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Did Any Pre-Christian Jews Expect a Dying-and-Rising Messiah?

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Abstract

An oft-repeated dogma that ancient Jews could never have imagined a suffering or dying messiah before Christianity should be abandoned. This can be demonstrated by surveying the views of several dozen specialists who have questioned or criticized this dogma from the mid-twentieth century to the present. They all call attention to a considerable amount of evidence that triangulates to the idea of a suffering and dying messiah probably predating Christianity in some circles of Jewish thought. At best, this evidence establishes this conclusion as a fact, but even at worst, it establishes its plausibility as a hypothesis, removing all justification for maintaining any dogma against it. Christianity can then more clearly be seen as a natural emergence from prior Jewish expectations and understanding of Scripture, rather than a radical break from it.

The opinion of a great majority of experts in ancient Judaism has long been that Judaism included (at least on its counter-cultural fringes) a belief that an eschatological messiah would suffer and die before ushering in the end of the world. They agree this belief was extant both before and after Christianity adapted it, and that the evidence for this is extensive even if not always direct. It is therefore difficult to explain why a minority of scholars still adamantly insist that no experts have concluded so, and that there is no evidence of it. This would appear to be a dogma that is eliding the actual state of the literature, and it warrants correction.

The contrary dogma is that "the Jews" would never conceive of a suffering or dying messiah, that they could only countenance a messiah who would be an invincible conquering hero, and therefore the Jewish-Christian innovation of a humiliated and slain messiah is unprecedented, never before comprehended from Scripture. This dogma is entangled in various ancillary dogmas, such as that before the Christians no Jews ever imagined—or even could have imagined—that the so-called "Servant Song" of Isaiah 52–53 was prophetic of the messiah;

likewise, the dying righteous hero of Wisdom 2 and 5, and other passages similar, such as the pierced messiah of Zechariah 12:10. Even Daniel 9, which appears to prophesy a dying "messiah," will be dismissed as never imagined to be about the messiah until Christianity.

The most ardent example of this dogmatic position comes from Bart Ehrman, who declares that "no Jews would have expected a crucified messiah," and "no Jew that we know of" would "make up the idea," nor could they "derive the idea of" a messiah's "death from Jewish legend and myth" because "Jews had no conception" of it.[1] Yet Ehrman presents no substantial defense of these assertions. First, he appeals to his opinion that it is "crazy" [*sic*] and "blasphemous," presenting no evidence for either, other than an anachronistic and inapplicable analogy to David Koresh.[2] Second, he denies that any Jews read Isaiah 53 or Daniel 9 as messianic, insisting "we do not have a single Jewish text prior to" Christianity saying so, indeed "there were" no Jews "who expected" even "a humiliated messiah" of any kind—citing no scholarship on the point (as might have corrected him).[3] Ehrman thus concludes "we do not have a shred of evidence" of a prior Jewish belief in a messiah who would suffer and be killed. And third, Ehrman says Paul's declaring this a "stumbling block" for Jews proves none could countenance it (even though in the very same place, Paul says some did).[4]

A less ardent (but more substantive) defense of this dogma comes from John J. Collins, who declares that "attempts to find precedents in the [Dead Sea] Scrolls for a suffering or dying messiah have, I believe, been misguided" and "the notion of a suffering and dying messiah eventually found a place in Judaism" but "clearly much later."[5] Collins addresses very few of the scholars to be surveyed here (only Starcky, Puech, and Wise), is refuted by the remainder, and argues mainly from subjective opinion (and only regarding Isaiah 53 and 4Q541). Nevertheless, his treatment is important enough that anyone wishing to evaluate the state of the question should consult his entire excursus, as it is the only substantial case in print for the dogma that no pre-Christian Jews expected a dying messiah.[6]

Otherwise, this dogma against a pre-Christian dying-messiah tradition appears

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1 Bart Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2012), 292, 163, 240.
2 Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 163–64.
3 Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 165–70 (esp. 165, 168, 170).
4 Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 170; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:22–24.
5 John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd ed., 2010), 19 and 147–48. For the corresponding view that Christians must therefore have invented it: John J. Collins and Adela Yarbro Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 80–82, 130–33.
6 Collins, *Scepter and Star*, 140–48.

to be barely more than an assumption.[7] And even Collins does not present so as to rebut any of the best arguments for it advanced throughout the literature, which leaves his conclusion inadequately justified, and arguably overwhelmed by the actual cases for it that have been made. How or why the overwhelming majority of studies on this question have been ignored or gainsaid may be beyond explanation. But this oversight requires an organized correction, bringing together a complete survey of the numerous studies against this dogma and their findings and reasoning—which will only be briefed here, but future scholars can use this survey to locate and explore further the details of their arguments.

Navigating Definitions

Definitions must first be clarified.

First, we must distinguish the factual from the modal form of the argument. The factual argument would be something like, "some Jews *did* expect a suffering and dying messiah." One would then argue for this being at least more probable than not (as certainty is never possible, especially on subjects for which records are scarce and problematic). Every scholar arguing this way indicates they also mean *some* Jews thought this, not all or even a majority of them, from whom the Christians may have taken up the notion. On this view, Christians did not invent the idea, but most successfully employed it.

The modal argument, by contrast, does not purport to prove this as a fact, but as a distinct possibility. This would be something like, "some Jews *could have* expected a suffering and dying messiah." This does not require proving that any did, but rather only that it would be plausible they did, and therefore any *hypothesis* that the Christians did not invent the idea but inherited it (from some forgotten fringe of Jewish interpreters) cannot be said to be impossible or too improbable to credit. This form of the argument seeks only to establish that the conclusion is contextually plausible enough to entertain, and thus cannot be *ruled out*. This is a logically different position than the factual argument. To say we cannot rule out a hypothesis is not the same thing as saying the hypothesis is true, or that it is false. A middle possibility remains: *that we do not know*. So, we cannot shut the door on either conclusion.

Therefore, even if you are not convinced the evidence makes the conclusion *probable*, you might still be convinced by that same evidence to concede that this conclusion is at least *plausible*. That would suffice to justify rejecting all dogmatic claims to the effect of "that is impossible," and therefore that no Jews,

7 For example, Géza Xeravits, *King, Priest, Prophet: Positive Eschatological Protagonists of the Qumran Library* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 66, 114–15, 143; Albert Hogeterp, *Expectations of the End: A Comparative Traditio-Historical Study of Eschatological, Apocalyptic and Messianic Ideas in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 427.

not even a fringe minority of them, "could possibly" have thought this (a position Collins appears receptive to, but that Ehrman definitely is not). One is then left to admit that this could have happened, even if one believes insufficient evidence survives to be sure.

Second, we must also avoid hyper-defining our words to avoid a conclusion. Dogmas might be defended by defining a word so narrowly as to eliminate the subject altogether, and then pretending broader definitions do not exist or cannot be applicable. For example, if one defines "messiah" so narrowly as to *only* mean "a supernaturally invincible military hero," then you have simply constructed a circular argument, defining out of existence all other possible conceptions of a messiah. In truth, before Christianity, Jewish messianism was very diverse and subject to continuous innovation. As Dietmar Neufeld puts it, "contrary to traditional assumptions of a ubiquitous and consistent messianism in early Judaism," many "studies have pointed out that messianism was a fluid and diverse phenomenon."[8] In the words of Matthew Novenson, the very term "messiah" is "notable primarily for its indeterminacy," because "the diverse strands of messianism in ancient Judaism" arise by interpreting the same "scriptural source texts in a number of different ways."[9] The messiah could be a priestly figure, a kingly figure, a messenger or prophet, or any combination; they could be an actual celestial being (as in the *Melchizedek Scroll*), or an ordinary man elected by God; there could even be two messiahs working in succession; and either could be a great warrior, or an agent of peace who will conquer the world with words and not weapons (as depicted in the *Psalms of Solomon* 17.21–40).[10] What an "anointed" figure may represent to interpreters of prophecy could vary even in extant writings, and we can expect it would vary even more among interpreters whose views have not chanced to survive in the record, particularly as very little has survived at all. Even Bart Ehrman asks "how would we know" a belief was not held by "every" ancient person when so little survives to tell us.[11] Hence the difference between arguing "they did" and arguing "they could have."

8 In Craig Evans and Peter Flint, eds., *Eschatology, Messianism, and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 120–21. Among concurring studies: Matthew Novenson, *Christ among the Messiahs: Christ Language in Paul and Messiah Language in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Magnus Zetterholm, ed., *The Messiah in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007); James Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger, and Gerbern Oegema, eds., *Qumran-Messianism: Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998); James Charlesworth, ed., *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992); Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, Ernest Frerichs, eds., *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

9 Novenson, *Christ among the Messiahs*, 41, 177, 61.

10 Each of these is discussed in Charlesworth et al., *Qumran-Messianism*, esp. 63–66, 88–90, and 183; as well as across the studies cited here in n. 8 (including the two-messiah tradition, to be discussed more shortly).

11 Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, 193.

The Jewish term "messiah" means "anointed" (*mashiaḥ* / *christos*) and could refer to many kinds of figures, from priests and kings to mere prophets. The only thing that distinguishes a "messiah" relevant to the origins of Christianity is whether they were substantively connected to the *eschaton*, the "end of the world," however conceived. "The" messiah is then any "anointed one" (whether priest, king, prophet, servant, or elect) who plays an essential part in bringing about this new revolutionary end-state. On the more supernatural end of this field of imagination were Jewish sects expecting this end-state to be accompanied by the overthrow of all ungodly powers and the resurrection of the dead. Christianity emerged from this line of thought.

Therefore, here we should understand "messiah" to mean any man who is believed to have been chosen (hence "anointed") by the Hebrew God to play an essential part in God's plan to liberate his Chosen People from their oppressors and restore or institute God's true religion. This means: persons "anointed" in any sense then understood (literally, figuratively, cosmically, or symbolically); "liberate" in any sense genuinely believed (whether physically or spiritually); "oppressors" in any sense then identified (whoever or whatever they may be); "religion" in its fullest sense (cult, mores, sacred knowledge, and the resulting social order); and "play a part" only as such, not necessarily meaning "bring to fruition." As mentioned, there is evidence of a double-messiah tradition within Judaism, whereby there are *two* eschatological messiahs, not just one, and both play crucial roles in bringing about the final outcome. We should not discount either messiah in such systems of thought; both are "the" messiah in the relevant sense here.

Third, one can distinguish the concepts of "dying" and "suffering." There can be a suffering but not dying messiah (who perhaps suffers a palpable fear or risk of death but does not die). And there could be a dying but not suffering messiah (who perhaps dies in his sleep or gloriously on the battlefield, rather than suffering some worse end). We do know the "righteous suffering hero" was a common Jewish trope,[12] into which a messiah could easily be cast, just like the "atoning" death-by-crucifixion of the Maccabean martyrs.[13] But this study will forefront the aspect of *dying*.

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12 George Nickelsburg, "The Genre and Function of the Markan Passion Narrative," *Harvard Theological Review* 73 (January–April 1980): 153–84; John Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (vol. 1; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 167–71; Thomas Thompson, *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 191–93.

13 Jarvis Williams, *Maccabean Martyr Traditions in Paul's Theology of Atonement: Did Martyr Theology Shape Paul's Conception of Jesus's Death?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), esp. 53–63, 72–84; and Daniel Stökl ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

Finally, since "the resurrection of all God's chosen" was inherent to the system of Jewish thought that Christianity arose from, we need not prove a belief that the messiah, so defined, would be *resurrected* if slain. If any resurrectionist sect of Jews (like the Christians) believed the messiah would die (or indeed had to die, to effect God's plans), they would have also believed God would resurrect him. This was also supported by the same scriptures that could inspire an expectation of his dying (for example, Dan 9:25–26 in light of Dan 12:1–3, and Isa 53:4–10 in light of Isa 53:11–12). So, it is not the resurrection of a messiah that any resurrectionist Jews would doubt, but his dying.

Common Themes

Before surveying specific scholars' arguments, some underlying themes common to many or all of them should be understood. Supporting argumentation, along with a contextualization of passages in their respective periods, and other matters essential that space is lacking to detail here, can be found in the studies surveyed. The following is meant only as a summary.

First, there is actually no evidence of any universal Jewish hostility toward a suffering or dying messiah. That claim has been largely conjectural or hypothetical, not directly factual. The existence of Jewish factions expecting the messiah to be a straightforward military victor is beyond doubt. But as just noted (citing Neufeld, Novenson, Charlesworth, Evans, and others), there was a considerable diversity of Jewish messianic expectations, such that the presence of one model cannot evince the absence of others.

Second, it is commonly thought that the authors of Daniel 9:24–27 assigned the death of the "messiah" (the beloved high priest) Onias III as a sign of the looming apocalypse—to be followed, according to Daniel 12, by a triumphant messianic figure, the Archangel Michael.[14] This arguably established a precedent for intercalating dying hero-messiahs into prophetic-apocalyptic timetables that could have inspired Christians, reinterpreting the same material to refer to their man rather than Onias. Because the "end" did not come according to the originally intended timetable matching Onias, requiring later Jewish interpreters to ascertain what *future* figure must have been intended. As I will show, many scholars find hints of this in the Dead Sea Scrolls, establishing multiple precedents

14 Though it is not an element of the present analysis, that an equation of Michael with Jesus (as well as with a Melchizedek figure, in the Dead Sea Scrolls, with whom Jesus was also associated in Hebrews 5–7) could date back to the earliest Christian interpreters has been argued by Darrell Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Tradition and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011); and a pre-Christian connection between Michael and Melchizedek has been argued by Michael Flowers, "The Two Messiahs and Melchizedek in 11QMelchizedek," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 7 (2016): 194–227; and Rick Van de Water, "Michael or *Yhwh*? Toward Identifying Melchizedek in 11Q13," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 16.1 (2006): 75–86, among others.

for later Christians to draw upon. Because "all pesharim" found there "deal with prophetic biblical texts" but "interpret them as referring to their author's own time or to the eschaton," thus not following their originally intended sense.[15]

For example, some scholars see this happening to Daniel 9 in the fragmentary text of 11Q13 (the Melchizedek Scroll). In the second column of this text, lines 17–18, we are told the "messenger" who brings the good news in Isaiah 52:7 is the "Anointed One of the spirit, concerning whom Daniel said…" at which point the text is damaged, but it must continue with some part of either Daniel 9:25 or 9:26—most likely 9:25 ("until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens' and sixty-two 'sevens'…" NIV), but possibly implicating 9:26 ("After the sixty-two 'sevens,' the Anointed One will be put to death…" NIV).[16]

Those who argue this note that the preceding material in 11Q13 establish that this is a discussion of the last years of the apocalypse in the timetable of Daniel 9, so this can no longer have been understood by these authors as meaning Onias III (much less *anyone* centuries earlier), but some other figure in the future or more recent past, who will appear just a few years before the end of the world. Many of the scholars we will examine argue that the author(s) of 11Q13 can therefore only have understood the "anointed" in Daniel 9:25 to be the same person as the "anointed" killed in Daniel 9:26, and thus did indeed mean that the "messiah" who brings "the good news" will be killed, and thereby signal that the end times have begun.[17] This might even have been explicitly discussed in lost sections of this text, which would establish the precedent Christians later co-opted. For example, in accord with Daniel 9, in earliest Christian imagination (1 Cor 15:20–25), Jesus was regarded as "the firstfruits" of the resurrection of all, and therefore his death-and-resurrection was originally regarded, and marketed, as a sign of the apocalypse (originally the intended function of the death of Onias).[18]

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15 Aharon Shemesh, "Biblical Exegesis and Interpretations from Qumran to the Rabbis," in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism* (ed. Matthias Henze; Grand Rapids; Eerdmans 2012), 467–89 (468). Concurring, and in particular with respect to Daniel 9: Paul Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchireša* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association, 1981) 21, 49–50, 98; Dean Ulrich, "How Early Judaism Read Daniel 9:24-27," *Old Testament Essays* 27.3 (January 2014): 1062–83; and other scholars to be examined here.

16 I will survey the scholars who make this argument shortly, but for general background on this manuscript and its textual issues, see: Alex Jassen, *Mediating the Divine: Prophecy and Revelation in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 90–95; John Sietze Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 277–91; Géza Vermès, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (7th ed.; New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 532–33; and Christian Metzenthin, *Jesaja-Auslegung in Qumran* (Zurich: TVZ, 2010), 314–23.

17 Experts here surveyed also argue the authors of 11Q13 saw the messenger of Isaiah 52:7 to be the Suffering Servant of 52:13ff.

18 By contrast, 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, early post-Christian texts sometimes cited as attesting a Jewish belief in a dying messiah (e.g. Collins, *Scepter*, 147), are rarely used as evidence owing to their uncertain scale of Christian editing. I will therefore not consider them. See Xeravits, *King, Priest, Prophet*, 142–44.

Third, the Suffering Servant prophecy of Isaiah 52–53 can have had many interpretations, varying from its original intent as a poetic-figurative description of Israel's liberation by Cyrus the Great, to a moral outline for suffering righteous heroes generally, to an actual prophecy of a future hero or even messiah.[19] Scholars present evidence that each of these interpretations existed in different corners of Jewish thought even before the talmudic era. The same can be said for other passages, such as the suffering righteous hero in Wisdom 2 and 5. Many scholars find intertextual relationships among all three texts (Isa 52–53; Dan 9–12; and Wisdom 2 and 5), suggesting even the authors of Daniel and Wisdom were aware of, and using, these alternative interpretations of the Fourth Servant Song (Isa 52:13–53:12).[20]

Fourth, in the Talmud, there is no resistance at all to the idea of a suffering or dying messiah, or a messianic interpretation of the Fourth Servant Song, but ready acceptance. Despite hundreds of disputes recorded across the Talmud, none are on this. References to it are instead made as if it were so widely accepted that no explanation was even required.[21] Many of the scholars soon to be cited conclude that in *b. Sanhedrin* 98b, it is said the messiah will be "burdened" with "afflictions like millstones," attesting an uncontested assumption of his suffering. Likewise, in *b. Sanhedrin* 93b, it is said the messiah will be called "the leper" because, quoting Isaiah 53:4, "Indeed, our illnesses he did bear and our pains he endured; yet we did esteem him injured, stricken by God, and afflicted." This passage is cited to adduce one of the messiah's "names," but the fact that it was assumed the Fourth Servant Song could provide such information entails it was assumed the Fourth Servant Song was about the messiah.

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19 For example, there are Qumran manuscripts of Isaiah that say the suffering "servant" in Isaiah 53 shall be "anointed" by God and then "pierced through for our transgressions" as discussed in Martin Hengel (with Daniel Bailey), "The Effective History of Isaiah 53 in the Pre-Christian Period," in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 75-146 (103–05). Hengel notes the text of Isaiah 53:10 in 1QIsa[a] reads "pierced" rather than "bruised," the text of Isaiah 53:5 reads that he is "pierced through for our transgressions" rather than merely "wounded" for them, and the text of Isaiah 52:14 describes God having "anointed" his appearance "beyond that of any man." See also Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Sacrificial Life and Death of the Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)," *Vetus Testamentum* 66.1 (2016): 1–14.

20 That Wisdom 2 and 5 interpret Isaiah 52–53 is a common view now: Michael Stone and George Nickelsburg, eds., *Early Judaism: Texts and Documents on Faith and Piety* (Minneapolis: Fortress, rev. ed., 2009), 133–37; Daniel Bailey, "Suffering Servant," in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* (ed. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1257; and John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd ed., 1998), 186, who cites many scholars concurring; likewise, the intertextual relationship between Daniel 9–12 and Isaiah 52–53: Matthias Henze, "The Use of Scripture in the Book of Daniel," in *A Companion to Biblical Interpretation in Early Judaism* (ed. Matthias Henze; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 298.

21 I shall employ translations from the Online Sefaria Project at https://www.sefaria.org. The scholars cited later provide translations that do not relevantly differ.

The Talmud also describes a dying messiah without contest: *b. Sukkah* 52a records a dispute over the subject of a certain eulogy, and one possibility offered is that it is for the "Messiah ben Joseph" who will be "killed in the war of Gog from the land of Magog prior to the ultimate redemption with the coming of Messiah ben David," describing a two-messiah model of the apocalypse, whereby the death of one sets the stage for the coming of the other, marking the end of the world.[22] There it is declared "this would be the meaning of that which is written in that context: 'And they shall look unto Me because they have thrust him through; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son,'" quoting Zechariah 12:10, used by early Christians to the same point.[23] Hints of this two-messiah tradition appear in the Dead Sea Scrolls (explicitly in 1QS 9:11 and 1Q28a 2:11–21, and implicitly elsewhere), suggesting it was an old and evolving concept.[24] And in the Talmud, it is clear one of them will be killed.

It might be noticed that both messiahs have appellations shared by Jesus: Son of David and Son of Joseph. If an interpreter reimagined these as the same person, one the resurrected form of the other, we would have the Christian belief. It is less probable that Rabbinical Jews elaborately split the Christian messiah into two rather than Christians merging an already existing pair, suggesting these beliefs predated Christianity. The Talmud certainly evinces no evidence that any of this was derived from Christianity (whether the appellations, the expected death, or messianic understandings of Zech 12 and Isa 52–53). That can only be conjectured; and conjectures should not be confused for facts. As we shall see, many scholars argue the evidence more supports the Talmud preserving ancient ideas that separately influenced both Christianity and talmudic discourse, instead of radical post-Christian changes to Jewish messianism borrowing from (or even lending unwanted support to) a disapproved heresy against Judaism, and without this ever raising dispute or comment.

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22 See: John Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 40–66; and Marshall Johnson, *The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies: With Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 120–38.

23 See: Christopher Tuckett, "Zechariah 12:10 and the New Testament," in *The Book of Zechariah and Its Influence* (ed. Christopher Tuckett; London: Routledge, 2013), 111–22.

24 Several scholars assessing this evidence see in it a possible exegesis of Zechariah 6:9–13. Besides the discussion in Johnson, *Purpose*, Flowers, "Two Messiahs," and Evans and Flint, *Eschatology*, 121–22, see also: Peter Flint, "Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Historical Jesus in Context* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, Dale Allison, Jr and John Dominic Crossan; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 110–31; Evans and Flint, *Eschatology*, 5–6; Florentino García Martínez and Eibert Tigchelaar, eds., *Qumranica minora*, Vol. II (Boston: Brill, 2007), 13–32; J. Liver, "The Doctrine of the Two Messiahs in Sectarian Literature in the Time of the Second Commonwealth," *Harvard Theological Review* 52.3 (1959):149–85; K.G. Kuhn, "The Two Messiahs of Aaron and Israel," *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (ed. K. Stendahl; New York: Harper, 1957), 54–64. Although doubts are raised in L.D. Hurst, "Did Qumran Expect Two Messiahs?," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 9 (1999): 157–80, they depend on an over-specific definition of "messiah."

And finally, the fact that talmudic compilers so easily developed a dying-messiah concept of their own (independently or not) demonstrates there was no Jewish hostility to the idea. Indeed, the Talmud evinces none at all, not even in any remembered discourse from the Tannaitic period or earlier. So, however one might react to scholars concluding that the evidence establishes such ideas *probably* predate Christianity, it remains hard to deny that the talmudic readiness to adopt them demonstrates how easily this *could* have been the case that far back. If it were plausible for Talmudic Jews, it would have been so for pre-Christian Jews. As the transformation of the Maccabean martyrs into atoning heroic deaths already evinces, the two historical contexts did not relevantly differ in their effect on such thinking. Hence, many scholars see this mindset emerging already in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The Survey of Scholars Questioning the Dogma

I will now survey the scholars challenging this dogma and succinctly brief their arguments. In each case, I will break convention by listing their credentials, because it is a mode of argument often employed in defense of a popular dogma to dismiss scholars challenging it on the grounds of their supposed "incompetence" in the relevant languages, materials, or methodologies, or even their inadequate "prestige," even though that should not matter.[25]

The most important studies are either the most recent (as they update, survey, and integrate prior results) or the most cited (thus being the studies others have most built upon). So, I will begin with those. I will then move back in time to all known studies concurring to illustrate the length of time these views have been held and the number of experts agreeing, which further demonstrates this is not some new radical revisionism. It has been defended and maintained for decades, without relent, by a large and diverse scholarship.

