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ETS Evangelical Theological Seminary JOURNAL

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ACADEMIC ARTICLES

Reclaiming the Clarity of Scripture: Specifying Differences between the Traditional Doctrine of Clarity and Some Recent Evangelical Articulations

by KEVIN STORER

Abstract: *This paper discusses the Christian doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, suggesting that while Christians have traditionally viewed Scripture's clarity in light of God's saving work in readers, certain Evangelical modernists have come to view Scriptural clarity in terms of "epistemological correctness" in grasping the intention of the human author. I first provide a brief analysis of the doctrine of Scriptural clarity as held by Irenaeus, Augustine, Luther, and Kierkegaard, in order to show how the traditional doctrine of clarity is not tied to human authorial intent. I then provide an overview of Hans Frei's figural reading in order to provide a model of Scriptural reading which can affirm the importance of the literal sense while refraining from locating Scripture's clarity in the intention of the human authors. I conclude with some benefits Evangelicals might achieve by returning to the traditional doctrine of Scriptural clarity.*

Key words: Clarity of Scripture, figural reading, hermeneutics, authorial intent

I. Introduction

This paper will revisit the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture in order to suggest that the Church has always held a doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, and that this doctrine was coherent in the history of the Church when it was used to emphasize the unique divine capacity of the Bible to lead readers to salvation. The paper will further suggest that it was Evangelicals who made the

doctrine of clarity incoherent, as Evangelicals turned the focus of the doctrine to "epistemological correctness" (being able to discern precisely the intention of the human author) instead of focusing on the unique divine saving capacity of the Bible. My thesis throughout is that in order to hold legitimately to a doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, the doctrine must be retrieved from the Evangelicals who currently use it to affirm "epistemological correctness," and returned to its rightful place as a statement about Scripture's saving power.

II. Clarity as Epistemological Correctness

The first task is to provide a definition of this deficient view of clarity from its Evangelical proponents. Wayne Grudem defines the doctrine of clarity as articulating that "the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it, seeking God's help and being willing to follow it."[1] Gregg Allison suggests that the doctrine means that "the Bible is written in such a way that ordinary believers and not just Bible scholars are able to understand it rightly."[2] Allison argues further that "whatever God has revealed to his people is accessible and intelligible; thus, all of Scripture must be considered to be perspicuous."[3]

[1]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 2000), 108.

[2] Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 120.

[3]Allison, *Historical Theology,* 139-40. Deuteronomy 29:29 states, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."

We might notice that the logic of these authors generally proceeds as follows:
1) God is capable of revealing truth clearly to all; 2) Scripture is God's revealed truth for all; therefore 3) Scripture must be intellectually graspable by all.

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics provides a similar, yet somewhat more nuanced definition, as it states:

> We affirm the clarity of Scripture and specifically of its message about salvation from sin. We deny that all passages of Scripture are equally clear or have equal bearing on the message of redemption. We affirm that a person is not dependent for understanding of Scripture on the expertise of biblical scholars. We deny that a person should ignore the fruits of the technical study of Scripture by biblical scholars.[4]

Significantly, with the Chicago Statement, we observe a more explicit recognition that because Scripture is a book about salvation, the doctrine of Scripture's clarity applies primarily to Scriptural teaching about salvation (a claim specifically not endorsed by Grudem or Allison).[5]

[4]*Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics,* 23,24 (accessible at https://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/25/25-4/25-4-pp397-401_JETS.pdf).

[5] Now Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 82, does admit that, "The New Testament writers frequently state that the ability to understand Scripture rightly is more a moral and spiritual than intellectual ability." This sounds like a good start. However, Grudem quickly reverts to epistemological categories. Grudem (ibid, 82), takes back what he has just given when he chides "theologians" for narrowing the doctrine of clarity to "the way of salvation." Grudem (ibid, 83), goes on to say that when Christians disagree about the meaning of a passage, this shows that "the problem always lies not with Scripture but with ourselves." This, I would suggest, is quite clearly a slide from soteriology to epistemology.

The above collection of quotes serves as a good sample of definitions by those Evangelicals who promote the doctrine of clarity. We might notice in these statements two interesting tensions. First, on the one hand there is a desire to affirm the basic intelligibility of Scripture for all persons, yet on the other hand there is a willingness to admit that many Scriptural passages remain difficult and will require the expertise of "biblical scholars." Second, on the one hand there is a decided emphasis on intellectual comprehension, and yet on the other hand there is an implicit recognition that clarity refers first to salvation. These two tensions reveal precisely where I will suggest that the Evangelical version of the doctrine has gone wrong, and therefore where the Evangelical doctrine of clarity must be reworked.

To focus these tensions further, let us use the example of Barth Ehrman, a preeminent New Testament scholar who claims not to be a Christian.[6] We might ask, does Ehrman read Scripture "clearly"? If "epistemological correctness" in grasping the human authorial intent is the criterion of Scriptural clarity, then we must say that Ehrman is nearly unmatched in his ability to read Scripture clearly…yet Ehrman explicitly rejects Christian faith. If, on the other hand, Scriptural clarity refers to the efficacious saving work of God that occurs in the process of reading (as I am suggesting the Church has always believed), then Ehrman does not read Scripture "clearly." Of course, as we saw above, Grudem, Allison and the Chicago Statement all note that Scripture is read most "clearly" when the Holy Spirit is illuminating interpretation. Yet the tension is that their focus on "epistemological correctness" in

[6]Barth Ehrman is an American New Testament scholar. His work is accessible at www.bartehrman.com.

grasping the intention of the human author prevents them from articulating clarity as a function of God's saving work.

So again my thesis: Traditionally, the doctrine of clarity functioned soteriologically—it showed that the Bible is used by God to mediate salvation to those who are formed by it. Under certain Evangelicals, "clarity" has been modified to mean primarily epistemological correctness—the ability to identify correctly the original intent of the human author through the historical-grammatical method.[7] This focus on epistemological correctness, so central to Evangelicals like Grudem and Allison, has distorted the historic doctrine of the clarity of Scripture by reducing the doctrine to the realm of knowledge about Scriptural propositions rather than the supernatural saving encounter by God to human beings. To put this claim in hermeneutical terms, we might say that the Church has always understood the doctrine of clarity to be located "in front of the text"—in the saving power of the Triune God encountering the reader, while these Evangelicals have placed the doctrine of clarity "behind the text"—in the reader's ability to grasp the intent of the human author. I am suggesting that we must restore the doctrine of clarity to its rightful place "in front of the text."

[7]For Evangelicals, "authorial intent" does not so much mean the ascertaining of hidden thoughts in the mind of a distanced author; rather, it means the insistence that the meaning of a text becomes more evident when it is read with attentiveness to its original context, and with the expectation that a text was given a relatively determinate meaning by a particular author. As such, the phrase "human authorial intent" usually operates as a stand-in for the "grammatical-historical method." (See, for example, Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 22, who notes that, "Those who invoke authorial intentions usually do so in order to provide a base for a stable, determinate, and decidable textual meaning.")

III. Gregg Allison's Survey of Church History

Gregg Allison, who wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, provides Christians a valuable service by surveying the history of the doctrine of clarity in the Church. It will help to examine certain Church Fathers and theologians that Allison holds up as adherents of the doctrine of clarity (Irenaeus, Augustine, and Luther), to see what they have to say on their own terms. To this list I will add Kierkegaard, because he provides perhaps the most powerful critique of the quest for epistemological clarity from within the age of historical critical scholarship. My suggestion is that none of these authors would agree with Allison that clarity should be associated with human authorial intent, and therefore that none of these authors can be used to promote Allison's Evangelical version of the doctrine of clarity.

III.1 Irenaeus

Allison's first proponent of the doctrine of clarity is the 2nd Century bishop Irenaeus. What Allison has in mind is a quote by Irenaeus that states that there are some particularly clear parts of Scripture which bear its central message, and that the Gnostics would be corrected if they would focus on these clear parts of Scripture. Allison cites Irenaeus's statement that, "No question can be solved by another which itself awaits solution. Nor… can an ambiguity be explained by means of another ambiguity, or enigmas by means of another greater enigma. But things of this kind receive their solution from those which are manifest, consistent and clear."[8] So far, so good—Irenaeus is certainly a

[8]Allison, *Historical Theology*, 122, citing Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.10.1.

proponent of the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture, and that it must fit into one unified story centered on Christ.[9] But what Allison ignores is Irenaeus's claim that Scripture is only clear when read through the Rule of Faith and in line with Apostolic Succession.[10] Irenaeus's central polemic against the Gnostics is that the Scriptures function clearly precisely because the Church's Rule of Faith insures that they be read in a stable way. The "rule" that we might learn from Irenaeus, then, is that Scripture can be read with clarity (in the sense Irenaeus means), only when it is read in the context of the Church, guided by the Church's central theological affirmations. Clarity simply does not exist apart from the Rule of Faith, and the Rule of Faith was established by the Christian community.

III.2 Augustine

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, Augustine is highlighted as a champion of the clarity of Scripture. Allison notes Augustine's claim that "among the things that are plainly laid down in Scripture are to be found all matters that concern faith and the manner of life."[11] Indeed, this is a great passage on the clarity of Scripture! It shows Augustine's commitment to intertextual reading, and it shows Augustine's commitment to beginning with what is clear (faith and growth in salvation) before getting caught up in the

[9]See, for example, John Behr, "Irenaeus of Lyons," in Justin S. Holcomb, ed., *Christian Theologies of Salvation: A Comparative Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 41-59.

[10]See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.2.2, who argues based on the Rule of Faith preserved by apostolic succession: "[W]e refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, [and] which is preserved by means of the succession of presbyters in the Churches" (Irenaeus's full text is accessible at https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103302.htm).

[11]Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 2.9.14 in Allison, 124. (Augustine's full text is accessible at https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1202.htm).

many parts of Scripture that seem unclear.[12] But it is not so clear that Allison and Augustine would agree on how Scripture is clear. Remember Allison's close association of clarity with human authorial intent. As we will see, Augustine rejects this entire framework. To see how Augustine would articulate a doctrine of clarity, we must deal with the following (uncomfortable) realities.

First, Augustine says he was able to read Scripture clearly only when he began to read Scripture allegorically. For Augustine, the "literal" sense of the Old Testament (the human author's intent) was a major stumbling block to Augustine becoming a Christian—the Old Testament text seemed at times so barbaric, so unfitting of God. It was Ambrose who showed him that the Old Testament could be interpreted allegorically, and then Augustine began to see the unified Scriptures as leading beautifully toward Christ.[13] Augustine, then, will never tie the doctrine of "clarity" directly to human authorial intent.[14] Second, then, while Allison ties clarity to the grasping of human authorial intent, Augustine believes that clarity of Scripture occurs when the text directs us toward the Love of God and Love of Neighbor. Augustine's key chapter is entitled: "The fulfillment and end of Scripture is the love of God and our neighbor."[15] Here Augustine says, "Whoever,

[12]Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 2.9.14, says that "those matters that are plainly laid down in [Scripture], whether rules of life or rules of faith, are to be searched into more carefully and more diligently," and only after that "we may proceed to open up and investigate the obscure passages."

[13]See Pamela Bright, "St. Augustine," in *Christian Theologies of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. Justin S. Holcomb (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 39.

[14]This is the same Augustine who claimed, "I would not have believed the gospel, but that the authority of the Catholic Church moved me thereunto'" (cited in Michael Horton, "Theologies of Scripture in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation: An Introduction" in Justin S. Holcomb, *Christian Theologies of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 89.

[15]Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.35.

then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought."[16] Now Augustine is not quite saying that any interpretation which leads us toward love of God and love of neighbor is the right interpretation, but he certainly thinks that any interpretation that does not lead in the direction of love of God and love of neighbor is a wrong interpretation, a worthless or wasted interpretation.[17] Here Augustine leads us to a fundamental choice that each of us must make in interpretation: which is most important in reading Scripture: getting it right, or becoming holy? Which is most important: ascertaining human authorial intent, or growing in love of God and neighbor? No one would say that these are *entirely* different…but they are different, and the one that we choose to prioritize will determine how we approach this text. In fact, Augustine believes that there could be numerous "correct" interpretations of the literal sense, which all fit within the boundaries of the Christian faith, and which all lead to deeper love of God and neighbor.[18] Augustine writes bluntly: "See how stupid it is, among so large a mass of entirely correct

[16]Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.36.40.

[17]Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.36.40. Augustine claims "If, on the other hand, a man draws a meaning from them that may be used for the building up of love, even though he does not happen upon the precise meaning which the author whom he reads intended to express in that place, his error is not pernicious, and he is wholly clear from the charge of deception." Clearly Augustine does not say any interpretation is as good as any other (one who "does not happen upon the precise meaning which the author…intended" is in "error"); yet neither is Augustine focused primarily on authorial intent. More important for him is that the outcome be the love of God and love of neighbor.

[18] This conviction that the plain sense is "inherently pluralistic" was common among the Fathers, with some "explicitly stat[ing] that God providentially ordered the words so that they could be taken in different ways" (see Lewis Ayres, "Patristic and Medieval Theologies of Scripture: An Introduction," in Justin Holcomb, ed., *Christian Theologies of Scripture* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 14.

interpretations which can be elicited from these words, rashly to assert that a particular one has the best claim to be Moses' view, and by destructive disputes to offend against charity itself, which is the principle of everything he said in the texts we are attempting to expound."[19] Since Moses gave the command to love God and love neighbor, to interpret him in such a way that "knowledge puffs up" must be wrong interpretation.

Third, if we are to appeal to Augustine's doctrine of the clarity of Scripture, we must also deal with Augustine's doctrine of the obscurity of Scripture. God's authorial intent, Augustine thinks, was to make Scripture obscure in some places. Augustine explains that difficulties in Scripture were "divinely arranged for the purpose of subduing pride by requiring hard effort, and of preventing a feeling of satisfaction in the intellect, which generally undervalues what is discovered without difficulty."[20] Put simply, God has made Scripture difficult for three reasons: 1) to force us to become disciplined in study, 2) to make us humble as we realize that we don't have all the answers, and 3) to slow us down in reading so that we can hear from God. Consequently, for Augustine, "The Holy Spirit has, with admirable wisdom and care for our welfare, so arranged the Holy Scriptures as by the plainer passages to satisfy our hunger, and by the more obscure to stimulate our appetite."[21] (Again, compare this to your fundamentalist bible college.) We see quite clearly that for Augustine the real point of Scriptural interpretation is transformation, not "intellectual correctness" in grasping human authorial intention.

[19] Augustine, *Confessions* XII 25.35, cited in Bright, "Saint Augustine," 48 (Augustine's full text accessible at https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1101.htm).

[20] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 2.6, cited in Allison, Historical Theology, 124.

[21] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 2.8, cited in Allison, Historical Theology, 124.

III.3 Luther

Of course, it is to Luther that everyone appeals for a doctrine of the clarity of Scripture. In the teeth of the Reformation, Luther insisted that Scripture was clear on its own, not requiring the interpretation of the Catholic Church to be understood. Luther's goal was to once again allow Scripture to critique the Church, as he uttered his famous statement, "Sacred scripture is its own interpreter."[22] Yet in Luther we do not find the Evangelical focus on epistemological correctness.[23] For Luther, "The purpose of the scriptures as a whole…is to witness to the Christ who is apprehended in faith.…'Whatever promotes Christ'…Luther insists, this is the Word of God to be sought and found in Holy Scripture."[24] Here we find something important: Luther is interested in the "words" of Scripture insofar as they point us toward the "Word" of Scripture (Christ)—the goal is not primarily human authorial intention, but the divine Word. In short, what clarity came to mean for Luther was a dialectic of Law and Gospel. To read Scripture clearly is to read both Law and Gospel in every passage. Law "is the sheer and inflexible commandment in which God announces what is required of us."[25] Gospel is the promise that points us toward Christ, and it

[22]Richard A. Muller and John Thompson, "The Significance of Precritical Exegesis," *in Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation,* ed. Richard A. Muller and John Thompson (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 340.

[23]Muller and Thompson, "The Significance of Precritical Exegesis," 340, notes that Luther scholars are quick to point that, for Luther, "[T]he meaning of the individual books of scripture is not ultimately determined by the intentions of their historical writers, or by their original historical contexts, but rather by the canon of scripture itself, and ultimately by God, the ultimate 'author' of scripture."

[24]Mickey L. Mattox, "Martin Luther," in *Christian Theologies of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction,* ed. Justin Holcomb, (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 97-98.

[25] Mattox, "Martin Luther," 101. (The first commandment stands for the Law everywhere in

also must be found in every single passage, since the whole focus of Scripture is to lead us to Christ. Scripture must be read with "a perpetual tension between Law and Gospel," since, "Both as Law and as Gospel, the Word of God speaks the truth about the human creature."[26] To see myself condemned in every passage and to see the promise and hope of a savior in every passage—that is the clarity of Scripture for Luther.[27] We must conclude, then, that Luther had a fundamentally different hermeneutic than that employed by Allison: Luther operated on the dialectic of Law and Gospel, while Allison (and Evangelicals like him) operate on the grammatical historical method. By changing the hermeneutic, we change the nature of clarity itself: For Luther, Scripture is clear for salvation; for Evangelicals like Allison and Grudem, Scripture is clear to cognitively grasp human authorial intent. Luther, then, cannot be used by Allison as a champion of the Evangelical version of Scriptural clarity.[28]

Scripture—I am to put God first—and this command always shows me my inability to live up to God's standard.)

[26] Mattox, "Martin Luther," 101.

[27] Michael Horton, "Theologies of Scripture in the Reformation and Counter-Reformation," 85, shows that the whole Lutheran and Reformed Traditions made this emphasis: "The Law commanded certain things to be done, the Gospel announced that certain things had been done, specifically, Christ's accomplishment of redemption. Neither the reformers nor their Protestant scholastic successors regarded scripture as a book of timeless truths, a body of mere propositions to be given assent.…The Lutheran and Reformed scholastics were united in reasserting Luther's point that a proper distinction between Law and Gospel was crucial to faithful proclamation."

[28] Here we notice several things. First, no one can read "correctly" without the work of the Holy Spirit in one's life. Luther is very clear on this—a biblical scholar may ascertain the intention of the human author but miss the entire point of Scripture. Second, it is clearly the Gospel, the Rule of Faith, which sets the bounds for Scriptural reading.

III.4 Kierkegaard

It was with Schleiermacher, the Father of Liberalism, that clarity began to be most forcefully identified with the intention of the human author. For Schleiermacher, "'authorial intent' constituted the truth of a text."[29] Schleiermacher was optimistic that we could come to understand the intention of the human author at times even better than that author understood himself.[30] Schleiermacher established the modernist hermeneutical way, and Evangelicals jumped on board quickly, identifying Scriptural "clarity" with the historical grammatical method through the hermeneutics of theologians like Charles Hodge.[31] It is in light of Schleiermacher and the historical critical tradition that we can understand Benjamin Jowett's optimistic (typically 19th Century) claim that "Scripture has one meaning—the meaning which it had in the mind of the Prophet or Evangelist who first uttered or wrote, to the hearers or readers who first received it."[32] In such a setting, clarity came to be identified precisely with "epistemological certainty" in grasping human authorial intent.

[29] B.H. McLean, *Biblical Interpretation and Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 37.

[30] As McLean, *Biblical Interpretation*, 42, puts it, "For Schleiermacher, the ultimate goal of the grammatical side of interpretation is to move past the outer form of a text - past its words, sentences, and paragraphs - to grasp its true inner origin, which lies in the originating spirit, or presence, of its author."

[31] See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology—Volume One* (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005), 33 (accessible at https://www.ccel.org/ccel/hodge/theology1.html), who states his theological method by claiming, "The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his store-house of facts."

[32] Benjamin Jowett, *On the Intepretation of Scripture: Essays and Reviews,* 7th ed. (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861), pp. 330-433, cited in David C. Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37 (1980), 27.

Yet it is a contemporary of both Schleiermacher and Hodge, Søren Kierkegaard, who recognizes the danger of the "epistemological certainty" approach more clearly than anyone of his time, and Kierkegaard is much closer to Augustine and Luther than he is to Evangelicals like Grudem and Allison. Kierkegaard begins by showing that the quest for epistemological correctness really is only a matter of "approximation knowledge."[33] In any difficult passage, where interpreters have disagreement, scholars put forward arguments about what they think the human author meant. And these proposals might be "more correct" or "less correct." But for Kierkegaard, all of this misses the point. There is an infinite qualitative difference between "approximation knowledge" and the requirements of Scripture. I am required to leave everything and follow Christ right now (that demand is absolute) whether or not I can provide the most accurate interpretation of a particular Scriptural passage.

As he thought about the state of Biblical scholarship, Kierkegaard became convinced that much of the quest for approximation knowledge was really an attempt by scholars to avoid the cost of discipleship.

Kierkegaard relentlessly mocks the historical critical scholars for creating a method of Bible study precisely in order to escape commitment to Christ:

> [T]ake ten dictionaries, twenty-five commentaries, then you can read [Scripture], just as calmly and coolly as you read newspaper

[33] Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Vol. 1, ed. and trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 30, notes that, "If all the angels united, they would still be able to produce only an approximation, because in historical knowledge an approximation is the only certainty-but also too little on which to build an eternal happiness."

> advertising….Look…there are several [textual] variations, and perhaps a new manuscript has just been found…and…'there are five interpreters with one opinion and seven with another and two with a strange opinion and three who are wavering or have no opinion,' and so in the end I can defer obedience until I understand the text with more certainty.[34]

The quest for epistemological correctness often draws readers away from obeying the text.[35] Of course we would not accuse Grudem or Allison of trying to escape the requirements of the Bible, but on Kierkegaard's and Augustine's way of saying it, these Evangelicals have confused the issue, as they have associated clarity more with epistemological correctness than with transformation of the reader. Of course Allison would protest. The "key reason for my affirmation of the clarity of Scripture," he writes, "is that the biblical writings 'are characterized by the presumption of continued intelligibility even as those writings travel far from their original audience."[36] The Bible, for Allison, is a uniquely clear book that keeps being uniquely clear after 2000 years. But "continued intelligibility" across the historical gap simply misses the point. Is Scripture clearer than any other book (the Qur'an, the Vedas, Shakespeare or Homer)? And if so, how is it clearer than any other book? If epistemological correctness is the criterion of clarity, then it is unlikely that one could ever find

[34] Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, ed. and trans. Howard and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 32.

[35] Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, 26, speculates that, "One could almost be tempted to assume that this is craftiness, that we really do not want to see ourselves in that mirror and therefore we have concocted all this that threatens to make the mirror impossible, all this that we then honor with the laudatory name of scholarly and profound and serious research and pondering."

[36] Allison, *Historical Theology*, 140.

any more "clarity" in the Bible than in any other ancient book: all ancient books require background specialists to clarify them, and all depend on approximation knowledge in ascertaining the intent of the human author.

Yet if clarity refers to this book's ability to invite and to effect a new life, then the Christian tradition bears witness that the Bible is uniquely clear. It seems that Scripture is clearer than any other book in at least the following ways: First, the Holy Spirit has promised to use just this text to convict, transform, and sanctify readers. Second, the Church has set doctrinal boundaries around the text so the community of faith can approach the text in faith. Third, the Church continually provides embodied interpretation of Scripture's meaning that guides readers to love of God and neighbor. These premises lead us toward the traditional doctrine of clarity.

IV. Retrieving the Traditional Doctrine of Clarity: Figural Reading

As Evangelicals have charted their own course in a modern age dominated by historical critical method, they have often accepted uncritically Schleiermacher and Jowett's modernist premise that human authorial intent simply is the meaning of Scripture, and therefore have assumed that the doctrine of clarity is directly tied to epistemological correctness as the grasping of human authorial intent. What is needed at this point is an alternative strategy for reading Scripture which respects the Church's traditional emphasis on the "plain" reading of Scriptural texts, yet which acknowledges that Scripture's meaning (and therefore Scripture's clarity) is located more in God's saving work

than in human authorial intent. This section, then, provides a brief proposal to Evangelicals about how they might read Scripture "plainly" or "literally" while nonetheless refraining from locating meaning primarily or exclusively in human authorial intent, thereby reducing the doctrine of clarity to "epistemological correctness." We will follow Hans Frei's description of "figural reading" as the process of reading Scripture "literally" in a way that places primary emphasis on the saving work of the divine Author rather than the propositions of the human author. This proposal will enable us to envision how Scriptural "clarity" might be conceived without being tied too closely to "epistemological correctness" in grasping human authorial intent.

For Hans Frei, figural reading is the kind of "plain" reading that has always been at the center of Christian use of Scripture. Frei shows that Scripture has traditionally been read as one book "by means of 'typology' or 'figuration,' so that not only 'Old Testament' narrative but its legal texts and its prophetic as well as wisdom literature are taken to point beyond themselves to their 'fulfillment' in the 'New Testament.'"[37] Frei argues that the Church has traditionally placed the Gospel narratives at the center of their Scriptural reading, and then extended the ascriptive story of Jesus to the whole of Scripture so that the Bible is read as one book. Put simply, the Church has always read Scripture as one unified story leading to Jesus. To affirm in faith that both Old Testament and New Testament constitute one unified story leading to Christ leads to several important implications about Scriptural clarity.

[37] Hans Frei, "The 'Literal Reading' of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does it Stretch or will it Break?" in Hans Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, ed. George Hunsinger and William C. Placher, 117-152 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 120.

