of "positive elements in other faiths," and of saving faith not having to have a knowledge of Christ in this life, as well as of the logic of God's love for the world necessarily demanding

access for everyone to salvation, and of general revelation being salvifically sufficient.

The chapter, "Inclusivism and the Bible," alone makes the book worthwhile, for it highlights most effectively, yet succinctly, just how the Scriptures are used (and abused), both in supporting inclusivism and in explaining away exclusivism. Given the warnings in Scripture about false teachers and given the history of error and heresy and the accompanying twisting of Scripture, one should perhaps not be *that* surprised at what is being done with Romans 1—3, and 10, with Acts 4, 10, 14, 15, and 17, and with John 14.

Nash also uses a chapter to deal with those questions which do arise: what about other religions, hell, salvation after death, and salvation by works for some? Nash also points out that the troubling and emotionally laden question of salvation and the death of infants and the mentally incompetent provides an opening for inclusivists to exploit against exclusivists. It was good that he acknowledges that this issue is not really answerable and that little is gained by extending speculation beyond what God has said.

A hearty note of agreement is in order when Nash writes, "In many cases, what Christians have historically regarded as a significant New Testament passage testifying to Christ's exclusive role as savior is watered down so that it becomes a trivial or unimportant utterance" (119).

It is perhaps something of an understatement for him to write in the closing paragraph of the book, "But I have tried to show that the adoption of inclusivism is not theologically harmless. The acceptance of this biblically insupportable opinion carries an enormously high theological cost." Yes, it does! But upon reflection does it not put one who holds to it outside of what is rightfully defined as evangelical and orthodox? Perhaps Nash is willing to be a little more gracious, forgiving, and yielding than this reviewer is prepared to be. One thing is certain: reading this book will challenge missionaries, pastors, and teachers to an unequivocal and unapologetic affirmation of exclusivism.

J. I. Packer. *Growing in Christ*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994. 288 pp. \$10.99 (paper). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible.

This companion book to *Knowing God* was issued in 1977 under the title *I Want to Be a Christian* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House). Packer has 64 chapters—usually 2-4 pages each—in four divisions: Affirming the Essentials (The Apostles' Creed); Entering In (Baptism and Conversion); Learning to Pray (The Lord's Prayer); and Design for Life (The Ten Commandments).

Typically, Packer is lucid, often illustrates well, and is orderly. The book has more help for building up a young Christian's knowledge than it is an effort to guide Christians in how to grow, as the title suggests. If one wants a fairly easy book to follow, he finds that here. It is often, though not always, written in a way to arouse the attention of readers who are not persevering.

Many statements are quite helpful. A good definition of faith, on p. 19, is "trustful commitment and reliance." Faith in a doctor involves submitting to his treatment and such is faith in God (20). Packer slowly reasons, step by step.

Not all will agree with Packer's taking Christ's preaching to the spirits in 1 Pet 3:19 to be a proclamation of His kingdom and appointment to be the world's judge, made before He arose from the dead. Packer sees the preaching to be to fallen angels, defined as the "sons of God" in Gen 6:2, 4. Of various views on the passage, many believe that the preaching occurred in spirit (or Spirit) back in the days of Noah, and was to unbelievers who rejected and are now in prison (i.e., death). Packer does firmly reject basing universalism on what the 1 Peter passage says (57).

A good brief discussion appears on what would be true for Christianity if Jesus had not risen (59): faith would be futile and sinners still in sins; they would have no hope of resurrection; Jesus, not being alive, could not reign and return; and there could be no salvation and fellowship in a living Lord. Packer also has good reasons Christians can validly believe that Jesus did rise (60). A number of other fine discussions are helpful, such as what heaven means, Christ's public future coming, the Holy Spirit, forgiveness, bodily resurrection, everlasting life, baptism, baptism in the Spirit.

Some will be troubled by Packer's defense of churchmen who say, after infant baptism, "Seeing how this child is regenerate" (133). Packer says that such phrases "denote only the ceremonial making over to us of spiritual rights and privileges, which if it is ever to be effectual must be confirmed by faith in Christ." But this slides away from the issue. If the infant will *not* be "regenerate" until faith in Christ some day, it is incorrect biblically to say that he or she is "regenerate" now. Why not use wording that expresses what is unequivocally true?