Baseline Examples

I will start with a representative example: David Mitchell, who has a PhD in the Hebrew Bible from New College, Edinburgh. Mitchell produced an extensive

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25 For accounts of such tactics: Philip Davies, "Did Jesus Exist?" *The Bible and Interpretation* (August 2012) at https://bibleinterp.arizona.edu/opeds/dav368029; Justin Meggitt, "'More ingenious than Learned'? Examining the Quest for the Non-Historical Jesus," *New Testament Studies* 65.4 (2019): 443–60; Tom Dykstra, "Ehrman and Brodie on Whether Jesus Existed: A Cautionary Tale about the State of Biblical Scholarship," *Journal of the Orthodox Center for the Advancement of Biblical Studies* 8.1 (2015): 1–32; Lester Grabbe, "The Case of the Corrupting Consensus," in *Between Evidence and Ideology: Essays on the History of Ancient Israel Read at the Joint Meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study and the Oud Testamentisch Werkgezelschap Lincoln, July 2009* (Bob Becking and Lester Grabbe; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 83–92.

study, *Messiah ben Joseph*, to considerable expert praise.[26] His endorsers include: the author of its foreword, Robert Gordon, emeritus professor of Hebrew at Cambridge; Alan Avery-Peck, professor of Judaic studies at Holy Cross and editor of the *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*; Mart-Jan Paul, professor of Old Testament at ETF Leuven; Michael Heiser, a PhD in Hebrew and Semitic studies having held many related appointments and professorships; Evangelical scholars L. Michael Morales, with a PhD in Old Testament from Trinity College, UK, who has held seminary professorships in biblical studies, and Michael L. Brown, a PhD in Near Eastern languages and literature from NYU, also with seminary professorships; and Lester Grabbe, retired professor of Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism from the University of Hull with a PhD in religion from Claremont Graduate University and an extensive publication record in the subject of early Judaism.

Mitchell argues that the modern belief that this messianic concept derived later (such as from the disappointing experience of Bar Kochba) is not based on evidence but only conjecture,[27] whereas a preponderance of evidence indicates the idea long predates that. Mitchell triangulates to this conclusion from a wide range of evidence, persuading many professors of Jewish studies to concur that this is plausible or probable. Mitchell's evidence ranges beyond the talmudic passages to include material from the Dead Sea Scrolls and their (and others') uses and interpretations of Isaiah 53, and argues that the Melchizedek Scroll "may not be the only Qumran text to feature a dying messianic figure."[28] His point of reference is the two-messiah tradition, the one (Son of Joseph) who dies harbingering the one (Son of David) who comes to resurrect him.[29]

More often cited is Daniel Boyarin, professor of talmudic culture at UC Berkeley with a PhD in talmudic studies from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, who wrote that the "commonplace view" that dying-messiah interpretations of Isaiah 53 were a Christian innovation unprecedented in Judaism "has to be rejected completely," because "the notion of the humiliated and suffering messiah was not at all alien within Judaism before Jesus," and even "remained current among Jews" well after, proving "Jews, it seems, had no difficulty whatever with understanding a Messiah who would vicariously suffer to redeem the world."[30]

26 David Mitchell, *Messiah ben Joseph* (Glasgow, Scotland: Campbell Publishers, 2016). For the reviewing scholars named see https://brightmorningstar.org/publications/messiah-ben-joseph.

27 For example: Collins, *Scepter*, 147–48. Derivation from bar Kochba makes little sense given that he was deemed a false messiah (*b. Sanh*. 93b) and thus not a model for one: Richard Marks, *The Image of Bar Kokhba in Traditional Jewish Literature: False Messiah and National Hero* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

28 Mitchell, *Messiah*, 100–01.

29 Some of Mitchell's findings were previously published in David Mitchell, "Rabbi Dosa and the Rabbis Differ: Messiah ben Joseph in the Babylonian Talmud," *The Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 8.4 (January 2005): 77–90.

30 Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: The New Press, 2012), 132–33.

Boyarin adds that "there is no evidence at all that any late ancient Jews read Isaiah 52–53 as referring to anyone but the messiah," whereas there are "several attestations" of their reading it messianically.[31]

Mitchell and Boyarin are talmudic specialists. But they note that experts in the Dead Sea Scrolls have reached similar conclusions. One often cited is Timothy Lim, professor of the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Judaism at the University of Edinburgh, a noted expert in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Lim concurs that 11Q13 refers to a dying messiah who would presage the end of the world, and who cannot there be understood anymore as Onias, a conclusion that has the support of Geza Vermès.[32] Lim concludes that "what 11QMelch does is to link the dying prince/messiah of Dan 9 to the herald of Isa 52:7" in a final apocalyptic timetable. He concedes this is debatable, and lists reasons for its uncertainty, but he affirms, nevertheless, that "what is unassailable is that in Dan 9:25ff. there is a figure who is described as 'an anointed one' and 'a priest,' whose appearance is connected with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and who after sixty-two weeks of years is cut off or killed (cf. Dan 11:22)," thus heralding the imminent end of the world. Mitchell cites Lim on this point, and Craig Evans concurs, concluding that in 11Q13 it "seems that the anointed one who comes proclaiming the year of the YHWH's (or Melchizedek's) favor will be killed."[33]

Perhaps most cited is Martin Hengel, a professor of New Testament studies at the Universities of Erlanger and Tübingen, of which the latter had previously awarded him the PhD in Judaic studies. Hengel's conclusion came with the assistance of Daniel Bailey, a PhD in New Testament studies from the University of Cambridge.[34] Hengel and Bailey argue that "the demonstrated uses and echoes" of Isaiah 52–53 in early Judaism "are enough to suggest that traditions of suffering and atoning eschatological messianic figures were current in Palestinian Judaism, and that Jesus and the earliest Church *could* have known and appealed to them" [*sic*]. They conclude "this would explain" how the Christian conception "would be comprehensible to their Jewish contemporaries."[35] These earlier concepts could even have included "a Messiah ben Joseph or Messiah from Ephraim who

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31 Boyarin, *Jewish Gospels*, 152–53.

32 Vermès elected Lim to add the appendix to Geza Vermès, "The Oxford Forum for Qumran Research Seminar on the Rule of War from Cave 4 (4Q285)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 43 (1992): 90–92, entitled "11QMelch, Luke 4 and the Dying Messiah." Vermès also approvingly mentions the dying "Messiah ben Joseph" in the Talmud.

33 Craig Evans, "From Gospel to Gospel: The Function of Isaiah in the New Testament," in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah* (ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1997), vol. 2, 651–91 (659–60).

34 Hengel, "Effective History."

35 Hengel, "Effective History," 75, 146.

ultimately dies."[36] Others convinced of this overall point include Craig Blomberg and Etienne Nodet.[37]

Hengel and Bailey agree these ideas "might" post-date one of the Jewish Wars, but they "could also be significantly older," as Mitchell also argues. More assuredly, they find interconnections between Isaiah 53 and Wisdom 2 and 5.[38] They note both are pre-Christian texts depicting a heroic "chosen one" dying but being exalted and effecting God's ultimate messianic plans in some way. They also agree that Daniel 9 already set up a model for a dying-messiah eschatology.[39] And across their entire study, they locate a range of other evidence for early Jewish thinking along these lines, concluding:

> The expectation of an eschatological suffering savior figure connected with Isaiah 53 cannot therefore be proven to exist with absolute certainty and in a clearly outlined form in pre-Christian Judaism. Nevertheless, a lot of indices that must be taken seriously in texts of very different provenance suggest that these types of expectations could also have existed at the margins, next to many others. This would then explain how a suffering or dying Messiah surfaces in various forms with the Tannaim of the second century C.E., and why Isaiah 53 is clearly interpreted messianically in the Targum and rabbinic texts.[40]

A different approach to the same conclusion is taken by George Brooke, a renowned scrolls specialist, member of the Israel Antiquities Authority's international team of editors of the Dead Sea Scrolls, founding editor of *Dead Sea Discoveries*, and a past president of the British Association for Jewish Studies, with a PhD in religion from Claremont Graduate School and a DDiv from Oxford, as well as being a professor of biblical criticism and exegesis at the University of Manchester. Brooke argues that we cannot be certain the reference to Daniel 9:25 in 11Q13 meant to implicate as well the following verse, 9:26, but "it is possible" it does, and so 11Q13 "should be viewed as providing much of the exegetical background … allowing for the early Christian development of the motif of a dying messiah."[41]

Brooke also cites Lim on this point. But he goes further. In his chapter on "The Use of Isaiah in 4Q541," the *Apocryphon on Levi* in which Brooke is a leading expert, he argues "it may be possible to construe" even that text as "speaking of

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36 Hengel, "Effective History," 77, 139.
37 Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 79; Etienne Nodet, *Le fils de dieu: procès de Jésus et évangiles* (Paris: Cerf, 2002), 167, 199–202.
38 Hengel, "Effective History," 101, 130.
39 Hengel, "Effective History," 137.
40 Hengel, "Effective History," 140.
41 George Brooke, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 160–61.

the death" of an "eschatological figure as Isaiah 53 could itself be construed" to do, "possibly even a death by crucifixion."[42] When we link this with 11Q13, he notes, the atoning role of that death can also be inferred. Hence Brooke concludes regarding 4Q541 that "it now seems that there is a Jewish text whose author used the Servant passages of Isaiah to support the understanding that there was to be an eschatological priest who would suffer, possibly even that the suffering involved death, death that would lead to joyous benefits for others," proving an early messianic reading of Isaiah 52–53 even more affirmatively, he says, than Hengel argued.[43] Thus Brooke thinks the first Christians co-opted (not invented) "already existing traditions about the suffering of the eschatological Servant priest (-Messiah) to explain" the fate of Jesus.[44]

Recent Experts Concurring

Those authors are representative of the expert literature. But a complete list must include many more, some stating their concurrence and others arguing for it. I shall survey known examples from the most recent publications to the oldest, beginning with the present century.

Gabriele Boccaccini, founding director of the Enoch Seminar and once professor of Second Temple Judaism and Christian Origins at the University of Michigan, with a PhD in Judaic studies from the University of Turin, wrote that "the idea that the messiah could suffer and die was not foreign to the Jewish tradition," citing Boyarin.[45]

John Goldingay, once a professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, with a PhD in Old Testament studies from the University of Nottingham and a DDiv from the Church of England, in one of the most recent commentaries on Daniel, writes that whatever the original (evidently failed) prophetic intent of the author(s) of Daniel 9 had been, in subsequent transmission and reinterpretation, given the received "punctuation of v. 25a in the ancient versions" it is "probably the same 'anointed' as in v. 26, one who appears after seven plus sixty-two sevens" who was understood to be killed; and he explains why grammatical arguments to

42 Brooke, *Dead Sea Scrolls,* 150–51. 4Q541 is cited by many other scholars here briefed; but it must be distinguished from another text argued as attesting a dying messiah, 4Q285, which is widely agreed to be too ambiguous: see Martin Abegg, "Messianic Hope and 4Q285: A Reassessment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (Spring 1994): 81–91; Vermès, "Oxford Forum"; and Xeravits, *King, Priest, Prophet*, 64–68.

43 Brooke, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 152–54.

44 Brooke, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 155–57. Brooke concludes Bruce Chilton also "posit[ed] (now apparently with some vindication) that there was a pre-Christian messianic Servant" in Isa 52–53 (Brooke, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 152 n. 24). Chilton will be discussed shortly.

45 Gabriele Boccaccini, *Paul's Three Paths to Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 101.

the contrary do not carry weight.[46] He thus considers early dying-messiah interpretations of the text plausible, if uncertain.

Joseph Angel, professor of Bible and Jewish history at Yeshiva University, an expert in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Jewish Apocrypha, with a PhD in Hebrew and Judaic studies from NYU, argues, like Brooke, that 4Q541 suggests a pre-Christian dying-messiah concept was already constructed from Isaiah 52–53, because "the trajectory of this figure's experience," including "his universal significance, the association of his mission with the removal of darkness, ridicule and abuse, perhaps violent suffering, even death, and positive results for others," all "appears to be modeled on that of Isaiah's servant" and "this is corroborated by extensive linguistic and thematic links with the Servant Songs" as well as this figure's declared "atoning function" (e.g., 4Q541:2: "And he will atone for all the children of his generation"). In consequence, "several scholars have thus seen evidence in 4Q541 for the notion of a suffering messiah in pre-Christian Judaism," citing Brooke (among others).[47]

Anathea Portier-Young, a professor of Old Testament at Duke Divinity School, with a PhD in religion from Duke University (majoring in Hebrew), argues that Daniel 9 was deliberately written to articulate such an interpretation of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52–53, and thus its authors already understood these passages to reflect messianic expectations—albeit, she argues, collectively in the body of the "enlighteners" (the elect): the one who suffers and dies being a model for the end-time fate of these righteous few as a whole, possibly even with an apocalyptic atoning function similar to the Maccabean martyrs tradition, which of course would be rewarded with resurrection.[48] Hence, a pre-Christian package of apocalyptic atoning-death heroism based on these texts was already in place to adapt to any specific messiah later interpreters (like the Christians) may have wanted.

Dean Ulrich, with two PhDs—in theology from Westminster Theological

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46 John Goldingay, *Daniel* (World Biblical Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 261–62. That the "messiahs" of verses 25 and 26 of Dan 9 later came to be seen as the same person is agreed by others here mentioned, since at least the time of Joseph Fitzmyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (Missoula: SBL, 1974), vol. 1, 138 (see also 119–20 and 251–58).

47 Joseph Angel, "Enoch, Jesus, and the Priestly Tradition," in *Enoch and the Synoptic Gospels: Reminiscences, Allusions, Intertextuality* (ed. L.T. Stuckenbruck and G. Boccaccini; Atlanta: SBL, 2016), 285–316 (299). Besides 4Q541, Angel also finds allusions to Isaiah 53:3 in the "Self-Glorification Hymn" (4Q491). And he finds the critique of such positions in Collins, *Scepter and Star*, to be undermined by the findings in Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, "Fasting with Jews, Thinking with Scapegoats: Some Remarks on Yom Kippur in Early Judaism and Christianity, in Particular 4Q541, Barnabas 7, Matthew 27 and Acts 27," in *The Day of Atonement: Its Interpretations in Early Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Thomas Hieke and Tobias Nicklas; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 163–87.

48 Anathea Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 272–76.

Seminary and in biblical studies from North-West University—concludes that regardless of which verse is cited in 11Q13, "the anointed one of Daniel 9:26 seems to be in view," the one that verse says will be "cut off," and although this part of Daniel originally referred to people in the past, the author of 11Q13 "evidently expects a recapitulation of messianic suffering in the near future," hence expecting another dying messiah to come.[49]

Sook-Young Kim, an expert on ancient Hebrew and messianism with a PhD in New Testament from Andrews University Theological Seminary, and professor of theology at Avondale College, agrees that 11Q13 refers to "the Messiah who would be cut off in Dan 9:25–26," citing Lim as attesting to the possibility there of "a reference to the dying Messiah."[50] She also finds (as other scholars have) that Daniel 9 is based on (and represents an interpretation of) Isaiah 53, and that Isaiah 53 was thus by some taken as a messianic text delineating an apocalyptic model whereby, "contrary to the customary way" of imagining a messiah as "conducting war with military weapons," this messiah "takes a different way of achieving supremacy, namely through suffering, humiliation, and death," locating similar themes in the book of Enoch as well.[51]

John Bergsma, professor of theology at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, with a PhD in theology from the University of Notre Dame, a noted specialist in the Old Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls, makes the point (like several others here surveyed) that 11Q13 purveys an end-times prophecy entailing an understanding that Daniel 9:25 must be referring to the same messiah who dies in Daniel 9:26, regardless of whether it quoted verse 25 or not (and regardless of what the original author(s) of Daniel intended).[52] Bergsma then argues that this must be the ultimate messiah, Melchizedek himself.[53] He also cites Lim concluding that 11Q13 links "the dying prince/messiah of Dan 9 to the herald of Isa 52:7."[54]

Rick Van de Water, a Catholic priest and widely published expert in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Second Temple Judaism, concludes that 11Q13 indeed means to indicate that the messiah referenced in Daniel 9 verses 25 and 26 is supposed to be understood as the same man. He then notes "that he is said to be the Anointed One 'cut off' (Dan 9.26), moreover, implies his death," and "since the 'cutting off' of Daniel's Messiah is associated with 'atonement for sin,'" it "is not

49 Ulrich, "How Early Judaism," 1071.
50 Sook-Young Kim, *The Warrior Messiah in Scripture and Intertestamental Writings* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2010), 263 (cf. 226) and 146 n. 244 (a republication of her Andrews dissertation).
51 Kim, *Warrior Messiah,* 80–82 (cf. 263).
52 Bergsma, *Jubilee*, 282–83, 288–89.
53 Bergsma, *Jubilee,* 289–90.
54 Bergsma, *Jubilee*, 283 n. 80.

inconceivable that the death of Melchizedek," the messianic figure described by 11Q13, "was taken to be the act of expiation delivering 'those of his lot' from" an ill end and therefore "the elaborate collage of biblical images in 11 QMelch argues that its full text presented Melchizedek, not only as a heavenly priestly Messiah, but also as a human suffering Messiah."[55] Of course, we needn't assume this dying messiah had to be Melchizedek himself, given the availability of a two-messiah model (one dying, one triumphant); but several of the scholars here cited do believe these particular figures were already being regarded as the same.

Marshall Johnson, with a PhD in biblical studies from Union Seminary in New York and a former director of Fortress Press and lecturer at the University of Bergen, agrees that the two-messiah tradition that evolved into later Medieval traditions of a dying "Messiah ben Joseph" followed by a resurrecting "Messiah ben David" (as per Mitchell) could be evident in the Dead Sea Scrolls.[56] And Brant Pitre, professor of Scripture at the Augustine Institute with a PhD in theology from the University of Notre Dame and specializing in ancient Judaism, finds the dying messiah element to be obvious already in Daniel 9. After a detailed analysis of that text, he concludes "it is inexplicable" why anyone disagrees with this observation.[57]

Israel Knohl, professor of biblical studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he also received his PhD, observes that "one could also find confirmation of the killing of the messiah in Daniel," as well as in the Talmud.[58] Knohl approvingly cites as an example "the Messiah, son of Joseph, who was" to be "killed in the war of redemption and was" then "destined to be resurrected."[59] He also notes that Jerome reports in his *Commentary on Daniel* that some Jews indeed regarded Daniel 9:26 as messianic.[60] And he adduces evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls that "the messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 was not discovered in the Christian Church" but "was already developed" at Qumran, where "a catastrophic model of messianism based on verses of the Bible" was developed by members who "believed that the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Messiah were a necessary basis for the process of redemption," and all through a messianic reading of Isaiah 53.[61] Knohl suspects the sectarians at Qumran might already have applied this to a revered member of their own community; of course a century

55 Rick Van de Water, "Michael or *Yhwh*?," 83.
56 Johnson, *Purpose*, 129–38.
57 Brant James Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of the Atonement* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 402.
58 Israel Knohl, *The Messiah Before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 120 n. 61.
59 Knohl, *Messiah*, 74.
60 Knohl, *Messiah*, 74. One could say the same of Josephus (see Beckwith, below).
61 Knohl, *Messiah*, 26, 48, and *passim*.

later, with the end not having come, such a conclusion would need to have been abandoned, and a new subject sought, opening an opportunity to the Christians.

Experts from the Last Century

In the nineties, Michael Wise, professor of the Hebrew Bible and ancient languages at the University of Northwestern St. Paul, an expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls, with two PhDs—in Jewish studies from the University of Chicago, and in classics from the University of Minnesota—made a case for a historical pre-Christian dying messiah similar to Knohl's, showing strong links between the "Thanksgiving Hymns" at Qumran and Isaiah's Servant Songs, and arguing for a messianic understanding of both (links that several other scholars here cited also make).[62] Wise argues 11Q13 must be referencing the messiah of Daniel 9:26, perhaps by abbreviation (whether the lemma quoted is verse 9:25 or not), because the "Anointed One" it refers to can only be someone in the last days, not someone hundreds of years before.[63] Hence, Wise concludes "they found predicted in Daniel 9:24–27 the death of an Anointed One, a messiah."[64] The same point has been made by Roger Beckwith and others (below).

Owing to Daniel 9's original scheme implicating a dying "priestly" messiah (to fit Onias), many scholars connect that idea with an anticipation of a priestly messiah who must die as part of God's final plan. Florentino García Martínez, a professor of religion and literature of early Judaism and director of the Qumran Institute at the University of Groningen, previous professor of literature of early Judaism at the University of Leuven, editorial secretary of the *Revue de Qumran*, and editor in chief of the *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, argues similarly to Brooke and others that the Qumran text 4Q541 "shows us that the portrayal of [a] 'Messiah-priest' with the features of the 'Suffering Servant' of Deutero-Isaiah

62 Michael Wise, *The First Messiah: Investigating the Savior Before Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1999).

63 Wise, *First Messiah*, 227–29. The idea that a pesher like 11Q13 could cite one verse and intend to implicate adjacent verses is sometimes denied, but this is actually a well known procedure in the pesharim. Shani Berrin, *The Pesher Nahum Scroll from Qumran: An Exegetical Study of 4Q169* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 28, says "atomization" is just "one possible approach to the biblical context" that pesharim employ, whereas another is "contextual correspondence," where the "impact of the content of the base-text upon the pesher" is evident. Maurya P. Horgan, *Pesharim: Qumran Interpretations of Biblical Books* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1979), 245–46, gives several examples of a pesher citing one verse but intending preceding or following verses to be understood as well, concluding that in general pesharim are often "referring back to an earlier lemma or anticipating a following lemma," and sometimes a "pesher refers not to the immediately preceding lemma but to an earlier citation," and "there are places where part of the pesher seems to be based on a following lemma" or "anticipating" material "in the next lemma." See also Timothy Lim, *Holy Scripture in the Qumran Commentaries and Pauline Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 49.

64 Wise, *First Messiah*, 232, and in 223–24, Wise finds intertextual links and messianic intent in 1QH 26:2–10 and 1QH 12:25 (referencing Isa 53:2–3), the so-called "Hymn of the Exalted One" (also known as the "Thanksgiving Hymns").

is not an innovation of" the Christians "but the result of previous developments," and "it cannot be excluded that the Aramaic text even contained the idea of the violent death of this 'Messiah-priest.'"[65] A few years before this, Émile Puech, a Dead Sea Scrolls scholar with a PhD in biblical studies from the Catholic University of Paris at the School of Ancient Oriental Languages, argued something like the thesis of García Martínez, and is also cited approvingly by Brooke.[66]

In the eighties, Roy Rosenberg, a rabbi and graduate of Hebrew Union College with a considerable publication record, agreed "a slain Messiah is spelled out very clearly in Dan 9:26" which "says that the 'Messiah will be cut off and will be no more,'" and that post-Danielic Jews saw the "messiah" in Daniel 9, verses 25 and 26, to be the same person.[67] He also avers that "a ritualistic mourning for a slain Messiah is referred to in Zach. 12,10–11," and he notes "there are some rabbinic texts that speak of a 'Messiah ben Joseph' who will perish in the War of Gog and Magog," citing not only *b. Sukkah* 52, but also a Targum of Zechariah 12. He argues that a concurrence of vocabulary across these and other messianic passages would have made it "quite simple for [Jewish] exegetes to identify" that figure as the messiah and conclude "it was the destiny of the Davidic Messiah to flourish for a time, and then be cut down," a view he thinks later transferred to the Josephite messiah.[68] He concludes that such a "sectarian exegesis of scripture brought forth the doctrine of a slain Messiah" before the Christian sect took it up.

