

# ANNUAL CATA CONFERENCE (2025)

## Abstracts for Parallel Paper Sessions

Mark J. Boda, “Protest and Penitential Prayer in Conflict? Zechariah as an Integrating Voice”

Responses to the fall(s) of Jerusalem are well represented in the Hebrew Bible. They are not singular in approach, ranging from bitter protest questioning God and cursing enemies to submissive penitence justifying God and accepting culpability. Exemplar communal prayer texts include Pss 74, 79, 89, 137; Lam 1–5; Isa 63:7–64:11[12]; Ezra 9:6–15; Neh 1:5–11; 9:5–37; Dan 9:4–19; Ps 106. This contribution investigates evidence of the influence of this tradition of disorientation prayer on Zech 1–8. While one may think of these various prayers as belonging to distinct traditions, Zech 1–8 highlights how a community that survived the fall of Jerusalem could integrate a breadth of approaches, a reminder for contemporary faith communities who tend to prioritize certain prayer expressions over others.

Dustin Burlet, “Flat Earth Fallacies: Reframing Ancient Hebrew Cosmology”

Modern discussions of ancient Hebrew cosmology frequently conflate worldview with world-picture, thus assuming the biblical text itself subscribes to a rigid, three-tiered universe: a flat earth, a solid dome above, and a chthonic Abyss. This paper, however, maintains that ancient conceptions of the cosmos were more fluid—shaped by theological motives rather than strict materialistic concerns of origins.

This study will employ rhetorical criticism to demonstrate how ancient Near Eastern representations of the cosmos were not scientific hypotheses but symbolic frameworks used to communicate spiritual realities. The argument that the ancients lacked cognitive competence to recognize the limitations of ‘flat earth’ models fails to account for their not insignificant empirical engagement with the world.

Put differently, the people of Babylonia, Egypt, and Canaan cogently understood the basic properties of water and weight distribution, thus complicating the notion that they held to a rigidly primitive model of cosmology. Instead, their world-pictures poignantly reflected a conceptual worldview expressing divine order and cosmic stability rather than a material/physical, scientifically verifiable astrophysical structure. In a similar manner, Scripture employs evocative imagery to convey theological truth, blending empirical observations with eternal significance. Recognizing this interplay between cosmology and theology prevents misreadings which impose anachronistic scientific expectations onto an ancient Near East text.

In sum, this rhetorical analysis challenges contemporary ‘flat earth fallacies’ by demonstrating how the Bible functions as persuasive literature—worldview-formative rhetoric—thereby preserving Scripture’s theological integrity while ensuring an interpretive framework respectful of its ancient Near East context.

Renwei Chi, “Karl Barth’s Christological Interpretation of Luke 15:11-32”

Where is Christ in the third parable of Luke 15? If the shepherd and the woman in the first and second parables are the likeness of Christ, who is the one accordingly in the third parable? If the lost son represents the sinner and the father represents God, does it imply that sinners are able to turn back to the God by themselves? In his *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, Barth presents a Christological perspective, proposing that the prodigal son can be understood as Christ. This interpretation, situated within the backdrop of contemporary historical-critical exegesis, is regarded as an illustration of his “Christocentrism,” and potentially even as eisegesis.

Thus, the goal of this paper is to unpack Barth's Christological interpretation of Luke 15:11-32, demonstrating how he establishes a connection between Christ and the lost son. It will then present an alternative emendation to Barth's reading of the parable of the prodigal son, suggesting that for Barth, the prodigal son represents both Christ and sinners. This emendation has the dual purpose of alleviating the tension within Barth's interpretation and of providing a perspective understanding of Barth's Christological interpretation of the parable and his doctrine of reconciliation.

Jonathan Cleeland, "Warfield, Postmillennialism, and the Extent of the Atonement"

The extent of the atonement is a major theological topic in Reformed theology and a central text in this debate is 1 John 2:2—"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." Commonly the debate over this text concerns whether "world" is meant to be taken universally—namely, Christ died for all people. Or, if it is meant to refer to the elect all around the world, thus making it limited in extent. This debate charts two major pathways that interpret this passage based on soteriological presuppositions. However, as this paper will demonstrate, another aspect of theology that has influenced interpretations of this text is eschatology.

In his 1921 article, "Jesus Christ the Propitiation for the Whole World," B.B. Warfield argues that the "whole world" will truly be saved in the future. Right now, "our" sins are covered, but later this will be true of the "whole world." Thus, Warfield interprets 1 John 2:2 in a limited atonement framework, yet in a way that will extend to the whole world through the history of redemption. Seen in this way, Warfield's postmillennialism influenced his interpretation of this text.

Therefore, in order to show the potential influence eschatology can have on one's reading of 1 John 2:2, this paper will offer an exposition and analysis of Warfield's article, showing how his postmillennial Reformed context influenced his atonement theology.

Daniel Cooper, "Breakdown in Babylon: An Analysis of Ps 137 Through the Lens of Metal Subculture and Lyrics"

Psalms 137 persists as a particularly difficult text to stomach as anything beyond a dark relic of a bygone era. It is all the more difficult to read as a text with (positive) theological import today but help can be found between the lines of metal lyrics sheets. There are unexpected-yet-strong lines of continuity between the experiences and cultural expressions of modern metalheads and those of the Exilic community in Babylon that have yet to be explored.

This paper examines the similarities between the experiences of the Exilic community and those of modern metalheads as a means of better understanding the violent lynching of musical instruments, self-inflicted body horror, and cruel infanticidal wishes of Ps 137. Through modern cultural and ancient anthropological studies, this paper explores how Ps 137 shares four key similarities with heavy metal music and its attendant subculture: alternative religiosity, social isolation, a desire to keep the community pure, and creation from destruction. The self-reinforcing relationship between the socioeconomic experiences of metalheads, their subculture, and their music as a means of creating, maintaining, and protecting their in-group can also be seen in a pronounced way in Ps 137 as an expression of the trauma experienced by the Exilic community. By understanding and appreciating the euphemistic, cathartic, and theopolitically-subversive nature of metal lyrics and art, we can more easily understand the rage in the Psalmist's words as being euphemistic, cathartic, and theopolitically-subversive.

