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Christ and Culture Revisited





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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EDITORIAL	5
1. Christ and Culture Revisited Again In the 2020s Theodore J. Cabal	9
2. Evangelicals and Politics: A Complicated Relationship Timothy D. Padgett	21
3. A Theology of Cultural Intelligence Darrell L. Bock	35
4. The Separation of Church and State: A Southern Baptist Perspective Nathan A. Finn	51
5. The Gospel, Religious Liberty, and Social Duty: The Holistic Theology of George Washington Truett Malcolm B. Yarnell III	69
6. The Sacredness of Life in a Culture of Death Ashley L. Allen	85
7. Dual Citizens of Concentric Kingdoms: Christian Citizenship According to the New Testament James R. Wicker	99
BOOK REVIEWS	117
BOOK NOTES	139
2021 SWJT BOOK AWARDS	143



EDITORIAL

The Spring 2022 issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* is focused on the theme of “Christ and Culture Revisited.” Richard Niebuhr wrote a classic work titled *Christ and Culture* in 1951. In the book, Niebuhr provided a thorough overview and analysis of five different approaches that Christians have taken throughout church history in their response to and engagement with culture through the years. Christians currently find themselves in a key cultural moment, a time described by philosophers and sociologists as “a secular age.”

In a recent article in *First Things*, Aaron Renn notes that secularization in America has now entered a third phase. During phase one, which he labels the Positive World, being a Christian was viewed as a force for good. During the second phase, called the Neutral World, Renn observes that society was generally ambivalent about the Christian faith, seeing it as one option among several others in a pluralistic context. In this current phase, Renn claims that being a Christian is now understood as something quite negative, even a threat to the public moral good. Considering these developments, it seems appropriate to once again revisit the question of the relationship between the church and culture.

Ted Cabal, professor of philosophy at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has helpfully provided the first article in this issue on the topic of “Christ and Culture Revisited Again in the 2020s.” Timothy Padgett, who serves with the Colson Center for Christian Worldview, insightfully explores the issue of “Evangelicals and Politics.” Borrowing from his highly regarded publication on *Cultural Intelligence*, Darrell Bock, senior research professor of New Testament and executive director of cultural engagement at Dallas Theological Seminary, has offered a thoughtful piece on “Cultural Intelligence and Engagement.”

Two outstanding Baptist thinkers have given us updates on two important Baptist characteristics. Nathan Finn, provost and dean of the faculty at North Greenville University, has authored “Church and State:

A Baptist Perspective.” Malcolm Yarnell, research professor of theology at Southwestern, has addressed the important theme of religious liberty by using the work of George Truett as a lens through which to think about this topic.

Two Southwestern Seminary faculty members have written our two final articles for this issue. Ashley Allen, assistant professor of women’s ministries, with conviction, has contributed an article on “The Sacredness of Life in a Culture of Death.” New Testament professor Jim Wicker has employed his interpretation skills and his knowledge of New Testament backgrounds to help us think wisely about the topic of “Christian Citizenship.” We are grateful to each of these fine scholars for outstanding contributions to this issue of the journal.

This issue also includes several book reviews on a variety of topics. At the conclusion of this issue, readers will find the results of the second annual *SWJT* Book of the Year Awards. The members of the Southwestern Seminary faculty have once again evaluated dozens of significant publications from 2021 and have selected the substantive work by Douglas J. Moo, of Wheaton College, on *A Theology of Paul and His Letters* (Zondervan). Several outstanding volumes have also been selected in the other key categories. We congratulate Professor Moo and these other gifted authors.

I want to offer my sincere thanks to associate editors Andrew Streett and Robert Caldwell on their conscientious work on this important issue. Additional appreciation is expressed to James A. Smith Sr., Ashley Allen, and Wang Yong Lee for their careful oversight of the various processes related to this publication. We pray that readers will find this timely issue to be helpful in their lives and their service.

Soli Deo Gloria

David S. Dockery



CHRIST AND CULTURE REVISITED AGAIN IN THE 2020s

Theodore J. Cabal^{*}

A Southern Baptist living in the United States of the 1950s would have experienced a far different relationship to culture than one in the 2020s. Almost all Americans (>95 percent) in the 1950s identified as Christian.¹ Especially in the Deep South, the culture would have reflected many values of the SBC. Blue laws remained in effect forbidding many Sunday activities. Counties typically prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages. Baptist pastors preaching against gambling could be seen as one who cared about the health of the greater community.

Fast forwarding to the 2020s reveals an astonishing change in cultural norms. Sunday commerce, including the sale of alcohol, is considered the norm. Legalized gambling is promoted widely and is easily accessible, including via the Internet, not to mention sanctioned in many state lotteries.² Surely, a Southern Baptist of the 1950s would not likely have imagined the 2020s with the legalization of pornography, gay marriage, and state mandated transgender bathrooms.

Christians struggling with culture and each other about culture is nothing new. Near the end of the second century, Tertullian sought to dissuade Christians from frequenting the theater and the games. He argued that those belonging to God have more than enough excitement in the truth of their own literature (books, poems, aphorisms, songs) and the bloody victory of Christ.³ Christian thought about culture has yielded more heat than consensus. But one thing has become clear: the church's history, in

¹Frank Newport, "Percentage of Christians in U.S. Drifting Down, but Still High," Gallup, December 24, 2015, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/187955/percentage-christians-drifting-down-high.aspx>.

²On the explosion of gambling in the 1980s and 1990s, see Thomas Barker and Marjie T. Britz, *Jokers Wild: Legalized Gambling in the Twenty-first Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 41–112.

³Tertullian, *De Spectaculis*, XXIX.

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one sense, *is* its relation to culture, with types of relationship ranging from Christian martyrdom to Constantinian symbiosis. The modern era has brought forth further reflection and debate about the church in relation to culture. We shall turn later to examine one historically unique aspect of the 2020s that has dramatically changed the way Christians engage this debate. But first we turn to the book that for much of the last century defined the terms regarding the church's relationship to culture.

I. THE BACKGROUND OF *CHRIST AND CULTURE*

In January of 1949 Helmut Richard Niebuhr (1894–1962) delivered a series of lectures at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Niebuhr's reputation as a brilliant theologian was established, and these lectures formed the basis of his most influential book published two years later, *Christ and Culture*.⁴ Immediately, the book was hailed as “without a doubt the one outstanding book in the field of basic Christian social ethics.”⁵ Since then, the influence of *Christ and Culture* overshadows all other works on the subject.

Niebuhr had long wrestled with the relation of church and culture. His own participation in the Evangelical Synod of North America with its German immigrant background led him to consider the effects of assimilation with American culture. At Yale his doctoral thesis on Ernst Troeltsch exposed him to thinking of Christianity in part as a product of historical relativism. Niebuhr specifically cites Troeltsch's *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches as his primary stimulus for Christ and Culture*.⁶ But Niebuhr felt that work needed correction because “it is an aberration of faith as well as of reason to absolutize the finite” when one understands that “all of this relative history of finite men and movements is under the governance of the absolute God” (xii).

As we will see, Niebuhr's famous models of the relationship of the church and culture have, with good reason, been seriously criticized for

⁴H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951). By 1970, Martin Marty wondered whether since Jonathan Edwards's America had produced a theologian of such “organizing brilliance” as H. Richard Niebuhr. Foreword to John D Godsey, *The Promise of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 1970), 7. For an excellent study of Niebuhr's formation leading to *Christ and Culture*, see Jon Diefenthaler, “H. Richard Niebuhr: A Fresh Look at His Early Years,” *Church History* 52, no. 2 (1983): 172–85. By the 1994 centenary of Niebuhr's birth, meetings and articles celebrated and debated his theological legacy.

⁵Paul Ramsey, review of *Christ and Culture*, by H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Journal of Religion* 32, no. 3 (1952): 208.

⁶Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, xi–xii. Hereafter I will use parenthetical citations to the page numbers of this book.

theological reasons by evangelicals. Niebuhr was accused of liberalism for not believing in a personal Satan while at the seminary of his denomination, Eden Theological Seminary (now associated with the United Church of Christ).⁷ Although he did identify to some extent with American Protestant liberal theology, Niebuhr held “strong reservations” about liberal Christianity in general.⁸ Thus, he could write his now well-known description of liberal theology: “A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”⁹ Niebuhr’s theology was closer to (though still critical of) Karl Barth’s, which explains why Niebuhr, as dean at Eden Seminary, was charged with believing the Bible contains, but is not, the word of God.¹⁰

There is little surprise then that evangelicals discern problems with Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*. But the book remains the standard by which other proposals on the subject are compared. Niebuhr’s typologies provide starting points for examining the perennial problem of how Christians should relate to culture. As D. A. Carson notes, however, though everyone references Niebuhr’s iconic book, few today still read him closely.¹¹ So we revisit Niebuhr’s proposal.

II. THE ARGUMENT OF CHRIST AND CULTURE

Five of the book’s seven chapters present Niebuhr’s famous models describing how Christians have related to culture.¹² Before presenting the models, Niebuhr proposed in the first chapter what he considered “The Enduring Problem.” The “problem” is recognized in the way Christians handle several “special issues.” Two issues stand out; interestingly, these had been important in his own background.

For example, Niebuhr regarded Christian confidence/distrust in education as an ongoing central Christian concern. How should a Christ

⁷Diefenthaler, “H. Richard Niebuhr,” 182.

⁸Diefenthaler, “H. Richard Niebuhr,” 183.

⁹H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1937), 193.

¹⁰Diefenthaler, “H. Richard Niebuhr,” 183–84.

¹¹D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), xi. The title of this article obviously reflects upon the title of Carson’s excellent analysis of Niebuhr. Carson excels especially in his faithful appropriation of biblical theology as the correct starting point in critiquing Niebuhr and Christian cultural models. Though the secondary literature on Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture* is now expansive, I find Carson’s work most helpful and will use him as dialogue partner with Niebuhr. For an evangelical work less critical of *Christ and Culture*, see Tim Keller, *Center Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

¹²Niebuhr actually sees three models, with the final model having three sub-versions. Confusing matters, each sub-version gets a “Christ and...” title and chapter of its own.

follower consider the relationship of Athens and Jerusalem? Niebuhr's own experience is apparent here since his denomination had struggled considerably with the issue. He had personally served as a major force seeking to bolster its confidence in education.¹³

Another perennial cultural problem Niebuhr considered is how Christian ethics should be applied to economic life. His own background is enlightening here, too. He had argued that his synod should not engage only in acts of charity (hospitals, asylums, etc.), but should also be sympathetic with the labor movement. "In Niebuhr's estimation, the church and labor were natural allies in a society in which 'rugged individualism' had become rampant and the profit motive was undercutting human values."¹⁴

Evangelicals today can agree that education and prosperity present unique challenges to many Christians in the Western world, even if many would differ with the specifics of Niebuhr's own solutions. Niebuhr did, however, consider such "special issues" as part of the more general "enduring problem." The essential question has to do with whether Christians should bear responsibility for the general good of the social order or adopt the norm of "separation of Christ's followers from the world" (1). Presenting the general problem in this way contrasts two particular Christian views which Niebuhr sought to hold in tension. Indeed, one might think that just two models/chapters would then describe his view of Christian cultural response. But Niebuhr admitted there is no single answer to the problem. Thus, he appeared to consider each of his five cultural responses as divinely sanctioned. "Christ as living Lord is answering the question in the totality of history and life in a fashion which transcends the wisdom of all his interpreters yet employs their partial insights and their necessary conflicts" (2).

Yet, Christians with "partial insights" are forced to choose how to live in the world, and this leads to his presentation of the five choices Christians have historically made. Most analysts of *Christ and Culture* quibble a little or a lot with these five typologies. Indeed, Niebuhr himself recognized they are "something of a construct" because no one group or person ever "conforms completely to a type" (44).

Chapter 2, "**Christ against Culture**," might reasonably be argued to be Niebuhr's most consistent model as qualified by the New Testament. One might suspect he began with this type because it is easiest to exemplify in

¹³Diefenthaler, "H. Richard Niebuhr," 174–75.

¹⁴Diefenthaler, "H. Richard Niebuhr," 178–79.

the New Testament and early Christianity. Niebuhr noted that prominent second-century Christians wrote of Christianity as its own way of life. Tertullian exemplified the approach, even if perhaps most radically in early Christianity. Politics, philosophy, and plays have no place in the life of the obedient Christian. Niebuhr contended this position is necessary but inadequate because, while Christians with this approach preach the need for culture to reform, Christians employing a less separatist approach must engage the culture as mediators of the message (65). This approach, “important as one movement in the church, cannot itself exist without the counterweight of other types of Christianity” (82).

Niebuhr rightly noted that no Christian truly escapes involvement with the culture. “Man not only speaks but thinks with the aid of the language of culture” (69). Even Tertullian “makes evident that he is a Roman, so nurtured in the legal tradition and so dependent on philosophy that he cannot state the Christian case without their aid” (69–70). This approach has struggled perpetually with reason and revelation, the nature and prevalence of sin, law and grace, and the relation of Christ’s lordship to his being Creator and Governor of the world.

“**The Christ of Culture**,” the subject of chapter 3, has rightly been considered the most controversial of Niebuhr’s models. Those holding this view “feel no great tension between church and world, the social laws and the Gospel, the workings of divine grace and human effort, the ethics of salvation and the ethics of social conservatism or progress” (83). Niebuhr described these as the “once-born,” and though he recognized the term “liberalism” is accurate theologically, he believed the approach is “more aptly named Culture-Protestantism” (84). Niebuhr admitted this approach has been historically viewed by most Christians as heretical or apostate. But since the eighteenth century, that which had been “heresy became the new orthodoxy,” and Christ was interpreted as a hero of “manifold culture” (91). Examples include Thomas Jefferson, Immanuel Kant, and Albrecht Ritschl. Jesus becomes “the great enlightener, the great teacher, the one who directs all men in culture to the attainment of wisdom, moral perfection, and peace” (92).

Niebuhr argued that this cultural approach contributes to the extension of Christ’s reign among the leading groups of a society. These “missionaries to the aristocracy” effect change by using the language of the sophisticated, whether philosophy or culture or political or economic (104). “If it is an error to interpret [Jesus] as a wise man teaching a secular wisdom, or a

reformer concerned with the reconstruction of social institutions, such interpretations serve at least to balance the opposite mistakes of presenting him as a person who had no interest in the principles men used to guide their present life in a damned society because his eye was fixed on the Jerusalem that was to come down from heaven” (106). At this point in reading *Christ and Culture*, one might be forgiven for thinking the book could end here. The “Christ against culture” Christians are necessary but need the “Christ of Culture” proponents to balance things out.

Niebuhr did, however, criticize these “cultural Protestants” for finding “it strangely desirable to write apocryphal gospels and new lives of Jesus” (109). If Christ against culture proponents pit revelation against reason, the Christ of culture type pits reason against revelation. Interestingly, Niebuhr recognized that cultural Christianity had met its challenge in naturalism. One wonders how Niebuhr might have valued the “cultural Protestant” approach if he had experienced the radically secularized, post-Christian Western culture today. Again, he sternly warned that loyalty to contemporary culture can radically qualify loyalty to Christ such that he is “abandoned in favor of an idol called by his name” (110).

In spite of Niebuhr’s criticisms of theological liberalism, D. A. Carson suspects that this approach “could add today that Jesus stands for inclusion, for tolerance, for spirituality.”¹⁵ And devastatingly, Carson observes that “Machen, though he wrote three-quarters of a century ago, was surely right: liberalism is not another denomination or any other kind of legitimate option within Christianity. Rather, it is another religion.”¹⁶

In chapter 4, Niebuhr introduced his model, “**Christ above Culture.**” If his “enduring problem” lent itself to just his first two models, Niebuhr noted his resistance to think in terms of just two classes. So he presented his “above culture” type, as most often exemplified in Christian history, as a view which finds its place between the extremes of the first two models. Confusingly, he proposed that the “Christ above culture” model has three versions: the synthetic, dualist, and conversionist. Therefore, though the synthetic approach is a subset of “Christ above culture” and is explained in this chapter, it is not identical, but only part of the “above culture” approach. Yet he gave “Christ and...” names to the other two subsets of the “Christ above culture” approach.

Niebuhr presented Thomas Aquinas as an example of the synthetic

¹⁵Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 19.

¹⁶Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 33–34.

version of Christ above culture. Reasonable people will discover in the nature of things broad principles to govern culture. Divine and natural law overlap, though the divine certainly transcends the natural. Niebuhr recognized that a particular modern culture might not even allow for a synthetic Christ above culture approach like that of Thomas, but he presented no answer to the question why.

“Christ and Culture in Paradox” (again a version of the Christ above culture model) is the subject of chapter 5. Niebuhr referred to this group as “both-and” or “dualist” in the relation of Christ and culture. The dualist places a greater emphasis upon “the extent and thoroughness of human depravity” (152). Martin Luther exemplified this approach. The corruption of culture is highlighted, and the dualist views the synthesist’s more favorable view of culture as deeply flawed. The dualist thus speaks and lives in paradoxes, especially in law and grace, and in divine wrath and mercy. Niebuhr viewed Paul as a likely candidate of this approach since he held in tension the demands of this age and the next. Paul also always began with Christ, which is not the case with the synthesist who begins with God. Luther’s dialectic approach argues that just as “there is no way of deriving knowledge from the gospel about what to do as a physician, builder, carpenter, or statesman, so there is no way of gaining the right spirit of service, of confidence and hopefulness, of humility and readiness to accept correction, from any amount of technical or cultural knowledge” (176). Evangelicals might be tempted to describe the first two of these “Christ above culture” subsets as stressing either creation (synthesis) or the Fall (dualist), but Niebuhr’s next model makes clear he thought differently.

In chapter 6, Niebuhr presented his last model, **“Christ the Transformer of Culture.”** Niebuhr called this the “conversionist” approach and regarded it as embodied in the great central church tradition. In contrast to the dualist, the conversionist more positively assesses culture. And as opposed to the dualist stressing redemption from sin, the conversionist focuses more on creation. Christ has always ordered culture in some way from the beginning. Unlike the dualist, the conversionist believes culture is corrupted, but not evil altogether. History reveals God’s involvement with humanity rather than his abandonment of a “dying pagan civilization” (195). Niebuhr thought Augustine fit this model, though he admitted Augustine was far too complex to fit it neatly. Cultural “sinfulness is dependent on the presence of a fundamentally good, created order” (213). Calvin, too, fits

the conversionist model even more so with his understanding of human vocation and the need for the gospel to permeate all of life.

Yet Carson notes that “what is striking about this fifth paradigm is that [Niebuhr] offers no negative criticism whatsoever. Most scholars understand Niebuhr thus to be bestowing his approval.”¹⁷ And worse, “F. D. Maurice turns out to be the hero, because he allows the conversionist pattern to take him into universalism — not on the ground that any New Testament document supports this line, but on the ground of what Maurice asserts he is ‘obliged’ to believe in.”¹⁸ In the end, “it is hard to see how this fifth pattern escapes the criticism that Niebuhr himself levels against various forms of liberal theology.”¹⁹

In chapter 7, “**A Concluding Unscientific Postscript**,” Niebuhr recognized his work was both “unconcluded and inconclusive” (230). The work of other analysts could have been examined, and many other historical figures might have been analyzed. Yet the effort was important because it allowed one “to act in greater harmony with movements that seem to be at cross purposes” (232). But in the end, no insight into the ways other Christians have wrestled with culture relieves “the Christian individual or the responsible community from the burden, the necessity, the guilt and glory, of arriving at such conclusions in present decisions and present obedience” (233).

III. CHRIST AND CULTURE REVISITED AGAIN IN THE 2020s

Certain critiques have become rather standard of Niebuhr’s now classic book. Carson identifies the most common by noting that even “as influential as it has been in the past, Niebuhr’s fivefold typology now seems parochial.”²⁰ The model is based on finding multiple allowable paradigms from various parts of the Bible rather than listening to the unified voice of the Bible. Also, Niebuhr’s use of concrete historical figures are not always good fits for his patterns.²¹

But discerning patterns in history is no easy feat, and Niebuhr was well aware of these issues as we have already noted. Niebuhr’s keen sense of our historical limitations is obviously correct in one sense. No human

¹⁷Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 28–29.

¹⁸Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 38–39.

¹⁹Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 39.

²⁰Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 201.

²¹Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 40–43. Carson especially notes problems with Niebuhr’s understanding of Augustine and Calvin.

interpreter, despite the importance of the effort, will see these matters from a God's-eye perspective.

But Christian historical awareness can lead to historical relativity when the Bible does not remain the essential determinant for understanding these things. Most readers of this journal will recognize Niebuhr's biggest problem is due to his understanding of Scripture. "We do not trust the God of faith because we believe that certain writings are trustworthy. Yet it is our conviction that God is faithful, that He kept faith with Jesus Christ who was loyal to Him and to his brothers; that Christ is risen from the dead; that as the Power is faithful so Christ's faithfulness is powerful; that we can say 'our Father' to that which has elected us to live, to die, and to inherit life beyond life" (255). A standard critique of neo-orthodoxy applies here to Christ and Culture. How can Niebuhr arrive at such "convictions" if the Bible is not believed trustworthy? Carson concludes that Niebuhr's work "is transparently the stance of a mid-twentieth-century Westerner steeped in the heritage of what liberal Protestantism then was."²²

Consequently, Niebuhr's understanding of Christ is also deeply flawed. "Important as are the once debated questions whether Jesus ever 'really' lived, and the still moot problem of the trustworthiness of New Testament records as factual descriptions of actual events, these are not the questions of primary significance" (12–13). What does matter is how the New Testament Jesus "shapes our present faith and action" (13). Niebuhr has walked himself into a historicist Christological corner due to two particular problems. "The first is the impossibility of stating adequately by means of concepts and propositions a principle which presents itself in the form of a person. The second is the impossibility of saying anything about this person which is not also relative to the particular standpoint in church, history, and culture of the one who undertakes to describe him" (14). Carson rightly notes that "the sweep of the interpretations of 'Christ' that [Niebuhr] embraces is doubtless too broad, if one is trying to limit oneself to the forms of confessional Christianity that explicitly and self-consciously try to live under the authority of Scripture."²³

Niebuhr faces the same problem with his understanding of culture. At times culture appears to be defined by beliefs and values friendly to Christ. At other times culture functions for Niebuhr like the New Testament "world," that is, not friendly to Christ. Carson notes that the culture

²²Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, x.

²³Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 10.

terminology has a palpable “slipperiness.” Niebuhr is really talking about two competing authorities within culture, the Christ found in various mainstream Christendom paradigms versus all other authorities “divested of Christ.”²⁴ The lack of a clear biblical grounding for knowledge of Christ and culture leads perilously close to Christs and cultures.

IV. AN APPLICATION OF CHRIST AND CULTURE IN THE 2020s

Having critiqued *Christ and Culture* with D. A. Carson’s help does not alleviate the need for our assessments and actions today. As noted earlier, Niebuhr’s last chapter extends the challenge that no insight into the ways other Christians have wrestled with culture relieves “the Christian individual or the responsible community from the burden, the necessity, the guilt and glory, of arriving at such conclusions in present decisions and present obedience” (233). And though for a variety of reasons it is harder to critique one’s own life and community, revisiting *Christ and Culture* again without attempting personal application would be cowardly.

Southern Baptists, like other Christians, do not always think globally when contemplating cultural challenges. Cultural problems discussed by Western Christian leaders often focus primarily on Western culture. Yet what apparently matters most to the Lord Jesus in building his church is not centered in the United States. Even with an extremely generous estimate of how many U.S. citizens are Christian (76.9 percent), approximately 90 percent of the world’s Christians live elsewhere.²⁵ Contemplating the persecution so many Christians face elsewhere has dramatically changed the way I view my own culture, increasingly anti-Christian though it be.²⁶ As Carson wisely notes, my choice of options regarding relating to my culture “is a luxury reserved for those who have options.”²⁷ Even if respected Christian cultural critics like “Abraham Kuyper had grown up under the conditions of the killing fields of Cambodia, one suspects his view of the relationship between Christianity and culture would have

²⁴Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 12.

²⁵Jeff Diamant, “The Countries with the 10 Largest Christian Populations and the 10 Largest Muslim Populations,” Pew Research Center, April 1, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/01/the-countries-with-the-10-largest-christian-populations-and-the-10-largest-muslim-populations/>.

²⁶Carson notes that when Western Christians reflect on their cultural challenges, they significantly miss the perspective gained from “the voice of the contemporary church in the Two-Thirds world.” Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 31.

²⁷Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 224.

been significantly modified.”²⁸ Thus as one who lives in relative security, I humbly offer a perspective on just one significant way in which Christians in my corner of the world “suffer” from an anti-Christian culture.

Conservative Christians such as Southern Baptists are generally alert to dramatic cultural incursions into the churches such as endorsements of same-sex marriage. But I suggest we are very much oblivious to the effects of one of the biggest changes in cultural history: **the digital revolution**.²⁹ I am not here referring to the digital dangers of pornography or worldly distraction or spiritually destructive teachings. *I am referring to the way Western culture’s new medium with its priorities, attitudes, and consequences has often captivated the church’s thinking.*

Culture’s medium is digital and thus allows for virtually instant communication. This wonderful technology has both opened the door for gospel proclamation in closed countries and flooded the world with pornography. A radically new and enormously influential way of communication has become the short message (Twitter, Facebook, and blogs, for example). Digital media has powerfully enabled glorious opportunities for families to stay in touch around the world. For the first time in history, most in the West have access to rapid communication and information.

But also never has such a powerful medium existed to spread so rapidly shallow thinking and misinformation. And Christians, including Southern Baptists, can claim no special exemption from the widespread damage of this powerful cultural force. The loudest voices, whether wise or not, often gain the widest following even in Christian circles. The medium is not conducive to careful conversation. A premium is awarded for reaction versus reflection.

Culture’s priorities remarkably often today sweep up Western Christians into their wake. Whereas the issues which might ignite debate among Christians in the past were doctrinally and ethically oriented (e.g., biblical inerrancy), current controversies are often driven by the culture rather than clearly articulated biblical concerns. For example, pandemic vaccines and masks are important issues requiring well-informed decisions. But what biblical mandate leads some Christians to conclude that masking

²⁸Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, ix.

²⁹“In the space of 50 years, the digital world has grown to become crucial to the functioning of society. The revolution has proceeded at breakneck speed—no technology has reached more people in as short a space of time as the Internet—and it has not finished yet.” Richard Hodson, “Digital Revolution: An Explosion in Information Technology is Remaking the World, Leaving Few Aspects of Society Untouched,” *Nature Outlook*, 28 November 2018, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07500-z>.

or not is a basis to divide from one another?

The **culture's attitude** today has been described as cancel or call-out culture. Western Christians, including Southern Baptists, have become especially adept at call-out culture, the practice of criticizing other Christians publicly on social media. Just like the broader culture, Christians often exemplify anger and self-righteousness in their attacks on other believers. No conversation is attempted, and mature, respectful thinking can be considered a sign of compromise or lack of commitment. Carson, just a few years ago, noted that as “Western culture becomes more polarized, the barriers to meaningful interaction between, on the one hand, Christians who are trying to be faithful to the Bible, and, on the other, people who are committed to one form or another of secularism, become more acute.”³⁰ Today this description of polarization increasingly fits Christians on opposite sides of nonbiblical or nonessential issues.

Culture's consequences, then, are tension and division between Christians. Yet because the culture embraces division, Christians have often followed suit with each other without realizing the biblical implications. Sometimes separation is unavoidable between those who call themselves by Christ's name. Indeed, not to separate over doctrinal and ethical issues of first importance is dereliction of one's duty to Jesus Christ. But to call for or incite division over issues that are not biblically critical is something God hates.

V. CONCLUSION

Debate about Christ and culture typologies will likely endure until he comes. The practice of faithfulness to Christ in the face of culture is not an option, however. Courage is required for his people to remove the cultural logs from their own eyes to see where culture has interfered with allegiance to Jesus Christ. Yet, as H. Richard Niebuhr rightly argued, the effort is critical because it allows one “to act in greater harmony with movements that seem to be at cross purposes” (232).



³⁰Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 119.

EVANGELICALS AND POLITICS: A Complicated Relationship

Timothy D. Padgett*

From a supposedly singular starting point in the Scriptures and theological meditation, evangelicals have fostered a fractious public image, an image that is not entirely false. Much of this tension flows from the reality that evangelicalism is not a singular movement, but one born of consensus. Despite an ostensible unity when it comes to big picture issues, evangelical political action has been shaped by the functional absence of a centering point for the movement. It is not that there is no core principle uniting all the factions; it is that too often in their quest to fight the good fight on behalf of a good cause, evangelicals have missed the forest for the trees. It is in many ways a question of perspective. When evangelicals move their eyes from the transcendent to the immanent, the intrinsic tensions between their constituent parts and shared characteristics lead all too often to a contentious interaction, with and before the world.

This is a point which secular media outlets are keen to recall. Frankly, it would not be too much to say that this is what our neighbors know most about us. On October 24, 2021, Peter Wehner wrote in *The Atlantic*, “The root of the discord lies in the fact that many Christians have embraced the worst aspects of our culture and our politics.... The result is not only wounding the nation; it’s having a devastating impact on the Christian faith.”¹ Just two days later, Ryan Burge in the *New York Times* added:

It used to be that when many people thought about evangelicalism, they conjured up an image of a fiery preacher imploring them to accept Jesus. Now the data indicate that more and more Americans are conflating evangelicalism

¹Peter Wehner, “The Evangelical Church Is Breaking Apart,” *The Atlantic*, October 24, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/10/evangelical-trump-christians-politics/620469/>

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with Republicanism — and melding two forces to create a movement that is not entirely about politics or religion but power.²

Now, we may quibble with this or that element of these characterizations. After all, the conflation of politics and piety is hardly unique to conservatives, but it is fair to say that something feels not quite right in our political lives.

Mind you, this does not mean we know what to do about it. We may be quick to note the folly of trying to legislate morality, but we always manage to find exceptions when it comes to our own favored causes. Perhaps more precisely, we tend to describe others' social engagement as "politicizing the gospel," while our own attempts are "merely" applying biblical principles to the public square. How many pastors are keen to preach or march about *both* questions of racial injustice and poverty as well as issues related to abortion and biblical sexuality? No doubt there would be some we could identify who do both, but the fact that we have to think about it to come up with an example is rather telling.

We have seen, or maybe even participated in, rallies to "take America back for God," all under the assumption that God's special hand has been upon our nation and its special role in the world, all in a right-wing perspective.³ At the same time, we have read in others or written ourselves from the progressive end of things calling on evangelicals to embrace "a new vision for faith and politics," rooted in "God's politics," a politics which just so happens to echo much of secular left-wing talking points.⁴

If evangelicals hailed from another theological tradition, or even a specific branch within our own, it might be easier to tread this twisting path. When we think of the "social gospel" of theological liberalism of a century ago, many of its progressive protégés in more recent days, or the politically engaged activists of the 1980s Religious Right, it is clear that the Christian life in such contexts is all but defined by political action. You are Christian only insofar as you act out this Christianity in a public setting. On the other hand, there are those at the opposite end of the spectrum

²Ryan Burge, "Why Evangelical Is Becoming Another Word for Republican," *The New York Times*, October 26, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/26/opinion/evangelical-republican.html?referringSource=articleShare>

³Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1-2.