Likewise, Sydney Page, a Professor of New Testament at Taylor Seminary, surveyed the evidence for a pre-Christian notion of a suffering or even dying messiah and concluded that while it cannot be conclusively proved, "the denial of the possibility of such a conception having been entertained before the time of Christ is unwarranted."[69]

Likewise Bruce Chilton, professor of Religion at Bard College and formerly professor of New Testament at Yale, with a PhD in New Testament from Cambridge University, and an expert in Aramaic, argued against simply assuming that a dying-messiah interpretation of Isaiah 53 "cannot" be a pre-Christian

65 Florentino García Martínez, "Messianic Hopes in the Qumran Writings," in *The People of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Florentino García Martínez and Julio Barrera; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 159–90 (170–72). See Chilton, below.

66 Émile Puech, "Fragments d'un apocryphe de Levi et le personnage christologique. 4QTestLevi[a–d(?)] et 4QAJ," *The Madrid Qumran Congress*, ed. Julio Trebolle Barrera and Luis Vegas Montaner (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 449–501.

67 Roy Rosenberg, "The Slain Messiah in the Old Testament," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 99 (1987) 259–61.

68 It could also be the other way around. The dispute as to which messiah dies (and whether they were switched at any point) is a subject of Boyarin's *Jewish Gospels*.

69 Sydney Page, "The Suffering Servant between the Testaments," *New Testament Studies* 31.4 (1985): 481–497 (493).

development in Judaism.[70] He derives this from the Targum on Isaiah 53 by the early-first-century CE Jonathan ben Uzziel (traditionally a student of Hillel and a contemporary of Shammai, both contemporaneous with Jesus), also cited by Hengel, which explicitly identifies its "suffering servant" as the messiah, while otherwise transforming the narrative to suppress or downplay the element of his dying.[71] But even this indicates a messianic understanding of the passage was current, which means other interpreters could well have read the original Hebrew text that way, too. Hence Chilton clarifies that he isn't saying, for example, that the Targumic re-phrasing of the prophecy in Isaiah 53 "unequivocally means the messiah did die, but merely that it is susceptible of the interpretation that he did so." Therefore such a pre-Christian development is plausible, and thus its denial cannot be used to date developments in the interpretation of Isaiah. Of course, Brooke and Mitchell and others think the case for this is even stronger now than Chilton did, moving the ball from "possibly" to "probably."

Then we have Roger Beckwith, an Oxford librarian with an impressive publication record and a DDiv from Oxford University, who made a similar point regarding the interpreters of Daniel 9 in 11Q13 (which relies on the timetable described in Daniel 9), and elsewhere. Beckwith says, "since they are looking to the future, they concentrate their attention on the concluding part of the 70-week period, and expect 'the anointed one, the prince' of verse 25 not after the 7 weeks" there listed "but after the 7 weeks and 62 weeks (i.e., 69 weeks)" there listed, and "as a consequence, they usually identify 'the anointed one, the prince' with 'the anointed one' who is cut off after the 62 weeks in verse 26," therefore formulating a dying-messiah eschatology well before Christianity came along.[72]

In the sixties, Jean Starcky, another Dead Sea Scrolls specialist with advanced degrees from the Pontifical Biblical Institute of Rome and the École Biblique

70 Bruce Chilton, *The Glory of Israel: The Theology and Provenience of the Isaiah Targum* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1982), 94.

71 Chilton acknowledges there are many issues regarding the transmission history of this text, but he is not alone in concluding this reading is early: concurring is Jintae Kim, "Targum Isaiah 53 and the New Testament Concept of Atonement," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 5 (2008): 81–98, with Jintae Kim, "The Concept of Atonement in the Fourth Servant Song in the LXX," *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 8 (2011-2012): 21–33. Likewise, Jostein Ådna, in "The Servant of Isaiah 53 as Triumphant and Interceding Messiah: The Reception of Isaiah 52:13–53:12 in the Targum of Isaiah with Special Attention to the Concept of the Messiah," in Janowski and Stuhlmacher, *Suffering Servant*, 189–224 (191 and 219–220), notes the possibility that an earlier version preserved the original text's 'death' and it was edited later in hostile response to Christianity (transferring that fate to "the wicked"; while the extant text's description of the messiah, as receiving rewards "because he handed over his soul to death," was then 'reinterpreted' as only his facing a *risk* of death).

72 Roger Beckwith, "Daniel 9 and the Date of the Messiah's Coming in Essene, Hellenistic, Pharisaic, Zealot, and Early Christian Computation," *Revue de Qumrân* 10.4 (December 1981): 521–42.

in Jerusalem, also argued a similar thesis to García Martínez, and is also cited approvingly by Brooke.[73]

In the fifties, William Brownlee, a Dead Sea Scrolls scholar and professor of religion at Claremont Graduate School and Director of their Dead Sea Scrolls Project, with a PhD in religion from Duke University, argued that Daniel 9:24–27 was a reinterpretation of Isaiah 52:13–53:12, linking its dying messiah with the Suffering Servant and the murdered hero of Zechariah 12:10, particularly in light of variant readings in Isaiah found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, which, he argues, set the entire stage for later Christian readings of these texts.[74]

Finally, Harold Luis Ginsberg, once a professor of biblical literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York, with a PhD in biblical literature from the University of London, argued an early form of the thesis developed by Portier-Young, establishing the plausibility of the Christian model already being a going idea circulating in Jewish thought, whereby anyone who models "the Servant" can be expected to be killed but resurrected and exalted, possibly thereby having atoned "for the many" by their willing deaths—a model then easily applied to any hero, like an eschatological messiah.[75]

Conclusion

Other scholars influenced by this literature could be added to the list. I myself, with a PhD in ancient history from Columbia University, and Raphael Lataster, with a PhD in religious studies from the University of Sydney, have both argued to the same conclusion.[76] Likewise Jason Staples, a professor of religious studies at NC State with a PhD from UNC-Chapel Hill, who affirmed the same conclusion in a dissertation approved by Bart Ehrman, then published as a monograph.[77] There, Staples declares that "the oft-repeated dictum that there is no evidence for the concept of a suffering and dying 'anointed one' or of a messianic interpretation of the Suffering Servant in pre-Christian Judaism is therefore mistaken," citing Brownlee, Ginsburg, and Goldingay.[78] This is a more forceful conclusion than that

73 Jean Starcky, "Les quatres étapes du messianisme à Qumrân," *Revue Biblique* 70 (1963): 492.

74 William Brownlee, "The Servant of the Lord in the Qumran Scrolls," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 132 (December 1953): 8–15.

75 Harold Luis Ginsberg, "The Oldest Interpretation of the Suffering Servant," *Vetus Testamentum* 63 (October 1953): 25–28.

76 Richard Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (Sheffield: Sheffield-Phoenix 2014), 73–87; Raphael Lataster, *Questioning the Historicity of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 94–99.

77 Jason Staples, *The Idea of Israel in Second Temple Judaism: A New Theory of People, Exile, and Israelite Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

78 Staples, *Idea of Israel*, 163 n. 79.

of, for example, Otto Betz thirty years before, who already then admitted to this being *possible*.[79]

That makes now Mitchell, Boyarin, Lim, Hengel, Bailey, Brooke, Boccaccini, Goldingay, Angel, Portier-Young, Ulrich, Sook-Young Kim, Bergsma, Van de Water, Johnson, Pitre, Knohl, Wise, García Martínez, Puech, Rosenberg, Page, Chilton, Beckwith, Starcky, Brownlee, Ginsberg, Carrier, Lataster, and Staples all affirming the dogma should be abandoned, either factually or modally. Together, they present a significant body of evidence for that conclusion. And concurring that this conclusion is at least plausible (or even probable) includes, as well, Gordon, Avery-Peck, Paul, Heiser, Morales, Brown, Bailey, Grabbe, Betz, Evans, Ådna, Jintae Kim, and Blomberg, Nodet, and Vermès. That totals almost four dozen scholars, nearly all experts in Hebrew studies generally or the Dead Sea Scrolls specifically. If we include the peer-reviewers who must have approved these arguments for publication, then we must add dozens more to the number of scholars agreeing it is at least *plausible* that the dogma Staples denounced is indeed as false as he avers. How many do we need before we conclude that that dogma should be abandoned?

If we add to all this that none of these dozens of studies (not even from those dissenting, such as Ehrman and Collins) ever locate any evidence of universal opposition to a dying-messiah schema (that is always simply presumed), then we are left with no basis on which to even assert that dogma. Why, then, should we continue to? We should instead conclude that in this detail, as in so many others, Christianity began as a sect of Judaism that evolved out of pre-existing Jewish thought; it was not a radical break from it.

79 Otto Betz, “The Servant Tradition of Isaiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *Journal for Semitics* 7.1 (January 1995): 40–56.

The End of Eternal Celibacy: A Response to Sarah Giles's "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage"

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Abstract

This paper is a critical response to Sarah Giles's 2023 two-part study on the interpretation of Jesus's response to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34–36, which traditionally suggests that marriage and procreation cease in the resurrection. Giles challenges this traditional view, arguing that Jesus's statement condemns mixed marriages among Jerusalem's elite in the present age rather than advocating for eternal celibacy in the resurrection. She situates the passage within the context of late Second Temple Judaism, arguing that Malachi's critique of intermarriage influenced his response to them. While Giles presents some compelling arguments, this paper offers a brief constructive critique, highlighting two significant issues. First, it addresses the astral-celestial conception of angelic existence in Jewish thought, which complicates her dismissal of angelic celibacy. Second, it examines the unresolved tension between marital continuity in the resurrection and the purity laws governing proximity to God's presence, which require further exploration. The paper acknowledges Giles's valuable contribution to the scholarly debate, especially her emphasis on the absence of a universal belief in eternal celibacy in Jewish eschatology but argues that her analysis has not eliminated eternal celibacy as the belief behind Jesus's response.

Christianity traditionally maintains that human existence in the resurrection will be devoid of marriage, including sexual activity and procreation, a view that may date back to its inception.[1] This perspective is primarily based upon Jesus's response

1 All English translations of biblical passages are from the NRSV. English translations of Dead Sea Scrolls are from Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1998). To avoid repetition, this paper uses terms such as "resurrection," "eschatological future," "age to come" interchangeably when referring to life after the inauguration of God's eschatological reign; although, "resurrection" pertains to those who will have died before its commencement. Additionally, the Latter-day Saints, and possibly other traditions, hold that certain marriages continue into the next life.

to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34–36 and its synoptic parallels. Most scholarly works on Jesus's view about marriage in the resurrection focus on reception of this response within early Christianity and subsequent interpretations.[2] The publication in 2023 of Sarah Giles's two-part study in *CATR* challenges this traditional Christian understanding of Jesus's reply and advances ongoing scholarly discussion over its interpretation.[3] What did Jesus mean when he stated that those worthy of the resurrection would be as angels, immortal and neither marrying nor giving in marriage? Giles situates Jesus's response within the discursive critiques of late Second Temple priestly leadership, emphasizing its "Hebraic" background. However, she downplays or overlooks two significant factors that complicate her conclusion: astral-celestial conceptions of angelic existence and the sexual purity requirements for proximity to God's presence.

Since the following is intended as a constructive response to a welcome contribution, my comments on the many merits of Giles's study will be brief so that I can devote more space to raising what I believe to be unresolved issues.

Reconstruction and the Future of Marriage: A Summary

Giles's two-part study challenges the traditional (Christian) interpretation of Jesus's response to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34–36 (and parr.), that marriage and procreation will cease in the afterlife, a view she terms *eternal celibacy*. In Part 1, she begins by briefly scrutinizing some of the foundations of the traditional reading, arguing instead that biblical promises and blessings frequently emphasize marital fruitfulness.[4] She contends that the expectation of abundance generated by such promises during the exilic and postexilic periods was extended by writers like Ezekiel into an eschatological hope for a future Edenic age.[5] Turning back to the Lukan passage, Giles presents a case that the phrase "sons of this age" in Jesus's response refers specifically to wicked sons, while the expression "marrying and giving in marriage" denotes illicit marriages.[6] For Part 1, she concludes that Jesus's use of the phrase about marriage was a description of "the *sexual immorality* that would occur at the end of the age."[7]

In Part 2, Giles begins by noting a few scholars who have also challenged the eternal celibacy interpretation of Jesus's words. However, while these scholars generally maintain that Jesus was referring to marriage in a broad sense, Giles

2 Sarah Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage: Interpreting Luke 20:34–36 in its Hebraic Context," *Canadian-American Theological Review* 12 (2023), I.54–61.
3 Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," I.54–72; II.73–91.
4 Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," I.55–57.
5 Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," I.62–66.
6 Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," I.66–72.
7 Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," I.72.

believes she has demonstrated that Jesus's focus was forbidden marriages.[8] She then provides a brief historical recounting and critique of marriages among the Jerusalem elite of the late Second Temple period, highlighting numerous accounts of intermarriage.[9] Next, she examines three temple disputations in Luke, drawing a connection between Jesus and John the Baptist, whom she then links to the book of Malachi. Building on this framework, she argues that Jesus's response to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34–36 was not a statement about the absence of marriage in the afterlife but rather a condemnation of intermarriage—one rooted in Malachi's critique of the Jerusalem priesthood's intermarriages in his own time.[10]

Giles ultimately concludes that the traditional interpretation—that Jesus advocated eternal celibacy in Luke 20:34–36—is flawed. She argues that his phrase "sons of this age" was a negative expression for the Jerusalem priesthood, while by using "marrying and giving in marriage" he referred specifically to illicit intermarriages. In contrast, those deemed worthy of the age to come are those who uphold the law, including properly sanctioned marriages. According to her interpretation, marriage will persist in the resurrection.

Noteworthy Contributions

As Giles argues that Jesus may have envisioned the continuation of marriage—and therefore sexual activity—into the eschatological future, there is much to commend in her analysis. She effectively highlights the lack of references to a celibate afterlife in the orthodox Christian tradition, explicitly based upon Jesus's reply, until the mid-to-late second century.[11] Furthermore, she rightly underscores the prevalence of Jewish eschatological expectations by the first century for the continuation of marriage and procreation in the world to come. Her examination of the phrases "marrying and giving in marriage" and "eating and drinking" is both insightful and thought-provoking, even if I remain unconvinced that they refer exclusively to forbidden marriages.

8 Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," II.73–74.

9 Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," II.74–76. Some, such as this writer, may take a more skeptical approach toward Josephus's accounts and that of the Mishna. Josephus is both a key source for Jewish history of the period and yet known for polemically rhetorical accounts. As one example, his description of the Essenes (like that of Philo) characterizes them as akin to Greek philosophical movements in contrast to the picture one gets of the Qumran community from the sectarian scrolls, which many identify with the Essenes. Similarly, evidence is lacking among the Dead Sea Scrolls for his portrayal of the negative estimation of women and wives by Essene men, particularly his rationale—their misogyny.

10 Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," II.77–88.

11 For example, this view is absent from the Apostolic Fathers. Aside from the central thrust of her argument, Giles privileges a modern western doctrinal perspective throughout her study, an approach acceptable to many and not uncommon. Doing so, however, allows for the exclusion of other early, now noncanonical Christian writings, such as the Thomasine literature. The Gospel of Thomas hints at such a belief, at least contemporaneously with the Apostolic Fathers, potentially adding support for the presence of this view within early strands of Christian thought.

More significantly, Giles makes some noteworthy contributions to analysis of the Sadducean controversy. First, few scholars, aside from William Loader, have devoted substantial attention to the marital dimension of Jesus's response in Luke 20:34–36 or its parallels, let alone in conjunction to its language about angels. Moreover, she synthesizes a theme Loader has explored across multiple studies into a concise, two-part analysis: the deep concern over intermarriage (exogamy) among pious Jewish circles in Jesus's time.

Second, Giles is less critical of the sources for Sadducean and priestly marriages than some might prefer. However, introducing the storyline of recent Jerusalemite priestly marriages into an analysis of this pericope is an innovative contribution that any future study of this topic must consider.

Third, Giles makes a respectable case that Malachi 1–3 provided an interpretive framework for Jesus's response, at least as presented in its Lukan form. In this regard, her analysis is reminiscent of Peter Bolt's persuasive essay that elements of the book of Tobit influenced Mark's account of the Sadducean controversy.[12] Consideration of both John Meier's and James McGrath's examinations of the importance of John the Baptist to the formation of Jesus could further support this portion of her argument.[13]

While the above highlights some of the strengths of Giles's study, a note of caution is suggested regarding two issues that bear upon the topic—one pertaining to a particular line of her argument, and the other to a related aspect that she either overlooks or does not fully consider. First, the astral-celestial descriptions of angelic beings in both pre and postexilic literature, along with their implications for the developing concept of eternal celibacy, do not so easily align with Giles's interpretation. Second, marital existence for the resurrected raises unresolved questions about the presence of sexual impurity in the eschatological divine presence. It should be emphasized that the following critique is not intended as a wholesale rejection of her analysis but rather as constructive engagement with specific components of her argument.

Like Angels, Astral-Celestial Existence

First, Giles largely bypasses astral-celestial conceptions of angels, instead relying upon anthropomorphic and animated or interactive portrayals, particularly those with priestly analogues. Yet there are many passages across Israelite and Judean literature that speak of angelic beings in astral-celestial terms, including as stars or the heavenly host. We can trace the equation of angels with stars back to preexilic

12 Peter Bolt, "What were the Sadducees Reading? An Enquiry into the Literary Background of Mark 12:18–23," *Tyndale Bulletin* 45.2 (1994): 369–94.

13 John P. Meier, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, vol. 2 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (AYBRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 19–233; James F. McGrath, *Christmaker: A Life of John the Baptist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024).

biblical texts.[14] For instance, Judges 5:20 describes the stars (Heb. כוכבים; Gk. ἄστρα) "from heaven" as waging battle against Sisera near Hazor alongside several Israelite tribes. Similarly, Isaiah 14:12–13 employs the imagery of a morning star (Heb. הילל; Gk. ἑωσφόρος) and stars of God (Heb. כוכבים; Gk. ἄστρα) in a metaphorical critique of the Babylonian king, a passage that later influenced Jewish and Christian views of Satan's fall. In Job 38:7, God asks Job where he was when the morning stars (Heb. כוכבים; Gk. ἄστρα) sang together, and the sons of heaven rejoiced. Psalm 147:4 celebrates the creation of the stars, then Psalm 148:2–4 explicitly equates angels (Heb. מלאכי; Gk. ἄγγελοι) and the heavenly host (Heb. צבא; Gk. δύναμαι), associating them with the sun, moon, and shining stars (Heb. כוכבים; Gk. ἄστρα). Writers often use the term "holy ones" (Heb. קדשים; Gk. ἅγιοι) to denote this angelic host (Ps 89:5, 7; Deut 33:2–3; Job 5:1; 15:15).[15]

These depictions generally present angels as a nearly fixed, luminous host, akin to stars adorning the night sky.[16] E. Theodore Mullin's entry "Host, Host of Heaven" in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* catalogues these portrayals, describing the heavenly host alternately as a quartered heavenly army, as members of the divine council or, conversely, as celestial entities worshipped idolatrously by Israel and its neighbors.[17] By the Hellenistic period, Jewish sources increasingly refer to angels as "spirits" as well (Heb. רוחות; Gk. πνεύματα).[18] Meanwhile, Daniel 12:3 affirms that the wise and righteous, those who endure the persecutions of Antiochus, "shall shine like the brightness of the sky" and "like the stars forever and ever." By the late first century, the author of Revelation identifies the "seven stars" as the "angels of the seven churches" (Rev 1:20) and depicts the dragon sweeping "a third of the stars of heaven" to the earth (Rev 12:4).

Taken together, these examples suggest that one could, within late Second Temple Judaism, envision angelic existence as astral and transcendent—celestial in both ontology and comportment—in contrast to more anthropomorphic depictions. This complicates efforts to situate interpretations of angelic ontology solely

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14 That surrounding cultures made similar identifications is acknowledged but set aside to narrow this response.

15 Cf. later 1QS/4Q264 XI, 8.

16 Potential agency is sometimes implied through accompanying choral or military language. On the Greek chorus and its function as a "collective character," see Albert Weiner, "The Function of the Tragic Greek Chorus," *Theatre Journal* 32.2 (1980): 205–12.

17 E. Theodore Mullins, Jr. "Host, Host of Heaven," *Anchor Bible Dictionary* III (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 302–04. Cat Quine has recently disputed interpretations of the heavenly host as a military force, "The Host of Heaven and the Divine Army: A Reassessment," *JBL* 138.4 (2019): 741–55.

18 E.g., 1 En. 15:4a, 7b: "You were holy ones and spirits, living forever … The spirits of heaven, in heaven is their dwelling" (also 6a, 10a; cf. Jub. 2:2; 1QH[a] xix.10–13). As several passages among the Dead Sea Scrolls attest, scribes sometimes used a shortened form of "gods" (Heb. אלים) for angels as lesser beings of the divine council (e.g., 1QM I, 10; cf. Exod. 15:11).

in priestly analogues and cautions against dismissing the possibility that Jesus's reply may have reflected or evoked an astral conception of angelic existence.

Coincidentally or not, such astral language includes no affirmations of angelic marriage or sexuality. This is precisely the point. Several narratives do depict angels with a semblance of individuality, agency, and mission—animated, in contrast to the above. Of these, only some evoke priestly functional imagery. But the extensive range of angelic depictions as heavenly ones, stars, holy ones, host, mighty ones, or the various terms by which some make up the divine council, in rather staid, celestial formulations, is large and spans the pre and postexilic literature. With no mention of feminine-gendered angels, marriage between angels, or sanctioned models of angelic sexual agency, there was significant space for imagining heavenly, immortal existence with God—devoid of marital or sexual activity—once Jewish writers began contemplating resurrection and its eschatological hope. No doubt, Platonic philosophy influenced the opposition between spirit and flesh that fueled celibacy and the restraint of sexual passion among many Christians and non-Christians by the first century and beyond. But the foundations for the notion that there is no sexual activity in heaven had already been set, descriptions of angelic existence with God, devoid of marriage and sex.

As for resurrected humans, Giles references a conclusion of William Loader when she asserts that "the idea of an eternally celibate state was virtually unknown to Jews at the time of Christ."[19] Furthermore, although she acknowledges, but only in a footnote, that "several biblical and extra-biblical texts do expect resurrected humans to possess a shining physical appearance like that of the angels (e.g., Dan 12:3; Matt 13:40–43; 4 Macc 17:5–6; Wis 3:7–8; 1 En 104:1–6; 2 Bar 51:1–11)," she then adds:[20]

> this glorified state is not said to entail a new asexual ontology. A rare contrast is the Jewish Platonist Philo, who opined that the deceased patriarchs have already become "equal to angels" since in his view they have shed their bodies to become permanently incorporeal and thus also by implication permanently celibate (*Sacr. 2.5–6*).[21]

The late Second Temple period was, however, a theologically dynamic era. While Loader and Giles may be correct in asserting that exilic and postexilic textual trajectories generally supported an emerging belief in a sexually fertile afterlife, it is important to note that no single, coherent Jewish view of the afterlife prevailed between 200 BCE and 70 CE. Simultaneously, some texts reveal speculations

19 Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," I.65; see William Loader, "Sexuality and Eschatology: In Search of a Celibate Utopia in Pseudepigraphic Literature," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 24.1 (2014): 50.

20 Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," II.82, n. 30.