First, in figural reading Scripture is read "plainly" when it is read with some schema such as "letter and spirit," or "promise and fulfillment" which goes beyond the intention of the human authors.[38] Such a schema is necessary to read the whole Scripture as one unified story, since Christian readings of the Old Testament will differ from Jewish readings of their Hebrew Scriptures precisely because Christians read the "Old" Testament in light of the "New" Testament. Consequently, the Old Testament becomes, for Christians, a "mere letter" if it is not read in such a way that it leads toward Christ, and it is read "spiritually" (in traditional Christian language) as it is read in light of its fulfillment in Christ. Such reading always goes beyond human authorial intent to a recognition of "meaning" in the greater canonical whole. (Notice here that Christian figural reading has no intention of dismissing human authorial intent—authorial intent still functions as a useful, and at times nearly indispensable, reading strategy as it supplies parameters for determining what a text meant in its original context. Yet Christian figural reading shows that "epistemological correctness" in grasping human authorial intent cannot be where meaning ultimately resides in the Scriptural text, and therefore cannot be where the doctrine of "clarity" is located either.)

Second, in figural reading Scripture is read "plainly" when it is read according to the Rule of Faith, which establishes the boundaries for acceptable Scriptural reading. As Frei sees it, the Rule of Faith "governed the Gospels' use in the church [and] asserted the primacy of their literal sense."[39] For Frei, the

[38] Frei, "The 'Literal Reading,'" 122.

[39] Frei, "The 'Literal Reading,'" 121.

Church has set these guidelines so as to safeguard the "ascriptive identity" (the life, death, resurrection, ascension) of Jesus. Frei concludes that "it was largely by reason of this centrality of the story of Jesus that the Christian interpretive tradition in the West gradually assigned clear primacy to the literal sense in the reading of Scripture, not to be contradicted by other legitimate senses—tropological, allegorical, and anagogical."[40] The important point for us is that Scriptural "clarity" functions only within the context of the Church, as the Church's Rule of Faith sets boundaries for Scriptural interpretation so that the Scriptures may be read "clearly" as a unified witness to the saving reality of Christ. It is the Rule of Faith that allows Scripture's "clarity" to emerge in the context of the Church.

Third, in figural reading Scripture is read "plainly" when divine authorial intent is given priority over human authorial intent. It is this point that makes sense of Frei's claim above that there are "other legitimate senses" of Scripture beyond the "literal," even if those senses are always dependent on the primacy of the literal sense. Christians read Scripture as one unified story because they assume that God has providentially ordered the events of salvation history (creation, covenants, prophets, Christ) to reveal God's saving action in the world. Christians, then, see Old Testament events and characters as "types" which have fuller meaning in light of Christ (this recognition of deeper levels of meaning in historical events and characters is what the Fathers called "allegory"—reading in light of Christ).[41] Further, Christians

[40] Frei, "The 'Literal Reading,'" 121.

[41]See Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980), Chapter 1, "Preface to Bultmann.

read Scripture as one unified story because they understand it to be their story: this God who has so arranged the providential events of history leading to Jesus Christ has also created the Church as a continuation of God's saving plan. This means that the God of Scripture is actively present in the reading of Scripture, calling believers to greater union with Christ as they daily walk with Him (this is what the Fathers called "tropology"—the moral sense of Scripture).[42] Further still, Christians read Scripture as one unified story because they read in the hope and expectation that the same Jesus Christ will return to consummate history (this is what the Fathers called "anagogy"—reading in light of the hope of Christ's return).[43] Such "spiritual senses" (as they are often called), are always clearly dependent on the "plain" reading of Scripture as one unified book (the "literal" sense), yet we could say that they bring out the full meaning or the full implications of this unified story for the life of the Christian today.[44] These "spiritual" dimensions of Scriptural reading become possible (and necessary) as Christians see meaning residing ultimately in the intensions of the divine Author, and as they recognize that the divine Author is living and active and working to transform them as they read this text. The doctrine of Scriptural clarity, on this account, is tied more to the saving work of the divine Author than to "epistemological correctness" in grasping the intention of the human author.

Again, the goal in this section is not to confuse "method" with the doctrine of "clarity;" rather, it is to show how traditional

[42]See Henri de Lubac, "Mystical Tropology," in *Medieval Exegesis*, *Vol. 2: The Four Senses of Scripture,* trans. E. M. Macierowski (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans), 2000, 127-78.

[43]See de Lubac, "Anagogy and Eschatology," in *Medieval Exegesis*, Vol. 2, 179-226.4

[44] This fuller meaning clearly goes beyond what was understood by the human author.

Christianity, through figural reading, has consistently emphasized the "plain reading" of Scripture while articulating the doctrine of clarity in terms of God's saving work rather than in terms of the "epistemological correctness" of grasping human authorial intent. It is precisely here where Evangelicals such as Grudem and Allison move away from the traditional doctrine of clarity, and so it is here that the doctrine must be retrieved.

V. Conclusions

I conclude, then, that the Evangelical assumption that the doctrine of "clarity" fits with the historical grammatical method alone is a Modernist (Liberal and Evangelical) invention: it reveals a loss of the Church's traditional use of Scripture. While the doctrine of clarity has traditionally been located "in front of the text" (in the encounter between God and reader leading to transformation), some in the modern age have hidden the doctrine of clarity "behind the text" (in the ability to excavate with epistemological correctness the intention of the human author), and we should put the doctrine back "in front of the text" where God's saving work occurs.

What would this refocusing of the doctrine get us? First, refocusing the doctrine would promote a more "generous orthodoxy."[45] If Christians could admit that there could be multiple adequate literal interpretations of a passage, all capable of leading believers on the path of discipleship, then diversity of interpretation could, at times, be considered more a joy to be celebrated than a concern to be overcome. Such a recognition would produce more humility and charity toward other believers,

[45] The phrase is from Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, 208.

and in many cases would open greater pathways toward cooperation with other churches. As Christians recognize that the Church has established a Rule of Faith, they would read expectantly within that Rule, believing that this text's Author is guiding us toward love of God and neighbor. Second, refocusing the doctrine would enable a greater commitment to "walking" as the means to "knowing." With Augustine, we could say that every text must lead me to love of God and love of neighbor. With Luther, we could say that every text must give me the requirements of Law and the promise of Grace so that I will cling to Christ. With Kierkegaard, we could say that every text must be a gracious invitation to costly Christian discipleship. And with this shift in emphasis from epistemological correctness in ascertaining the human author to responding to an invitation of the Triune God, believers would recognize that Scripture becomes "clear" as it is lived out in joyful embrace of Scripture's Author.

Salvation as Theosis: A Heritage of Traditional Christian Theology

by **SADANAND KUMAR**

Abstract: *The understanding of God's ultimate purpose for human salvation was articulated throughout the early Christian Tradition as theosis or deification. This concept captures everything God desires for humanity and everything Christ desires to achieve in human beings. Nevertheless, theosis has become a concept of scrutiny and misinterpretation in the West and East, particularly in modern Evangelical Christian theology, due to the emphasis on the concept of justification by faith. Many contemporary Christians in these traditions associate theosis primarily with the Eastern Orthodox Tradition. This article contends that, although this line of thought is widespread, this association is a modern construct in the 19th and early 20th centuries through narratives established by German scholars such as Adolf von Harnack, F. C. Baur, and Albrecht Ritsch. In response to this German Protestant narrative, many Eastern Orthodox theologians have insisted on theosis as a uniquely "Eastern" understanding of salvation, historically preserved within their tradition in contrast to Western Christianity. The article suggests that theosis extends beyond Eastern Orthodox Tradition, having roots in both Greek and Latin churches, and provides a more comprehensive understanding of salvation that remains valuable today.*

Keywords: Salvation, Theosis, Deification, Participation, Image of God, Historical Theology, Tradition, Christian Doctrine, Eastern Orthodox, Evangelical Theology, Western Christianity, Greek and Latin Tradition, Adolf von Harnack, Early Christianity, Hellenistic philosophy.

I. Theosis: Defining the Concept

Theosis is a transliteration of the Greek word, from the root *theos* (θεός), meaning "god." Therefore, theosis means "becoming a god," "being made a god" or "being made like God." The closest English equivalent of theosis is "deification." The term "deification" comes from the Latin word *deificatio*, derived from the verb *deificare*, combining deus, meaning "god," and *facere*, meaning "to make" or "to create." Therefore, deification means "to make divine" or "to become god (like God)." The terms theosis and deification are the preferred choices. Other parallel terms that describe this concept include apotheosis[1] in Greek, and deification, divinization, participation, or union in English. There is diversity in defining this concept of salvation, as different authors used various terms to communicate the idea of theosis or deification.[2] Early Christian theologians consistently used the term in many ways in their preaching, teaching, and writings, but no one clearly and fully defined the doctrine of deification until Pseudo-Dionysius. While the term, theosis, was coined by Gregory of Nazianzus, an Archbishop of Constantinople, in the fourth century,[3] it was Pseudo-Dionysius who formulated the first theological definition of theosis in the 6th century: "Divinization consists of being as much as possible like and in union with God."[4] In fact, a cluster of

[1]Apotheosis has much the same meaning as theosis; Robert V. Rakestraw, "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40.2 (1997): 260.

[2]Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Eugene, Oregon): Pickwick Publications, 2006), 4–6. See also Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University. Press, 2006), 333–34. Sebastian Mateiescu and Florin George Călian, eds., Review of Ecumenical Studies, The Institute for Ecumenical Research, vol. 11 (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, 2019), 440. Benjamin Drewery, "Deification," in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Gordon Rupp*, ed. Peter Brooks (London: SCM, 1975), 38.

[3]Finlan and Kharlamov, Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology, 1.

[4]Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy 1.3; Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works. The Classics of*

Greek words were used in this context.[5] Sometimes it is translated as "divinization" while other times it is phrased as "sanctification" or "ethical perfection."[6] Some of the church fathers referred to this as the process of restoration of believers into the likeness of God.[7] Rakestraw observes that the primary definition of theosis was the restoration and reintegration of the Imago Dei or likeness of God, which was seriously distorted by the fall.[8] Therefore, the concept involves the process of being divinized or transformed into the image and likeness of God, often within the context of religious or theological discourse.

The term "theosis or deification"[9] is a profound concept, awe-inspiring in its implications. It means "to be made into a god," and it can also mean "to become God"- a notion that may seem unorthodox,[10] acquiring a specious sound in many ears, and perhaps raising significant theological concerns, particularly when it appears to align with ideas that run contrary to scriptural teachings.[11] Over

Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist, 1987), 198.

[5]There are five groups of Greek words that explicitly point to making into a god or deifying: 1) αποθεοω/ αποθειοω – αποθεωσις; 2) Θεοποιεω – θεοποιια – θεοποιησις – θεοποιος; 3) εκθεοω/εκθειοω – εκθεωσις – εκθεοτικος; 4) θεοω – θεωσις;[5] 5) αποθειαζω – εκθειαζω.

[6]Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 6. See also Daniel B. Clendenin, "Partakers of Divinity: The Orthodox Doctrine of Theosis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 3 (September 1994): 374.

[7]Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 1.

[8]Rakestraw, "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis," 261.

[9]For this article, the terms "theosis""deification," and "divinization" are treated as synonyms, although theosis is preferred.

[10]Michael Casey, *Fully Human, Fully Divine: An Interactive Christology,* 1. ed (Liguori, MO: Liguori/ Triumph Publication, 2004), 2.

[11]Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and James Innell Packer, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology*, Nachdr., The Master Reference Collection (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1988); Rowan Williams, "Deificatio"n in *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, Gordon S. Wakefield, ed., 3ed. (London: SCM

time, the concept of deification has not only become a significant point of reference but also a subject of theological contention. For many individuals, the words "deification" and "divinization" may evoke images of ancient Greek philosophical systems[12] such as Platonism,[13] Stoicism,[14] Neoplatonism,[15] and Romanism,[16] with their notions of *henosis* and *theurgy*, which speak of an undifferentiated union with Spirit/God.[17] In these contexts, theosis implies either becoming a deity or being absorbed by God, akin to a drop of rain losing its individuality when it melds with the sea. Such interpretations suggest that to be deified is to cease being human altogether. In this interpretative tradition, "The man is changed, no longer himself

Press, 1986), 106–8.

[12]Norman Russell, "The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition," ed. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth, *Oxford Early Christian Studie*s (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 10; Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 26-27; Plato, The Collected Dialogues of Plato: Including the Letters, ed. Edith Hamilton, 16. print, Bollingen Series 71 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 881.

[13]Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions,* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 26-27. Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato: Including the Letter*s, 881.

[14]*International East-West Symposium of New Testament Scholars*, The Holy Spirit and the Church According to the New Testament: Sixth International East-West Symposium of New Testament Scholars, Belgrade, August 25 to 31, 2013, ed. Predrag Dragutinović et al., Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 354 (International East-West Symposium of New Testament Scholars, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 187–220.

[15]A.H. Armstrong, trans., *Plotinus, Ennead: The Intent of Man Is Not Only to Be without Sin but to Be Good,* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 26.

[16]Ben C Blackwell, *Christosis: Engaging Paul's Soteriology with His Patristic Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2016), 104. See, C. Suetonius Tranquillus, *Life of Vespasian*, 23. 4; (Loeb Classical Library), 1994.

[17]Suetonius, *Lives of the Twelve Caesars: An English Translation*, Augmented with the Biographies of Contemporary Statesmen, Orators, Poets, and Other Associates, ed. Alexander Thomson and J. Eugene Reed (Philadelphia: Gebbie & Co, 1889), in *Life of Vespasian*, 23. 4.

nor self-belonging; he is merged with the Supreme, sunken into it, one with it: center coincides with the center."[18] Consequently, in the modern era, the concept of deification has not always been warmly received by many Christians. Instead, it has been met with suspicion, as it appears to echo ancient philosophical concepts and practices. Some view theosis as an import from pagan beliefs that blurs the critical distinction between the Creator and his creation, potentially leading individuals into unorthodox, if not outright heretical beliefs.[19] Therefore, it is crucial to clarify that although the term and concept are similar in both Platonic and Christian contexts, a closer examination reveals that the meaning of that term and word are significantly different in Traditional Christian theology when they explain the concept of salvation as theosis.[20] As observed above, the chief aim of the Greek concept of ascent to the divine was to possess πνεῦμα (soul), the ultimate One[21] - a principle that infuses the entire cosmos and holds it together.[22] Kenney describes the higher part of the Plotinian soul as "the unitive or erotic soul," emphasizing the important role eros plays in guiding the psyche/ soul back to the World Soul. This longing, expressed through art,

[18]Plotinus, *The Enneads* 6. 9, 10-11, trans. Arthur Hilary Armstrong, Reprinted, The Loeb Classical Library, 7 vols., (London: Heinemann: Loeb Classical Library, 1988), 440–45, 68.

[19]John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2013), 2129; Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 871. Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 37; Millard J Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 2013), 904.

[20]John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, eds., *Mystical Doctrines of Deification: Case Studies in the Christian Tradition, Contemporary Theological Explorations in Mysticism* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 152–55. Russell, The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition, 2006, 333–34.

[21]*International East-West Symposium of New Testament Scholars, The Holy Spirit and the Church According to the New Testament,* 187–220.

[22] Blackwell, *Christosis*, 104.

culture, beauty, and love, is central to the soul's journey-the return of "the alone to the Alone."[23] Contemplation/theoria or meditation is how one seeks to return the soul so that it can be present to its true origins in the One.[24] While it is evident that the early Christian tradition uses the same concept to explain the concept to explain salvation as theosis, nevertheless they present it with a distinctively new meaning.[25]

In the first place, the early Christian theologians fundamentally understood the promise of salvation as theosis, a process rooted in the scriptures Gen 1:26-27; 3:5; Ps 82:6; John 10:34-35; 1 Pet 1:4; 1 John 3:1-2.[26] According to Pelikan, the promise is based on two central passages: Ps 82:6, "I say, You are gods," which Jesus quoted in John 10:34-35, and the "exceedingly great promise" in 2 Peter 1:4 that believers would become "partakers of the divine nature"[27] Theosis understands the God's purpose in creating the world, specifically humanity, to be the communication of God's glory outside of himself so that his creation might reflect that glory back to him.[28] Additionally, theosis involves the renewal

[23]John Peter Kenney, *Contemplation and Classical Christianity: A Study in Augustine,* First edition, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23.

[24]Plotinus, Plotinus: *The Enneads*, 6. 9. 7-8, trans. Arthur Hilary Armstrong, Reprinted, 07 vols., The Loeb Classical Library 443 (London: Heinemann: Loeb Classical Library, 1988), 468.

[25]See Jaroslav Jonas Pelikan, *Christianity and the Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism:* Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen, 1992-1993 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

[26]Timothy Ware, *Orthodox Church - An Introduction to Eastern Christianity.* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1963), 236.

[27]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine, Vol. 2: The Spirit of Christendom (700-1700),* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 10.

[28]Two passages of Scripture are pertinent here: Hab 2:14 and 1 Cor 15:28. These passages seem to indicate that the ultimate end of the world is the union of the divine and the created.

of the image of God in humanity through "the transformation of believers into the likeness of God."[29] Renewal, because Genesis informs that humanity was created in the image of God. "Then God said, "Let Us make mankind in Our image, according to Our likeness; … So, 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."[30] God's intention in creation was to be united to it, which he was going to accomplish, by his sovereign design, through creating humanity to image him.[31] Humanity was created perfect, not in finality but in perfect potentiality. Humanity did not possess its ultimate end, union with God, but rather was called to it. Thus "the perfection of our first nature lay above all in this capacity to … be united more and more with the fullness of the Godhead."[32] As a result of this unrealized capacity, it can be said that "man at his first creation was innocent and capable of spiritual development."[33] Hence, according to the Eastern Church, humanity's perfection was something it was called to realize fully. The image is "a gift within man but at the same time a goal set before him, a possession but also a destiny."[34]

[29]Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology,* 1.

[30]Charles Caldwell Ryrie, ed., *Ryrie Study Bible: New American Standard Bible,* 1995 Update, Expanded (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995).

[31]Andrew Louth, "The Place of Theosis in Orthodox Theology," in Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 36.

[32]Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 126.

[33]Kallistos, Ware, *The Orthodox Way,* Rev. ed (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 52.

[34] Panayiotis Nellas and Norman Russell, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 37.

Second, when patristic theologians taught the doctrine of deification, where believers could partake in the divine nature or be divinized as "god," they used various terminologies depending on different contexts. Terms like ἀποθέωσις, ἐκθειάζω, θεωποιηθώμεν, θεοποιέω, θέωσις,[35] were employed to convey this idea. They also utilized subject-verb expressions such as θεος ειμι "to be god", τυκτος θεος "created god" and θεος γιγνομαι "to become god", extensively. These expressions emphasized that the deified human person never ceases to be human, contrasting with pagan philosophy.[36]

Third, theosis does not mean that humans can become one in essence with God. It was never the intention of Christian theologians to teach that believers transform into the same kind of being as the one true God.[37] To become God in essence is both impossible and heretical according to Christian tradition. The mystical union and participation between God and humanity is a true one; yet in this union, Creator and creature do not fuse into a single being as taught by pagan religions, where humanity is said to be "swallowed up" in the deity.[38] The Orthodox Tradition rejects any notion of pantheism, as Justin Martyr puts it, "That which participates in anything is distinct from that in which it participates."[39]

[35]Sebastian Mateiescu and Florin George Călian, eds., *Review of Ecumenical Studies, The Institute for Ecumenical Research,* vol. 11 (Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, 2019), 440; Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition,* 333–34. Benjamin Drewery, "Deification," in *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp,* ed. Peter Brooks (London: SCM, 1975) 38.

[36]Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 2006, 333–34

[37]Michael Scott Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ*, 1st ed (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 269.

[38]Ware, *Orthodox Church - An Introduction to Eastern Christianity.*, 236.

[39]Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition,* 113.

Fourth, the essential aspect of salvation as theosis is "the restoration of the image of God to man."[40] Augustine explains that what makes humans unique and distinct from non-rational animate beings is that they are made in God's image.[41] Unlike Platonism, Augustine describes theosis as achieved through the work of the triune God, with Christ as the key mediator and educator of the soul. For him, Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life." He writes, "The Lord himself heals the eyes of our hearts to enable us to see what he shows us."[42] Thus, intimacy with the person of Christ leads to the divinization of the soul-not through human efforts or merits but solely through the love and grace of God, freely given. Augustin states, "The Son of God was made a sharer in our mortal nature so that mortals might become sharers in his Godhead"[43] Similarly, Irenaeus articulates, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through his transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."[44] Athanasius

[40]Angelo Di Berardino and Istituto Patristico Augustinianum, eds., *Patrology: The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature, from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon,* 7. print, vol. 4 (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1994), 454.

[41]Philip Schaff, ed., *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: On the Holy Trinity:* 1819th–1893rd ed., vol. 3, 1 (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1893), 14.25. See, B. McGinn, "Humans as Imago Dei: Mystical Anthropology Then and Now," in: P.M. Tyler and E. Howells (eds.), *Sources of Transformation: Revitalizing Christian Spirituality,* (London: Continuum, 2010); *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism,* vol. 1, The Foundations of Mysticism, (London: SCM, 1991), 243-44.

[42]Aurelius Augustinus, *Confessions. 2: Commentary on Books 1 - 7,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.18.24

[43]Augustinus, *Confessions.* 2: Commentary on Books 1-7, 1. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 435; Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 133.

[44]"Irenaeus, Against Heresies 5, Preface," in *Anti Nicaean Fathers 1,* Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 526.

writes in On the Incarnation of the Word, "For he (Christ) was made man that so that he might us sons of God."[45] When Christ took on flesh, he made it possible for humanity to be unified with God, fulfilling what Adam could not. Christ made theosis possible for humanity through his death and resurrection. As 1 Cor 15:20-23 teaches, Christ's resurrection makes our resurrection possible, transforming our mortality to immortality and our corruptibility to incorruptibility. This contrasts with the Platonic approach, where personal effort and contemplation (theoria) are seen as the means to reach the Nous/Divine or the One.

II. Theosis: A Modern Perception of the Concept as Uniquely Eastern

Numerous modern scholars associate theosis or deification primarily with Eastern Orthodox theology. They argue that Greek patristic figures and Eastern Orthodox theologians place a greater emphasis on deification compared to their Western counterparts. This perspective is reflected in the views of Finlan and Kharlamov, who asserts:

> The Eastern Orthodox Church has retained theosis as a concept for theological reflection, while the Western churches-separated by time, language, and philosophy from the Greek thinkers of the early church-have dropped it. In fact, theosis simply does not exist for most contemporary Western theologians.[46]

[45]Athanasius, *De incarnatione* 54,3, cf. Contra Arianos 1.39; Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. IV,* Second Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 65.

[46]Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds., *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), 8.

According to this line of thought, the true source theosis is believed to lie in the teachings of Greek patristic figures, and whether someone embraces this doctrine depends on their connection to these historical figures. In the Western Christian context, the situation is portrayed as dire. Finlan and Kharlamov lament, "The near disappearance in Western Christendom of an idea that was widely accepted for over a thousand years . . . is a serious loss for Christian thought and hope."[47] This article will demonstrate that while this perception of deification is widespread, the concept came to be perceived as a dividing factor in the modern era. Specifically, it was through the narrative constructed by German scholars in the 19th and early 20th centuries that theosis came to be viewed as a uniquely Eastern concept.[48]

II.1. German Liberal Theologian's Representation of the Concept

Adolf Von Harnack, one the most prominent historians within the protestant tradition of his time and a student of Baur and Ritschl, further developed the narrative that the concept of theosis or deification is the prime exemplification of how Hellenistic influences corrupted the essence of the gospel.[49] In his monumental work, History of Dogma, Harnack asserts that deification is, in truth, a Platonic idea that early figures such as

[47]Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 8.

[48]Russell, The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition, 3; John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, eds., *Mystical Doctrines of Deification: Case Studies in the Christian Tradition, 2;* Gavrilyuk, 'The Retrieval of Deification, 47-59; Mosser, 'An Exotic Flower? 38-56.

[49]Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition, 3;* Keating, Deification and Grace, 29; Arblaster and Faesen, *Mystical Doctrines of Deification,* 2 Gavrilyuk, 'The Retrieval of Deification', 1; and Mosser, 'An Exotic Flower?', 41.

Irenaeus and Hippolytus adapted into service for the church.[50] Harnack discusses the theological developments of the 2nd century and equates the meaning of theosis in the Christian tradition with that of paganism. He contends that during this period, Irenaeus and Hippolytus significantly reshaped the concept of redemption as deification, which did not include atonement.[51] Instead of framing redemption in terms of atonement for sin, as many Christians do today, they redefined it as theosis or deification.

Harnack believed that the gospel's original message, in its simplest form, revolved around three key principles: "the kingdom of God and its coming; God the Father and the infinite value of the human soul, and the higher righteousness and the commandment of love."[52] He emphasized the notion of God as the loving Father of all humanity and the spiritual brotherhood of all. This message was straightforward and emphasized the intimate relationship between God and humanity. Deification, however, represented a fundamental swerve from this message:

> When the Christian religion was represented as the belief in the incarnation of God and as the sure hope of the deification of man, a speculation that had originally never got beyond the fringe of religious knowledge was made the central point of the system and the simple content of the Gospel was obscured.[53]

[50]Harnack, *History of Dogma,* 2:10–11.

[51]Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma,* trans. James Millar, vol. 3 (London: Williams & Norgate, 1897), 165.

[52]Adolf von Harnack and Thomas Bailey Saunders, *What Is Christianity? Sixteen Lectures Delivered in the University of Berlin during the Winter Term 1899-1900* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1900), 150–51.

[53]Harnack, 2:318.