⁴Jim Wallis, *God's Politics* (San Francisco: HarperCollins), xv.

for whom the Christian life is purely an internal affair. What happens “out there” in the world is not nearly as weighty as what goes on in our hearts and our private actions. This is not to say that these emphases are somehow absent in the evangelical tool-kit. Instead, the intramural debates over politics abide with such intensity largely because, for evangelicals, these poles remain ever in tension with one another. Evangelicalism hinges, almost definitionally, on the insistence of making manifest the internal and spiritual elements of the Christian faith in the wider world of social action and politics, yet it does so from a set of often mutually exclusive priorities and beliefs.

I. WHAT IS IN A NAME?

For the media and much of academic discourse, to study evangelicals is to study their place in politics. As noted above, it would not be too much to say that “evangelical” in the popular imagination is simply a socio-political designation – white, politically conservative, Protestant Americans driven primarily by the passions of the Cold and Culture wars. Granted, anyone who has studied evangelicalism beyond the headlines and the best-seller lists knows full well that this is a stereotype, and a shallow one at that. Evangelicalism is truly a global phenomenon, embracing multiple denominations, spanning centuries of history, and representing unknown numbers of tongues, tribes, and peoples of the world.

Yet, the fact that the monochromatic view of evangelicalism is a caricature in no way diminishes the ubiquity of this image in people’s minds, nor can it deny the elements of truth which lie beneath it. Consider this: in nearly every academic or media discussion of religion and politics, Anglo- and African Americans are treated as distinct entities, even if their theological principles are identical. We can (and should) complain about this. After all, why should whites be distinguished according to their own specific beliefs while African Americans are lumped together by race even if their doctrines are mutually exclusive? Not only does this obviously cast people into groups according to the color of their skin, but it radically ignores the significance of ideas and their consequences. Nevertheless, this distinction is not entirely an illusion. For all their common theology, there is a more than reasonable chance that any group of Anglo- and African American evangelicals will vote differently along racial lines, owing significantly to differing emphases about their shared beliefs.⁵ Therefore,

⁵Mary Beth Matthews, “The History of Black Evangelicals and American Politics,” *Black Perspectives*,

the popular association of “evangelical” with white conservatives is at the same time both unfair and fairly reasonable.

Even just among Anglos, not everyone who claims or is called by the name evangelical conforms to any semblance of a theological evangelical. Hence, we find at least some of the now (in)famous 81 percent of evangelicals who voted for a certain party in recent elections did not really hold to classical evangelical practices like church attendance or Bible reading.⁶ At the same time, and at the other end of the political spectrum, we see others who were emphatically not a part of the 81 percent who downplay or even disregard other evangelical emphases like abortion or biblical sexuality.⁷ Looking at these and similar statistics, one could be forgiven for wondering how many self-identified evangelicals even believe the *Evangel*.

This confusion of identity is almost innate to the evangelical experience. This allusion to “bipolar” sounds hyperbolic, but it points to something key, both for understanding evangelicals as a group and for how that group interacts politically. While we speak of a singular evangelicalism, and there is just cause for doing so, we must understand that at its core, evangelicalism is not a singular movement, but one born of consensus. Most obviously, this means that while commentators regularly speak of evangelical ideas, there is no temporal authority to define just what those ideas are. There is no Magisterium, no council, no bishop, nor, with the passing of Billy Graham in 2018, any acknowledged figurehead to whom the whole can look for clarification. Or, as BreakPoint host John Stonestreet has put it, there are evangelical churches but no Evangelical Church.⁸ Formal institutions like the National Association of Evangelical and the Evangelical Theological Society or flagship publications like *Christianity Today* have, for some, served in that role from time to time. However, none of these *ad hoc* authorities change the reality that evangelicalism is a collection of distinct and occasionally contradictory organizations and emphases, united by a shared focus on internal piety and external activism. This lack of an organizing *telos* yields a movement with no center and little in the way of a clear trajectory yet driven by a passion to encourage

March 30, 2017, <https://www.aaihs.org/the-history-of-black-evangelicals-and-american-politics/>

⁶Bonnie Kristian, “Are the 81 Percent Evangelicals?” *Christianity Today*, December 21, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/january-february/evangelicals-evangelicalism-politics-eighty-one-percent.html>.

⁷Alex Samuels, “White, Evangelical . . . And Progressive,” *FiveThirtyEight*, September 30, 2021, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/white-evangelical-and-progressive/>

⁸Personal communication.

changed people to change the world.

II. THE CONTEXT

Evangelical political practice did not emerge in a vacuum. This is a truism. It is also something that is too often ignored in analyses of the movement. For a great many contemporary scholars, the only things that seem to matter in discussing the issue are the factors which are equally contemporary. The historical and philosophical background takes a back seat to purely sociological, racial, and gender power dynamics of only the last generation or two. Even if it is simpler to look at evangelicalism's political activity as driven by a fascination with certain movie stars or purity culture, when it comes to movements embracing millions of people, Ockham's razor is reversed; the more multifaceted answer is more often true. It is not a question of ignoring the sociological influences on evangelicalism but, instead, of widening our perspective to include a wider swath of the story.

One of the most obvious elements of evangelical thought is the centrality of personal piety. All in all, this is a good thing. We can think of the English influence of Wycliffe and Tyndale on translating the Bible into native tongues and Luther's dramatic "Here I stand" moment at Worms. Evangelicalism has always insisted on a world where butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers possessed as much access to God as any prince or priest. Similarly, the continental ideas of Pietists like Philipp Jakob Spener and Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians imparted to later evangelicalism an insistence on the inner life and personal application of theological themes. These principles crafted an evangelicalism which connected the personal and the public. In the best of times, this meant a holistic approach to life, a perspective where the individual could not hide from the implications of Christianity in the common square. When devolved from original goals, this brought an atomistic and individualistic subjectivity to public affairs, a fact that continues to afflict us.

Another factor is the cross-denominational element in evangelical practice, and this goes back to its immediate antecedents. The English Civil Wars provide an unexpected bit of foreshadowing. During that conflict, the Parliamentary Army was a hodgepodge of theological systems.⁹ As the war

⁹"Cromwell had openly espoused the principle of religious toleration and was rapidly drawing the Independents and Baptists under his masterful influence. The general's army was a hotbed of zealous sectarianism, and the vigour and competence of his leadership drew men to him like a magnet." W. K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England: From the Convention*

wore on, and commanding officers were replaced; instead of only Anglican and Presbyterian chaplains, the New Model Army increasingly diversified. As notable Reformed pastor Richard Baxter put it, “Independency and Anabaptistry were most prevalent; Antinomianism and Arminianism were equally distributed.”¹⁰ While these chaplains were too early, historically speaking, to be considered evangelicals in the contemporary sense, we could term this ecumenicity an example of proto-evangelicalism, as pastors from distinct denominations worked together on a common cause while keeping their theological distinctives in tow. This is something that would become a hallmark of evangelical practice a century later in the Awakenings of the 1700s,¹¹ and would continue to define evangelicalism down to the present.

A third set of influences on evangelicalism deals with first principles. We may agree on certain issues, but we often approach them from widely divergent presuppositions. Take for example the questions of religious liberty. For those in the Baptist line, liberty of conscience is near and dear to their hearts. Likewise, those coming from a more Reformed/Kuyperian stream have such freedom at the forefront of their political theory. However, despite this common ground, their respective emphases and rationale are almost contradictory. For the former, liberty is a positive good, a blessing from God to each individual upon which the state cannot infringe.¹² For the latter, however, the focus is more on the negative; it is not so much that people have the right to think what they wish as much as it is that the state lacks the authority to dictate beyond its sphere.¹³

of the Long Parliament to the Restoration, 1640-1660 (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), 65.

¹⁰Richard Baxter, quoted in Anne Laurence, *Parliamentary Army Chaplains: 1642-1651* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 1990), 79. Baxter was not a fan of this multid denominational activity. As he put it, “And when the Court News-book told the World of Swarms of Anabaptists in our Armies, we thought it had been a meer lye, because it was not so with us, nor in any of the Garrison or County-Forces about us.” Laurence, 79.

¹¹Douglas Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: The History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 30.

¹²“That it is the will, and mind of God (in these Gospel times) that all men should have the free liberty of their own Consciences in matters of Religion, or Worship, without the least oppression, or persecution, as simply upon that account; and that for any in Authority otherwise to act, we confidently believe is expressly contrary to the mind of Christ.” *The Standard Confession of 1660*, Article 24, https://www.nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology/confessions/Standard_Confession_1660.pdf.

¹³“Every State-formation, every assertion of the power of the magistrate, every mechanical means of compelling order and of guaranteeing a safe course of life is therefore always something unnatural; something against which the deeper aspirations of our nature rebel; and which, on this very account, may become the source both of a dreadful abuse of power, on the part of those who exercise it, and of a continuous revolt on the part of the multitude. Thus originated the battle of

III. HOW WE GOT HERE

In the last century or so, evangelical political engagement has been in for a wild ride. Granted, this must be an abbreviated century of around eighty years since before that time those holding to evangelical beliefs were normally categorized as fundamentalist. While the backstory is quite complicated, a strong case can be made that evangelical politics, in the modern sense, began in the Second World War with the drive to break the mainline monopoly on military chaplains.¹⁴ Before this time, those with theologically conservative beliefs had been significantly sidelined in the denominational battles of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and, while this point is often exaggerated, there was an element of fundamentalist thought that shied away from the public square. To be precise, the public action by conservative Christians in those days (and now) was more centered on private initiatives at the local level, the sorts of things that get overshadowed in the history books when compared to government actions like FDR's New Deal.

During the conflict with Germany and Japan, evangelicals were wholeheartedly supportive of the war effort, though they often voiced disapproval of the state's indifference to moral concerns and offered occasional critiques about progress and policy of the war. Once peace had returned, evangelicals emerged with a strong voice. Part of this was simply due to the growing prominence of the movement with the rise of Billy Graham, but part was a renewed emphasis on engaging the culture. We see in 1952 Francis Schaeffer writing to President Truman about the latter's cooperation with the Vatican to oppose Communism.¹⁵ Carl F. H. Henry had a similar complaint just a few months earlier when, in a letter to a local paper, he chided the Truman administration for its moves to appoint an envoy to the Vatican.¹⁶ For the 1950s and 1960s, with certain exceptions, political activity remained largely a matter of proclamations rather than overt involvement in the process. And, as can be seen from the examples above,

the ages between Authority and Liberty, and in this battle it was the very innate thirst for liberty which proved itself the God-ordained means to bridle the authority wheresoever it degenerated into despotism." Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism: The Stone Lectures of 1898* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 78.

¹⁴ Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian: An Autobiography* (Waco: Word, 1986), 105.

¹⁵ Francis A. Schaeffer, Letter to President Harry S. Truman, November 19, 1951, Francis A. Schaeffer Collection, Box 57, File 23, The Library, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC.

¹⁶ Carl F. H. Henry, Letter to the Editor of *Pasadena Star-News*, November 7, 1951, Carl F. H. Henry Papers, Box 1951 1, File Protestants and other Americans for the Separation of Church and State, Roling Library Archives, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL.

evangelical commentary was hardly partisan at this point but centered on issues of specifically religious or moral natures. Now, “moral” was not just shorthand for “personal piety.” Evangelicals were highly concerned with the social order, but they did not call for action as much as they declared what was right. This declarative engagement continued even as the Civil Rights movement and the Cold War gained steam. When evangelical outlets like *Moody Monthly* or *Christianity Today* spoke out about segregation, they tended to challenge people to consider their ways instead of calling on them to vote in a certain way.¹⁷ When they talked about the menace of global Communism, they did not play to the chauvinism of America versus the world but the gross immorality and oppression of Marxist tyranny.¹⁸ With a high-level moral perspective leading the way, evangelicals managed to engage, even at a discrete distance, the political realm without getting bogged down in the muck and mire of partisanship. What is more, they could and did praise their nation for its qualities while also calling it out for its failings,¹⁹ with language that was a far cry from America as God’s chosen land.²⁰

¹⁷“And BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this convention exhort every Bible-believing Christian to foster in every reasonable and Christian way the full participation of every group in the advantages of Christian culture, including equal opportunities in the means of grace, of education, in wages, in housing, and in free enterprise; And finally, BE IT RESOLVED that this convention repudiate as unChristian, unwelcome guardianship of one group by another on the basis of racial or ethnic distinctions.” Press Release, National Association of Evangelicals, Carl F. H. Henry Papers, Box 1951 2, File NAE Committee on Social Action, Rolfling Library Archives, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL. Emphasis in original.

¹⁸“But shame on us Christians who have not realized that the Communist system will naturally and inevitably bring forth oppression, because, in a materialistic view, there is no basis why the human being has any unique intrinsic value ... the individual has no unique, intrinsic value, and there will be oppression, because he or she is only considered as expendably useful for the collective of the state and for the elite which has absolute control of that state. Are we shocked with Stalin’s millions that he killed? Are we shocked with Mao’s probably killing more than Stalin and Hitler put together? We should not have been shocked, we should have been overwhelmed with tears and with fury, but not surprised.” Francis A. Schaeffer, “The Responsibility of Free Christians in the Soviet Bloc,” Speech given to the Christian Rescue Effort for the Emancipation of Dissidents, October 29, 1981. Emphasis in original.

¹⁹“Whatever the outcome of this struggle, Christians all over America must approach the problem penitently, aware that the existence of the problem is the fault, not of the Negro, but of the white man who brought him to America against his will and as chattel property. Amends for the wrongs done the Negro in the first place should loom large in the thinking of Christians who believe in justice and righteousness.” Harold Lindsell, “The Bible and Race Relations,” *Eternity* (August 1956): 12.

²⁰“The vast majority of Americans today may believe in a ghost god, in a phantom god, in a god who makes very little difference in the great decisions of life and even less in the cares of everyday existence.... These must be non-Christian gods, non-biblical gods, gods who have little in common with the gods of our fathers which many of these 99% of the Americans worship.” Carl F. H. October 17, 1952, Carl F. H. Henry Papers, Box “Let the Chips Fall,” Rolfling Library Archives, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL.

This, however, was not to last. After around 1970, a fracturing occurred within evangelical ranks. It is not that they stopped seeking political change or making moral claims in the public square. Instead, these claims bifurcated. Increasingly, with the rise of the Evangelical Left and, later, the Religious Right, the evangelical voice on politics became increasingly partisan, with each side claiming to be the authentic and prophetic voice in the land. More and more, despite many protestations to the contrary, evangelicals began identifying with one of the two major parties. Clearly, most evangelicals found themselves more at home with the Republicans; there is a reason why David Swartz's book, *Moral Minority* has the title it does and Jim Wallis's *Post-American/Sojourners* embraced its "outsider" role.²¹ Those on the left looked at their fellow believers' inaction and complicity with segregation and found that they had more in common with others of lesser orthodoxy but, by their count, greater morality regarding the dignity of human beings. Those on the right looked at their coreligionists' apathy and occasional endorsement of Communism's tyranny and discovered that they could oppose oppression just as comfortably with nonbelievers as with their own kind.

It is no coincidence that this split became more apparent even as the evangelical movement as a whole became more prominent in the popular consciousness. The year 1976 saw "The Year of the Evangelical"²² and the election of the first self-proclaimed evangelical to the presidency. In 1926, evangelicals were still, at least in the public imagination, reeling from the Scopes Trial the year before. In 1946, they were just coming together as a recognizable entity, distinct from both Modernists and fundamentalists. By 1976, they had grown to the point that, one, it was now "cool" to be an evangelical, and two, the movement was large enough that the left-leaning and right-leaning could experience an ideological mitosis of sorts, forming distinct communities under the evangelical banner. Instead of seeing their coreligionists as primary partners for social reform, evangelicals increasingly found allies among secular cobelligerents who shared

²¹Yet not everyone was wholly on board with the new partisan alignment. In a letter to Billy Graham, Carl F. H. Henry acknowledged the co-belligerency with the Republicans like President Nixon but insisted that this was born of common temporal causes and not shared theology. "[T]here is always the risk of seeming to confer approval on Nixon politics, and thus equating evangelical political action as such with a particular program which in essence—although it [illegible] the errors of leftist politics—is simply secular right, and lacks evangelical ingredients no less than its alternatives." Carl F. H. Henry, Letter to Billy Graham, August 1, 1970, Box 1970 3, File Correspondence—Graham, Billy, Carl F. H. Henry Collection, Rolffing Library, Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL. The illegible word is possibly "avoid."

²²David Kucharsky, "The Year of the Evangelical," *Christianity Today* (October 22, 1976): 73.

their political vision and party.

The next two decades saw evangelical political prominence rise ever higher. They became a key constituency in Reagan's 1980 and 1984 elections, and, even if they felt less at home with the patrician George H. W. Bush,²³ they arguably had more say in his administration. The Clinton years brought great consternation to evangelicals, both by those concerned over his policies²⁴ and by those having to reassure fellow believers that the President was not, in fact, the Antichrist.²⁵ In George W. Bush, evangelicals found a hero, someone who spoke for and like them, even as he found his voice in the rubble of 9/11.²⁶ Yet, it was arguably in his time in office that evangelicals entered a new stage, in fact, a new instability. A generation of believers had grown up in a world where the GOP was clearly on the side of God, if not the other way around. Seeing their fathers vote in lockstep for the Republican party led the rising cohort of evangelicals to find hope by moving lockstep in the opposite direction. Now, instead of risking moral compromise by associating too closely with the right-wing of the nation, they now got rather cozy with the left and voted for President Obama in good conscience. By the elections of 2016 and 2020, the fissures in the movement were profound. The majority of evangelicals continued to side with political conservatism,²⁷ but a vocal minority could no longer countenance this association. In today's world, the loudest voices on each side of an increasing chasm cannot fathom how the other side sleeps at night, and each faction sees the other as wholly captive to an unholy alliance with the world. Even as the polarizing figure of President Trump recedes into history, the fissures exacerbated in recent years continue to define much of evangelical political discourse, to the point that one's political affiliation is often a more potent indicator of identity and association than theological contentions.

²³Lyn Cryderman, "Am-Bushed?" *Christianity Today* (September 24, 1990): 16-17.

²⁴The Editors, "20 Years After Roe..." *Christianity Today* (January 11, 1993): 36.

²⁵Philip Yancey, "Why Clinton is Not Antichrist," *Christianity Today* (August 16, 1993): 72.

²⁶"Girding for a new kind of war, Mr. Bush seemed like a new kind of president. His speech before a joint session of Congress galvanized and energized the nation." Bob Jones IV, "Reload and Reset," *World*, 20 October 2001, 21-22. Even the left-leaning *Sojourners* spoke highly of Bush, seeing in his coalition-building in the autumn of 2001 a chance to rein in American adventurism. Jim Wallis, "A Light in the Darkness," *Sojourners*, November/December 2001, 8. Granted, this generosity changed very soon, particularly after the President moved his coalition not only into Afghanistan, but into Iraq.

²⁷Even if the 81 percent is not as accurate as headlines like it to be, there is little question that most evangelicals continue to vote for the Republican party.

IV. THE PROBLEM

Part of the problem is that we cannot do nothing. In the contemporary United States, there are political implications related to our historical moment that are, after a fashion, unique.²⁸ After all, if you were a first- or second-century Christian, you might have certain ideas about how the Roman Empire should be run, but, since there would be precious little you could do about it, in practical terms, these ideas could well be reduced to, “Try not to get eaten by the lions.” Even in the centuries which followed the Edict of Milan, unless you happened to be of noble birth or an adviser to those who were, your political opinions as an ordinary believer mattered little. Today, on the other hand, Christians living in the West in general and America in particular have both other opportunities as well as newer responsibilities as voters in a democratic society. As a citizen and not just a subject, an American Christian has a voice in the affairs of state about which earlier believers could only dream.

For all the proactive nature of an American citizen’s role in today’s society, the overarching concerns for the follower of Christ remain the same. How do we balance our temporal allegiance to the land of our natural birth with our ultimate loyalty to the hope of our new birth? The problems surrounding evangelicals’ involvement in politics are, in many ways, simply exacerbated versions of the issues facing Christians from all eras. Are we to remain above the fray with thoughts of God’s kingdom being not of this world, or are we to become involved in the mess of life and love our neighbors by seeking the welfare of the city? Do we, like many in the early church, the Anabaptists, or more recent end times enthusiasts see ourselves as sojourners and pilgrims who are just passing through towards a greater tomorrow, or do we look to the state’s role as minister of God to preserve the peace for today?

For Americans, this tension is exacerbated by several distinct and almost unique factors. Citizens of the Land of the Free are possessed of an endemic spirit of chosen-ness. Some will go so far as to declare the United States to be a covenant nation, a New Israel, in special relationship to God, but even those who deny this in principle cannot easily escape in practice the founding myths of our forebearers. Whether we see America as uniquely good or especially evil, Americans are keen to view their nation as being under the particular gaze of God, whitewashing its failures to the point

²⁸Parts of this section are adapted from the introduction to my *Dual Citizens: Politics and American Evangelicalism* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020).

of innocence or highlighting them as viler than the evils of others.

With political parties, this becomes even more exaggerated. We can temper our patriotism in the knowledge that our citizenship is an accident of birth, but the voluntary nature of political parties allows pride to invest and infest our membership with a sense of superiority. It is not our inner selves alone who push us along this way. Whether appealing to the millions of believers in their midst or looking to a quasi-Christian foundation, few partisan announcements can resist the call to connect a given election year's priorities to the eternal will of the God of the Bible. We may claim that Jesus is not a Republican or a Democrat, but we have trouble imagining that he is not whichever one we happen to be.

This perspectival thinking plays out among "professional" evangelical commentary as well. In December 1989, even as the last echoes of the Cold War faded into the history books, the United States went to war in Panama. It was not much of a war, ending as it did in a matter of days, if not hours. It was a straightforward campaign – the Americans rid themselves of thorn in their side, Panamanian strongman, Manuel Noriega. However, this simplicity did not yield unanimity when it came to evangelical perceptions. The evangelical left journal, *Sojourners*, blasted the fighting as needless interventionism born of American imperial ambition,²⁹ and wrote of American troops robbing from local people.³⁰ In contrast, the decidedly more conservative *World* magazine highlighted the support for the invasion found among the Panamanian people,³¹ and shared photos of local children playing with GIs.³² How can both these images be true? Americans as unwelcome bullies or long-expected liberators? The temptation here is to assume some kind of malfeasance, that one or the other of these periodicals fabricated or willfully misconstrued the situation. The far more likely and less dramatic option is that each group of writers and editors chose from among a host of true facts those elements which best conformed to what they thought their audience most needed to hear.

²⁹Danny Duncan Collum, "Under Bush's Thumb," *Sojourners* (April 1990): 4.

³⁰Brian Jaudon, "Just Cause I," *Sojourners* (July 1990): 32.

³¹The Editors, "Occupying Panama," 7.

³²The Editors, "With New Stability, Missionaries Want to Seize Day in Panama," *World* 20 (January 1990): 17.

V. TOWARDS A SOLUTION

Part of the evangelical problem with politics has nothing to do with evangelicals, or even with politics. The abbreviated nature of Twitter and Facebook amplify and enhance already simmering conflicts. We would like to blame social media with its limited space for nuance, its faceless interactions, its red and blue feeds, but there is more going on than outrage algorithms. There is a personal element involved. It is just too easy to create ideological silos where we can tailor the information we receive to what we want to hear. Unlike past years where there were only a handful of truly national papers or TV networks, the overwhelming number of choices available makes it impossible to absorb them all. Then, with human nature being what it is, we inevitably self-select those options which reflect our own preconceptions of the world. With this kind of context, it is easy to feel trapped by the blaring cacophony around us.

Then there is the common burden of postmodernism. We live in a culture that is constantly crying that life has no meaning and truth is unknowable. Society insists on a sort of epistemological libertarianism, where no one can tell another what is right, beautiful, or true. The most educated and morally conscious around us demand that there is no basis for morality. Yet, who can live like that? Our human need for identity and purpose and our God-given understanding that right and wrong are real combines with a philosophical system intent on meaninglessness, creating a rancorous rhetorical world where calls for political justice are both absolute and arbitrary.

Nonetheless, evangelicalism's political travails are not fundamentally technological or philosophical. These things affect and afflict us, indeed, but our fundamental problem is theological. Perhaps it would be better put as theologically teleological. Put simply, evangelicals have lost their way. Now, given human frailty, there is no way to achieve full unanimity on all issues, but that hardly entails that genuine progress is impossible. The questions of subjectivity, denominationalism, and ideological variance unique to evangelicalism, as well as the contemporary concerns over partisanship, social media, and postmodernism are mitigated if not sidelined in light of a transcendent orientation. We need something bigger, better, and higher than our own passing partisan priorities if we wish to be of service to God and a blessing to his world. By becoming unmoored from the Evangel, from the divinely privileged vantage point rooted in God's Word, evangelicals forfeited their greatest strength. And it is only

by restoring the Evangel to the center of evangelical politics that we can hope to restore our role in helping to make all things new. To borrow from C. S. Lewis's *The Silver Chair*, we have forgotten to seek the signs. Is it any wonder that we have lost our way? Or, to use a biblical example, if we, like Peter, take our eyes off the source of our strength, can we be shocked that the waves threaten to undo us?



A THEOLOGY OF CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

Darrell L. Bock*

Cultural intelligence requires knowing our calling as well as the real nature of our battle. The spiritual nature of the conflict means we must utilize both a spiritual perspective and divinely appointed resources. It also means appreciating what is going on with the people around us who have made different choices. In the section that follows, we will consider six of the most significant texts on the cultural places and spaces we find ourselves occupying, as well as how the resources we have enable us to engage wisely.

I. SIX KEY TEXTS

1. *Ephesians 6:10–18*. The key text is verse 12:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.

Christians fight a battle in a fallen world. Scripture often speaks of the world as being opposed to the things of God and, as a result, opposed to believers. John 15:19 reads, “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. However, because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of it, the world hates you.”

In a battle, it is essential to understand the calling and the mission. For decades the church fought a culture war where we often made other people the enemy. But this core biblical text on engagement reminds us that our real battle is spiritual. It requires spiritual resources, and we are armed with those in response to the conflict.

Ephesians 6:10–18 is the most explicit battle text among the NT letters. In fact, the Greek word for battle (or as v. 12 calls it, our “struggle”) entails

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hand-to-hand combat, and the context involves arrows being shot during the struggle. It is a life-and-death fight.

Verse 12 of this text says we are in a wrestling match that needs armor. The metaphor is mixed, with arrows also coming from afar. In the passage, Paul is telling the Ephesians to stand strong as they resist the devil (vv. 11, 13). Ground has already been won. That ground is spiritual and is tied to things such as our theology and our character. That ground resides in the church and with the believing people of God. We need to hold our ground, not take over new territory.

This is what the text mentions as armor: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and God's Word. Commentators debate whether this is about truth in the abstract or truth applied; whether it is about righteousness as justification or righteousness applied. Given what has been said in the letter of Ephesians to this point, it is probably all of this rather than either/or. Both a guide to the battle and a description of the battle are present in this text. Strength is to come from the Lord (v. 10), and we are to equip ourselves with what he provides: his armor (v. 11).

If we were to state the key verse emphatically, it would read: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens" (v. 12). I emphasized "not" because on the other side of it is a fourfold description of the enemy that makes our opponent and the nature of the battle clear. Our mission is not to defeat or crush people. It is to stand with spiritual resources against an unseen enemy. These spiritual enemies are so invisible that people may not even realize they exist.

To repeat an essential point, the rest of the text names our resources: truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer (vv. 13–18). There is nothing about circumstances here. There is nothing about political ideologies here. The resources are our theology, our faith, and the quality and character of our lives as believers.

People are not the enemy. They are the goal. When Jesus sent forth his disciples with the Great Commission in Matt 28:18–20, he said to go into the world and make disciples. He did not say, "Go into the church and be disciples," or "Withdraw from public space." He sent the church into the public space, armed for battle with spiritual resources that only God and the gospel provide through Christ.

Now, let's think through our battle metaphor. We are members of the

GIA (God's Intelligence Agency). Our assignment is to rescue people, as special forces do. We are to seek to rescue people from the clutches of unseen enemies. Those people walk "according to the ways of this world" (Eph 2:2)—a reality that should not surprise us. It is unrealistic to expect people who are not connected to God to live in ways he directs. This is why the gospel is so important in this struggle. The gospel equips people with ability and capability that they otherwise do not possess.

What does a member of the GIA do, and what is the mission? The mission is to so faithfully and relationally live out the truth of God that a way of rescue is made apparent. To so faithfully represent the truth of God that our lives and words demonstrate a flourishing, alternative way of life—his way of life.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to rescue people out of the clutches of destructive spiritual forces so sinister that people may not realize they are in any kind of danger. This is an enormous part of the challenge. People are in extreme danger, yet they don't know it or see it. Understanding that our special-forces operation involves the rescue of people in harm due to sinister forces they often don't recognize totally changes how I engage. If I see the person across from me not as an enemy but as one who needs to be recovered, as lost and needing to be found, I will engage differently.

This is not mission impossible, and this tape will not self-destruct in five seconds. This is the call of God, where we possess the resources to fight the battle he describes in the way he prescribes. Those resources are contained in and deployed through the truth we live out day by day individually among our neighbors, as the body of Christ before the world, and as believers engaging the world in ways that are distinct from how the world engages.

In the culture-war approach, we have all too often grown misguided in the mission, making people the enemy. In that faulty execution of our assignment, we've not only failed to accomplish the call of making disciples, but we have actually damaged the church by robbing it of its good news. Our challenges to culture, which were intended to attract, have sometimes been expressed so hard and so heartlessly that the recipients have been repelled instead. This is especially the case when we do battle in the same ways the world battles, or when we neglect to live in contrast to the world. As soon as we shed the relational distinctives that are the church—the call to love our enemies and to live authentically with integrity and grace—we

look like any other special-interest group. Then people will choose cultural options with their own special interests in mind.

The damage to the church's reputation and the cause of Christ is immense when the mission is as ill-defined as we've made it. Masses of our own young people look at how we older generations engage culturally, and they reply, "No, thank you!" Our assignment is to engage in this spiritual battle using the spiritual resources we've been given so that, by the distinctive way we live and love, others will be drawn in. That distinctiveness is most evident when we love our enemies as Jesus called us to do. It is not an easy assignment, which is why it requires spiritual resources to accomplish.

Many biblical texts point to the rich resources we possess. Ephesians 1:3 says we have been given every spiritual resource we need from heaven, and we can praise God for that. Second Peter 1:3–4a blesses the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because, "according to his great mercy, he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is unperishable." And as 1 John 4:4 says, "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." This is true no matter what the world says, does, or thinks.

Ephesians 1:21–22 likewise teaches that Jesus has been exalted over all other powers and appointed head of the church. Nothing can remove him from his place, regardless of what happens in the world. And nothing can alter our position in Christ as a result. There is nothing to fear in the battle, for the spiritual resources we have are great and the identity we have is unshakable. Our assignment is to draw on those resources rather than rely on those that make us more like the world. We do so by engaging intelligently with people who think differently than we do, not by despising or disrespecting them, but by seeing them as hostages in need of rescue. When we act like the world and perceive them as enemies, our rescue mission goes off course and we lose our spiritual advantage.

2. *1 Peter 3:13–18*. The key text is verses 15–16a:

But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do this with gentleness and respect.

First Peter is a great book. Much of it covers engagement. The apostle Peter, the author, sat at Jesus's feet and took the engagement class the Savior held as he prepared the disciples to go into the world with the gospel. One of my favorite engagement passages is 1 Pet 3:15, a verse often used in Scripture-memory programs. We are to be prepared to explain what we believe, our hope. Our faith is not ultimately about ideas, though it certainly has those, but is about hope.