21 Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," II.82, n. 30.

about angelic transfigurations of the most righteous.[22] Therefore, Philo's perspective above demonstrates that, within Jewish thought at the time, one could identify a connection between celibacy, a celestial notion of angels, and one's vision of life after death. Centuries earlier, the Book of Watchers solidified the concept of heavenly angelic celibacy where God links eternal angelic existence in his presence with celibacy: "But you originally existed as spirits, living forever … therefore I did not make women among you" (1 En. 15:6–7).[23] Later, Revelation likened the redeemed 144,000 who stand before the divine throne to angels in their eternal praise of God (Rev 7:9–17; 14:1–3) and, in line with 1 Enoch 15:3–10, describes them as virgins (Rev 14:4).[24] When considered alongside broader evidence of astral conceptions of angelic existence, such sources indicate that, among Jews by Jesus's day, there was still no consensus that marital relationships would persist, even in a transformed state, in the eternal age to come.

Angels, Resurrection, and Sexual Purity before God

A second complication, which Giles does not address, concerns the prohibition of sexual impurity in God's presence. There is little dispute that angels and priests are often analogous in biblical and extrabiblical Jewish literature of the period. While the inherited nature of the priesthood incentivized marriage, it simultaneously demanded both moral and ritual sexual purity. Yet, this analogy introduces a notable tension once conceptions of the afterlife and resurrection begin to appear. Sexual activity, even within marriage, generates impurity, which cannot coexist

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22 On the unsettled nature of Jewish views of the afterlife by the early first century, see C. D. Elledge, *Resurrection of the Dead in Early Judaism, 200 BCE–CE 200* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Jan Sigvartsen, *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Apocrypha and Apocalyptic Literature*, Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies, 29 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019); *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Apocrypha and Apocalyptic Literature*; and *Afterlife and Resurrection Beliefs in the Pseudepigrapha*, Jewish and Christian Texts in Contexts and Related Studies, 30 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2019). On angelomorphism, see Kevin Sullivan, *Wrestling with Angels: A Study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Charles Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); and Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997).

23 Giles addresses this passage in a footnote, but views it as inconsequential because 1) it does not address resurrected humans, and 2) 1 En. 10:17 anticipates human marriage in a post-judgment world.

24 The author of Revelation is ambiguous about the location of God's dwelling in relation to the visions of the 144,000. Beginning in 4:1, the text locates God's temple and throne room "in heaven." This heavenly setting likely remains intact during the initial mention of the 144,000 in 7:1–17. However, in 14:1, the text describes them as "standing on Mount Zion," where they sing before the throne, which is presumably still situated in the heavenly temple (14:7). This hint of interplay between a heavenly temple and an earthly Mount Zion or Jerusalem introduces a degree of spatial ambiguity within Revelation. A similar, though more pronounced, tension between celestial and terrestrial realms is evident in the journeys of Enoch in the Book of Watchers (1 En. 6–36). See Daniel Olson, "'Those Who Have Not Defiled Themselves with Women': Revelation 14:4 and the Book of Enoch," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59.3 (1997): 492–510.

with God—residue that is both defiling and contagious. However, God will dwell among his people.

According to Torah legislation, priests were subject to specific sexual purity regulations that permitted them to marry, procreate, and serve in the temple so long as they maintained ritual purity. Given such practices in the present age, it is understandable that many in antiquity presumed that priests—and by extension, others—would continue in similar relationships in the age to come. Giles is right to highlight scriptural promises of marital fruitfulness into the future. Later, numerous texts from the Hasmonean-Herodian period attest to the prevalence of this belief. Her analysis of *4QPseudo-Ezekiel*'s reinterpretation of Ezekiel's own interpretations of the visions of the Dry Bones (Ezek 37:1–14) and Two Sticks (37:15–28) illustrates one way in which developing forms of resurrection theology could integrate earlier promises of national restoration and family continuity.

Although some texts presume marriage and procreation in the resurrection, Giles either overlooks or sidesteps the unresolved issue of sexual impurity in God's presence. Her innovative claim, that Luke 20:34–36 (and parr.) constitutes a condemnation of intermarriage, reflects the increased theological emphasis on endogamous marriage and procreation from the exile period forward. However, while Giles appears to present the Bible as uniformly opposing intermarriage, the stories of Ruth, Esther, Joseph, and Moses can be understood in part as presenting counternarratives, suggesting that not all intermarriages were viewed as transgressive.[25] Such stories may represent a view that intermarriage was not inherently illicit unless it led to idolatry or moral impurity, the graver concern in debates over exogamy.

Although sex was categorically "good" within the Torah, at least where the views of disputing parties converged, it nonetheless resulted in ritual impurity.[26] This impurity required specific purification rites, including washing and a temporary period of exclusion between emission and renewed access to others or the divine presence (Lev 15:16–18; Deut 23:10–11). Leviticus 21 outlines additional restrictions for priests, especially the high priest, whose proximity to the divine

25 Giles writes: "Indeed, as God's angel-like messengers, the priests were to be models of holiness and purity. This required a personal fidelity to God's law, including his statutes regarding the institution of marriage. But like their forebears in Malachi's day, the Sadducean priests did not adhere to God's marital laws and so failed to live out their holy calling," Giles, "Resurrection and the Future of Marriage," II.83.

26 E.g., Gen 13:15–16; 15:1–5; 16:1–2; Exod 23:26; Deut 7:13; 28:4; 30:9. That God declares all creation "good" in the Priestly source, which includes sex, see Liane Feldman, *The Consuming Fire: The Complete Priestly Source, From Creation to the Promised Land*, Hebrew Edition (Oakland: University of California Press, 2024), 24–28, 30; cf. also the Song of Songs and the Book of Ruth.

presence necessitated heightened restrictions on both marital and sexual activity.[27] Such texts raise a critical theological question: if sexual impurity remained operative for priests in the present age, how might one reconcile ongoing marital relations with the full presence of God in the eschaton?

During the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, ritual purity observance became increasingly widespread across Jewish society.[28] Such concerns remained highly relevant into the early first century, a time when beliefs about resurrection and the coming reign of God were not fully settled. Among those influenced by texts such as Jubilees, marital intercourse on the Sabbath became explicitly prohibited.[29] The Temple Scroll, moreover, extends the sanctity of the temple precinct to encompass all of Jerusalem, with significant implications for purity. According to this view, a nocturnal emission or the onset of menstruation required temporary departure from the city until the prescribed time of purification had elapsed, thereby effectively prohibiting marital intercourse within Jerusalem's sacred boundaries.[30]

However, since the Temple Scroll emerged from a group that had largely withdrawn from Jerusalem, its prescriptions likely did not reflect the lived reality of the city's inhabitants— practical challenges implementing such a policy notwithstanding. Notably, this same community produced a range of texts that seem to envision marriage and even procreation as integral components of the eschatological future.[31] Yet no extant text offers a clear resolution to the tension these writers generated between their increasingly stringent sexual purity regulations and the expectation of marital abundance as a marker of covenantal faithfulness.[32] The first-century accounts of celibacy among the Essenes may suggest one way certain groups attempted to navigate this tension. Given that some Dead Sea Scrolls depict worship as occurring together with angels, it seems plausible that a subset of the *Yaḥad* at Qumran perceived themselves as already participating in the

27 Feinstein argues that "sexual intercourse has a contagious effect" in the Hebrew Bible which "seems generally to be confined to the female partner. Through sex, the female is effectively 'marked' by the male in an invisible but very real way." This lingering "essence" may not pollute the sanctioned marriage partner but "is negative and can be described as polluting" beyond the wife; Eve Levavi Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 91. Although she thinks only female partners seem to acquire this polluting "essence," this imagery may convey how male Israelite society thought about the mechanisms which spread sexual impurity.

28 E.g., 4Q414; 4Q274; 4Q272 1 II, 3–7a; 11QT19 XLV, 11–12; XLVIII, 14–17; see William Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 77–78; Yonatan Adler, *The Origins of Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022); Andrea Berlin, *The Middle Maccabees: Archaeology, History, and the Rise of the Hasmonean Kingdom* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2021).

29 Jub. 2:25–27; 50:8; see also CD XI, 5; 4Q271 5 I, 1–2.

30 11Q19 XLV, 6–12; cf. CD XII, 1.

31 CD VII, 6; XIX, 12; 4Q471 1–10 III, 1–2a, 10–11; 11Q14 1 II, 11, 14b//4Q285 1 7, 9; 4Q423 3 1–5; 11Q19 LIX, 12.

32 At least by those anticipating an eschatological new age.

eschatological age. If so, celibacy may have functioned as one lifestyle adaptation aimed at facilitating perpetual or near-perpetual access to the divine presence.

The Hebrew Bible never explicitly addresses the sexual purity of angels.[33] However, this begins to shift in the Hellenistic period, which coincides with the era's increasing emphasis on purity restrictions and observance. 4QSongs of the Sabbath Sacrifice[a] states that angels "sanctify themselves perpetually" to remove the impurity incurred through interactions with "those of a depraved path."[34] Jubilees asserts that God circumcised his angels, perhaps to mark them with a covenantal sign of purity, thereby aligning them with the descendants of Jacob.[35] Although generally portrayed as male, biblical texts never depict angels married or producing progeny, apart from the rebellious angels in the Watchers tradition and Genesis 6. Instead, a defining feature that emerges in the Hebrew tradition is that angels are male-gendered heavenly beings who refuse to engage their potential sexual agency. This restraint serves to preserve both ritual and moral purity, a prerequisite for their continued immortal existence within the divine presence. If, as Lukan 20:34–36 and its parallels suggest, righteous humanity in the age to come are to be "like angels" in heaven, and if this statement was made in conjunction with the claim that those "in the resurrection of the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage," then it is plausible that Jesus's response implied an affirmation of angelic celibacy rather than a condemnation of intermarriage to some in his early first-century context. What, then, was Jesus's intended meaning?

Concerns about purity in the eschatological future were undoubtedly present in early Roman Galilee and Judea. Several scholars now interpret Jesus's healings and exorcisms not merely as isolated miracles, but as symbolic acts of purification—restorative gestures aimed at reintegrating those whom the law had excluded from God's presence, thereby preparing them for entry into his eternal kingdom. Just as prophetic acts in the Hebrew Bible were often meant to foreshadow broader events among God's people, Jesus's healings of a leper, a paralytic, and even raising a dead person may be seen as symbolically overcoming purity-based exclusions, such as those prescribed in Leviticus 21:16–23. Importantly, these acts did not abrogate the law but rather anticipated its eschatological fulfillment.[36]

While the precise mechanism by which purity laws related to marriage and

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33 Hellenistic era scribes clearly interpreted Gen 6:1–4 as a violation of divinely set boundaries that paralleled condemnations of intermarriage.

34 4Q400 1 I, 15–16.

35 Jub. 15:25–27.

36 E.g., Luke 5:12–26; 7:11–17. See Christopher Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 34; Jodi Magness, "'They Shall See the Glory of the Lord' (Isa. 35.2): Eschatological Perfection and Purity at Qumran and in Jesus's Movement," *JSHJ* 14 (2026): 102.

sexuality might be overcome in the eschatological age remains uncertain, it is clear that sexual activity, even sanctioned marital sex, consistently resulted in impurity and was therefore incompatible with God's presence. This was a shared assumption across the major forms of late Second Temple Judaism in Jesus's day.[37] Although speculative, it is plausible that Jesus's statement regarding the resurrected, being like angels who do not marry, reflects a response to this very tension: how could the realities of sexual impurity be reconciled with eternal existence in God's presence? Significantly, Luke's version of this saying—the focus of Giles's analysis—replaces the phrase "in heaven" (as found in Matthew and Mark) with "in that age," a formulation that better accommodates a vision of a postresurrection existence on a renewed earth rather than in a heavenly realm.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, Giles's interpretation of Jesus's response to the Sadducees in Luke 20:34–36 provides an intriguing perspective, contributing significantly to the scholarly conversation about the nature of marriage in the resurrection and the age to come. By situating Jesus's statement within the context of late Second Temple Judaism and critiquing the traditional Christian interpretation of eternal celibacy, Giles prompts a reevaluation of the eschatological roles of marriage and sexual activity in the afterlife. Her innovative argument that Jesus's condemnation in this passage targets illicit, intermarital unions, informed by Malachi 1–3, rather than a general rejection of postmortem marriage, offers a substantive alternative to established readings. Future analyses must contend with her interpretation of Luke 20:34–36 and its parallels, particularly her reading of the cultural conflicts over marriage constraints and observance during the late Second Temple period.

Nevertheless, as this rejoinder suggests, there remain issues that demand further attention, particularly the implications of astral-celestial conceptions of angelic existence and the role of sexual purity in the divine presence. The tension between ritual purity laws and the expectations of marital continuity in the afterlife remains an area in need of deeper exploration. While I am not theologically committed to defending the traditional view, I am not entirely persuaded by her thesis. However, her contribution complicates the task for those who will continue to assert that Jesus's statement implies eternal celibacy. Ultimately, this dialogue underscores there is room for continued scholarly engagement with these themes, as they have profound implications for both historical theology and contemporary Christian thought on the nature of human existence in the resurrection.

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37 In Jubilees, Eden is God's residence, the holy of holies (8:19). Its author depicts Adam and Eve's first marital intercourse before entering the garden (3:6) and resuming after their expulsion (3:34), insisting no marital sex occurred while in Eden. Cf. 11Q19 XLV, 7–12; 1Q28a II, 4–9a.

Isaiah 11 and the Teleological Essence of Fauna: Theodical Engagement with Animal Predation and Natural Evil in the Thought of Saint Augustine

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Abstract

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 that an approach in which Isaiah 11:6–9 is brought into dialogue with evolutionary development and the Augustinian concept of latent potentiality offers a potential direction for reflection on animal violence. If Isaiah indicates a trajectory in which the eschatological end of animals is peaceful co-existence, and if peace is the outcome of teleological development, then evolutionary development is reconfigured in light of this intended end. Since Augustine views creation as tending toward non-existence and decay, Rosenberg suggests that his theology should be interpreted to consider violence in the animal kingdom as part of animal nature, not as evil. Choosing to instead view animal nature in light of peace categorizes violence as an effect of created nature's mutability and views predation as natural evil, the result of choice in development leading to complexity. This developmental trajectory culminates in response to God, whose redemptive action brings about peaceful co-existence. Within an evolutionary paradigm, Augustine's thought can be largely preserved without requiring that violence in the animal world be accepted.

Introduction

Augustine of Hippo's solution to the problem of evil has received renewed attention in recent years amid dialogue between theological and scientific disciplines. In particular, interpreting Augustine's attribution of evil to human will in light of evolutionary theories of creation has become an important conversation. Does Augustine's thought necessitate a historical fall to explain the presence of evil? Stanley P. Rosenberg represents one recent interaction with this question, arguing that careful interpretation will lead the reader to exclude violent natural acts from the Augustinian definition of evil. Rosenberg concludes that Augustine's position suggests decay and destruction, including predation, are to be considered a natural part of creation and the animal world.[1]

Underneath the issue of Augustinian theodicy in relation to the animal world lie broader questions regarding the implications of positing a God who sanctions privation in the evolutionary creative process. Rosenberg appears to achieve progress toward separating God's creative acts from the emergence of moral evil within an evolutionary paradigm, but his interpretation of Augustine seems to require two points of assent: the reader (a) must be willing to concede that violence in creation falls outside the definition of evil and (b) must also agree that this violence is not only natural but necessary, a condition of being "creature." Without further conversation, then, this adjustment raises theodical questions about a deity who not only allows violence but embeds it into creative processes. Such conversations further complexify in light of scholarship challenging the idea that animals do not experience trauma or violence—including predation—as recognizable suffering.[2]

The task of this paper is not to address such implications directly; instead, it will suggest that reconciling Augustinian theology with evolutionary development does not require a belief that God sanctions animal predation. Reading Isaiah 11:6–9 as a teleological orientation suggests that animal nature is intended toward a peaceful existence in which animals "lie down together" instead of harming one another. Such a statement may seem incongruous with evolutionary dependence on predation to drive development, but engaging Augustine's dual concept of the *rationes seminales* (primordial principles) provides a basis from

1 Rosenberg is addressing the need to account for prehistoric decay, while Augustine's concern is to explain the existence of violence in nature. See Stanley P. Rosenberg, ed., *Finding Ourselves After Darwin: Conversations on the Image of God, Original Sin, and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 226–43.

2 Robert Francescotti, "The Problem of Animal Pain and Suffering," *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 113–27; Phil Halper, et al., "Against Neo-Cartesianism: Neurofunctional Resilience and Animal Pain," *Philosophical Psychology* 34, no. 4 (2021): 474–501; Trent Dougherty, *The Problem of Animal Pain: A Theodicy for All Creatures Great and Small* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

which to posit a "puzzle" argument.[3] Mariusz Tabaczek recasts one iteration of the *rationes seminales* within Thomistic hylomorphism; his work can be utilized alongside the Augustinian concept of privation of essence to define predation as a product of animal freedom within a goal of increasing complexity and co-creation in dialogue with the work of Bethany Sollereder. The second type of *rationes seminales* provides a foundation to suggest that one outcome of complexity is response to God, whose eschatological act (incorporating this co-creative work into the new creation) will redeem creation and cause predation to cease, maintaining continuity with creation's work while being discontinuous with privation. The Augustinian distinction of natural and moral evil can thus be maintained; predation is viewed as stemming from free teleological movement, allowing an assertion that (a) predation is undesirable—a corruption, and (b) God's ongoing participation in the work of creation will culminate in creaturely peace.

Rosenberg's Interpretation of Natural Decay in Augustinian Thought

Stanley P. Rosenberg's work responds to traditional interpretations of Augustine that view the theologian as holding "privation and loss of order in nature is a breakdown of some imagined ideal ordering of the natural world."[4] In other words, Rosenberg feels that the majority of Augustinian scholarship attributes violence and decay in nature to the fall of humanity.[5] On this view, the human and nonhuman world become estranged from God as a result of human sin; widespread acceptance of an evolutionary paradigm necessitates the reinterpretation of Augustine's theodicy in light of science.

To reconcile evolutionary theory and Augustinian theology, Rosenberg begins by examining Augustine's own words to discern whether violence in the nonhuman world is attributed to human failure. His summary begins with a progression outlined as follows: God (and thus all that is created by God) must be good. Anything that exists, regardless of state, possesses good "to the extent that it exists." Good is linked to existence; evil, therefore, does not exist but represents a loss or diminishment of its original essence. Thus, "evil is the absence of good."[6]

3 The argument takes a dual trajectory form beginning from *telos* and moving to peace in parallel movement—the puzzle's outer pieces—but the solution cannot be reached without a final, central piece to link the others.

4 Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin,* 250.

5 John Hick, Albert Wolters, and Joseph Kelly are representative of traditional interpretations of Augustine's theodicy. See John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 3rd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 55–56; Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 46; Joseph Kelly, *The Problem of Evil in the Western Tradition: From the Book of Job to Modern Genetics* (St. John's, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2002), 58–59.

6 This paragraph Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin*, 250–52.

Rosenberg proceeds to identify the first key point in Augustine's discussion of evil—corruption:

> It was obvious to me that things which are liable to corruption are good. If they were the supreme goods, or if they were not good at all, they could not be corrupted … If there were no good in them, there would be nothing capable of being corrupted. Corruption does harm and unless it diminishes the good, no harm would be done … All things that are corrupted suffer privation of some good. If they were to be deprived of all good, they would not exist at all.… Hence I saw and it was made clear to me that you made all things good, and there are absolutely no substances which you did not make.[7]

For Augustine, evil is a corruption of an entity's original essence. Corruption cannot destroy essence, but it can alter or disrupt it. Evil cannot be existence because evil would then be good by virtue of being created. Corruption is, therefore, a movement toward non-existence, denying the good of an entity's original essence.[8]

A second pivotal concept is the idea that when original essence is restored, evil will be nowhere. Rosenberg again quotes Augustine at length as saying:

> In this universe even that which is called evil, well ordered and kept in its place, sets the good in higher relief, so that good things are more pleasing and praiseworthy than evil ones. Nor would Almighty God … since he is supremely good, in any way allow anything evil to exist among his works were he not so omnipotent and good that he can bring good even out of evil. For what else is that which is called evil but a removal of good?… A wound or a disease is not in itself a substance but a defect in the substance of flesh. The flesh itself is the substance, a good thing to which those evil things, those removals of the good, known as health, occur. In the same way all evils that affect the mind are removals of natural goods: when they are cured they are not moved to somewhere else, but, when they are no longer in the mind once it has been restored to health, they will be nowhere.[9]

Augustine thus offers salvation as a solution to human corruption, which does not

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7 Augustine, *Confessions* 7.12.18, trans. Henry Chadwick (London: Oxford University Press, 1991). All references after the first on each of Augustine's works will omit his name.

8 This paragraph Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin,* 252–253.

9 Augustine, *Enchiridion* 3.11. Citations from the *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Charity* are based on the translation in *The Augustine Catechism: Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Charity in the Works of St. Augustine for the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Bruce Harbert, ed. Boniface Ramsey (El Segundo: New City, 1999).

answer questions regarding privation in the natural world.[10] Accordingly, Rosenberg continues to his third point, arguing that Augustine believes creation is necessarily contingent and mutable; therefore, all creation must be open to movement and thus to decay.[11] Rosenberg's task thus becomes clear—he must distinguish between decay in the natural world and the spiritual corruption of humanity.

To accomplish this goal, Rosenberg turns to Augustine's discussion of the secular state and cosmology. He outlines a threefold structure in Augustine's thought: (a) the structure of creation stems first from God as its maker, (b) God creates underlying principles or "reasons" which guide creation's trajectory, and (c) God creates the world with seminal reasons that guide structure and development in creation. One of these principles states that creation both advances and decays by virtue of being created.[12] Rosenberg argues that rot and decay—including the ability to kill—were thus part of creation's original design. His thought is worth quoting at length for greater clarity:

> Decay is so obviously a part of a temporal, creaturely state, Augustine suggests, that to think otherwise would be absurd. Such defects are not blameworthy, as they are not voluntary; nor does he describe them as coming later in time or as a secondary result of the fall.… Decay and destruction are necessarily to be expected from anything that does not have its own absolute being … Augustine … does not suggest that God sustained creatures so that they would not experience decay or that physical decay was loosed on the cosmos only after the fall, though the fall certainly altered the human pair's natural condition for the worse.[13]

Rosenberg believes Augustine requires that the cosmos be understood as intrinsically bearing the "necessity for destruction" and indeed, Augustine does seem to see created nature as including the possibility of violence and decay:

> It would be ridiculous to regard the defects of beasts, trees and other mutable and moral things which lack intelligence, sense or life, as deserving condemnation. Such defects do cause their nature to decay, which is liable to dissolution; but these creatures have received their mode of being by the will of their Creator, whose purpose is that they should bring to perfection the beauty of the lower parts of the universe by their alternation and succession in the passages of the seasons; and this is the beauty in its own kind, finding its place among the

10 Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin,* 253.
11 Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin,* 253–254.
12 This paragraph Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin,* 255–256.
13 Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin,* 256–58.

> constituent parts of this world.… Consequently, in those areas of the universe where such creatures have their proper being, we see a constant succession, as some things pass away and others arise, as the weaker succumb to the stronger, and those that are overwhelmed change into the qualities of their conquerors; and thus we have a pattern of a world of continual transience. We, for our part, can see no beauty in this pattern to give us delight; and the reason is that we are involved in a section of it, under our condition of mortality, and so we cannot observe the whole design, in which these small parts, which are to us so disagreeable, fit together to make a scheme of ordered beauty . . . As for those defects, in things of this earth, which are neither voluntary nor punishable; if we observe them closely we shall find that, on the same principle as before, they attest the goodness of the natures themselves, every one of which has God as its sole author and creator.[14]

Rosenberg thus presents Augustine as believing that death and decay in the animal world are a part of the created order, directly linked to God, and a natural part of being created; since death and decay are part of creation's original nature, they do not constitute corruption, privation, or evil. Violent physical and biological acts in nature are not blameworthy because they do not represent moral corruption of a spiritual, reasoning creature.[15] Evil is that which is *willful* corruption, whereas "decay in its gory finality" is part of a rational design and *expresses the Creator's will*.[16]

Expanding the Problem

Rosenberg's work takes a step toward coherence between Augustinian scholarship and modern evolution, but the last hundred years have also witnessed significant advances toward understanding animal well-being in positive and negative terms.[17] Alain Boissy's 2007 review outlines a body of literature supporting positive affective states in animals.[18] The criteria for adequate welfare in animals have shifted from merely denoting the absence of negativity to the need for positive emotional

14 Augustine, *City of God* 12.4, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972). Rosenberg amends this translation, and the edited version has been utilized for clarity.