Harnack argues that by making the belief in the incarnation and the concept of human deification the central focus of Christianity, the simpler and more straightforward teachings of Jesus were overshadowed. The core message of love, compassion, and the relationship with God, as taught by Jesus, was obscured by the complex and speculative theological ideas.[54] In his book *What is Christianity?*, Harnack further insists that the Christian understanding of redemption was distorted by the Hellenistic context in which it took root.[55] To Harnack, the concept of deification was symptomatic of a broader issue-Hellenization. He believed this process distorted and veiled the straightforward biblical message by introducing Greek metaphysical influences. Consequently, Harnack's perspective significantly reverberated through generations of scholars, leading many to regard deification as a Greek notion. He presented it as a prime example of how Greek philosophy allegedly tainted Eastern Christianity.[56] By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the concept of deification (theosis or theopoiesis) came to symbolize, in the eyes of Harnack[57] and many of his contemporaries,[58] everything they perceived as exotic and misguided within Eastern Orthodox theology.

[54]Harnack, *History of Dogma* 2:318; Panayotis Bratsiotis, "The Greek Patristic Doctrine of Deification of Man," *Theologia* 42/ 1–4 (1971): 37 (in Greek); Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature, 3*. Cf. also Gavrilyuk, 'The Retrieval of Deification, 647.

[55]Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* 232.

[56]Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* 150–51; Ben Drewery, `Deification', Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Gordon Rupp (ed. Peter Brooks; London: SCM, 1975), 35-62. Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 3: 165.

[57]Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* 239, 41, 63.

[58]William Ralph Inge, *Christian Mysticism* (London: Longman Press, 1993), 356; Cf. Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology,* 7; Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1978), 442; Cf. also Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature, 3;* Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 7.

II. 2. Eastern Orthodox Theologians' Response to the Concept

Harnack's portrayal of the narrative concerning theosis or deification became a quintessential example of how Hellenistic influences allegedly corrupted the simple essence of the Christian gospel. According to this view, the decline in the gospel's purity was primarily caused by early Greek Christians incorporating the doctrine of deification from pagan sources.[59] This interpretation of the doctrine of theosis became a widely accepted viewpoint in Protestant circles. However, Orthodox Christians[60] who had emigrated to the West following the Russian Revolution, encountered this narrative, albeit with significant modifications. Orthodox theologians embraced the idea that theosis characterizes Eastern Christianity.

For them, however, it was not a mark of Greek philosophical influence, as German Liberal Scholars presented but rather the hallmark of Eastern Orthodox Christian achievement, uniquely preserved within their tradition.[61] From the Orthodox perspective, Western Christians were the ones who were considered apostates-those who had abandoned the profound essence of salvation as

[59]Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition, 3*. Jared Ortiz, ed., *With All the Fullness of God: Deification in Christian Tradition* (Lanham Boulder New York London: Lexington Books, 2021), 1–2. See also Keating, Deification and Grace, 29; Gavrilyuk, 'The Retrieval of Deification', 1; and Mosser, 'An Exotic Flower?', 41.

[60]McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Patristic Theology,* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 252–54; John of Damascus, An Exposition of Orthodox Faith in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, S.2, Vol.9, trans., E. W. Watson and L. Pullan, (New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1899),3.1-28; Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature,* 76.

[61]Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 146–67.

deification,[62] which incorporated the divine purposes in both creation and redemption.[63] In the late 19th century, at the provocation of German Liberal Protestant theologians and historians of doctrine, polemics surrounding the concept of salvation as theosis emerged, making a significant point of contention between Eastern and Western Christianity. Faced with such criticism, Orthodox theologians used the doctrine of deification both as a polemic against Western narratives and as an apologetic defense of their tradition.[64] Consequently, theosis has become a defining feature for Eastern Orthodox theologians, who assert that the doctrine of deification represents a core element in their distinctive construal of salvation. This stands in sharp contrast to what they perceive as the deficient redemption theories formulated by Western theologians during the second millennium.[65]

Myrrha Lot-Borodine was a pioneer who introduced the concept of deification as a central doctrine in Eastern Orthodox Tradition to Western readers in the early 20th century.[66] In a series of articles, she emphasized the distinction between Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Christianity, aligning her analysis with

[62]Finlan and Kharlamov, *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 8.

[63]Georgios I. Mantzaridēs, *The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition, Contemporary Greek Theologians, no. 2* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), 12; Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature,* 75.

[64]Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature,* 77.

[65]Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God,* ed. John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 99–100; Robert G. Stephanopoulos, "The Doctrine of Theosis," in *The New Man: an Orthodox and Reformed Dialogue* (New Brunswick, NJ: Agora Books, 1973), 149-161; Daniel B. Clendenin, "Partakers of Divinity: The Orthodox Doctrine of Theosis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37/3 (September, 1994), 365-379.

[66]Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition,* 4.

the framework previously outlined by Ritschl and Harnack.[67] In her first article, Lot-Borodine referenced Harnack's description of deification as a 'physico-pharmacological'[68] process and argued that the Western tradition, shaped by Augustine, held a fundamentally different perspective of salvation than Orthodoxy.[69] While Western Christianity concentrated on reconciliation and forgiveness of sins, the East consistently emphasized participation in the divine life.[70] Beginning with Lot-Borodine's work, Orthodox figures initiated an anti-Western polemic centered around deification, portraying it as a positive and distinctive feature of Eastern Orthodoxy in contrast to the critique of their German Liberal counterparts.

Vladimir Lossky was one of the key contributors to the Orthodox revival in self-understanding and confidence during the 20th century.[71] In 1944, he published *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, in which he critiqued numerous passages in Harnack's work as an example of a common tendency among Protestant historians, "the mystics are set up against the theologians."[72] In a corrective stance, Lossky argued that the Eastern perspective doesn't present a conflict between mysticism and theology. Instead, he depicted the mystical union expressed by deification as the central focus of early

[67]Heleen E. Zrgdrager, trans., "A Practice of Love: Myrrha Lot-Borodine (1882-1954) and the Modern Revival of the Doctrine of Deification," *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 64 (3-4), 2012, 287–307.

[68]The term physico-pharmacologicala- Harnack used this to show the doctrine of deification, a concept developed by early Christianity from pagan philosophy which teaches an activity of absorption or elimination of the human physical body to the divine in salvation.

[69]Zrgdrager, "A Practice of Love," 287-307.

[70]Zrgdrager, "A Practice of Love," 287-307.

[71]Papanikolaou, A., *Being with God: Trinity, Apophaticism, and Divine-Human Communion,* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 1; Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature*,75.

[72]Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, N.Y: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 8.

defenders of orthodoxy from the 4th to 7th centuries.[73] Lossky pursued a vigorous polemic against the West as he expounded on and defended the theology of the East. Critiquing the Western soteriological model, championed by figures like Ritschl and Harnack, he elevates deification to a newfound prominence within Orthodox theology, presenting it as the central theological concern driving the major doctrinal controversies of the patristic era.[74] He regards the doctrine of theosis as the crowning achievement of Byzantine theology[75] and perceives deification as a mystical union with God, attainable through participation in his uncreated energies. By doing so, Lossky distinguished the 'dynamic' theology of the East from the 'static' theology of the West.[76] According to his perspective, the West has consistently failed to capture the realistic and ontological relationship between God and humanity, while the East has faithfully preserved the essential doctrine of unity with Christ and the attainment of deification. The unique focus on theosis within Eastern Orthodoxy has significantly influenced subsequent generations of scholars.[77]

It has been used to construct polemical distinctions between Eastern and Western theological traditions, reflecting a propagation of the modern Orthodox reflection that emphasizes the uniqueness of theosis within their theological framework.[78]

[73]Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church,* 10.

[74]Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God,* 97–98; *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 134, 215.

[75]Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God,* 97–98; *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 134, 215.

[76]Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church,* 215.

[77]Andrew Louth, *The Place of Theosis in Orthodox Theology in Partakers of the Divine Nature,* 32–44; Kalistos Ware, *The Inner Unity of the Philokalia and Its Influence in East and West,* ed. Alexander S (Athens: Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2004), 1–3.

[78]Andrew Louth, *The Place of Theosis in Orthodox Theology in Partakers of the Divine Nature,* 32–44; Kalistos Ware, *The Inner Unity of the Philokalia and Its Influence in East and West*, ed. Alexander S (Athens: Onassis

III. Theosis: A Heritage of Traditional Christian Theology

On the one hand, German liberal scholars often characterize theosis/deification as an aberration of Greek philosophy imposed on early Christianity. On the other hand, many Eastern Orthodox theologians present it as a unique doctrine preserved in their tradition while being lost in the West. However, the heritage theosis extends far beyond this narrative. Theosis is embedded in a broader theological spectrum shared by both Eastern and Western theologians, representing a common heritage of traditional Christian theology of salvation rooted in the scripture, with the ultimate of becoming like God. These theologians sought to understand how the Christian experience transcends mere redemption and forgiveness of sins, reaching toward the profound idea that human beings can participate in the divine nature. Clendenin observes that, for a large part of the life of the Church, the concept of salvation has been intimately linked with deification.[79]

III.1. Evidence in the Eastern Tradition

The concept of theosis or deification originated in the early expressions of the post-Apostolic church. The Apostolic Fathers, who lived from the late 1st century to the mid-2nd century, explored themes that later formed the foundation for a broader understanding of deification.[80] For example, Ignatius of Antioch (AD. 35-108), in his letters to various churches, refers to Christians as "God-bearers," "God-runners," those who "participate in God,"

Public Benefit Foundation, 2004), 1–3.

[79]Daniel B Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1994), 120.

[80]Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion,* 51.

are "wholly of God," "filled with God," and "have God within them."[81] Ignatius emphasized the theme of participatory union as essential for salvation in his writings. While he doesn't use the specific terminology of deification, he lays the groundwork for its later development by speaking of Christ as God.[82]

In the works of Justin Martyr (AD. 160), deification is paralleled with divine filiation. Drawing on the earlier understandings, Justin proposed that followers of Christ, as the new Israel, could be considered gods if they remained obedient to him.[83] Justin writes, "As the (soul) lives not as being life, but as the partaker of life; but that which partakes of anything is different from that of which it does partake."[84]

The concept of salvation as theosis became prominent in the theology of Irenaeus of Lyons and Athanasius of Alexandria in early Christianity. Two famous statements from these early church fathers are frequently cited in discussions on theosis. Irenaeus, in his work Against Heresies (Book V), writes, "…but following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did,through his transcendent love, become what we are, that

[81]Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition,* 91.

[82]Camp Josep Ruis, *The Four Authentic Letters of Ignatius, the Martyr* (Charlottesville: The University of Virginia: Pontificum Institute Orientalism Studiorum, 1980), 413; Vladimir Kharlamov, *Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers in Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology,* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2006), 51-66.

[83]Raymond Edward Brown, ed., *The Gospel According to John. 1: I - XII,* 2. ed., 42. print, The Anchor Bible 29 (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1996), 409–10.

[84]Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, Ch.6 *In Ante-Nicene Christian Library,* ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867), 95–96; Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition,* 113.

He might bring us to be even what He is Himself."[85]

Similarly, Athanasius famously stated, "He (Christ), the Son of God became man that men might become god (sons of God)."[86] Both emphasized that the Son of God, endowed with the full divine essence of the Father, took on full humanity to restore humanity's ability to partake in the divine life and achieve theosis.[87] The notion of salvation as theosis is further articulated by theologians such as Clement of Alexandria,[88] Cappadocian Fathers:[89] Basil of

[85]Irenaeus of Lyons Against Heresies, book 5, preface. Alexander Roberts, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, vol. I* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 526. See the tantum-quantum or 'exchange' formula of Irenaeus in M. J Edwards and Elena Ene D-Vasilescu, eds., "Growing like God: Some Thoughts on Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies, V (praef.); Against Heresies,* 3, 19, 1, SC 34." Visions of God and Ideas on Deification in Patristic Thought, 2017, 37–51.

[86]Athanasius, *Contra Gentes De Incarnatione, trans.* Robert William Thomson, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon press, 1971), 54. "The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods" (CCC 460); c. f. *De incarnatione* 54,3, cf. *Contra Arianos* 1.39 & Contra Gentes, 3-5, 30-34; Philip Schaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, vol. IV,* Second Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 65.

[87]Mateiescu and Calian, *Review of Ecumenical Studies,* 11:9, Athanasius uses θεοποιέω at least 33 times in a Christian context.

[88]Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen,* Chapter I. See also, Clement of Alexandria, Book III, Chapter, I; *The Stromata, or Miscellanies, Book VII,* Chapter XVI.

[89]Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and the Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism: Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen, 1992-1993* (New Haven: Yale-University-Press, 1993), 10–92.

Caesarea,[90] Gregory of Nazianzus,[91] and Gregory of Nyssa,[92] Cyril of Alexandria,[93] Pseudo-Dionysius[94] and Maximus the Confessor,[95] and many others. As Christianity spread across the Roman Empire and Greco-Roman culture, early theologians were tasked with defending, interpreting, and harmonizing their theological beliefs and practices within the evolving Christian subculture and the broader cultural context. This endeavor involved explaining and appropriating the Christian beliefs biblically, theologically, and philosophically to make their cases.[96]

[90]Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Sancto* (of the Holy Spirit) 9. See also, Basil, De Spiritu Sancto in chaff, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: VIII*.15-16.

[91]Gregory of Nazianzus, First Oration from Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Father.* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894.); Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature*,123; Daniel B Clendenin, "Partakers of Divinity: The Orthodox Doctrine of Theosis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 3 (1994): 371; Hilarion Alfeyev, *Orthodox Christianity* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011), 374–75.

[92]Lewis Ayres, "Deification and the Dynamics of Pro-Nicene Theology: The Contribution of Gregory of Nyssa," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 49,* 2005, 375–95.

[93]Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ,* ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 59, 63, 80.

[94]*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1.3; *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works. The Classics of Western Spirituality, in the Original Greek:* (New York Paulist Press, 1987), 198. Corpus Dionysiacum, *Patristische Texte Und Studien,* Bd. 36, Ed. Beate Regina Suchla (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991) 66. See also, Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition,* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–5, 250–55.

[95]Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, eds., The Philokalia: *The Complete Text Compiled by St Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St Makarios of Corinth,* trans. Gerald Eustace Howell Palmer, vol. 2 (London Boston: Faber and Faber, 1990), 178–79; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom: in Christian Tradition: Vol. 2, A History of the Development of Doctrine 400-700,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), viii.

[96]See Pelikan, *Christianity and the Classical Culture: the metamorphosis of natural theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale-University-Press, 1993); Robert M. Grant, Greek Apologists of the Second Century (Philadelphia: Westminster 1988).

III.2. Evidence in the Western Tradition

While theosis is often considered foreign to the Western mind and an import from the East, as Harnack suggested, this essay argues otherwise. It contends that deification is deeply embedded in worship, praxis, and teachings of major theologians in the Latin or Western tradition.[97] Tertullian (AD. 155-220)[98] stands out as the earliest Latin theologian to employ the concept of theosis in a Christian context.[99] Akin to Irenaeus, Tertullian presents a profound correlation between the incarnation of the Son of God and humanity's union with God through an exchange formula, where "God was found little so that man might become yet very great."[100] In his comments on Ps 81, Tertullian writes, "We shall be even gods, if we shall deserve to be among those of whom He declared: 'I have said, you are gods' (Ps 81:1), and, 'God stands in the congregation of gods' (Ps 81:6). But this comes of His own grace, not from any property in us because it is He alone who can make gods."[101]

[97]Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Concept of Deification," *Journal of Theological Studies,* no. 37 (1986): 369–86; Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition,* 225–32; Philip Wild, The *Divinization of Man according to St. Hilary* (PhD diss., Mundelein Seminary, 1950); Ellen Scully, *Physicalist Soteriology in Hilary of Poitiers* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Daniel Keating, *The Appropriation of Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 227-93.

[98]Tertullian, Against Marcion, 2, 27; *Against Hermogenes,* 5 in Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian,* ed. D.D. Allan Menzies, vol. Volume III Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995); Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (New York: T&T Clark International, 1988), 61.

[99]Tertullian uses three words for deification such as: 'deificari', 'deificatio', and 'deificus.' See, Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion,* 61; Oroz Reta José., "Papers Presented at the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Sturdies in Oxford 1991," ed. Elizabeth A Livingstone., Leuven: Peeters, 1993, 372.

[100]Ttullian Adversus Marcionem, 2.27, in ANF, 317.

[101]Tertullian *Adversus Hermogenem,* 5, in ANF, 202; Tertullien and Robert Dick Sider, "Apology." *Christian and Pagan in the Roman Empire: The Witness of Tertullian, Selections from the Fathers of the Church 2* (Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America press, 2001), 69.

Augustine of Hippo (AD. 354–430), one of the most renowned Latin Church Fathers and a prominent theologian in shaping Western Christianity, addressed the doctrine theosis/ deification more frequently than most others in the West.[102] Although the terms *deificari* and *deificatus*, along with their various forms, surface only around eighteen times in Augustine's corpus,[103] he frequently expressed this concept through alternative language.[104] Many references to deification are found in Books 4 and 13 of Augustin's *De Trinitate*, particularly through his exchange theme.[105] Augustin writes, "But he that justifies also deifies, for by justifying he makes sons of God. For he has given them the power to become the sons of God" (referring to John 1:12). He concludes, "If then we have been made sons of god, we have also been made gods."[106] Furthermore, he emphasizes that through the sacraments, God

[102]Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," *Journal of Theological Studies,* 37, no. 2 (1986): 169–86; Augustine Casiday, "St Augustine on Deification: His Homily on Psalm-81," 2, no. 23 (2001): 23–44; Oroz Reta José., *"Papers Presented at the Eleventh International Conference on Patristic Sturdies in Oxford 1991,"* ed. Elizabeth A Livingstone., Leuven: Peeters, 1993.

[103]David Meconi, "Becoming one Christ: The Dynamics of Augustinian Deification," *Tolle Lege: Essays on Augustine,* 157-8. *The One Christ: St. Augustine's Theology of Deification* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), xv.

[104]Patricia Wilson Kastner, "Grace as Participation in the Divine Life in the Theology of Augustine of Hippo," *Augustinian Studies,* 1976, 135-52; A. Casiday, "St. Augustine on Deification: His Homily on Psalm 81," *Sobernost 23* (2001) 23-44.

[105]Augustin, *De Trinitate 4.4* in NPNF, 135.

[106]Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Concept of Deification," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1986): 369–86; Robert Puchniak, "Augustine's Conception of Deification, Revisited," in *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology,* ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), 122–33; Henri Rondet, *The Grace of Christ A Brief History of the Theology of Grace,* trans. Tad W. Guzie (Westminster. MD: Newman. 1948), pp. 9 1-95; and Aurelius Augustinus, John E. Rotelle, and Aurelius Augustinus, Newly Discovered Sermons, trans. Edmund Thomas Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine Sermons, a translation for the 21st century / Augustinian Heritage Institute; Pt. 3 Vol. 11 (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997).

"turns his worshipers into gods."[107] Cyprian of Carthage and the Monk of France also echo Irenaeus' classical exchange formula of deification. Cyprian writes, "What man is, Christ was willing to be, that man may be what Christ is."[108] Similarly, the Monk of France states, "The Holy Spirit . . . transforms us into the self-same image after which we were made . . . and thus the soul becomes deiform (deiformis) and like unto God amongst the sons of God . . . he enables it to gaze with face unveiled upon the glory of God."[109]

The concept of salvation as theosis is also evident in the works of Protestant Reformers Martin Luther[110] and John Calvin,[111] particularly in terms of union and participation with God. A recent interpretation of Luther, championed by the New Finnish School, identifies deification in his theology through his conception of participation with Christ by faith.[112] The notion of theosis

[107]St. Augustine, *City of God,* trans. Henry Bettenson, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1984), Book 10.1

[108]St. Cyprian of Carthage, *On Works and Almsgiving,* in ANF, 601.

[109]Louise Nelstrope, The Monk of France, ed., Arblaster and Faesen, in *Mystical Doctrines of Deification,* 138; David Vincent Meconi and Carl E. Olson (eds.), *Called to be Children of God: The Catholic Theology of Human Deification,* San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2016, 6.

[110]Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: Career of the Reformer,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 3. print, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), 189–90; *Luther's Works: Lectures on Galatians*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 26 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955), 168; *Luther's Works: Lectures on the Romans*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publ. House, 1972), 257, 58; Braaten and Jenson, *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 45.

[111]Carl Mosser, "The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification," *Scottish Journal of Theology* Ltd, 2002, 38–39; Dennis E. Tamburello, Union with Christ: *John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard,* 1st ed, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 84–90; Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 2.12.2; 3.1.1; 3.20.36; Less typical, deification in Calvin is briefly mentioned by David J. C. Copper, `The Theology of Image in Eastern Orthodoxy and John Calvin', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35, no. 3 (1982), 233-4.

[112]Tuomo Mannermaa, "Why is Luther So Fascinating? 19-20; Braaten and Jenson, eds., *Union with*

appears in some of Luther's sermons. For instance, in his sermon on Ephesians 3:13-21, Luther reflects on the significance of being filled with all the fullness of God, "…it means having God himself and all his blessings dwelling in us in fullness and being effective to make us wholly divine-not so that we possess merely something of God, but all his fullness."

John Calvin articulates the concept of theosis even more vividly than Luther, emphasizing union, participation, and incorporation with Christ as essential aspects of salvation.[113] His use of the exchange formula highlights the presence of theosis embedded in his theology of salvation. Calvin writes, "… Who could have done this had not the selfsame Son of God become the Son of man, and had not so taken what was ours as to impart what was his to us, and to make what was his by nature ours by grace?"[114] Additionally, he remarks on the ultimate goal of the Gospel, stating that it intends to make us sooner or later like God; in fact, it can be described as a form of deification (*quasi deificari*).[115]

Christ, 49.

[113]Martin Luther, *Sermons of Martin Luther: Sermons on Epistle Texts for Trinity Sunday to Advent,* ed. John Nicholas Lenker, vol. 8, The Ages Digital Library (Albany, USA: Books for the Ages, 1977), 236; Luther, *Luther's Works: Lectures on the Romans,* ed. Hilton C. Oswald (Saint Louis: Concordia Publ. House, 1972), 257, 58.

[114]Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification, 3rd* ed (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 225.

[115]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 2.12.2; D. Willis-Watkins, "The Unio Mystica and the Assurance of Faith According to Calvin," in Calvin, Erbe und Auftrag, ed. W vant Spijker (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991) 78; Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians,* ed. David W Torrance, trans. Ross Mackenzie, ed (Grand Rapids, Mich., Carlisle: Eerdmans; Paternoster, 1995), 160.

IV. Theosis: A Contemporary Significance

Interestingly, the concept of theosis has been appropriated in contemporary Protestant discussions of soteriology. Lutherans have been at the forefront of this discourse, particularly through the Finnish School, led by Tuomo Mannermaa and his students, and supported by American scholars such as Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson.[116] Anglicans and Episcopalians, including figures like A. M. Allchin and F. W. Norris,[117] have also embraced the concept of theosis, drawing inspiration from the theologians such as Richard Hooker and Lancelot Andrewes. Methodist theologian Thomas Oden incorporates the notion of theosis in his Systematic Theology series, particularly in Life in the Spirit.[118] Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann has found space for this idea, exploring it in his works, including The Spirit of Life and The Coming of God.[119] A few evangelicals, such as Clark Pinnock,[120] Stanley Grenz,[121] Douglas Harink,[122] Robert Rakestraw,[123] Daniel Clendenin, and Veli Matti Karkkainen[124] seem to encourage the idea of theosis as a positive

[116]John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter,* trans. William B. Johnston and David Wishart Johnson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), 330.

[117]F. W. Norris, "Deification: Consensual and Cogent," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49, no. 4 (1996).

[118]Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology, vol. 3* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1987).

[119]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001); *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

[120]Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit,* Repr. (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2004).

[121]Stanley J Grenz, "Celebrating Eternity: Christian Worship as a Foretaste of Participation in the Triune God," *The Asbury Theological Journal,* 1, 60 (2005), 43–53.

[122]Douglas Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013).

[123]Rakestraw, "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis." *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40/2, (1997), 257-69.

[124]Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary*

and meaningful construction for contemporary evangelical theology and spirituality. However, when theosis is generally introduced in many evangelical and reformed congregations, it often provokes confusion, discomfort, or even resistance.

Examining the concept of salvation as theosis, as presented in Traditional Christian theology, has the potential to significantly broaden and deepen contemporary Evangelical soteriology, which often relies heavily on forensic-judicial categories. Evangelical theologians can develop a deeper appreciation of the ancient Christian heritage, which is deeply rooted in scriptural teachings that emphasize salvation as more than moral improvement or forgiveness of sin. Instead, salvation involves a transformative process through which humanity is drawn into the life and nature of God. Theosis doesn't supplant the forensic or declarative aspect of justification; rather, it clarifies and enriches them by the transformative dimension of justification.[125] The concept of theosis invites believers to view salvation as a journey toward becoming "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4), offering a holistic perspective of salvation that encompasses spiritual growth, ontological intimacy with God, and the restoration of human nature to its intended divine image and likeness. Through this lens, the traditional Christian understanding of theosis enriches the modern comprehension of salvation by connecting it to its biblical foundations, where the Spirit of God enables the believer to participate in the divine life and, by grace, be made like God.

Perspectives (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

[125]Chris VanLandingham, *Judgement and Justification in Early Judaism and the Apostle Paul* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2006), 271–72.

V. Conclusion

The concept of salvation as theosis, often associated with Eastern Orthodox Christianity, has a much broader historical and theological foundation than is commonly recognized. Theosis forms a broader theological structure rooted in the shared Christian heritage between the Greek and Latin theologians. While 19th and early 20th-century German scholars such as Adolf von Harnack, following the perspective of Baur and Ritschl, portrayed theosis as a Hellenistic corruption of early Christian doctrine, this narrative was countered by Orthodox theologians. In response, these theologians inverted it by embracing theosis as a distinctive achievement of Greek Christianity, uniquely preserved in Eastern Orthodoxy. By examining the development and interpretation of theosis within early Greek and Latin church traditions, this article argues that theosis is not merely an Eastern Orthodox construct but a fundamental aspect of Christian soteriology. This broader understanding challenges the modern narrative and demonstrates theosis as a significant heritage of traditional Christian theology. Consequently, integrating the concept of theosis into evangelical soteriology can significantly transform and enrich the abstract dimensions into real participation in the life of the triune God.