Festus Duamor, "God and His Ghanaian Stewards in the Midst of Evil"

The problem of evil is real in our world. Evil is simply the absence of good. Evil came into the world from heaven and resulted in sin and the fall of man in the Garden. Evil is both an effect and defect. Evil as an effect is caused by the existence of creatures and as a defect is simply because of the fallen condition of the creature. The creator God who is both omniscient and omnipresent cannot be absorbed from evil. He actually takes responsibility for some of the evil that bedevils our world like the flood in the days of Noah. The creator God who is sovereign and has the final say has to allow evil no matter the source. God is able to also use evil to achieve good in the end like allowing Christ to be crucified so we can all be saved in the end. Evil has also been attributed to Satan and demons but in Job 1-2 and Zechariah 3, Satan is only a prosecutor accuser carrying out his mandate.

In the New Testament, evil is manifested through principalities and powers. These principalities and powers are not just spiritual forces but also human lords and institutions. According to Ephesians and Colossians, Christ is now the reigning Lord, and as the reigning Lord he has entrusted his power to his body that is the church to confront the evil in this world. Because we are still awaiting Christ's return and the age to come, we do not yet have a perfect world. It is the researcher's position that since Christ was an advocate against evil which led to the cross, it is the way all believers must go and an active involvement in governance, leadership, innovation and inventions of any sort by those who are saved and sanctified is the way to curtail most of the evil while we await the perousia. Ghana becomes the scope for this particular study while drawing lessons from other jurisdictions.

Patrick S. Franklin, "God's *Dispassionate* Wrath? Reconciling Divine Impassibility with God's Wrath and Anger"

According to the classical Christian Tradition, God is both immutable and impassible. Yet, biblical revelation clearly speaks of God's wrath and anger in response to sin, evil, and injustice. How can God be both impassible *and* wrathful/angry? Is this not a blatant contradiction? In this paper, I argue that the answer is NO! Divine impassibility and God's wrath/anger are not in contradiction.

In fact, thinking carefully about God's wrath and anger can help us to reflect on the nature of divine impassibility with greater theological precision and nuance. Correspondingly, a precise and nuanced understanding of divine impassibility can equip us to frame and interpret the biblical portrait of God's wrath and anger with sufficient theological-philosophical depth and consistency. The paper will conclude by outlining several important positive (even crucial) implications of divine impassibility for Christian thought and life.

Candace Hamm, "Isaiah 11 and the Teleological Essence of Fauna: Theodical Engagement with Animal Violence and Natural Evil in the Thought of Saint Augustine"

Augustine's exposition of evil has had a profound impact on historical Christian doctrine. Traditional interpretations of Augustine predicate theodicy on a historical fall but seem incompatible with a view of creation in which violence and death in the animal world precedes humanity. Stanley P. Rosenberg argues that evolutionary theory can be coherent with Augustine's thought if decay and violence are understood as part of created nature. Doing so renders animal predation natural, a conclusion that provides logical coherence but does not address concerns regarding the nature of a God who created a world in which such violence is normal.

This paper suggests an approach which brings Isaiah 11:6-9 into dialogue with evolutionary development and the Augustinian concept of latent potentiality to offer a potential direction for reflection on animal violence. If Isaiah indicates a trajectory in which animals develop toward peaceful co-existence, and if

this peace is the outcome of teleological development, then evolutionary development is reconfigured as movement towards peace. Since Augustine views creation as tending toward non-existence and decay, Rosenberg suggests this concept can be interpreted to consider violence in the animal kingdom as part of animal nature, not as evil. Choosing instead to view animal nature in light of peace categorizes violence as an effect of created nature's mutability, but also as a natural evil that will cease as development progresses. Within an evolutionary paradigm, Rosenberg's interpretation of Augustine can be largely preserved without requiring that animal violence be accepted as normal.

Joshua Heath, "God's Mission, State's Vision: The Ambivalence of Theologies of Reconciliation in the Context of Colonialism in Canada"

Within the evangelical tradition, faith and social justice have frequently been set in uncomfortable juxtaposition, if not open opposition. Meanwhile, many Indigenous theologians, theorists, leaders, and communities have called for a holistic approach to spirituality and social action to address the ongoing damage caused by colonization in Canada. In many contexts around the globe, theologies of reconciliation have provided a way to articulate the essential connection between the message of the Gospel and Christian engagement with injustice and oppression in society. Theologies of reconciliation can help bridge the gap from a truncated understanding of salvation to a more holistic vision of Christian life and discipleship. However, the Canadian context presents its own unique challenges. While many Indigenous leaders and communities call for reconciliation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada observes that Indigenous peoples and the government of Canada "have very different and conflicting views on what reconciliation is and how it is best achieved."\* For example, Taiaiake Alfred argues that "without a return of land to our nations and comprehensive financial support for Indigenous youth to reclaim, rename and reoccupy their homelands, to do what they need to do to ensure their own and coming generations' survival as real people, reconciliation is recolonization."†

This paper highlights the ambivalence of theologies of reconciliation in the Canadian context, which provide a framework for holistic integration of faith and social action, while remaining vulnerable to co-option by dominant national narratives. It argues that if they are to have transformative potential for Christians in Canada, theologies of reconciliation must include an understanding of the settler colonial context and be embedded in a relational network shaped by real accountability to Indigenous peoples, movements, and communities.

\* Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Ottawa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 187.

† Taiaiake Alfred, "It's All About the Land," in *Whose Land is it Anyway? A Manual for Decolonization*, edited by Peter McFarlane and Nicole Schabus (Vancouver: Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC, 2017), 13. See also Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011), 22.