15 Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin,* 260–261.

16 Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin,* 259–260.

17 That is, animal perception of well-being in addition to research on areas such as stress, pain, and grief. See D. Mellor, "Animal Emotions, Behaviour and the Promotion of Positive Welfare States," *New Zealand Veterinary Journal* 60 (2012): 1–8; Alain Boissy, et al., "Assessment of Positive Emotions in Animals to Improve Their Welfare," *Physiology and Behaviour* 92 (2007): 375–97; D. M. Broom, "Cognitive Ability and Awareness in Domestic Animals and Decisions About Obligations to Animals," *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* (2011): 1–11.

18 Boissy, "Assessment of Positive Emotions in Animals," 375.

experiences, resulting in a growing body of research dedicated to the physiological and cognitive markers of positive and negative experiences.[19]

Current research generally agrees that animals experience markers consistent with pain and with types of suffering, a consensus supported by varying methodological processes. While animal emotions cannot be studied subjectively,[20] they can be roughly correlated to human experience by measuring objective changes similar to human emotional research based on adrenocortical measures, the autonomic nervous system, and the immune system.[21] Techniques range from basic mood state extrapolation to deviation from non-transient normality and reactions and stimulus appraisal through association.[22] Animals and humans demonstrate similar impulses in their subconscious behaviours; differences lie in the *extent* to which humans move to advanced types of cognition and in the type of animal. Certain birds and mammals show markers consistent with consciousness and awareness.[23] Overall, animals can be expected to respond to various stimuli, and some have the ability to cognitively receive and process it.

The well-being of animals is thus affected by stimuli positively and negatively. Animals show markers of grief, empathy, fear, and pain; while acknowledging the pitfalls of using such terms, the general consensus is that animals experience flourishing and deprivation according to their unique needs even without access to "consciousness."[24] For example, behavioural changes consistent with a decrease in well-being occurred in dogs whose companion animal died, including increased fearfulness and low food consumption; elephants also displayed changes of behaviour in response to death that varied according to whether that

19 Mellor, "Animal Emotions," 1, and Boissy, "Assessment of Positive Emotions in Animals," 375.

20 Human suffering is also not strictly considered subjectively verifiable. Michael Mendl, Oliver H.P. Burman, and Elizabeth S. Paul. "An Integrative and Functional Framework for the Study of Animal Emotion and Mood," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 277, no. 1696 (2010): 2895–904.

21 Mendl, "An Integrative and Functional Framework," 2896.

22 Mendl, "An Integrative and Functional Framework," 2897–2898; D.B. Morton, "A Model Framework for the Estimation of Animal 'Suffering': Its Use in Predicting and Retrospectively Assessing the Impact of Experiments on Animals," *Animals* (Basel) 13, no. 5 (2023): 800.

23 G. Ehret and R. Romand, "Awareness and Consciousness in Humans and Animals- Neural and Behavioral Correlates in an Evolutionary Perspective," *Frontiers in Systems Neuroscience* (2022): 11–12. The study defined awareness as being aware of and reacting to stimuli, and consciousness as the ability to process and respond to stimuli.

24 A.L. Engh et al., "Behavioural and Hormonal Responses to Predation in Female Chacma Baboons (Papio Hamadryas Ursinus)," *Proceedings of the Royal Biology of Science* (2006): 707–12; D. J. Langford et al., "Social Modulation of Pain as Evidence for Empathy in Mice," *Science* (2006). See also Marc Bekoff, "Why 'Good Welfare' isn't 'Good Enough': Minding Animals and Increasing Our Compassionate Footprint" (2008); Ralph Adolphs, "The Biology of Fear," *Current Biology* 23, no. 2, 79–93; Lynne U. Sneddon, "Pain in Aquatic Animals," *Journal of Experimental Biology* (2015): 967–976; M. Stamp Dawkins, "Animal Welfare With and Without Consciousness," *Journal of Zoology* 301, no. 1 (2017): 1–10.

death was an older elephant or a calf.[25] Predation also produces observable markers ranging from potential symptoms of chronic stress, such as changed birth and survival rates, to acute responses, such as a change in diet and reduced nutrient conversion efficiency.[26] In short, certain animals have been shown (a) to respond to negative outcomes, including pain, and (b) to have the ability to process these experiences, suggesting that animals may undergo a form of recognizable suffering when predation occurs.[27] Both response and processing are key reasons that Augustine sees no evil in predation: "When we read 'Thou shalt not kill,' we are not to take this commandment as applying to plants, for these have no sensation. Nor does it apply to the non-rational animals which fly, swim, walk or crawl, *for these do not share the use of reason with us*."[28]

The effects of predatory animals on prey species is strong enough to merit its own body of literature as a philosophical, ethical, and theological conundrum; the sheer pervasiveness of deprivation within the animal kingdom demands engagement.[29] Cursory research on methods of predation in wolves suggest both the chase and death due to blood loss and suffocation in their prey can take hours—the

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25 S. Uccheddu, et al., "Domestic Dogs (*Canis Familiaris*) Grieve Over the Loss of a Conspecific," *Scientific Reports* 12, no. 1920 (2022); L. Rutherford and L. E. Murray, "Personality and Behavioral Changes in Asian Elephants (*Elephas Maximus*) Following the Death of Herd Members," *Integrative Zoology* 16 (n.d.): 170–88.

26 See Michael Clinchy, Michael Sheriff, and Liana Zanette, "Predator-Induced Stress and the Ecology of Fear," *Functional Ecology* 27 no. 1 (2013): 56–65; D. Hawlena and O. J. Schmitz, "Physiological Stress as a Fundamental Mechanism Linking Predation to Ecosystem Functioning," *The American Naturalist* 176 no. 5 (2010): 537–56.

27 Lynne U. Sneddon et al., "Defining and Assessing Animal Pain," *Animal Behaviour* 97 (2014): 201–12; James W. Yeates, "Brain-pain: Do Animals With Higher Cognitive Capacities Feel More Pain? Insights for Species Selection in Scientific Experiments," in *Large Animals as Biomedical Models: Ethical, Societal, Legal and Biological Aspects* no. 51 (2012): 24–46.

28 *City of God,* 12.4; emphasis mine. What precisely Augustine means by "reason" is unclear, but provided the above scholarship is correct, it appears one would either need to suggest that (a) Augustine was at likely at least partially incorrect in creating a gap argument or (b) assert that God does not regard the detriment of animals as consequential, because animals lack the highest possible tier of rational capacity, a privilege reserved for humans. The former option seems less problematic, especially given that Augustine ties his ideas back to natural laws, not to distinction between types of reason: "For the simple reason, of course, that some are the proper diet of others. Nor can we have any right to say, 'There shouldn't be some on which others feed.' All things, you see, as long as they continue to be, have their own proper measures, numbers and destinies. So all things, properly considered, are worthy of acclaim; nor is it without some contribution in its own way to the temporal beauty of the world that they undergo change by passing from one thing into another." English translations taken from Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* trans. John Hammond Taylor (Ramsey, NJ: Newman, 1982) 3.15.24.

29 For recent discussion from a variety of fields, see Julius Kapembwa, "Predation Catch-22: Disentangling the Rights of Prey, Predators, and Rescuers," *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 31, no. 5 (2018): 527–42; Nathan Kowalsky, "Predation, Pain, and Evil: Anti-Hunting as Theodicy," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 46, no. 4 (2017): 489–510; Kyle Johannsen, *Wild Animal Ethics: The Moral and Political Problem of Wild Animal Suffering* (London: Routledge, 2020); Mark Maller, "Animals and the Problem of Evil in Recent Theodicies," *Sophia* 48, no. 3 (2009): 299–317; Michael Murray, *Nature Red in Tooth and Claw: Theism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

stress and pain receptor activity caused by such predatory methods suggest intense physical distress in and of themselves.[30] Consider also the effects of death by suffocation or in being ripped apart; even the quickest manner of death results in acute stress.[31] John Stuart Mill sums up the problem in saying:

> if there are any marks at all of special design in creation, one of the things most evidently designed is that a large proportion of all animals should pass their existence in tormenting and devouring other animals. They have been lavishly fitted out with the instruments necessary for that purpose; their strongest instincts impel them to it, and many of them seem to have been constructed incapable of supporting themselves by any other food. If a tenth part of the pains which have been expended in finding benevolent adaptions in all nature, had been employed in collecting evidence to blacken the character of the Creator, what scope for comment would not have been found in the entire existence of the lower animals, divided, with scarcely an exception, into devourers and devoured, and a prey to a thousand ills from which they are denied the faculties necessary for protecting themselves! If we are not obliged to believe the animal creation to be the work of a demon, it is because we need not suppose it to have been made by a Being of infinite power.[32]

Were the above to be considered untenable, a theocentric consideration of the problem still demands an explanation for a God that first creates the natural world with a certain essence but allows other aspects of that creation to deprive each other of the full expression of this essence.[33] Elizabeth Johnson and Christopher Southgate outline this problem in relation not to predation, but to the "second

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30 See George B. Schaller and Gordon R. Lowther, "The Relevance of Carnivore Behavior to the Study of Early Hominids," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 25, no. 4 (1969): 329–330; George B. Kolenosky, "Wolf Predation on Wintering Deer in East-Central Ontario," *The Journal of Wildlife Management* 36, no. 2 (1972): 266.

31 Kurt Alt and Matthew Eckert, *Predation ID Manual: Predator Kill and Scavenging Characteristics* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017); John L. Cloudsley-Thompson, "Predatory Techniques" in *Biotic Interactions in Arid Lands* (Springer Lehrbuch, 1995), 9–35; J. F. Eisenberg and Paul Leyhausen, "The Phylogenesis of Predatory Behavior in Mammals 1," *Zeitschrift für Tierpsychologie* 30, no. 1 (1972): 59–93.

32 John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion,* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, & Dyer, 1875), 58–59. Bethany Sollereder echoes this sentiment in critiquing "classical theodicy." See Bethany N. Sollereder, "Compassionate Theodicy: A Suggested Truce Between Intellectual and Practical Theodicy," *Modern Theology* 37, no. 2 (2021), 382–95. See also Trent Dougherty, *The Problem of Animal Pain: A Theodicy for All Creatures Great and Small* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

33 At least one neo-Cartesian argument suggests that animals are not capable of perceiving deprivation as morally relevant suffering based on criteria stemming from physical difference, not similarity. See Calum Miller, "Do Animals Feel Pain in a Morally Relevant Sense?" *Philosophia* 49 (2021): 373–92.

pelican chick," an insurance chick hatched and left to starve by pelican parents.[34] The pelican chick cannot be said to achieve full flourishing (that is, the full expression of its essence) unless one decides to argue that starvation *is* the chick's final end. Predation, of course, shows many instances of such privation as young animals are eaten by others. Arguments can be made for the flourishing of an entire ecosystem that require such instances of early death, but such discussion finds difficulty in securing flourishing for the individual animal.[35]

Rosenberg's take on Augustine places the reader in the midst of this conundrum; if God created an earth in which deprivation in all its bloody, strangling, rending, parasitic, predatory forms must be considered as necessary for existence, contra the (at times prolonged) pain and individual deprivation of the animal—can such a God truly be considered good? In other words, it appears necessary to attempt a categorization of predation—even if such activity can at times be beneficial—as undesirable. The Augustinian solution must expand to address this consideration; God does not author moral evil, but God also should not be implied as authoring natural predation.

Isaiah 11:6–9; Eschatology and the Nature of Animals

> The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.[36]

The first step in responding to this problem of predation is to determine God's intentions regarding predatory activity. J. Richard Middleton suggests that the grand arc of biblical narrative outlines what he terms "holistic eschatology."[37] For Middleton, the "logic of salvation in the Bible" necessitates the redemption

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34 Elizabeth Johnson, "Christ and the Pelican Chick," presented at Boston School of Theology and Ministry, accessed 31 March, 2025; Christopher Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation: God, Evolution, and the Problem of Evil* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2008), 82–90.

35 See Jay B. McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1989), 51–85.

36 Isaiah 11:6–9, NIV 2011.

37 J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and A New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 155-75. For a theological perspective on holistic eschatology, see Richard Bauckham, "Eschatology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology,* ed. Kathryn Tanner, John Webster, and Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2009).

of all of creation along with the redemption of humanity.[38] Themes of covenant, wisdom, and Torah in the Old Testament—and of resurrection in the New Testament—spring from an insistence that every wrong will be rectified in a vision of restorative justice that arises from YHWH's character and intentions toward humanity and the earth.[39] If salvation is restorative, and if Christ's work is universally redemptive, affecting all things, then it follows that creation itself must also be part of restoration, enabled to fulfill its role as God's cosmic temple.[40] Creation, too, will experience God's intentions for its existence.[41]

Middleton's paradigm directs inquiry into the passage at hand. Isaiah 11:6–9 is placed between discussions of messianic attributes grounded in YHWH's character and hope for YHWH's action based on that character.[42] Patricia Tull suggests that Isaiah 11 outlines a messianic desire for a ruler characterized by wisdom, knowledge, and fear of the Lord. In following the Lord, this ruler evidences the following: (a) support of justice for the oppressed, (b) an influence extending into the animal kingdom to produce peace between predators and prey, and in whose time the Lord will gather together the remnants of the people.[43] Godself determines the fate of the animal kingdom as an outcropping of the nature of this rule; peace springs forth as a result of God's determining character expressed through this ideal ruler.[44] Such hope for the future suggests a deep resonance with the idea that all is not right yet, but that things will be as they should be someday because of God's justice, peace, and sovereignty.[45]

In terms of literary unity, then, Isaiah 11 seems to center around the enactment of divine intent.[46] The fate of creation is directly tied to the eschatological deliverance of God's people in this final vision of the future. The whole earth will now express devotion to the will of God in God's act of a new (or renewed)

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38 Middleton, *A New Heaven and A New Earth,* 156.

39 Middleton, *A New Heaven and A New Earth,* 96–104, 137–44.

40 Middleton, *A New Heaven and A New Earth,* 156-58. See also J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 51–6, 87.

41 Middleton, *A New Heaven and A New Earth,* 151–58. See also J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 36, 41–45, 49–53, 55–56. For another argument supporting this concept, see N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2013), 1043. For visions of Isaiah 11:6–9 as a future utopia, see Rodrigo Franklin De Sousa, *Eschatology and Messianism in LXX Isaiah 1–12* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 149, and Hans Wildberger, who connects animal peace to proper rule. See Hans Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 465–73.

42 Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah* (Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing, 2001), 100.

43 Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 209.

44 Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 11:1–9.

45 Tiemeyer, *The Oxford Handbook of Isaiah,* 355–57. Some scholars feel that vs. 6–9 are part of a redactional layer, suggesting that the passage may have been intentionally placed in its context for literary purposes aimed at describing the divine intent for creation. Childs, *Isaiah*, 100.

46 Childs, *Isaiah,* 100.

creation.[47] There will be no destruction in this future reign, even among animals, because “the whole land is filled with the knowledge of YHWH.”[48] This thematic argument is prominent across a variety of discussions of dating, genre, forms of criticism, historical reception, and context.[49] In other words, a peaceful existence between animals who currently exist in a predator-prey relationship is an integral part of a future vision in which God’s intentions are realized and God’s character is honored.

This idea of peace in the animal kingdom can be understood as (a) impending reality, (b) allegory, or (c) metaphorical hyperbole.[50] In the former, discussion of animal peace is viewed as relating directly to the animal kingdom, part of an eschatological vision in which creation is directly restored. In semi-allegorical interpretations, animal traits can refer to animals, but the underlying thrust of the passage is to reflect these traits in people. In metaphorical hyperbole,

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47 Childs, *Isaiah,* 104. Some Jewish interaction with the text supports this idea as well; while such reception does tend to focus on humanity, the overall picture is of a life filled with peace. As such, even if animals only receive peace as a byproduct of human utopia, the picture is of an idyllic world in which oppression and suffering are no more—particularly when tied to Jewish conceptions of environmentalism. Hershey H. Friedman and Joshua Krausz, “Jewish Perspective on Social Justice and Ethics: Implications for the Modern World,” *Journal of Intercultural Management and Ethics* 7, no. 2 (2024): 69–70. See also Richard H. Schwartz, *Judaism and Vegetarianism* (Ikeja: Lantern Books, 2001), 12.

48 Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39: With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 339.

49 Sweeney, *Isaiah 1–39,* 345, Childs, *Isaiah,* 100–4; see also Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Bloomsbury, 2021), 264–265; Jeff Fisher, ed., *Isaiah 1–39,* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2024); and Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*. A notable contrasting position within reception history is the 12th century Jewish scholar Maimonides, but he also appears to insist that the nature of the world does not change, raising the same issue as Augustine’s idea of form. See Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Kings and Wars 12*, trans. Eliyahu Touger (New York: Moznaim, 1993), 1. Maimonides’ motivation may have been to attempt a “calming” of messianic expectations, suggesting that Jews in his time were in fact hopeful for peace in the animal kingdom! See Mia Anderssén-Löf, “May He Speedily Come: A Comparative Study on Hardal and Haredi Understandings of Exile and Redemption” (PhD diss., Åbo Akademi University Press, ٢٥٦–٢٥٥ ,(٢٠١٧. For a parallel in modern reception, see Christopher Leighton and Adam Gregerman’s exploration of the text’s use in Israeli synagogue Independence Day readings: Christopher M. Leighton and Adam Gregerman, “Between Text & Sermon: Isaiah 11:1–11,” *Interpretation* 64, no. 3 (2010): 286–88.

50 For an example of the former, see J. Richard Middleton, “The Image of God in Ecological Perspective,” In *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible and Ecology* (London: Oxford University Press, 2022), 294–295. For a semi-allegorical interpretation, see Ronald E. Clements, “The Wolf Shall Live with the Lamb: Reading Isaiah 11:6–9 Today”; Arthur W. Walker-Jones and Suzanna R. Millar, eds., *Ask the Animals: Developing a Biblical Animal Hermeneutic* (Vermont: SBL Press) 2024; P. J. Harland and Robert Hayward, *New Heaven and New Earth: Prophecy and the Millennium; Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 99, and J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 180. For hyperbole, see Joshua J. Van Ee. “Wolf and Lamb as Hyperbolic Blessing: Reassessing Creational Connections in Isaiah 11:6–8,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 2 (2018): 319–37. A fourth option exists, but the argument seems dependent upon a presupposition of the text as anthropocentric cultural literature. See Jacob R. Evers, *Ask the Animals: Developing a Biblical Animal Hermeneutic,* ed. Arthur Walker- Jones and Suzanna R. Miller (Vermont: SBL Press, 2024).

characteristics of animal nature are assigned to ruling nations to suggest that the oppression of YHWH's people will cease through the idea that wild animals (the ruling nations) will no longer be capable of hurting domestic interests (those of the people of YHWH).[51]

Within the paradigm of God's character, all three positions appear to suggest that the ideal kingly rule—and existence under this rule—is peaceful. Peace is a reflection of God's character in providing for a future in which all is as it should be. The concept of interspecies peace, therefore, seems to reflect God's character in a way that violence does not. Even if the primary regard of the passage is to assure the future of Israelite interests, the underlying picture suggests that a cessation of harm fulfills the desires of YHWH. Predation, then, is portrayed as negative, not merely because it occurs in relation to humanity or represents oppressive peoples, *but because peace reflects God's character.* When God removes destruction, the result is peace. When God himself moves to destroy, God's action results in the removal of and cessation of harm and evil, not the affirmation of it.[52] As a result, whether directly or indirectly, a holistic interpretation of Isaiah 11:6–9 appears to suggest that predatory harm does not represent God well; cessation of harm most logically represents not merely a "starting over" or a partial redemption, but instead the renewed rightness of all creation in relation to God.

The Augustinian Concept of *Telos* in Creation

If God's character and creation's rightness are represented by peace, what evidence of peace might be found in creation? For Augustine, the first point for consideration would likely be an object's *telos*: "Each nature (or form) has a *telos*—a goal, a place of rest."[53] Premodern concepts of purpose generally suggested that all action was meaningful in moving to and from a goal; Augustine's idea of *telos* was no different. In breaking with thinkers such as Plotinus, who insisted creation was a "stretching" of the divine matter,[54] Augustine suggested that creation is intrinsically mutable (movable) because it is created; God is the only immutable

51 Van Ee would like to argue that "the only change is the level of peace and security that the villagers now experience in their relationship with formerly dangerous and wild animals" (Van Ee, "Wolf and Lamb," 333), but such a statement assumes that the only relationship at work in this passage is between the two natures (human and oppressor), and does not account for the relationship between wolf and lamb, snake and child, calf and lion, even if such relationships are changed in relation to a focus on one specific relationship. See Hulisani Ramantswana, "Not Free While Nature Remains Colonised: A Decolonial Reading of Isaiah 11:6-9," *Old Testament Essays* 28, no. 3 (2015), 82023.

52 For a broad overview of salvation as rescue from and restoration from harm, see Ernst M. Conradie, "The Salvation of the Earth from Anthropogenic Destruction: In Search of Appropriate Soteriological Concepts in an Age of Ecological Destruction," *Worldviews* 14, no. 2/3 (2010), 111–40.

53 Scot Bontrager, "Augustine's Concept of Volition and Its Significance for the Doctrine of Original Sin" (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 2019), 23.

54 Simon Oliver, "Augustine on Creation, Providence and Motion," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 18, no. 4 (2016): 379.

substance.[55] Being mutable, creation has a *telos*; its action is meaningful because it is tied to the God who defines meaning, being drawn by God's providence.[56] For Augustine, then, the *telos* of creation is to reflect the Word: "the Word … recalls His imperfect creature to Himself, so that it may not be formless but may be formed according to the various works of creation which He produces in due order."[57] And again, "in the conversion and in the perfecting of creatures by which their species are separated in due order, the Blessed Trinity is likewise represented … God finds pleasure in all the limited perfections of His creatures."[58] Augustine thus (a) links the nature of creation to the Trinitarian God, (b) suggests that its *telos* is to reflect God to the capacity and fulfillment of its nature, and (c) states that God finds this all good.[59]

Even in its unformed state, "*hyle*" (Augustine's term for formless matter) evidences this *telos*. Oliver Simon and Michael Hanby indicate that *hyle* (a) is not passive, (b) has a rudimentary capacity for forms—and thus, beauty and goodness, and (c) intrinsically possesses the form of seeking form.[60] This form is meant to orient in a certain way: "what God created was made solely because of His goodness … In a word, it was made because it was good. And it was called good only after it was made to intimate to our mind that each created being reflected the goodness which was the reason of its being made."[61] Form, for Augustine, is not purely intrinsic so as to become autonomous after creation, nor is form purely extrinsic in that creation is imposed upon indifferent matter. Instead, matter intrinsically seeks form because it originates and participates in the Word who determines its nature.[62]

In other words, for Augustine, God is *Esse*; that is, God is essence and being and act itself that determines all other essences.[63] Created nature is determined in relation to God's character; the *telos* of creation must therefore be in accordance with God's character since otherwise it could not reflect or participate in God. Isaiah 11:6–9 (with its corresponding emphasis on the divine character as a basis for holistic eschatological renewal) thus offers good reason to suggest that the

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55 See footnote 9, 13, and 15. See also *Confessions,* VII 11.17 and Augustine, *Of True Religion,* ed. Louis O. Mink, trans. John H. S. Burleigh (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1959), I 18.35.