PASTORAL ARTICLES

Is Rome a True Church?[1]

by **CHRIS CASTALDO**

When my grandfather, our family's esteemed patriarch, died, I spoke at his funeral. The parlor at Moloney's was jam-packed with Roman Catholic friends. Like the pensive Michael Corleone (of The Godfather), I sat near the casket eyeballing visitors.

An acute feeling of loss coupled with the realization that we'll one day stand before Almighty God and consigned to either ineffable bliss or agonizing terror for eternity heightened my emotions. At the appointed time, I approached the lectern and delivered an animated message (imagine Billy Sunday wearing a double-breasted suit, pinky ring waving). The congregation sat motionless, eyes like saucers. I concluded my homily with an invitation to receive Christ. And then there was silence.

No one moved. Everyone simply stared at me. After a moment, it became palpably awkward, and then unnerving. Another moment passed before Monsignor Tom, my childhood priest, stood up at the back of the room and began walking forward. Everyone's eyes followed him until he was directly before me. With a warm smile that I had come to know over the decades, Monsignor Tom exclaimed, "Christopher [you'll have to imagine the Long Island accent], what a fine message. This is precisely the good news that we need at a time like this. I am so proud of you and thankful for

[1]This article is published with the permission of Mere Orthodoxy, a media outlet for Christian renewal. Chris Castaldo, Ph.D., is lead pastor of New Covenant Church in Naperville, Illinois.

the way you have served your family."

It was a kind gesture. By putting his personal (and clerical) imprimatur on my message, Father Tom delivered me from the familial scorn that would have inevitably followed. But it was more than that. It was also a statement about the Roman Catholic capacity to recognize Christian faith in the Protestant tradition. The question, however, is whether evangelical Protestants can reciprocate.

I. The Status of Roman Catholicism

Protestants understandably have strong opinions about the Roman Catholic Church. For example, in response to my article on Pope Francis's declaration, *Fiducia Supplicans*, a "friend" on Facebook left the following comment: "Let's pray that this cult repents and turns from their false, accursing, different Gospel (Gal 1:6-9). And that Big Eva jellyfish quit trying to embrace them as fellow believers."[2]

The uncharitable and serrated edge of this comment, it seems to me, is less common today (outside of fundamentalist circles, at least), but it nevertheless contains underlying ideas common to many Protestants. Before trying to disentangle them, let me offer one more example of how the question has recently asserted itself.

When Bryan Zhang, host of the "That'll Preach" podcast, wrote to thank me for being on his program, he included the following note: "One particularly popular question from our listeners is whether Protestants ought to consider Rome a true

[2]Chris Castaldo, A Protestant Reading of "Fiducia Supplicans," Jan. 4, 2024, https://adfontesjournal.com/web-exclusives/a-protestant-reading-of-fiducia-supplicans/

church, i.e. a church in the New Covenant. This is more about the corporate body of Rome rather than whether an individual Roman Catholic can be saved (which none of our listeners disputed)."[3]

You'll notice how the Facebook comment conflates the institution of the Roman Catholic Church (what he calls a cult) with the personal faith of Catholic individuals. Bryan, by contrast, distinguishes the two, recognizing (as most people do) that there are men and women in the Roman Church who possess a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. In other words, the controversial question is not whether there are Catholic Christians; it is, rather, whether Protestants should recognize the Roman Catholic institution (in her tangible structures, teaching, and practice) as legitimately Christian.

II. Prevailing Perspectives

Protestants tend to answer the question of Roman Catholicism's status in one of two ways. Looking through the lens of the early creeds (i.e., Nicene and Apostles'), some understand it to be fundamentally orthodox. The rationale is simple: because the creeds uphold the basic tenets of Christianity, and Rome upholds those creeds, her apostolicity is affirmed. Roman Catholicism is thus regarded as "inside the pale."

An alternative reading, one that probably informed the Facebook comment, is to view the Roman Catholic Church through the lens of the sixteenth-century Reformation in which the Council of Trent anathematized (pronounced to be cursed) the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Because such faith is recognized

[3]Bryan Zhang, "That'll Preach" podcast: https://thatllpreachpodcast.podbean.com.

as the driving center of the biblical gospel, and Rome forcefully repudiates the doctrine, the Roman Church is therefore considered incompatible with biblical faith.

I recognize the logic in these positions, but in my opinion, both are incomplete. Yes, Roman Catholicism upholds the early creeds, but the way she receives and applies them in her imperial hierarchy, institutional organs, magisterial authority, or in accretions such as the requirement of priestly celibacy, treasury of merit, indulgences, venerating images, transubstantiation, role of Mary, and papal infallibility—to cite a few examples—is miles away from biblical teaching. In short, identifying the creeds as the basis of our unity when their appropriation leads to such divergent conclusions seems unsatisfying, to say the least.

But the second view, which affixes to Roman Catholicism a categorically non-Christian or heterodox label, also misses the mark. Before explaining why, however, we must first define precisely what we mean by the "Roman Catholic Church."

III. What Is Roman Catholicism?

The challenge of defining the Roman Catholic Church grows out of her multiple layers. On one hand, in her adherence to the inspired Scriptures and the early creeds, she offers a foundational core of orthodoxy. This is what C.S. Lewis described as "an agreed, or common, or central, or 'mere' Christianity," in his book by that name. Lewis explains how he had sent his manuscript of Book 2, What Christians Believe, to four clergymen, including a Roman Catholic, all of whom recognized the extent of doctrinal agreement in this Nicene core not as a watered-down, minimalist Christianity,

but substantial, positive, and pungent.[4]

At the same time, we recognize that Rome has surrounded this doctrinal core with a dense layer of tradition that easily obscures, undermines, or confuses biblical teaching. Here, the three-tiered crown and crossed keys of the papal emblem, representing the pope's authority to rule as Christ's vicar, is instructive. According to the Catechism, "The Pope enjoys, by divine institution, nothing less than 'supreme, full, immediate, and universal power in the care of souls.'"[5] Claims such as this, which overlay Scripture with totalizing statements that are binding upon the conscience of the faithful, lead Protestants to see the foundations of Christianity as no longer accessible.

In view of this multilayered reality, how are we to assess the orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church? A serious application of truth and grace would have us recognize it as belonging to Christendom, and, inasmuch as it elucidates the orthodox core, see it as a true church, but one with major problems that often distort the gospel. In analyzing the Protestant Reformers' response to Rome, Herman Bavinck states:

> The Protestants, through firmly rejecting the church hierarchy of Rome, continued to fully recognize the Christian elements in the church of Rome. However corrupted Rome might be, there were still left in it "vestiges of the church," "ruins of a disordered church"; there was still "some kind of church, be

[4]The other three ministers, says Lewis, were Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2023), xi.

[5]*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 937.

> it half-demolished," left in the papacy. The Reformation was a separation from the "Roman and papal church," not from "the true church."[6]

This nuanced perspective, as Bavinck noted, was the general position of Protestants from the earliest days. Martin Luther, for example, wrote: "In the papacy there is true Christianity, even the right kind of Christianity and many great and devoted saints…. The Christendom that is now under the papacy is truly the body of Christ and a member of it."[7] John Calvin maintained the same conviction, saying: "When we categorically deny to the papists the title of the church, we do not for this reason impugn the existence of churches among them."[8] Further examples may be adduced, whether it's from the Princeton theologian Charles Hodge[9] or from J. Gresham Machen[10] These men, even after the Council of Trent, acknowledged an orthodox core in the Roman Church despite its less than biblical overlay of traditions.[11]

[6]Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation.* Vol 4. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 314-315.

[7]Martin Luther, *Luther Works, vol. 40,* ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 232. Elsewhere, Luther asserted, "The Roman Church is holy, because it has God's holy name, the gospel, baptism, etc." Quoted in Gustaf Aulen, *Reformation and Catholicity,* trans. Eric H. Wahlstrom (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 76.

[8]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.2.12. Calvin expressed a similar sentiment in his letter to Cardinal Sadoleto, stating that despite serious differences of doctrine, "[it doesn't mean] that Roman Catholics are not also Christians. We indeed, Sadoleto, do not deny that those over which you preside are Churches of Christ." John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoleto, *A Reformation Debate: Sadoleto's Letter to the Genevans and Calvin's Reply,* ed. John. C. Olin (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 69.

[9]Charles Hodge's Letter to Pope Pius IX," http://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2010/charles-hodges-letter-to-pope-pius-ix/ (accessed on January 20, 2024).

[10]J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 52.

[11]Protestants ought to acknowledge that we also have our share of less than biblical traditions.

IV. What About the Doctrine of Justification?

The most common protest to this approach among Protestants is instigated by the Roman Church's condemnation of justification by faith alone at Trent in 1547. As mentioned above, Protestants see this judgment, which Rome cannot formally retract, as a repudiation of the gospel, an error of such proportions that it undermines the Roman Catholic claim to Christian orthodoxy. But while Rome can't retract the condemnation, it can reinterpret it. And it has been doing just that.

The Catholic Church, it must be remembered, has a vast hermeneutical tradition of paradoxical subtlety—a "both-and" approach ("et-et" in Latin) that interprets and applies doctrinal development in unanticipated ways. For example, one remembers, says Henry Blocher, "the maxim *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* [there is no salvation outside the Church], whose interpretation was reversed (by 180 degrees), in the course of history, from an exclusive to an all-inclusive understanding."[12] In some respects, such developments have occurred in the Roman Catholic understanding of justification.

This development is illustrated by the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ), the Roman Catholic Church's most important contemporary discussion of the subject.[13] The document

[12]Henri A. Blocher, "The Lutheran-Catholic Doctrine of Justification" *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*. Ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 201.

[13]*The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* was signed at Augsburg on Reformation Day, October 31, 1999, by the Lutheran World Federation and the chairman of Rome's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Edward Cardinal Cassidy, with support from the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith and with the pope's blessing. In other words, the declaration wasn't merely the product of some progressive scholars but was officially accepted at the highest level.

makes no pretense to having ended all the disagreements between Catholic and Lutheran doctrines of justification. Indeed, it doesn't. For example, it fails to address imputed righteousness and offers only passing attention to issues such as purgatory and indulgences. But it does something new and significant for the question at hand: in the Annex, which possesses the same magisterial authority as the Official Common Statement (a detail that is sometimes misunderstood), the JDDJ qualifies the condemnations of Trent by accepting the "faith alone" formula.[14]

It says, "Justification takes place 'by grace alone' (JD 15 and 16), by faith alone, the person is justified 'apart from works' (Rom 3:28, cf. JD 25)."[15] When Protestants (Lutheran and other ecclesial bodies that have later supported the declaration, including certain Methodists, Anglicans, and Reformed) remain in the limits set forth by the document, the condemnations no longer apply.

It should be noted that this affirmation of faith alone was also expressed by Pope Benedict XVI in Saint Peter's Square on November 19, 2008, when he said, "Being just simply means being with Christ and in Christ. And this suffices. Further observances are no longer necessary. For this reason, Luther's phrase: 'faith alone' is true, if it is not opposed to faith in charity in love." A week later on November 26 in the Paul VI Audience Hall the pontiff continued

[14]Anthony Lane. *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment,* London: T & T Clark, 2002), 122. The Annex was signed along with the Official Common Statement on October 31, 1999. The stated purpose of the Annex is to elucidate and underline the consensus reached in the JDDJ.

[15]The Annex is accessible at: http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/1999-dichiarazione-congiunta-sulla-dottrina-della-giustificazion/en4.html

this emphasis: "Following Saint Paul, we have seen that man is unable to 'justify' himself with his own actions, but can only truly become 'just' before God because God confers his 'justice' upon him, uniting him to Christ his Son. And man obtains this union through faith. In this sense, Saint Paul tells us: not our deeds, but rather faith renders us 'just.'" Lest you think the pope's statements were an out of turn, momentary flash in the pan, you can also read them in his book *Saint Paul.*[16]

One may ask, "How can the Roman Catholic Church draw this new conclusion?" Tony Lane offers insight when he writes, "The canons [of Trent] were deliberately not addressed against specific people and the statements condemned were derived from second- or third-hand compilations of the statements of the Reformers, taken especially from the earlier years of the Reformation and not seen in their original context."[17] Thus, unlike Alexander V's papal bull against Wycliffism in 1409 or Leo X's Exsurge Domine against Luther in 1520, Trent's Canons were aiming into a mist of hearsay. Moving forward in history, even to the present, Catholic theologians have said, in effect, that because the bishops of Trent didn't accurately understand Reformation teaching, the object of their canons were different from what truly was or is Reformation theology.[18] Accordingly, the preamble of the JDDJ asserts, "… this declaration is shaped by the conviction that in their respective histories our churches have come to new insights." The "new insights" include the realization of Trent's misguided critique of the

[16]Pope Benedict XVI. *Saint Paul.* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 82-85.

[17]Anthony Lane. *Justification by Faith in Catholic,* 104-105.

[18]Avery Cardinal Dulles provides examples of this disconnect in "Justification in Contemporary Theology," in *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII,* ed. H. George Anderson, et al. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 256-277.

Protestant Reformers' doctrine. Once again, this is not to say that there's now consensus. But Roman Catholics can at least endorse a version of justification by faith alone.

Do all Catholics choose to speak this way? No. But, in truth, Catholicism has never been a strict monolith, and it's even more diverse today. The 1.3 billion Roman Catholics around the globe, planted in virtually every culture, exist in a variety of forms, an ecclesial montage that comprises ultra-traditionalists (so-called "Rad Trads"), moderate traditionalists, liberals, charismatics, the nominal, and popular folk. "What you find in Spain and Latin America," says Tom Howard, "differs greatly from what you find in The Netherlands or Norway. Sicilians do not order their worship as do the Watutsi; nor does Irish Catholicism yield just the look given things by the Filipinos."[19]

Furthermore, in some places, it's simply harder to maintain a collegial relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. I think of evangelicals in the city of Rome who are actively persecuted and harassed. It's understandable why the Protestant outlook in those settings may look more strained or even adversarial.

As a rule, however, I find the nuanced position of the Reformers and their heirs, which recognizes the underlying orthodoxy of the Roman Catholic Church (albeit one that is covered by extraneous and at times false doctrines) to be the most honest and theologically precise way of responding to our question.
In obedience to Paul's admonition to love in a manner that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1

[19]Thomas Howard, *On Being Catholic* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997). 34.

Cor. 13:7), I think this approach avoids the extremes of Protestant pugnacity and pride on the one hand, and sloppy doctrinal compromise on the other. Instead, it brings us closer to the grace and truth ethic of Jesus Christ. And isn't that what we all desire?

Scientific Truths, Philosophical Myths, And Apologetics

by **JOHNSON C. PHILLIP**

Abstract: *Well-known as well as obscure scientific facts and theories are often used to attack the Bible. They do so by philosophizing the scientific information. The fallacies of several such cases are explained in this paper to contend that scientific theories cannot be generalized or philosophized for applying to the Bible, Humanities, or Social Science.*

I. Introduction

In academic settings around the globe, Christian students frequently encounter a unique challenge that tests their faith. In classrooms, particularly those focused on science and technology, it is not uncommon for them to hear professors cite various scientific discoveries as evidence that contradicts or even nullifies the core tenets of Christianity.[1]

These assertions can range from the origins of the universe and evolution to advancements in medical science and cosmology. Such claims often position scientific findings, or even theories, as being in direct opposition to biblical narratives, suggesting an irreconcilable conflict between faith and scientific understanding.

[1]Are Scientists Biased Against Christians? Exploring Real and Perceived Bias Against Christians in Academic Biology." *PLOS ONE* 10, no. 5 (2015): 123-134. Accessed January 1, 2022. This study published in PLOS ONE explores the potential bias against Christian individuals in the field of academic biology. It examines how Christians are negatively stereotyped about their abilities in science, which could affect their trajectory in the field. The study also discusses the perceptions of bias against Christians among college science students and the distinction between perceived and actual bias against Christians in science. It highlights the underrepresentation of Christians in science and the various factors contributing to this phenomenon, including potential discrimination in the workplace and negative societal stereotypes.

For Christian students, this can create a sense of dissonance and discomfort, as the foundational beliefs of their faith are seemingly undermined by the very subjects they are studying. This experience is not isolated to any specific region or culture but is a common phenomenon experienced by Christian students in diverse educational environments across the world. It raises significant questions about the relationship between faith and science, and challenges these students to reconcile their religious beliefs with their academic pursuits.

The frequent assertion that scientific discoveries contradict or nullify biblical teachings often stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of either science, the Bible, or both. When such claims are closely scrutinized, it becomes evident that they lack solid grounding in either field. This misunderstanding can arise from interpreting scientific data without a comprehensive understanding of the scientific method and its limitations. Scientific theories and discoveries are often subject to revision and refinement as new data and technologies emerge. Therefore, using a current scientific understanding to dispute or dismiss ancient religious texts like the Bible can be problematic, as it ignores the evolving nature of scientific knowledge.

On the other hand, misinterpretations of the Bible can also contribute to these perceived conflicts. The Bible, composed over centuries and in various cultural contexts, often employs metaphorical and poetic language, and its texts are subject to various interpretations. The literal interpretation of certain biblical passages without considering historical context, literary genre, or intended audience can lead to conclusions that seemingly

conflict with scientific discoveries. However, when these passages are interpreted in their proper context, taking into account the intentions of the authors and the literary styles of the time, the apparent contradictions with scientific findings often dissolve.

Moreover, the relationship between science and the Bible is not inherently adversarial. Both can offer valuable insights into our understanding of the world and existence. Science excels in explaining the how of the natural world – the mechanisms and processes underlying our physical reality. The Bible, meanwhile, addresses the why – providing moral guidance, spiritual truths, and insights into the meaning and purpose of human life. A holistic approach that respects the strengths and scopes of both science and the Bible can lead to a more nuanced and integrated understanding. This approach acknowledges that science and faith can coexist and complement each other, rather than being in a constant state of conflict. By carefully examining and respecting the methodologies and objectives of both fields, it becomes apparent that many supposed contradictions are based on misinterpretations or misunderstandings, rather than any fundamental incompatibility.[2]

[2]Hanegraaff, Hank, "What Is the Relationship between Science and the Bible?" *Christian Research Institute,* March 16, 2009. This article discusses the compatibility of scientific inquiry and biblical teachings. It argues that the Bible and science are not mutually exclusive or contradictory, but rather complement each other. The article presents the view that early scientists, influenced by Christian beliefs, saw the study of the natural world as a way of understanding God's creation. It suggests that many scientific principles are rooted in a biblical worldview, which views the world as knowable, observable, and orderly. The piece counters the notion of inherent conflict between science and religion, instead highlighting instances of cooperation and mutual reinforcement

II. The Most Frequent Misrepresentations

II.1 Theory Of Relativity Proves That There Are No absolutes

Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity, introduced in the early 20th century, is often misunderstood and misapplied, particularly in contexts outside of physics. One common misconception is that it suggests the non-existence of absolutes, extending this scientific concept to areas like morality and social norms. However, this interpretation is a significant distortion of the theory's actual implications. The Theory of Relativity, encompassing both the Special and General theories, fundamentally addresses the nature of space, time, and gravity. Its most famous equation, $E=mc^2$, indicates the relationship between energy (E), mass (m), and the speed of light (c), suggesting that the laws of physics are the same for all non-accelerating observers.

The misapplication of the Theory of Relativity in moral and social contexts likely stems from a misunderstanding of its name and core principles. The term 'relativity' refers specifically to the way measurements of space and time can vary for observers in different states of motion, not to the relativity of truth or ethical norms. In fact, one of the key aspects of Einstein's theory is the constancy of the speed of light in a vacuum, which is a fixed, universal constant - an 'absolute' in the realm of physics. This underlines that the theory, far from negating the existence of absolutes, actually establishes certain fundamental constants.[3]

[3] Schantz, Richard, and Markus Seidel, eds., "The Problem of Relativism in the Sociology of (Scientific) Knowledge." Reviewed by João Arriscado Nunes. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews.* University of Notre Dame, October 19, 2012. This article from Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews discusses the central role of relativism in the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK). It provides insights into the debate over relativism within the field of science studies, particularly how it relates

Therefore, extending the Theory of Relativity to negate moral or social absolutes is an overreach, taking a concept from physics and incorrectly applying it to entirely different domains. The theory's actual scientific implications revolve around understanding the fabric of space and time, the behavior of objects in motion, and the influence of gravity. It revolutionized our understanding of the universe but was never intended to be a commentary on philosophical or ethical absolutes.[4]

In conclusion, while Einstein's Theory of Relativity is a cornerstone of modern physics, its relevance lies in the realm of scientific inquiry, not in moral or social philosophy. Its misuse to argue against the existence of absolutes in non-scientific contexts reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of both the theory itself and the nature of scientific knowledge. The distinction between scientific theories and philosophical or ethical principles is crucial in maintaining the integrity and applicability of both domains.

to the understanding of scientific knowledge. The article reflects on the historical and contemporary debates within science studies, including discussions of relativism in relation to scientific and technological practices, and the impact of sociology and philosophy on these debates. This reference can help illustrate the misapplication of relativism, a concept often associated with Einstein's theory of relativity, in fields like history and sociology.

[4]Mohler, Albert. "Relativity, Relativism, and the Modern Age." Ligonier Ministries. October 25, 2016. https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/relativity-relativism-and-modern-age/. This article discusses the impact of Albert Einstein's Theory of Relativity on modern thought, specifically addressing the confusion between the scientific concept of relativity and the philosophical idea of relativism. Mohler clarifies that Einstein's theory, which fundamentally altered our understanding of physics, was misconstrued by some as endorsing a broader cultural relativism — the idea that truth and morality are relative and not absolute. He emphasizes that Einstein himself was not a moral relativist and that his scientific theories were not intended to provide commentary on morality or culture. The article explores how Einstein's scientific contributions inadvertently influenced modern perspectives on truth and values, contributing to a shift towards relativism in various aspects of society.

II.2 Uncertainty Principle Proves That Nothing Is Certain

Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle is a principle that applies at the atomic level. This is purely a physical phenomenon, but people often invoke it to make the false claim that nothing is certain in this Universe. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, formulated by Werner Heisenberg in 1927, is a fundamental concept in quantum mechanics that has profound implications for our understanding of the physical world at the atomic and subatomic levels. The principle states that it is fundamentally impossible to simultaneously measure with perfect precision both the position and momentum of a particle, such as an electron. In essence, the more accurately you determine one of these properties, the less accurately you can know the other. This is not a limitation of our measurement tools or techniques but a fundamental property of the nature of particles at the quantum level.

However, the Uncertainty Principle is often misunderstood and misapplied, especially in contexts outside of physics. It is sometimes incorrectly used to make philosophical claims about uncertainty in all aspects of life, leading to assertions that nothing in the universe can be known for certain. This extrapolation is a significant leap from the principle's actual scientific implications. Heisenberg's principle applies specifically to quantum systems and does not imply a universal philosophical uncertainty about the nature of reality or existence.[5]

[5]VinhQuang, N., "Do the Robertson-SCHRÖDINGER and the Heisenberg Uncertainty Relations Imply a General Physical Principle?" arXiv: Quantum Physics, (2002). This paper shows that there exist physical states where the Robertson-Schrödinger and Heisenberg uncertainty relations are invalid, suggesting that these relations may not imply a general physical principle. The author provides an explanation through functional analysis.

The principle's implications are confined to the microscopic physical world and do not directly impact our everyday macroscopic experiences. In the world we perceive around us, objects do not behave according to the rules of quantum mechanics, and thus, the Uncertainty Principle does not apply in the same way. For example, while the position and velocity of a car can be measured quite accurately, the same is not true for an electron.

Moreover, it is important to distinguish between the scientific understanding of uncertainty in quantum mechanics and the broader philosophical or existential notions of uncertainty. In philosophy, uncertainty often relates to the limitations of human knowledge and understanding, encompassing a wide range of topics from ethics to epistemology. However, the Uncertainty Principle is a specific scientific concept that should not be taken as a metaphor for all types of uncertainty or unpredictability in life.

In science, the principle has led to significant advancements in our understanding of the quantum world. It has implications for fields such as quantum computing, cryptography, and quantum mechanics research. The principle is also foundational in understanding the behavior of atoms and molecules, impacting chemistry and materials science. However, this principle has no application outside the narrow confines within which it comes into play in the microscopic world.

In conclusion, while the Uncertainty Principle is a cornerstone of quantum mechanics and has revolutionized our understanding of the atomic and subatomic world, its application is specific to the realm of quantum physics. It should not be

misinterpreted or overextended to make broad philosophical claims about the nature of reality or to suggest that nothing in the universe is certain. Such misapplications overlook the specific scientific context and significance of Heisenberg's groundbreaking work. The principle, though crucial in the quantum realm, does not diminish the reliability or predictability of the macroscopic world we interact with in our daily lives.

II.3 The Big Bang Theory Disproves God

The Big Bang Theory, a cornerstone of modern cosmology, proposes that the universe originated from an extremely dense and hot state, expanding over billions of years into its current form. This theory, while widely accepted in the scientific community, has often been brought into discussions about the existence of God, with some claiming that it negates the need for a divine creator. However, such assertions overlook critical nuances in the relationship between scientific theories and theological concepts.[6]

Firstly, it's important to understand the nature of scientific theories. The Big Bang Theory, like all scientific theories, is based on empirical evidence and observation. It is a model that explains a wide range of phenomena observed in the universe, from the cosmic microwave background radiation to the distribution of galaxies.[7]

[6]Lawson, Finley Issac. "Why Metaphysics Matters for the Science-Theology Debate – An Incarnational Case Study." *Studia Philosophiae Christianae* 56, no. 3 (2020). This article examines the relationship between science and theology within a critical realist framework, focusing on metaphysics as a unifying starting point.