Emmanuel Israel, "The Evil of Othering: Responding Through Jesus' Greatest Commandment and Paul's Admonition on the Renewal of the Mind"

In a world of evil and suffering, one wonders if hope for change exists. Sometimes, evil appears through othering. There are two approaches to analyzing othering. The first takes a constructive view, linking the othering to human identity formation. This perspective sees othering as a crucial developmental milestone shaping self-understanding for individuals and groups. For example, othering can be articulated as follows: "I gain a sense of who 'I' am by convincing myself I am not the other." The second approach, referred to as unhealthy othering, begins with the stigmatization (labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination) of the other.

This paper aims to explore the link between sin (both personal and social) and unhealthy othering. What resources can we learn from Jesus' two greatest commandments: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, and mind," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," along with Paul's admonition regarding the renewal of the mind? (1) I will distinguish healthy forms of 'othering' that help individuals and groups define their identities from unhealthy othering. (2) I will describe how othering is executed and rationalized. (3) I will propose a sustainable alternative by examining insights from Jesus' two greatest commandments and Paul's encouragement for the renewal of the mind.

As an interdisciplinary study between psychology, political science, and theology, I will employ analytical textual analysis to study and understand the text and its meanings regarding othering. This approach will assist me in examining contemporary biblical and theological scholarship on how to respond to the problem of othering in the contemporary world.

### Mykhaylo Khromyak, "The War In Ukraine, Horror Between The 'Russian World' And American Christian Nationalism – A Ukrainian Evangelical Perspective"

Ukrainian evangelicals have always had a deep connection to North American evangelicalism. Most Bible colleges and seminaries in Ukraine were founded by American and Canadian churches, and many Ukrainian pastors had at least one professor from the USA. Since the beginning of the war, and especially with the Trump presidency, Ukrainian evangelicals have been forced to observe the strange union between the ideology of the 'Russian World' and Christian nationalism. One Ukrainian Christian on social media thanked American missionaries for telling him about Jesus and later voting for Trump. Now, he says that while dying in a Russian filtration camp, he will be sure that he is saved. This post reflects the trauma and pain that most Ukrainian evangelicals suffer during the war—betrayed by their neighbor on the border and by their faith community on the other side of the Atlantic. It also highlights their search for ways to cope with the pain and respond to existential and faith-related questions.

In this paper, I aim to present the voice of the Ukrainian evangelical community, which finds itself trapped in the horrific union between Eastern Orthodox "Russian World" authoritarianism and American Christian Nationalism. This will be analyzed through the lens of examining the Russian invasion of Ukraine as another cultural war, similar to the cultural wars in North America. I will explore how the Russian Orthodox Church shapes the idea of the "Russian World," in a manner akin to how the Moral Majority helped shape the American Christian Nationalism movement. I will engage with the work of Daniel K. Williams\* and Cyril Hovorun.† Additionally, I will analyze primary sources in Russian, including Patriarch Kirill, Alexander Dugin political theologies, MAGA narratives, as well as responses, reflections, and declarations from Ukrainian theologians, religious leaders, and laypeople regarding the war, Russia, the USA, and the role of God and faith during the horrors of this invasion.

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† <https://bellarmine.lmu.edu/theologicalstudies/graduateprograms/faculty/?expert=cyril.hovorun#:~:text=Archimandrite%20Cyril%20Hovorun%20is%20a,Durham%20University%20in%20the%20UK>

### Christopher Landon, "Soup for My Family: A Satirical Reading of the Unnamed Woman in Judges 9"

Examining a literary work as a satire requires identifying the target of the satire, the means that the satirist utilizes, and the purpose of the satirical work. Such an analysis is not foreign to the book of Judges, but it has typically been limited to the story of Ehud (Judg 3). This paper will apply satirical analysis to the story of Abimelech (Judg 9).

Abimelech is the first named Israelite character in the book to explicitly establish himself as king and his rule is that of a tyrant. In response, the reader may have expected, based on the preceding narratives in

the book of Judges, a named hero to be raised up to deliver the people from the tyrant. In a further subversion of the established pattern of the book, the named “hero” who could deliver the people, Gaal son of Ebed, is both a foreigner and a coward. Instead, deliverance from the tyrant, Abimelech, comes primarily at the hands of an unnamed woman and her millstone, which she drops on Abimelech’s head during a siege.

This paper examines a selection of satirical elements, names with double meanings (Abimelech, Gaal ben Ebed, and Zebul) and wordplay (the repetitive use of “one,” “upon,” “head,” and “stone”), and concludes that the target of the satire is primarily Abimelech and the institution of the monarchy. The purpose of the satire is twofold. First, it is a criticism of Abimelech and the monarchy he represents. The satire also criticizes, to a lesser degree, the rich and powerful in the community, Gaal ben Ebed and Zebul, who seek to elevate themselves. Each of the targets are exposed as less than they present themselves to be. Second, based on the observations of James C. Scott’s “everyday resistance” and an analysis of the social function of millstones, the satire also encourages average people to use the means of their daily lives to resist tyranny as represented by the unnamed woman and her millstone.

#### Alain Machia Machia, “The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) or God’s ‘dis-order’: Paradigm of Biblical Anti-Totalitarianism”

This paper aims to show how God’s justice is expressed in a paradoxical way through the narrative characterization of the divine character in Genesis 11:1-9 compared to Genesis 1:1-2:4a within the macroscopic context of Genesis 1-11. Gen. 11:1-9 describes God’s detachment from totalitarianism, tyranny, and self-divinization.