56 Note that this meaning does not depend on creaturely consciousness, but rather on God's designation of purpose. Oliver, "Augustine on Creation, Providence and Motion," 385. See also James F. Anderson, *St. Augustine and Being; A Metaphysical Essay* (Leiden: Nijhoff, 1965), 16–17.

57 *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* 1.4.9.

58 *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* 1.6.12.

59 Note the thematic link: God's nature.

60 Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2003), 85–8; Oliver, "Augustine on Creation, Providence and Motion," 386.

61 *City of God*, 11.24.

62 Oliver, "Augustine on Creation, Providence and Motion," 387.

63 Anderson, *St. Augustine and Being,* 5–6, 12–16.

telos of creation should ultimately result in peaceful co-existence, including the cessation of predation.

Predation and the Problem of Teleology

If Isaiah 11:6–9 evidences a final endpoint of peace for all of creation within God's redeemed creation that reflects God's character, then it follows that, within an Augustinian paradigm, this endpoint is ultimately desirable while predation is undesirable. Accordingly, if creation is unaffected by a historical fall, one would expect to find a *telos* toward peace and supporting evidence of a progression toward peace. Unfortunately, observation of biology and evolution seems in many cases to indicate the exact opposite—or even to problematize the idea of teleology as a whole—and it is partially this issue to which Rosenberg points.

Predation itself appears to have facilitated major components of the evolutionary process from its earliest forms.[64] Microevolutionary changes in response to predator pressure are hypothesized to be one of the greatest impactors of species habit, and partially responsible for diversification; in many cases, prey species evolution moves in response to increases in predatory efficiency rather than the reverse.[65] Furthermore, predator and prey responses generally tend to complexify over time, introducing various strategies for escaping predation or for improving on it.[66] The interconnected nature of predator/prey interaction reflects a seeming evolutionary tendency toward complexity which has drastically increased the variants and forms interspecies competition and predation over time (albeit simultaneously complexifying symbiosis and mutual benefit).[67] It is therefore entirely unclear that the evolutionary process tends toward peace.

At an even deeper level, the evolutionary process and indeed life itself appear to be intertwined with and dependent on violence. When Rosenberg utilizes the phrase "red in tooth and claw," he is referring to the phrase coined by Alfred Lord Tennyson to describe the reality of an unsentimental violence whereby predators

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64 S. Bengtson, "Origins and Early Evolution of Predation," *The Paleontological Society Papers* 8 (2002): 289–318.

65 S. A. Price, S. T. Friedman, and P. C. Wainwright, "How Predation Shaped Fish: The Impact of Fin Spines on Body Form Evolution Across Teleosts," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 282, no. 1819 (2015): 2–3; Peter A. Abrams, "The Evolution of Predator-Prey Interactions: Theory and Evidence," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 31 (2000): 90–2; Lenka Trebatická, "Predation Risk Shaping Individual Behaviour, Life Histories and Species Interactions in Small Mammals," (PhD diss., University of Jyväskylä, 2009).

66 Geerat J. Vermeij, "The Evolutionary Interaction Among Species: Selection, Escalation, and Coevolution," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* vol. 25 (1994): 231–33.

67 See Thomas Miconi, "Evolution and Complexity: The Double-Edged Sword," *Artificial Life* 14, no. 3 (2008): 325–326; Daniel W. McShea, and Robert N. Brandon, *Biology's First Law: The Tendency for Diversity and Complexity to Increase in Evolutionary Systems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 45–69. For a recent response on a genomic basis to arguments against complexity, see Christoph Adami, Charles Ofria, and Travis C. Collier, "Evolution of Biological Complexity," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 97, no. 9 (2000): 4463–68.

become covered with the blood of their prey as they eat; this same violence facilitates the well-being of other predators and even their prey through circumstances like the stabilization of food webs.[68] Furthermore, predation is in part responsible for keeping the earth from (a) becoming overpopulated, and (b) evolutionary stagnation, providing for the life needs of countless creatures who are thus dependent on violence for their very existence. One could argue that the ability to even consider observable teleological movement is a result of predation![69] The question, then, is this: "can Augustine's theology accommodate the idea of a peaceful endpoint for animals while accounting for the prevalence of predation?" Denying that predation is part of an animal's intended essence will now require a dual trajectory argument as follows.

Trajectory A: Hylomorphism, Complexity, and the *Rationes Seminales*

Mariusz Tabaczek's reworking of Augustine's *rationes seminales* begins a response to the conundrum of peace, *telos,* and natural predation. Tabaczek cannot assume that Augustine directly allows for interspecies evolutionary development; the concept of interspecies change would have been foreign to Augustine's Neoplatonic definition of forms.[70] Instead, rethinking Augustine's *rationes seminales* within the tradition of Thomistic interpretation provides grounding for interspecies development.

Tabaczek argues that Augustine's idea of the *rationales seminales* is twofold; all of creation came about at once, but its unfolding happens across a process of time.[71] The unfolding of these potentialities occurs as a result of hidden "seeds" and can take the form of either (a) "the potentiality that manifests in the slow growth [unfolding] in the favorable conditions of the environment;" or (b) "the potentiality that provides a suitable ground for the instantaneous and direct

68 Alfred Lord Tennyson, "In Memoriam A. H. H. Obiit" MDCCCXXXIII: 56, *Representative Poetry Online*, University of Toronto, accessed 3 April, 2025; A.M. De Roos, et al., "Stage-Specific Predator Species Help Each Other to Persist While Competing for A Single Prey," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, U.S.A.* 105, no. 37 (2008): 13930–13931.

69 Stefan Bengtson, "Origins and Early Evolution of Predation," *The Paleontological Society Papers* 8 (2002): 289–318; Benjamin J. Toscano, Bianca R. Rombado, and Volker H.W. Rudolf, "Deadly Competition and Life-Saving Predation: The Potential for Alternative Stable States in A Stage-Structured Predator–Prey System," *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 283, no. 1837 (2016): 4–5; Jeff McMahan, "The Moral Problem of Predation," in *Philosophy Comes to Dinner* (London: Routledge, 2015), 273–75.

70 Mariusz Tabaczek, "The Metaphysics of Evolution: From Aquinas's Interpretation of Augustine's Concept of Rationes Seminales to the Contemporary Thomistic Account of Species Transformism," *Nova et Vetera* 18, no. 3 (2020), 946.

71 Tabaczek, "The Metaphysics of Evolution," 951.

[general or special] divine production of the first adult form of a new kind."[72] Tabaczek points out that these potentialities appear to both happen naturally and to require God's direct intervention; the *rationes seminales* can thus account for (a) development that occurs within the laws of nature and (b) direct intervention by which God does not again create *ex nihilo*, but draws on the earth's potencies to move beyond natural tendencies.[73] Augustine appears to think that both types of development are equally valid: "We must conclude, then, that these reasons [*rationes seminales*] were created to exercise their causality in either one way or the other: by providing for the ordinary development of new creatures in appropriate periods of time, or by providing for the rare occurrence of a miraculous production of a creature, in accordance with what God wills as proper for the occasion."[74]

Tabaczek uses a Thomistic interpretation of the *rationes seminales* to accommodate the form shifts of interspecies evolution. Thomas Aquinas subscribed not to Platonic forms but to Aristotelian hylomorphic metaphysics,[75] from which Tabaczek argues that "all representatives of a species share a 'common nature' (defined by a substantial form of a particular kind), which finds its expression in the variety of inter-actions and inter-relations between unique individuals that differ in terms of many accidental features."[76] Aquinas grounds potentiality in "primary matter" that "persists through all changes that a given substance can be exposed to."[77] Potentiality is matched by a complementary "act"—a substantiation of form, which causes a thing to be what it is;[78] *new substances therefore arise from a common potentiality of primary matter*, which then limit the possible forms of further development. From here, in conjunction with his other metaphysical commitments, Aquinas can postulate that "from the fact that matter is known to have a certain substantial mode of existing, matter can be understood

72 "The principle which makes this development possible is hidden to the eyes but not to the mind; but whether such a development must necessarily come about is completely unknown to us. We know that the principle which makes it possible is in the very nature of body; but there is no clear evidence in that body that there is a principle by which it must necessarily take place" (Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* 6.16); Tabaczek, "The Metaphysics of Evolution," 953.

73 "God has established in the temporal order fixed laws governing the production of kinds of beings and qualities of beings and bringing them forth from a hidden state into full view, but His will is supreme over all. By His power He has given numbers to His creation, but He has not bound His power by these numbers." *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* 6.13; Tabaczek, "The Metaphysics of Evolution," 953–954.

74 *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* 6.14. Edited for clarity.

75 "...every physical object is a compound of matter and form." Thomas Ainsworth, "Form vs. Matter," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (Fall 2024 Edition).

76 Tabaczek, "The Metaphysics of Evolution," 964.

77 Tabaczek, "The Metaphysics of Evolution," 964.

78 Tabaczek, "The Metaphysics of Evolution," 965.

to receive accidents by which it is disposed to a higher perfection, so far as it is fittingly disposed to receive that higher perfection."[79]

The underlying hylomorphic structure of this argument allows Tabaczek to reconfigure the first conception of *rationes seminales*. He suggests that seed-principles need not be seen as a dormant organism fully present in its potential, but instead as principles that actualize entities (classified as secondary matter) and "dispose" the primary matter in different and specific ways; in other words, new substantial forms can arise from the primary matter of seed-principles.[80] These new kinds do not arise *ex nihilo* (violating the Augustinian assertion that creation was instantaneous); instead, they arise from existing potentiality. Tabaczek's argument thus reconfigures the philosophical limitations of Neoplatonist forms while retaining the Augustinian theological concept. His reconfiguration also lends itself to a simple extension; *this entire process of actualized entities may evidence a telos of co-creation manifesting itself through a latent potential of increasing complexity.* Such an idea appears to be consistent with not only Tabaczek's discussion of potentiality but also evolutionary science as discussed above. For the present argument, the first form of the *rationes seminales* will thus be considered the mechanism for a *telos* toward complexity. In Augustinian terms, a *telos* of complexity is good because God determined it to be so.

Trajectory B: Freedom, Natural Evil, and the Second *Rationes Seminales*

A *telos* of co-creative complexity is not a *telos* of peace, and predation also seems to increase in complexity through development; therefore, a parallel trajectory must separate the goodness of complexity from the privation of predation. Furthermore, this separation must explain desirable and undesirable movement without moving into the territory of morality. Augustine *does* link moral evil to the fall; ascribing morality to animals would thus prove problematic purely from the standpoint of evolutionary engagement, both in terms of timeline and in dealing with the potential for morality in simpler organisms such as worms or bacteria.[81] As a result, describing predation as undesirable must be accomplished without appealing to morality.

Within a non-moral paradigm, Bethany Sollereder's concept of limited animal

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79 Augustine, *Quaestio disputata de anima*, q. 9, corp. (trans. in *Questions on the Soul*, trans. James H. Robb, [Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984]).

80 Tabaczek, "The Metaphysics of Evolution," 968–969.

81 Augustine, *On The Free Choice of the Will*, ed./trans. D. M. Pontifex (Pine Beach: Newman, 1955), 74–6, 104, 125. "Therefore, in all defects, either the defective things did not receive further being, and there is no fault—just as even while they exist there is nonetheless no fault because they did not receive more being than they are—or they were unwilling to be what, if they had been willing, they would have received as their being, and, since [what they would have received] is good, *it is an offense* if they are unwilling." *On The Free Choice of the Will*, 104, emphasis mine.

freedom proves helpful. Sollereder explores freedom from a narrow lens primarily concerned with animal choice in relation to existing environments, from which freedom is not seen as necessarily (a) conscious or (b) moral; this freedom still constitutes choice because differing actions alter outcomes or influence development.[82] Placing a *telos* of complexity as an intrinsic property of the creature allows for limited freedom in animal development since these developments remain within the bounds of the developmental trajectory, but the choices within this development cannot be attributed to God since God did not ordain the specifics of these outcomes any more than he ordained the choices of man's corrupt will.[83]

For Sollereder, evolutionary change occurs in part because of the free choices of the animal world, which can result in both disvalue and value as a result of these choices;[84] as behaviour and possible choice complexify, suffering (and predation) also appears to develop and increase.[85] God, therefore, creates a world in which choice allows animals to develop, including toward predation. Within an Augustinian frame, Tabaczek's theory provides for such a concept of freedom within development; freedom becomes one mechanism of development from latent potential—a means by which various forms of complexity are achieved. This freedom is not tied to morality or consciousness, so being a non-moral kind of freedom, it does not impinge on Augustine's thought regarding human free will and capacity; in fact, limited forms of freedom are supported by Augustine's suggestion that creation is both intrinsic and extrinsic.[86] Augustine's idea of natural law (that is, numbers, weight, and measures) indicates a creation in which God has determined the boundaries of a creature's existence, but within which creatures may develop to their fullest extent.[87] Animal freedom need only be considered non-moral and within the bounds of natural law (that is, determined by God to be so) to be consistent with Augustine's thought.

The existence of increasingly complex predation is thus linked to creaturely freedom in development, but another challenge to the endeavour of undesirable

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82 Bethany N. Sollereder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering: Theodicy without a Fall* (London: Routledge, 2019), 107–108. She uses the example of a killdeer that can choose between two different responses to encroaching predators.

83 "So too free will, without which no one can live rightly, must be a God-given good, and you must admit rather that those who use this good wrongly are to be condemned than that He who gave it ought not to have given it." *On The Free Choice of the Will*, 131.

84 Sollereder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering,* 107.

85 Sollereder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering,* 107–108.

86 Oliver, *Augustine on Creation, Providence, and Motion*, 393–96.

87 "But clearly, if we suppose that he now sets any creature in place in such a way that he did not insert the kind of thing it is into that first construction of his, we are openly contradicting what scripture says, that he finished and completed all his works on the sixth day. Yes, within the categories of the various kinds of things which he set up at first, he manifestly makes many new things which he did not make then. But he cannot rightly be thought to set up any new kind, since he did then complete them all." Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 4.3–4.4, 5.23, and *On the Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (El Segundo: New City, 1991), 3.16.

predation arises; both Sollereder and Augustine deny that animal nature is affected by fallenness. Sollereder says (speaking of cannibalism in chimpanzees), "it is theologically difficult to consider a chimp's actions as sin since they (so far as we know) have no conscious recognition of God's laws, and therefore cannot be held culpable on a moral level, whatever proto-moral concepts of fair and unfair they might have. I contend that a theological definition of sin is uniquely human; that humans alone are fallen."[88] She bases this contention on the idea that sinfulness is directly tied to the ability to perceive God's law; since animals lack the ability to act in relationship to this law, their actions cannot be sinful.[89] Augustine concurs; since animals are incapable of willful corruption, their actions are not sin:

> The defect, however, would not deserve blame unless it were voluntary … Consequently it would be most absurd to say that temporal things ought not to decay. They are placed in an order of things such that, unless they decay the future cannot follow the past, nor can the beauty of the ages unfold itself in its natural course. They act in accordance with what they have received, and they pay their debt to Him to whom they owe their being, in accordance with the measure of their being.[90]

Augustine desires to prevent God from being accused of authoring evil, while Sollereder's concern is to accommodate pre-human decay.[91] For both Augustine and Sollereder, a narrow definition of fallenness dictates these moves; this form of evil is that which is willfully culpable. Sollereder goes so far as to define fallenness in relation to the idea that harm need not arise from "something gone wrong," which propels her to say that the predatory outcomes of exercising this freedom are not evil and "do not stand outside the purposes of God" since animals are not morally aware.[92] A careful reading of Augustine, however, may provide grounds to address Sollereder's concerns while also avoiding (a) labelling predation as voluntary sin and (b) labelling predation as part of the purpose of God.

To explore this question, recall Rosenberg's interpretation of Augustine as asserting that (a) God (and all that is created by God) must be good, (b) anything that exists, regardless of state, possesses good "to the extent that it exists," (c) evil therefore does not exist but represents a loss or diminishment of original essence,

88 Sollereder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering,* 108.
89 Sollereder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering,* 108–109.
90 *On the Free Choice of the Will,* 42–43.
91 Sollereder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering,* 35–36.
92 Sollereder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering,* 108–11. Sollereder critiques the use of Isaiah 11 as a basis for a peaceful purpose to creation but does not preclude the possibility of peace as an intended "end" to creation.

and (d) that evil is thus the absence of good.[93] Further recall that this progression forms the basis for Augustine's exposition of corruption, which insists that (a) corruptible things must be good in order to be corruptible, (b) harm is only done when corruption diminishes the good, and (c) evil is the corruption of an entity's original essence.[94] Corruption moves toward non-existence, denying the good of an entity's original essence. *When the original essence is fully realized, evil will be nowhere.* The peaceable kingdom in Isaiah 11, in an eschaton where God's intentions reign supreme, suggests that predation will be nowhere; therefore, predation ought to be considered as a form of evil.

Augustine based his insistence that predation is part of a greater good on observable animal nature and the constraints of his concept of natural law; beginning from a peaceable nature suggests his logical progression stands but requires an adjustment to its outcome. For Augustine, evil is relative to the nature a thing has.[95] Animal nature (and specifically animal freedom in creative development) is good. Doing good to that animal promotes its well-being in relation to its nature; lack of a thing required in order for the animal to fulfill its nature is therefore evil for that thing.[96] Furthermore, it is not merely the actual privation of the good, but a *tendency* to privation that is undesirable. Augustine does not suggest that privation is only the moral, willful committing of evil; instead, he acknowledges that circumstances exist which deprive an object of its ability to be itself. Even when an object is "good" (such as light) or "evil" (such as poison), harm or good can result from each, suggesting that privation is intrinsically intertwined with goodness by virtue of being a created thing (thus, not being Godself). This is the concept of natural evil.[97] Peter King comments: "The lion attacks the sheep and is undeniably a cause of evil to the sheep, but the lion is only following the imperatives of its nature and is not morally evil in doing so."[98] Predation is natural evil, not moral, but it is not "good" because predation hinders the development of both predator and prey toward an endpoint of peace.[99]

A layer of complexity can thus be added to Augustine's thought by saying that freedom to creatively develop can account for the imperatives of nature, leaving

93 Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin,* 250–53.
94 Rosenberg, *Finding Ourselves After Darwin,* 252–56.
95 Peter King, "Augustine on Evil," in *Evil: A History,* ed. Andrew P. Chignell (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2019).
96 King, "Augustine on Evil," 163.
97 *City of God*, 11.20–23. See also 12.2 and 12.3, where evil is evil solely because it corrupts an object's intended nature.
98 King, "Augustine on Evil," 163. See also *City of God,* 12.4.
99 King exemplifies this by saying "Augustine reasons that to be a good for something is to help or promote its doing well at being the kind of thing it is … (speaking of a horse) … if any of these features required to do well are missing—say, a horse has only partial lung capacity—then that horse cannot fully realize its nature as a swift animal. The horse cannot be good of its kind." King, "Augustine on Evil," 161–162.

animals *morally* blameless, but still allow discussion of predation as undesirable, since ideal development would result in peace.[100] "The same thing," says Augustine, "when applied in one way, is destructive, but when applied suitably, is most beneficial."[101] It is not creative development in nature *but the resulting privation* which is destructive. When applied suitably, development is beautiful and beneficial; a concept can thus be good and tend to privation at the same time—creation, as Christopher Southgate says, is "good and groaning."[102] Predation is thus (a) undesirable under a broad category of privation based around deviation from God's intentions *in any way*, and (b) an expression of the natural tendency of created beings toward non-existence. God is not the author of predation; instead, God's work sustains, upholds, and empowers a trajectory of free complexifying development, of which predation is a privation even as it also enables development and certain forms of animal flourishing. It is the *ideal* development, then, of which creation has potential from the beginning, that is desirable.[103]

Augustine defines fixed essence in terms of original nature; placing Sollereder's thought in Augustinian terms seems to indicate fixed essence is the freedom to develop. Both seem to define *telos* as movement in the outworking of these concepts. If original nature is considered to be *a movement through freely increasing complexity in response to God that fulfills an intended essence of peace*,[104] and original nature is defined as including a teleological movement toward this intended end, then both the goodness of developmental freedom and the concept of original nature are preserved while also providing for privation, redefined as *movement that is a natural result of creative developmental freedom but moves away from peace*. Corruption thus remains congruent with an Augustinian

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100 Augustine provides for this idea within his discussion of humans: "but whether such a development must come about is completely unknown to us. We know that the principle which makes it (old age) possible is in the very nature of the body; but there is no clear evidence in that body that there is a principle by which it must necessarily take place." *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, 6.16. The existence of a potential for peace need not mean it always comes about for peace to be the desired outcome of creative development. Note that King says Augustine asserts all suffering is morally justified; in this case, animal suffering is justified by the benefit of limited animal freedom— i.e., non-coercion, which Sollereder also suggests. King, "Augustine on Evil," 156, and Sollereder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering*, 92–117.

101 *City of God*, 12.4.

102 Southgate, *The Groaning of Creation,* 15. Perhaps "good" and "groaning" need not mean the same thing.

103 *City of God*, 12.5. Augustine asserts that "though the corruption of transitory and perishable things brings them to utter destruction, it does not prevent their producing that which is designed to be their result … God is not to be found fault with on account of the creature's faults but is to be praised in view of the natures He has made." Perhaps God can affirm the creative development of animals as in Job 38:39 while equally affirming the existence of privation within the very same aspect of development. This affirmation could also account for Augustine's assertion that without decay, forms of beauty could not occur (see footnote 90).

104 Note that "response" does not entail an anthropocentric conception of deliberate, but only the ability to respond in whatever way God desires the creature to achieve.

definition of natural evil. Isaiah 11's insistence that animals will eventually lie down together presents a picture in which God restores the detriment of *all* privation, not merely moral evil. Fulfillment and restoration, then, move beyond the effects of moral evil to encompass the struggles inherent in being created, since peace better reflects God's character than does predation.[105]

One question remains: if creation tends toward privation and increasing complexity also results in increasingly complex forms of privation, how can peace result? Recall that Tabaczek outlines not one but two forms of the *rationes seminales*, where the second is "the potentiality that provides a suitable ground for the instantaneous and direct (general or special) divine production of the first adult form of a new kind."[106] Augustine suggests that these "seed-principles" are unfolding even now, and that God does not establish new kinds (that is, those which did not have their potentiality present in the first creative act), but that He does "in accordance with these (kinds) … God makes many new things which He did not make then."[107] God's providential rule continues from creation until now, and crucially, into the future; it is God that constantly enables creation and its development, meaning that God's creative movement is constantly at work. This second type of potentiality is not created *ex nihilo* but is embedded into existence from the beginning; natural law still partially applies since God has chosen to work within the overall form of these bounds.[108] God's creative will, however, must move overtly within this type instead of depending on creation's impetus to development. In other words, this second type of *rationes seminales* is embedded within nature but will not occur without divine intervention.[109]

Response and Redemption: The Final Piece

A suggestion might be made that this second type of *rationes seminales* could allow the incorporation of creaturely co-creation into God-directed eschatological peace. If, from the beginning, creatures have carried a latent potential for developmental complexity *culminating in response to God's intent*, and if creatures freely develop in a co-creative process with God, then the realization of this process might include a redemptive, creative act whereby God takes every single creature and redeems their developmental labor into a life of peace—creatures, then, realize their potential for peace inherent from the beginning.[110] In other words, since every

105 "For He is not truly called Almighty if He cannot do whatsoever He pleases, or if the power of His almighty will is hindered by the will of any creature whatsoever," *Enchiridion,* 96.

106 See footnote 72.

107 *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* 20.41.

108 *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* 6.13.

109 *The Literal Meaning of Genesis,* 6.14.