[7]Fang, Lizhi and Shu Xian Li, *Creation of the Universe,* (World Scientific Publishing Company, 1989.) This book traces the development of the Big Bang theory, covering topics from the expansion of the universe to quantum cosmology, and from the formation of large-scale structures to the physics of the Planck era. The authors, Fang Li Zhi (a leading Chinese astrophysicist) and his wife Li Shu Xian,

However, it remains a theoretical framework, not an absolute fact. Scientific theories are always subject to revision and refinement as new data and technologies emerge. Therefore, using the Big Bang Theory to outright deny the possibility of a divine creator is an overreach beyond its scientific scope.

Moreover, the Big Bang Theory addresses the formation and evolution of the universe, not its ultimate origin or the inception of matter and energy. The theory describes how the universe expanded from a hot, dense state but does not explain what caused the initial expansion or what preceded it. This leaves open questions about the universe's ultimate origin, which are philosophical and theological rather than scientific. Some theologians and philosophers argue that the existence of the universe, as described by the Big Bang Theory, still requires a causal explanation that could be attributed to a divine creator. This argument is based on the premise that everything that begins to exist has a cause, and since the universe began to exist, it too must have a cause.

Additionally, discussions about the Big Bang Theory and the existence of God often reflect a misunderstanding of the relationship between science and religion. Science and religion address different types of questions and employ different methods of inquiry. Science seeks to understand the natural world through empirical observation and experimentation, focusing on the 'how' of the universe. Religion, on the other hand, often addresses questions of meaning, purpose, and the 'why' of existence. While the methods and scopes of science and religion differ, they are

present complex cosmological concepts in an accessible and often humorous manner, incorporating anecdotes from both Eastern and Western philosophy to elucidate difficult topics.

not inherently contradictory. Many religious scholars and scientists maintain that the two can coexist and complement each other.

In conclusion, while the Big Bang Theory provides a seemingly compelling explanation of the universe's formation and evolution, it does not inherently negate the concept of God or a divine creator. The theory explains the observable phenomena of the universe's expansion but leaves unanswered questions about the ultimate origin of the universe and the existence of matter and energy. The relationship between scientific theories and theological beliefs is complex and multifaceted, requiring careful consideration and understanding of both fields. It's essential to approach these discussions recognizing that science and religion address different aspects of human inquiry and can coexist without contradiction.

II.4 Similarities Prove Evolution

The argument for evolution based on similarities in the plant and animal world is a significant aspect of evolutionary biology. Evolutionists often point out that the genetic, anatomical, and physiological similarities across diverse species suggest a common origin and evolutionary pathways. For instance, the presence of similar structures like the vertebrate limb in different species is used as evidence of a shared ancestry. These structures, although used for different functions in various species, have a common structural framework, implying that they evolved from a common ancestor.

However, critics of evolutionary theory have shown that similarity does not necessarily equate to common descent. They suggest that similarities could also result from similar environmental pressures leading to convergent development, where unrelated

species develop similar traits independently. Additionally, the argument is made that if evolution were true, we should expect to see a gradual spectrum of living forms, with small, incremental differences between each species. Researchers point out that the fossil record, in many instances, shows a different story with abrupt appearances and disappearances of species, which they argue is not consistent with the gradual changes predicted by evolution.[8]

Moreover, it's argued that dissimilarities between species are often understated in evolutionary discussions. For instance, the genetic differences between humans and chimpanzees, despite their genetic similarity, lead to vastly different outcomes in terms of intelligence, behavior, and abilities. These differences are not trivial and raise questions about how small genetic differences can lead to significant differences in species.

Furthermore, critics of evolution also point to the concept of irreducible complexity, which suggests that certain biological systems are too complex to have evolved from simpler or "less complete" predecessors through natural selection. This argument is often used to challenge the idea that complex organ systems could have evolved through a series of small, incremental steps, as posited by evolutionary theory.

[8]"Three Creationist Perspectives," in *Science, Evolution, and Creationism,* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2008). In it, the arguments from creationists against evolutionary theory are explored. This article discusses how creationists often argue that evolution remains hypothetical because direct observation of the evolutionary process is challenging. They contend that scientific conclusions, including those about evolution, often depend on inferences made by applying reason to observations, rather than direct observation itself. This contention leads to a debate about the nature of scientific reasoning and the empirical testing of theories like evolution. The article delves into various creationist.

From a theological perspective, many argue that similarities in the natural world reflect a common design rather than a common ancestry. This viewpoint suggests that a creator or intelligent designer could have used a similar blueprint to create various forms of life, accounting for the observed similarities. This perspective aligns with certain religious beliefs, which may view species as distinct creations rather than products of evolutionary processes.

In the context of scientific discourse, it's important to acknowledge that theories evolve with new evidence. The theory of evolution, like any scientific theory, is subject to revision and refinement as new data is discovered. The fossil record, for instance, is continually being updated with new finds that often add contrary observations to the whole idea of evolution.

It's also crucial to recognize that science operates on the basis of testable hypotheses and empirical evidence. While similarities in DNA, anatomy, and other areas provide strong evidence for common ancestry, science also acknowledges the role of genetic mutation, natural selection, and other mechanisms in driving the diversity of life. Evolutionary biology continues to explore and explain not just the similarities but also the differences between species, seeking to understand the full spectrum of biodiversity.

In conclusion, the argument that similarities in the natural world prove evolution is a central tenet of evolutionary biology, but it is met with plenty of criticisms and complexities. The debate touches on questions about the origins of life, the mechanisms of change in species, and the interpretation of scientific data. As with all scientific theories, the theory of evolution is continually tested

and challenged, contributing to the dynamic and evolving nature of scientific understanding. The ongoing discourse clearly shows that "similarity proved descent cannot be established at present.

II.5 We Did Not See God In Space So God Does Not Exist

Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet Premier during Yuri Gagarin's spaceflight, played a significant role in promoting the Soviet Union's official atheistic line. He is reported to have used Yuri Gagarin's space mission as a propaganda tool to emphasize the atheistic stance of the Soviet government. Khrushchev is said to have proclaimed that Gagarin had not seen God in space, aligning with the government's position on religion.[9]

However, it's important to note that Gagarin himself did not make this statement; it was attributed to him as part of the Soviet Union's propaganda efforts. Khrushchev's actions reflect the political agenda of the time, which sought to use scientific achievements, such as Gagarin's spaceflight, to promote the ideology of the Communist regime, including its stance on religion and atheism.

II.6 None Of Us Has Seen A Miracle Taking Place So Miracles Do Not Exist

The assertion that miracles do not exist simply because none of us has witnessed one is a stance that relies heavily on personal experience as a benchmark for reality. However, this view

[9]Popov, A. (2021), "Space Superhero: Formation of the Cult of Yuri Gagarin in the Context of the Relationship between Power and Society in the USSR."**Вестник Пермского университета. История,** DOI: 10.17072/2219-3111-2021-3-29-37. Explains how the Soviet propaganda machine used this kind of propaganda using flimsy grounds at best.

can be limiting, as it presumes that individual human experience is comprehensive enough to encompass all phenomena, including those that may be rare or extraordinary. Such a perspective disregards the vastness and complexity of the world and the potential for occurrences beyond our direct observation or understanding.[10]
Further expanding on the idea that human life itself can be perceived as miraculous, it's worth considering the extraordinary complexity and harmony of biological life. The human body, with its intricate systems working in concert, the fine balance of ecosystems, and the precise conditions required for life on Earth, all contribute to a sense of wonder that some might describe as miraculous. These everyday marvels, though scientifically explainable, can evoke a profound sense of awe and appreciation that parallels the concept of miracles.

In many religious and spiritual traditions, miracles are viewed as manifestations of divine intervention, transcending natural laws. This perspective underscores that the belief in miracles is not grounded in empirical evidence but is rooted in faith. It suggests a worldview where the physical and metaphysical coexist and where the occurrence of miracles is a possibility within a larger, more mystical understanding of the universe.

Additionally, history and literature are replete with accounts of miracles, from religious texts to personal testimonies. While these accounts vary in their credibility and are often open to interpretation, they form a significant part of human culture and consciousness.

[10]Plantinga, Alvin. *God, Freedom, and Evil.* Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974. Argues for the possibility of miracles within a theistic framework, even if they fall outside the bounds of normal scientific understanding.

The enduring nature of these stories and their impact on various cultures and belief systems indicate that the concept of miracles plays a meaningful role in the human search for understanding and meaning.

In conclusion, the existence or non-existence of miracles is a question that intersects the realms of personal experience, science, faith, and philosophy. While the absence of personal experience of a miracle does not provide conclusive evidence against their existence, it prompts a broader contemplation of the nature of reality, the limits of human understanding, and the role of faith and wonder in human life. The debate over miracles touches on fundamental questions about the known and the unknown, the explainable and the inexplicable, challenging us to consider the depths and mysteries of existence.

The tendency of some individuals to leverage scientific truths as a means to challenge or undermine Christian faith is not a new phenomenon. Throughout different societies and eras, a pattern emerges where scientific concepts are appropriated and philosophized beyond their intended context, then used as tools in theological or philosophical arguments. This practice can manifest in various forms, but the essence of the critique often remains consistent, reflecting a fundamental misunderstanding or misapplication of scientific principles.

One common example is the extrapolation of the concept of relativity in physics to broader philosophical or theological discussions. The Theory of Relativity, proposed by Albert Einstein, revolutionized our understanding of space, time, and gravity.

However, its implications are specific to the realm of physics. Some individuals, however, have taken this concept and applied it to argue that all truths, including moral and theological truths, are relative. This is a misinterpretation of the theory, which deals with physical phenomena at a cosmic scale, not moral or existential truths.

Another frequent assertion used to discredit religious beliefs is the argument that if one has not personally witnessed a phenomenon, such as a miracle, it does not exist. This stance overlooks the fundamental nature of faith and the historical context in which many religious texts and doctrines were established. The absence of personal experience is not a definitive proof of non-existence. Many aspects of both the natural world and human history are accepted and understood through recorded evidence, not through direct personal experience.

These examples demonstrate a broader trend where scientific concepts are taken out of context and used to challenge religious beliefs. This approach often fails to acknowledge the distinct methodologies and realms of inquiry that science and theology embody. Science, by its nature, is empirical, relying on observation, experimentation, and the testing of hypotheses. Religion, on the other hand, often deals with the metaphysical, the existential, and the moral, addressing questions of meaning, purpose, and ethics that are not typically within the purview of scientific inquiry.

In conclusion, while scientific discoveries and theories can certainly inform and enrich philosophical and theological discussions, they should not be misappropriated or used to dismiss religious beliefs outright. The relationship between science and faith

is complex and multifaceted, requiring a nuanced understanding and respect for the distinct contributions each makes to our understanding of the world. Dismissing religious beliefs on the basis of misunderstood or misapplied scientific principles not only undermines the integrity of both disciplines but also closes off the possibility of a more integrated and holistic understanding of reality.

III. The Bible On False Philosophies

The verse from Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ," offers a critical perspective on the use of philosophy and, by extension, can be applied to the discussion of scientific theories when they are used inappropriately or deceptively, particularly against religious beliefs such as those in the Bible.

In this verse, the scripture is cautioning the believers in Colossae against being misled by teachings and ideologies that are not grounded in the teachings of Christ. The term "hollow and deceptive philosophy" in this context refers to teachings that are based on human traditions and the basic principles of the world, rather than on the gospel of Christ. This can be seen as a warning against adopting beliefs simply because they are popular, traditional, or seemingly sophisticated, without critically evaluating their truthfulness or their alignment with Christian teachings.

When applying this verse to the false use of scientific theories against the Bible, it can be interpreted as a warning against

accepting scientific claims that contradict biblical teachings without careful examination. It suggests that not all philosophical or scientific theories, even if widely accepted or based on human reason, are necessarily true or beneficial, especially if they lead one away from the core principles of the Christian faith. This doesn't mean a rejection of science or philosophy, but rather an encouragement to discerningly evaluate such knowledge in the light of Christian doctrine.

Moreover, the verse implies the importance of grounding one's beliefs and worldview in the teachings of Christ, rather than solely in human wisdom or understanding. In the context of scientific theories, this might mean recognizing the limitations of human knowledge and understanding that scientific knowledge is always evolving and subject to change. It's about finding a balance between appreciating scientific inquiry and maintaining the core tenets of faith.

In summary, Colossians 2:8 serves as a reminder to approach philosophical and scientific teachings with discernment, ensuring they do not contradict or undermine the fundamental teachings of Christianity.[11] It encourages believers to be aware of the potential for deception in teachings that are based on human tradition and the elemental forces of the world, and to anchor their beliefs and understanding in the teachings of Christ.

[11]O'Brien, Peter T. *Colossians, Philemon*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000. O'Brien's commentary provides a comprehensive exegetical analysis of Colossians 2:8, exploring its historical background, literary structure, and theological implications.

ARTICLES FROM EMERGING SCHOLARS

A Functional Guru Christology for Ram Mohan Roy

by **GEORGE PAULSON**

Abstract: *Ram Mohan Roy, a Bengali intellectual, perceived the morally excellent life as the appropriate response of the individual to God and to their relationship with fellow human beings. He saw this morality best inculcated in the teachings of Jesus as given in the synoptic Gospels. But in doing so, he disconnected them from the person of Christ and the atoning end of his life, death and resurrection. He refused to accept that the precepts of Christ had any relation to the person of Christ or the salvation that was offered by his death. This paper articulates the three emphases that shaped his religious framework and suggests that the guru Christology of Thomas Thangaraj is a viable contextual Christology for Indians like Ram Mohan Roy.*

Keywords: Ram Mohan Roy; contextual theology; functional Christology; guru Christology;

I. Introduction

In the 1960s Don and Carol Richardson went as missionaries of the good news of Jesus to Western New Guinea among the ethnic group known as the Sawi. The Sawi were a people who honoured treachery and betrayal as ideals. In the legends the Sawi people tell their children the heroes are men who befriended others with the express purpose of eventually betraying them, to kill and eat them. Not surprisingly, in the narrative of the gospel story the hero was Judas Iscariot, who for three years befriended Jesus only to betray him at the last possible moment. It seemed impossible to communicate the gospel with such a people group. That was until

the couple discovered the local concept of the peace child (*tarop tim*). Two warring tribes would each make peace with the other, by giving the other tribe one infant from their own village. This child would be known as the peace child, and he would be raised by the other village as one of their own. So long as the peace child lived, there would be peace between the warring tribes. Don and Carol Richardson used their indigenous concept of the *tarop tim* to present Jesus as the peace child that God sent to make peace between Himself and the Sawi people. The Richardsons were finally able to communicate the necessity of the atoning work of Christ for the Sawi by framing the message in a cultural garb familiar to the them.

All cross-cultural missionaries face conundrums similar to that faced by the Richardsons, and it is no different in India. In this paper we will look at Ram Mohan Roy, one of the most influential figures of modern India, whose particular brand of religiosity led him to embrace whole-heartedly the moral teachings of Jesus while categorically denying His unique personhood, as articulated by orthodox Christian theology, and His atoning life, death and resurrection. In the sections below I will throw light on the specific points of view that shaped the faith of Roy and his interpretation of the gospel story, followed by an experimental solution of a 'peace child' for presenting Christ to those like Ram Mohan Roy.

II. The Context of Ram Mohan Roy and His Hermeneutic in the Defense of the Precepts of Jesus

II.1 Ram Mohan Roy's Context

Ram Mohan Roy, a liberal Hindu Brahmin, is popularly known as the "Father of Modern India" for his epoch-defining

social, political and educational reforms. The beginning of the Indian renaissance is usually traced back to 1815, the year Roy settled permanently in Kolkata.[1] Underlying all of these pursuits, however, were his religious convictions. He interacted extensively with the ancient texts of Hinduism—the Vedas, Brahma Sūtras and the works of Sankara, and in addition, the Quran and the Bible. His religious thought had elements borrowed from all these three faiths.

He was arguably the first significant Indian practitioner of comparative religion, and his most elaborate interreligious dialogue was with Christianity. This arose as a result of a controversy sparked by the publishing of The Precepts of Jesus by Roy.[2]

The Precepts of Jesus was a compilation of just the moral precepts of Jesus verbatim, without any interpretation, drawn primarily from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke and—not surprisingly—to a very limited extent from John. A dispute arose between Roy and the Serampore Trio, led by Joshua Marshman. This was on account of Roy, in his Precepts of Jesus, separating the core doctrines of the Christian faith and the personhood—especially the divinity—and the atoning death and resurrection of Christ from his teachings. He excised texts that referenced the miracles of Christ—except a couple that had moral learnings to be drawn—and the passion narratives as a whole.

[1]David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization* 1773-1835 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 196.

[2]The full title is "The Precepts of Jesus: The Guide to Peace And Happiness, Extracted from the Books of the New Testament, Ascribed to the Four Evangelists." The work was also translated into Sanskrit and Bengali.

Soon after Roy's publishing of the Precepts in 1820, Joshua Marshman, the editor of the Friend of India, published his observations on the compilation in the same journal, to which Roy responded with a short work titled *An Appeal to the Christian Public in Defence of the Precepts of Jesus, by a Friend to Truth* (henceforth referenced as AA). Marshman then engaged, through articles in the Friend of India, in two more detailed critiques of Roy's first appeal. To this Roy responded with a lengthy 173-page A Second Appeal (henceforth referenced as SA). This was followed by a third work, about 300 pages in length, titled the Final Appeal which was in response to Marshman's critique of the SA.

To better understand the issue, the problems it raised, and the possible solutions suggested in this paper, it will be helpful to state and elaborate the three aspects that formed the foundation of the religious thought of Roy: first, a strict monotheism that affirmed the unity of the Godhead, second, the conviction that morality and moral excellence is the essence of true religion, and, third, a thoroughgoing rationalism that commended to faith only that which was reasonable.[3] These three facets, as they are elucidated in the sections below, will shed light on the hermeneutical choices that guided his understanding of the Gospels, the person of Christ and his atoning work, and clarify why he took the interpretive positions that he did in his dialogue with Joshua Marshman.

II.2 A Strict Deistic Monotheism

Ram Mohan Roy in his early childhood was exposed to

[3]M. M. Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance, vol. 5* of Confessing the Faith in India (Madras, India: Christian Literature Society, 1970), 2.

the mythological stories and cultic rituals of Vaishnavism—by his father—and Shaktism—by his mother, whose father was a Shakta priest. But the influence of these faded soon with his Arabic studies in Patna, where, significantly, he became acquainted with the Quran and the monotheistic faith it espoused. After his studies in Patna he moved to Banaras where he studied Sanskrit and also became acquainted with the Vedas and its interpretations by the Advaita school of Indian philosophy.[4]

In 1803 he published his first work, titled Tufat-ul-Muwahhidin (A Present to the Believers in One God) in which he makes a case for the unity of God. For Roy this also includes a denial of multiple persons in the Godhead. He concludes that "belief only in one Almighty God is the fundamental principle of every religion" and this God is "the One Being who is the fountain of the harmonious organization of the universe."[5] From 1816–1820 he published English translations of the Vedanta and four Upanishads to clarify to his fellow Indians, and the Europeans occupants of India, "that the superstitious practices which deform Hindoo religion have nothing to do with the pure spirit of its dictates,"[6] rather, "the real spirit of the Hindoo Scriptures [is] … the declaration of the unity of God."[7]

The title of his English translation of the Vedanta clarifies his intentions, Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedant … Establishing the unity of the Supreme Being; That he Alone is the

[4]D.H. Killingley, "Rammohun Roy on the Vedānta Sūtras," *Religion* 11.2 (1981): 151–52.

[5]Jogendra Chunder Ghose, ed., *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy* (New Delhi, India: Cosmo Publications, 1982), 957, 947.

[6]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 4.

[7]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 35.

Object of Propitiation and Worship.[8]

"[T]here is no other way to salvation" apart from a knowledge of the Supreme Being. Multiple other works were published by Roy, over his lifetime, to describe the Vedantic teaching of the Supreme Being alone being God, and that his worship "is the chief duty of mankind and the sole cause of eternal beatitude."[9]

Ram Mohan Roy bemoans the reality that his fellow Hindus perceive the idols they worship to be actual gods. He clarifies in multiple works that idol worship, according to the Vedas, is for "those only who are incapable of raising their minds to the notion of an invisible Supreme Being."[10] In other words idols are a means for the weak worshipper to contemplate on and worship the Supreme Being, but they themselves are not divine, nor are they incarnations of all or part of the Supreme Being. Roy concludes from readings of the Vedanta and the works of Shankaracharya that an individual can have faith in, and worship, God independent of the performance of ceremonies and rituals.[11]

In his Translation of the Vedanta Roy gives us the modes in which one should worship the Supreme Being. They can be broadly categorized as two: firstly, by showing devotion to God and adoring him, and secondly, and for our purposes more significantly, the Vedanta "shows that moral principle is part of the adoration of God."[12]

[8]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 1.
[9]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 64.
[10]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 96.
[11]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 107.
[12]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 14.

This leads us to the next critical facet of the religion of Ram Mohan Roy.

I.3 Morality as the Essence of Religion

Ram Mohan Roy from his early years, beginning with his studies in Patna, was increasingly disillusioned by the moral degradation he observed around him. A case in point is the practice of sati—the self-immolation of a widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband—which the seventeen-year-old sister-in-law of Roy was a victim of after the death of his brother, despite the vehement protests of Roy. In his view, the idolatry in Hindu society was the root cause for this, and many other social evils. A social and moral reform for the Hindu society of his day was a relentless pursuit of Roy, and he may have found the destination of that journey in the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels.

A morally excellent life is a mode of worship to the Supreme Being. In his introduction to the Translation of the Ishopanishad—published in 1816, four years prior to The Precepts of Jesus—which highlights the incomprehensibility of the Supreme Being, Roy restores confidence to any reader who is overwhelmed by the puniness of humanity by exalting its moral faculties which possess "a capability of almost boundless improvement … [and] the highly beneficial objects which the appropriate exercise of them may produce."[13] He concludes the introduction with "that grand and comprehensive moral principle—Do unto others as ye would be done by."[14] Committing to the practice of such a moral principle made the existence of the individual profitable for both

[13]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, 73.

[14]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 74.

God and humanity. For Roy, the Golden Rule was partially taught in all religions but was "principally inculcated by Christianity."[15] The teachings of Jesus were sufficient to elevate the minds of its readers to a high view of God and to guide their conduct to fulfil their duties to themselves and to society. Roy could only hope for the "best effects" from the publishing of the teachings of Jesus.[16]

The morally excellent life has atoning value for Ram Mohan Roy. Though this assertion is not as clear in his other writings,[17] it is clearly espoused in his view of the teachings of Christ. He states unequivocally in AA that one of the beliefs motivating his separation of the teachings of Jesus from the doctrinal texts was that, "they alone [i.e. the teachings of Christ] were a sufficient guide to secure peace and happiness to mankind at large."[18] Roy supports this position with multiple texts, key among them being Matt 22:37–40 (and its parallel texts), "Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." For Roy, the "Law and Prophets" refers to all the divine commandments ordained in the Old Testament.[19]

[15]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 483.

[16]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 485.

[17]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 106. One such occurrence is in his Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Veds, in which he sees "faith in the Supreme Being … united with moral works leads to eternal happiness." (Emphasis mine)

[18]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 550.

[19]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 550.

It would be absurd, says Roy, for Jesus to respond to the lawyer seeking to inherit eternal life in Luke 10, with the statement "this do, and thou shalt live," if He also required assent to certain doctrinal content as necessary for salvation.[20]

When Joshua Marshman counters Roy with the necessity of the deity of Christ and the atoning of Christ for the forgiveness of sins, Roy is quick to note that the Scriptures speak of atonement and forgiveness by genuine repentance. He quotes verses like Luke 13:3 "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," and Luke 5:32 "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance," to clarify the promise of Jesus "that the forgiveness of God and the favour of his divine majesty may be obtained by sincere repentance." He concludes SA with the certainty that remission of sins is a necessary consequence of repentance, and that his compilation of the precepts of Jesus "contain all that is essential in practical Christianity … [and a guide to] the most acceptable atonement [i.e. repentance] on our part to the All-merciful, when we have fallen short of that duty."[21] Roy is unwavering in his position, based on his confidence in the authority of the Christian Scriptures, that adherence to the teachings of Christ is indispensable for one to enter the kingdom of heaven, while there is, in his opinion, no similar necessity in relation to acknowledging the "mysteries or historical relations contained in those books [the Gospels]."[22]

I.4 A Thoroughgoing Rationalism

While Ram Mohan Roy abhorred the degrading moral

[20]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 550.

[21]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 550.

[22]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 550.

standards of Hindu society plagued by an idolatrous faith that opposed the true spirit of Hinduism as enshrined in the Vedas, he concluded early in his education that a rational perception of religion was the sole means to purify Hinduism and Indian society of the superstitions and mysteries that prompted these diabolical acts.

This rationalist bend was likely a result of his interactions with Western thought and his studies in Arabic and Arabic philosophy at Patna. Roy implicitly accepted Enlightenment values and sought an objectivity in his thought and writing that would protect him against claims of provincialism.[23] His first published work *A Present to the Believers in One God* is replete with this principle. He notes,

> there is always such an innate faculty existing in the nature of mankind that in case any person of sound mind, before or after assuming the doctrines of any religion, makes an impartial and just enquiry … he will be able to distinguish the truth from untruth and true propositions from fallacious ones, and … he becoming free from the useless restraints of religion, which sometimes become sources of prejudice … and causes of physical and mental troubles, will turn to the One Being who is the fountain of the harmonious organization of the universe, and will pay attention to the good of society.[24]

In his later years, by the time he compiled The Precepts of Jesus, Roy was more cognizant of the limitations of reason, of a "conviction in the mind of its total ignorance of the nature and

[23] David J. Neumann, "The Father of Modern India and the Son of God: Rammohun Roy's Jesus Christ," *Journal of Religious History* 45.3 (2021): 373.