Peter had one word he could choose to summarize everything that faith comprises, and he chose "hope." That hope is about understanding and appreciating why we are on Earth and how we can connect to the Creator who made us. First Peter 1:13 ends with the exhortation to "set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." We see that hope in the way that God made the connection between us and him possible. It is why the believer's message is called the good news. We get reconnected to the living God. We "get located" in the way we were designed to live, both now and for eternity.

First Peter 3:15 is an exciting call and a wonderful verse. But we often miss what is around it that helps answer our question about what intelligent engagement involves. Starting in verse 13, we're given a picture of the world as it ought to be: "Who will harm you if you are devoted to what is good?" If we do good to others, things should go well. Simple enough.

Only we live in an upside-down world, so the next verse reads, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed" (1 Pet 3:14a). Now, look at that verse. It anticipates that we will suffer for doing right, just as Jesus taught his disciples (Matt 5:10–12). It sounds as if Peter actually understood what Jesus had been saying in effect throughout the entire second half of his ministry: "If you follow me, there will be pushback. The disciple bears a cross daily. That is the world we engage in and with. Yet we are blessed, because our acceptance does not come from the world but from God and being faithful to him."

The next part of the verse is even more amazing. "But do not be terrified of them or be shaken" (1 Pet 3:14b NET). There is no cause for fear as we engage, even though we can anticipate rejection and injustice. Now, I have to be honest. A lot of what I see in the church's response to our culture looks like fear or our being shaken. We fear for the loss of the Judeo-Christian net that once encircled much of Western culture. We tremble at the way the world lives and the choices it makes, disturbed by the influences it produces. These are disturbing events, but they should

not surprise us.

Our fearful responses never help us engage well. The believer's hope and identity rests in God. It is at this point that we connect to Christ as our hope and march into the world ready to engage, ready to give a defense, ready to stand firm, and armed with the spiritual resources that allow us to stand. And our dominant message is positive. It is about hope.

The tension of sharing the gospel and engaging with our culture is always a balance between the challenge the gospel presents to people about their sin and failure to live rightly and the gospel's invitation to enter into hope and a new kind of life. As we engage, we have to simultaneously challenge and invite. How do we do that well?

The church often fails by focusing so hard on the challenge that the hope gets lost. We so wish to highlight what is wrong in the world that we mute the hope that God has made available, or we defer that hope to the future alone. Yet this hope starts now, in this life. Now, the only reason to come to a new hope is because we realize shortcomings in this life, many of them our own. So, challenge has to be there somewhere. Yet our landing place is hope. It cannot go missing. Biblical hope is not about prosperity or a trouble-free life. It exists in a life that is plugged into God's purpose for creating us and aligned with his reasons for making us to begin with. So, in our engagement, it is important that we never lose the message of hope in the midst of a defense of the gospel and the challenge that comes with the gospel.

The only way for good news to be good news is for the good news to be in the message! And it needs to be communicated with an appreciation of why the news is good (because there is a rescue) and why grace is grace and not deserved or merited. Often, we stop reading 1 Pet 3:15 right there at the mention of being prepared to give a defense for our hope. That is a major mistake. We don't merely offer our content, but the tone we present it with matters. Verse 16 says: "Do this [give this defense of hope] with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame."

Of all the things to digest here, let me make three quick points: First, our engagement should come with gentleness and respect. It is not to be delivered with fear, or anger, or resentment but with hope, because it is hope we share. We need not be threatened; we can be gentle and respectful because we know God stands with us. We engage not arrogantly but

humbly because it is only by the grace of God that we stand in this hope. I see less of this gentleness combined with respect than I would hope to see from the church as it engages the world. We can do better here.

Gentleness and respect are crucial in engagement. The two terms refer to a positive kind of meekness and humility placed alongside a regard for those with whom we interact. Tone really matters because it communicates our love for those we challenge with the gospel.

Second, our good behavior will be slandered. This is the second time Peter has said our good will meet with bad. Every good deed will be punished. Do not be surprised when pushback comes. People don't like to be challenged, though it is a part of the gospel message. However, it's not the whole message. Hope still needs to be the dominant note.

Third, we are to maintain a good conscience while knowing God is fully aware of the wrong we have experienced. First Peter 4:19 consoles us as we suffer: "Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good." The shame our accusers will have is before God. This is one of the reasons we need not fear as we engage.

In 3:17, Peter explains why we can conduct ourselves in this way: "For it is better to suffer for doing good [yet another mention of injustice!], if that should be God's will, than for doing evil." We are not to respond to the world in kind, even in the face of unjust responses. Disciples engage and show a different way of relating, even to those who reject them. This is part of how we love our enemies in a distinctive way.

The reason for this approach is what Peter says next: it is the example of Jesus himself (v. 18). He was the just One. He suffered and served in order to draw the unjust to God. Only note that the text does not only put it so generically. It says, "that he might bring you to God." Peter personalizes it with a reminder about our own entry into grace. Christ is our model. We suffer because we are mirroring what he suffered so that we may be like him.

We ought to remember where we came from and how we arrived at such blessing. In other words, as we engage others and mirror Jesus, we need to recall that there was a time when God was gracious to us while our backs were turned on him. We should be able to understand what it means to be opposed to God and how God drew us graciously to him. That is the tone that matters.

We operate with cultural intelligence when we engage in the same

manner that God interacted with us. We focus on hope even as we challenge people, and we do so with gentleness and respect because we remember our own experience of his grace.

3. *Colossians 4:5–6.*

Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.
Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so
that you may know how you should answer each person.

Paul includes this brief but significant remark on engagement as he is offering final exhortations to the Colossians. Set in a context of prayer and the hope of open doors for the gospel (vv. 2–3), Paul turns our attention to how we can make the most of such opportunities. Two terms are fundamental in this text: “always” and “gracious.”

First, “always” is a technical term. The dictionary defines it as “all the time.” No exceptions. That means twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks out of the year, 365 days a year (and 366 days in leap years). There are no days off every four years—or ever. In other words, it is an emphatic time marker. “Always” is all the time.

Second, our tone always matters. “Gracious” is like the gentleness and respect we read about in 1 Peter 3. We should always be ready to share our hope, but always do it with this gracious tone. In fact, this is how gentleness and respect translate into application and action. It means to be gracious as we interact with those outside the faith.

The idea of salt as a preservative reinforces the imagery. Our speech should help things to settle—and to settle down. It should be constructive in dealing with issues, not destructive by engaging in personal insult. Again, I’m not sure how well many in the church have been applying this idea in their engagement, including many of our most prominent leaders. Yet how we relate what we believe matters. Without such gracious speech, we are not being culturally intelligent.

4. *Galatians 6:10.*

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good
of all, especially for those who belong to the household of
the faith.

This short exhortation comes at the end of a long section where Paul has explained the law of love—the royal law that Jesus gave the church, the law of distinctive love. In Gal 5:14, he noted that the entire law is fulfilled in the exhortation to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Once again, the relational dimension steps forward as the supreme application that God desires in our interaction with people.

Jesus had underscored in Luke 6 that this love is distinctive: it includes enemies and those who hate and oppress us (vv. 27–36). Jesus drove home the point that there is no distinctiveness when we only love those who love us; even sinners do that. The disciple is to do better, and the disciple’s love should be greater.

Jesus told a story—the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37)—to make clear that our call is to be a neighbor, not worry about who is our neighbor. A scribe had asked him, “Who is my neighbor?” The question itself suggested that there are people who are not our neighbor, not our concern. Jesus’s parable said, “No, that idea is false.” Our call is to be a neighbor and to know that neighbors come in surprising packages, and Jesus underscored the point by presenting a hated Samaritan as the example.

So, in Gal 6:10, Paul ends his exposition on loving our neighbor with this: “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.” This is a call for us to actually do good. Engagement is not left to words alone. We have to show through our actions what we declare.

A technical term in this verse is the word “all,” which the dictionary defines as “any and every one.” This love is directed toward all. It excludes no one. Just as Jesus illustrated in the parable, we are to be good neighbors to all. With some texts, we are prone to get into a somewhat sinister debate about whether they apply just to those of the faith or to everyone. I think of Matthew 25 as an example. New Testament scholars have spilt much ink debating whether the text refers only to how believers are treated or how all people are treated. Frankly, it’s not an easy choice contextually.

This text in Galatians suggests the debate may be somewhat superfluous, because all people are to be loved and treated the same. We undoubtedly ought to treat believers with kindness; then again, they are to be treated as everyone else is to be treated. When we say, “Believers are to be treated one way and others another way,” we miss the point of this text. The call to love applies especially to those in God’s community, but it also applies

to all people.

The result of a too-narrow application is that we excuse ourselves from a responsibility we all possess and reduce our call to love all people. We also limit actions of love and care, undercutting the most powerful visual proof of our claims. We become like the scribe who asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?”—as if there is a limit to our care.

To narrow this kind of a text is to misapply the passage and fail at our calling and mission to love. I fear that in our recent past we have fallen into this trap. Cultural intelligence says our love is most distinctive when it includes all people.

5. *2 Corinthians 5:17–21*. The key text is verse 20:

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf: “Be reconciled to God.”

Another major text for engagement is found as Paul discusses the gospel in 2 Corinthians 5. It is actually one of the most important Pauline texts in the NT. It gives a picture of our mission and how we ought to minister in light of the gospel.

Verse 17 reads, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” This alludes to the newness of life gained at conversion, to one’s spiritual rebirth. Specifically, it refers to being born again and the new life acquired by a connection to Christ in faith. This verse explains why the gospel is at the center of mission and engagement: without the new life, living in ways that honor God is not possible.

There is a provision that comes with faith—an enablement that a person who does not know Christ lacks. This is because salvation is not just about forgiveness of sin but also about enablement for a new kind of life, a life that honors God and has access to the indwelling Spirit of God to live that way. This is what Rom 1:16 says is “the power of God for salvation.” A formerly spiritually dead person is forgiven and made alive through faith in Christ. That person receives the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit of God to walk in God’s ways. That is the message of Romans 1–8 and is what Paul calls being “a new creation” in Christ in 2 Corinthians.

Then Paul says this: “Everything is from God, who has reconciled us to

himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18). And I sit here thinking that if I were to walk out on the street and ask someone, “In one word, how would you summarize what the gospel, or salvation, is all about?” and I just asked it open-ended like that, I imagine I’d get all kinds of answers: Grace. Forgiveness. Hope. Salvation. Judgment. I’m also willing to bet that if I walked into the average church and asked that question of people who ought to know the answer, the term reconciliation would be way down that list. It would not be in the top five; it might not even make the top ten. Yet Paul’s one word to summarize what his ministry is about is reconciliation. Peter used the word hope in a similar way in 1 Peter 3, but in 2 Corinthians the result of salvation is being focused on. God saves us to reconcile us to him and to others.

Now reconciliation is obviously aimed primarily at our relationship with God. When you read on in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he says more about this work of God: “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us” (5:19). And then comes this wonderful verse, verse 20, that I think is actually one of the core verses regarding engagement in general. It reads, “Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ.”

Now, an ambassador represents a country. He also is a foreigner in a strange land. An ambassador’s calling is to represent his home country and its values. He or she works for peace between the people the ambassador represents and the people among whom the embassy resides. All those things are in play. That is the picture Paul uses to describe what we do when we engage.

There are many parts here. First, an ambassador has a primary allegiance to the home he comes from, not to the foreign country where he lives. In our case, we are citizens of heaven and part of the multinational, multiethnic community God has formed around the world. Our home and representation are primarily with the people of God. In terms of priority, all civil connections come after these relationships. We represent God and his people first.

Second, an ambassador does not ask people to come to the embassy to get to know his country. He goes out and engages with the people of the land in which he now lives. The ambassador is out and about, learning whatever is necessary to understand the country where he or she resides.

Third, we are the bearers of a message from God. That message is

proclaimed not only by what we say, but by how we say it and by how we live. These themes align with the previous texts we have examined. Christians are always ambassadors, visibly representing the One whom they serve back at home, that is, our heavenly home.

Verse 20 has even more to say: “God is making his appeal through us. We plead on Christ’s behalf: ‘Be reconciled to God.’” Do you hear the interesting tone of the verse that summarizes our message to the world? Once again, tone matters. The human-divine relationship is obviously the focus here. But what we offer is an invitation to be reconciled. It is a plea we give.

Now, the people we’re pleading with are accountable to God for their response, but that also means their response is not part of my responsibility. The response is between that person and God, and so is the accountability for that response. The call within engagement is to be faithful in message and tone—to be a faithful representative of God, an ambassador who is worthy to be heard.

Reconciliation is an important theme in engagement, and to me this category is the answer to the problem of life and finding our proper place in it. Without being reconciled to God, we cannot be fixed. Our human brokenness—and its estrangement from God—overshadows everything: politics, ideology, world circumstances.

Without a change of heart, only externals change significantly. We can posit all kinds of answers as to what might fix what’s wrong in the world, but ultimately reconciliation is the divine answer to the problem that ails the human race. Getting properly reconnected to God, and then letting his resources and his power and his enablement change how we act and interact—that is the answer. And in that process, a healthier dynamic can emerge, a better way of functioning in the world around us.

This is why the gospel is so central to our mission, and central in our engagement with culture. How we represent God in word and tone sets the stage for our credibility about the gospel. What we care about and how we care for others is part of building a bridge to the gospel.

Some people think the answer is in other places, especially in our politics. But we have seen that experiment fail. Israel had God as a legislator in the OT, and they had laws he gave them, and yet their history was a mess. That is why God eventually said the solution is in a new covenant, where he would forgive them and put his law on their heart and give them his Spirit. Without a changed heart, laws and circumstances change little.

So we need to be careful that politics does not become our answer for society's problem. Society's problem, as a spiritual issue, is deeper than any political ideology.

Verse 21 closes the section, "He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." It is Christ who brings change. In saying this, however, the message is not: "Engagement doesn't matter," or "We should ignore the environment around us, including politics or other social concerns." That is sometimes how an emphasis on the gospel is read. But that is a mistake. We show our care for people by engaging with their lives and what is going on inside them, being aware of what troubles them and why. We help people when we do not just argue but show them that there's a different way to live. One of the best ways to do that is to listen and care.

The reason injustice is so often a topic in the Prophets is because the prophets themselves cared about people, especially when people were being mistreated or marginalized. It is no accident that we have texts in Scripture such as Mic 6:8 or Jas 1:27 or 2:1–13. When we as humans, whether believers or not, appreciate what God cares about in relating to people, then how people—our "neighbors"—are treated becomes our concern.

Cultural intelligence calls us to see ourselves as ambassadors representing God, not so much as citizens of a particular earthly nation or political view, but as citizens of his kingdom. Our mission is to offer an invitation, pleading with any tribe and every nation to reconcile to God, showing love to any and all people.

6. 2 *Timothy* 2:22–26. The key text is verses 24–26:

The Lord's servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth. Then they may come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Our final text is hardly ever brought up in discussions about engagement, but it ties together several things the other texts say. The passage is a summary of Paul's advice to Timothy, a young pastor. It starts with Timothy's own character, which mirrors to a degree the spiritual attributes

of Ephesians 6.

Here is verse 22: “Flee from youthful passions, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” Righteousness, faith, and peace are part of the theological-relational attributes noted in the other epistles, especially in Eph 6:14–17. The content of this verse also overlaps with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23), attributes that are primarily relational as well.

Verse 23 argues against getting into controversies that lack substance: “But reject foolish and ignorant disputes, because you know that they breed quarrels.” The Lord’s servant is supposed to engage with a different set of goals: kindness, gentleness, and patience (v. 24). There will be conflict, but it takes a certain temperament to get through such tension well.

Two themes that we have seen before reappear here. The first is being kind toward all. Kindness is not selective. The second theme is gentleness (echoing 1 Pet 3:16 yet again). Nothing about this is necessarily easy. Thus, it takes spiritual resources and maturity to develop such responses. It’s all too common to want to snap back during a disagreement. Paul tells Timothy not to go there.

Perhaps the most amazing part of the exhortation comes next, in verses 25b–26. I repeat it because it is so significant: “Perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth. Then they may come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

There are several things of note here. First, the person’s response to God is tied to something God does. The ambassador is not responsible for the response of someone’s heart. To come to repentance requires an eye-opening work of God. Still, in a battle of ideas or actions, we don’t want to give someone cause for rejecting what we are saying. It may be unavoidable due to a difference of opinion, but we should never seek conflict. In fact, we should be careful not to descend into debate, but instead work to have a fruitful discussion.

Second, tone is again being highlighted, but we are only called to be faithful in sharing what we have experienced and what we understand by God’s grace. Winning an argument is not a goal because it is not in our control anyway.

Third, the remark about escaping the devil’s trap is another allusion to the spiritual battle of Eph 6:12. We now have come full circle to the fact that a person can be in the clutches of spiritual forces about which they

are unaware. The members of the GIA are skilled at balancing challenge with hope.

Fourth, the result is a liberating escape. Rather than being trapped and captive, the person is given a different kind of freedom—one that links to God and his grace and fills him or her with enablement and hope. The result for that individual is a flourishing life and walk with the Creator.

Cultural intelligence avoids unnecessary disputes and engages in ways that are gentle. It also allows God to own the results of a conversation and trusts that by engaging faithfully and patiently, we are offering the non-believer an opportunity for a life-changing escape.

II. CONCLUSION

Engagement can lose its effectiveness when we lose sight of the primary objectives of our mission. A mission that is poorly defined or that incorrectly identifies what is most central can take us off a productive conversational path and may even result in real damage. The church's recent path may have unintentionally produced such damage because our mission has been misdirected. People are not the enemy but the goal.

In shifting times such as ours, we need a biblical agility that sees what is needed, alongside a relational ability to read and react. As we develop cultural intelligence, we gain this agility, guiding us to carefully listen and pursue gentleness while balancing challenge and hope. We also learn to appreciate the spiritual nature of the challenge of engagement and how to use those spiritual resources that allow us to stand. Skillful engagement means having a sense of our security in God so we do not fear no matter how grave the circumstances may look. Finally, cultural intelligence teaches us to understand that the gospel is the real answer for ultimate human transformation. Every other answer has severe limits.

Such engagement also grasps that not only is what we say important, but so is how we say it. Whether we think of ourselves as being engaged in the rescue of a lost person in danger or being an ambassador who represents the hope of God, the call is to humbly remember where we came from when God drew us to himself. It was by the amazing grace of God that he stretched out a hand of invitation to us while we were being challenged about our need for God through the gospel.

Jesus's death for sin clears the way for the gift of life in the Spirit. The gospel takes people from challenge and deep need to hope. The result is a powerful reconciliation with God. Such reconciliation also opens up a

unique kind of love for others that reflects who God is, what he did in Christ, and who his people should be.

None of this comes easily; it requires the fruit of the Spirit of God. Engaging properly with others requires an enablement and instincts that we do not have on our own. Engagement cuts against the grain and does not react as the world does. It requires a love that extends to all people at all times.

In the end, even if the world sometimes pushes back (as it did against the Savior), biblical engagement reveals the presence of God, who empowers us to live distinctively and speak to others with wisdom and skill. The result is a cultural intelligence that images God's character in our individual relationships, our church communities, and in our society. When we mirror him, we honor him



THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE: A Southern Baptist Perspective

Nathan A. Finn*

Baptists have always advocated soul freedom, or liberty of conscience, in matters of religion. As such, Baptists affirm the principle of a free church in a free state, or as it has come to be more commonly known in the United States, the separation of church and state. This is true of Southern Baptists, who summarize our position in *The Baptist Faith and Message* (2000):

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and He has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are contrary to His Word or not contained in it. *Church and state should be separate.* The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others. Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God. The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work. The gospel of Christ contemplates spiritual means alone for the pursuit of its ends. The state has no right to impose penalties for religious opinions of any kind. The state has no right to impose taxes for the support of any form of religion. *A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal,* and this implies the right of free and unhindered access to God on the part of all men, and the right to form and propagate opinions in the sphere of religion without interference by the civil power.¹

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The key phrases, highlighted above in italics, are “Church and state should be separate” and “A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal.” While these phrases might seem clear enough, over the past couple of generations the idea of church-state separation has at times been controversial among Southern Baptists—at times for good reasons.

In the following pages, I offer a Southern Baptist perspective on the separation of church and state. Note that I am not claiming to advance “the” Southern Baptist position. As is the case with nearly any idea, including historic Baptist distinctives, Southern Baptists are not unanimous in our understanding of church-state separation.² Nevertheless, I want to advance a distinctively Baptist version of this principle that is worth defending against contemporary threats, regardless of the direction from which they come.

Like many of our Baptist forebears, I argue that the formal separation of church and state remains the best provisional arrangement for safeguarding the principle of religious liberty for all people. When there is full religious liberty, there is less occasion for the state to introduce coercion or confusion into matters of ultimate importance. Rightly understood, the separation of church and state guarantees the freedom of all people, regardless of their religious commitments (or lack thereof), to practice those commitments in accordance with their conscience. It also guarantees the freedom of believers to share the truth of the gospel with non-believers, making the best case we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, for the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) in the midst of a world of competing religious claims. For Baptists, church-state separation is not first and foremost about how to properly interpret a constitutional principle or how to best to embody one of our historically cherished distinctives, but it is ultimately about the Great Commission to proclaim the good news of King Jesus and make disciples from among all people.

In this essay, I begin by surveying early Baptist understandings of church and state. This will be familiar ground for many readers. I then focus upon several noteworthy Southern Baptists who have written on this topic over the past century. Though all Southern Baptists affirmed religious liberty,

¹“The Baptist Faith and Message 2000,” Article XVII: Religious Liberty, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xvii-religious-liberty>.

²For more on this recurring theme of diversity vis-à-vis Baptist distinctives, see Nathan A. Finn, “Debating Baptist Identities: Description and Prescription in the American South,” in *Mirrors and Microscopes: Historical Perceptions of Baptists*, ed. C. Douglas Weaver (Bletchley, Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2015), 173–87.

by the 1970s the issue had become controversial, leading to competing accounts of church-state separation. I will close with a call for Southern Baptists to remain committed to the principle of a free church in a free state for the sake of Great Commission faithfulness.

I. EARLY BAPTISTS AND CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION

In 1612, the English Baptist pioneer Thomas Helwys (died ca. 1616) established the first Baptist church on English soil in Spitalfields, which is now a district in the East End of London. That same year, Helwys wrote *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity*, wherein he argued for liberty of conscience in matters of religion. He did not argue for mere religious toleration, nor did he limit this freedom to orthodox Christians, but rather advocated for religious freedom for all people, including heretics, Jews, and Muslims. This was a radical claim at the time, made the more remarkable by Helwys's handwritten inscription in the copy he sent to King James I:

The king is a mortal man and not God, therefore he has no power over the immortal souls of his subjects, to make laws and ordinances for them, and to set spiritual lords over them. If the king has authority to make spiritual lords and laws, then he is an immortal God and not a mortal man.³

Helwys was imprisoned for his controversial beliefs, eventually dying in London's Newgate Prison around 1616. But the die was cast. Since the early 1600s, Baptists have remained tireless defenders of soul freedom.

In the generation after Helwys, Baptists in Colonial New England were making a similar case for religious liberty. Roger Williams (1603–83) and John Clarke (1609–76) are considered the co-founders of the colony of Rhode Island. Each man fled Massachusetts in search of greater religious freedom than was possible under the Puritan establishment. Each subsequently became a Baptist, founding the first two Baptist churches in the English colonies in Providence and Newport, respectively. Each also wrote in defense of religious liberty. In 1644, Williams penned *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, followed by Clarke's *Ill Newes from New England* in 1652. Both books catalogued religious persecution of Baptists and other religious dissenters and made the case for liberty of conscience.

³Thomas Helwys, "A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity," in *The Life and Writings of Thomas Helwys*, ed. Joe Early Jr. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 156.

Williams went further, however, in arguing for a clear distinction between the “garden” of the church and the “wilderness” of the world. In a follow-up work to *The Bloudy Tenent*, Williams played off of this metaphor when advocating for a “hedge or wall of Separation between the Garden of the Church and the Wilderness of the world.”⁴ A century and a half later, President Thomas Jefferson would invoke similar language when he claimed the First Amendment to the US Constitution created a “wall of separation between Church & State” in his 1802 letter to the Baptists in Danbury, CT.⁵

Since the time of Williams, the consensus among Baptists in America is that the best way to protect religious liberty is to champion the formal separation of church and state. Baptists the world over echo these sentiments, whether they are free citizens of liberal nations that adhere to church-state separation or oppressed minorities struggling to worship freely under atheistic or theocratic regimes.⁶ But the separation of church and state has enjoyed particular resonance with Baptists in America. This is partly because the First Amendment rejects a religious establishment when it says “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” Baptists in the United States appreciate that one of their cherished principles is enshrined in the Constitution. Second, and perhaps just as important, Baptists claim to have played a small but strategic role in influencing the course of the early American history of disestablishment.

In 1773, New England Baptist minister Isaac Backus (1724–1806) authored *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty Against the Oppressions of the Present Day*. In this treatise, Backus echoed Williams’s earlier argument for the separation of church and state to protect religious liberty against the coercive Congregationalist establishment. Backus was troubled that Baptists in New England continued to be persecuted for their dissenting beliefs. He petitioned the Massachusetts delegates to the Continental

⁴Roger Williams, “Mr. Cotton’s Letter, Lately Printed, Examined and Answered,” in *The Complete Writings of Roger Williams*, vol. 1, eds. Reuben Aldridge Guild and James Hammond Trumbull (Providence, RI: Narragansett Club, 1866; reprint, New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), 392.

⁵“Jefferson’s Letter to the Danbury Baptists,” Library of Congress, accessed July 13, 2021, <https://loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpre.html>.

⁶For example, in 1960 the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) adopted a “Resolution on Separation of Church and State,” available online at <https://www.baptistworld.org/resolution-on-separation-of-church-and-state/> (accessed July 27, 2021). This resolution was reaffirmed by the BWA in 2020. See also “Baptist World Alliance Study Document and Manifesto on Religious Liberty,” *Journal of Church and State* 2.2 (November 1960): 156–60.

Congress to end compulsory tithes to support the establishment and later voiced his approval of the First Amendment to the Bill of Rights while attending the Massachusetts convention that ratified the US Constitution in 1788. As Brandon O'Brien argues, "[Backus] fought for more than half a century to make America a nation that protects every citizen's right to exercise their religion according to their conscience."⁷

Also in 1788, the Baptist evangelist John Leland (1754–1841) met with James Madison, who was seeking Baptist support for his election to the House of Representatives from Virginia. Leland had contemplated running in the election himself to promote the cause of soul freedom. The two men came to an agreement: Leland withdrew from the race and encouraged Baptists to vote for Madison in exchange for Madison championing the same sort of understanding of full religious liberty associated with Jefferson, a friend of both men and Madison's close political ally. Madison was elected and subsequently drafted the First Amendment to the Bill of Rights, which was amended to the US Constitution in 1789 and ratified by the requisite number of states in 1791. John Ragosta argues that the views of the Baptists remained "particularly weighty" for Madison throughout the religious liberty debates in Virginia and eventual adoption of the First Amendment.⁸

The thinking of Williams, Backus, and Leland continues to influence how Baptists in America think about religious liberty and church-state separation. Among Southern Baptists, the turn of the twentieth century introduced a chorus of additional voices that have been gradually added to the "cloud of witnesses" for soul freedom that continues to the present day. In the next section, I will highlight how a selection of key Southern Baptist thinkers have discussed the separation of church and state across the century or so from 1908 to 2015. This list should be taken as representative rather than exhaustive, since numerous thoughtful Southern Baptists have written on the importance of a free church in a free state.

II. SOUTHERN BAPTIST VOICES

E. Y. Mullins (1860–1928) was almost certainly one of the most influential Southern Baptist theologians during his lifetime and arguably the

⁷Brandon O'Brien, *Demanding Liberty: An Untold Story of American Religious Freedom* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2018), 5.

⁸See John A. Ragosta, *Wellspring of Liberty: How Virginia's Religious Dissenters Helped Win the American Revolution and Secured Religious Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 168.

entire twentieth century.⁹ As Albert Mohler argues, “Mullins—more than any other writing theologian among Southern Baptists—remains the one figure against whom almost any other theologian is compared.”¹⁰ His numerous noteworthy writings included *The Axioms of Religion* (1908), a constructive interpretation of Baptist distinctives, and *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (1917), a widely adopted theology textbook. Mullins was also one of the leading denominational statesmen of his era. From 1899 until his death, Mullins served as president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1921 to 1924, chaired the committee that drafted the Baptist Faith and Message in 1925, and was president of the Baptist World Alliance from 1923 to 1928.

Mullins addressed the separation of church and state in *The Axioms of Religion*, devoting an entire chapter to the topic “The Religio-Civic Axiom: A Free Church in a Free State.”¹¹ Mullins argued of Baptists, “There has never been a time in their history, so far as that history is known to us, when they wavered in their doctrine of a free Church in a free State.”¹² He discussed the history of the modern religious establishment in England, contrasting this view of church and state with the views of Roger Williams and the Virginia Baptists. Mullins suggested the Baptists have made a significant contribution to western civilization with their separationist perspective. Mullins conceded that in a perfect society church and state might be united, though because no such society exists, the functions of church and state must remain separate. This separation relates to their different functions. Mullins argued the church is a voluntary spiritual organization while the state is a temporal organization that compels obedience. Thus, while church and state are compatible, in the sense that they can co-exist, the church is its own holy commonwealth that is free and independent of state control. Mullins closed his chapter by applying the principle of church-state separation to the question of tax exemption

⁹The most important book-length study of Mullins life and legacy is William J. Ellis, *A Man of Books and a Man of the People: E. Y. Mullins and the Crisis of Moderate Southern Baptist Leadership* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985). The best short introduction to Mullins’s thought is Fisher Humphreys, “E.Y. Mullins,” in *Baptist Theologians*, eds. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 330–50.

¹⁰R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Baptist Theology at the Crossroads: The Legacy of E.Y. Mullins,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3.4 (Winter 1999): 17.

¹¹E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion: A New Interpretation of the Baptist Faith* (Philadelphia: Griffith & Rowland, 1908), 185–200.

¹²Mullins, *Axioms of Religion*, 189

for religious property, arguing for exemptions on the logic that the state is not sovereign over the church.

One of Mullins's contemporaries was George W. Truett (1867–1944), longtime pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas.¹³ Like Mullins, Truett was a denominational statesman who served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention from 1927 to 1929 and the Baptist World Alliance from 1934–1939. Unlike Mullins, Truett was more of a preacher than a theologian. He was widely considered one of the most eloquent pulpiteers of his era. During World War I in 1918, Truett was invited by President Woodrow Wilson to serve as one of twenty American ministers that were selected to preach to Allied forces in Europe, under the sponsorship of the YMCA. All of Truett's books were sermon anthologies, many of which have been reprinted periodically because of their enduring popularity. In an obituary published in *The Christian Century*, J. M. Dawson wrote of Truett, "The consensus at the time of his passing ascribed Dr. Truett's extraordinary powers to his eloquence, his brotherliness toward all men and his passion for souls."¹⁴

Truett's most noteworthy sermon was his address "Baptists and Religious Liberty," which he preached on May 16, 1920, from the east steps of the US Capitol while the Southern Baptist Convention was holding its annual meeting in Washington, DC.¹⁵ Like Mullins, Truett argued that religious liberty is the supreme Baptist contribution to the world. Baptists are not satisfied with mere religious toleration, which concedes too much power to the state, but rather affirm absolute religious liberty as a matter of principle and a gift from God. Drawing upon Jesus's command in Matthew 22:21 to "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's" (KJV), Truett argued for the "divorcement" (separation) of church and state. This biblical model of separation was rejected by Constantinianism, which continued in various forms into the Reformation period, before being recovered by the modern Baptists. Far from church-state separation leading to the absence of a religious witness

¹³The standard scholarly biography of Truett is Keith E. Durso, *Thy Will Be Done: A Biography of George W. Truett* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009).