110 This redemptive act is the final puzzle piece. Furthermore, this culmination of response to God's intent solves the problem of coercive essential change by suggesting that a lion will, in some way, desire God's redemption from privation stemming from his development.

creature today exists as a result of this impulse toward co-creation, and inasmuch as every creaturely existence reflects both desirable development and undesirable privation, creation will be given a life where each being realizes the goal of its development in response to God, at which point privation is no more. Such a proposal seems to fit Augustine's category of a rare and miraculous production; it also incorporates evolutionary complexity as an essential co-creative work of creation, linking the two types of *rationes seminales*. Further, this progression grounds an emergent characteristic of peace, avoiding potential problems of reductionism (peace need not logically arise from development) while incorporating physical existence to evidence continuity and discontinuity with the current world. In this vision of the eschaton, all parts of animal nature will be good in *every* way.[111] Thus, the final end of animal development can accommodate interspecies peace, arrived at via developmental complexity and co-creation in a movement culminating in response to God.

Conclusion

Traditional readings of Augustine have attributed moral evil and the created world's suffering to a historical human fall, but evolutionary science challenges the idea that creation ever existed without violence. Stanley Rosenberg suggests that predation is a natural part of creation according to God's will; such a response does not address the implications of a God who sanctions these acts. Isaiah 11:6–9 and its vision for animal interaction insists that peace is what best reflects God's character. Utilizing Mariusz Tabaczek's reconstrual of the *rationes seminales* in conjunction with Bethany Sollereder's concept of limited animal freedom allows Augustinian thought to accommodate an evolutionary trajectory of peace; further, Augustine's theory of evil as privation allows a view of predation as an undesirable part of creation resulting from creative freedom in animals. Finally, the oft-neglected second concept of the *rationes seminales* provides a basis on which to speak of eschatological redemption as God's act of new creation, one that utilizes existing matter, allowing the animal kingdom's co-creative freedom to culminate in peace. Such an argument requires adjustments to Neoplatonic ideas of form but does not impinge on Augustine's main theological priorities.

111 "For if vice does not injure, it is not vice." *City of God*, 12.3.

Stephen D. Moore's Poststructuralist Criticism of Mark and Luke: An Exegetical Retrospective

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Abstract

Stephen D. Moore's 1992 monograph *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* continues to pack a provocative literary punch over three decades after its initial publication. However, despite its frequent acclaim for being a methodological innovation, detailed interaction with its numerous interpretive proposals has been scarce, and thus this kind of analysis remains an important but underexplored area of the history of biblical interpretation. It is the intention of this study to offer such an exposition and appraisal. Accordingly, this essay proceeds by briefly describing the intellectual context of Moore's poststructuralist biblical criticism, documenting the superficial nature of much interaction with this monograph, and offering an overview and critical discussion of five major interpretive topics found throughout *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*. Specifically, this study does not focus on engagement with the philosophical foundations of poststructuralism itself but rather performs careful analysis of the textual observations found in Moore's *Mark and Luke* to inquire whether these results offer anything that might unsettle more conventional reading strategies. Moore often uses the biblical text to develop applications for questions of textual meaning itself, reflecting the larger poststructuralist worldview regarding the elusiveness of textual meaning. Since these implications are themselves part of his "interpretation," I interact with these by drawing from recent developments in theoretical linguistics, specifically regarding mechanisms for using texts to reconstruct their social contexts, principles of lexical semantics, the nature of and criteria for discerning literary genres, and definitions of authorial intention.

1 Special thanks are due to Dr. Dustin Burlet for his invaluable assistance with the preparation of this manuscript.

Introduction

Stephen D. Moore's 1992 monograph *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* continues to pack a provocative literary punch over three decades after its initial publication.[2] However, despite its frequent acclaim for being a methodological innovation (as documented below), detailed interaction with its numerous interpretive proposals has been scarce, and thus this kind of analysis remains an important but underexplored area of the history of biblical interpretation.[3] It is the intention of this study to offer such an exposition and appraisal. Accordingly, this essay proceeds by briefly describing the intellectual context of Moore's poststructuralist biblical criticism, documenting the superficial nature of much interaction with this monograph, and offering an overview and critical discussion of five major interpretive topics found throughout *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*.

Intellectual Context and Rationale

Any discussion of poststructuralism necessarily requires some introduction to its predecessor movement, structuralism. Structuralism is notoriously difficult to define.[4] This is, in part, because structuralism manifested itself in diverse ways in different fields.[5] Structuralism can be summarized at the most abstract level by noting that it views meaning as being primarily dependent on the "'deep structure' (foundational truths that span culture, time, and language)."[6] This "deep structure" itself possesses far more agency or significance than the conventional channels of authorial intent or sentence grammar, and, indeed, these latter phenomena are viewed as a mere means of working backwards to discern these underlying structures rather than being of central importance, as in traditional approaches.[7]

Poststructuralism is an umbrella term for certain theoretical approaches that

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2 Stephen D. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). This is evident in the numerous instances of risqué innuendo throughout, as exemplified in its closing sentences on pp. 157–58. John Drury, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *JTS* 44 (1993): 313–14 (314), refers to this tendency of Moore's, stating "he … shocks the bourgeoisie with hit-and-miss scatological references." Similarly, Robert M. Fowler, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *CBQ* 55 (1993): 812–14 (812), opens with "It is hard to imagine a lukewarm response to this book. It is a tour de force, demanding passionate response, whether that be hot or cold." For further documentation, see the "Reception" section below.

3 See the "Reception" section below for documentation of this state of affairs.

4 J. T. Robertson, "Structuralism," in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (London: Routledge, 2007), 345–46 (345) states, "there are no universally accepted definitions for structuralism."

5 Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 195–96, gives separate examples from the fields of linguistics, social anthropology, and psychology. A similarly diverse lineage is traced in Stanley E. Porter and Jason C. Robinson, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction to Interpretive Theory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 155–67.

6 Robertson, "Structuralism," 345.

7 Robertson, "Structuralism," 345.

reject these universally valid abstract frameworks.[8] Runions identifies three key streams of poststructuralism: (1) "The endless play of texts," (2) "Analytics of power," and (3) "Ethics and the face of the Other."[9] The first of these elements is encapsulated in what is known as deconstructionism.[10] Deconstructionism was popularized by Jacques Derrida, who "argues that difference and deferral in meaning infects and prevents any possible claim to presence or original meaning."[11] In practice, this opened up a wide range of possibilities for reading against the grain of a text, ranging from analyses of deliberate conceptual tension[12] to attempts to eliminate any stable or coherent meaning.[13] Unsurprisingly, due to deconstructionism's inherently skeptical stance towards questions of meaning, truth, or metaphysics, much (although not all) evangelical Christian thought is antagonistic towards it.[14]

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8 Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 196–97. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 201 states "It became clear … that the so-called structures were just as arbitrary as other aspects of language." For further background on structuralism, see Robertson, "Structuralism," 345–46; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 195–201; Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 154–67.

9 Erin Runions, "Poststructuralism, Deconstruction," in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (London: Routledge, 2007), 287–89.

10 Thus, in literary circles, the terms "poststructuralism" and "deconstructionism" are often used interchangeably, although the latter is technically a subset of the former. Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 119.

11 Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 199. Robertson, "Structuralism," 74, succinctly summarizes this platform: "Deconstruction … critically undermines conventional notions of truth, reality, and knowledge … there is no transcendentally signified … truth or grounding.… There is only a 'play' that connects signs to other signs.… Texts have no decidable meaning but are full of internal tensions and contradictions that make their truth claims … no more than the reflections of the free play of language—an infinite play of signs." For discussion of the implications of poststructuralism for human subjectivity, see David J. Fuller, "Roland Barthes: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, and the Pleasure of the Writing Subject," in *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 3: Further Essays on Prevailing Methods*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Zachary K. Dawson, McMaster Biblical Studies Series 6 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021), 409–43 (423).

12 One of the canonical works of literary poststructuralism is Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974). For discussion, see Fuller, "Roland Barthes," 423–27. For application to biblical studies, see Edward L. Greenstein, "An Equivocal Reading of the Sale of Joseph," in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives. Volume 2*, ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992), 114–25.

13 Robert Dale Parker, *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 101, states, "if everything is about the free play of language, the free play of signifiers, the dissemination of meaning, and so on, then all texts are alike. It seemed that every high deconstructionist interpretation reached the same conclusion about every text, and experienced readers could predict the ending of a high deconstructionist interpretation while they were still reading the beginning or before they started to read it at all."

14 A representative dialogue regarding different Christian perspectives on deconstructionism is found in the interaction between Patricia A. Ward, "Worldly Readers and Writerly Texts," *Christian Scholar's Review* 17 (1988): 425–35, and David Lyle Jeffrey, "*Caveat lector*: Structuralism, Deconstructionism, and Ideology," *Christian Scholar's Review* 17 (1988): 436–48. See especially the nine theses in Ward, "Worldly Readers," 434–35 regarding what evangelicals should learn from poststructuralism. For discussion of possible weaknesses in the typically negative reactions to deconstructionism, see Alan Jacobs, "The Values of Literary Study: Deconstruction and Other Developments," *Christian Scholar's Review* 16 (1987): 373–83. See also James K. A. Smith, *Jacques Derrida: Live Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2005).

Stephen D. Moore's first monograph, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge*, came out in 1989 and sought to survey both narrative and reader-response approaches while also pushing beyond them towards deconstructionism.[15] His deconstructionist period is encapsulated in 1992's *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives: Jesus Begins to Write* (the focus of the present study)[16] and 1994's *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross*.[17] Moore's subsequent work moved away from deconstructionism and towards ideological and cultural studies.[18]

Although the purpose of the present study is to focus on tangible interpretive results more than underlying theory, it is worth noting one of the major methodological points in *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (hereafter *MLPP*). Moore follows Derrida by emphasizing the agency of language itself over and above the conscious intentions of human authors.[19] Furthermore, Moore merges this with a Freudian sensibility for the deep well of "unconscious" meanings latent in the multiple senses of isolated words.[20] Arguing that the subcon-

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15 Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 287–91. For biographical background on Moore, see Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 286–87; Roger Allonby Latham, "Talking with Strangers: Towards a Christian, Postmodern, Academic Model for Biblical Interpretation" (PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2006), 75–76, 87–90. For context on the major streams of postmodern biblical criticism more broadly through the mid-1990s, see Bible and Culture Collective, *Postmodern Bible*, 13.

16 Moore, *Mark*.

17 Stephen D. Moore, *Poststructuralism and the New Testament: Derrida and Foucault at the Foot of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). This monograph was much more broadly accessible than the earlier *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* and accordingly received much published interaction. It is widely known for containing Moore's deconstructive reading of the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4. For discussion, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 91; Latham, "Talking," 84–86; Andrew P. Wilson, *Transfigured: A Derridean Rereading of the Markan Transfiguration*, LNTS 319 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 36–38; David I. Yoon, "Literary Criticism and New Testament Interpretation: A Critique of Formalism, Structuralism, Reader-Response Criticism, and Deconstructionism" (ThM thesis, The Master's Seminary, 2010), 106–112.

D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 134, memorably states "When a scholar as brilliant as Stephen D. Moore offers us a poststructuralist exegesis of John 4 that is full of the kind of word-association games that are trained out of the work of first-year exegesis students, we are right to infer that something is amiss with the theory."

18 Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 287; Latham, "Talking," 76–81, 84, 86.

19 Moore, *Mark*, 61–62.

20 Some definitions of Freudian terms are necessary here. Nandor Fodor and Frank Gaynor, eds., *Freud: Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), cite Freud defining the "unconscious" areas of the self as that which "the individual knows nothing of their contents and that it requires an expenditure of effort to make him conscious of them" (194). Freud's tripartite constitution of the self consists of the id, ego, and superego. The id is purely unconscious and "contains everything that is inherited" (90). The ego processes experience and governs the desires of the id (62). Finally, the superego represents the pressure to repress the ego that is inherited through life experiences (179–80).

scious operates through making puns,[21] Moore asserts that such juxtapositions of different meanings have an ontological significance far removed from light-hearted wordplay, as "Puns babel … [of] an ecstasy of meaning so immense that one could forever lose one's self in it,"[22] and hence, efforts to discern unitary meaning are driven more by fear of this chaotic depth than anything rational.[23] For Moore, writing that drives home a single clear "point" is a mere accessory to the patriarchal regime, while "unweaned" writing instead revels in this abyss of unconstrained signification.[24] Moore points to Derrida's metaphor of "dredging" with a crane to describe this kind of writing, in which one plunges a bucket to the bottom of a lake of infinite meanings, only to watch as this body of aqueous connotations "re-forms herself."[25]

Moore approvingly notes this leads to Derrida's practice of "exploiting chance associations between words across several languages,"[26] and other similar moves. This means that Derrida's overall approach was a kind of "textual congress with the *letter* of the text being read … as opposed to the ideality of its content."[27] Thus, Derrida's exploratory works (such as *Glas*) that play on the meanings a given lexeme may have in different languages are anything but idle paronomasia—they are "miming the movements of the unconscious."[28] If this intense exploitation of homonyms is no less than a full-fledged "epistemology,"[29] then it follows that one can pursue "an academic writing no longer fixated on the voice … that picks its steps through horizontal, single-tiered, associated, open-ended word clusters."[30]

Since the literature assessing deconstructionism based on its *philosophical*

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21 Moore, *Mark*, 64.
22 Moore, *Mark*, 65. The punning in the quotation above is original and part of Moore's writing style. For more information on puns as they pertain to the Bible (specifically) see Russell Jay Hendel, "Biblical Puns," *JBQ* 34 (2006): 190–97.
23 Moore, *Mark*, 65.
24 Moore, *Mark*, 65.
25 Moore, *Mark*, 66, citing Jacques Derrida, *Glas*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. and Richard Rand (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 204b–205b.
26 Moore, *Mark*, 66.
27 Moore, *Mark*, 66.
28 Moore, *Mark*, 66.
29 Moore, *Mark*, 67, citing Gregory Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology: Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), xii.
30 Moore, *Mark*, 68. Some of the critics cited in the "Reception" section below seem to have missed this point, complaining about the abundance of wordplay without recognizing the psychoanalytic rationale underlying it. Since I mentioned above that Moore had largely abandoned deconstructionism by the mid-1990s, it is worth noting two more recent essays discussing his later views on the nature of textuality and textual meaning (or lack thereof): Stephen D. Moore, *The Bible After Deleuze: Affects, Assemblages, Bodies Without Organs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 58–110; Stephen D. Moore, "A Bible That Expresses Everything While Communicating Nothing: Deleuze and Guattari's Cure for Interpretosis," in *Biblical Exegesis Without Authorial Intention?: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Authorship and Meaning*, ed. Clarissa Breu, BibInt 172 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 108–125.

merits is already vast and deep, there is no need to duplicate that effort here.[31] What is worthwhile, though, is a careful analysis of the textual observations arising out of the vantage point briefly sketched above, to inquire whether these results offer anything that might unsettle more conventional reading strategies.[32] This admittedly does involve passing over vast swaths of *MLPP*, such as its extended reflection on how the "Son" is like a "Sponge,"[33] or how the Gospel of Mark itself is like the "mark" of an "X."[34] Whatever merit these discourses might have as exercises in creative writing, they simply are too dissimilar to traditional exegesis to warrant comparison.[35] Nonetheless, *MLPP* still offers testable assertions meant to expose shortcomings in previous New Testament scholarship, and, as documented in the "Reception" section below, these have yet to be catalogued and given detailed consideration. This study thus seeks to work carefully through Moore's claims in the instances where they do overlap with the questions being asked by conventional scholarship.[36] Carrying this out often requires both syn-

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31 See, for example, Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 331–36; Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 209–211; Vanhoozer, *Meaning*, 98–140; Robert Wicks, *Modern French Philosophy: From Existentialism to Postmodernism* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2003), 204–216.

32 This is the reason for the use of the word "Exegetical" rather than "Hermeneutical" in the title of this article.

33 Moore, *Mark*, 48–54.

34 Moore, *Mark*, 54–60.

35 For the purpose of establishing a reference point, the present study uses conventional historical criticism as a "home base" with which to compare the findings of Moore, *Mark*. Craig L. Blomberg, "The Historical-Critical/Grammatical View," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Beth M. Stovell (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 27–47 (28, 41) argues that historical-grammatical criticism should be viewed as the foundation of all other legitimate interpretive practices, and in doing so, he represents what is likely the consensus viewpoint. However, it should be noted that this stance can be challenged on both metaphysical and historical grounds. See, for example, Hans Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018); Yael Almog, *Secularism and Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

36 This, of course, raises the question of how *MLPP* would compare with *unconventional* readings such as those of other poststructuralists. As documented in the "Reception" section below, some poststructuralists fault Moore for producing results that too closely resemble the conventional task of exegesis (see the second category), while others chide him for writing in an anti-propositional vein that virtually defies outside critique (see the fourth category). As noted above in the discussion of the history of Moore's work, by the mid-1990s, he had moved away from the deconstructive focus of *MLPP* into more explicitly ideological territory, a trend reflected in the literary guild as a whole, resulting in a situation where later poststructuralists would have little to say about a work such as *MLPP*. Michal Beth Dinkler, *Literary Theory and the New Testament*, Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 106, notes that current iterations of poststructuralist theory are generally not only ideological in nature (as opposed to promoting the referential instability of texts) but usually are steeped in the confluence of multiple ideological perspectives. She states, "today's literary theorists are conversant with and draw on a range of poststructuralist discourses to explore how any number of variables—sexual, social, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, national, physical, and others—intersect and together constitute diverse ways of being and forms of meaning-making." This trend is immediately visible in the topics of the essays comprising Moore's own *festschrift* (K. Jason Coker and Scott S. Elliott, eds., *Bible and Theory: Essays in Biblical Interpretation in Honor of Stephen D. Moore* [Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020]). An example of an exception to this trend could be a monograph

thesizing treatments of topics throughout *MLPP*, since its organization is hardly systematic, and regularly stepping outside of Gospel scholarship into general hermeneutical questions, since Moore's poststructuralist framework often leads him towards drawing conclusions about the nature of meaning and the interpretive task as a whole.[37]

In short, the present study is an attempt to test Lindsay's assertion that *MLPP* uncovers "original insights into the text that should fascinate any traditionalist,"[38] while consciously transgressing Adam's warning that "a summary would leave out precisely that which is characteristic and remarkable in this performance."[39]

Reception

Some documentation of general trends in the citations and discussion of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* is necessary to justify the relevance of the present study.

Within academic journal reviews of *MLPP* shortly after its release, there was both support and criticism. To first engage positive responses, Fowler praised Moore's documentation of the role of sensory perception in Luke, his application of Foucauldian theory to the "narrative … omniscience"[40] in Luke-Acts, and his diagnosis of biblical scholarship's obsession with consuming the entire meaning of texts as being ultimately rooted in capitalism. He states, "Leaving no morsel undigested in the body of the biblical corpus, biblical criticism acts out a fantasy of the totality and unity of the biblical authors' intended meanings."[41] However, he did wish that Moore had more fully developed the concept of "local theology" that he mentioned in passing.[42]

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written by one of Moore's doctoral students (although note the use of the word "after" in the title), Scott S. Elliott, *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus: Narrative Criticism after Poststructuralism*, Bible in the Modern World, 41 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011). Richard Walsh, review of *Reconfiguring Mark's Jesus*, by Scott S. Elliott, *BCT* 8.2 (2012): 72–74, notes that Elliott tends to view the reader's situatedness as ultimately determinative for meaning, but still sees the final referent of the text as pointing towards the agency of discourse itself, a move not dissimilar to those made in *MLPP*, but done in a way less hostile to the task of theology itself.

37 As seen in the "Analysis" section below, Moore often uses the biblical text to develop applications for questions of textual meaning itself. Since these implications are themselves part of his "interpretation," I interact with these by drawing from recent developments in theoretical linguistics, even though the focus of this essay is more practical than methodological. In other words, Moore's ultimate application is aimed towards the larger poststructuralist worldview regarding the elusiveness of textual meaning. As a result, my engagement is not with the philosophical foundations of poststructuralism itself but rather with the points about interpretation and meaning that proceed from his allegorical connections made with the biblical text.

38 Alan G. Lindsay, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Religion & Literature* 25 (1993): 93–94 (94).

39 A. K. M. Adam, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *ATR* 75 (1993): 261.

40 Fowler, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 813.

41 Fowler, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 814.

42 Fowler, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 813–14.

Lindsay found *MLPP* worthwhile because of the novel readings of the text it generated.[43] Mottram evaluated *MLPP* highly, simply due to its playful, exuberant spirit.[44] Staley deemed *MLPP* useful for raising important questions about language, the ultimate referent of theology, the nature of reality, and authorial intent.[45] At the same time, he was concerned about the absence of non-Western scholarship and the lack of clarity regarding what kind of community would be served by such work.[46] Templeton applied the descriptors "useful and pleasant"[47] on account of the appropriateness of creating literature as a means of evaluating other literature, and for the power of such a style to evoke "transcendence."[48] Upton lauded *MLPP* for being "invigorating and entertaining"[49] and only pauses to question who will read the book and whether it will have its intended impact on the scholarly guild as a whole.[50]

Others were not as enthusiastic. Kingsbury was dubious of its viability simply due to its dependence on a philosophical framework that few would find viable.[51] Vickery faulted Moore for slavishly forcing the conclusions of select postmodern thinkers onto the biblical text to the point where the latter virtually vanishes, and for failing to account for the strident historical claims, particularly those about miracles, made by the texts themselves.[52]

Drury criticized the apparent anachronism of using postmodern theory to interrogate a premodern text without devoting equal attention to the historical setting of the latter.[53] Drury also derided Moore for wholeheartedly embracing his postmodern sources without considering any of their shortcomings, labeling Moore a "propagandist and sprightly performer."[54]

By far the most notable voice critical of Moore is Adam, as the latter himself

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43 Lindsay, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 94.
44 Gillian Mottram, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Faith and Freedom* 45 (1992): 138–40 (139).
45 Jeffrey L. Staley, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *JBL* 114 (1995): 152–54 (153–54).
46 Staley, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 154.
47 Douglas Templeton, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Literature and Theology* 8 (1994): 218.
48 Templeton, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 218.
49 Bridget Upton, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Theology* 96 (1993): 72–74.
50 Upton, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 73–74. Specifically, she states, "Is it, in the end, a form of gnosis, highly seductive for those with the energy and willingness to be seduced, but somehow outside the arena of most main-line biblical studies? I hope not—developing a dialogue would be well worth the effort."
51 Jack Dean Kingsbury, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Int* 48 (1994): 92–93.
52 John B. Vickery, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives*, by Stephen D. Moore, *Christianity and Literature* 42 (1993): 344–46 (346).
53 Drury, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 313–14.
54 Drury, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 314.

produced a number of publications contributing to the field of postmodern biblical criticism.[55] Despite their shared engagement in this idiom, Adam ultimately decides *MLPP* is "more ingenious than convincing."[56] He further expresses concern that "Moore's unequalled wordplay and his vast erudition sometimes become the center of attention, so that Mark and Luke are engaged principally as foils for Moore's exhilarating wit."[57]

Above and beyond book reviews proper, some general trends can be charted in other sources that interact with Moore. The first such trend is that *MLPP* is considered a landmark work, innovative for introducing literary deconstruction in New Testament studies. Adam calls it "extraordinary"[58] and a "key reference point,"[59] in stark contrast to his review summarized in the paragraph above. Similarly, Aune's history of literary criticism applied to the New Testament credits *MLPP* as being a pioneering work.[60]

The second category contains sources that interact with certain details in *MLPP* while appraising it positively. Wilson's extended discussion of *MLPP* gives it high praise for putting into practice the assumptions about language introduced by Derrida,[61] only faulting it for retaining the traditional academic conventions of proposing defined interpretations.[62] In a more constructive vein, Troost uses Moore's overall approach to Luke as the foundation for his monograph on gender in Luke 1–2, particularly Moore's metaphors of Luke as a painter and as being an "obese androgyn."[63]

A third category exists for works that cite *MLPP* in passing to indicate points of dissent. Clivaz critiques Moore's proposal of an omniscient narrator in Luke by instead positing the diversity inherent in the multiple witnesses drawn upon by the author.[64] Similarly, Hatton deviates from Moore's reading of the naked young man in Mark as an analogy to the vanishing author by seeing an intentional

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55 A. K. M. Adam, *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); A. K. M. Adam, ed., *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000).