According to Gen. 1:1-2:4a, divine creation essentially boils down to the ordering of original Chaos (תְּהוֹמוֹת) after calling the elements into existence from nothing (*ex nihilo*). This ordering of the hurly-burly results in the use of specific action verbs including בָּרָא (“to create”), אָמַר (“to say”), בָּדַל (“to separate”), קָרָא (“to call”), רָאָה (“to see”), עָשָׂה (“to make”) as well as the creation of every living creature “after his kind” (Gen. 1:11,12,21,24,25). The created universe then becomes a cosmos, meaning “order” (κόσμος) so that “God saw that it was good” (וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב, Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25,31).

In the Babel narrative (Gen. 11:1-9), the God of order paradoxically becomes the God of “disorder” or, more precisely, of “dis-order”. God sows confusion, confounding humans languages so that they can no longer understand each other and dispersing them all over the earth. Could God be so allergic to human unity? Answering to this crucial question leads to solving the enigma of the pericope. Indeed, Gen. 11:1-9 is a *sandwich* within the ethnographic table and the genealogies of Shem (Gen. 10-11) bounded by the double inclusion between Gen. 11:1 and Gen. 11:9 around the lexeme שָׁפָה and the phrase כָּל-הָאָרֶץ (“the whole earth”). Additionally, Gen. 11:1 is incompatible with Gen. 10:5,20,31, and the *tol’dôt* (תּוֹלְדוֹת) formula only reappears again in Gen. 11:10 after Gen 10:32.

The Babel narrative is one of the most famous biblical stories. It has been subject of various interpretations. Christoph Uehlinger was the first to point out its sociopolitical basis, linking the story to the erection of the Chaldean and Babylonian empire in the 6th century BC. From my point of view, the hermeneutical key of the story lies in the translation of de lexeme שָׁפָה (Gen. 11:1,6,7,9). Its semantic field is relatively wide. However, unlike לָשׁוֹן (“tongue”, Gen. 10:5,20,31), its primary meaning is “lip” which alludes to a servile mimicry rather than unity, so that the *Babel* narrative appears to be a totalitarian project aimed to subject all of humanity to a centralized empire. Such a project not only rejects God's order of creation which favors unity in diversity but tends to substitute man for God so that God's

punishment restored justice, meaning the righteous (קִיָּץ), wise, and appropriate relationship with God, others, and nature.

Matthew Maw, “Listening to the Judgement of God in the Early Bibliology of John Webster”

The Anglican priest and theologian, John Webster, has been referred to as a ‘theologian’s theologian,’ but there has yet to be a monograph written on his bibliology. While this full-scale treatment is lacking, many scholars have written on his approach.

Webster’s early bibliology emphasizes God’s speech as divine judgement. Rather than pacifying or consoling its hearers, Scripture proclaims a judgement that cannot be “overthrown or subverted” (*Christ our Salvation*, 93). Those receiving the Word, then, are not judges or ‘interpreters’ of the Word, but are its ‘hearers.’ This approach challenges the interpretive assumptions of fundamentalists and the scholarly hermeneutics of Webster’s time.

Webster’s account of Scripture has drawn criticism from Agnus Paddison and Jordan Senner. According to Paddison, Webster’s interpretive vision is one-sided, pitting human agency against that of God. Senner likewise finds his use of the term ‘hearers’ restrictive, making interpreters passive receivers of the Word. This, for Senner, falls short of a truly non-competitive approach.

In contrast, this paper will show that Webster’s careful ordering of God’s speech and human reception are an asymmetrical unified event. Describing how ‘hearers’ are to properly listen to the text, Webster retains human agency while prioritizing divine speech. As those hearing Scripture actively listen, they are enabled to properly attend to and respond to the judgement of God in His Word. This paper will contribute to the field of Modern Theology by offering a broader understanding of the hearer as listener in early Websterian bibliological writings.

Elizabeth Millar, “Goodness in an Age of Toxicity, Moral Scandal, Narcissism: What Does Healthy Canadian Church Leadership Look Like?”

It is no secret that the evil that exists around us also presides within us. This is especially evident in the moral scandals and stories of toxic church culture that continue to shock. When toxicity and lack of virtue surround us, it is perhaps helpful to look at models of goodness. What does goodness look like for church leadership in Canada? How can we resist the evil that is within us? This paper will explore markers of healthy church leadership among Canadian churches, gleaned from a 2024 research study of “greatness” in 31 Canadian congregations. The framework for the research project comes from business management expert Jim Collins whose good-to-great principles have been found to highly resonate in non-business establishments such as education, healthcare, social services, arts, police, and churches. To date, no Canadian studies have examined the applicability of Collins’ framework to the church leadership context.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how Collins’ leadership framework may particularly be used to identify and promote healthy church leadership within congregational settings. These findings will be put into theological conversation with Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer’s *A Church Called Tov and Pivot*, which address the harm caused by unhealthy church leadership structures and narcissistic leaders. Finally, the practice of presence will be promoted as an embodied posture that exemplifies and facilitates goodness in a Canadian church leadership context.

Jeff Morris, “Omnipresence and the Problem of Divine Absence”

This paper will explore how insights into God’s attributes can serve further theological tasks. In particular, we will see how God’s omnipresence can serve an apologetic function by solving the problem of divine absence, a problem which has to do with reconciling God’s absence from believers who endure horrendous evils.

God is omnipresent in the sense that, by his power, he gives being to every created thing. Since God is not separate from his power, he “contacts” every created thing. Thus, his presence is a necessary condition for the presence of every created being, including beings who commit horrendous evils, which implies that God is intimately present to those evils.

God seems absent because he is not present by occupying space but by sustaining things in existence. Since our normal way to detect a being is by perceiving them in space, and God does not occupy space, we fail to detect his presence. God’s omnipresence also addresses the experiential problem of divine absence because if God is omnipresent by contact, he is not only aware, but intimately present to the horrendous evils believers experience, offering us comfort and hope for justice.