¹⁴J. M. Dawson, "Truett's Death Moves All Texas," *The Christian Century* (July 26, 1944): 880.

¹⁵"Baptists and Religious Liberty" was subsequently published in Truett's sermon anthology *God's Call to America and Other Addresses Comprising Special Orations Delivered on Widely Varying Occasions* (New York: George H. Doran, 1923). It has since been reprinted numerous times in various formats. This paragraph engages with the edition published electronically by the "Baptist Joint Committee on Religious Liberty," accessed July 13, 2021, <https://bjcconline.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Baptists-and-Religious-Liberty.pdf>.

in the public square, Truett believed this arrangement fosters the freedom to promote religious education and evangelistic advance.

Both Mullins and Truett wrote on church-state separation at a time of great cultural optimism. Each man was a proponent of American exceptionalism who closely identified American democracy with Baptist democracy.¹⁶ Though neither would likely have appreciated the concept of a civil religion because of their Baptist sensibilities, both articulated their views on church and state within a milieu that was still shaped profoundly by the broadly and generically Protestant assumptions that had characterized American culture since its founding.¹⁷ That consensus would remain largely unchallenged through the early postwar years and into the Eisenhower Administration. In 1954, Congress added the words “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance, followed two years later by a joint resolution adopting “In God We Trust” as the national motto of the United States. Both moves were attempts to position the United States as a righteous counterpart to the atheistic communism of the Soviet Union.

Yet some Baptists were uncomfortable with the God and Country emphasis of the early Cold War era. For example, Joseph M. Dawson (1879–1973) emerged as the leading Southern Baptist voice for the separation of church and state during the mid-twentieth century.¹⁸ Dawson served for over thirty years as pastor of the First Baptist Church of Waco, Texas (1915–1946), during which time he was also a respected denominational leader. Following his retirement from pastoral ministry, Dawson served from 1946 to 1953 as the founding executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (BJC), which represented the interests of several Baptist denominations in Washington, with emphasis on matters of religious liberty. In 1957, Baylor University established what is now the J. M. Dawson Institute for Church-State Studies to honor Dawson’s contributions to the topic.

Two of Dawson’s books, *Separate Church and State Now* (1948) and *America’s Way in Church, State and Society* (1953), anticipated changes that would come to American culture in the 1960s. Motivated both by his

¹⁶See Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 178.

¹⁷For a history and critique of American civil religion, see John D. Wilsey, *American Exceptionalism and Civil Religion: Reassessing the History of an Idea* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015).

¹⁸The most important study of Dawson’s life and thought is Travis Lamar Summerlin, “Church-State Relations in the Thought of Joseph Martin Dawson” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 1984). See also James Leo Garrett Jr., “Joseph Martin Dawson: Pastor, Author, Denominational Leader, Social Activist,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 14, no. 4 (October 1979): 7–15.

commitment to Baptist principles and concerns over potential government aid to Catholic parochial schools and the possibility of a US ambassador to the Vatican, Dawson advocated for the strict separation of church and state.¹⁹ During this same time, a number of leaders primarily from main-line Protestant traditions came together to form Protestants and Other Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. It is noteworthy that Dawson served as the first executive director of Americans United from 1947 to 1948, since the relationship between the two organizations would provoke considerable controversy forty years later. Dawson's final major work, *Baptists and the American Republic* (1956), was a study of Baptist influence on American culture, with emphasis on church-state separation.

The two decades between 1945 and 1965 were a transitional period marked by growing international tensions related to the Cold War, armed conflicts in Southeast Asia that were proxies for the Cold War, the emerging Civil Rights movement, persistent technological advances, government expansion, and significant economic growth that raised the standard of living in the United States. Within that milieu, a series of influential Supreme Court decisions drew upon Jefferson's "wall of separation" metaphor to codify the strict separation of church and state as the best way to interpret the First Amendment.²⁰ In *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), the Court upheld a New Jersey statute that used taxpayer funds to bus children to private Catholic schools. However, in its majority opinion—written by Associate Justice Hugo Black, a Southern Baptist Sunday school teacher from Alabama—the Court argued the statute was constitutional precisely because it did not violate the Establishment Clause in the First Amendment and the wall of separation it erected between church and state.²¹ In *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), the Court ruled that school-spon-

¹⁹Protestant antipathy toward Catholicism has deep roots in American history and has often contributed to arguments in favor of the strict separation of church and state. See Elizabeth Fenton, *Religious Liberties: Anti-Catholicism and Liberal Democracy in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), and Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

²⁰There continues to be debate among historians and legal scholars about the meaning of Jefferson's metaphor, its relationship to the First Amendment, and its relevance for contemporary jurisprudence related to church and state. For example, Philip Hamburger and Daniel Dreisbach have raised questions about the strict separationist interpretation and application of Jefferson's words. See Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), and Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation Between Church and State* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

²¹For more on Black, see Barbara Perry, "Justice Hugo Black and the 'Wall of Separation Between Church and State,'" *Journal of Church and State* 31, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 55–72. Scholars of Black debate whether his Baptist beliefs or his anti-Catholic sensibilities had the greater impact upon

sored prayer in public schools was unconstitutional because it violated the Establishment Clause. Again, Black wrote the majority opinion. Two additional cases in 1963 struck down teacher-led Bible reading and the Lord's Prayer using the same reasoning. While many fundamentalists attacked these decisions, which contributed to the rise of the Religious Right in the 1970s, Southern Baptist editorials and resolutions at the time praised the Court for upholding church-state separation.²²

The Dawson-Black view of church-state separation continued to be the position of the Baptist Joint Committee of Public Affairs through the presidential tenures of C. Emanuel Carlson (1954–1971) and James E. Wood Jr. (1972–1980). However, during James Dunn's turn as president of the BJCPA (1981–1999), the separation of church and state became a hotly contested topic among Southern Baptists. The early Dunn years coincided with both the early days of the Inerrancy Controversy in the Southern Baptist Convention and the rise of the aforementioned Religious Right within the Republican Party.²³ The latter was a movement that mobilized conservative Protestants to become active in the Republican Party to advocate against elective abortion, the normalization of homosexuality, and the secularization of the public square. The Religious Right became a key constituent within the Republican coalition that elected Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980 and 1984 and fueled the Republican takeover of Congress in 1994. In general, the Religious Right responded negatively to the strict separatist view of church-state separation advanced by the Supreme Court in the 1960s, in part because many of them were committed to the idea that America has always had a special place in God's divine plans.²⁴

For Southern Baptists, the debate about church and state was somewhat more complicated. During the final quarter of the twentieth century, there were at least three general perspectives among Southern Baptists when it came to church-state separation and the closely related question

how he viewed the relationship between public schools and church-state separation.

²²Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 62–67.

²³For an overview of the Inerrancy Controversy from a conservative perspective, see Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville: B&H, 2000). For a moderate interpretation, see Bill Leonard, *God's Last and Only Hope: The Fragmentation of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

²⁴William C. Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway, 1996), 371–85.

of America's Christian identity.²⁵ The first two views were common among SBC conservatives and could be understood as "hard" and "soft" forms of Christian nationalism.²⁶ Some believed that America was founded as an explicitly Christian nation as part of God's divine plan. This view was common within the wider Christian Right, as reflected in Peter Marshall's 1977 bestseller *The Light and the Glory*, Christian private school and home-school history curricula, and the "soft reconstructionism" of David Barton's controversial Wallbuilders organization.²⁷ Many Baptist laypeople and at least some pastors affirmed that America was, by design, a Christian nation.²⁸ Sometimes proponents of this view rejected in principle church-state separation, identifying the concept with secular humanism more than the Baptist tradition. For example, longtime SBC leader W. A. Criswell memorably referred to the separation of church and state as "the figment of some infidel's imagination" during a 1984 television interview, putting Criswell at odds with the historic Baptist position.²⁹

A second view of American history, more prominent among conservative Southern Baptist scholars, was that America was not founded as an explicitly Christian nation, but that the Judeo-Christian tradition had deeply influenced the nation's historic identity, a fact that should be acknowledged and celebrated. Barry Hankins argues this perspective was common among Baptist public intellectuals, who understood it to be more historically faithful than the idea that America was founded as a Christian nation.³⁰ Most Southern Baptists of this persuasion embraced an "accommodationist" view of church and state.³¹ Accommodationists

²⁵Portions of the following three paragraphs are adapted from Nathan A. Finn, "The Christian Right: From Reagan to Trump," in *Explorations in Baptist Political Theology*, eds. Thomas S. Kidd, Paul D. Miller, and Andrew T. Walker (Nashville: B&H, forthcoming.)

²⁶For a conservative and baptistic critique of Christian Nationalism, see Paul D. Miller, *Christianity and the American Nation: Power and Principle in Competing Christian Visions of American Nationhood* (Downers Grove: IVP, forthcoming).

²⁷See John Fea, *Was America Founded as a Christian Nation? A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 60–67; Julie J. Ingersoll, *Building God's Kingdom: Inside the World of Christian Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 39, 79–118.

²⁸Texas pastor and former SBC President Jimmy Draper was the most noteworthy pastoral defender of this view. See James T. Draper and Forrest E. Watson, *If the Foundation Be Destroyed* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984).

²⁹Cited in William Estep, *The Revolution within the Revolution: The First Amendment in Historical Context, 1612–1789* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 9.

³⁰Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 63–64.

³¹See Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon*, 139–64. Legal scholar Carl Esbeck calls accommodationism "institutional separationism," contrasting it with five other positions on church and state. See Carl H. Esbeck, "A Typology of Church-State Relations in Current American Thought," *Faith*

rejected the idea of a state-sponsored religion, but believed the government should adopt a generally friendly posture toward religion. As a rule, they emphasized the “Free Exercise” Clause of the First Amendment more so than the antiestablishment clause, though as Baptists they certainly opposed any sort of religious establishment. America was not a Christian nation, but rather was a nation of Christians, and the Constitution guaranteed their (and others’) soul freedom.

The third view, what Carl Esbeck calls “strict separationism,” argued America was officially a secular nation, albeit one influenced significantly by Christians (especially Protestants) for much of its history.³² However, strict separationists rejected both hard and soft forms of Christian Nationalism, arguing that America should remain neutral toward religion. They identified their view of church and state with earlier Baptist thinkers from Williams through Truett. Dunn was the leading advocate of this perspective, arguing that strict separationism was the historic Baptist position and that accommodationists had sold out to the Religious Right.³³ Conservative critics maintained Dunn and the BJCPA allied themselves too often with leftwing *secularist* organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and the renamed Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, while also seeming embarrassed at times about overt displays of patriotism, and were more generally supportive of progressive positions on social issues (especially abortion and LGBTQ+).

In 1988, Richard Land was elected president of the Christian Life Commission, the Southern Baptist agency that was tasked with speaking to the Convention on ethical matters and social concerns.³⁴ Land had previously served as a faculty member at Criswell College and worked as an advisor to Texas Governor Bill Clements. He had also been a member of the Public Affairs Committee, which represented the Convention’s interests on the Baptist Joint Committee. When Southern Baptists voted to defund the BJCPA in 1991, the Christian Life Commission was reassigned the responsibility of representing the SBC in matters of religious liberty. In 1997, the name of the entity was changed to the Ethics and

and Mission 8, no. 1 (Fall 1990): 12–14.

³²Esbeck, “Typology of Church-State Relations,” 7–9.

³³For more on Dunn, see Aaron Douglas Weaver, *James M. Dunn and Soul Freedom* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2011), and Aaron Douglas Weaver, ed., *A Baptist Vision of Religious Liberty and Free and Faithful Politics: The Words and Writings of James M. Dunn* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2018).

³⁴For more on Land, see Jerry Sutton, *A Matter of Conviction: A History of Southern Baptist Engagement with the Culture* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 271–420.

Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC). Land served as president of ERLC from 1988 to 2013. He was also active in public life beyond the SBC. For example, Land was appointed a commissioner to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom by President George W. Bush.

Reflecting his academic background, Land edited collections of scholarly essays on Christianity and politics that originated as addresses given at seminars hosted by ERLC, in addition to the many other essays he published elsewhere.³⁵ But Land proved especially adept at bridging the gaps between the academy, the church, and faith-inspired activism. As a leading public intellectual within the Religious Right, Land was frequently interviewed by news outlets. He also hosted a live syndicated radio program from 2002 to 2012, frequently penned op-ed pieces for national publications, and wrote several popular books that advocated a socially conservative vision for America. Land's book *The Divided States of America? What Liberals and Conservatives Are Missing in the God-and-Country Shouting Match* (2007) was a popular account of his accommodationist views of church and state, albeit one rooted in Land's appreciation for Baptist history and the close tie between church-state separation and the freedom to practice and proclaim Christian truth.

In 2013, Russell Moore became the president of ERLC, a position he held until 2021. Moore came to ERLC from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he taught theology and served as chief academic officer for nearly a decade. Moore's position on church and state did not perfectly align with Land's accommodationism or Dunn's strict separationism.³⁶ Instead, he affirmed a view similar to what Esbeck calls "freewill separationism," which argues for state neutrality toward religion, but envisions the church as having a prophetic posture toward the state.³⁷ Like Land, Moore emphasized the importance of orthodox Christian voices contributing vigorously to public discourse and advocating for the common good. Like Dunn, Moore was concerned that some forms of accommodationism (at least in the wider culture) took an overly positive outlook toward civil religion. Moore emphasized the kingdom of God, contrasting it with

³⁵For example, see Richard D. Land and Louis A. Moore, eds., *Christian Citizens: The Rights and Responsibilities of Dual Citizenship* (Nashville: B&H, 1994), and Richard D. Land and Lee Holloway, eds., *Christians in the Public Square: Faith in Practice?* (Nashville: ERLC, 1996).

³⁶Russell D. Moore, *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 138–60. See also Russell Moore, "What Does the Gospel Say?" in *The Gospel & Religious Liberty*, Gospel for Life, eds., Russell Moore and Andrew T. Walker (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 25–40.

³⁷Esbeck, "Typology of Church-State Relations," 9–12.

earthly kingdoms—including the United States. For Moore, the separation of church and state was primarily a question of mission. Church-state separation preserves soul freedom, thus providing the best cultural context for authentic faith to flourish and the gospel to advance.

III. THE GREAT COMMISSION AND CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION

As we enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, it has never been more important for Southern Baptists to maintain our historic commitment to the separation of church and state. The secularist left and their sympathizers continue to threaten religious liberty in the United States, especially the freedom of theologically and morally orthodox Christians. Often, these threats are in response to Christians maintaining traditional views of gender and marriage in public ways that run afoul of the progressive status quo, as in the much-publicized cases of Colorado baker Jack Phillips and Washington florist Barronelle Stutzman.³⁸ Religious freedom, historic Christian views of marriage and family, and the sanctity of human life are often intertwined in both public controversies and legal challenges, creating the need for Southern Baptists and other orthodox believers across ecclesial traditions to link arms for the sake of human flourishing.³⁹ Organizations such as Alliance Defending Freedom, Becket, the Thomas More Society, and Southern Baptists' own Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (among others) are on the front lines of defending religious freedom for all from (primarily) threats from the leftwing end of the ideological spectrum.

However, such threats do not only come from the secularist left. Some voices on the right side of the aisle, which at times cloak their arguments in Christian language, also threaten religious liberty by rejecting or downplaying the importance of church-state separation. For example, in the 2010s a number of communities passed local ordinances to prevent Muslims

³⁸See R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The Gathering Storm: Religious Liberty in the Wake of Sexual Revolution," in *First Freedom: The Beginning and End of Religious Liberty*, 2nd ed., eds. Jason G. Duesing, Thomas White, and Malcolm B. Yarnell III (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 169–80.

³⁹In 2009, a group of Christian leaders adopted "The Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conference" as one way to unite believers around life, marriage, and liberty. The statement is available online at <https://www.manhattandeclaration.org/> (accessed July 27, 2021). For further reflections on "The Manhattan Declaration" and its legacy, see David S. Dockery and John Stonestreet, ed., *Life, Marriage, and Religious Liberty: What Belongs to God, What Belongs to Caesar* (New York: Post Hill, 2019), and Nathan A. Finn, "The Manhattan Declaration: Ten Years Later," Baptist Press (November 20, 2019), accessed July 27, 2021, <http://m.bpnews.net/53946/firstperson-the-manhattan-declaration-ten-years-later>.

from building mosques. The ERLC rightly defended Muslims against challenges to their religious freedom, noting that a threat to their liberty was a potential threat to the liberty others—including Baptists. As Moore argued in response to a question from a concerned Southern Baptist, “[W]hen you have a government that says, ‘We can decide whether or not a house of worship is being constructed based upon the theological beliefs of that house of worship,’ then there are going to be Southern Baptist churches in San Francisco and New York and throughout this country who are not going to be able to build.”⁴⁰ Because of these rightwing challenges, Southern Baptists committed to our historic position on church and state must make clear we are not embracing, even implicitly, what Richard John Neuhaus famously described as a “naked public square” wherein religious claims are ruled out of bounds in principle.⁴¹ Instead, by defending the soul freedom of unbelievers to hold incorrect or irreligious views, we are also defending the freedom of believers to worship and witness in accordance with their conscience.

Land is surely correct that the Judeo-Christian tradition has deeply shaped American history and that secularist trends since the mid-twentieth century—including some that affected court decisions about church and state—have created a post-Christian and increasingly anti-Christian context. We are right to lament the waning of the Christian worldview in the public square. But Moore is also correct that this very shift means Southern Baptists and other orthodox Christians should increasingly think of ourselves as a prophetic moral minority rather than beleaguered moral majority. We are right to see this as an opportunity to clarify (and perhaps in some cases purify) our public witness. Moving forward, Southern Baptists should think of the separation of church and state as a missional principle rooted in God’s character and his Great Commission of global disciple-making, a posture that I am confident both Land and Moore would unhesitatingly affirm.⁴²

J. M. Dawson has rightly argued that “The principle of church-state

⁴⁰Tom Strode, “ERLC’s Moore defends Religious Freedom for Muslims,” Baptist Press (June 16, 2016), accessed July 27, 2021, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/erlcs-moore-defends-religious-freedom-for-muslims/>.

⁴¹Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

⁴²More recently, Andrew Walker has argued that religious liberty should be approached from a missiological perspective in a pluralistic age. See Andrew T. Walker, *Liberty for All: Defending Everyone’s Religious Freedom in a Pluralistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021), 145–217. See also Evan Lenow, “Religious Liberty and the Gospel,” in *First Freedom*, 111–26.

separation rested originally upon evangelical faith in personal regeneration, although many people at the time were not aware of the fact.⁴³ This remains the case today, even among many Baptists. Pastors and other ministry leaders must remind the present generation of Southern Baptists that the separation of church and state, rightly understood, is ultimately about creating a context where all people are free to follow their conscience in matters of religion. In turn, this provides Southern Baptists and other Christians with the freedom to proclaim the Kingship of Jesus Christ and call upon all men and women to freely bow the knee to him through repentance and faith rather than coercion or compulsion. This arrangement, which Southern Baptist ethicist Andrew Walker memorably refers to as “Christian secularism,” is by no means permanent, since it will not continue into the eschaton.⁴⁴ But until that day when, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev 11:15), we continue to champion religious freedom for all people and the separation of church and state.



⁴³Joseph Martin Dawson, *Baptists and the American Republic* (Nashville: Broadman, 1956), 53.

⁴⁴Walker, *Liberty for All*, 60.



THE GOSPEL, RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, AND SOCIAL DUTY: The Holistic Theology of George Washington Truett

Malcolm B. Yarnell III*

George Washington Truett (1867-1944) is most well-known as the pastor who developed the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, into the large and important church it remains today. Truett was, moreover, a leading trustee at Baylor University, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention, a trusted speaker for President Woodrow Wilson, and the president of the Baptist World Alliance. He has been compared both to William Jennings Bryan and to Charles Haddon Spurgeon for his rhetorical ability and was highly successful as an evangelist among the cowboys of West Texas. Closer to home, Truett was the leading trustee for Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary from its foundation in 1908 until his death in 1944.

Truett's best-known address is his dramatic sermon on "Baptists and Religious Liberty." Delivered from the eastern steps of the United States Capitol on May 16, 1920, the audience of 15,000 included many Baptists alongside presidential cabinet officers, senators, congressmen, journalists, and a variety of religious leaders and intellectuals. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, Lee Canipe gathered evidence of the original excitement and continuing importance of that address in "The Echoes of Baptist Democracy."¹ *The Baptist Standard* in 1920 described Truett's address as "the greatest hour ever witnessed in the SBC."² The Baptist historian Walter Shurden said it remained "one of the most often quoted

¹Lee Canipe, "The Echoes of Baptist Democracy: George Truett's Sermon at the U. S. Capitol as Patriotic Apology," *ABQ* 21 (2002): 415–31. Cf. Canipe, *A Baptist Democracy: Separating God and Caesar in the Land of the Free* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011).

²"The SBC," *Baptist Standard*, May 20, 1920, 1.

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Baptist statements on religious liberty of the twentieth century.”³ The sermon continues to be reprinted in full and in excerpt, physically and digitally, and continues to be lauded by both Southern Baptist moderates and conservatives in the twenty-first century.⁴

Because of the dominance of religious liberty in the title and in the first part of Truett’s long address, it is easy to forget Truett was equally interested in aspects of what today might be called “social justice.” His passion for Baptists to exercise their social responsibility indeed dominated the second part of his most famous address. In Truett’s day, the typical terminology, originally fostered and consistently advanced by Walter Rauschenbusch, was the “Social Gospel.” Truett shared the platform of the Second Congress of the Baptist World Alliance in Philadelphia with Rauschenbusch.⁵ He also shared many of the same social concerns as the pastor from Hell’s Kitchen, but it would be inappropriate to categorize the pastor from Dallas as a participant in the Social Gospel movement. His definition of “gospel” was thoroughly evangelical, even as his passion for the Christian life was thoroughly integrative.

Truett was a gospel preacher who demanded Christians live with integrity. He coupled the priority of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ with political theology. His political theology combined widespread evangelical

³Walter Shurden, *Proclaiming the Baptist Vision: Religious Liberty* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 1997), 5.

⁴More recently, see Charles W. DeWeese, “George W. Truett, the Baptist World Alliance, and Freedom,” Texas Baptists Committed, August 2004, <https://www.txbc.org/2004/Journals/August%202004/Aug04GWTruett.htm>; “Truett’s Famed Religious Liberty Speech Recreated at D.C. Event,” Baptist News Global, June 28, 2007, <https://baptistnews.com/article/truetts-famed-religious-liberty-sermon-recreated-at-dc-event/>; Sam Hodges, “Truett Speech Remembered,” *Dallas Morning News*, June 29, 2007; Rob Sellers, “Religious Liberty, Our Forgotten Baptist Heritage,” Good Faith Media, November 3, 2011, <https://goodfaithmedia.org/religious-liberty-our-forgotten-baptist-heritage-cms-18774/>; George W. Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty” (Transcript), Baptist Joint Committee, March 2014, <https://bjconline.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Baptists-and-Religious-Liberty.pdf>; David Roach, “Truett’s Religious Liberty Legacy Celebrated,” Baptist Press, July 7, 2014, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/truetts-religious-liberty-legacy-celebrated/>; Danny Akin, “Religious Liberty: A Baptist Distinctive,” Baptist Press, January 29, 2016, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/religious-liberty-a-baptist-distinctive/>; Ken Camp, “George W. Truett on Religious Liberty,” *Baptist Standard*, August 22, 2016; George W. Truett, “Baptists and Religious Liberty” (Digital Copy), Baylor Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections-baylor.quartexcollections.com/Documents/Detail/baptists-and-religious-liberty/820079>; O.S. Hawkins, “The Legacy of George W. Truett,” Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, August 30, 2021, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/the-legacy-of-george-w-truett/>.

⁵Keith E. Durso, *Thy Will Be Done: A Biography of George W. Truett* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2009), 107. Truett spoke twice and served on the Resolutions Committee of the meeting. The Baptist World Alliance, Second Congress, Philadelphia, June 19-25, 1911 (Philadelphia: Harper, 1911), xv, 89.

invitations to faith in Christ with appeals for both universal religious liberty and for Christians to fulfill their social duties. His vision for politics and for Christian involvement drew upon Scripture, history, and contemporary crises to address the churches, the nation, and the world. Our goal here is to provide a sketch of Truett's holistic and integrative political theology, a political theology which included both a grand hope for individual religious liberty and Christian involvement in education, politics, and society. We shall begin with a review of his famous Capitol speech.

I. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Two weeks after Truett delivered his address, it was published by the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. James Bruton Gambrell, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and a retired professor from Southwestern Seminary, contributed an effusive preface. He compared it to Paul preaching in Rome and argued it demonstrated how Baptist ideas about personal religious liberty had been largely responsible for the United States becoming "the greatest and freest nation on earth."⁶ Gambrell believed Truett's address made the Baptist logic abundantly clear to every listener. The first half of Truett's *Baptists and Religious Liberty* develops the Baptist theology of religious liberty. The second half of the sermon develops his view of what it means for Baptists to take their beliefs into the public square. Religious liberty and social ethics are tightly correlated, the second deriving from the first.

This correlation between religious liberty and social ethics is so tightly presented that postmodern Baptist scholars detect a melding of American patriotism with Baptist identity. According to Canipe, "Truett seamlessly weaves Baptist theology and American democracy together to the point that the two are virtually indistinguishable."⁷ Truett's mixture, Canipe says, means he has sublimated freedom in Christ to American ideas. He accuses Truett and other early twentieth-century Baptists of deriving religious liberty from state patronage, "a notion at odds with an historical Baptist theology that locates the source of religious freedom in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."⁸ Canipe interprets Truett with a deconstructionist hermeneutic, ascribing hidden motives to power, but

⁶George W. Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty* (Nashville, TN: Baptist Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1920).

⁷Canipe, "The Echoes of Baptist Democracy," 416.

⁸Canipe, "The Echoes of Baptist Democracy," 423. Cf. Greg Wills, "Review of A Baptist Democracy," by Lee Canipe, *Journal of Church and State* 55 (2013): 355–58.

his contention is proven false from the very beginning of Truett's address.

This postmodern reading of Truett and other early twentieth-century Southern Baptists is exposed as fallacious through two important moves those theologians make. First, Gambrell recognized in his preface the division which must be maintained between Baptist beliefs and their positive influence on wider society. Both Gambrell and Truett faithfully maintained the difference between church and state and the difference between the goals of each institution. They rejoiced that while Baptist beliefs in Christian freedom and "spiritual democracy" contributed to the development of human freedom and "American democracy," they nonetheless strongly maintained a difference between church and state. Our twentieth-century Southern Baptist forefathers exalted that difference to the point of "strict separation," according to a prominent Southwestern Seminary historian.⁹

The first half of Truett's address is addressed to "fundamental Baptist principles." There are nine identifiable principles in Truett's presentation. The first, which explains all the others, is "the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ. That doctrine is for Baptists the dominant fact in all their Christian experience, the nerve center of all their Christian life, the bedrock of all their church policy, the sheet anchor of all their rejoicings."¹⁰ Contrary to Canipe's postmodern reading, wherein Baptist principles are grounded in American polity, Truett stations everything manifestly in Jesus Christ. The importance of this first principle ought not be understated. From the absolute Lordship of Christ over church and state, as well as over every individual, the rest of Truett's political theology develops.

The eight remaining ground principles include everything from epistemology to personal salvation to separation of church and state. The second principle is epistemological: "The Bible, and the Bible alone, is the rule of faith and practice for Baptists."¹¹ Third, Baptists reject every effort of "lording it over the consciences of men." "Freedom of conscience" is diametrically opposed, for instance, to Roman Catholic sacerdotal, sacramental, and ecclesiastical hierarchy.¹² Fourth, the absolute Lordship

⁹Jim Spivey, "Separation No Myth: Religious Liberty's Biblical and Theological Bases," *SWJT* 36.3 (1994): 15.

¹⁰Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 9.

¹¹Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 10.

¹²Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 10–12. Truett did not foresee the rise of Baptists who would construct their own cultural "hierarchies," such as those of elders over laity or of males over females.

of Jesus Christ shows itself in the individual's "direct, personal dealings with God."¹³ Fifth, Christ commanded not multiple priestly sacraments conveying grace but two ordinances which are symbolic.¹⁴

The sixth foundational Baptist principle concerns the conviction that "the New Testament clearly teaches that Christ's church is not only a spiritual body but is also a pure democracy, all its members being equal, a local congregation, and cannot subject itself to any outside control."¹⁵ This important principle is key not only for the development of congregational polity but also for the remaining principles which ensure the untrammelled Lordship of Christ over each person and each church. The seventh principle derived therefrom is "a free church in a free state." Against the Roman Emperor Constantine's "apostasy," Truett says, "Christ's religion needs no prop of any kind from any worldly source, and to the degree that it is thus supported is a millstone hanged about its neck."¹⁶

The eighth Baptist principle intersects with the modern American ideal, taking a circuitous and tortuous route through the Magisterial Reformers and early Puritan persecutions of the Baptists. The relevant ideas are set in dualistic terms. On the one side, there is "individualism" and "democracy;" on the opposite side, "absolutism" and "autocracy." The ninth and final Baptist principle is a necessary consequence of the absolute Lordship of Christ in the distinct realms of life. Church and state must "be forever separate and free, that neither may trespass upon the distinctive functions of the other."¹⁷

II. SOCIAL DUTY

After establishing the ground principles from which Southern Baptist ideas about social duties emanate, Truett discussed some of those derivative social responsibilities. In the second half of his famous address. After the "fundamental Baptist principles," there "comes now the clarion call to us to be the right kind of citizens."¹⁸ There are seven social priorities for Christians seeking to be the right kind of citizens, the first being the need to serve one another in love and not abuse the wide civil liberties

¹³Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 12–15.

¹⁴Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 15–16.

¹⁵Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 16.

¹⁶Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 16–17.

¹⁷Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 19–22.

¹⁸Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 25.

available to Baptists in American society.¹⁹ Second comes the Baptist need to encourage the adoption of “laws humane and righteous” within the nation. Third, the Christian must not only be a national citizen but a “world citizen,” being particularly concerned for the pursuit of peace among the nations.²⁰

Fourth, Truett considers the ways in which Baptists must prepare their people to lead in the new environment. He again distinguishes between the “civil” and “religious” forms of “democracy.”²¹ While the Dallas pastor allows a place for secular universities, he is convinced by his theological anthropology that “the only complete education, in the nature of the case, is Christian education, because man is a tripartite being.”²² Fifth, as always giving priority to the gospel, Truett asserts, “we must keep faithfully and practically in mind our primary task of evangelism, the work of winning souls from sin unto salvation, from Satan unto God.” The primary task of evangelism likewise fosters concern for worldwide missions.²³

The sixth social duty first turns inward critically. To be a faithful witness to the world of biblical principles, Baptists must pursue holiness. “Surely we should be a holy people.”²⁴ Finally, as with the strict separation of church and state, which provided a capstone for the fundamental Baptist principles, Truett concluded with a capstone for the social duties incumbent upon Baptists, indeed upon all Christians. “Let us today renew our pledge to God, and to one another, that we will give our best to church and to state, to God and to humanity, by his grace and power, until we fall on the last sleep.”²⁵

Truett’s logic in *Baptists and Religious Liberty* is both clear and compelling. From the single great principle of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, Truett calls Baptists to be true to their derivative principles, such as direct, personal responsibility before God and the strict separation of church and state. Operating from these principles, he then calls Baptists to be good citizens of both the nation and of the world, even as they carefully maintain their distinctions from them. Baptist principles, grounded in the lordship of Jesus Christ, issue forth in social duties. We now turn to

¹⁹Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 24–26.