Packer at times allows intrusion of his ideas in the way of practical realism. An example is when he opens his section on the prayer Jesus taught His disciples with his (Packer's) reasons why many go through only a form of prayer or have given it up. The reason, he offers, is that people are uncertain whether God exists, or whether He is personal, good, in control, or concerned about ordinary folk (155). These are part of the reasons for unbelievers. But for them and believers for whose growth the book appears mostly to be written, why leave out a smiting of guilt over sins with its inability to feel confident coming to God? Or why leave out the fact that even

believers can avow firm belief in all the things Packer lists, yet be so much at high speed on the fast lane in the barrenness of a busy life that they keep telling themselves they have little time to pray to God? Such problems plague even Christian leaders; a meaningful regularity of prayer is often fairly smothered by things that clutter life. If growing in Christ is the idea, these problems in prayer are more bothersome than things Packer mentions.

One needs a lot of imagination to realize how some prayers fit with "every prayer of ours should be a praying of the Lord's Prayer in some shape or form" (156). And is this really "The Lord's Prayer" if He taught it to be *the disciples' prayer*? The Lord's Prayer which *He Himself Prayed* is in John 17. The book overstates things, too, in saying that this one model of prayer "not only is . . . the Lord's first lesson in praying, it is all the other lessons too" (158). Such sweeping generalities needlessly claim too much to be practical guides. One has to take them with a grain of salt.

Another inaccuracy is that the prayer "Thy kingdom come" is for His saving grace to be experienced "till Christ returns and all things are made new" (160). Jesus here meant His Messianic Kingdom, and spoke of prayer that this kingdom might come *when* He returns, not that (or just that) it would be experienced "till" He comes, as if it is not to be realized *after* that. It is good that Packer does clarify later, in a whole chapter on the kingdom, that the kingdom has a future aspect. There his wording conveys quite a different idea. For "Thy kingdom come" now looks on to that day (177) and is not all realized prior to and "till" that day.

The work has a two-page subject index that will help one find discussions. Overall the book is a fairly good survey of fundamentals Christians should believe. It is not of great help specifically on how they can grow in Christ, though it offers some assistance. Many will not notice the generalizations that lack the definitive precision of which Packer is capable. Others can be bothered by their frequency even while they profit from many good aspects. On a scale with ten at the top, the rating here is about an eight.

J. I. Packer. *Rediscovering Holiness*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1992. 276 pp. \$9.99 (paper). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible.

In the main this is a readable book with explanations that set holiness in a correlated context and various lists that relate to aspects of it. Packer attempts to focus Christians on God's chief point for their lives here and now and for eternity. He shows concern that holiness (a life consecrated to God and to His glory) has been so subject to "sidelining" even among Bible-centered Western Christians (9).

This may be the best work other than the Bible on the subject since J. C. Ryle's *Holiness* (1879 and still in print). It has its very bright parts in guiding Christians who are healthy spiritually and some who are weak or could be better in inculcating practical counsel.

Chapter 1 is helpful on what holiness is and why it matters. Here Packer also correlates holiness with love to God from the *heart* (motivation, passion, spring of thought, and conscience); *temperament* in reacting to situations, things, and people; *humanness* in being like Christ the perfect man through the fruit of the Spirit; *relationships* pursued in a humility that deals with others with a genuinely good attitude (22-32). Chapter 2 delves into why holiness is necessary.

Holiness begins with being awestruck at God's greatness, grateful for His mercy, zealous for His glory, and natural in living life (for life in its real naturalness as God intended it is a holy life, as Jesus lived on earth). So argues chapter 3.