Sarah Newman, “Dreams in Genesis: Revelation, Crisis, and Covenant

This paper explores the function and significance of dreams in Genesis through the nominal and verbal forms of *ḥlm* (*ḥalōm*, and *ḥālam*, respectively), comparing their literary and theological dimensions with surrounding ANE traditions. Through a close examination of eight key passages in Genesis, it will be argued that dreams in Genesis not only serve to protect the covenantal line, reveal divine sovereignty, and shape the trajectory of salvation history, but they also occur in moments of crisis. In sum, dreams occur not simply as mystical experiences, but as vital encounters through which God reveals, redirects, and redeems in tangible ways— often in imagery rooted in their experience or vocation.

Andrew Noble, “The Forgotten Physicality of Idol Critique”

In contemporary evangelical churches, idolatry is often spoken of as a matter of the heart. For example, the New City Catechism says, “Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator.” Subsequently, the modern polemic against idolatry is associated with emotional, moral, and existential matters. But idolatry is immaterial and material: relational betrayal and physical manifestation. This paper will consider the physicality of idol critique, from the people who become stiff-necked after worshipping the stiff-necked calf, to today’s technological idols, which manifest similar repercussions upon our bodies.

Kenneth Hamilton is one example of a 20th-century theologian who placed emphasis on immaterial idols, saying, “Our imagination is our interior workshop.” Likewise, Timothy Keller, co-author of the New City Catechism, was influenced by the counselling-oriented work of David Powlison. But the rise of “inner” idolatry goes back much further. Three influences will be discussed: the Reformation, Augustine, and the teachings of Jesus himself. While each of these could be said to emphasize the importance of the inner life of the Christian, none of them should be understood as rejecting the physicality of idolatry. The physicality of idol critique in Scripture is important for technology ethics today: given the rise of stiff necks, dry eyes, and “brain rot” (Oxford’s 2024 Word of the Year), not to mention potential robots run by artificial intelligence, we should retrieve the forgotten physical critique of idolatry.

Pavani Paul, “Remembering Redemption, Confronting Oppression: Psalm 44’s Protest Against Divine Violence”

In times of crisis, such as war, violence, injustice, or oppression, the question of divine presence and involvement in human suffering becomes unavoidable. Psalm 44, set in the context of war, engages this theological dilemma through a bold protest against divine inaction. It resonates with those innocent sufferers who felt abandoned in need. Unlike many lament psalms that progress from distress to confidence, Psalm 44 reverses this trajectory, recalling past divine redemptive acts to challenge God’s silence in the face of present suffering. This reversal intensifies the theological tension between divine faithfulness in the past and the current affliction, interweaving expressions of praise with stark accusations of abandonment.

Drawing on the interdisciplinary perspectives from biblical studies, trauma theory, and resilience studies, this paper presents how Psalm 44 embodies resilience amid distress. By engaging in a theological protest, the psalmists not only assert their covenantal identity but also refuse to accept suffering as divine judgment passively. Instead of signalling despair, their lament becomes an act of resilience—an urgent appeal to divine justice signalling hope. This study positions Psalm 44 within a broader theological discourse on suffering, faith, and the legitimacy of questioning God amid oppression, engaging with themes of moral injury and spiritual coping mechanisms. This paper analyses the psalm’s emphatic protest against divine silence, demonstrating how lament serves both as an articulation of distress and as a vehicle for theological resilience.

Matthew Quintana, “The ‘Parent’ and ‘Grandparent’ Texts of Revelation 19:11–16: Expanding the Intertextual Context of the Apocalypse’s Old Testament Allusions”

This paper examines the Old Testament background of Rev 19:11–16 and its highly allusive portrayal of Christ’s future return as a royal messianic warrior. It is widely recognized that this passage’s imagery depends on Isa 63, Isa 11, and Ps 2. But starting from the recognition that NT texts (“offspring texts”) frequently refers to OT texts (i.e., “parent texts”) which are themselves inner-biblical developments of prior OT texts (i.e., “grandparent texts”), I will seek to demonstrate that the import of these intertextual references, and thus of Rev 19:11–16, is fully grasped only when viewed in light of their broader OT context—that is, the fact that they are themselves inner-biblical interpretations and developments of key Pentateuchal texts (i.e., Gen 49 and Num 24).

I will argue that the author of Revelation was not only aware of the intertextual links associating Isa 63, Isa 11, and Ps 2 with Gen 49 and Num 24, but that he intended to activate these texts and their broader interpretive network in his identification of Christ as the messianic warrior-king who is their embodiment and fulfillment. I will thus show that understanding the larger context of the OT allusions in Rev 19:11–16 amplifies the passage’s theological significance, illuminating further intertextual associations relevant for interpreting this NT text. I will conclude the paper by addressing implications for interpreting the OT allusions and theological message of Rev 19:11–16, especially as it relates to the passage’s violent, bloody imagery.

Ian Ritchie, “THE APOCALYPSE In the context of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Life and Witness”

The paper will provide a moral and theological reflection on *The Apocalypse* through the lens of the life and witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The past four months have seemed apocalyptic to many, and the appearance of a new Bonhoeffer movie promoted by Eric Metaxas in 2024, just prior to the U.S. election, has contributed to renewed interest in Bonhoeffer, through the projection of a highly controversial portrait of the man as a “Christian Nationalist.” The interplay of political currents involving evangelicals

and Roman Catholics has led to a charged atmosphere surrounding questions of how his life should be understood, and whether Bonhoeffer would approve.

We shall briefly explore the accuracy of the various portrayals of Bonhoeffer, and then reflect on the moral theology of *The Apocalypse*, in the light of how things unfolded in 1930s and '40s, compared to today.

Bonhoeffer taught that while grace is free, it cannot be taken for granted, lest we become dependent upon what he called “cheap grace.” To him, grace without repentance or reformation of life was not grace at all. He saw this false concept of grace at work predominantly in the churches of the western world, with the exception of the black churches he loved to visit in America. We shall examine how relevant reflexion on Bonhoeffer’s witness is to the world of 2025.