²⁰Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 26–30.

²¹Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 30.

²²Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 31–32.

²³Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 32–34.

²⁴Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 35.

²⁵Truett, *Baptists and Religious Liberty*, 36.

other relevant works to provide more detail regarding Truett's social and political theology.

III. FAITH THEN WORKS

Truett's sermons can be paired thematically, along similar lines to his famous Capitol address. On the one hand, he emphasized the Word of God in order to save souls through personal faith in the atoning death and justifying resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the other hand, he emphasized the thorough impact the gospel should make upon the Christian life, including all of a person's responsibilities in the home, the church, and the society. Take, for instance, two sermons Truett preached during a June 1917 revival in Fort Worth, Texas. The first considers the gospel of Jesus Christ. The second considers the effect of the gospel upon the Christian life.²⁶

In the first sermon, "How To Be Saved," Truett addresses unbelievers. Truett outlines three simple steps for salvation: seek Jesus's help, take Jesus at his Word, and trust Jesus will do what he says.²⁷ He called for simplicity: Preachers should make it clear exactly what salvation entails. And unbelievers should pray in the simplest of terms, "Lord, help me! Lord, forgive me! Lord, save me! Do for me what needs to be done, I humbly pray."²⁸ The New Testament describes personal salvation in various ways, but for Truett the dominant idea within the pivotal moment is an entire personal yielding to Jesus as Master: "Yes, Jesus, I yield. I give up. I trust. I surrender. Save me your way."

Such yielding is only possible when one admits personal sinfulness and inability while receiving the Word of Christ being proclaimed. "Lord Jesus, here I am, a sinner, and I cannot save myself."²⁹ The effective agent in salvation is the Word of God itself, and the sinner's role is limited to reception. "The very essence of faith is taking Christ at His word."³⁰ The hearer must respond to Christ. "Christ does the saving, and does it all. But the sinner has to give up to Christ, and then when the sinner does

²⁶I systematized Truett's Christ-centered doctrine earlier in this journal and refer the reader there for details about both his dogmatic theology and practical theology. Malcolm B. Yarnell III, "A Theology for the Church: George W. Truett and the Southwestern Tradition," *SWJT* 63.1 (2020): 4–19.

²⁷George W. Truett, *A Quest for Souls: Comprising all the Sermons Preached and Prayers Offered in a Series of Gospel Meetings, Held in Fort Worth, Texas* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1945), 275.

²⁸Truett, *A Quest for Souls*, 277.

²⁹Truett, *A Quest for Souls*, 279.

³⁰Truett, *A Quest for Souls*, 284.

that, Christ takes such sinner, forgives and guides and keeps such sinner for all the afterwhile. How simple and how glorious! Come, now.”³¹ The pastor called new believers to make their confession public. His editor notes, “Numbers came forward, confessing Christ, while the song was being sung.”³²

In the second sermon, “The Supreme Offering to Christ,” Truett addressed a lunch audience, whom he presumed to be “Christian men and women.” While Christ performs the work of salvation in the sinner’s life, from beginning to end, the Christian carries a responsibility for practical Christian living. Yielding in faith begins the Christian life and yielding to Jesus as Lord continues the Christian life. “Would you have your life to count for the highest and the best? Then such life cannot count for the highest and best if it be not yielded to the guidance and mastership of the Lord Jesus Christ.”³³ For the Kingdom of God to triumph, emphasis must not be placed upon numbers, nor upon finances, but upon surrender. God works through those who “put God’s cause as the first thing in his life.”³⁴ Family and business come after God.

Truett described the Christian life metaphorically as a trust. A “trustee” prudentially stewards the estate of another. The transformative discovery of a West Texas cattleman served as an example. The cattleman confided, “Now I see that every hoof of all these thousands of cattle belongs to Christ, and every acre of all these lands over which they browse belongs to Christ, and I want to take my true place in God’s cause. I want you to tell God for me that I will be His trustee from this day on. I will be his administrator on His estate.”³⁵ The Christian who approaches life in a selfish or hedonistic way simply does not understand Christianity. “One of two factors dominate every life. Either self is the dominating factor in life, or God. Mark it! The self-centered life is doomed.”³⁶ Selfishness dooms not only individuals, but also families, organizations, and nations.

IV. “WE ARE ALL DEBTORS TO OUR FELLOW HUMANITY”

According to Thurmon Earl Bryant, the principles of “stewardship” and “debtorship” anchored Truett’s concept of the Christian life. Service

³¹Truett, *A Quest for Souls*, 284.

³²Truett, *A Quest for Souls*, 288.

³³Truett, *A Quest for Souls*, 196.

³⁴Truett, *A Quest for Souls*, 198.

³⁵Truett, *A Quest for Souls*, 202.

³⁶Truett, *A Quest for Souls*, 203.

is the task of the Christian life.³⁷ And radical service to Christ, according to Truett, manifests itself in every arena. “It is by service that we vindicate our faith in any and every realm of life, in business, in literature, in statecraft, in religion.”³⁸ Jesus, moreover, upends the standards of success. Truett subordinated the martial standard of greatness, as well as the financial and intellectual: “War must cease unto the ends of the earth.”³⁹ “The true wealth of a country is not financial and material, but moral and spiritual.”⁴⁰ And while the intellectual standard supersedes other standards, it too must serve.

All Christians must subordinate themselves to Jesus Christ, and our Lord calls us to serve him in the world. “The Great Saviour and Master tells us that he who would be the chiefest of all must be the servant of all. He teaches us that all power is under inexorable bonds to serve humanity—all power, whether it be physical, financial, social, intellectual, moral or spiritual.” The first principle within Christian service is, therefore, “debtorship,”

The correct life-principle for every life is thus stated by Paul: “I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians; both to the wise and to the unwise.” “I am debtor” means just what the words declare. We are all debtors to our fellow humanity. We owe ourselves to mankind.⁴¹

How does a Christian pay the debt he owes, first, to Christ, and thence, to others? By service through the whole of life. A person can invest her life in one of three ways: As a miser, refusing to invest in others; as a prodigal, spending everything upon oneself; or, as a debtor, serving others.⁴² One can live life either as “a tramp,” “a thief,” or “a trustee.” Make your choice now.⁴³ The spheres of service include, first, the home, but also society. Every human being is our neighbor. “We must not, dare not, be indifferent to any human life, anywhere. As we can help humanity, we are constrained by

³⁷Thurman Earl Bryant, “The Ethics of George Washington Truett” (Th.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1959), 96.

³⁸George W. Truett, “The Making of a Life,” in *Follow Thou Me* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1932), 117.

³⁹Truett, *Follow Thou Me*, 118.

⁴⁰Truett, *Follow Thou Me*, 119.

⁴¹Truett, *Follow Thou Me*, 120.

⁴²Truett, *Follow Thou Me*, 121.

⁴³Bryant, “The Ethics of George Washington Truett,” 102.

bonds inexorable to render such help.⁴⁴ And if you refuse to help, you are sinning.⁴⁵ For Truett, theology and practice are inextricably intertwined. Doctrine must be expressed in duty, and “duty is the unfailing test of doctrine.”⁴⁶ Faith and works coinhere.

V. HIGH THEOLOGY, HIGH ANTHROPOLOGY

To be honest, Truett’s humanitarian vision not merely refreshes but shocks, for a different spirit is evident today. In the last few years, the Southern Baptist Convention’s repeated resolutions regarding the problems of misogyny and racism, alongside continuing news stories exposing ecclesiastical misdeeds, remind us that a deficient anthropology is our most significant problem. In the Conservative Resurgence, while we emphasized institutional respect for the Word of God, did we forsake personal respect for the image of God? To his credit, George W. Truett had a high anthropology at the same time he maintained a high bibliology, theology, and Christology along with a sober hamartiology and passionate soteriology. Truett’s anthropology is high, precisely because his theology is high. He grounded his anthropology, and thereby his ethics, in the *imago Dei*. And his doctrine of the image of God was compelled by his high regard for the Word of God.

Regarding the doctrine of revelation, Truett consistently stood against both liberalism and its modernist soulmate, fundamentalism. On the one hand, against liberalism and the historical critical method, Truett proclaimed, “This holy Bible is the infallible rule of faith and practice.” He believed in the utter truthfulness of Scripture because it was inspired by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ On the other hand, against those consumed with defending the Bible rather than preaching and living it, Truett said, “Let not the last blatant attack against the Bible be noticed overmuch. It is not the chief business of God’s minister to answer the last fool who has escaped from the mortar in which he was brayed. The Gospel faithfully preached is its own best defense.”⁴⁸

Regarding the doctrine of humanity, Truett argued human life is

⁴⁴Truett, *Follow Thou Me*, 122.

⁴⁵“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). Bryant, “The Ethics of George Washington Truett,” 100.

⁴⁶Bryant, “The Ethics of George Washington Truett,” 105.

⁴⁷George W. Truett, “The Bible Lost and Found,” in *George W. Truett Library*, ed. Powhatan James (1950; reprint Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 1.2:69.

⁴⁸George W. Truett, “The Subject and Object of the Gospel,” in *We Would See Jesus and Other Sermons* (New York: Revell, 1915), 202.

supremely valuable on the basis of its relationship to God. In a 1907 sermon in Waco, Texas, Truett asserted: “Next in importance to a right conception of God, is a right conception of man. To think meanly of human life is to live meanly.”⁴⁹ This foundational truth grounds the Baptist concerns for human liberty, free speech, and freedom of conscience.

Warning America, Truett exposed the significant errors of civilizations past and present. Ancient Rome and ancient Egypt held humans as slaves. France’s Napoleon considered 100,000 human lives trivial. Contemporary Russia struggled with anti-Judaism. And America? “That terrible trinity of horrors—suicide, lynching, murder—still mock us, with their awful carnival in every section of our great country.”

If this nation is to be saved from the doom of the proud nations of the olden days, we must learn from the Son of God himself the priceless value of human life. We must see in humanity, with all of its races and classes, the image of God, despoiled and defaced to be sure, but see that image sufficiently to know that a man, any man, anywhere, is infinitely more precious than fine gold, even than the golden wedge of Ophir. We must see that the value of the meanest human life in the earth is wholly irreducible to terms of silver and gold. This is the doctrine that needs profoundest emphasis today, the dignity and value of human life.

Truett’s declamation against the inhumanity of America was just beginning. He called America to tame its commercial and martial spirits.

No country can be truly called rich where human life is held as a cheap thing; where vast plague spots are willingly allowed to infect her cities; where conditions are such that hordes of defenceless [*sic*] women and children live in squalor and sordidness, dwarfed in body and mind, with life’s horizon little larger than that of the beasts that perish. Any and every civilization is a dismal failure, even though its commerce is in every market, and its ships on every sea, and its banks glutted with gold, if the end of such civilization

⁴⁹George W. Truett, “Why Save Human Life?,” *The Baptist Standard* (December 26, 1907): 1. All further quotations in this section come from this source.

is the making of money, rather than the making of men.

Truett called for his hearers (and *The Baptist Standard* for its readers) to remember, “Next to God, in dignity and value, let it be said with reverence is man.” Of course, Truett, as a good Bible reader and evangelistic preacher, recalled humanity’s fall, continuing sinfulness, and need for salvation. Yet humanity retains its value. “He was made in the image of God, and though fallen and marred by sin, he still retains traces of his wonderful creation. The tiniest babe, therefore, that ever cooed in its mother’s arms, is intrinsically more valuable than the whole material universe.”

Truett’s lofty theological rhetoric was not exaggerated “preacher talk.” He meant every practical word with every doctrinal fiber of his entire Christian being. The value of the *imago Dei* extends to the community and the individual. What gives human life practical value today ought not be found in some measurable ability or accomplishment, but in the fact that each life was created in order to render God his glory. “Infinite dignity and value is therefore given to human life, because of its exalted office. The humblest peasant in this way becomes a king.”

Truett also called for practical legislation to preserve social life. God, both in nature and by grace through Jesus Christ, demands that we seek the welfare of every human being. Laws must be passed to protect children from abusive labor practices; the ghetto landlord must provide safe housing. “The voice of human blood crieth against us on every side, if in any wise we disregard the safety and the preciousness of human life.”

The requirement to seek the welfare of our fellow human beings is laid upon every preacher, every educator, every journalist, every politician, every businessman, and every labor leader. “Christ’s conception of human life and His Spirit toward it must be ours. He magnified the dignity of the individual. He gave constant emphasis to human brotherhood. He practiced a pure democracy.” Rather than self-centered tyrants who abuse humanity, this revered pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas, asked Christians to place their hope in the Prince of Peace.

VI. WHERE IS THIS BAPTIST VOICE TODAY?

George Washington Truett’s evangelical doctrines of the Lordship of Christ and of personal salvation compelled his beliefs about religious liberty and social ethics. His list of accomplishments is akin to that of Spurgeon. To advance human education, he pulled Baylor University

back from the brink of insolvency, surrendering his own college savings to see the job completed. He made Texas Baptist medical facilities his pet project, providing the vision and raising the funds for what was formerly called Baylor Hospital system, including advocacy for African American medical care.⁵⁰ He helped build orphanages. He preached peace passionately and supported war only in absolute necessity. He made sure African American Baptists were neither segregated nor otherwise discriminated against during the 1939 Atlanta meeting of the Baptist World Alliance.⁵¹ He denounced lynching, when few Southern Baptist leaders, save Joseph Martin Dawson of the First Baptist Church of Waco, the “Mother Church” of Texas Baptists, dared say anything.⁵²

During his 1911 sermons to the Baptist World Alliance, Truett called for “heroic” and “sacrificial” service. For him, there were Christians, and then there were “the right kind of Christians,” those who “literally re-live Christ” and “give Christ their best.”⁵³ This was the type of Christian Truett respected. As a Baptist, Truett was a passionate advocate of religious liberty in the United States and around the world, but he was more than that. He wanted America to be a Christian nation, but he was under no illusion it ever was. Our cities had too many divisions; gambling was rampant; the press was venal; and there was an “awful gulf between labor and capital.”⁵⁴ “In our great country the social world is filled with frivolities and vanities, and the business world crowded with dishonesties, and the political world

⁵⁰George W. Truett, “Address at Banquet in Behalf of Baptist Sanitarium and Hospital, Houston, Texas” (Manuscript, 28 January 1915), 11.

⁵¹Durso, *Thy Will Be Done*, 234-35.

⁵²James Leo Garrett Jr., “Joseph Martin Dawson: Pastor, Author, Denominational Leader, Social Activist,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 14 (1973): 8-9, 14. Scholars diverge over how Truett’s views of race should be evaluated. In the most detailed study of Truett’s ethics, Thurman Earl Bryant argued the Dallas pastor recognized racism is a problem and believed it remains the duty of every Christian to address. Truett said that the stronger races should help the weaker, that racial similarities rather than dissimilarities should be emphasized, and that the “Christian must look on all races as did the Savior.” There are two ways in which racial problems can be addressed, socially or individually. Truett believed the individual approach was more effective. Bryant, “The Ethics of George Washington Truett,” 125-28. Otis Swofford Hawkins highlighted the difficulties in Truett’s legacy on race at the First Baptist Church of Dallas, concluding Truett possessed an “underlying racism,” while alleviating criticism of Truett’s successor, Wally Amos Criswell. O. S. Hawkins, “Race and Racism in the Southern Baptist Convention: The Lost Legacies of George W. Truett and W. A. Criswell,” *SWJT* 63.2 (2021): 119-26. Curtis Freeman, however, believes Criswell’s conversion from racism was marked by ambiguity and compelled by political advantage. Curtis W. Freeman, “Never Had I Been So Blind’: W. A. Criswell’s ‘Change’ on Racial Segregation,” *The Journal of Southern Religion* 10 (2007): 1-12.

⁵³The Baptist World Alliance, Second Congress (Philadelphia: Harper, 1911), 95-99.

⁵⁴George W. Truett, “The Coming of the Kingdom in America,” in *The Baptist World Alliance, Second Congress*, 424.

bathed with graft, and the religious world mocked by formalism that is never to bring Christ's people to their knees."⁵⁵

However, Baptists are not without resources to bring change. Truett lauded Anglo American Baptists for their numbers, but he reminded them that their African American Baptist "brothers" were one of the "chiefest and most glorious assets in winning America and the world to Christ."⁵⁶ He called for ecumenical union where possible. But the greatest asset for Baptists in bringing the Kingdom of God into this world remains the Word of God. Bowdlerizing Cardinal Manning, Truett declared, "Let all the world go to bits and we will reconstruct it on the authority of Jesus Christ voiced in the New Testament." We Baptists must "come back to the word of God as the absolute and ultimate authority for the people of God."⁵⁷

And the Word of God calls us to correct our doctrine and to correct our social problems by means of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We advance as we obey Christ's call to preach and live the gospel before all people. Universal religious liberty provides the space in which the gospel can be compellingly proclaimed. Our social and political activities ought to derive from fundamental Baptist principles. Truett denounced orthodoxy which refuses to live life in service to God and humanity. That type is a "dead, dry orthodoxy out of which has gone the heart-beat and passion for a lost world.... The only thing that can save our churches is a living orthodoxy."⁵⁸

When the chairman of the Baptist World Alliance introduced Truett for the first time to that august body, he said, "I have no hesitancy in saying the best-beloved Baptist minister in all the South is Pastor George W. Truett." Somebody behind him then said, "Or the North either."⁵⁹ Truett was widely beloved as he simultaneously evangelized the lost, advocated for universal religious liberty, and proclaimed a compelling social ethic. So, where is our Truett today—that heroic pastor who was so selfless his people wouldn't give him the deed to his house because they knew he would likely give it away to poor people?⁶⁰ Where are our George Washington Truetts today? Where are those Christian leaders who wish so deeply and

⁵⁵Truett, "The Coming of the Kingdom in America," 424.

⁵⁶Truett, "The Coming of the Kingdom in America," 425.

⁵⁷Truett, "The Coming of the Kingdom in America," 426.

⁵⁸Truett, "The Coming of the Kingdom in America," 428.

⁵⁹The Baptist World Alliance, Second Congress, 95.

⁶⁰Durso, *Thy Will Be Done*, 90.

passionately to be like Jesus in every word and in every deed that the world will want to follow their Master?





THE SACREDNESS OF LIFE IN A CULTURE OF DEATH

Ashley L. Allen*

On the surface, Oklahoma City and New York City do not appear to have anything in common. The capital city of the state of Oklahoma boasts a population of less than a million people and is primarily known for the ranchers and farmers that helped settle the state. By contrast, New York City's population is well over eight million people and is home to some of the most famous buildings and people in the world.

However, common bonds the two cities share are tragedy and loss of life. In downtown Oklahoma City and in Lower Manhattan are memorials designed to remember the tragedies the two cities experienced on April 19, 1995, and September 11, 2001, respectively. The memorial site in Oklahoma City is framed by two entrances marked 9:01 and 9:03 while the field in between the entrances contains 168 illuminated chairs representing the lives of those killed at 9:02 a.m. in the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. At the New York City memorial site are the footprints of the two 110-story towers that comprised the World Trade Center. On the stone perimeters marking the footprints of each building are the names of almost 3,000 people who died when hijacked commercial airplanes flew through the two towers, the Pentagon in Washington, DC, and crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, when passengers overpowered the plane's hijackers.

Following each attack, the nation went into mourning at the loss of life intentionally taken at the hands of fellow humans. Families began to share the pictures and stories of their loved ones and the numbers of those killed began to take on names, personalities, and experiences. Still today, the pictures and stories of each of the individuals who died on those days are shared at the museums at the respective memorial sites as well as on the official memorial websites. In the midst of death, society recognizes at

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the heart of what is lost during tragedy is life—and life is sacred.

When Pope John Paul II issued *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life) on March 25, 1995,¹ three weeks before the Oklahoma City bombing, it was to “reiterate the view of the Roman Catholic Church on the value of life and to warn against violating the sanctity of life.”² Throughout the *EV*, John Paul II provides an understanding of the Catholic Church’s stance on abortion, euthanasia, and birth control as well the then-almost two-decade-old invitro fertilization method of conception. John Paul II, who expressed concerns these actions added to a growing “culture of death,”³ advocated for a “culture of life” by defining why human life has worth and dignity.⁴ In almost thirty years since the late pontiff issued *EV*, a culture of death has expanded as terrorist attacks, wars, increases in suicides, school shootings, and human trafficking, as well as easier access to abortions, and controversies and opinions surrounding a global healthcare pandemic have all added to a devaluing of human life.

While those killed by abortions, euthanasia, murders, suicides, wars, pandemics, and terrorist attacks could be reduced to a set of numbers and statistics, the numerical value does not express the individual lives and worth of each human being represented. Often humanity recognizes the loss of life is unnatural. People do not grieve for inanimate objects that can be replaced, but rather they mourn when life is lost and when human dignity is not upheld or respected. Though the Ten Commandments are often the basis of law for many governments of civilized society, God has placed his law, his moral law, on the heart of every human being (Rom 1:32; 2:15).

This article will seek to examine why human life is sacred and valued. The author will first examine the first murder in Scripture, as well as God’s response to the violence and corruption that filled the earth. The author will then provide an explanation of why life is sacred as its origins are found in the *imago Dei*. Finally, the author will provide application and implications for why upholding the sacredness of life is necessary.

¹John Paul II, “Evangelium Vitae,” The Vatican Website, accessed 7 December 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html.

²Benjamin Garcia and Katherine Brind’Amour, “*Evangelium Vitae* (1995) by Pope John Paul II,” The Embryo Project Encyclopedia, accessed 20 December 2021; <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/evangelium-vitae-1995-pope-john-paul-ii>

³John Paul II, “Evangelium Vitae.”

⁴John Paul II, “Evangelium Vitae.”

I. CAIN AND ABEL

The first murder in human history occurred during the second generation of people. Cain, the older son of Adam and Eve who was a “tiller of the ground,” (Gen 4:2)⁵ offered the Lord fruit he had harvested from the ground. His younger brother, Abel, “also brought of the firstlings of his flock and their fat portions” (Gen 4:4). In the Genesis account, Moses recorded that God had regard for Abel’s offering, but did not have regard for the offering Cain gave (Gen 4:4–5).⁶ Cain, who responded to the Lord’s disregard of his own offering with anger and a downcast countenance (Gen 4:5), was given a warning by the Lord: “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?” (Gen 4:6–7). Radisa Antic notes God’s questions of Cain “were intended to provoke a change of heart” due to his angry state that “is often a prelude to homicidal acts.”⁷ God, who knows the hearts and minds of mankind, told Cain sin was “crouching at the door; and its desire” was for him who was plotting to take the life of his younger brother (Gen 4:7).

In the fields Cain does take the life of his brother, Abel. While the motive appears to be jealousy, what is most jarring is the callous and indifferent response Cain gives to God as he inquires of Abel’s whereabouts (Gen 4:9). Only after God tells Cain of his punishment for the murder of Abel does the older brother respond in remorse—and yet his remorse and regret is for the consequences of his actions rather than the actions that led to his punishment (Gen 4:13–16). Though the Lord said Cain would be a wanderer the remainder of his life, God protected Cain as he marked him with a sign so that no one who found him in his wanderings would slay him for vengeance (Gen 4:15). While the sign God placed on Cain is unknown, “God was trying to change the being of Cain, which was permeated by hatred and petrified in rebellion” as he manifested both his love and protection.⁸

Interestingly, Scripture does not record the response of Adam and Eve to the murder of their second child at the hands of their firstborn. Based

⁵All Scripture references are from the New American Standard (NAS) version of Scripture unless otherwise noted.

⁶God’s acceptance of Abel’s offering and disregard for Cain’s offering is further reiterated in Heb 11:4 where the author of Hebrews observed that “by faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain” indicating that God knew the heart motivations of both men. God still knows the heart motivations of all humanity today.

⁷Radisa Antic, “Cain, Abel, Seth, and the Meaning of Human Life as Portrayed in the Books of Genesis and Ecclesiastes,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44, no. 2 (2006): 205.

⁸Antic, “Cain, Abel, Seth,” 206.

on other responses to the loss of life, one can only imagine the anguish and heartache the couple experienced. While one life does not replace another, in his grace God gave Adam and Eve another son, Seth (Gen 4:25).

Violence on the earth did not cease with Adam and Eve's sons. Ten generations later, during the days of Noah, the Lord "saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" and "the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence" (Gen 6:5, 11). Though "all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth" (Gen 6:12), Noah found favor in God's eyes. While the Creator prepared to destroy "all flesh" with the impending flood, Noah and his family were spared and protected under the covenant God established with him (Gen 6:17–18). At the conclusion of the flood, God promised he would never again destroy every living thing as he had done even though the inclination of humans is evil (Gen 8:21).

From the very beginning of creation, God showed that he values human life. While sin and its effects have continued to permeate mankind, the sacredness of life has not diminished. God, who sent his own Son to die for sins of men, values the lives of human beings.

Evaluation of the sacredness of life leads one to examine why human life is important. Therefore, one must begin with an understanding of why human life is different than any other aspect of creation—namely that man is made in the image of God.

II. *IMAGO DEI*

The creation of man on the sixth day of Creation is the only aspect of God's created work of which the Triune God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to our likeness" and then "God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen 1:26–27). Formed by God from the dust from the ground, man is the only part of creation that God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" for man to become a living being (Gen 2:7). The original Hebrew word "formed" (*yatsar*) indicates "a basic meaning of 'molding' something into a desired shape."⁹ The same word is used in the creation of the animals, however, man is the sole part of creation made in the image and likeness of God.¹⁰ The distinction of being made

⁹James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 528.

¹⁰It is beyond the scope of this article to address the variance of the many ways "image of God" has been defined by theologians throughout the centuries.

in the image of God sets man apart from the rest of creation while simultaneously indicating all of mankind is an image-bearer of their Creator.¹¹ The image of God is defined as the God-given ability humans possess to have a relationship with God.¹²

John Hammett notes “humans are image-bearers of God because they are created as such”¹³ and this gives humans a “special dignity.”¹⁴ The fact humans are created in God’s image makes them “unique” among God’s creation and gives them “transcendent worth and dignity, simply because they are image-bearers.”¹⁵ All humans, therefore, are created in the image of God which gives them both worth and dignity and enables each to have a relationship with God. While the fall has damaged this relationship, Scripture shows that Christ Jesus is not only the one who can restore a relationship with God,¹⁶ but he is also the perfect image of God.¹⁷ Through a relationship with God through Christ Jesus, man can be “renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (Col 3:10).¹⁸ John F. Kilner observes that God’s image, as is revealed in Christ Jesus in the New Testament, provides the plumb line for human existence and growth.¹⁹ One human being is not made any more or less in the image of God than any other person.

Often discussions regarding a culture or sanctity of life focus on life in the womb as the unborn child is made in God’s image. While this discussion is true and warranted, the scope of the discussion needs to broaden to

¹¹The reference to man being made in the image, or likeness, of God is not limited to Gen 1:26–27. Gen 5:1–2, 9:6 and Jas 3:9 also use the same phrasing.

¹²John S. Hammett, “Human Nature,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. by Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 386. Human beings are the only element of creation living on earth that can have a relationship with God.

¹³John S. Hammett, “A Whole Bible Approach to Interpreting Creation in God’s Image,” *SWJT* 63, no. 2 (Spring 2021): 31. Hammett notes that “[e]ven after the fall, humans are spoken of as being in the image of God, so the image is not lost in the fall” while simultaneously noting that “[h]ow humans live out their creation in God’s image has been damaged in some way by sin” (35).

¹⁴Hammett, “A Whole Bible,” 32.

¹⁵Hammett, “A Whole Bible,” 35.

¹⁶Among the passages of Scripture that give evidence of this truth are John 3:16, 6:52–58, 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:24, 5:8–9, 6:23; and 1 John 5:1–4.

¹⁷John 5:19–24, Colossians 1:15–20, and Hebrews 1:3. It is imperative to note the distinction between Christ Jesus being the image of God while man is made in the image of God. He is God; humans are not.

¹⁸Other passages of Scripture that speak to the renewal of humans into the likeness of Christ Jesus include Romans 8:29 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. Scripture makes evident transformation into the likeness of Christ occurs following salvation through Christ Jesus.

¹⁹John F. Kilner, “The Image of God, the Need for God, and Bioethics,” *Christian Bioethics* 23, no. 3 (2017): 267.

include the mentally and physically disabled, and older adults who society disregards due to their senior status. Being made in the image or likeness of God is true of all mankind—regardless of ability, age, social status, or race. “Biblical affirmations that all people are created in the image of God provide a ringing denunciation of basing people’s significance on their particular attributes—precisely because that image is not a matter of current attributes, which vary in degree from person to person.”²⁰ Understanding that every person is an image-bearer should alter perceptions while simultaneously recognizing that God places value and dignity on every life and gives each life purpose.²¹

III. GOD GIVES LIFE, VALUE, AND DIGNITY²²

In the Declaration of Independence, the document that let England’s King George III know the thirteen colonies were cutting ties, America’s founding fathers penned, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”²³ Several of the United States’ founding leaders were deists, yet recognized the value of human life was not granted by government, but rather by the Creator of mankind—a free democracy, they noted, can only uphold and reinforce the value of the lives of its citizens by ensuring those God-given rights are protected. Additionally, when the United Nations was formed in 1945 following the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust, the preamble to the organization’s charter included the statement, “We the people of the United Nations determined . . . to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person.”²⁴ Neither the government of the United States or the

²⁰Kilner, “The Image of God,” 6.

²¹Of note is Jas 3:8–12 where James writes the same tongue cannot bless the Lord God while also cursing men who are made in the image of God. When people demean an individual based upon disability, age, race, or social status, they are not only insulting a fellow image-bearer, they are insulting the Image.

²²A review of literature revealed human dignity and sacredness of life are used synonymously and interchangeably. They are used in the same manner in this article.

²³“Declaration of Independence,” National Archives, accessed 30 December 2021, <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>. In his 2001 Pulitzer-Prize-winning biography of John Adams, David McCullough notes in the initial draft of the Declaration of Independence that “certain ‘truths’ were described as ‘sacred and undeniable,’” but the “simpler, stronger ‘self-evident’ was substituted.” See David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 122. The author of this article asserts human rights are those that are within the bounds of Scripture and not those that encourage or perpetuate sin.

²⁴“United Nations Charter: Preamble,” United Nations, accessed 30 December 2021, <https://>

organization designed to uphold international order is biblically based, yet both recognize the value and dignity of human life. Inherent in man is something that tells us that human life is sacred and valued and should be treated as such. As previously noted, this moral law is written on the hearts of men by God. Human rights stem from the acknowledgement of the sacredness or dignity of human life.