[24]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, 947, 958.

of the specific attributes of the Godhead, and … the real essence of the soul."[25] It was such a clarity of the deficiencies of human reason that led him to eschew speculative doctrines in his religious conviction and shift his focus to the discovery of a morality that could be conceived as the essence of true religion.[26]

The rationalist emphasis on morality led him to prioritize the ethical texts in Matthew, Mark and Luke and reject the more metaphysical focus of the Gospel of John.[27] This was unlike Swami Vivekananda who preferred a mystic Christ to an ethical Christ,[28] though the conclusions they both drew were similar, resulting from a rejection of the deity of Christ. Religion should only accept as the content of faith that which is reasonable.[29] This is clear when he writes about The Precepts of Jesus:

> Moral doctrines … are beyond the reach of metaphysical perversion and intelligible alike to the learned and to the unlearned. This simple code of religion and morality is so admirably calculated to elevate men's ideas to high and liberal notions of God, … and is also well fitted to regulate the conduct of the human race in the discharge of their various duties to themselves, and to society.[30]

[25]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 483.

[26]Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* 4.

[27]Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* 4.

[28]Rathan Almeida, "Uniqueness and Universality of Jesus Christ Revisited: An Encounter of Walter Cardinal Kasper's Spirit Christology with the Indian Theology in the Light of Ecclesia in Asia. An Attempt to Focus on and Deepen the Specificity of Jesus Christ in the Context of Religious Pluralism in India" (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 2016), 267–68.

[29]Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* 2.

[30]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 485.

This rational bend guided his interpretation of the Gospels. In situations where the text of the Gospels contradicted plain reason, he employed his principle of an unprejudiced logical reading to conclude that those texts defying reason were to be understood metaphorically, or at the very least interpreted in light of those texts that were reasonable when interpreted literally. (This hermeneutic becomes clear in his argument for a Christology that is characteristically Arian.) In endorsing this method he follows in the footsteps of Vyasa, the commentator of the Vedas, who employed this technique to good effect in reconciling passages which were seemingly at variance with each other.[31]

From the preceding sections we can conclude that the belief of Ram Mohan Roy in one God who was transcendent and incomprehensible, and his conviction of a rational reading of religious texts that purified religion of its superstitions and mysteries, all culminated in the priority of a morally excellent life as the means to salvation. And it was this relationship between morality and salvation that was at the heart of the controversy between Marshman and Ram Mohan Roy. Ram Mohan Roy used his advanced knowledge of Hebrew and Greek and his familiarity with the Bible to prove his own unique interpretations which affirmed that the Godhead had a single person, namely the Father, Jesus was created, and the passion and resurrection of Jesus had no atoning value. The compilation that Roy had made of the teaching of Jesus was all that was necessary for humanity.[32] Meanwhile, for

[31]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 36. Here Roy clarifies in light of Vyasa's commentary, that though the Vedas speak of an invisible Supreme Being, and a plurality of independent visible gods, the latter truth is to be allegorically interpreted in light of the former truth which is more rational. Also see page 10.

[32]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 552.

Marshman, whose soteriology was like that of the throughgoing modern evangelical, the position Roy held was out of the bounds of orthodox Christianity.

III. Ram Mohan Roy on the Deity of Jesus Christ

Joshua Marshman in his articles examining the compilation of Ram Mohan Roy articulates the two doctrines, which if not accepted will make the precepts of Jesus insufficient for salvation: the deity of Christ and his atonement. Marshman writes, "[a]ll these assertions [of the existence of the Triune God, the Deity of the Son, and the Atonement of Christ] we shall meet simply with Divine Testimony on this subject, from which there can be no appeal, and with which, we think, our author should have made himself fully acquainted before he published them to the world."[33] What Marshman did not count on was that Roy would have little regard for the traditional and historical Christian interpretation of Scripture, but would rather employ on the biblical text the same rationalist hermeneutic that had aided his understanding of the Vedantic texts and persuaded him of the monotheistic essence of all religions.

For Roy, Jesus was a teacher par excellence, "a wise and rational sage" whose teaching and religion could be embraced anyone of sound mind, Indian or non-Indian. Jesus was the giver of a moral standard that transcended all cultures and was a judge for all human activity, including religious activity. "The identity of Jesus was central to Roy's critique of Indian polytheistic 'superstition.' This Jesus was an Enlightened critic of Hindu 'priest craft,' a figure

[33]Joshua Marshman, *A Defence of the Deity and Atonement of Jesus Christ, in Reply to Ram-Mohun Roy of Calcutta* (London: Kingsbury, Parbury and Allen, 1822), 79–80.

who echoed Protestants' anti-Catholic evaluation of Hinduism."[34] But Jesus, for Roy, could not be divine, for multiple reasons: of which a few are enumerated here. Roy observes that Jesus himself acknowledges his dependence on the Father and that his power and authority are from the Father. A couple of the many texts Roy quotes are, John 17:1–2 "… glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee; As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him," and John 5:30 "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me."

Roy interprets the oneness of the Son with the Father spoken of in a text like John 10:30 "I and my Father are one" in light of the prayer of Jesus for the unity of his disciples in John 17:11 "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are," and John 17:20–23. The unity that exists between the Father and the Son is not one of nature, but, as Jesus clarifies by the statements in John 17, is of a kind that exists between the Son and the apostles, it is a "subsisting concord of will and design."[35] He avers that once we conclude the unity spoken of in these two contexts is of the same nature then we are left with three options as to its meaning:

> "First as conveying the doctrine that the Supreme Being, the Son and the Apostles were to be absorbed mutually as drops of water into one whole … [which] is quite inconsistent with the faith of all … Christians. Secondly, as proving an identity

[34]Neumann, "*The Father of Modern India and the Son of God,*" 381.

[35] Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 577.

> of nature, with distinction of person, between the Father, the Son and the Apostles … multiplying the number of persons in the Godhead far beyond what has ever been proposed by any sect [of Christians].
>
> Thirdly, as expressing that unity which is said to exist wherever there are found perfect concord, harmony, love and obedience such as the Son evinced towards the Father, and taught the disciples to display towards the Divine will. That the language of our Saviour can be understood in this last sense solely, will, I trust be readily acknowledged by every candid expounder of the sacred writings, as being the only one alike warranted by the common use of words, and capable of apprehension by the human understanding."[36]

For Ram Mohan Roy, Jesus was inferior to God but greater than human beings and angels. He would have little difficulty in acknowledging that the Son was identical in nature with the Father, but would add that the Son must inevitably be a reality subsequent to the Father, not coeval. Based on the authority of the Scriptures, he readily agreed that Jesus existed from all eternity, and the world was created by him and for him, but on the basis of the same authority he believed that the Son was produced by the Supreme Being, one among created beings (John 5:26; Col 1:15).[37]

Fundamentally, though, the greatest difficulty for Roy was to accept the reality of the incarnation and multiple persons in the Godhead. The idea of an avatar, i.e. God taking on a human

[36] Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 578.

[37] Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 583–84.

form seemed unjustifiable to Roy as "there can be obviously no inducement for an omnipotent [and omniscient] being … to assume a form in order either to acquaint himself with the affairs of men, or to accomplish any benevolent design towards his creatures."[38] The concept of God becoming man seemed completely unreasonable to Roy, and the possibility of three persons in the Godhead was no different to Hindu polytheism. In his third article in the Brahmunical Magazine, initiated to respond to Joshua Marshman and the Friend of India, Roy notes:

> Is it conformable to the nature of the Supreme Ruler of the universe to take the form of a servant though only for a season? Is this the true idea of God which the Editor maintains? Even idolaters among Hindus have more plausible excuses for their polytheism … both of them being equally and solely protected by the shield of mystery.[39]

The unreasonableness of the incarnation confounded Roy to such an extent that he referred to these Christian doctrines as "extravagant fancies" worthy of "the derision of the discerning public."[40]

IV. An Experimental Solution

IV.1 The Need for a Functional Christology

Ram Mohan Roy was arguably the first but not the last of the Hindu reformers to read the Bible with a lens coloured by the presuppositions of their understanding of the essence of

[38] Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 117.

[39] Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 203.

[40] Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 184.

Hinduism (and Enlightenment ideals). Keshub Chunder Sen, Swami Vivekananda, Manilal Parekh and Mahatma Gandhi are few of the many who made the same journey but charted their own distinct paths through this relatively uncharted field of Hindu-Christian interreligious dialogue in India. Important for our discussion is that each of them awakened the Indian church to the necessity of an articulation of Christian faith that was grounded in the Christian Scripture and tradition while missionally relevant to the religious and cultural realities of the Indian people who would hear, believe and express that faith.[41]

The lack of success Joshua Marshman had in communicating the significance of the person and life of Christ was largely due to his inability to account for the religious and cultural context in which the religious thought of Roy germinated and was rooted. To his credit, Roy recognized this failure when he observed that though Christian missionaries laboured tirelessly to communicate the gospel message, they had "completely counteracted their own benevolent efforts, by introducing all the dogmas and mysteries taught in Christian churches to people by no means prepared to receive them,"[42] communicating the message to the Indian people "in the same way as if they were reasoning with persons brought up in a Christian country."[43] This critical observation of the lack of contextualization of the gospel message and the Christian faith on the part of the missionaries and an inability to meet the people where they were in their specific religious and cultural contexts is,

[41]Palolil Varghese Joseph, *An Indian Trinitarian Theology of Missio Dei: Insights from St. Augustine and Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, American Society of Missiology Monograph Series 39* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 71.

[42]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 557. Emphasis mine.

[43]Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy,* 557.

and for the time being will be, a significant impediment for the continual development of an Indian Christian theology.

M. M. Thomas notes that, Ram Mohan Roy was not the last Indian to be awakened by the teaching of Jesus in the Gospels from the metaphysical to the ethical aspects of life, and for such individuals the message of salvation cannot be in terms devoid of the ethical facet. "[T]herefore the communication of the gospel of salvation [to such persons] has to be in terms of the nature and fulfilment of the moral life."[44] The research I am engaged in seeks to evaluate the guru Christology of Thomas Thangaraj—articulated in his work The Crucified Guru: An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology—as a viable means of communicating the gospel message to persons like Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi who were captivated by the moral teachings of Jesus Christ.[45]

IV.2 Guru Christology as a Potentially Viable Functional Christology

The differences that arose in the controversy between Ram Mohan Roy and the Serampore missionaries represented by Joshua Marshman can be critiqued from multiple facets—we could critique the approach of Marshman who failed to emphasize the love of Christ as means to bridge the rational moral outlook of Roy

[44]Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance*, 11. This is not to suggest that the ethical aspects of the gospel message can be separated from the message of salvation, but to rather indicate the need for a communication and contextualization that makes the ethical aspect a significant part of the message.

[45]Since this article aims primarily to highlight my current area of research and its relevance for the broader evangelical church in India, it will briefly consider a few aspects of guru Christology, a perspective whose usefulness and problems need to be researched in greater depth and weighed against each other.

with the reality of Christ[46] or the inability of Roy to exercise the sympathy and imagination that would permit him to read the Bible through the lens of Christian tradition, to read as the comparative theologians of today seek to, and understand other religions on their own terms.[47] But in this paper I will briefly explore the possibility of a contextual Christology that is relevant to the situation of Ram Mohan Roy.

Traditional Christology is focused on answering the question 'Who is Jesus?' in terms of his relationship to and consubstantiality with the Father, his eternal being, his incarnation, the union of two natures in the one person Jesus, and other aspects. Such a Christology is often referred to as an ontological Christology. In contrast to it is functional Christology which focuses on the work that Jesus has accomplished and what we continue to receive from Him.[48] Examples of a functional Christology include understanding Jesus as healer, provider, protector, deliverer, peacemaker, redeemer, etc. For Ram Mohan Roy it was the teachings of Jesus that were "the guide to peace and happiness" for his readers, and consequently the primary function of Jesus was as a teacher and the primary task of Christology as the articulation of this teaching.[49] For Roy, Jesus was the greatest of all teachers, one who was in His nature superior to human beings and angels. The functional guru Christology presented by Thomas Thangaraj, which includes at its core the idea

[46]Thomas, *The Acknowledged Christ of the Indian Renaissance,* 29–36.

[47]Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology,* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2020), 79. Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 57–59.

[48]R. T. France, "The Uniqueness of Christ," *Churchman* 95.3 (1981): 211.

[49]The Gospels on numerous occasions refer to Jesus teaching and as the "rabbi" or "teacher" of the disciples. See Matt 5:3; Luke 18:18; John 3:2; 4:31; 20:16.

of the guru (teacher) training a shishya (disciple) is inseparable from the function of the guru as a teacher. Thomas Thangaraj in his work examines carefully the Tail Saivite concept of "guru" and tries to develop a Christology informed principally by this distinct Indian symbol.

Thangaraj at the beginning of his work elucidates three points of dissatisfaction with the traditional ways of doing Christology, and two of these are relevant to the context of Ram Mohan Roy. Firstly, the insufficiency of incarnational language which identifies Jesus as the incarnation of God, and his unique reality of being fully man but also fully divine and coequal with the Father. The most relevant problem that contributes to the insufficiency is that the mythical language of incarnation is not intelligible to modern human beings who find themselves entrenched in world dominated by technology and the natural sciences. It was a similar rationalist tendency informed by Enlightenment ideas and Roy's previous conception of the Supreme Being from the Vedas that led him to the same disillusionment with the deity of Jesus Christ.[50] Secondly, the insufficiency of doctrinal orthodoxy and the necessity for the kind of orthopraxis posited by Gustavo Gutiérrez for a meaningful Christian theology.[51]

For Ram Mohan Roy, the moral degradation he saw permeating the society around him, attributed largely to the blind ritualist idolatry espoused by the Brahmin priests that refused to

[50]M. Thomas Thangaraj, *The Crucified Guru: An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 25–27.

[51]Thangaraj, *The Crucified Guru,* 27–30.Thangaraj does not ignore the issues this raises, including the undermining of the criterion of doctrinal orthodoxy in order to highlight orthopraxis, and takes these issues into consideration as he develops a Christology based on the concept of guru.

account for the pure essence of Hinduism, drove him to see the precepts of Jesus as the most excellent articulation of the moral principle.

The concept of guru is one that is known in all south India languages and has been used to speak of Jesus in hymnic literature, apologetic discourse, the works of Hindu thinkers and Christian theologians in India and even pictorial expressions. For example, the Tamil poet Marian Upatesiyar sings, "O! Thou true guru, Christ the true guru! Life-giving Word, the guru! The good guru of eternal joy! Heavenly golden guru! Lord!" and Mahatma Gandhi said "I regard Jesus as a great teacher of humanity."[52]

Thangaraj interacts with the reflective traditions and writings of Tamil Saivism in his articulation of the guru concept, rather than the popular and unreflective notions heard in everyday conversation. He argues that "guru" as a concept is "comprehensive enough to accommodate the various theological and soteriological concerns in avatar," the latter being the India concept that parallels "incarnation." In other words, a guru Christology has the ability to account for the person of Christ as articulated in Christian tradition, to progress from a functional Christology to an ontological one.[53]

Thangaraj in his work argues for a creative theological task that permits "a two-way traffic between the concept of guru in Saiva Siddhanta and traditional Christology, each informing and shaping the other."[54] "The distinctive features of the concept of

[52] Thangaraj, *The Crucified Guru,* 59–86.

[53] France, *"The Uniqueness of Christ,"* 211.

[54] Thangaraj, *The Crucified Guru,* 88.

guru are brought in to influence and shape my explication of the significance of Jesus … [and] the elements peculiar to my portrait of Jesus function as correctives to the Saiva Siddhanta understanding of guru."[55] He argues that recognition of the inter-related nature of human existence compels us to respect the integrity of other religions and interact with them as mutual partners rather than from a position of power.[56]

V Conclusion

Faith is the adequate response of the individual who encounters God, while theology is an articulation of the expression of that response, and the content and beliefs that undergird the expression. The latter depends on revelation and tradition for clarity. The task of Christian theology, specifically Christology in India, is not so much to translate the meaning of the traditional definitions of western Christology as it is to contextualize it in manner intelligible to the Indian community. Only when it is intelligible will it be truly meaningful to the community that adopts it. The emphasis on intelligibility though does not mean a sacrifice of the distinctives of orthodox Christology.

In this article we have tried to understand the biases that molded the religious thought of Ram Mohan Roy, who arguably stands at the headwaters of the Bengal and Indian renaissance. We identified and explicated that for Roy a strict deistic monotheism and a narrow rationalism resulted in a focus on the moral principle as the apt response of the individual in their relationship to God and to man. We saw that any efforts on the part of Joshua Marshman

[55] Thangaraj, *The Crucified Guru,* 108.

[56] Thangaraj, *The Crucified Guru,* 107.

to convince Roy of the connection between the moral principle, the person of Jesus and salvation through Jesus were largely futile. In conclusion we proposed that a functional rather than an ontological Christology needs to be the starting point for dialogue with persons like Ram Mohan, and it needs to be one that is contextual to the Indian community. The guru Christology propounded by Thomas Thangaraj was espoused as a likely viable means to communicate Christ in the Indian context, after an evaluation of its advantages and disadvantages. This critical evaluation is the next step that the current research aims to take.

Knowing the Incorporeal God: An Evangelical Reparation of Correspondence Theory

by **Ginminlian Hauzel**

Abstract: *The current discussion on God-talk revolves around whether true knowledge of God occurs when a concept corresponds to what God is, or when it is recognized as true by a community of believers. The former holds correspondence theory without giving sufficient attention to the role of community, the latter employs an intersubjective recognition of truth to the exclusion of correspondence theory. This essay attempts to bridge this gap using Augustine's theory of illumination and offers a repaired version of correspondence theory compatible with intersubjective recognition of truth.*

Key Words: Truth, Illumination, Corporeal, Incorporeal, Picture, Representation, Intersubjective

I. Introduction

If Christianity is true, Christians must speak rightly about the God they worship. What does it mean to speak rightly about God? This essay attempts to bridge the gap between theologians who claim that speaking rightly about God means the correspondence between human concepts and God without attending to the importance of the role of the community on the one hand, and theologians who focus on the community's intersubjective recognition of truth to the exclusion of correspondence theory on the other. It provides an appreciative yet critical assessment of both approaches and offers a repaired version of correspondence theory compatible with the intersubjective recognition of truth. This goal is achieved by retrieving Augustine's theory of illumination.

II. Either Correspondence Theory or Intersubjective Recognition?

Charles Hodge, a prominent modern Evangelical theologian, claims that everyone has an anthropomorphic innate idea of God. We have no God, He argues, if we reject the anthropomorphic concept of God: everyone conceives of God as a moral person, God reveals himself in Scripture as a moral person, and God incarnates in Christ as a moral person. God is to be conceived in terms of human perfection.[1] Hodge asserts that our knowledge of God is true when "our ideas of God, founded on the testimony of his Word, correspond to what He really is."[2] Here, the "true is that in which the reality exactly corresponds to the manifestation. God is true…because all his declarations correspond to what really is,"[3] therefore, "what God has revealed may be confided in as exactly corresponding to what really is, or is to be."[4] What Hodge means by this is that God gives a mind that can form the exact representation/picture of what God is through God's revelation in Scripture. Thus, according to Hodge, our idea of God is true because it corresponds exactly to what God really is. This is a typical correspondence theory employed by modern Evangelicals.[5]

[1]Charles Hodge, Theology Proper, vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 191–99. Hodge's theology is heavily influenced by Scottish Common-Sense philosophy. See Mark A. Noll, "Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought," *Am. Q*. 37.2 (1985).

[2]Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* 364.

[3]Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* 437.

[4] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 437.

[5]See Carl F. H. Henry, God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations, vol. 1 of *God, Revelation, and Authority Vol.1* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976); J. P. Moreland, "Truth, Contemporary Philosophy, and the Postmodern Turn," *J. Evang. Theol. Soc.* 48.1 (2005): 77–88; Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor, eds., *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2004).

On the contrary, the contemporary theologian Kevin Hector contends that "if God is thought to correspond to one's ideas of God, then God will be cut down to size like any other object."[6] If one claims that a concept corresponds to God, the concept is "inescapably violent, since it forces objects (God) to fit into predetermined categories."[7] Rather than using the correspondence theory, Hector utilizes an intersubjective recognition of truth. In this account, "A belief about God is true, then, if it gets Christ's subject matter right, and it gets Christ's subject matter right if it goes on in the same way as precedent beliefs which have been recognized as getting it right."[8] Regarding concepts, Hector claims that a concept changes each time a new concept is recognized as true, therefore "the application of concepts to God does not entail that God has been subsumed under a predetermined, fixed category."[9] As the Spirit enters the process of recognition, it is the "Spirit who enables one to go on in the same way as Christ"[10] and "raises these concepts up and applies them to Godself,"[11] Thus Hector asserts that "truth need not be thought of in correspondentist terms,"[12] and "the loss of correspondentism need not be thought to entail a loss of

[6]Kevin W. Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics: God, Language, and the Spirit of Recognition,* Current Issues in Theology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 13. Hector grounds his truth account in the ordinary theory of language drawn from the later Wittgenstein. Theologically, he is influenced by the Yale theologians through Bruce Marshall who is a prominent interpreter of George Lindbeck's works. See Bruce D. Marshall, *Trinity and Truth*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[7]Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics,* 47.

[8]Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics,* 242.

[9]Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics,* 146.

[10]Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*, 86.

[11]Hector, *Theology without Metaphysic*s, 129.

[12]Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics*, 234.

theological truth."[13] In short, Hector overcomes the objection raised against correspondence theory by repudiating the theory itself.

Evaluation: Recent theologians aptly associate Hodge's version of correspondence theory with the picture/representation theory that claims that "'truth' is a correspondence relation in which language (and thought) accurately reflects, mirrors, or pictures reality."[14] Though Hector does not directly refer to Hodge, his criticism of correspondence theory is directed to the picture/representation theory. From the brief exploration of their views, it can be observed that Hodge's anthropomorphic innate idea of God is akin to Hector's predetermined concepts of God. Hodge is criticized for seeming never to "fear that their minds had been affected by sin,"[15] and for holding "an almost Pelagian confidence that the mind was essentially undisturbed by sin's influence."[16] Yet Hector too is criticized for being unable to overcome correspondence theory because under his theory, concepts "will still correspond to determinate properties, and so, in applying them to objects, we

[13]Hector, *Theology without Metaphysics,* 243.

[14]Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *J. Evang. Theol. Soc.* 48.1 (2005): 95. Kevin Vanhoozer categorized Charles Hodge and Carl Henry as holding early Wittgenstein's "picture theory" and terms them as the Hodge-Henry (H-H) hypothesis. He states that the picture theory "fails sufficiently to recognize that we use language to do other things beside referring." Likewise, Alister McGrath notes, for Hodge, "To know the words of Scripture is thus to know immediately the realities to which they relate," and today's reader can be "assured of encountering the very words, thoughts, and intentions of God Himself." See Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," 95–96; Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 169.

[15]Jack Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 290.

[16]Rogers and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach,* 290. Vanhoozer associates Hodge's theory with the picture/representation theory. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," 95–96.

will still be sorting things into predetermined categories."[17] These criticisms show that 1) if correspondence theory is to be retained, the effects of sin in the mind should be taken seriously, and 2) if intersubjective recognition is to be adopted, it cannot be without correspondence theory. In short, if Hodge's correspondence theory is vulnerable to violence and idolatry and Hector's account could not overcome correspondence theory, the way forward may be to repair correspondence theory rather than repudiate it. To develop a repaired form of correspondence theory, we now turn to Agustine's doctrine of illumination.

III. Augustine's Doctrine of Illumination

Though there are indications from commentators that Augustine holds correspondence theory, Augustine does not develop a correspondence theory of truth in the modern sense of the term. Marcial L. Colish, for example, infers from Augustine that "words are acoustic signs, which correspond accurately to the realities they represent. This correspondence theory, however, is partial, and it does not constitute identity with the things signified."[18] This is a fair inference about Augustine's theory of language, but we will need to explore how Augustine develops a correspondence theory, and how this theory can be related to theological language, particularly in God-talk. Thus, the purpose of turning to Augustine is not to draw straightforwardly from him, but to construct a correspondence theory from his doctrine of illumination, specifically in light of

[17]Michael C. Rea, "Theology Without Idolatry or Violence," *Scott. J. Theol.* 68.1 (2015): 70, 72.

[18] Marica L. Colish is inferring this correspondence theory from Augustine's de Magistro, a dialogue between Augustine and his son, Adeodatus. Marcial L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (United States of America: Yale University Press, 1968), 54. To read the English translation of de Magistro, see Augustine, "The Teacher," in *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, trans. Peter King (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995).

the contemporary discussion on God-talk. The overall goal is to correct the typical correspondence theory of modern Evangelicals by engaging with postmodern challenges.

Augustine's doctrine of illumination is chosen because it provides the knowledge of God without Hodge's theory of mental representation. In what follows, it will be shown that 1) the barrier to the knowledge of God is sin, 2) the presence of God in the mind is the condition for the possibility of the knowledge of the corporeal and incorporeal, and 3) true knowledge of God is the love of the incorporeal God through the incarnate Christ. The whole purpose of this exploration is to formulate an improved version of correspondence theory using Augustine's doctrine of illumination.