David Ross, “Awakened from Slumber: Biographical Reconstruction and Hypocrisy in John Calvin’s Reception of Paul’s Conversion”

This paper investigates John Calvin’s reception of Paul’s Damascus Road conversion/calling experience. It will consider Calvin’s commentary on Acts 9 and on some of Paul’s auto-biographical material (Romans 7, Philippians 3:1-16). Scholars have drawn on the insights of the sociological study of religious conversion to argue that Paul engaged in what is known as ‘biographical reconstruction’ after his conversion. This means that converts will often re-evaluate their prior life in ways that they would not have agreed with at that time.

This paper argues that Calvin interpreted Paul as engaging in a kind of biographical reconstruction after his Damascus Road experience. For Calvin, Paul’s biographical reconstruction enabled him to transition from a form of hypocrisy (defined as sincerely yet deludedly believing himself to be more righteous than he actually was) to a true understanding of himself according to God’s perspective rather than that of human beings (profoundly in need of divine grace for his justification). This paper thus yields a deeper understanding of Calvin’s Pauline exegesis, Paul’s Damascus Road experience, and also 16th century understandings of hypocrisy, which has recently been identified by scholars as an understudied but important aspect of Reformation rhetoric.

Peter Schuurman, “Spinning Webs in Which We Ourselves are Caught: On the Necessity of Faith Deconstruction in Canada”

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz once said, “Man (sic.) is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.” The webs for Geertz are the symbols and practises we socially construct with earnest intention but which in time constrain, oppress, and become obsolete. Drawing on research in practical theology from my co-authored book *Blessed are the Undone: The Quiet Deconstruction of Faith in Canada* (2024), I will show how some of the practises and institutions of conservative evangelicalism became the webs in which many were caught, and after a time of reckoning, deemed to be cultural and political entanglements that were counter-productive to faith and flourishing.

We interviewed 28 Christians in Canada who said the resulting “church hurt” led to the deconstruction of their faith. We explain the notion of deconstruction as the experience of becoming “undone” – the unravelling of one’s taken-for-granted faith and church life, and we investigate the main cultural trappings for such a crisis. One key pattern we noticed was that much of what Canadian Christians were deconstructing was religious resources that came from American parachurch organizations. The reconstruction process then requires an untangling from such influences and a re-contextualizing faith within the less polarized and more globalized Canadian cultural context.

As humans bearing God's image, we cannot help but spin fresh webs of significance, and these webs can be more or less conducive to shalom. Some, in fact, lead to horrendous abuse. From our research we develop a theology of the necessary and normative nature of the deconstruction of faith, drawing on biblical parallels, suggesting healthy and unhealthy approaches, all framed by the practise of repentance that leads into renewal.

J. Ryan Smith, "Divine Violence in Scripture and The Rise of Modern Theodicy: A Methodology for Engaging Biblical Interpreters Within Their Own Theodical Context"

Reconciling divine violence with God's moral perfection is not a new problem, however, its significance and prevalence have increased since the late eighteenth century. Biblical interpretation of complex texts has often presupposed that its role is to resolve the tension between the text in accordance with human standards of perfect justice and goodness. Drawing on contemporary philosophers of the history of evil such as Susan Neiman, this paper argues that the former hermeneutical approach to difficult moral texts is anachronistic and ahistorical. Anachronistic because it fails to recognize how modern theodical assumptions have shaped our reading of divine violence. Ahistorical because its hermeneutical assumptions lead to a failure to understand and appreciate how earlier interpreters sought to make sense of the morally absurd in both Scripture and nature. The paper concludes with utilizing the navigational theodicy of Mark Scott to offer a new direction for analysing the "theodical function" of biblical interpretation, which provides a more sophisticated methodology for understanding historical interpreters' attempts to render divine violence within Scripture meaningful within their own historical and cultural context.

Israel Steinmetz, "Happy is the One Who Seizes Your Infants and Dashes Them Against The Rocks': Imprecatory Psalms, Moral Injury, And The Presence Of God"

The imprecatory psalms present one of the most challenging cases of reading the OT as Christian Scripture. Psalm 137:9 is a jarring example of how problematic such texts can be as the author asserts, "Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks." What are Christians—steeped in biblical ideals of the sanctity of human life and guided by the enemy-loving, non-violent teachings of Christ and the Apostles—to make of such passages? How can such words be understood, much less applied, as Christian Scripture?

The psychological category of moral injury may serve as a helpful lens for grappling with such texts. Moral injury occurs when one's core values are violated by experiencing, witnessing, or perpetrating evil, particularly in war. Psalm 137, and the other imprecatory psalms, are written in the contexts of tragedy, war, exploitation, oppression, and exile. They express the moral injury of those who endure such events and offer hope that God hears, responds to, and speaks through his people, even in their darkest hours and most twisted contemplations.

My paper combines theological interpretation of Scripture with recent psychological research. I argue that when viewed through the lens of moral injury, the imprecatory psalms make space for grappling with the horrors of war, the moral injury inflicted on its perpetrators and victims, and God's presence in the midst. Thus, they remain an invaluable part of Christian Scripture, not least among Christians who continue to experience the horrors of war and moral injury.

Ashley St. Pierre, "Monster Movies, Revelation, and Apocalyptic Ethics: Contemporary Cultural Artefacts of Horror and Christian Responses to Injustice"

Monsters in film and art throughout the last century are generally understood to be revelatory or prophetic in the sense that they often represent societal fears in bodily form. Yet these monstrous

depictions can also be complex representations of ourselves. Revelation's monsters, including its potentially monstrous representations of God, function in both similar and yet different ways. In this paper I explore how monsters and the monstrous are interpreted and understood within the cultural artefacts of our day and how they are presented in John's Apocalypse, with the aim of supporting Christian apocalyptic responses to contemporary politics and culture that are both critical and creative.