Chapter 4 proposes that holiness is six things: *redirecting* the outlook to desire God [Scripture rather than Packer's own ideas would help the reader here, cf. 98]; however, he does say that prayer is "the top priority in the life of holiness," and eventually mentions Eph 6:18-20 (99). Holiness is also *cultivating* virtues (1 Cor 13:13); *following* the Holy Spirit's urgings [Packer manages these four pages without a direct reference to any Bible verse, 103-6]; *overcoming* sin's downdrag, negatively by mortification and positively by vivification in the Spirit's fruit (Gal 5:22 ff.); *exercising* faith for a "second blessing" (109). Packer does not concur with the "second blessing" as often taught. He sees it as having occurred in some Christians' experiences, but does not view it as necessary for *all* Christians (111-12). A reader can wonder why he worded the section as he did, as though it were for all. Packer rather views holiness as a progressive renewal and restoration through a sanctifying process with God at the center. As Packer's list concludes, holiness is the *practicing* of spiritual disciplines. He gives a concise survey of books from 1978-1991 on the spiritual disciplines (by Richard Foster, Donald Whitney, R. Kent Hughes, Elisabeth Elliot, and Dallas Willard, 113-14). True biblical discipline has motivations that center in love to God and desire to please Him (114-15). It would help to emphasize here God's grace enabling the life, as well; Packer does not integrate such empowering at this point, though he is clear about it in some other places (chap. 6, etc.).

His emphasis on "Growing Downward to Grow Up" (chap. 5) will get attention. The point is repentance. Holiness involves decreasing in our own importance, and trusting Christ to be great in us as His grace appears more in us in a "continual shrinkage of carnal self" (121). As Luther's first of 95 theses in 1517 said, "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' . . . he willed that the whole life of believers should be one of repentance" (121). Packer on p. 123 rightly sees this repentance as a fruit of faith and a gift of God (Acts

11:18). This excellent chapter has, among other things, a brief exposition of Psalm 51, surveying verses in six segments (146-48). Good counsel also appears on coming to repentance by "Soaking our souls in Scripture" (154). This is in asking of each passage, what does this tell me about God, about living, and about my own life today? (154-55). Meditation should lead into prayer that talks to God about each question.

Chapter 6 focuses on growth positively. It is of the Spirit, yet requires effort and conflict. Packer does well, but could shine more light on this by explaining just how the *God*-side and the human part in this correlate. He does say that in temptation the Christian should run to God in prayer for help (175). No counsel appears amidst the idealism for Christians for whom nothing seems to change when they do this.

The work abounds with lists. For example, he has five signs that one is growing in grace (188-90), and different lists on practicing principles. One list appears on pp. 192-95, then another immediately on pp. 196-97. This can be a bit confusing as to why two lists rather than an integrated one. Packer puts a fuzz of generality on things in Revelation 2—3, using verses that some believe pertain to the need of merely professing believers to repent and gain genuine salvation and its holiness, and verses that refer to genuine Christians (141-42).

Many interesting discussions occur in chapter 7, "The Empowered Christian Life." But nothing is developed here on *how one can practically experience* the power of God. Readers do find a section on the place of prayer in God's will, in seeing things done to His glory (230-32). Chapter 8 on endurance in the Christian race has much to edify, and more particularly on having a sane perspective about suffering.

Some chapters are overly long. Chapter 5 on repentance covers pp. 119-56 (big pages), Chapter 6 on positive growth pp. 157-99. The writer has much to contribute, but drags the persevering reader through more of a forest of material than seems really necessary. Some will find that extended discussions here get in the way of keeping the main point in view. This inclusion of extra detail also can dishearten many who need the book.

For the highly motivated, tenacious reader, the book goes a long way toward defining and integrating biblical holiness. It has enough excellent sections and paragraphs to rate high despite the tendency to go into verbose detail that makes a pursuit of the attractive theme drag. But the seriously patient who are aggressive to learn will be much richer for staying with *Rediscovering Holiness*.

John H. Walton. *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan*. Grand Rapids:

Zondervan, 1994. 192 pp. \$14.95 (paper). Reviewed by David C. Deuel, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

The author, Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Moody Bible Institute explores the purpose of the covenant. Following a biblical theological methodology, he probes the fundamental issue which serves as the basis for many divisions within Christianity:

From the systematic frameworks of covenant theology and dispensationalism, to the theologies of promise, liberation or theonomy, covenant would prove itself to be the single most important theological structure in the Old Testament (10).