Because mankind is created in the image of God, each life has value and dignity as bestowed on them by their Creator. As the Creator, God knows his created beings and it is he who gives mankind its dignity, not created being to another created being. Susan Haack expounds on this when she writes, “We are equal to each other precisely because none of us is the maker of another—we have all received our life equally as a gift from the Creator.”²⁵ John Stott notes the value of humans “depends . . . on God’s view of us and [his] relationship to us” while also observing that human dignity finds its basis in three relationships: God, fellow man, and the earth and its creatures.²⁶

1. *Relationship with God.* “God desires relationships with people and He is the initiator of the relationships.”²⁷ God called out to Abraham and Moses by name.²⁸ The Lord told Jeremiah that while the prophet was in the womb he knew him, consecrated him, and appointed him as a prophet to the nations (Jer 1:4–5). David said the knowledge God had of him was “too wonderful” and “too high” for him to attain (Ps 139:6) and also wrote God “searched him” and had “known him” (Ps 139:1).

David’s use of the word *yada*, or “know,” was emphasized with his proclamation that God was “intimately acquainted with all” his ways (Ps 139:3). Aspects of David’s life did not escape God—he was familiar with them before David knew they would occur. David knew God personally while also recognizing God knew him personally. David not only declared God’s knowledge of him (Ps 139:1–6), but also God’s presence with him (Ps 139:7–12). The knowledge and relationship God has with man is not

www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/preamble

²⁵Susan Haack, “Christian Explorations in the Concept of Human Dignity” *Dignitas* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 5.

²⁶John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 198–99. Stott bases this claim on God’s words in Gen 1:26–27: “God created man in his own image” (relationship with God); “male and female he created them” (relationship with fellow man); and “...fill the earth and subdue it” (relationship with the earth and its creatures).

²⁷Ashley Lane Allen, “A Study of Selected Factors Related to Mentoring in Women’s Ministry Leaders in Selected Southern Baptist Churches” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 19, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

²⁸For Abraham, see Genesis 12:1–3; 15:1–6; 17:1–6; and 22:1, 11. For Moses, see Exodus 3:1–9.

limited to the Old Testament, but also affirmed in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ, God made flesh, said no one could come to the Father except through him (John 14:6), and no one could come to the Father without the Father drawing the individual to himself (John 6:44, 65). Jesus called his disciples to himself²⁹ and called out to Paul as he was on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians (Acts 9:1–8). God’s desire for relationship with people through Christ is still true today. Just as God knew all the aspects of the lives of Abraham, Moses, David, Jeremiah, and Paul, he knows all the same qualities of each individual today.

This aspect of God’s character is not limited to a select handful of people, but rather is true of all humanity for all time. God knows individuals personally and knows what individuals need. Jesus reiterated this in the Sermon on the Mount when he reminded the disciples God knew the food, drink, and clothing they needed (Matt 6:30–33). Jesus also reminded them God knew and provided what the birds need and that man is worth more than the birds (Matt 6:26).³⁰

Additionally, and most importantly, humanity is the only part of creation for whom Christ died. The entire metanarrative of Scripture points to mankind’s redemption in Christ. Jesus said God loved the world and sent his only begotten Son to save the world (John 3:16) and Paul reinforced this in his letter to the Romans when he wrote, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). God loves people—the sole part of creation who was made in his image.

The *imago Dei* shows not only the capacity man has for a relationship with God, but also the personal way God knows humans. Both Jeremiah and David referred to God as LORD, or Yahweh. God’s personal, holy name was originally revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:14–15) as his memorial name, known as I AM. Jesus revealed himself to people as I AM through seven statements made in John’s Gospel.³¹ He used the same

²⁹Matt 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:27–8; 6:12–16; and John 1:35–39.

³⁰God’s provision of the basic necessities of life is not contingent upon an individual knowing Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior. God in his providence, kindness, and grace provides these things to his creatures.

³¹Jesus told his followers: “I am the Bread of life” (John 6:35, 48, 51); “I am the Light of the world” (John 8:12); “I am the Door of the sheep” (John 10:7); “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11); “I am the Resurrection and the Life” (John 11:25); “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6); and “I am the True Vine” (John 15:1). By revealing himself through the use of the phrase “I AM,” Jesus showed those around him that he is God while simultaneously fulfilling Old Testament prophecy in relationship to the seven phrases.

phrase when he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion (John 18:8). God desires to relate to mankind personally.³²

Stott notes God's divine image "includes those rational, moral, and spiritual qualities which express something of who God is."³³ Thus, humans are able to learn about God from teachers and preachers; know him through Christ and serve him; live dependent on him; and obey his commands and precepts as outlined in Scripture.³⁴ Stott concludes "all those human rights we call the freedom to profess, practise [*sic*] and propagate religion, the freedom of worship, of conscience, of thought and of speech, come under this first rubric of our relationship with God."³⁵

2. *Relationship with fellow man.* When God made Adam, he declared, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18). From the beginning of creation, God intended for man to be in relationship with fellow man. Floyd Schneider said relationships have a two-fold purpose: to express care and concern for individuals and to get to know others better.³⁶ Hammett notes God made humans with a need to have community and relationships with other humans.³⁷ From Abraham to Moses to the Israelites, God calls people, rather than "isolated individuals to himself."³⁸

In the New Testament, relationships are evidenced in Jesus' relationship with his disciples as well as Scripture's emphasis on the necessity of believers establishing relationships with others and "living in harmony with one another."³⁹ Establishing relationships with others is the underlying element of the Great Commission and Jesus sent his disciples to witness two-by-two so they could work together in community to share the gospel with the lost (Luke 10:1–24). Jesus prayed for unity among believers as these relationships "form the basis of a believer's witness to the world and the world recognizes Christians by their love for one another."⁴⁰ The early church was also characterized by the community they had with one

³²Of note is that God calls people by name in Scripture. Abraham, Moses, Jacob, Samuel, Zacharias, the disciples, and Saul (Paul) were all called by name by God. They all responded with an immediate understanding that it was the Lord calling them.

³³Stott, *Issues Facing Christians*, 198.

³⁴Stott, *Issues Facing Christians*, 198.

³⁵Stott, *Issues Facing Christians*, 198.

³⁶Floyd Schneider, *Evangelism for the Fainthearted* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), 28.

³⁷Hammett, "Human Nature," 368.

³⁸Hammett, "Human Nature," 368.

³⁹Allen, "Selected Factors," 21.

⁴⁰Allen, "Selected Factors," 21.

another (Acts 2:42, 46).

Hammett observes today's postmodern society desires community.⁴¹ However, true community as God desired and designed is first established with him and then overflows into relationships with others as commonality is found in Christ Jesus. While Scripture shows God's desire is for community among mankind, sin including "anger, pride, self-centeredness, envy, [and] greed" tends to "frustrate [man's] attempts to build community."⁴² Redemption in Christ Jesus is the beginning point of true relationship with both God and man.

3. *Relationship with earth and its creatures.* When God created man and woman, He told them to be fruitful, multiply, fill and subdue the earth, and "rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:28). Man and woman were given the responsibility of caring for and keeping the earth. The unique relationship mankind has with the earth and its creatures gives man the responsibility to steward the earth and its resources while also enjoying the rights of work, rest, the earth's resources, food, clothing, shelter, the preservation of life and health, and freedom from poverty, hunger, and disease.⁴³

Stott rightly summarizes the three relationships of human dignity as follows:

[A]ll human rights are at base the right to be human, as so to enjoy the dignity of having been created in God's image and of possessing in consequence unique relationships to God himself, to our fellow human beings and namely that our Creator has also redeemed or re-created us, at great personal cost, through the incarnation and atonement of his Son. And the costliness of God's redeeming work reinforces the sense of human worth which his creation has already given us.... There is no situation in which it is permissible to forget the dignity of human beings by creation, and their consequent right to respect.⁴⁴

⁴¹Hammett, "Human Nature," 399.

⁴²Hammett, "Human Nature," 398.

⁴³Stott, *Issues Facing Christians*, 198.

⁴⁴Stott, *Issues Facing Christians*, 199–200.

IV. APPLICATION AND IMPLICATIONS

The importance of understanding the *imago Dei* and the relationships that extend from it provide the foundational perspective of how man views the sanctity, or dignity, of human life. Because man is not the author of life it is imperative to look to the one who created life and, therefore, gives life value and purpose. Each life is created in God's image and subsequently is considered sacred regardless of the perspective of fellow man. While sin has marred this image, because of his mercy, God offers redemption and renewal through Christ Jesus.

In *EV*, Pope John Paul II recounted the words issued to the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Sixty years after its initial proclamation, the statement is still true:

Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or wilful [*sic*] self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person, such as mutilation, torments inflicted on the body or mind, attempts to coerce the will itself; whatever insults human dignity, such as subhuman living conditions, arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions, where people are treated as mere instruments of gain rather than as free and responsible persons: all these things and others like them are infamies indeed. They poison human society ... they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator.⁴⁵

In response, John Paul II noted the “disturbing” state of society was “far from decreasing” but rather was “expanding.”⁴⁶ In addition to the scientific and technological progress that have proved to diminish the dignity of human beings, John Paul II wrote, “a new culture climate is developing and taking hold, which gives crimes against life a new and—if possible—even more sinister character, giving rise to further grave concern: broad sectors of public opinion justify certain crimes against life in the name of the rights of individual freedom, and on this basis they claim not only exemption from punishment but even authorization by the State, so

⁴⁵John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae*.”

⁴⁶John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae*.”

that these things can be done with total freedom and indeed with the free assistance of health-care systems.⁴⁷

The lack of respect for the sacredness of human life has continued its downward spiral since 1995. A postmodern society, as well as an increase in asserting rights and freedoms with little to no regard to how they affect others, have been factors that have contributed to a society that seemingly has little care or concern for life. The late pontiff noted the “tragic” result is not only “the destruction of so many human lives still to be born or in their final state extremely grave and disturbing, but no less grave and disturbing is the fact that conscience itself, darkened as it were by such widespread conditioning, is finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between good and evil in what concerns the basic value of human life.”⁴⁸

In a world that continues to grow increasingly dark, sinister, and callous, it should not be a surprise that human life is not valued and held in high esteem. When people have a true understanding of who God is and how he has made each individual member of society “fearfully and wonderfully” (Ps 139:14) only then will a true understanding of the sacredness of human life be realized. This understanding affects and changes society and as it is carried over into how people treat one another. While laws and restrictions can provide protection and consequences, they cannot change the hearts of individuals and how they view and value their own lives and the lives of others. Only redemption and renewal in Jesus Christ can provide this transformation.

Though redemption is provided in Christ Jesus, it should also not be a surprise when the judgment of God comes upon a society due to individual and collective sin and lack of repentance. Continuing to kill life in the womb, while also allowing almost twenty percent of the nation’s states to legally allow physician-assisted suicide,⁴⁹ does not escape the wrath of God upon society. Sin has consequences.

Human beings were not created for easy disposal, but rather to give glory to the Triune God (Isa 43:7). From conception to death, and every stage in between, human life should be valued because God values life and every life can bring glory to the Creator. Regardless of gender, race, abilities, and age, God places a premium on human life as it is made in his image and he gave his Son for the redemption and restoration of man.

⁴⁷John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae*.”

⁴⁸John Paul II, “*Evangelium Vitae*.”

⁴⁹Currently California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington have so-called “death with dignity” laws.

The body of Christ should lead the way in manifesting a value for the sanctity of life at every stage in word and deed. This mandate encompasses both Christians individually and the church collectively. One's relationship with God is manifest in how an individual views, treats, and speaks to and about others. As believers are renewed into the image of Christ, their love for God should overflow in loving and valuing other people—brothers and sisters in Christ and lost people. As Christ came to provide eternal and abundant life (John 10:10), believers, who have been entrusted with the gospel of life, should speak life in a culture that is surrounded by death. The love of Christ compelled the apostle Paul to speak truth among the Corinthians and his love should continue to compel believers today (2 Cor 5:12). In a culture that continues to self-define what it means to be a person, believers must stand firmly on what the Creator of life says in his word while simultaneously not allowing their love to grow cold as lawlessness increases (Matt 24:12).





DUAL CITIZENS OF CONCENTRIC KINGDOMS: Christian Citizenship According to the New Testament

James R. Wicker*

What does it mean to be a godly Christian citizen today? Does this differ for a Christian living in a republic like the United States, a Muslim-majority country like Iran, a Communist dictatorship like Cuba, or any of sixteen different types of governments¹ in 197 different countries?² Does the New Testament address Christian citizenship, and is it still relevant to twenty-first-century Christians?

The word “citizen” is rare in the NT: the noun form of the “citizen/commonwealth” cognate group appears only once in the NT (*politeuma* in Phil 3:20) and the verbal form appears only twice (*politeuomai* in Acts 23:1 and Phil 1:27). Yet, the NT teachings on this important issue are relevant to twenty-first-century Christians. This article will demonstrate Christian citizenship is best understood as dual citizenship of concentric kingdoms. After establishing the model based on the primary NT teachings,³ there will be six NT applications: (1) using courts, (2) taking an oath in court, (3) serving as a soldier or peace officer, (4) voting, (5) holding office, and (6) participating in civil disobedience or revolution.

I. CONCENTRIC KINGDOMS

All NT writers wrote and lived in the first-century AD Roman Empire.

¹“16 Government Types,” Infographic Facts, accessed November 1, 2021, <https://infographicfacts.com/16-government-types/>.

²“Countries & Areas,” U.S. Department of State, accessed December 1, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/countries-areas/>.

³Although there is much scholarly debate on the matter, this writer assumes the traditional authorship of the NT.

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Yet, they addressed three different geopolitical areas. For instance, the Christian recipients of Paul's letter to the Romans were in a much different political situation than the Christian "sojourners"⁴ (*parepidēmois*, 1 Pet. 1:1) in Asia Minor to whom Peter wrote 1 Peter. First, Jesus ministered in Palestine, and Syria/Palestine had been under Roman control since 63 BC. It had few Roman citizens, and Rome considered most inhabitants to be *peregrini* ("aliens").⁵ Rome usually allowed Jews freedom to exercise their religion as Rome typically did in conquered areas. The early church enjoyed this same freedom for a while because outsiders considered them a Jewish sect at first. In addition, there was indirect Roman rule through the local, provincial rule of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. There was direct Roman rule through Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea and Samaria—appointed directly by Tiberius since AD 26. In addition, the Jewish Sanhedrin and the high priest, Caiaphas, retained limited religious power. Second, Paul wrote to Christians in Rome. It had a much higher percentage of Roman citizens than the rest of the empire. Yet, there were so many slaves in Rome that they may have been the majority population in this huge metropolis. Third, Paul, Peter, and John wrote to Christians in Mediterranean cities which ranged from provincial cities with many Roman citizens, such as Ephesus and Philippi, to cities with few Roman citizens, such as the island of Crete and the Galatian province.

This study will first examine Jesus's teachings about God's kingdom and earthly kingdoms. These passages are foundational for all subsequent NT passages on the subject. Then it will investigate the other relevant NT passages in canonical order.

1. *Render to Caesar* (*Matt 22:15–22; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–26*). Understanding Jesus's statement on taxation is key to comprehending how his followers should relate to the state. Although he addressed only taxation, the principle behind it is likely connected with other major NT teachings on the state.⁶ The Jews found Roman occupation taxing—literally! They hated paying what they considered oppressive taxes to the occupying power

⁴All NT translations are the author's own.

⁵Edwin M. Yamauchi and Marvin R. Wilson, *Dictionary of Daily Life in Biblical and Post-Biblical Antiquity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2017), s.v. "Citizens & Aliens."

⁶Longenecker says this saying by Jesus may be behind what was later written in Rom 13:7; 1 Pet 2:13–14; and Titus 3:1–2. However, his assertion that it was from a "sayings of Jesus" or "Q collection" is unwarranted. Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 967–68. See also R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 830–31.

and thought tax collectors to be terrible sinners.⁷ The tax Jesus addressed in this passage was the tribute tax (poll tax) that the inhabitants of Roman colonies paid in denarii.⁸ These Roman coins bore a picture of the Roman Emperor, and Jews considered all images idolatrous based on the fourth commandment (Exod 20:4).

On Tuesday of the Passion week in Jerusalem, Pharisees and Herodians, who frequently opposed each other, joined to present a theological conundrum to trap Jesus. They assumed Jesus would be in trouble regardless of how he answered the question: to whom does one owe tax? He would favor either Caesar or God and be branded a collaborator or a revolutionary. However, Jesus saw their “wickedness” (*ponērian*) and realized they were testing him (Matt 22:18). His surprising response was that people should give to Caesar what is his and to God what is his (v. 21). In this answer, Jesus said the two realms of authority do not necessarily contradict.⁹ Although Jesus addressed only taxes in his answer, the relationship he described between God’s rule and Caesar’s rule helps clarify other matters about citizenship. God’s realm is everywhere and includes everything, yet he gives limited authority to earthly rulers. This concept fits what Jesus told Pontius Pilate three days later: “You have no authority over me except what has been given to you from above” (John 19:11). Thus, the situation is not: (1) Caesar over God or (2) God over Caesar—the only two choices the questioners expected. Nor is it (3) two separate realms of God and Caesar, but it is (4) God gives Caesar limited authority within God’s greater realm. Thus, one can “be both a dutiful citizen and a loyal servant of God.”¹⁰

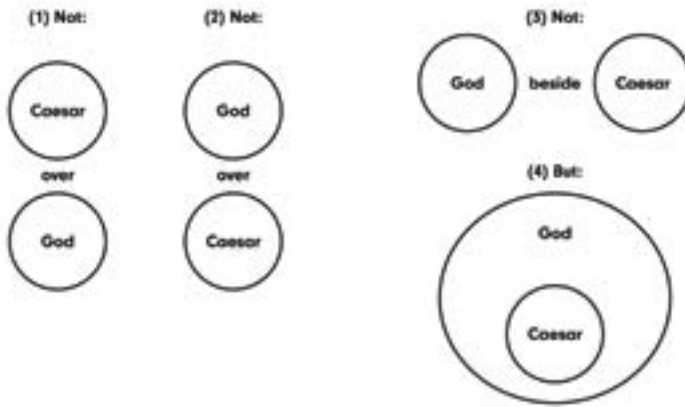
⁷The phrase “tax collectors and sinners” appears nine times in the Gospels—singling out this despised occupation (Matt 9:10–11; 11:19; Mark 2:15–16; Luke 5:30; 7:34; 15:1; 7:34).

⁸Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Louisville: WJK, 2011), 79. A denarius had the value of one day’s wage for a common day laborer.

⁹Thus, an empire-critical reading that in his answer Jesus promoted rebellion against Rome and giving nothing to Caesar is unwarranted. Contra Richard A. Horsley, “Jesus and Empire,” in *In the Shadow of Empire*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Louisville: WJK, 2008), 89, 90, 95.

¹⁰France, *Matthew*, 830.

Figure 1



Thus, Caesar has limited authority, given to him by God.¹¹

By asking for a denarius to use as an object lesson, Jesus emphasized that the Jews were enjoying the benefits of Roman rule. They were to “give back” (*apodote*) what was essentially already Caesar’s.¹² This verb implies a moral obligation to the state. The questioners “marveled” (*ethaumasán*) at Jesus’s answer (Matt 22:22). They were not expecting him to be able to answer the question without turning either the Jews or the Romans against him.

2. *Simon’s statēr* (Matt 17:24–27). An earlier statement by Jesus in Capernaum addressed a different tax on the Jews: the annual half-shekel temple tax on every Jewish male over the age of twenty. Jewish leaders based this religious tax on Exod 30:13; 38:25–26. In this event, Jesus and his disciples passed through Galilee on their way to Jerusalem. In Capernaum, some tax collectors asked Simon Peter if Jesus did not pay the “double drachma [tax]” (v. 24), which was an amount roughly equivalent to a half shekel. Although it was a religious tax, the state provided tax

¹¹Figure 1 is an adaptation of a helpful illustration by my friend Curtis Broyles, who does not remember the source from many years ago. However, Lenski gives a similar description. “This ‘and’ [v. 21] connects a small field with the whole field.... Our obligations to God are the whole of life, those to the state one part of this whole.” R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 867. See also Floyd V. Filson, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, BNTC (London: Black, 1960), 235.

¹²It is unwarranted to call the Pharisees and Herodians hypocrites for carrying a denarius on temple property. Nowhere does the biblical text say it was their denarius. They “brought” it to Jesus. Contra France, *Matthew*, 830. They could have secured a coin from a passerby or from someone outside the temple. However, they were hypocrites in their legalism and for testing Jesus (Matt 22:18).

collectors outside of Jerusalem.¹³

In a subsequent conversation with Peter, Jesus said he and his followers were exempt from this tax, no doubt because they were doing God's business. However, so as not to give offense, Jesus told Peter to cast a line into the sea and a fish would have a *statēr* in its mouth.¹⁴ This coin was close in value to a shekel, and it would pay the half-shekel temple tax for Jesus and Peter. Since Matthew recorded this event, one ought to assume Peter obeyed Jesus and caught a *statēr*-bearing fish.¹⁵

Many scholars dismiss this passage as a distorted report or unlikely miracle,¹⁶ but there is no compelling reason to doubt such a minor miracle occurred. However, it concerned a religious tax about the temple which Jesus was about to make obsolete. So, the applicable lesson for today is simply not to offend others.

3. *Acts incidents.* The disciples discovered soon after Jesus's ascension that blind obedience to all civil and religious leaders was untenable. On two occasions, the Sanhedrin—the highest religious authority in Judaism—firmly forbade the disciples from speaking about Jesus (Acts 4:17–18; 5:28). The second warning included flogging (v. 40). Yet, on both occasions, the disciples refused to obey the order—invoking the higher authority of God. At the second encounter, they said, “we must obey God rather than people” (5:29). Thus, they interpreted Jesus's teachings about relating to government to include disobeying directives by officials that violated God's commands. It was ironic that the first persecution of Christians came from religious authorities, the Jewish Sanhedrin; however, Jesus had predicted this would happen (John 16:1–2).

Luke was careful in Acts to show neither Paul nor other Christians disobeyed the Roman government. Civil authorities jailed Paul and Silas *without cause* in Philippi (Acts 16:37), Caesarea Maritima (Acts 24:12–16), and Rome (Acts 26:31–32). Paul never bribed procurators Felix (Acts 24:26–27) and Festus.¹⁷ Presumably, he bribed no one else. Paul was

¹³Josephus mentions this tax in *J.W* 7.6.6 and *Ant.* 18.9.1. Interestingly, after the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, Rome continued collecting this religious tax for Jupiter Capitolinus. Early Christians probably also had to pay it since many were Jewish.

¹⁴Most English Bible translations incorrectly use the term “shekel” to translate the Greek word *statēr*.

¹⁵Contra Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 271.

¹⁶See J. Duncan M. Derrett, “Peter's Penny: Fresh Light on Matthew XVII 24–7,” *NovT* 6 (1963): 1.

¹⁷One may assume Paul did not bribe Festus because Paul would have been released had he done so.

declared innocent by commander Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26–29), procurator Festus (Acts 26:31–32; 28:18), and King Agrippa II (Acts 26:32).

Christians usually did not ask the state for help when others wronged them. Yet, in circumstances which the state had to settle, Paul did not hesitate to call upon its help and protection. Several times Paul insisted on the benefits of his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:35–39; 21:39; 22:23–30). He accepted the protection of Roman soldiers (Acts 21:31–40; 22:23–30; 23:10–35). He informed a Roman officer of the plot for his death to foil would-be assassins (Acts 23:11–22). Trying to ensure his rightful acquittal, he appealed to the emperor (Acts 25:10–12, 21, 25; 26:32; 28:19). Evidently, Paul expected justice from the state. According to church tradition, he was obedient even to the point of his own martyrdom.¹⁸

4. *Subjection to the state (Rom 13:1–7)*. Romans 13:1–7 contains Paul’s longest and most important teaching about government. Yet, Gorman says it is “among the most difficult, potentially disturbing, and even possibly dangerous of all Pauline texts...[used to] support the divine right of kings, blind nationalism, and unquestioned loyalty to rulers—even tyrants.”¹⁹ Indeed, some German churches used this text to justify their support of Adolf Hitler.

This passage appears in the application section of Romans, chapters 12–15. It sits between a section about Christians’ relationships with insiders and outsiders (12:3–21) and Christians loving others (13:8–10).²⁰ Rather than a non-Pauline interpolation, 13:1–7 continues the theme of relating to outsiders.²¹ The Roman church receiving this letter was likely composed of house churches—some consisting mainly of Gentile Christians and others mainly of Jewish Christians. Oakes describes Christian attitudes to Rome in the mid-AD 50s as “awe, appreciation, resentment, contempt, denial of ultimate authority, expectation of overthrow.”²² There are many theories as to the impetus behind Paul’s exhortation in this passage to

¹⁸F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 441–45. Bruce examines the extant extrabiblical material about Paul’s last days and martyrdom.

¹⁹Michael J. Gorman, *Romans: A Theological & Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 252.

²⁰Gorman believes “love” in 13:8–10 “supports Christian opposition to many laws and practices” in the US, but he is practicing eisegesis here. Gorman, *Romans*, 259.

²¹Contra James Kallas, “Romans XIII.1–7: An Interpolation,” *NTS* 11 (1965): 374. Käsemann is correct in concluding Pauline authorship of this passage by both external and internal proofs. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 350–52.

²²Peter Oakes, *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 166.

Roman Christians.²³ Likely there were disagreements over whether to pay taxes and how much a Christian should obey governing authorities.²⁴ So, Paul addressed these issues. One must interpret this biblical text in its most natural sense. For instance, there is no reason to see it as a subversive call to rebel against Roman authority.²⁵

There are five key phrases in this passage. First, who are the “governing authorities” (*exousiais hyperechousais*, v. 1)? Cullmann argues for both rulers of this world as well as the invisible, demonic powers behind them.²⁶ Yet, the present pagan governments specifically, and earthly governments generally, best fit the context of verses 1–7.²⁷ Second, how are they “appointed (or ordered) by God” (*tetagmenai eisin*, v. 1)? The positivistic view says God providentially establishes each government; the normative view believes God establishes the principle of government, and he brings individual governments in line to his purpose; and the orderly view says God simply brings governments into order.²⁸ Third, what does it mean “to be subject to” (*hypotassethō*, v. 1) these authorities?²⁹ Does it denote more of a recognition of authority rather than an unquestioning obedience? Kruse says “submit” here means to submit “willingly, but not uncritically”—for there will be times government commands contradict God’s rules.³⁰ Fourth, how are authorities “a minister of God” (twice in v. 4) and “servants of God” (v. 6) in a pagan or evil government?³¹ They are ministers of God when they

²³See Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 491–92.

²⁴Tacitus wrote about many complaints about Roman indirect taxes (portoria), ad valorem taxes such as custom taxes, in AD 58 (*Ann.* 13.50). Likely, this anger simmered for years before it came to a head.

²⁵Contra Neil Elliott, “The Apostle Paul and Empire,” in *In the Shadow of Empire*, ed. Richard A. Horsley (Louisville: WJK, 2008), 110. Elliott says this is a puzzling passage and may have an undercurrent of defiance and dissent in his empire-critical interpretation of the text. He rejects using this passage to discern a Christian’s relationship to the state, but his skepticism is unwarranted. This passage fits well with what Paul wrote in 1 Tim 2:1–2 and Titus 3:1–2.

²⁶See Oscar Cullman, *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1956), 94–114, where he defends this interpretation against his critics on grounds of philology, Judaistic concepts, and Pauline and early Christian theology.

²⁷See Longenecker, *Romans*, 956–69.

²⁸John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 199–202. He describes the views but advocates for the third one. Each view has strengths and weaknesses.

²⁹See the same word for this subject in Titus 3:1 and 1 Pet 2:13. Paul also used this word for Christians to “submit” to each other in the context of the church (Eph 5:21–22) and for wives “submit” to their husbands (Col 3:18; Titus 2:5).

³⁰Kruse, *Romans*, 492.

³¹Consider also how God used pagan Assyrians to judge Israel and pagan Babylonians, Medo-Persians, Greeks, and Romans (in succession) to judge Judah. Yet, here Paul addressed how a

keep law and order and punish evil doers as they “bear the sword” and “bring wrath” (v. 4) upon them. Thus, the propagation of the gospel can continue. Fifth, what kind of “sword” (*machairan*) does the state bear? It is just a small dagger the Roman police used to keep the peace,³² or does it include capital punishment? The latter seems more likely since this term appears elsewhere in the NT in connection with violent death (i.e., Acts 12:2; Heb 11:34, 37).³³

Romans 13:7 lists the need to pay direct tax (*phoron*) and indirect tax (*telos*). The former included poll tax and land tax, and it may relate to imperial subjugation of conquered lands.³⁴ The latter contained toll taxes and customs duties, taxes on goods and services. Roman citizens were not exempt from indirect taxes.³⁵ Yet, Paul addresses much more than just paying taxes. This verse also says to give authorities the intangible obligations of “respect” (*phobon*)³⁶ and “honor” (*timēn*). Interestingly, Roman law also punished people who were ungrateful for benefaction.³⁷

Was Paul too simplistic about government in this passage? It is untenable that Paul naively considered governments as only benevolent. First, it is highly likely he knew of the abuses by Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate, Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and others. Second, he was beaten without cause and jailed by authorities in Philippi (Acts 16:23). When Paul wrote this passage, most government officials were pagans. Yet, the religion of the authorities is not the point of the passage. Nor did Paul say leaders would never abuse their authority. Rather, they are God’s appointed leaders. This passage is still applicable today regardless of what kind of government one lives under. James Leo Garrett aptly summarized this passage: “Obedient submission to the governing authorities of the civil state is a Christian duty because civil authority is ordained by God.”³⁸

5. *More on subjection (1 Tim 2:1–2; Titus 3:1–2).* Two of the last three epistles Paul wrote reflect his basic thought in Rom 13:1–7. He urged

government acted toward its citizens.

³²Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 795.

³³Kruse, *Romans*, 496–7; See also James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, WBC 38 (Dallas: Word, 1988), 764.

³⁴Thomas M. Coleman, “Binding Obligations in Romans 13:7: A Semantic Field and Social Context,” *TynBul* 48.2 (1997): 310.

³⁵BDAG, s.v. “telos.”

³⁶BDAG, s.v. “phobos.”

³⁷Coleman, “Binding Obligations,” 318–27.

³⁸James Leo Garrett Jr., “The Dialectic of Romans 13:1–7 and Revelation 13: Part One,” *Journal of Church and State* 18 (1976): 441.

Timothy (and the church at Ephesus) to make “entreaties, prayers, intercessory prayers, and thanksgivings” for all people and specifically for “all who are in authority” (1 Tim 2:1–2).³⁹ It is significant that prayers and thanksgivings were to be offered for the current Neronian government with persecution so imminent.⁴⁰ Prayers could be for their salvation, for God’s guidance for them, for conditions conducive for evangelism, and thanksgiving to God (which Paul mentioned). The goal of a “quiet and peaceful life” in 1 Tim 2:2 fits Paul’s stated purpose of government in Rom 13 of keeping law and order. Paul told Titus to remind Cretan Christians “to be subject to” (*hypotassesthai*) “rulers and authorities” (including local authorities) and “to obey” (*peitharchein*)⁴¹ them (Titus 3:1)—the latter term being a new addition to his teaching. “Obey” is not problematic if it is understood to apply only when government does not contradict God’s laws.