This paper first investigates contemporary monsters through the lens of monster theory by examining the current film, *Sinners*, and its reliance on and subtle transformation of a legacy of vampire tropes developed since Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and first analyzed in Franco Moretti's "The Dialectic of Fear." It then considers Revelation's monsters, employing relevance theory and monster theory to examine the red dragon of Revelation 12 within a context of Roman imperial visual culture and propaganda. Finally, it brings these two examples of the monstrous together in order to engage with apocalyptic ethics, proposing ways that Christians can respond both to the monstrous in contemporary cultural artefacts and to monstrous injustices, urging critical engagement and creation of content.

Significantly, both Revelation 12 and *Sinners* use popular mytho-cultural depictions of the monstrous in order to subvert and comment on narratives of power; thus, both their similarities and differences can be reflected upon in order to forge an appropriate Christian response to such power and its monstrous iterations in our culture—especially when Christians themselves exemplify monstrosity.

Yohanes Krismantyo Susanta, "From Almighty God to the Struggling God: Criticism of Theodicy in the Thought of Dorothee Sölle"

The problem of evil and suffering has posed significant challenges in Christian theology, particularly with the notion of divine justice. Conventional theodicy typically upholds the concept of an omnipotent and omniscient deity; yet, this perspective sometimes falls short of offering an acceptable explanation for individuals facing injustice and oppression. Dorothee Sölle critiques the notion of a passive and immutable God, proposing instead a deity who engages in conflict and partakes in human pain. Sölle's theology of solidarity posits that God is not an aloof sovereign overseeing the world's afflictions but is instead involved in humanity's fight against malevolence and oppression.

This paper analyzes Sölle's critique of conventional theodicy, particularly the perspective that asserts divinity remains unaffected by pain. This study investigates the notion of God grappling with humanity throughout history by analyzing her writings, including *Suffering and Silent Cry*. Sölle posits that divine justice operates not externally to the world, but rather via human activities that fight oppression. This study reexamines the concept of divine justice and introduces a novel framework for understanding the interaction among God, evil, and human agency in the pursuit of a more equitable society.

This critique seeks to underscore the significance of Sölle's ideas within contemporary theology, particularly in addressing current socio-political concerns. This study critiques the conception of God as absolutely omnipotent and demonstrates how the perspective of solidarity theology might facilitate a more dynamic and transformational understanding of faith in the context of suffering.

James Tughan, "Art is the Best Revenge: A Creative Response to Tyranny"

This paper asks readers to reconsider the power of artistry as a creative and theologically based response to tyrannical oppression, as demonstrated in scripture, in art history and more immediately the *Dreaming of Lions Project* art display. This art is a metanarrative drawing sequence of an exodus-like fictional rebellion against a ruthless regime. This display will be shown in the MDC Gallery as a backdrop to the paper's reading.

The paper will consider how artmaking can resist tyrannical regimes which can be vocational, institutional, political or domestic. It will suggest how Scripture offers repeated evidence of God's response of empathy through communication and pathways of deliverance or escape from such oppression.

*The Dreaming of Lions* images suggest clues as to how tyranny works with abuse of power in information controls, silencing of protest, demonization of kindness, dehumanization of the individual, betrayal of promises made, and overwhelming, disorienting manipulation of events. However, it also affirms how God can speak into such situations to deliver his people from such trauma.

I will reference works by Goya, Johansen, Picasso, Rothko, Kollwitz, Dumas, Endo and Murphy who similarly documented evil and offered an artistic response. This paper will draw upon commentary by Miroslav Volf, Paul Tournier, Mako Fujimura, Ellie Weissel, Jean Le Carre, Alice Miller, and others, authors who are intimately acquainted with tyranny, suffering, faith and protest in artistic expression.

Juliana Uchenna Onu, "Wealth and Social Responsibility in Ben Sira: Implications for the Church's Witness to Divine Justice"

The book of Ben Sira presents wealth as a means of social responsibility. Although scholars such as Benjamin G. Wright III, Andrzej Piwowar and Bradley C. Gregory have examined the themes of wealth and Poverty within Ben Sira. However, a notable hiatus remains in the scholarship in understanding the systematic strategies Ben Sira articulates regarding how the wealthy are to fulfil their ethical and socioeconomic responsibilities towards the poor and how these teachings might inform contemporary responses to economic injustice. This research addresses this gap by examining Ben Sira 34:21-27 and 29:1-20, alongside other related passages such as chapter 4:1-10, posing the question: What systematic strategies teaching does Ben Sira offer regarding the obligations of the wealthy toward the poor, and how can these teachings inform the church's response to economic injustice today?

Employing both exegetical and theological approaches, this study explores the systematic strategic teaching of ethical and socioeconomic demands that the wealthy have toward the poor and investigates how these teachings can guide the church's witness to divine justice in the face of economic tyranny. Thus, the paper posits that Ben Sira's view of wealth as both a privilege and a moral challenge obliges the wealthy to take responsibility for the poor through systematic strategies such as equitable lending practices. It further asserts that the church's witness today must encompass active engagement in economic justice, not only through charity but also through structural transformation. By applying these teachings, the church can advocate for policies that reflect divine justice, challenge economic tyranny, and embody solidarity and liberation for the marginalised. In conclusion, this study calls for a renewed theological commitment to addressing economic disparities in light of Ben Sira's vision of responsible wealth stewardship as a vital dimension of the church's pursuit of economic justice in the world today.

John Vissers. "The Judging-Saving Work of Christ: Rethinking Calvin's Doctrine of the *Munus Triplex* in Relation to His Doctrine of the Redeemer as Judge"

Recent evangelical dogmatics has shown a renewed interest in the Reformed doctrine of the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king (*munus triplex*). In his treatment of this doctrine in the 1559 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin includes Christ's work at the Last Judgment as properly belonging to his office as king (*Inst.* II.15.5). Twenty-five pages later Calvin returns to the work of Christ the Redeemer as judge in the final paragraphs of his exposition of the Apostles' Creed, where he speaks of "Christ's future return in judgment" and "The Judge is the—Redeemer!" (*Inst.* II.16.17-18).