Walton examines the covenant as promise, redemption, administration or relation, and vassal treaty or land grant. In so doing, he moves beyond much of the earlier covenant research which sought to compare ANE and OT covenant forms in order to find corresponding functions which would ultimately lead to some explanation for the purpose of scriptural covenants. Earlier studies have made far too much of familial terminology, with the assumption that such terms proved "relationship" was the purpose of covenant. This too is now explainable as political and strategic rather than indicative of purpose.

Walton's view is not so much a rejection of other theories of covenant, but more of an integration of their good points with his primary concern—God's program of revelation. In short, what others have considered as a secondary, tertiary, or other issue is actually primary. His thesis is as follows:

God has a plan in history that he is sovereignly executing. The goal of that plan is for him to be in relationship with the people whom he has created. It would be difficult for people to enter into a relationship with a God whom they do not know. If his nature were concealed, obscured, or distorted, an honest relationship would be impossible. In order to clear the way for this relationship, then, God has undertaken as a primary objective a program of self-revelation. He wants people to know him. The mechanism that drives this program is the covenant, and the instrument is Israel. The purpose of the covenant is to reveal God (24).

In short, Walton "sees revelation as the particular *objective* of the covenant program" (25). He faults covenant theology with attempting to force a redemptive element into every phrase of the covenant (*ibid.*) and, in so doing, exchanging what he sees as the goal for the smaller set of objectives which should lead to the goal. He cites many theologians who recognize God's revelation but fail to incorporate it into a larger view (28). After citing and contrasting his view as it

pertains to particular aspects of others, Walton "interacts" with thematic "centers":

In my proposal both salvation and kingdom are important aspects of the covenant-relation program, but neither is the primary focus. They are both subsumed under the aegis of an overarching *plan of God's revealing his character, his will, and his plan*. In so doing, God provides a foundation for relationship with him (knowing God and being like him), a means by which that relationship might be achieved (salvation) and the structure that will define that relationship (Kingdom) (29).

This review has already noted that Walton reassesses kinship or familial terminology in order to move the focus of covenant away from relationship, where many place it, to revelation. A major re-evaluation comes in understanding the Hebrew term *yada*, "know," relationally to "know about" as revelatory. Walton does not deny the nexus between knowing about God (revelation) in order to know Him (relationship). He does believe the latter has been overemphasized and draws upon a point of grammar to support his argument. In many passages that use *yada*, God is the direct object. But in many others, the Hebrew *ki*, "that," follows the verb, introducing a noun clause as direct object "know that." The shift is from knowing the person (possible, but ambiguous) to knowing something about the person. This leads us to the conclusion that "this phrase indicates at least a revelatory result or function, if not a revelatory purpose" (31).

The author anticipates the question regarding other optional meanings for *yada* with a nominal direct object clause:

I see no substantial difference between "know" and "acknowledge" in these contexts. "Acknowledge" involves at least a *mental response*. It may or may not involve a change in conduct or worldview and therefore is not an intrinsically relational concept (26 n. 19).

In brief, Walton sets forth a well-organized (charted) study of the substance of these noun-direct object clauses. They are combinations of God's demonstrations of judgment and grace so Israel and the nations will *know* (acknowledge) that he is YHWH. Thus, "Israel achieved its knowledge of God through his acting on their behalf, by his doing what he had promised to do."

Israel is God's instrument for revelation, a point made by Loraine Boettner (Loraine Boettner, R. G. Clouse, eds. *The Meaning of the Millennium*, 52-53), a point Walton concedes he discovered late in his own research (120 n. 5).

Walton's book is enjoyable reading, particularly for those interested in the pursuit of an OT theological center. His argument for the legitimacy if not the centrality of revelation is convincing. The reader will have to determine for himself whether it is convincing enough to be *the* purpose of the covenant

or whether it is another major thematic strand (G. Hasel) in the rope of God's gracious covenant. But this reviewer feels Walton has rendered a great service by drawing attention to God's concern and His reasoning for revealing himself. This is a timely message, considering that both the character and the process of revelation is questioned.

The book is highly recommended to those interested in covenant research. Walton's very readable style, coupled with his desire to probe new ground, makes it delightful reading.