Elsewhere Paul referred to the temporary nature of civil governments and even religious rulers, such as the Sanhedrin, and their tendency toward injustice in 1 Cor 2:6–8. He described a Christian’s ultimate submission to God since one’s true citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20). Thus, every Christian is a citizen of God’s kingdom and a citizen or resident of an earthly kingdom—concentric kingdoms as Jesus taught. Paul also described “the restrainer” in 2 Thess 2:6–7. If “*to katechon...ho katechōn*” refer to the state or general world order as the restrainer of the man of lawlessness, this would be Paul’s earliest mention of the law-and-order purpose of the state. However, if the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, as this writer contends, Paul did not mention the state in this passage.

6. *Peter’s perspective.* Assuming Petrine authorship, this writer dates 1 Peter ca. AD 63, just prior to Nero’s orchestrated persecution of Christians. Peter says to “submit yourselves” to “every human institution,” including

³⁹Although there are some nuanced differences in the first three nouns, Paul was likely “collecting synonyms that effectively communicate the importance of prayer.” Thomas D. Lea, “1 Timothy,” in *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, NAC 34 (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 81. One might argue these epistles are irrelevant to this study because Paul wrote them to individuals. However, there is evidence Paul intended them for the church also. For instance, neither Timothy nor Titus needed to be reminded Paul was “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Tim 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1) or that they were converts under Paul’s ministry—the likely meaning of being Paul’s “true child in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4). Yet, those local churches did need this information.

⁴⁰See early mention of prayer for rulers in Ezra 7:25–28; 9:5–9; Josephus, *Ant.* 13.5.8; and Justin, *1 Apol.* 17.

⁴¹This word appears only four times in the NT and only once in Paul’s letters. The more common word for “obey” is *hypakouō*, appearing twenty-one times in the NT (eleven times in Paul). Hendriksen weds these terms well: Christians must outwardly subject themselves and inwardly have willful obedience. He adds that this applies if the commands do not conflict with obedience to God. William Hendriksen, *1–2 Timothy, and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 386.

kings and “governors” (*hēgemosin*, 1 Pet 2:14)—a statement like Rom 13:3–4. Christians should be “those who do good” (v. 14): obeying the laws and doing deeds for the betterment of society.⁴² Is this a naïve expectation that government will always be benevolent? No. First Peter 4:12–17 addressed strengthening the Christians in Asia Minor for both present and coming persecution. The “burning ordeal” (v. 12) included present persecution from unbelieving Jews and local officials as well as coming persecution from the Roman government.⁴³

Peter’s exhortations reflect some of Paul’s same themes of subjection to and the purposes for government. Yet, he wrote his epistle later than Paul’s letters and more clearly reflected the darker, abusive side of the state. Peter’s attitude to the state is a good link between the earlier and the later apostolic age.

7. *The evil empire in Revelation: A game changer?* Except for the persecutions of Christians under Nero (mid-to-late 60s) and Domitian (early-to-mid 90s), the attitude of the Roman Empire towards Christians in the first century AD was mostly benign. However, Revelation shows a stark difference with the evil empire starting in chapter 6 and reaching a crescendo in chapters 17–18. Does this make obsolete the earlier NT statements about Christians and government? Does this new situation break the paradigm?

Most scholars agree Revelation was written during the Neronian or Domitian persecution. This writer believes it also describes a future government that will be worse than the present one under Domitian: one that will be evil, anti-God, and anti-Christian.⁴⁴ Here is a government doing the opposite of its God-given tasks of punishing evildoers, keeping order, and praising people who do good. For instance, there will be much Christian martyrdom during this time (Rev 6:9–10). Although it depicts a time when there will be many more situations of needing to obey God rather than government, Revelation does not contradict nor negate earlier NT teachings concerning Christian citizenship.

Thus, the NT model is dual citizenship of concentric kingdoms, and this includes paying taxes and obeying laws that do not contradict God’s laws. However, the NT has more to say about Christian citizenship. Here

⁴²Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 175–76.

⁴³Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter*, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 184.

⁴⁴The two dominant views are Idealist and Futurist. Idealists say no specific government is in view and these are symbols of ongoing struggles. Most Futurists, such as this writer, believe there will be a specific future evil empire.

is a brief examination of six applications of Christian citizenship.

II. NEW TESTAMENT APPLICATIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

1. *Using courts.* Did Paul tell the Corinthian Christians not to go to courts of law in 1 Cor 6:1–8? If so, is such teaching normative for all Christians? This passage is often misapplied because of a failure to understand the context. Paul was not forbidding Christians from going to law courts. Paul himself used the courts or law representatives when appropriate, appealing to a Roman commander (Acts 22:25–29), two Judean governors (24:10–21; 25:8–9), and the emperor (25:10–12). The context of 1 Cor 6:1–8 is civil law, not criminal law. Paul said a Christian must not take another Christian to court, so this refers to civil matters. The church should arbitrate in such matters.⁴⁵ Sadly, in Corinth some Christians were taking other believers to court over trivial matters and letting unbelievers make decisions a believer was better equipped to make than a pagan judge or jury was (1 Cor 6:1, 7–8).

Paul did not address criminal matters in this passage. In a criminal matter, it is the city, state, or federal government rather than an individual that brings the accused to court. So, 1 Cor 6:1–8 has no application in criminal matters such as child abuse, spouse abuse, robbery, or other crimes against the state. A Christian has a duty to report a crime to the authorities. Keeping society safe by punishing evildoers is one of the main God-given functions of government (Rom 13:3–4). God’s purpose for government prohibits vigilante justice. Matters of punishment must be left to government action rather than to an individual or self-appointed group.

2. *Taking an oath in court.* In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said not “to swear/take an oath” (Matt 5:34). Instead, one should say, “Yes, yes; no, no” (v. 37). James wrote something similar in Jas 5:12. In the Passion week, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and scribes for their deceptive system of oath giving (Matt 23:16–22). So, giving deceptive oaths is wrong, but Jesus said not to make any oath. Rather, one should be such a person of integrity that people accept your word at face value and do not require you to take an oath for verification.

Some Christians use Matt 5:33–37 to refuse signing a pledge card for a church budget or building program even though they have no problem

⁴⁵Christians are competent to judge civil matters. In some way Christians will be used in the final judgment of the world (1 Cor 6:2), which will include judging angels (6:3). These must be fallen angels, demons (see Rev 19:19–20; 20:10).

signing a commitment to pay their monthly mortgage, cell phone, and electric bills.⁴⁶ Are these valid applications? It seems not. They are not making oaths; they are making commitments. It is not biblically wrong to make a commitment, but it is wrong to break a commitment.⁴⁷ Others cite this passage and refuse to take an oath in a court of law. Yet, this application also seems invalid. Taking an oath in a court of law is necessary because it is in front of people who do not know you and need some validation of your testimony, and Jesus was likely not referring to such action but addressing conversations with people who know you.

3. *Serving as a soldier or peace officer.* Did Jesus promote pacifism? Is war ever justifiable? May a Christian serve as a peace officer or in the military? There are two passages some Christians cite to claim Jesus promoted pacifism. First, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said to “turn to him also the other [cheek]” (Matt 5:39). Was this a prohibition against all fighting? No. Using one’s right hand (presumably) against the right cheek of another person is not a fight. Rather, Jesus referred to a backhanded slap of the right hand: an insult. So, allow people to insult you all day long. Second, in the same sermon Jesus said to “love your enemies” (5:44). Does loving one’s enemy forbid Christians from serving in the military or as a peace officer?

Five NT passages preclude pacifism and give insight to this issue. First, as forerunner to the Messiah, John the Baptist preached consistently what Jesus taught later. John told soldiers how to show true repentance, and it did *not* involve quitting their occupation (Luke 3:14). Second, Jesus did not explicitly address if his followers should serve in the military or as peace officers, but he implicitly affirmed it. He healed a centurion’s servant and praised the great faith of the centurion (Matt 8:10, 13), whom Jewish elders highly regarded (Luke 7:4–5). Jesus mentioned nothing about that occupation being inherently sinful. Third, the first conversion of a large group of Gentiles came through Peter’s preaching at the home of a centurion named Cornelius—a devout God fearer (Acts 10:1–2, 22, 30–32, 35). Fourth, another affirmation of these occupations being fit for Christians occurs in Paul’s description of the God-given mandate for government to “bear the sword” (Rom 13:4), which presumably involves keeping the peace domestically through peace officers and soldiers as well

⁴⁶This writer has heard these examples from fellow Christians many times through the years.

⁴⁷One might object to signing a church pledge card for personal reasons, but citing Jesus’s prohibition of oath giving is not a biblical reason.

as protecting the state from outside threats through soldiers. Fifth, Paul used a trifold metaphor for Christian discipleship: soldier, athlete, and farmer (2 Tim 2:3–6). He likely would *not* have used a sinful occupation in these examples, such as being a hard-working thief!

What about the bad actions of soldiers and guards in the NT? For example, (1) soldiers scourged Jesus, put mock royal attire on him, and beat him (John 19:1–3), (2) soldiers crucified him (vv. 17–18), (3) they pierced his side with a spear (v. 34), (4) the temple guard thrice arrested Peter and John at the temple (Acts 4:1–3; 5:17–18, 26–27) and flogged them after the third arrest (v. 40), (5) soldiers illegally beat Paul and Silas at Philippi (Acts 16:22–23),⁴⁸ (6) soldiers wanted to kill all prisoners when Paul’s prisoner ship wrecked near Malta (Acts 27:42), and (7) soldiers will gather to fight for the Antichrist in the future (Rev 19:19). Yet, examples of wrongdoing do not invalidate these occupations; rather, people in these jobs sometimes make wrong decisions, which can occur in any occupation.

4. *Voting.* If Jesus lived in the United States, *how* would Jesus vote? *Would* Jesus vote? Would he vote if there were two ungodly candidates? If the choice is between bad and very bad, is it right to choose the bad? Of course, if not voting causes the very bad candidate to win, that option is untenable. In addition, there are other options, too, such as running for office yourself or supporting a third candidate. Does the NT give guidance for voting in government elections?

Since God establishes governments (Rom 13:1), does it matter if a person votes in a democracy or republic? Here are two perspectives. First, that passage may mean God set up government but not particular governments, so Christians should work to set up the best government possible. Second, if that passage refers to particular governments, one must understand how God works throughout history: it is through people. God gave Canaan to the Jewish people, but he did not drop it into their laps. They had to work to conquer it. God desires that we live in godly marriages, but a good marriage takes hard work. It does not instantly happen. Nor does a good government suddenly appear—it takes hard work.⁴⁹

An extension to rendering unto Caesar would be participating in government practices that do not go against God’s Word. So, if a government allows its citizens to vote, they ought to do so. Former US Solicitor General

⁴⁸This was illegal because Paul was a Roman citizen. Paul had them apologize the next day for doing this—probably to make it clear he and Silas did not break any Roman law (Acts 16:37–39).

⁴⁹See Robert Tracy McKenzie, *We the Fallen People: The Founders and Future of American Democracy* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2021).

Ken Starr calls for Christians to vote their faith as well as to run for office—from local school boards and city councils to positions at the state and federal level to make a positive difference in their communities.⁵⁰

5. *Holding office and civil service.* Should a Christian hold public office or work in civil service? Here are two NT examples. First, Sergius Paulus, proconsul of Cyprus, was the first named convert on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:7, 12). He was "an intelligent man" (*andri synetō*) who presumably held office after his conversion. Sergius possibly sent helpful letters of commendation with Barnabas and Saul as they went to the mainland.⁵¹ Second, in the subscription in Romans, Paul mentioned Erastus, "the city treasurer" (*ho oikonomos tēs poleōs*) who sent greetings (Rom 16:23). This name helps locate Corinth as the city from which Paul wrote Romans. An extant pavement stone just northeast of the theater ruins at Corinth clearly displays the carved name "Erastus." He paid for this stone and it dates to the middle of the first century. One would assume from what Paul wrote that Erastus was a Christian public servant.

A Christian should live a godly life, exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, and do good works to others in every legal occupation. Not everyone is called to civil service or to hold public office. However, Christians who do serve in those jobs are able to help many people. This can be part of the doing "good" that government should "praise" (1 Pet 2:14).

6. *Participating in civil disobedience or revolution.* What should a Christian do who lives in an evil empire? The first-century Roman government was pagan, but it was mostly benevolent to Christians except during the reigns of emperors Nero and Domitian. However, it was nothing like the terrible one to come in Revelation. Regardless of one's interpretive view of Revelation, all must agree that the government in Revelation is evil and works against God. What must Christians do in those situations? Does the NT condone civil disobedience or revolution?

There are NT examples of civil disobedience. Peter, John, and other apostles refused to obey the Sanhedrin's demand to stop sharing about Jesus

⁵⁰Ken Starr, *Religious Liberty in Crisis: Exercising Your Faith in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Encounter, 2021), 171. He focuses on what he calls the Great Principles of liberty and equality under the law that "form the foundation of so much of our legal system" (35) and are principles within our constitution that are founded on Scripture. See also p. 70. He mentions additional Great Principles of "church autonomy, freedom of conscience, accommodation of religious belief and practice, and the primacy of history and tradition triumphing over [judge-made] doctrine" (146).

⁵¹Davis proposes this scenario. Thomas W. Davis, "The Destination of Paul's First Journey: Asia Minor or Africa?" *Pharos Journal of Theology* 97 (2016): 3.

(Acts 4:19–20; 5:29–32). No doubt the future persecution of Christians in Revelation (6:9; 12:11; 16:5–6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2) is from similar situations. Thus, a Christian must disobey an immoral law and be willing to accept the consequences.⁵² There are no NT examples about revolution; rather, there is a passive acceptance of persecution. Nowhere does the NT explicitly address revolt.⁵³ So, is revolution ever biblically justifiable? A separate study is needed to fully answer this question. Mott posits an interesting view in his requirements for a “just revolution”: (1) there is a just cause, (2) the last resort is revolution, (3) the implementation is by a lawful public authority: a parallel government, (4) there is a sufficient possibility of victory, (5) the probable good outweighs the resulting evil, and (6) it is conducted through proper means, such as excluding torture and terrorist violence against civilians.⁵⁴

The Christian’s responsibility to work for justice and peace in the world to better spread the gospel message must be balanced with the example one may be called upon to give through nonretaliation and joyful personal suffering under an oppressive government. Yet, there may be times for disobedience and even revolt to protect the lives of others.

III. CONCLUSION

It is fitting that the only appearance in the NT of the noun “citizenship” (Phil 3:20) provides a capstone for what the rest of the NT says about this subject. Paul wrote “our citizenship is in heaven,” referring both to himself, his coworker Timothy, and the Christians at Philippi. Of course, this concept applies to all Christians. Although Paul, and likely some recipients in this garrison city, were Roman citizens, others were not. Yet, they were all were subject to their governing authorities. At the same time, all these believers were citizens of heaven (v. 20).

Every Christian relates to two kingdoms: heavenly and earthly. One must always obey God. His realm is the higher one and it includes everything. One must also obey terrestrial authorities if doing so does not contradict what God says. In citizenship issues not specifically addressed

⁵²See Mott’s five criteria to follow for civil disobedience to lead to social change. Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 138–41.

⁵³This is contrary to empire-critical studies which claim many NT passages give a coded message to revolt against the evil Roman Empire. For instance, Horsley says Jesus’s exorcisms are symbols for the expulsion of the Roman occupying forces. Horsley, “Jesus and Empire,” 86.

⁵⁴Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*, 160–62.

in the NT, such as volunteering at the local library, one should apply the principles of promoting the greater good in society (1 Pet 2:12, 14) and taking every opportunity to be salt and light for Christ in the community (Matt 5:13–16).

One might think it is easy to decide when a government's practice or law goes against God. Sometimes it is. For instance, any law against Christian evangelism or against a person converting to Christ is wrong, and these are common laws in current Muslim governments. Abortion is the taking of a human life and is wrong. Yet, some current issues divide Christians in the United States—federal immigration policies, actions (or inaction) along the southern border, gun ownership, climate change, federal minimum wage, and a host of other divisive issues.⁵⁵ One must approach each issue biblically, humbly, carefully, and prayerfully.



⁵⁵For a somewhat balanced treatment of these issues, see Daniel K. Williams, *The Politics of the Cross: A Christian Alternative to Partisanship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).



BOOK REVIEWS

***The Method of Christian Theology: A Basic Introduction.* By Rhyne R. Putnam. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2021, xvii+336 pp., \$22.99.**

In *The Method of Christian Theology: A Basic Introduction*, Rhyne Putnam gives readers a method of theology that takes Christian formation and discipleship seriously as its primary goal. Putnam notes the rationale for understanding theological method: “We are rich with information but poor in wisdom” (p. 3). In our technologically saturated culture, the need for ascertaining wisdom is greater than ever. But this wisdom, as Putnam contends, should lead to a great passion for the Lord, his mission, and to be “more effective disciple-makers in the various ministry contexts to which God calls us” (p. 4). Putnam accomplishes this goal with this volume and has produced a vital resource for students of theology, whether in the academy or the church.

Divided in four parts, *The Method of Christian Theology* walks readers through what Putnam identifies as the principles (part 1), preparations (part 2), procedures (part 3), and practices (part 4) of Christian theology. Thus, Putnam writes with the novice in mind. The principles of theological method (part 1) include defining theology and the various disciplines within theological studies. Here Putnam defines the task of theology for the sake of Christian formation and discipleship. Putnam asserts, “Well-crafted doctrine faithful to the message of Scripture changes the whole disciple” (p. 44).

In the preparations for doing theology (part 2), Putnam sheds light on both the affective and cognitive aspects of doing theology. Here Putnam advocates for a “gentle theology” that is not about people-pleasing, but about sharing truth in love (pp. 96–7). Alongside this gentle theology, the theologian should be one who embraces a “faith seeking understanding” posture first postulated by Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and later emphasized by Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033–1109). Putnam notes, “We can *embrace* the Christian worldview in faith and still seek to *understand*

it with our God-given powers of reason” (p. 109; emphasis original).

In parts 3 and 4, Putnam presents the mechanics of doing theology. Part 3 presents readers with how theology is done through study in the Scriptures, reflection upon tradition, conversing with philosophy, and understanding the proper role of experience. This section concludes in chapter 11 with a twelve-step procedure for studying theology that moves from the study of the biblical text, through the study of tradition, into the ways in which doctrine affects the heart. Thus, the twelve-step process seeks to take the study of theology into the life of worship and discipleship. The final section of Putnam’s work provides guidance on developing theological writing both for the academy and the church. Whether writing a research paper or a sermon, Putnam demonstrates the vitality of theological method for building up disciples of Christ. While helping readers with an introductory approach to theological method, Putnam continually reminds readers of the proper aim of theological method: more effective and meaningful Christian discipleship.

Others have presented introductory works in theological method for readers. Glenn Kreider and Michael Svigel’s *A Practical Primer on Theological Method: Table Manners for Discussing God, His Works, and His Ways* (Zondervan Academic, 2019) and Mary Veeneman’s *Introducing Theological Method: A Survey of Contemporary Theologians and Approaches* (Baker Academic, 2017) are both excellent introductory works, but they presuppose some basic theological training. *The Method of Christian Theology*, thus, fills a need for an introductory text with the new student of theology in mind. It also fills a gap for a book on theological method that is easily accessible to the Christian layperson.

Putnam’s hope is to present doctrine for discipleship. He is clear in his directives and encouragement towards the task of doing theology. Most appreciated is his mindfulness of the beginning reader by the way he highlights necessary terms and compiles them at the end of each chapter. Along the way he is not afraid to engage with critical voices as well as friends of the faith. This book empowers rather than overwhelms the new student of theology. While the work is aimed at new students of theology, it could easily be read by interested Christian laypersons, and even serve as a text for a theological training program in the local church. If theology is

for the heart as well as the head, then Putnam's work gives readers exactly what they need to begin their journey.

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***The Child is Father of the Man: C. H. Spurgeon.* By Tom Nettles. Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2021, 230 pp., paperback, \$14.99.**

Tom Nettles, already a noted Spurgeon biographer, offers a fresh and scintillating perspective on this Baptist legend. Nettles is senior professor of historical theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The book's title and premise derive from William Wordsworth's *My Heart Leaps Up* revealing that people's personalities develop as children, and they show those same qualities as adults. Nettles develops ten specific Spurgeon convictions, "Issues that appeared early in [his] life, made their way in his ministry through the years, and stayed with him until death" (p. 213). Nettles intends this book to be a companion to his biographic magnum opus *Living by Revealed Truth: The Life and Pastoral Theology of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (Christian Focus, 2013).

Nettles sees providence as the bedrock of Spurgeon's convictions for he viewed everything through the lens of the divine purpose and gaged his internal and external response based on biblical doctrine (p. 19). Indeed, the doctrines of grace undergirded his spiritual convictions, proving a bulwark of security in all of Spurgeon's life and ministry challenges from conversion to death (p. 36). Spurgeon felt strongly about being a Baptist. Regenerate church membership had thrust him into Baptist life (p. 59), and he believed that Baptists held a deposit of sacred truth to defend, and one should not hesitate to battle for it (p. 72). After conversion, Spurgeon's early *evangelistic desire* led him to seek the salvation of his younger brother and throughout his life he believed the sole directive of the church and the minister was the winning of souls (p. 96).

While most are privy to Spurgeon's "tendency to despondency" (p. 120), some may lack clarity as to where he found relief. The Bible was as "an abiding source of tonic against depression" (p. 120) and Jesus was

his balm for depression, for in Christ “he found a fellow-sufferer of more deep physical suffering and more poignant troubles of soul” (p. 216). Spurgeon displayed an early bent toward transparency and commitment to self-analysis. Reading Spurgeon, one quickly becomes aware of his thoughts on personal experience (p. 143), thinking of himself as somewhat of a human paradigm (p. 216). God would use this conviction for the benefit of both his servant and those to whom he would minister (p. 144). From the onset of his walk with the Lord, Spurgeon felt a deep sense to contend for the faith. He believed that every minister who distanced himself from this “contending” would be responsible to God for the souls of men (p. 180). His contentions were not simply doctrinal, they were against the “coldness and the lethargy of the times” (p. 162). His was a deep conviction concerning slander. Nettles supplies a theology of slander in his study, where Spurgeon reveals how criticism gives opportunity to magnify God’s grace (p. 186).

The two best chapters (4 and 10) deal with Spurgeon’s convictions about preaching and his commitment to the Scriptures. Watching his father and grandfather prepare to preach, he knew early on “he could watch, but he must not talk or distract in any way, because faithfulness to God’s glory and the souls of men was at stake in the spiritual sensitivity which gave birth to a sermon” (p. 21). For him, preaching was art and science, but primarily a passionate overflow of the person and work of Christ (p. 215) and if exposition did not end in the cross of Christ, then true exposition had not occurred (p. 91). Nettles points out that his unshakable faith in the infallibility of Scripture was foundational to every Spurgeon sermon, book, ministry endeavor and controversy in which he engaged (p. 218). For Spurgeon, “[Inspiration] is the Thermopylae of Christendom. The entire battle for truth turns on it” (p. 198).

I find no downside to this book whatsoever. Nettles performs a service to both the church and the minister through his continued writing. This volume well serves those interested in preaching, ministry, Baptist life, or church history. Spurgeon was an excellent example of convictional steadfastness, who displayed many honorable characteristics that were noticeable throughout his pilgrimage (p. 19). May we similarly find courage in our

convictions that will carry us through to final breath.

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***The Person of Christ: An Introduction.* By Stephen J. Wellum.
 Wheaton: Crossway, 2021, 206pp., \$18.99.**

Stephen Wellum introduces this book with the shocking results of a 2018 poll conducted among evangelicals by Ligonier Ministries and LifeWay Research. When asked, 78 percent of polled evangelicals surprisingly agreed with the following statement: “Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.” Similarly, 51 percent agreed with this statement: “God accepts the worship of all religions, including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam” (p. 15). Appreciating the serious implications of misunderstanding who Jesus is for the evangelical community, Wellum states: “My goal is to equip the church to know the basic biblical teaching about who Jesus is and how the church has theologically confessed the identity of Jesus throughout the ages” (p. 16).

Knowing that a faithful biblical Christology can only be accomplished within the Christian worldview and the Bible’s clear teachings, Wellum finds his theological method not in a Christology *from below* but in a Christology *from above* whose interpretation and formulation stem from a “presuppositional nexus of philosophical and theological commitments” (pp. 23–24).

In chapters two and three, Wellum begins to unfold the identity of Christ from the Bible’s covenantal storyline. God as the Triune Creator and covenant Lord provides the interpretive framework for Scripture, which establishes Christ’s identity (p. 38). With the picture of the cooperating work of the Trinity presented in Scripture, the identity of Jesus, through both implicit and explicit witness, is revealed as God the Son. In particular, the well-known New Testament passages regarding Christ’s deity clearly point to his incarnational sonship (e.g., John 1:1–18; Matt 1:18–25; Col 1:15–20; Phil 2:6–11; and Heb 1:1–4; pp. 65–82).

Christological heresies played a significant part in church history, causing

the church to clarify the orthodox teaching of who Jesus is. Those present at the Council of Nicaea (325) debated the issues related to Trinitarian and christological orthodoxy, preserving the full deity of the Son and the eternal personal distinction of the Son from the Father. The Council of Chalcedon (451) had to deal with further discussion regarding the nature of the incarnation (pp. 96-97). The kernel of the debate at Chalcedon had to do with the distinction between Christ's person (*hypostasis*) and nature (*ousia*). With Christ's full deity and full humanity defended, the Chalcedonian Creed clarified that in Jesus Christ "the two natures subsist in the one person who acts fully through both of them but not contrary to either nature" (p. 106).

Next, Wellum expands his work to present several post-Chalcedonian clarifications regarding Christ: (1) the hypostatic union; (2) the *communicatio idiomatum*; and (3) dyothelitism. Did the human person of the Son replace the divine person in the incarnation? The hypostatic union affirms that the Son did not assume "the full existing individual man, that is, a human person and nature," rather he assumed the human nature and added it to his person (p. 110). Were these two natures intermingled or mixed in one person? Wellum helps readers understand they were not. The doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* ("the communication of attributes") means that "the attributes of each nature are 'communicated' not to the natures but to the person of the Son" (p. 116). Thus, these two natures had two wills in the one person of Jesus the Son (i.e., dyothelitism). In relation to the soteriology, Wellum says that Jesus' human will was critical to bring salvation to man, quoting the maxim of Gregory of Nazianzus, "What is not assumed is not healed" (p. 123). Finally, regarding the divine attributes of the Son in the incarnation, Wellum appeals to Colossians 1:17 and Hebrews 1:3 to show that the post-Chalcedonian development affirmed that Jesus had divine attributes, which continued to be exercised by the Trinitarian Son (p. 119).

An additional challenge to christological orthodoxy appeared in the name of Kenoticism, which argued that "the Son freely and temporarily gave up his accidental attributes" (p. 130). Against this view, however, Wellum contends that Christ retained all that is essential to deity. This challenge involves a wrong concept of "person," which needs to be understood as "a subsistent relation, a subject who acts in and through a nature," not as "a distinct center of knowledge, will, and action" (pp. 130, 137). Wellum concludes by giving a kind and well-organized summary regarding

Jesus as God the Son incarnate.

I highly recommend this book because (1) it helps contemporary evangelicals get back to our christological senses; (2) it balances biblical and rich theological content; and (3) it clearly articulates the truth that Jesus is Lord!

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***Pastoral Theology in the Baptist Tradition: Distinctives and Direction for the Contemporary Church.* By R. Robert Creech. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021, xii+259pp., \$26.99.**

R. Robert Creech puts his study and experience to work in writing *Pastoral Theology in the Baptist Tradition*.

In the Introduction, he states that the lack of studies on pastoral theology from a Baptist perspective was the motivation for writing the book. The book contains twelve chapters divided into four parts. Creech explores the topic of each chapter biblically, historically, and theologically. Finally, using James McClendon's Baptist vision of "this is that," Creech hopes to discover, describe, and transform the beliefs and practices of Baptist pastors.

Part one deals with "Becoming a Pastor." First, he notes that whereas the New Testament uses elder, bishop, and pastor interchangeably, more Baptists have favored the term pastor because of its relational connotations. Second, just as the prophets and apostles were called of God, Baptists have held a clear sense of the pastoral call as a marker of God's activity in the pastor's life. Third, Creech contends that Baptists have emphasized ordination as a component of pastoral ministry but have barely articulated a theology for it. To conclude this part, Creech posits that the Bible is equivocal on women in the ministry and admits that historically, Baptists have favored only men as pastors with a few exceptions. Theologically, Creech attempts to argue that women and men can serve as pastors and preachers by appealing to the priesthood of believers and the local church's autonomy as his grounds.

Part two deals with the pastor's proclamation. He observes that Baptists

have viewed the preaching ministry no differently from the biblical prophets and apostles. He notes that preaching is sacramental as God takes over the physical activity. Akin to this, Creech notes that Baptist pastoral ministry involves an evangelistic “sentness” to the world.

In part three, Creech deals with priestly acts that characterize Baptist pastoral ministry, providing Scriptures and Baptist history to justify his claim. First, Baptist pastors are to administer baptism and the Lord’s Supper, both priestly acts instituted by Christ. Also, they minister priestly care to God’s flock, an action rooted in Scripture and distinct from modern-day psychology. Lastly, Creech notes that at their best, Baptist pastors have been known for the priestly function of making disciples through the commanded means of teaching.

Creech explores pastoral leadership in the final part, examining pastoral authority, shared leadership, and vision casting. He posits that the Bible describes pastoral authority as delegated authority channeled through servant leadership. He notes that Baptists discuss pastoral authority relating it to the interrelationship of ordination and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. With a clear biblical vision for a shared ministry and the priesthood of all believers, which implies the inherent ministry of every believer, Creech bemoans “clergification” and the marginalization of the laity in Baptist life. Finally, Creech identifies the pastor’s duty to lead the church to discern God’s vision and keep alive hope for God’s promised future.

Robert Creech does several things well in this book. First, his attempt at filling a void is praiseworthy. While the topics he discusses may lend themselves to other traditions, Creech does well to tether these topics to a Baptist worldview. The reader will find the historical sketches included in the book helpful.

Having said the above, a book covering issues of this magnitude cannot but have tension points. Creech’s inclusion of a chapter on “Women in Ministry” is admirable. However, to what kind of Baptist is Creech writing? Southern Baptists? American Baptists? Or Baptists globally? Again, the basis for his egalitarian conclusions lies in the priesthood of all believers. Does the priesthood of all believers equal the “preacherhood” of all believers? Furthermore, if the church is to mirror the family structure as the New Testament describes, should that not inform an understanding of 1 Tim 2:11–13?

A couple of things also beg the question in Creech’s discussion on the

ordinances. He suggests, for example, that the disciples on the road to Emmaus were a couple, but he does not provide any argument to support this claim (p. 150). Furthermore, Creech observes that Baptists have failed to reflect on baptism from which their name is derived (p. 145), a point unjustifiable in light of the publication of Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright's book *Believer's Baptism: The Covenant Sign of the New Age in Christ* (2007).

Notwithstanding, Creech's work is a solid beginning for a pastoral theology in the Baptist tradition.

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***God Has Chosen: The Doctrine of Election Through Christian History.*
By Mark R. Lindsay. Downers Grove: IVP, 2020, xii+236pp., \$30.00.**

Mark R. Lindsay, who has wrestled with the doctrine of election for years, sheds light on the topic by examining both Scripture and the work of theologians throughout Christian history. His effort highlights the historical context of the doctrine by focusing primarily on the “understanding of the being of God rather than the destinies of people” (p. 7).