This paper will give a close reading of Calvin's doctrine of the threefold office of Christ in terms of the work of Christ the Redeemer as judge, in order to explore Calvin's teaching on divine justice and judgment, especially in relation to tyranny and coercive power. Does Calvin's emphasis on the spiritual nature of Christ's kingly office and his placement of Christ's work as judge under that office offer an account of divine justice and judgment that takes seriously an apocalyptic gospel which effects the judgment it proclaims, in this life, and in the life to come?

As a study in historical theology, this paper will be an exercise in Calvin interpretation, i.e., a proposal for a new reading of Calvin on his own terms. As a study in constructive Reformed dogmatics, this paper will propose the possibility of adding the work of Christ as judge to the threefold office, i.e., a fourfold office of Christ as prophet, priest, judge, and king, in order to offer a robust Christological account of divine judgment and justice.

Ben Voleman, "Prophets in Protest: The United Ministries of Martin Luther King Jr. and Abraham Joshua Heschel"

From January 1963 until the death of Martin Luther King Jr. in April 1968, he and Abraham Joshua Heschel enjoyed a heartfelt, mutually encouraging friendship while they became closely aligned with one another's political and social activism. Despite extremely diverse ethnic and theological backgrounds, they had a shared determination to work fearlessly in unity as prophetic voices empowered by scriptural principles at a time of national crisis over civil rights and growing public division concerning the war in Vietnam.

This paper will address their original motivations and theological focus as they moved individually toward public activism, eventually uniting to protest areas of injustice and immorality in American public and political spheres. While they might have enjoyed the prestige of their books, scholarship, and international reputations, both made extraordinary personal sacrifices in their witness to God's moral standards among their ethnic and religious communities, to national leaders, and a broad public audience. That witness affirmed their shared belief in "the most precious insight" that we receive from the prophets, according to Heschel, that we sense God's "involvement, attentiveness and concern" for humanity in the most challenging times.\* In hindsight, we recognize that their spiritual brotherhood has given us an exemplary, inspirational legacy of authentic prophetic faith.

\* A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: HarperCollins, 1962), 619.

Janet Warren, "Divine Justice: Inherent in the Created Order"

Christians struggle with the presence of injustice and evil in the world and have difficulty reconciling God's love with his justice. Rather than simplistic approaches (appealing to mystery or blaming an individual) or those that examine God's nature (as with theodicy), I suggest another approach, biblically based and borrowing from systems theory, is to focus on the nature of creation, with intrinsic natural and moral order.

First, I summarize systems theory. This view, used in many disciplines, claims that components of an organization or community are interdependent and connected. Systems are largely self-sustaining, operating within specific boundaries. They are highly sensitive to feedback; consequently, outcomes can be unpredictable. Next, I consider the biblical metanarrative through the lens of systems theory. God's creation is complex, self-sustaining but bounded; both natural and moral order apparent. The latter includes the concept of actions and consequences, blessings and curses, and divine "giving up" or allowing natural outcomes. Systemic sin illustrates how injustices may occur through the interaction of variables. The world can be viewed as a relational, functional, and teleological system in which divine

“justice” is largely intrinsic. This system is established by the Creator who oversees, facilitates and intervenes at times but does not need to micromanage. Moral order is established through human obedience but, given that the system is open, injustices may occur.

Instead of subjecting God to forensic analysis, understanding the complexity of his good creational system offers a different perspective on the problem of divine justice.

Clement Wen, “Meaning and Eternity amidst ‘the Horrors’: Marilyn McCord Adams and Wolfhart Pannenberg in Critical-Constructive Dialogue”

In this paper, Marilyn McCord Adams (1943-2017) is placed in dialogue with Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014) over the question of how sin, evil, and especially “the horrors” affects “meaning” and “meaning-making.” Because Adams emphasizes the subjectivity of individuals who are “meaning makers,” she posits that “the horrors” (i.e., the most grievous of inexplicable evils) work towards the destruction and undoing of “meaning” and our sense of reality’s “coherence.” Christological reflections under this scheme lead Adams to view eschatological salvation as involving a renewed ability for individuals to “construct meaning and coherence” for themselves again in light of the salvific work of Christ.

The implications of this view will be explored with especial emphasis on how such differs greatly from the way in which Pannenberg grounds *inherent, discoverable* “meaning” and “coherence” eschatologically by way of his differentiated omnitemporal understanding of “eternity” (as substantially influenced by his critical and constructive engagement with Plotinus and Dilthey) and the role in which such an understanding of “eternity” plays in Pannenberg’s conception of God’s action within history and creation towards the ultimate eschatological goal, not only of the overcoming sin, evil, and “horrors” (if I may borrow from Adams’ vocabulary for a moment), but also of creaturely participation in and through the “field” of the Triune God that is “creatively” marked by “love.” A broader implication is that a critically-constructive dialogue between Adams and Pannenberg promises to be immensely fruitful and, as such, the paper encourages and anticipates further interaction between these two important twentieth-century figures.

Jeff Wheeldon, “The Radically Unsatisfying Nature of Evil” by Jeff Wheeldon

The concept of evil is complex and multifaceted, ranging from radical personal evil embodied in human actions or even spiritual beings, to impersonal and banal systemic injustice. This presentation will argue that humans have an emotional preference for conceptions of evil that are personal and radical, and that this preference is embodied in our religious and social institutions, including our criminal justice system; but that both Jesus Christ and the modern social sciences point us more toward systemic evil and injustice, and away from punitive responses to perceived moral or legal failures. Jesus’ offer of grace for participation in evil is not only a radical reversal of radical personal evil, but is in fact the only appropriate and effective response to systemic evil; if evil is primarily systemic and impersonal, then grace is justice.