III.1 The Barriers to the Knowledge of God

Augustine claims that before the fall God spoke inwardly to the mind without a word from outside. The mind knows God without a mental representation in a corporeal body. However, after the fall, God uses external words such as the word of the Scripture (the writings of the prophets and apostles) to communicate who he is.[19] Because of sin, "the mind has become conformed to the world of bodies in such a way that it has lost the capacity to perceive that which is not bodily and to conceive of that which is

[19]Before the fall, Augustine writes "God watered it by an interior spring, speaking to its intellect, so that it did not receive words from the outside, as rain from the aforementioned clouds. Rather it was satisfied from its own spring, that is, by the truth flowing from its interior;" after the fall, "But he waters them from the clouds, that is, from the writings of the prophets and apostles. They are correctly called clouds, because these words which sound and pass away after they strike the air become like clouds when there is added the obscurity of allegories like a fog that has been drawn over them." Augustine, On Genesis, trans. Roland J. Teske, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* v. 84 (Baltimore: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 2.4.5.

not subject to representation."[20] Even the spiritual substance can only be thought of in a corporeal body. Thinking inevitably consists of representation.[21] Whenever the mind attempts to think of the incorporeal God, "it is able to think of that which it confesses only by constructing an idolatrous image."[22] Therefore the consequence of sin is that the mind cannot think of that which is non-bodily such as God.

Since God communicates himself in language, Augustine holds that language "has significance by convention," that is, only through "the agreement made within a society."[23] For Augustine, "Language is conventional only because it is fallen."[24] Thus "every human community relies on words and other external signs," wherein "external signs are both necessary for the life of a community and woefully insufficient."[25]

In the post-fall state, to speak "correctly is a matter of maintaining linguistic conventions."[26] This implies that there are no natural correspondence relations between language and reality, but

[20]Martin Westerholm, "The Work of the Trinity and the Knowledge of God in Augustine's De Trinitate," *Int. J. Syst.* Theol. (2012): 4.

[21]Westerholm, "The Work of the Trinity and the Knowledge of God in Augustine's De Trinitate," 7.

[22]Westerholm, "The Work of the Trinity and the Knowledge of God in Augustine's De Trinitate," 7.

[23]Darrell Jackson, "The Theory of Sign in Augustine's De Doctrina Christiana," *Rev. Etudes Augustiniennes Patrist.* 15 (1969): 14.

[24]Phillip Cary, *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 80.

[25]Cary, Outward Signs, 83.

[26]Peter King, "Augustine on Language," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine,* David Vincent Meconi and Eleanor Stump, 2. ed., Cambridge Companions (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014), 303. See Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine, trans.* J. F. Shaw, Reprint. (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2009), 2.13.19.

only conventional relations.

III.2 The Condition for the Possibility of Knowledge

Though Augustine claims that language is the result of the fall, human minds cannot perceive the incorporeal God, and language has significance only by convention, unlike the skeptics, he affirms true knowledge is possible. He claims that nothing is learned from a sign/language because "a sign is learned when the thing is known, rather than the thing being learned when the sign is given."[27] In this sense, "words have force only to the extent that they remind us to look for things; they don't display them for us to know."[28] Regarding the knowledge of the things themselves, he writes, "the things themselves made manifest within when God discloses them,"[29] and "it is He alone who teaches us whether what is said is true."[30] God impresses the intelligible objects/forms, and certifies true knowledge.[31] The inward presence of God in the mind is the condition for the possibility of all forms of knowledge.

Augustine claims that the God that indwells the mind is the interior Christ: "He Who is said to dwell in the inner man, does teach: Christ — that is, the unchangeable power and everlasting

[27]Augustine, "The Teacher," 10.33: 136.

[28]Augustine, "The Teacher," 11.36: 137.

[29]Augustine, "The Teacher," 12.40:141.

[30]Augustine, "The Teacher," 146.

[31]This is a much-debated issue in the discussion of Augustine's doctrine of illumination. The Franciscan interprets the role of illumination as imprinting forms in the mind, whereas the Formalist interprets it as conveying certainty to the mind. The view adopted in this paper is the combination of the two views, the illumination both displays forms and conveys certainty. See Ronald H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Ohio: Academic Renewal Press, 2003); Lydia Schumacher, *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge, Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

wisdom of God, which every rational soul does consult."[32] The interior Christ is the Light and Wisdom of God. The external world can only be seen and grasped "as they are lit up from Beyond, by the heavenly Light."[33] No theories of knowledge are sufficient without the Light of God:

> Not enough, for Augustine, to band creatures together in social networks; not enough to surround human knowers with social practices, inherited languages, conventional forms of life, and collective speech acts; not enough to proclaim that knowledge is a social artifact. No, for Augustine, knowledge—any knowledge at all!—demands divine help, the mercy of the Uncreated Light.[34]

As the Light of the world, "He makes earthly realities clear," and "as the Truth itself, He lays bare the truths each of us grasps in the act of understanding."[35] In other words, though the sun makes the material things in the world visible to the eye, without the light of God, the mind is incapable of perceiving them.

III.3 The Possibility of Knowing the Incorporeal God

If knowledge of truth is possible, can one know the incorporeal God? Augustine distinguished the eye of the body

[32]Augustine, "The Teacher," 11.38:139. For further discussion on Augustine's inetriority, see Khaled Anatolios, "Interiority and Extroversion in Biblical Trinitarian Faith in Augustine's De Trinitate," in *The Bible and the Church Fathers: The Liturgical Context of Patristic Exegesis,* ed. Scott Hahn (Steubenville: Emmaus Road Publishing, 2012).

[33]Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: Doctrine of God Vol.1* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 1:419.

[34]Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: Doctrine of God,* 1:422.

[35]Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: Doctrine of God,* 1:425.

and the eye of the mind as having sensible objects and intelligible objects respectively. While sensible objects are corporeal and visible, intelligible objects are incorporeal and invisible, but the possibility of the knowledge of the sensible object is the intelligible object.[36] These intelligible objects, as indicated in the previous section, are "forms exist first in the mind of God and exist in a derived form in the rational structure of man's mind,"[37] wherein "man does not create the eternal forms. They are a given and he must receive them as they are impressed upon his mind."[38] These intelligible forms such as good, truth, wisdom, and the like are the conditions of knowledge because "the actuality of the human capacity to make judgments about good things shows that human beings have a notion of the good 'impressed' upon their memory."[39]

Augustine further claims that these intelligible forms can be known and perceived. He suggests, "This is good and that is good. Take away this and that and see good itself if you can. In this way, you

[36]See Roland John Teske, "Augustine of Hippo on Seeing with the Eyes of the Mind," in *Augustine of Hippo: Philosopher, Exegete, and Theologian: A Second Collection of Essays, Marquette Studies in Philosophy 66* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009).

[37]Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge,* 110. These forms are what Thomas Aquinas calls literal terms that properly belong to God in contrast to metaphorical terms that properly belong only to creatures. However, the difference between Augustine's and Aquinas' view of these terms is how they are acquired. For Aquinas, they are abstracted from material objects, but for Augustine, they are impressed by God in the mind without the mediation from external objects. Men know and judge external/material objects by these forms. Thus, these forms are necessary for both the knowledge of God and creations. William P. Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," in *Reasoned Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology in Honor of Norman Kretzmann, ed. Eleanore Stump* (Cornell University Press, 1993); Kevin W. Hector, "Apophaticism in Thomas Aquinas: A Re-Reformulation and Recommendation," *Scott. J. Theol.* 60.4 (2007): 377–93.

[38]Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge,* 104–5.

[39]Westerholm, "The Work of the Trinity and the Knowledge of God in Augustine's De Trinitate," 9.

will see God."[40] Good is not a thing abstracted from external things but is impressed by God. To perceive the eternal good and truth, one must take away the things in good things and the things in true things. Good things and true things will perish but good and truth are eternal. Since to perceive these eternal forms such as good and truth is to perceive God, "knowledge of God is possible despite the mind's absorption in images because in principle it requires nothing more than a movement away from that which has been added to the mind in sin and towards God's presence in memory."[41] Good things can be represented in the mind, but eternal good and truth that properly belongs to God cannot be represented. Therefore, we "do not 'represent' God in our dogmatics…Rather God is present to us, and praised in our dogmatics, as the ineffable, invisible Reality who bathes our everyday life and stands with us in His own unique and superabundant Mode."[42] God is the invisible reality and we perceive him as the invisible.

III.4 The Possibility of the True Knowledge of God

If everyone can perceive good or the incorporeal God, does this mean that everyone has the true knowledge of God? For Augustine, perceiving good is not sufficient, one must love good to enjoy it, that is, "we must cling to God in love if we are to come to know him in enjoyment of his presence."[43] Though humans can perceive good, they love good things rather than the good itself because of sin.[44] True knowledge of God is not just perceiving

[40] Westerholm, "The Work of the Trinity and the Knowledge of God in Augustine's De Trinitate," 9.
[41] Westerholm, "The Work of the Trinity and the Knowledge of God in Augustine's De Trinitate," 9.
[42] Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: Doctrine of God,* 1:429.
[43] Westerholm, "The Work of the Trinity and the Knowledge of God in Augustine's De Trinitate," 13.
[44] When Augustine claims that to know the good is to know God, there is a tendency to associate such a view with Karl Rahner's view of knowledge, where he states that the condition for the experience

God, but loving God. The Platonists can perceive God's eternity, yet they "do not know God, for they approach him in the self-love of pride and their perception is thus distorted."[45] They did not know God because they fail to embrace the humility of Christ, and Christ is the object of faith and love.

For Augustine, there is no separation between 'illumination of the mind and purification of the heart.'[46] This implies that "Augustinian faith is both an adherence of the mind to supernatural truth and a humble surrender of the whole man to the grace of Christ."[47] When faith is rested in Christ, Christ himself is the model for purity. Thus, the role of faith in Christ is 'both a purification and an illumination.' Reason is not unnecessary as "it asks God for faith to purify the heart, so that by liberating it from the stain of sin."[48] Believing God in Christ means that "you love Him while believing Him; it means that in believing Him you cherish Him, enter into Him through love and become incorporated with His members."[49] Faith in Christ must always be accompanied by love because "He is a mediator only to the extent that we are in Him as He is in

of things is the knowledge of God. Augustine will differ greatly from Rahner particularly in his view of Christ, because it is the love of good in Christ that one has the true knowledge of God. True knowledge of God is objective for Augustine. However, how Christ is the object of faith will differ from Karl Barth's notion of Christ as the object of faith. While Barth states faith in Christ transforms the mind, for Augustine, Christ is the right way/road for those who wandered away from God so that they will return to their home. See Paul D. Molnar, "Can We Know God Directly? Rahner's Solution from Experience," *Theol. Stud. 46* (1985); Paul D. Molnar, *Faith, Freedom, and the Spirit: The Economic Trinity in Barth, Torrance and Contemporary Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

[45]Westerholm, "The Work of the Trinity and the Knowledge of God in Augustine's De Trinitate," 14.

[46]Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine,* trans. L. E. M Lynch (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 31.

[47]Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine,* 31.

[48]Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine,* 30.

[49]Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine,* 31.

us, through faith and charity."[50] Faith results in understanding, and understanding is possible only through love.

If the incarnate Christ is the object of faith and love, does this mean God can be represented bodily in the image of the human Christ? For Augustine, "the Son's human visibility must be intended to draw us towards recognition of his divine invisibility."[51] Christ's "incarnate materiality draws us towards his nature as the immaterial and fully divine Son."[52] When Christ teaches using external words, he "does not teach only that the reality of the divine transcends all that we may say about it in human speech; Christ teaches that the Christian should attempt to clarify her faith, believing that there is a correspondence between the language of faith and the reality that awaits," and the believer's task is "to grow in the ability to hone these correspondences, identifying and applying the principles that allow us to 'look' beyond the created categories within which Scripture speaks."[53] By focusing on this incorporeal aspect of Christ, believers grow in the true knowledge of the incorporeal God. Christ reorders our love for justice, truth, good, and wisdom by orienting toward the true incorporeal God.[54]

IV. The Reparation: A Constructive Proposal

Having explored Augustine's doctrine of illumination, we shall now attempt to construct a correspondence theory by repairing the existing theory. Regarding the anthropomorphic innate idea

[50]Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Augustine,* 32.

[51]Lewis Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143.

[52]Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity,* 147.

[53]Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity,* 152.

[54]Westerholm, "The Work of the Trinity and the Knowledge of God in Augustine's De Trinitate," 20.

of God found in Hodge, Augustine would agree with Hector that such an idea of God is idolatrous because of sin—representing the incorporeal God in a corporeal body. However, Augustine believes that the mind has incorporeal concepts such as good, truth, wisdom, and the like impressed by God that are not anthropomorphic/corporeal. To use correspondence terminology, the correspondence is not between the corporeal and the corporeal or the corporeal and the incorporeal, but the incorporeal and the incorporeal.[55] The corporeal appearance of Christ does not condition that one can now conceive of God in a corporeal body, rather, the purpose is to draw the mind to the incorporeal God. The purpose of Scripture and its analogical and metaphorical language likewise is not to form a corporeal concept of God, but that the corporeal concept would be drawn toward God's incorporeality. When we turn outside, we will be tempted to form a corporeal God that is idolatrous and violent, but if we turn inside where there is the incorporeal, we will be able to use the incorporeal forms that correspond to God's incorporeality.[56]

[55]This is another way of saying "we know God by God" found in Karl Barth. For Barth "God, who is always God in this relationship, takes the part of man, there is genuine correspondence and agreement." By sharing God's knowledge of himself, there is now a correspondence between God's knowledge of himself and humans' knowledge of God. Augustine does claim that we know God in how God knows himself, but he takes a different route. Human knows God by the forms impressed by God in the mind. These forms are primarily in God which are used by God to know himself. These forms are not alien or wholly other from God and need no raising up. What is needed is an orientation of these forms. Thus, the correspondence is the incorporeal forms in the mind and the incorporeal God. For Barth's view, see *Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics: Doctrine of God,* ed. Geoffrey William Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (London; New York: T. & T. Clark International, 2004), II/1:225, 193, 195, 223. Paul D. Molnar, *Faith, Freedom, and the Spirit: The Economic Trinity in Barth, Torrance and Contemporary Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

[56] This may appear idealism to many philosophers and theologians. However, it is important to recognize that there are various forms of idealism, including Kant's transcendental idealism, Hegel's absolute idealism, Berkeley's subjective idealism, and the occasional idealism of Jonathan Edwards, among others. Consequently, the current proposal could also be referred to as Augustinian idealism.

God is neither pictured nor represented in a corporeal body. This repaired correspondence theory, in other words, is not a picture/representation theory of truth.

As Augustine claims that language has significance only by convention, Hector's theory of intersubjective recognition of truth is not foreign to Augustine. Intersubjective recognition, for Augustine, is necessary though woefully insufficient in this sinful and temporal world. This makes more sense because the incorporeal concept in the mind and the incorporeal God are both inaccessible and they can be epistemically recognized as true only by human convention as guided by the Spirit. Moreover, Augustine does maintain that true knowledge of God is performance, that is, one should love God and neighbor. Augustine attributes this to the work of the Holy Spirit who gives the will to love God and others. Purity is the means to have a deeper knowledge of God. That is, the knowledge of the incorporeal God is partial, not just because humans are finite, but because humans are yet to attain perfect purity. Believers' task is to continue to hone the correspondence between the incorporeal forms in the mind and the incorporeal God.

V. Conclusion

The repaired version of correspondence theory offered in this essay is designed to be compatible with the intersubjective recognition of truth. It advances the typical correspondence theory of modern Evangelicals by engaging with postmodern challenges,

It is essential to note that Augustine does not fully embody the concept of idealism as it is commonly understood; rather, he should be seen as a realist who acknowledges the existence of an external reality. See Roland Teske, "Ultimate Reality According to Augustine of Hippo," *J. Univ. Tor. Press* 18.1 (1995): 20–33.

particularly in light of the contemporary discussion on God-talk. While affirming that true knowledge of God is the correspondence between the incorporeal forms in the mind and the incorporeal God, it also acknowledges that speech about God has significance only by convention. These two poles are placed together in order: when a concept is recognized as going in the same way as the precedents through the Spirit of God, there is a correspondence between the incorporeal concepts impressed by God in the mind and the incorporeal God. This account of correspondence theory offers two implications for contemporary Evangelicals.

First, it theologically and philosophically redefines the acquisition of forms/concepts applied to God to overcome the violence problem. The Aristotelian/Thomistic theory of abstraction predisposed us to assume that forms are abstracted only from the external world, and this consequently led us to suppose that whatever is abstracted from the external world will always be unfit for God. Doing theology in this trajectory, Hodge believes that abstracted forms (human perfections) are fit for God, whereas Hector considers that abstracted forms (predetermined categories) are unfit for God. However, if we assume (along with Augustine's version of Christian Platonism) that these specific incorporeal forms are acquired from God without mediation from the external world, they are fit for God.[57] In other words, incorporeal forms

[57]It may be surprising for many to use Augustine's doctrine of illumination influenced by Platonism in the contemporary discussion where Platonism is seen by many as corrupting Western theology. Aware of this criticism, Lewis Ayers convincingly shows that Augustine's use of Platonism is controlled by many other theological factors, including the Nicene doctrine, Scriptures, the rule of faith, the theology and teachings of his peers and predecessors, and his personal experience of God. Ayres then qualifies, "I am also convinced that the complexity of the links between Christian and non-Christian Platonists is better conceived the more we move away from assuming the fundamental incompatibility

applied to God are not abstracted from the external world but were impressed by God in the mind.

Second, it practically reemphasizes the importance of the church as a means to grow in the knowledge of the incorporeal God. The knowledge of the incorporeal God is partial not just because human beings are finite, but because of the enduring influence of sin, hindering perfect purity in this temporary life. Progress in purity is possible only through Christ and by participating in the church he established. This is where an intersubjective recognition, centering around the community of believers that conventionally use Christian language, is necessary though insufficient. The purpose of this community is not to have a better imaginative picture of God. In other words, a church is not a place to train the mind to replace the images of gods with the corporeal image of Christ or God. Rather, it is a place to train the mind in the knowledge of God's incorporeality by following the humility shown by Christ in his incarnation. Purity is achieved through the right performance, yet the telos of this performance is to have a deeper knowledge of the incorporeal God.

between Christianity and the non-Christian Platonism and toward a more piecemeal examination of the use made by Christians of Platonic doctrines." Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity,* 19.

BOOK REVIEWS

Abraham Kuruvilla. *Psalms 1-44; Psalm 45-100; Psalm 101-150: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (3 Volumes). Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2024. Pp. 342, 380, 394 respectively. ISBN: 978-1666751673; 978-1666751703; 978-1666751734. Reviewed by Saji P. Thomas.

The use of reliable commentaries is an invaluable asset to the faithful pastor who preaches on a weekly basis. As a pastor who has used all of Kuruvilla's Theological Commentaries for Preachers, I find his three-volume set on Psalms to be an especially valuable addition because of Kuruvilla's ability to show literary beauty in each Psalm with precision and brevity.

Abraham Kuruvilla is currently the Carl E. Bates Professor of Christian Preaching at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Luisville, Kentucky, USA. Prior to joining the faculty at the Southern, he taught preaching at Dallas Theological Seminary for 15 years. While many have contributed to the field of Preaching, Kuruvilla has dedicated his life consistently for that one cause—to help the preacher discover the thrust of the text for the preaching purpose. Apart from producing theological commentaries for preachers, Kuruvilla has published several works on preaching, and maintains the website "homiletix.com" to provide readers with additional resources for exegesis and preaching.

Like his previous commentaries, this three-volume set is intended to "function as the bridge between text and application, between the circumstances of the text and those of the reading community, enabling the move from the then to the now (Vol. 1, p.

4, italics his)." A preacher who regularly preaches on Sundays will find this set a treasure chest of exciting observations that are often missed by other critical and exegetical commentaries.

Each paperback volume is beautifully bound, and each provides an attractive layout with good margin spaces to scribble notes. The first volume has a lengthy 'Introduction,' which does not deal extensively with typical introductory matters such as authorship, compositions, types and rules for interpreting Psalms,. Instead, Kuruvilla uses the Introduction primarily to clarify his approach to preaching. (Readers who are new to Kuruvilla's commentaries may prefer his lengthier treatment of his approach to preaching found in his commentary on Mark or his book, *Privillege the Text*.)

Yet beyond his explanation of the task of preaching, Kuruvilla uses the Introduction to provide useful "excurses" on "Lament and Enemies" (pp.9-12) and "Imprecations" (pp.12-22). Kuruvilla also develops a full-fledged argument against the common notion of Christian charity, defends both the usefulness of preaching imprecatory prayers in the church, and provides four helpful guidelines for how the "imprecatory prayers may be utilized by the body of Christ" (pp.20-21). (Because so much of the Introduction deals with Kuruvilla's approach to preaching, these additional details could have been placed in a separate chapter to specify their importance.)

Kuruvilla's treatment of each Psalm follows a helpful six step analysis: 1) a brief Overview of the Psalm, sometimes indicating the relationship with other Psalms (eg., Psalms 1&2, 42-43), 2) his own Literal Translation, 3) an Outline with dual-shade

grey background for a quick grasp of the of the psalm's structure, 4) a Theological Focus statement, 5) a Commentary of the psalm that follows the major divisions and captures the thrust of the given psalm, and 6) a suggested Sermon Map. (Each volume also concludes with an impressive Bibliography and Indices of Authors and Scripture; volume three provides an "Index of Key Words and Selected Topics.") I will highlight the usefulness of several of these steps below.

Overview: Kuruvilla immediately categorizes each Psalm as Psalm of 'Orientation' 'Disorientation', or 'Reorientation', following "Bruggerman's typology, seeing three thematic sets of psalms…" (p.7). Kuruvilla also gives a title to the Psalm that is reflective of its theological focus. These two clarifications alone are of great help in overcoming "preachers' block" when pastors wonder how to think about the psalm for preaching.

Literal Translation: While few commentaries include the author's translation, Kuruvilla's translation is intentionally too literal, refusing to polish the text for reading, in order to help preachers see "what the author is doing with what he is saying." In his commentary sections, Kuruvilla often utilizes multi-shades of grey coloured charts that capture these authorial doings of the text; at times with the help of the Hebrew term or phrase. He says, "[My translation attempts] to aid the preacher in catching the text's literary clues to its thrust: wordplays, unique word choices, chiasms, sequences, organizations, alliterations, puns, repetitions—the many filigrees of structure and nuances of language—all of which enable one to catch the how of the text (that significantly affects the what of the text) and most of which are hardly discernible in standard

translations" (Psalms 1-44, p.22). While the preacher should still do his own primary task of translating the text; consulting Kuruvilla's translation can shed light on important nuances of the Hebrew text that may prove important for preaching.

Commentary: The commentary section is the meat and treat of Kuruvilla's work. That his work is a 'Theological Commentary for Preachers' makes it distinct from other commentaries which attempt to move from the text to sermon. The difference between Kruvuilla's work and, say, The NIV Application Commentary series (which moves from 'Original Meaning' to 'Bridging Contexts' to 'Contemporary Significance'), is that Kuruvilla shows the outworking of the theology of the given pericope for preaching within the text itself and does not regard theology merely as an afterthought drawn from reflecting further on the text's meaning. Theology, for Kuruvilla, is not drawn from the "principles" of the text, but the text itself.

Kuruvilla is gifted with language and skill to articulate his points, and he often conveys insights from the text with wit and wisdom. Consider his comments on Psalm 108:7-9: "[Yahweh's] dominance over surrounding nations is total: he washes off with Moab, pelts Edom with his footwear, and is flush with victory over Philistia (108:9).... Israel's enemies are relegated to being 'washbasins' and target practice for the divine 'sandal'... In other words, the people of God are right to assume the sovereignty of their deity will serve them well in the war with their enemies" (Vol. 3, pg. 62).

Or consider again the way Kuruvilla uses the imagery of

water progressively: from water of life that the Psalmist desires (vv.1-2, "streams of water"), to water of grief (v.3, "my tears"), to waters of trauma (v.7, "your waterfalls… your waves"), indeed the waters of God himself (v.7) (Vol. 1, pp.303, 307). Or consider yet again Kuruvilla's observation of the "'storying' of the psalm's composition" in the same Psalm, where he notes the gradual disappearance of his enemies who are taunting him, via the Psalmist's growing hope through contemplation of Yahweh with his descriptive attributes (Vol. 1, p.306). This vivid observation, so aptly caught by Kuruvilla, is significant to the thrust of the Psalm, because the critical question raised by the Psalm is, "Where is God?" amidst suffering! This use of verbal images provides preachers with immediate benefits in the task of preaching.

Sermon Map: One final element to be commended about this commentary is the Sermon Map at the end of each Psalm, which provides alternative suggestions for preaching. These sermon maps are not to be copied verbatim by preachers, but best serve as "pointers" of possible ways a preacher may organize a sermon. The sermon points do not necessarily follow the text divisions; when they do not, Kuruvilla will arrange the points according to recurring themes within the Psalm (for ex., following the Chiastic Structure). An important element in every sermon map is that for every main sermon point Kuruvilla suggests a 'Move-to-Relevance.' Each sermon map's last main point is a recapturing of the thrust, followed by directing the preaching to "Specifics" of that thrust. These notes force the preachers to think through the sermon with its relevance for his people and challenge them to be specific with their application.

Overall, I find Kuruvilla's three-volume Theological Commentaries on the Psalms to be a fresh approach to commentary writing, which particularly keeps the preacher in mind. Kuruvilla's structure is easy to follow even for lay teachers and all believers who want to get more out of the Psalms. It is not likely that pastors will preach through the entire Psalter in one stretch, and Kuruvilla's commentary can be a valuable asset in any pastor's library for leading his flock through Israel's song book in the different seasons of the congregation's life. Kuruvilla's work will be a valuable investment for all who wish to worship God more deeply and teach others about Him through the Psalms.