Beginning with the biblical concept of election in the first chapter, Lindsay emphasizes God's relationship with his people when it comes to the connotative terms “to choose,” “knowing,” and “calling” (p. 16). These terms portray a God who not only initiates relationship with people but vitalizes the dynamic inclusivity of the relationship (p. 17). The first passage highlighting this characteristic of God is found in Genesis 12:1–9, which is amplified in other biblical passages such as Genesis 32, Deuteronomy 7, Romans 9, and Ephesians 1:3–14. God acts freely in election without regard for any merit in man as he embraces peoples and nations. This, says Lindsay, is a pattern of God's working for “an expansive inclusivity that extends even to the most unlikely and alien” (p. 35).

From chapter two to the end of the book, Lindsay develops the understanding of the doctrine of election chronologically from the Church Fathers through the Middle Ages and Reformation period, and on to the

neo-orthodox thinkers of the twentieth century, focusing on key theologians of each era.

Lindsay presents four key Fathers in relation to the doctrine of election: Ignatius of Antioch, Origen of Alexandria, Cyprian of Carthage, and Augustine of Hippo (pp. 51–71). One noteworthy feature during this period lies in the way election is grounded in the nature of the church as the visible substance of the elect community (pp. 39–45). For example, Augustine believed the church to be a mixed community in which the “twofold possibility of election and condemnation” coexist because of the grace of God, not because of God’s lack of foreknowledge (p. 69).

Contrary to the ecclesiological orientation of the doctrine found in the Fathers, Lindsay observes that two medieval thinkers, Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus, articulated the doctrine of election with reference to their imperial context (that is, their political theology; p. 75). Providing an overlapping role between church and state, medieval Christianity gave the perception that “being a ‘good believer’ in one was virtually synonymous with being a ‘good citizen’ in the other” (p. 103).

John Calvin, Lindsey’s representative of the doctrine of election in the Reformation era, is famous for making this doctrine explicit in his Institutes. However, as Francois Wendel mentions, the importance of the doctrine of election for Calvin is with “ecclesial politics and pastoral observations” (p. 108). What is critical in Calvin’s conviction about this doctrine, says Lindsay, is that “the eternal decision of God remains rightly veiled from our minds, a veiling that leaves us free to rejoice in our election and so, in our lives, to follow Christ in peaceful assurance” (p. 115).

After the Enlightenment, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth appear on the stage with their own interpretations of the doctrine. It seems appropriate to say the doctrine of election was reevaluated in Schleiermacher. His appeal to the *singularity* of God’s decree asserts, “It is not to be conceded that there is a divided revelation of divine attributes... Instead, justice and mercy must not be exclusive of each other” (p. 150). As for Karl Barth, it is well-known that he accepts Christology as the fountainhead of the knowledge of the electing God. Lindsay points to 1936 as the beginning of Barth’s thought on the concept of christological election, when he heard a lecture on “Election and Faith” by French pastor Pierre Maury (p. 167). Barth identifies Christ as the subject of election, which indicates election is intrinsic to God’s being and a “part of the very doctrine of God itself” (p. 171).

Lindsay surveys the doctrine of election by visiting key theologians in their own historical context. By doing so, he helps readers approach the doctrine of election through the lens of history. I gladly recommend this book to those who desire with humble minds to participate in the mysterious but glorious work of God.

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***Lifting the Veil: Imagination and the Kingdom of God.* By Malcolm Guite. Baltimore, MD: Square Halo Books, 2021, 111pp., \$18.99.**

Malcolm Guite is a rare combination—accomplished poet, Anglican priest, brilliant academic, and popular lecturer. In addition to recently publishing a collection of original sonnets on the Psalms (*David's Crown: Sounding the Psalms*), he has penned this work on imagination and the kingdom of God which originated in a lecture series he delivered at Regent College in 2019.

Guite's purpose is clearly stated: "This book is a defense of the imagination as a truth-bearing faculty, and more than that it is an appeal to artists, poets, sculptors, storytellers, and filmmakers to kindle our imaginations for Christ..." (p. 11). Thus, the book serves as both an apologetic for the imagination itself and an appeal to other artists to make use of their own imaginations. On both fronts, it succeeds.

In the opening chapter, Guite utilizes helpful quotes from figures such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, and C. S. Lewis to demonstrate why the imagination should be trusted as a truth-bearing faculty. First, he explains how imagination helps to remove "the film of familiarity" from us so that we can see truth we might otherwise miss. In this way, imagination empowers the arts to fulfill its intended purpose, which is to provide us with unexpected ways of glimpsing and telling the truth. Second, he reminds us that reason and imagination are both valid modes of knowing and learning truth, diverse modes which find their reconciliation and harmony in Jesus Christ. Third, he argues that imagination helps us apprehend the hidden realities of the invisible world beyond those realities merely discerned in

the visible. And fourth, he points out that Jesus unashamedly appeals to the imagination in his teaching, proving that “made up,” “fictional,” and imaginative stories can still teach profound truth.

The next three chapters detail three aspects of the imagination: the poetic, the moral, and the prophetic. In chapter two, “Christ and the Artistic Imagination,” Guite explores different ways that poets can “usher us further into the mystery of three essential truths about Christ: his Incarnation, Passion, and Resurrection.” Drawing on Scripture, his own poetry, and the poetry of others, he shows how the poetic imagination clarifies, and even intensifies, our view of Christ. In chapter three, “Christ and the Moral Imagination,” Guite highlights the teaching of Christ, giving specific attention to the parables of the grain of wheat and that of the Good Samaritan. These parables appeal to the moral imagination, which he defines as “that exercise of imagination which enables you to stand in another person’s shoes...to imagine and even re-imagine the world from their perspective.” In chapter four, “Christ and the Prophetic Imagination,” Guite discusses how Jesus’ teaching about the Kingdom is both a prophetic critique of this world and a prophetic call to hope and action.

Throughout the book, Guite seeks to stir the imagination of other artists in hopes that they will respond to his appeal to make art for the sake of Christ. Thus, the book is one-part permission and one-part motivation. His defense of the imagination gives artists permission to use their creative gifts to proclaim the faith without feeling that they must apologize or justify their validity. Embedded in the book is also a wealth of motivation geared to kindle a burning desire in artists to use their imaginations to help us see Christ and his kingdom more clearly. Theologically speaking, Guite motivates artists via three doctrinal realities: (1) imagination is part of the image of God in us; (2) the mystery of the incarnation makes the imaginative arts possible and meaningful; and (3) in Christ our imaginations have been renewed. Artistically speaking, Guite motivates by including numerous poems, paintings, drawings, and woodcuts throughout his work. He also explains the creative process behind some of his own poetry and encourages artists to go out and make new stories which are capable of embodying truth.

While the value of a work like this may seem obvious to right-brained “creative types,” I hope it finds a wide reading among left-brained “logical types,” too. Theologians and poets need to be in conversation for the good of the church, and Malcolm Guite serves as a stimulating conversation

partner toward this end. As he himself reminds us, “When we seek to enter into the mystery of our faith we must call the poets to the table as well as the theologians.”

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***Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope.* By Esau McCaulley. Downers Grove: IVP, 2020, 198pp., \$14.89.**

In *Reading While Black*, Esau McCaulley, who is assistant professor of New Testament at Wheaton College and an ordained Anglican, speaks aloud for the edification of modern Black Christians. The book is a combination of genres: hermeneutics, spiritual autobiography, and applied systematic theology. In it, McCaulley argues “that the Black ecclesial tradition...has a distinctive message of hope arising from its reading of biblical texts” (p. 164). His aim is to share this hermeneutic arising from this community.

Reading While Black contains seven chapters, a conclusion, and a helpful “bonus track.” Chapter one, “The South got Somethin’ to Say,” theologially situates the Black ecclesial hermeneutic, one that is “formed by the faith found in the foundational and ongoing doctrinal commitments, sermons, public witness, and ethos of the Black church” (pp. 4–5). Here McCaulley describes how this hermeneutic was “*canonical* from its inception” and “unabashedly *theological*” (p. 19). Chapter two develops a biblical theology of policing based on Romans 13:1–7 in light of the larger canon, leading the reader to understand that “the Christian’s first responsibility is to make sure that those who direct the sword in our culture direct that sword in ways keeping with our values” (p. 39).

Chapter three describes the “New Testament and the Political Witness of the Church” (p. 47) by beginning with Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” McCaulley rightfully notes that King’s ministerial detractors were “focused more on law and order than the demands of the gospel” (p. 48). Chapter four analyzes the pursuit of justice in the

New Testament, as especially seen in Luke-Acts.

Chapter five asks readers to consider Black identity as presented in the Bible itself. McCaulley explores this with relation to Abraham, Manasseh and Ephraim, David, Jesus, Simon of Cyrene, and the Ethiopian eunuch. He then robustly states, “Colorblindness is sub-biblical and falls short of the glory of God. What is it that unites this diversity? It is not cultural assimilation, but the fact that we worship the Lamb” (p. 116). Chapter six describes the struggle with “Black rage” at exploitative whites and sinful African Americans (p. 120). He calls upon persons feeling this rage “to develop a theological imagination within which we can see the world as a community and not a collection of hostilities. It does so by giving us the vision of a person who can heal our wounds and dismantle our hostilities” (p. 129).

Chapter seven describes a biblical theology of slavery and an accompanying hermeneutic of hope arising from both the biblical text and the life of Christian African Americans. Here, the Exodus serves as a hermeneutical key to the Bible. “Slavery is a manifestation of the fall,” McCaulley observes, “and God begins the story of Israel by freeing them from slavery as a symbol of hope. My ancestors read it that way and so do I” (p. 151). The “Bonus Track” surveys the “history of Black biblical interpretation” (p. 168) and is worth the price of the book.

Reading While Black is a thought-provoking book. It is thoroughly researched by an expert in the field, and the author writes with a tremendous amount of humility. Ultimately, it allows the attentive reader, who is not native to the Black ecclesial tradition, to have their eyes opened to the beauty of seeing Jesus as “the person who can heal our wounds and dismantle our hostilities” (p. 129).

The book does have a few drawbacks. The relative paucity of sources throughout the book is problematic. Often the reader is left to trust McCaulley that the black ecclesial tradition he speaks of is as described (p. 171). Also, more epistemological humility might be warranted, as when the author seems to speak out of what is often called class warfare when he describes “families living in luxury knowing that this wealth is bought with the price of their suffering” (p. 123).

It seems to this reviewer that the true genius of books like this lies in

the way they allow readers to see biblical themes endemic to the text in a fresh way, themes that they might not have seen without the benefit of a hermeneutical aid. While it is not a perfect book, *Reading While Black* does faithfully allow readers to hear from God's Word clearly.

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***Interpreting Jesus: Essays on the Gospels.* By N. T. Wright. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020, 368pp., \$52.99.**

N. T. Wright is a popular speaker, respected New Testament scholar, engaging writer, and prolific author having written over eighty books—an almost impossible combination. Equally rare are his voluminous contributions to two major fields: Pauline Studies and Gospel Studies. Having served as an Anglican bishop, he is currently senior research professor at Wycliffe Hall at the University of Oxford.

Interpreting Jesus: Essays on the Gospels is the second volume of a three-volume set, *The Collected Essays of N. T. Wright*. The other two volumes are *Interpreting Scripture: Essays on the Bible and Hermeneutics* and *Interpreting Paul: Essays on the Apostle and His Letters*. Each book contains journal articles and book essays that span almost forty years in Wright's impressive writing career.

The seventeen articles in this volume appear in chronological order from 1982–2020, and each essay has a short introduction providing helpful background and contextual information. The introductions show: (1) helpful connections leading up to some of Wright's major books, such as *Jesus and the Victory of God* (pp. 66, 81) and *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (p. 116); (2) interactions with writings of other major scholars (e.g., B. F. Meyer, p. 128, Richard Hays, pp. 188, 221, 243); and (3) important links with various lecture series Wright has delivered (p. 280).

There is much to like in these essays which are vintage Wright. First, his engaging writing style is a pleasure to read. Second, he is erudite without being unclear—an intelligible intellectual. These two points are likely related to his extensive experience as a pastor (pp. 154–58, 161). Third,

Wright usually deals kindly with scholars with whom he disagrees, such as Bultmann (p. 151). Fourth, some of his criticisms are particularly memorable. Referring to the Jesus Seminar's unwarranted anti-historical bias, he said "criticizing 'history' because of the Jesus Seminar is like warning against air-travel because of Icarus (p. 81)." Sometimes his comparisons are enjoyably naughty: "Ben F. Meyer, who has more understanding of how ancient texts work in his little finger than many of the Jesus Seminar seem to have in their entire word-processors (p. 85)." Fifth, Wright consistently affirms the historical content of the Gospels (pp. 31–32, 154, 160). Sixth, he gives good reasons for rejecting additional "gospels" and accepting only the four canonical Gospels (pp. 174, 198). Seventh, he is thought provoking and willing to go against the grain of NT scholarship, such as interpreting "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31) as being both "the satan *and* Caesar"¹ (p. 218; emphasis in the original). Eighth, he continually pushes scholarship forward to new, potentially fruitful areas of study (pp. 180–87).

Even with the helpful explanations prior to each essay, it is still sometimes unclear when they were written. That information is found in the "Acknowledgements" (pp. 329–30), but it would be more helpful were they found in the introductions at the beginning of each chapter. Additionally, a subject index would be helpful. Other points of criticisms are of a theological nature and aimed at information found in the articles. First, calling Genesis 1–2 "mythological" is problematic regardless how one defines the word and has problematic connotations (p. 23). Second, criticizing fundamentalism and the religious right is fashionable in scholarly writings but too often is painted with a broad brush (pp. 144–45) and deserves a more nuanced approach. Third, although the call for balance between a theology of cross and kingdom has merit, downplaying the use of the cross and resurrection to prove Jesus' divinity is problematic (pp. 160, 182, 186). Fourth, Wright's emphasis on the Jewishness of the Gospels is well founded, but the claim that Jesus summed up Israel in himself (pp. 34–36, 167) seems a bridge too far. Fifth, Wright interprets passages about Jesus' *parousia* (Mark 13:26; 14:62) as referring to Jesus' vindication as Israel's representative (p. 29). Yet, Jesus' second coming is the more likely interpretation. *Maranatha!*

Students and scholars alike will find *Interpreting Jesus* an enlightening

¹Wright prefers to use the term "the satan" (212, 218); whereas this reviewer prefers to use the name "Satan" in reference to God's enemy (John 13:27).

read of some thought-provoking essays. Wright's contribution to NT scholarship is impressive and his impact is undeniable.

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***The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship.* By Robert Letham. Revised and Expanded Edition. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019, 696pp., \$29.99.**

Letham's recent book, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, is a revised and expanded work of the same title (2004). This new edition maintains the same clear structure of the previous edition, dividing the book into four parts: Biblical Foundations, Historical Development, Modern Discussion, and Critical Issues. In Part 1 "Biblical Foundations," Letham examines the biblical evidence about the Trinity, focusing on the Son and the Spirit. The excursus "Ternary Patterns in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians" discusses the triadic pattern demonstrated in this letter. Part 2 "Historical Development" provides a chronological sketch of the development of the doctrine. Here, Letham covers important historical periods and figures including early trinitarianism, the Arian controversy, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, the Council of Constantinople, Augustine, the *filioque* controversy, the divergence between East and West, and John Calvin. Part 3 "Modern Discussion" examines the trinitarian thought of modern theologians such as Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenburg, Sergius Bulgakov, Vladimir Lossky, Dumitru Staniloae, and Thomas F. Torrance. Part 4 discusses some critical issues that Letham deems important such as the Trinity and the incarnation, the relations between the Trinity, worship, prayer, creation, and missions, and the concept of persons in the Trinity. Chapter 17 "The Trinity and the Incarnation" is one place where Letham substantially revised the earlier edition of this book.

Letham is to be commended for the way he sketches the development of the doctrine of the Trinity. The historical survey provides a comprehensive guide that is accessible to novices. However, as meticulous as Letham

is, he misses a recent update that affects his argument. On page xxxii, Letham remarks that “Leading evangelicals have recently questioned or abandoned the classic doctrines of the eternal generation of the Son and the one indivisible will,” and he then proceeds to list Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware as opponents of eternal generation. However, both scholars recently changed their position and have embraced this doctrine, a point they made public at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2016.² Ware also clarified his position of the distinct wills at this meeting. Letham’s presentation, in short, is out of date and does not accurately reflect recent developments in this debate.

Besides this oversight, I wish that Letham would have reorganized the first part “Biblical Foundations.” Although it is rich in content, unfortunately, the first part is not organized in a coherent way. The sections read like expanded dictionary entries that are only loosely connected. Moreover, Letham sometimes rushes to a conclusion without providing sufficient evidence for it. For example, while mentioning John 14:28, Letham says, “This is *evidently* a reference to his [Christ’s] incarnation.” (p. 29) He provides no exegetical or historical evidence for this conclusion, nor does he guide readers through his process of deduction. Inserting the word “evidently” will not do the job.³

Letham does an excellent job of presenting the historical development of the Trinity (Part 2). In Part 3 “Modern Discussions,” he captures the main themes of each modern trinitarian theologian’s thoughts, interacts with them, and evaluates their theologies in a judicious way. The reader will benefit tremendously from these two parts. However, due to the loose structure of Part 1 “Biblical Foundations,” and some of its rushed conclusions, the reader may want to consult other resources for a clear presentation of the biblical evidence for the Trinity. Because some of the information in Part 4 “Critical Issues” is outdated, the reader is encouraged

²See details in Hongyi Yang, *A Development, Not a Departure: The Lacunae in the Debate of the Doctrine of the Trinity and Gender Roles* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2018), 191–94.

³See a more detailed exegesis and discussion of the interpretation of John 14:28 in Yang, *A Development, Not a Departure*, 285–96. Briefly, there are two major traditions of interpreting John 14:28. The majority of the early church fathers (Tertullian, Novatian, Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Hilary of Poitiers, Marius Victorinus, and possibly John Chrysostom) interpret this verse from the perspective of the eternal Father-Son relationship. Letham’s view belongs to the other tradition (represented by Cyril of Alexandria, Theodore, Ambrose, and Augustine) that uses the two-nature exegesis.

to read this part critically.

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***The Federal Theology of Jonathan Edwards: An Exegetical Perspective.*
By Gilsun Ryu. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021, xvi+352 pp.,
\$29.99.**

In his book *The Federal Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, Gilsun Ryu has admirably tackled one of the more neglected areas of research in Edwards studies: Edwards’s federalism or covenant theology. Ryu does not just provide readers with a detailed account of Edwards’s federal schema—encompassing his theology of the covenants of redemption, works, and grace—he also situates this theology in the context of his reformed scholastic predecessors and thoroughly explores the ways Edwards exegetically supported his views. The result is a study that unites several current subdisciplines within Edwards’s studies: Edwards’s relationship with his reformed predecessors, studies on Edwards’s exegesis, and Edwards’s federalism. Ryu’s work is important because he suggests that the fundamental framework of Edwards’s approach to the Bible lies at the intersection of his understanding of the history of redemption and his federalism.

The book orbits around three concepts: Edwards’s reformed federalism, his understanding of the history of redemption, and his understanding of the unity of the Bible. Until recently, scholarship on Edwards’s doctrine of the covenants has emphasized his divergence from the reformed tradition. This older scholarship, Ryu observes, was misinformed primarily because the rich variety of approaches to covenant theology among Edwards’s predecessors was not fully appreciated. Federal theology among the reformed, Ryu notes, is not “a specific method or set of ideas,” but rather “a family of approaches” to understanding the Bible that rejected a Pelagian view of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments (p. 71), and broadly affirmed some version of the covenants of redemption, works, and grace. Looked at from this broad vantage point, the family semblance between the reformed tradition and Edwards’s covenantal scheme becomes

immediately apparent, even if we find Edwards deviating from his reformed predecessors on a number of minor points. In arguing this, Ryu helpfully devotes a chapter to the federal theologies of four seventeenth-century reformed theologians—Johannes Cocceius, Herman Witsius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Francis Turretin—in an effort both to show the diversity of the federal system and Edwards’s relatively close association with it.

Ryu next explores Edwards’s doctrines of the covenants of redemption, works, and grace in chapters three to five, respectively. His burden in these chapters is to demonstrate that salvation history (or “the history of redemption”) was prominent in Edwards’s mind as he articulated these doctrines. For instance, Edwards’s doctrines of the immanent Trinity and the covenant of redemption were specifically forged with the history of redemption in mind: “the redemptive work of God,” Ryu concludes, “has its seminal form within the immanent Trinity” (p. 103). Noteworthy in these chapters is Ryu’s lengthy study of Edwards’s doctrine of the covenant of works (chapter four), a topic that has rarely been examined in the secondary literature.

In chapters six through eight, Ryu details the exegetical strategies Edwards employed in constructing his theology of the covenants. Here the author dives deep into Edwards’s hermeneutics. While Edwards began with the literal-historical meaning of the text, he was not adverse to drawing upon typology, the literal-prophetic sense of texts, and even allegory to illuminate Scripture’s meaning. Edwards could thus see multiple dimensions to a biblical figure like Moses: “Moses could be understood as a real figure, a type of the church under the Mosaic era, a type of the soul of the elect, and a type of Christ being humiliated” (p. 255). Governing these forays into the fuller sense of Scripture is Edwards’s commitment to the unity of Bible, a unity that is christologically-focused, is framed by the history of redemption, and is guided by covenant theology.

The book is well-written and thoroughly researched. My one critique is that it can at times be rather dense, no doubt the result of the fact that it originated as a doctoral dissertation. Yet careful reading will, however, yield great rewards in understanding Edwards, federal theology, and the Bible.

It is well-known that several months before his unexpected death, Edwards wrote of his intent to author two “great works” on the Bible: *A History of the Work of Redemption*, and *The Harmony of the Old and New Testament*. Scholars have since theorized what these writings might have contained. Ryu’s book is, in my estimation, the best study so far pointing

to what these works might have looked like.

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BOOK NOTES

Foundational to one's spiritual formation and ongoing discipleship is the need for some form of regular personal worship or devotional life. While nowhere in Scripture are we commanded to have a daily quiet time, the implications throughout Scripture and the examples of key biblical figures, including our Lord Jesus Christ himself (Mark 1:35) encourage us toward faithfulness in this area of our life. Often, many people look for resources to help guide and shape this practice. Two important resources were published near the end of 2021 that are worthy of serious consideration. Trevin Wax has put together a beautiful book with the title *Psalms in 30 Days* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers). Jonathan Gibson has provided one of the most thoughtful devotional resources that I have seen. *Be Thou My Vision* (Wheaton: Crossway) includes Scripture readings, ancient prayers, catechisms, and hymns. It is a rich resource that can be used repeatedly.

Crossway continues their excellent theology series with shorter books on vital theological topics and themes. This series, edited by Graham Cole and Oren Martin, recently added two outstanding titles. *Glorification: An Introduction*, by Graham A. Cole, one of the finest theologians of this generation, is a brilliant overview of the doctrine of glorification. Each one of the thoughtful chapters in this splendid little book is grounded in Scripture and informed by key thinkers, both ancient and modern. Readers will find serious engagement with the questions regarding the doctrine of glorification, including its individual, corporate, and cosmic aspects. Cole offers wise guidance and hopeful encouragement as he contemplates God's wise and glorious plan regarding the future for the people of God. Another book that also comes highly recommended is *The Doctrine of Scripture: An Introduction*, by Mark Thompson. Thompson has provided Christ followers with an illuminating and refreshing introduction to holy Scripture. The biblically informed and theologically shaped work unapologetically affirms the Bible's inspiration, truthfulness, and sufficiency, pointing readers to Christ and faithful Christian discipleship. Simply stated, this substantive, thoughtfully organized, and highly readable volume is an

excellent contribution to Crossway's outstanding series.

An appropriate volume to be noted in this issue of the *Southwestern Journal of Theology* with its focus on Christ and Culture is a new IVP publication from Jim Belcher titled *Cold Civil War: Overcoming Polarization, Discovering Unity, and Healing the Nations*. Reflecting both his preparation as a political philosopher and his skills as a theologian, Belcher has given us a timely and insightful proposal to address public square issues by rebuilding a new vital center for America. Examining the ideas, trends, and developments that have brought about the current philosophical, political, and cultural divide, Belcher offers a bold, challenging, and hope-filled framework to move beyond the fragmentation and polarization on the right and the left. Grounded in an appeal to reclaim the place of both special revelation and natural law, and drawing on insights from Tocqueville, this important volume, while not naïve to the difficult road ahead, provides much needed guidance for shaping a public theology, enabling the church to reclaim its mission, overcome cynicism, and take responsibility for helping to bring healing to the nations. *Cold Civil War* is worthy of serious reflection and engagement by those on all sides of the issues.

The listing of superb books found in the Southwestern Book of the Year awards includes numerous volumes worthy of note (some of which have already been identified in a previous issue), especially the brilliant work on the Pauline materials by Wheaton College professor Douglas J. Moo. This volume will serve scholars, pastors, and students across the global evangelical world for decades to come. *A Theology of Paul and His Letters* (Zondervan) is certainly Moo's *magnum opus* and reflects decades of study and engagement with Paul's writings. Another fine book on the work of Paul has been offered by Alan Bandy, professor of New Testament at New Orleans Seminary. *An Illustrated Guide to the Apostle Paul* (Baker) will be especially beneficial to students and church leaders.

I am quite impressed with Nicholas G. Piotrowski's excellent work on biblical interpretation. Students of Scripture will want to read and learn from *In All the Scriptures: The Three Contexts of Biblical Hermeneutics* (IVP). Like Doug Moo, Wheaton College Old Testament scholar, Daniel Block has written his *magnum opus* on *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Baker). I have long admired Dan Block and his brilliant insights regarding the Old Testament.

While most think of global Christianity as a somewhat recent development, Donald Fairbairn has offered a well-researched volume on *The*

Global Church: The First Eight Centuries (Zondervan). John Massey, Mike Morris, and Madison Grace, all Southwestern colleagues, have worked to compile what will be recognized as the most complete history of Southern Baptist missions that has been written. *Make Disciples of All Nations: A History of Southern Baptist International Missions* (Kregel) will be a gift to all interested in the history and the future of global evangelism.

Gavin Ortlund continues to produce some of the most thoughtful and encouraging books for those seeking to follow Christ in a faithful manner. *Why God Makes Sense in a World that Doesn't* (Baker) will be particularly beneficial for those interested in Christian worldview formation and discipleship. John D. Basie, and his colleagues at Impact 360, have also produced a wonderful book for the same readership. I highly recommend this volume called *Know. Be. Live. A 360-Degree Approach to Discipleship in a Post-Christian Era* (Forefront).

Joe Crider's fine book on *Scripture-Guided Worship* and Gregg Allison's book on *Embodied* should not be missed. Rebecca McLaughlin has put together a book that will be extremely helpful for teens and their parents. I have already given away several copies of *10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask (and Answer) about Christianity* (Crossway). One more Forefront book should be noted. Jim Denison's new work offers hope and guidance for believers struggling to live faithfully in our upside-down secular context. I am sure that *The Coming Tsunami: Why Christians Are Labeled Intolerant, Irrelevant, Oppressive, and Dangerous—and How We can Turn the Tide* will receive a wide readership.

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SOUTHWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY 2021 BOOK AWARDS

BIBLICAL REFERENCE / BACKGROUNDS / LANGUAGES

An Illustrated Guide to the Apostle Paul: His Life, Ministry, and Missionary Journey, by Alan S. Bandy (Baker)

Honorable Mention:

Biblical Aramaic for Biblical Interpreters: A Parallel Hebrew-Aramaic Handbook, by Scott N. Callaham (Glossahouse)

Corpus Christologicum: Texts and Translations for the Study of Jewish Messianism and Early Christianity, by Gregory R. Lanier (Tyndale)

BIBLICAL STUDIES

The Old Testament Use of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide, by Gary Edward Schnittjer (Zondervan)

Honorable Mention:

In All the Scriptures: The Three Contexts of Biblical Hermeneutics, by Nicholas G. Piotrowski (IVP)

Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption, by Daniel I. Block (Baker)

THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

Contemplating God with the Great Tradition, by Craig A. Carter (Baker)

Honorable Mention:

Providence, by John Piper (Crossway)

Five Things Theologians Wish Biblical Scholars Knew, by Hans Boersma (IVP)

CHURCH HISTORY / BIOGRAPHY

The Global Church: The First Eight Centuries, by Donald D. Fairbairn (Zondervan)

Honorable Mention:

Augustine and Tradition: Influences, Contexts, Legacy, by David G. Hunter and Jonathan P. Yates (Eerdmans)

Black Fundamentalists: Conservative Christianity and Racial Identity in the Segregation Era, by Daniel R. Bare (New York University Press)

BAPTIST STUDIES

Make Disciples of All Nations: A History of Southern Baptist International Missions, edited by John Massey, Mike Morris, and W. Madison Grace II (Kregel)

Honorable Mention:

Thoughtful Christianity: Alvah Hovey and the Problem of Authority, by Matthew C. Shrader (Pickwick)

Liberty for All: Defending Everyone's Religious Freedom in a Pluralistic Age, by Andrew T. Walker (Brazos)

CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW / APOLOGETICS

Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College, by Michael Kruger (Crossway)

Honorable Mention:

Why God Makes Sense in a World that Doesn't, by Gavin Ortlund (Baker)

Risen Indeed: A Historical Investigation into the Resurrection of Jesus, by Gary Habermas (Lexham)

DISCIPLESHIP / SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Living God's Word (Revised), by J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays (Zondervan)

Honorable Mention:

Know. Be. Live.: A 360-Degree Approach to Discipleship in a Post-Christian Era, edited by John D. Basie (Forefront)

The Wisdom Pyramid: Feeding Your Soul in a Post-Truth World, by Brett McCracken (Crossway)

CHURCH MUSIC / WORSHIP

Send Out Your Light: The Illuminating Power of Scripture and Song, by

Sandra McCracken (B&H)

Honorable Mention:

Scripture-Guided Worship, by Joseph R. Crider (Seminary Hill Press)

Corporate Worship: How the Church Gathers as God's People, by Matt Merker (Crossway)

APPLIED THEOLOGY / ETHICS

Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World, by Gregg R. Allison (Baker)

Honorable Mention:

A Call to Christian Formation: How Theology Makes Sense of Our World, by John C. Clark and Marcus P. Johnson (Baker)

Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners, by Dane Ortlund (Crossway)

PREACHING / MINISTRY / LEADERSHIP

40 Questions on Pastoral Ministry, by Phil A. Newton (Kregel)

Honorable Mention:

Preaching to People in Pain: How Suffering Can Shape Your Sermons and Connect with Your Congregation, by Matthew D. Kim (Baker)

Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative (Revised), by Steven Mathewson (Baker)

EVANGELISM / MISSIONS / GLOBAL CHURCH

Teaching and Learning Across Cultures: A Guide to Theory and Practice,
by Craig Ott (Baker)

Honorable Mention:

A History of Evangelism in North America, by Thomas Johnston (Kregel)

The Muslim Majority: Folk Islam and the Seventy Percent, by Robin
Hadaway (B&H)

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION / COUNSELING / YOUTH AND CHILDREN

10 Questions Every Teen Should Ask (and Answer) about Christianity, by
Rebecca McLaughlin (Crossway)

Honorable Mention:

The Pastor as Counselor: The Call for Soul Care, by David Powlison
(Crossway)

The Whole Woman: Ministering to Her Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength,
edited by Kristen L. Kellen and Julia B. Higgins (B&H)

BOOK OF THE YEAR

A Theology of Paul and His Letters, by Douglas J. Moo (Zondervan)