David Gibson. ***The Lord of Psalm 23: Jesus Our Shepherd, Companion, and Host.*** **Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2023. Pp. xx+157. ISBN: 978-1433587986.** Reviewed by Sam T. Rajkumar.

In The Lord of Psalm 23, David Gibson offers a profound exploration of one of the most beloved passages of Scripture, inviting readers to delve into the richness and depth of Psalm 23. The book is rooted in a sermon series at Trinity Church in Aberdeen, UK, where Gibson integrates theological insights with personal anecdotes and pastoral wisdom. Sinclair B. Ferguson, in his foreword, sets the tone for the book, reflecting on how Psalm 23 has shaped his understanding of God, especially during times of hardship. He emphasizes that this psalm speaks to those who have navigated the "valley of the shadow of death" and have found God's presence therein.

The central argument of Gibson's work is that Psalm 23

encapsulates a deeply personal relationship with God, portraying him as a shepherd who offers guidance, provision, and comfort throughout life's journey (4). Gibson structures the psalm into three distinct yet interconnected vignettes: "sheep and shepherd" (vv. 1–3), "traveller and companion" (v. 4), and "guest and host" (vv. 5–6). Each section builds upon the previous one, revealing layers of meaning that resonate with the believer's experience of God.

In the first part of the book, Gibson explores the identity and attributes of the shepherd. He emphasizes that the opening phrase, "The Lord is my shepherd," signifies a divine authority rooted in a covenant relationship with God (12). The author draws attention to several key themes (identity of the shepherd, God's self-sufficiency, holiness and mystery, and the intimacy of the relationship). By identifying "the Lord" as the shepherd, Gibson highlights God's sovereignty and intimate connection with his people (14). The portrayal of God as self-sufficient reassures believers that he has the resources to meet every need, providing security and comfort. Gibson invokes imagery from Scripture to illustrate God's eternal and unchanging nature, reminding readers of the profound mystery that surrounds divine care (25). Through these reflections, Gibson invites readers to reflect on their own understanding of God's provision and care, encouraging a deeper appreciation for the shepherd's role in their lives.

The second part of Gibson's exploration focuses on Psalm 23:4, which speaks to the comfort and assurance found in God's presence during times of fear and darkness. Here, Gibson addresses the reality of human vulnerability, acknowledging the terrifying nature of darkness and how the assurance of God's presence

can alleviate fear (56). He uses the symbols of the rod and staff to illustrate God's protective and guiding nature, where the rod signifies strength and authority, while the staff represents guidance and discipline. The author highlights the theological significance of God's active involvement in the lives of believers, even in the midst of suffering and death (59). Gibson's exploration of these themes (comfort and assurance) deepens readers' understanding of the psalm, offering a comforting reminder that they are never alone in their struggles. The notion that the journey through life's valleys is part of God's providence resonates throughout this section, providing a rich theological framework for grappling with fear and uncertainty (66).

In the final part of the book, Gibson delves into the imagery of the banquet in verses 5-6, portraying God as both a generous host and a protector. He explores several themes (God's generosity, anointing and overflow, and eternal security). The imagery of a banquet illustrates God's abundant provision and care, offering believers a glimpse of the rich relationship they can experience with him. The concept of anointing with oil signifies blessing and healing, reinforcing the idea that God's love overflows in believers' lives (108). Gibson concludes with the promise of dwelling in God's house forever, emphasizing the eternal aspect of the believer's relationship with God. Throughout the book, Gibson's reflections invite readers to not only understand the theological implications of Psalm 23 but to also engage with its personal significance in their own lives. He encourages them to embrace the imagery of the shepherd, traveller, and host, allowing these metaphors to shape their faith journey (105).

The Lord of Psalm 23 is a remarkable contribution to the literature on the Psalms, primarily due to its strengths. Gibson's background as a pastor shine through in his writing. He weaves personal stories and pastoral insights into his theological reflections, making the content relatable and accessible to readers from various backgrounds. The book is rich in theological insights, drawing from church history and significant theologians like John Calvin. Gibson's reflections on God's character and his relationship with humanity are deeply rooted in Scripture, allowing readers to grasp the profound implications of Psalm 23.

Additionally, the inclusion of hymns and reflections on singing Psalm 23 emphasizes the connection between theology and worship. Gibson's emphasis on the interplay between song and Scripture enriches the reading experience and encourages readers to engage in a worshipful response. He adeptly combines intellectual rigor with emotional resonance, offering a holistic view of the psalm that encompasses theological, pastoral, and experiential dimensions.

While The Lord of Psalm 23 has many strengths, it does have a few limitations. The familiarity of Psalm 23 might cause some readers to approach the book with preconceived ideas, which could hinder them from fully embracing the deeper reflections Gibson offers. Additionally, some may feel that the book lacks a thorough exegetical analysis. Though Gibson provides rich theological insights, a more detailed exploration of the Hebrew text at times could further deepen the reader's understanding of the psalm's subtleties.

Furthermore, the book may not fully engage with the diverse cultural interpretations of Psalm 23 across different traditions. While Gibson's insights are valuable, a broader exploration of how various communities understand and apply the psalm could enrich the discourse surrounding it. Lastly, while the themes of comfort and assurance are central to Gibson's argument, readers might desire a more balanced discussion that also addresses the challenges of faith in the face of suffering. Engaging with the realities of doubt and despair could provide a more nuanced perspective on the psalm's message.

In conclusion, The Lord of Psalm 23 by David Gibson stands as a meaningful and insightful exploration of a cherished psalm. Gibson's blend of pastoral wisdom, theological depth, and engaging storytelling invites readers to embrace the profound truths of Psalm 23 in their own lives. While the book presents some limitations, its strengths far outweigh them, making it a valuable resource for anyone seeking to deepen their understanding of God's nature as shepherd and guide. By reflecting on the themes of provision, presence, and eternal security, readers are encouraged to navigate their own valleys with confidence, finding comfort in the assurance that they are never alone. Ultimately, Gibson's work serves as a poignant reminder of the richness of Scripture and its capacity to speak into the complexities of human experience.

***Varughese John. Truth and Subjectivity, Faith and History: Kierkegaard's Insights for Christian Faith*. Bangalore: SIACS Press, 2012, 159pp. ISBN: 978-81-87712-3-05.** Reviewed by Kevin Storer.

Being a late arrival to India, I was thrilled to discover this first-rate assessment of Kierkegaard's view of truth and history, written by Varughese John, the current RZIM Chair of Apologetics at SAIACS and a former Kierkegaard House Foundation Fellow at the Hong Kierkegaard Library (SAIACS Press books are far too seldom found in American and British libraries). V. John's argument, simply put, is that Kierkegaard can help Christian theologians chart what V. John calls the "Indian golden rule of a middle path" between several deficient Western alternatives: Modernist positivism vs. Postmodern skepticism, Liberal "experiential-expressivism" vs. Postliberal "cultural-linguistics," Enlightenment evidentialism vs. Post-enlightenment conceptualism. As a fellow Kierkegaard scholar and Evangelical educator in the Indian context, I believe that this is a crucial moment for Indian Evangelical theologians to consider Kierkegaard's "middle path" as a fruitful way to develop Evangelical theology. While most Evangelicals recognize serious shortcomings in the propositionalist theologies and evidentialist apologetics inherited from Western modernists, many still hold tightly to modernist approaches because they do not want to fall into the equally deficient approach of postmodern relativism. V. John enables Evangelicals to visualize, and thereby to pursue, Kierkegaard's "middle path," and I will present three insights from the book that Indian Evangelicals would do well to consider.

First, V. John provides an excellent account of "subjectivity" and "subjective truth," showing how, for Kierkegaard, religious

truth claims must be appropriated into one's life in order to be understood as "truth" at all (chapters 1-2). Kierkegaard believed that both theological liberalism (Hegelianism) and theological conservativism (what he calls "Orthodoxy") in his day shared a common error: both overemphasized "knowing" to the detriment of "practice." What good is a religious truth claim, Kierkegaard wonders, if it is not embraced with a passionate commitment to obedience? In Kierkegaard's perspective, Christian truth-claims simply cannot be "true" for the individual if they are held with indifference. Further, as V. John shows, Kierkegaard emphasizes that Christian truth-claims can never be embraced by reason alone, since they remain too great for reason to grasp and because they require God's gift of "faith" to be able to embrace them at all. All of the "facts" in the world cannot save and would only lead to indifference unless God causes faith in the hearer. Kierkegaard thus calls Evangelicals back to a more traditionally Christian project of "faith seeking understanding," and encourages them to recognize that any Christian "truth" that does not change my life is not yet "truth for me."

Second, V. John shows that Kierkegaard did indeed provide a "middle path" between Modern positivism and Postmodern skepticism, since Kierkegaard can affirm the absolute "truth" of Christian doctrine while rejecting the Enlightenment requirement to prove doctrine by logical demonstration (chapters 1-4). In contrast to Evangelical Modernists, Kierkegaard believed two things. First, Kierkegaard believed that Christian truth claims must include a dimension of "coherence" (that my life must "cohere" with the truth I affirm if that truth is really truth for me), along with "correspondence" (that the doctrinal claim "corresponds," at

least analogically, to reality). V. John explains that Kierkegaard will appreciate doctrine "only in connection with the intended purpose of the doctrine, which is personal transformation," since, "When doctrine is conceived as a proposition, what is tested for correctness is the doctrine, not the self" (29). Kierkegaard's aim is to call the individual to self-examination under the doctrinal standards that the individual claims to believe. Second, Kierkegaard believed that because the "Reality" to which a Christian truth claim corresponds is ultimately too great to be comprehended, Christian truth claims must have quite different criteria for verification from, say, scientific truth claims. As V. John shows, Kierkegaard ultimately "defines truth not as an idea but as a relation between the learner and the teacher, Christ, who himself is the Truth, both the medium and the message" (43). Thus for Kierkegaard, "Becoming truthful is…a mimetic act where a follower imitates Christ who is the Truth" (53). Kierkgaard therefore reminds Evangelical theologians who insist on holding a strong a correspondence theory of truth that Christian truth necessarily includes coherence, since Christian "Truth" is a Reality that grasps the individual and calls for a response, rather than an object or proposition that can be evidentially verified.

Third, V. John provides important correctives for Evangelical apologetics in light of Kierkegaard's warning against the overuse of Modernist evidentialism (chapters 5-6). ("Evidentialism" is the position that a belief is only justifiable when one can show evidence for it, and "evidence" is usually defined along some supposed foundationalist framework of neutrality, such as historical or scientific data, mathematical proof, etc.) V. John explains that the Evangelical evidentialist "fails to see some key factors that Kierkegaard takes for granted," such as 1) human self-deception

from truth, 2) the absolute importance of revelation and the paradox that revelation brings for our natural reason; and 3) the priority of personal encounter with the living Jesus Christ over historically-gleaned "facts" about Jesus (128). Evidentialists problematically tend to reassess claims of revelation that Scripture calls "'paradoxical,' or 'scandalous' or 'foolish,'" and instead present them as "'reasonable' and 'logical'" (129). In doing so, they tend to forget that Christianity is not accepted based on the reasonableness of "facts," but by the work of the Holy Spirit and personal encounter with Christ. While certain kinds of evidence (such as historical arguments for the resurrection or logical arguments for the inspiration of Scripture) may appear extremely convincing to the believer, this is because God has already given faith to that believer so that he/she can find them convincing. Consequently, certain aspects of evidentialist apologetics seem to stand in strong tension with Christian faith, and thereby must be seen to have only a limited value.

Evidentialist apologetics may have particularly little value in the context of India, V. John suggests, given an Indian understanding of history and time. V. John shows that since Hindu traditions are understood mythically, and since modernist historical positivism is associated with an arrogant Western colonizing tendency, Evangelical apologetics are often seen as a foreign imposition on Hindu culture. As one key task of the Christian apologist in India must be to "remove obstacles within the Christian tradition that are inherited from modernistic thinking" (145), V. John provides several practical suggestions for Christian apologetics in India today. First, while Western culture places an extremely high value on historical examination (something that is largely lacking in Indian cyclical thought), it is not necessary to "impose such rigor"

upon the Gospel. While no person can embrace the particularity of Christ "while remaining indifferent to [Christ's] historicity," persons can (and most do) embrace the particularity of Christ "without historical rigor" (144). While it is necessary to distinguish the Christian narrative from myth, it is ultimately encounter with and trust in the person of Christ that saves (rather than belief in the historicity of the narratives). Second, V. John suggests that appropriation of Christ (rather than a quest for "proof" about, say, the divinity or resurrection of Christ) may, in fact, be the best way to create in the believer the sense of historical importance needed for Christian faith. Appropriation allows the believer to realize that sharing in God's covenant promises will lead to "transformation" rather than the "helplessness that is typical of the fatalistic Hindu mindset" (142-144). V. John suggests that the practice of Eucharist may provide the best opportunity to deepen both the historical particularity of the Christ event (remembering) with the experiential appropriation of that event in the life of the believer (participation). Kierkgaard therefore invites Evangelical theologians to reconsider how the Gospel might be presented more effectively without Modernist limitations.

While V. John is not writing simply to Evangelicals, the book's argument may be at its best in showing Evangelical theologians how to move past certain Modernist presuppositions about truth and history which stand in significant tension with the internal logic of Christian faith, while at the same time encouraging Evangelical theologians to embrace even more deeply the central doctrines of their historic Christian faith. Few in the Christian tradition have thought so deeply as Kierkegaard about the internal logic of the Christian faith, and this book provides a particularly

rewarding entry-point into Kierkegaard's work.

Goldingay, John, Tremper III Longman, Havilah Dharamraj, Jason S. DeRouchie, and Craig A. Carter. Eds. Brian J. Tabb and Andrew M. King. *Five Views of Christ in the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2022. ISBN: 978-0310125518. Reviewed by Chubatemsu Kichu.

The "Five Views of Christ in the Old Testament" presents diverse Christological perspectives from John Goldingay, Tremper Longman III, Havila Dharamraj, Jason S. DeRouchie, and Craig A. Carter, each examining three passages (Gen. 22:1-19; Prov. 8:22-31; Isa. 42:1-4) utilising their unique hermeneutical approaches. This review will provide a concise analysis of each perspective.

Goldingay offers the "First Testament Approach," arguing that Jesus is not "in the First Testament" (22). He asserts that the First Testament (OT) prophesies do not point to Christ, asserting that the Israelites interacted with God, not Jesus, and that typological references are too ambiguous to make objective Christological claims (30-33). In Gen. 22:1-19, Goldingay does not see any messianic element (40). Regarding Prov. 8:22-31, Christ is not the subject matter but God's wisdom (41). Likewise, in Isa. 42:1-4, the servant is Israel, not Christ (44). Goldingay concludes that the original ancestral insights of the OT are missed when Jesus is read into it (44-45).

Longman's "Christotelic Approach" asserts that Jesus is the goal (telos) of the OT, fulfilling the Davidic covenant as affirmed by Paul and Jesus (Luke 24:25-27). However, Longman advises that

one must first seek out the author's intent in its original setting before re-reading it from the NT perspective (78-80). In Gen. 22:1-19, Longman first examines Abraham's faith in its original context, then interprets God's demand to sacrifice his son Christologically (89-91) in Prov. 8:22-31, Longman reads wisdom as God's wisdom and Jesus as the epitome of the same wisdom in the second reading (92-95). In Isa. 42:1-4, the servant is initially seen as Israel, but in the second reading, it is interpreted that Jesus is the ultimate realisation of this servant, the ideal Israel (96-99). To Longman, all scriptures anticipated Christ's coming.

Dharamraj takes a "Reception-Centered, Intertextual Approach" and explores how people relate Jesus to the OT. She speaks of how the readers pick up intertextual multireligious comparators from one's socio-religious space, particularly in South Asian contexts where the socio-religious landscapes are pluralistic (127-30). In these contexts, readers compare OT icons and themes with NT texts to see how they resonate with their understanding of Christ (132). In Gen. 22:1-19, Dharamraj parallels Jesus' obedient sacrifice with Judeo-Islamic views of voluntary sacrifice (133-38), in Prov. 8:22-31, wisdom as a creation agent is paralleled with Col. 1:15, showing that Jesus is the agent of creation (140-44). Isa. 42:1-4, read alongside Matt. 12:17 and Rev. 19:11-16 shows Jesus as a royal servant and warrior king, uniting the roles of liberator and judge to establish justice (151). This approach prioritizes both the text and the experiences of the readers.

In the "Redemptive-Historical, Christocentric Approach," DeRouchie affirms that Christ is the centre of God's redemption plan. Christ is both the beginning and end of OT (181-83).

DeRouchie argues that the OT anticipates Jesus as the one who will bring its full meaning (Deut. 29:4; Isa. 29:9-12) (183-84). DeRouchie focuses on "typologies," "ethical parallels", and "laws," all of which he believes are fulfilled in Christ (186-90). In Gen. 22:1-19, Abraham's offering of his son foreshadows God's future sacrifice (192-98) in Prov. 8:22-31, wisdom is viewed as God's royal son and the agent of creation (199-204). In Isa. 42:1-9, the servant is seen as a singular messianic agent who will redeem the world, despite many interpretations seeing the servant as Israel. DeRouchie maintains that the scriptures project Jesus as the redemptive agent (204-10).

Lastly, Carter's "Premodern Approach" argues that Christ was seen as the messianic figure in the OT and how Jesus recapitulates Israel's history by embodying the renewed Israel. Contrary to modern criticism, Carter attempts to recover the premodern confession of Christ as eternally Triune, which Christian orthodoxy affirms (239-42). Carter highlights how early Christian writings deliberately presented Jesus as fulfilling OT prophecies (245). He argues that any interpretation excluding Christ is inadequate (255). In Gen. 22:1-19, Carter emphasises Abraham's obedience literally and Christologically (258-59) in Prov. 8:22-23, Carter translates "qanah" as "generation," the eternally generated son through whom the cosmos was created. In Isa. 42, Carter interprets Jesus as the fulfilment of Isaiah's servant, highlighting his role in redeeming Israel and the world (261-63).

The five contributors offer varied perspectives by defining their hermeneutical approaches to their views of Christ in the OT. They clearly articulate their positions and theological insights, and their interpretations of three OT texts showcase their diverse

readings and views. This reveals both commonalities and differences rooted in their respective frameworks. For instance, Goldingay's focus on understanding the Old Testament in its historical context and Longman's emphasis on the historical setting are similar, though Longman also incorporates a secondary Christological reading. Similarly, DeRouchie's Christocentric view of predictive elements in the OT is generally supported by most contributors, except Goldingay. Aside from Goldingay, all the contributors find resonance in interpreting Christ as the servant or a pointer to Christ in Isa. 42:1-4.

According to Goldingay, Dharamraj is postmodern, Longman and himself are modern, and Carter and DeRouchie are premodern (152). This perspective holds some truth. While generally aligned with others, Dharamraj offers a distinctive postmodern, reader-centered interpretation from a South Asian perspective. Goldingay and Longman emphasise modern historical criticism, focusing on the text's original time, intent, and context. Meanwhile, DeRouchie and Carter present a premodern Christocentric approach, defending against reducing the texts to mere literary works (243). Goldingay's view is the most criticised, as it not only disagrees with all other contributors concerning Christ's presence in the OT but also rejects any prophetic implications (44). Goldingay emphasises historical context over modern eisegesis, a perspective echoed by Longman, who cites Childs and Brueggemann to support an author-centered reading. While Longman asserts the importance of understanding the original author's intent and implied readers in their historical setting, he also advocates for re-reading the OT through the lens of the NT (79-80). Furthermore, Longman refers to Luke 24:25-27, the Emmaus scene where Jesus reveals how the

OT speaks in anticipation of his coming, asserting that Christ's presence in the OT becomes clearer in the light of his death, and this goal of the OT is not realised until Jesus's resurrection (83-85). In this regard, Longman's view aligns with scriptural teaching while incorporating historical-critical methods.

In Dharamraj's approach, both the reader and the text play key roles. For example, she reads the Exodus narrative as a story of liberation from oppression, interpreting Jesus as the one who champions this cause from an Indian liberative perspective in the light of poverty and discrimination. Here, readers can explore OT texts for icons and themes that resonate with their understanding of Christ, based on their social and religious experiences, and then compare these with corresponding NT texts (130-32). However, as DeRouchie and others point out, this approach results in the reader "assuming a higher authority than the divine author himself" (164). Dharamraj herself acknowledges the risk in her approach of not prioritising the author's intent, which necessitates checks and balances (131).

In DeRouchie's redemptive approach, he argues that the OT authors recognised both the shadow and the substance of what was to come, with Christ being the central figure in the salvation history of God (186-90). A notable critique of this approach comes from Goldingay, who suggests that this approach is more 'Theocentric' than 'Christocentric,' as it primarily reveals God and his redemptive story. Additionally, Goldingay criticises DeRouchie for interpreting Abraham's promise of offspring in Gen. 22:1-19 as referring to a singular offspring, suggesting that this interpretation ignores the context and intent (212-13).

Carter, in his "Premodern Approach," emphasises the importance of recognising God's transcendent nature in biblical hermeneutics. He argues that God's transcendence grants himself the authority to inspire biblical texts, and this belief in divine inspiration is central to Carter's hermeneutical approach (249-50). Furthermore, he reads the scripture both literally and spiritually. To him, Isa. 53, though not explicitly referring to the crucifixion, foreshadows Christ's death in a literal manner (152-53). Carter not only upholds the unity, divine authorship, and authority of scripture but also identifies the spiritual presence of Christ in the OT. His approach receives positive commendation from Dharamraj and DeRouchie. However, Dharamraj suggests seeking a middle ground rather than polarising the premodern against the modern approaches (278-80). Similarly, Longman cautions Carter about the risks of neglecting modern historical-grammatical exegesis (277).

The five views reveal that no single approach or exegesis is free from criticism, as they often conflict with each other due to differing interpretive lenses. Each contributor, however, presents intriguing perspectives based on his/her methods. Despite their differences, the contributors collectively enrich the conversation around Christ in the OT by articulating their theological insights and methodological distinctions. The dialogue between these perspectives asserts the importance of balancing historical context, authorial intent, theology, and the faith community's interpretative experiences. Ultimately, the book not only reveals the complexity of reading Christ in the OT but also invites further exploration, including Asian perspectives, into how these diverse viewpoints can inform and enhance our understanding of scripture as a whole. This book is commendable for its emphasis on diverse approaches,

highlighting the continued relevance of the biblical text in a contemporary context and encouraging readers to connect with both its historical foundations and its lasting theological significance.

Andreas J. Köstenberger, Benjamin L. Markle, and Robert Plummer. *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Gramma r and Syntax of the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2020). Pp. 537. ISBN: 978-1-5359-8320-4. Reviewed by Hruaikima Reang.

As both a student and teacher of New Testament Greek grammar and syntax, I understand the challenges Indian students face in learning this subject. One of the most common difficulties is using popular Greek grammars, such as Daniel B. Wallace's Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament, the standard textbook for most Syntax courses in India. Since its advanced nature can be overwhelming for students who have only completed an elementary Greek course.

Seeking a more suitable textbook for intermediate students, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament*, provided the solution I was looking for. It is designed to benefit both students and teachers alike: for students, it presents intermediate-level grammar in a way that is both accessible and enjoyable, and for teachers, it provides weekly pre-planned materials, removing the need for separate lesson planning unless desired.

This book consists of 15 chapters, and it begins each chapter with the course objectives, which help readers prepare for

the material covered in the chapter. This is one of the most helpful aspects of this book, since right at the beginning the reader is shown the significance of material for interpreting New Testament texts. For example, Chapter 4 discusses how the syntactical function of the dative case in ἰδίᾳ δόξῃ καὶ ἀρετῇ (2 Pet 1:3) can alter doctrine and interpretation. This phrase, when understood as an instrumental dative, could mean "by means of his glory and goodness." However, if the dative is interpreted differently as it is in the ESV translation "to his own glory and excellence," the meaning is significantly altered, and this shows the importance of understanding the categories (121-3).

In addition to outlining chapter objectives and their importance, the book provides summaries at the end of each chapter, which helpfully enable readers to review the material without re-reading the entire chapter. Several unique features of the book are worth noting. One unique feature is its attempt to illustrate how grammatical rules discussed applied to biblical texts. This helps readers observe how these rules work in practice and apply them in interpreting other biblical passages. Another unique feature is the mention of the term diabolical passive in the footnotes, which is fitting since certain passages (such as 1 Timothy 2:14) suggest that the devil (διάβολος) is the agent (200).

Despite the book's strengths, there are a few areas where it may overlook important details. First, in its effort to simplify categories for students, the book omits certain significant grammatical categories, such as the genitive of purpose, genitive of association and reference, and the dative of measure. These categories are important in certain passages, such as Romans

8:17 where it is unclear under which category the genitive phrase κληρονόμοι μὲν θεοῦ (heirs of God) from should be classified. Second, this book does not discuss the usage of the indefinite plural in Chapter 6. This category is important, as the plural can sometimes refer to a singular subject. For instance, in Luke 12:20, the indefinite plural (they) is used to refer to God: ταύτῃ τῇ νυκτὶ τὴν ψυχήν σου ἀπαιτοῦσιν ἀπὸ σοῦ, this very night, "they" will demand your soul from you. Third, the book states that past time is indicated by the augment (236, 238). If the augment is used to convey past time, the book should also address related issues. For example, the presence of the augment in the future verb κατεάξει in Matthew 12:20 raises questions. Since the augment is a crucial element in the book's argument, certain issues related to it should be included.

Those using the book as a textbook will want to decide how much detail in categories is right for their classes. I have found that this book is well-suited for intermediate students, and I recommend that Greek teachers in India consider using this text for studying biblical Greek syntax. The categories and issues it overlooks can be supplemented by consulting other books and articles.