56 Adam, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 261.

57 Adam, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 261.

58 Adam, *What Is Postmodern*, 68.

59 Adam, *What Is Postmodern*, 70.

60 David E. Aune, "Literary Criticism," in *The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament*, ed. David E. Aune (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 116–39 (117).

61 Andrew P. Wilson, *Critical Entanglements: Postmodern Theory and Biblical Studies*, Brill Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 24–28.

62 Wilson, *Critical Entanglements*, 27. He also admits that Moore had few disciples in this idiom due to the difficulty of matching his inventive use of language.

63 Ari Troost, *Exegetical Bodybuilding: Gender and Interpretation in Luke 1–2* (Gieten, Netherlands: Drukkerij Zwinderman, n.d.), 69–80 (69). This monograph was based on his dissertation completed at Utrecht University.

64 Clair Clivaz, "'Asleep by Grief' (Lk 22:45): Reading from the Body at the Crossroads of Narratology and New Historicism," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 2.3 (2006): 9, 11–12.

parallel with the seizing of Jesus,[65] the application being that the clothing left behind is comparable to "the Gospel of Mark textually reifying Jesus."[66]

The fourth category is sources that evaluate *MLPP* negatively. Pearson dismisses Moore's poststructuralism as being a self-indulgent diversion, block-quoting extended excerpts from Moore's punning on how Mark is like the letter "X" and concluding that it is "counterproductive" and unlikely to create "anything of lasting value."[67] Pearson later evaluates *MLPP* as providing "a good example of why deconstruction should be avoided as a critical method."[68] More abstractly, Selby faults Moore for being unable to apply the critical gaze of deconstruction to his own work, for being inconsistent in treating Derrida authoritatively while being dismissive of the claims of Mark, and for being anachronistic in applying English wordplay to a Greek text.[69]

Wilson's engagement is particularly remarkable. Although he is a proponent of deconstruction himself, he faults Moore's work for being an overly autobiographical form of play that has little to offer the broader academic community,[70] stating "at times it takes on a certain opacity and threatens to be reduced to a series of virtuosic displays of wit and creative imagining."[71] Blomberg briefly points to Moore's wordplay on the names of Mark and Luke along with his comparison between these Gospels and the acts of "marking" and "looking," concluding that this approach is "unstable" and clashes with the idea that even deconstructionist authors want their readers to understand them.[72] Finally, Donahue finds *MLPP* deficient in that it lacks "respectful and powerful engagements with religious texts"[73] when compared with works such as Derrida's *The Gift of Death* (1995). The notable commonality of all these critiques is that they only engage selectively with aspects of Moore's work, and they often do not consider the theoretical foundation that drives the moves he makes.

The fifth category, and by far the most vastly populated, is works that simply make passing reference to Moore for specific exegetical points. Two examples of themes in *MLPP* that are repeatedly pointed to (if not engaged in any depth)

65 Stephen B. Hatton, "Dialectic of Seizing and Leaving Behind: Mark's Young Man in Gethsemane," *BibInt* 26 (2018): 207–218 (212–13).

66 Hatton, "Dialectic," 218.

67 Brook W. R. Pearson, "New Testament Literary Criticism," in *A Handbook to the Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 241–66 (247).

68 Pearson, "New Testament," 266.

69 Rosalind M. Selby, *The Comical Doctrine: An Epistemology of New Testament Hermeneutics* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 133–35.

70 Wilson, *Transfigured*, 36.

71 Wilson, *Transfigured*, 50.

72 Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022), 170. Similarly, see William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 133.

73 John R. Donahue, "The Literary Turn and New Testament Theology: Detour or New Direction?" *JR* 76 (1996): 250–75 (261).

are Moore's treatment of the distinction between insiders and outsiders in Mark[74] and his general interest in the themes of sight and other sensory organs in Luke.[75]

While *MLPP* has been evaluated both positively and negatively, the conclusion emerging from the above survey of its reception is that very few sources devote significant space to considering its direct observations on the biblical text. To summarize, some scholars reject *MLPP* for its "laborious inventiveness"[76] or for its underlying views of language, but there is a notable dearth of sources that comprehensively mine what it might have to offer by way of challenging conventional interpretations.

Analysis

The Messianic Secret and the Indeterminacy of Meaning: Overview

Much of the content of the first two chapters of *MLPP* is devoted to an extended reflection on the theme of miscommunication in Mark, as exhibited by the disciples' frequent failure to grasp the point of Jesus's teachings or his identity. This perennial failure of Jesus's message to hit home is then used by Moore as an allegory of the inevitability of written language drifting from its original intention.[77] This section will first review Moore's key textual observations, followed by some snapshots of his application of these phenomena to the domain of language and meaning.

Moore documents the numerous places in the Gospel where the disciples misunderstand Jesus and fail to follow his example, ironically noting that while the disciples are repeatedly contrasted with the "outsiders" throughout the book, they nonetheless often display of level of insight more suited to "outsiders" than "insiders." He states, "the only thing that distinguishes disciples from outsiders is that disciples long to be inside, to *be* the insiders they are said to be."[78] This ineffectiveness of Jesus's teaching even seems to be divinely ordained (Mark 6:52; 8:17).[79] Paradoxically, it is often the "outsiders" who grasp Jesus's messianic identity, whether demons (as in 3:11) or the well-known case of the

74 See Scott S. Elliott, "'Witless in Your Own Cause': Divine Plots and Fractured Characters in the Life of Aesop and the Gospel of Mark," *R&T* 12 (2005): 397–418 (404); Christy Cobb, *Slavery, Gender, Truth, and Power in Luke-Acts and Other Ancient Narratives* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 59. See further discussion in analysis section.

75 Brittany E. Wilson, "Hearing the Word and Seeing the Light: Voice and Vision in Acts," *JSNT* 38 (2016): 456–81 (459); Christy Cobb, "Entangled Tongues: A Poststructuralist and Postcolonial Reading of Acts 2:1–13," *Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies* 4 (2022): 1–16 (2).

76 Adam, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 261.

77 Moore, *Mark*, 17 states, "Like Jesus, who drifts from misunderstanding to misunderstanding across the surface of Mark's page, writing has always been a wandering outcast, drifting from (mis)reading to (mis)reading."

78 Moore, *Mark*, 13, italics in original.

79 Moore, *Mark*, 15.

centurion (15:39),[80] who is an "outsider abruptly pulled inside to substitute for the disciples,"[81] who themselves are suspiciously absent. But even in the case of the centurion, the apparent confession of Jesus's identity is prompted not by clear teaching but rather by Jesus's declaration of being forsaken by God and his final cry of agony from the cross (15:34, 37), which leads Moore to conclude "A writing of absence and inarticulation accomplishes what 'plain' speech (8:32) could not, speech that should have been laden with present, self-evident meaning.… Understanding occurs only at the moment when Jesus becomes absent, and when his speech decomposes as it is delivered up to death."[82] But even though Mark establishes an expectation that the disciples will understand Jesus's words after the resurrection (9:9; 16:7), the book instead ends with the women not sharing what they had seen in the tomb (16:8),[83] which Moore takes as indicating that "Mark narrates the flight of meaning—the meaning of Jesus's death fleeing with the women disciples, threatening to sink into silence … Mark's own meaning … [is] incessantly in flight from itself."[84]

In keeping with Derrida's interpretation of the function of signifiers in Saussurean linguistics,[85] Moore sees Jesus's full presence as something that is merely endlessly deferred in Mark, as seen in the great promises of the second coming (9:1; 13:26) and especially in the contrast between the promise of seeing Jesus in 16:7 and the response of fear and speechlessness in 16:8.[86] Moore compares Jesus's message to a letter that was only read by someone to whom the letter had not been written, the centurion,[87] and that any glimpses the disciples had of this letter only provoked fear (9:32; 10:32).[88]

Furthermore, Mark even makes an insertion in the direct speech of Jesus, acknowledging the role of the audience of the written Gospel (13:14), which, for Moore, demonstrates that "everything that passes between Jesus and his disciples

80 Moore, *Mark*, 24.
81 Moore, *Mark*, 24.
82 Moore, *Mark*, 25. He does note the alternative interpretation that the centurion's confession is instead triggered by the tearing of the veil in 15:38.
83 This is, of course, assuming that the original version of Mark ended at 16:8. See below for discussion of Moore's treatment of this text-critical issue.
84 Moore, *Mark*, 26–27.
85 Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 195, provides essential background on Saussure, stating that he "saw language (*la langue*) as a general system of structure from which particular words or acts of speaking (*la parole*) were selected. Within the system or structure, the internal relations between words, especially relations of contrast, were crucial." Porter and Robinson, *Hermeneutics*, 155, helpfully articulate one further point in Saussure's thought relevant to the discussion above: "the arbitrary nature of the sign: Saussure distinguishes between the *signifié* (thing signified) and the *significant* (signifier), and he sees their relationship as unmotivated; that is, there is no necessary correlation between the concept and the sounds used to speak of it."
86 Moore, *Mark*, 39. See also the further discussion of presence in Moore, *Mark*, 54.
87 Moore, *Mark*, 42.
88 Moore, *Mark*, 43.

is surreptitiously rerouted to us."[89] Moore observes that the women attending the crucifixion (15:40–41) show greater faithfulness than the disciples, but then seemingly fail to deliver the message entrusted to them at the empty tomb (16:8).[90]

Turning to the broader issues of meaning and language, Moore, as noted above, compares the Marcan Jesus to a written letter, and draws parallels between the crucifixion and the whims of readers.[91] Even in resurrection this letter remains opaque, as Moore states, "Mark's Jesus does transgress the common law of writing by finally uniting with his Father. But even then his status remains more that of an inscription than of a logos, marked as it is by absence ('he has been raised; he is not here'—16:6) and exposure to the accidents of (mis)reading ('they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid'—16:8)."[92] Since writing inherently drifts from its original context,[93] the Gospel of Mark is ideally suited to function as a kind of substitute for the historical Jesus after his ascension, but furthermore, "The story told in Mark can be read as a parable of the destiny of every written Mark."[94] This agenda is applied even to the detail of the young man who ran off without his linen cloth in Gethsemane (14:51–52), in which Moore finds a fitting parallel for the tendency of scholarship to greedily grab the smallest of clues but be left unable to obtain anything of substance.[95] Moore further seeks to turn this into an indictment of the critical scholarly guild, stating "the discredited hypothesis identifying the young man as Mark lays bare a truth it did not reach for: the truth that criticism is a fantasy of violent possession.… In attempting to pronounce the truth of this scene, what have we effected?… we ourselves stand exposed. The text has slipped away, having stripped *us* on its way out."[96] He then suggests that perhaps there is no grand mystery to be deciphered in this short detail after all.[97]

The Messianic Secret and the Indeterminacy of Meaning: Discussion

As seen in the summary above, Moore presents his reflections in a playfully unsystematic way. The discussion of Moore in the present study will accordingly organize the topics covered to eliminate redundancy.

Although Moore's chosen plane of application, the slipperiness of language, is unsurprisingly far removed from the interpretive questions raised in most scholarly discussions, it is still possible to evaluate the viability of his overall proposal

89 Moore, *Mark*, 43.
90 Moore, *Mark*, 44–45.
91 Moore, *Mark*, 17.
92 Moore, *Mark*, 17.
93 Moore, *Mark*, 18.
94 Moore, *Mark*, 19.
95 Moore, *Mark*, 31–33.
96 Moore, *Mark*, 36–37.
97 Moore, *Mark*, 37.

by testing the coherence of the underlying textual conclusions upon which he bases his allegorical application.[98]

Moore finds the confession of the centurion significant for its role reversal of the insider and outsider categories and for its prompt being the agony of suffering rather than informative teaching, leading him to connect this instance of understanding to the paradoxical vanishing of Jesus and his speech.[99] However, other perspectives on this account must be considered.

The centurion's capacity to grasp who Jesus is apart from miracles or instructional speech, which many others had witnessed firsthand without believing, stands as an example of God-given faith worthy of imitation.[100] Having a gentile recognize Jesus as the Messiah at the end of the Gospel crucially mirrors God the Father's similar announcement at Jesus's baptism (Mark 1:11) and points forward to a time when many more gentiles would come to faith.[101] That this recognition was accomplished through Jesus's crucifixion also provides a corrective to the earlier reluctance of the disciples to accept that Jesus's rule would come through "suffering" rather than "conquest."[102] Moore neglects to interact with these more conventional interpretations, and consequently his application to meaning in language is rendered vulnerable.[103]

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98 For discussion of the difference in definitions between allegory and typology, see Iain Provan, *The Reformation and the Right Reading of Scripture* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), 99–105. Crucially, typology is more closely tied to the surface of the text when multiple books are read together, whereas allegory is associated with drawing connections not found in the text itself. Cf. James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology—Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns: How Old Testament Expectations are Fulfilled in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022).

99 When contrasted with other poststructuralist treatments, Moore's reading comes off as remarkably conservative in that it takes the centurion's confession of Jesus's divine identity essentially at face value. A more consistently suspicious reading of the narrative is modelled by Matt Valler, "Eluding the Strong Man: A Poststructuralist Postcolonial Reading of Myers' Mark" (MA diss., London School of Theology, 2010), 36–46, who sees not only the centurion's confession, but even the announcements of Jesus's divine sonship in the baptism and transfiguration accounts as hopelessly mired in merely reiterating the demonic agenda of imperial Rome. Valler does a more consistent job than Moore at integrating the "analytics of power" noted by Runions to be one of the facets of poststructuralist criticism (Runions, "Poststructuralism," 288).

100 M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 433–34.

101 Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 706. Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 719, also supports this view that the centurion's confession anticipates the spread of the gospel among the gentiles.

102 Strauss, *Mark*, 706.

103 Other lines of evidence that are potentially relevant include Davis's argument that the centurion's confession deliberately echoed Peter's denial in Mark 14:71, providing resolution to the problem of how Jesus can be both God and man (as cited in Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 659) and Wright's analysis of Mark as Greco-Roman tragedy, in which the "reversal" accomplished by the tearing of the veil in the temple, an institution which typified opposition to Jesus, was expected in this genre to lead to the "recognition" of the hero character. See Adam Z. Wright, *Of Conflict and Concealment: The Gospel of Mark as Tragedy*, McMaster Biblical Studies Series 5 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), 145–46.

Although there is a full section below dedicated to Moore's take on the implications of the abrupt ending of Mark at 16:8, one particular detail found in this section is best addressed here. Mark variously creates the expectation that after the resurrection the disciples will finally grasp Jesus's message (9:9; 16:7) and see him again (16:7) only for the story to derail as the women, seized with fear, fail to report the message they are given at the tomb (16:8). Moore uses these details to support his reading of Mark as an allegory of the endless deferral of meaning and of the uncontrollable proliferation of the connotations attached to written language over time. At the surface level, there does seem to be a tension created as 16:7 contains a command for the women to share what they saw with the disciples, but v. 8 records that the women remained silent. However, Collins argues that v. 8 only focuses on the initial response of the women and leaves open the possibility that they delivered the message later.[104] Regarding the final comment in 16:8 that the women were afraid, there are two possibilities: the women were in awe due to their encounter with the divine or they were simply frightened.[105] Strauss prefers the latter option, but sees its purpose as prodding the audience to instead "respond with faith."[106] Collins furthermore argues that it was unnecessary for Mark to narrate what happened after 16:8, since it assumed this knowledge on the part of the audience.[107] Read in context, these provide a much more plausible explanation than Moore's deconstructionist framing of the collapse of meaning.

Another anomaly Moore finds in Jesus's message is that his own disciples tended to collapse with confusion and fear whenever they were told that he would suffer and die (9:32; 10:32), suggesting that the significance of Jesus's message remained endlessly elusive. However, a much simpler explanation is possible: if Jesus was going to be persecuted and put to death by Rome and the religious authorities in Jerusalem, Jesus's followers' lives would be in danger as well.[108] Collins further unpacks the significance of this fear, stating "their lack of understanding is closely related to the instinct of self-preservation … [it] is related to resistance to Jesus and his teaching, a classic example of 'hardness of heart.'"[109] Therefore, the disciples' fear was not so much a matter of failure to grasp meaning, but concern for personal well-being in the immediate present.

Another detail of interest to Moore is the short aside, "let the reader understand" (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοείτω), in Mark 13:14, which serves for Moore as a sign that Jesus's own words have been hopelessly reworked and recontextualized by the

104 Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 800.
105 Stein, *Mark*, 733.
106 Strauss, *Mark*, 723.
107 Collins, *Mark*, 801.
108 Strauss, *Mark*, 452; Stein, *Mark*, 479; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27—16:20*, WBC 34B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 58; Collins, *Mark*, 441.
109 Collins, *Mark*, 441.

author of the Gospel. However, there is no reason to view this note in such a suspicious way. While scholars naturally differ on whether the Gospel of Mark was written before or after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE,[110] this insertion could reasonably be instructions for a lector,[111] a warning that the original audience will soon experience these trials,[112] or a cue to consider the context of the link to Daniel.[113] There is thus no need to attribute nefarious intent to this device meant to aid in the understanding or proclamation of the words of Jesus.

The final relevant textual comment in this section is Moore's work with the naked young man in Mark 14:51–52,[114] in which he sees the tendency of scholarship to compound speculation as indicative of the capacity of a text to leave its readers empty-handed and symbolically denuded. However, other interpretations prove more convincing. While this detail could simply be a means of depicting the confusion and drama that attended Jesus's arrest,[115] a more contextually grounded reading would suggest that the fact that even someone of little importance chose to run away in a shameful manner rather than support Jesus signifies the degree to which his followers have been entirely unfaithful.[116] This example additionally offers a negative counterexample to the commitment required by true discipleship,[117] and of course also contrasts with the complete faithfulness unto death exhibited by Jesus himself.[118]

One global matter must be dealt with before moving forward. At the beginning of this discussion section (and the overview section above), Moore's overall approach was described as allegorical in the sense that it chooses to read Mark as symbolic of the ineffability of written language. Allegory, of course, is found throughout the history of biblical interpretation, extending at least as far back as Philo of Alexandria (who lived approximately between 20 BCE and 50 CE), who, for example, taught that the four rivers branching out of Eden in Gen 2:10–14 correspond to the four virtues of prudence, courage, temperance, and justice, which all proceed from the goodness and wisdom of God (*Alleg. Interpr.* 63–73). There

110 Compare Boring, *Mark*, 366–68 with Strauss, *Mark*, 580.
111 Compare Boring, *Mark*, 366–68.
112 Strauss, *Mark*, 580; France, *Mark*, 524.
113 Evans, *Mark*, 320, points to the connection between the questions about when these future events will happen in Dan 12:5–13 and Mark 13:4. He specifically argues that Mark wants his readers to connect Jesus's speech with the prophecy of the abomination in Dan 12:11.
114 On the meaning of the word for "naked" (γυμνός) here, see L&N 49.22, "pertaining to wearing no clothing or being very scantily clothed." BDAG 208 provides three main categories of usage: (1) "pert. To being without covering … naked, stripped, bare"; (2) "pert. To being inadequately clothed, poorly dressed"; (3) "pert. To being lightly clad, without an outer garment." It puts Mark 14:51–52 in the first category, while, in comparison, Peter's disrobed state in the boat in John 21:7 falls into category 3.
115 Strauss, *Mark*, 646.
116 Evans, *Mark*, 429; France, *Mark*, 597; Collins, *Mark*, 694–95.
117 Boring, *Mark*, 403–404.
118 Collins, *Mark*, 695.

is admittedly nothing stopping an interpreter from making these kinds of subjective symbolic leaps with a text. When considering language in isolation, without some metaphysical framework or additional contextual grounding, there is little to aid in establishing boundaries for which abstract associations are legitimate and which are not.[119] Moore, of course, would see all attempts at imposing context or limits on meaning to be equally arbitrary, and this claim would appear initially to have force if the only evidence available (as is often the case in biblical studies) is the text itself. However, recent advances in the application of modern linguistic theories to biblical languages have made it possible to derive relevant social context from the text itself, at least to a degree where the range of possible interpretations is significantly constrained.

Stanley Porter proposes a model for context and how it can be inferred from a text based on Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL). This model has three layers of context. The first is the "co-text,"[120] which is simply the syntactical structures and lexical choices of the text itself. The co-text both governs the meaning of the smaller units, as it "constrains the choices that will be made by the speaker"[121] and often provides clues about the "physical context"[122] of the text's compositional setting. The second layer of context is the "context of situation,"[123] which refers to "how a linguistic situation enables and determines the creation of a set of meanings that constitute a text."[124] In terms of analysis, it "is a means of describing the immediate linguistic environment of a linguistic act in terms of content, participants, and textual features."[125] The third layer is the "context of culture,"[126] which broadly involves "all the various knowledge systems that may exist within the individuals of any particular culturally defined … group."[127] Following

119 This, of course, relates to a longstanding hermeneutical debate of its own. Proponents of allegory would use appeals to ultimate reality to justify their associations, while detractors dismiss it as being inherently subjective. See further discussion in David J. Fuller, "Fault Lines in Evangelical Hermeneutics: Divergent Accounts of Patristic and Reformation-Era Interpretive Approaches in Recent Works by Carter and Provan," *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 23 (2021–2022): 41–102 (especially 42–49, 56–59, 64, 73–76, 81–83, 85–92).

120 Stanley E. Porter, *Hermeneutics, Linguistics and the Bible: The Importance of Context*, T&T Clark Library of New Testament Greek 3 (London: T&T Clark, 2024), 119.

121 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 119.

122 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 120, citing Gillian Brown and George Yule, *Discourse Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

123 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 121.

124 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 122.

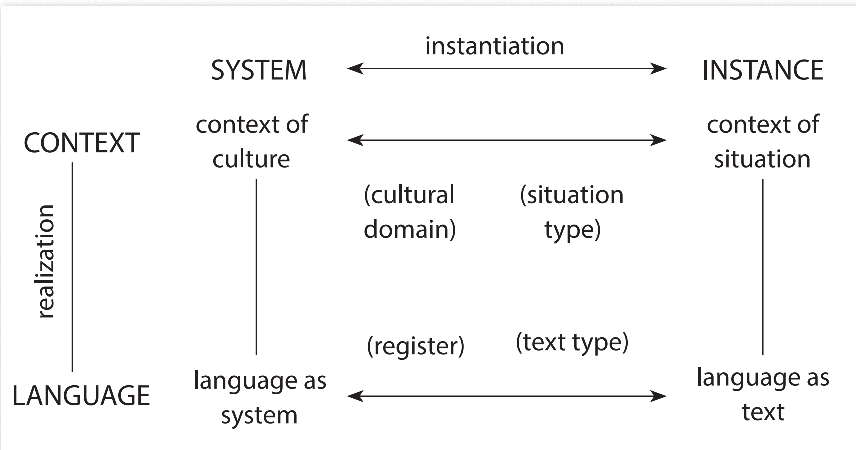
125 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 123.

126 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 124.

127 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 125. W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 19, follows this tripartite approach, but erroneously interprets Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (London: SPCK, 1989), 16, as stating that co-text and context of situation are related to "semantics" while the context of culture relates to "pragmatics." For further discussion of Tate see Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 97. For further discussion of how the traditional categories of "semantics" and "pragmatics" relate to Porter's SFL mode, see Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 78–79.

Leckie-Tarry, this knowledge can be divided into "ideational," "interpersonal," and "textual"[128] categories, in a manner similar to the field, tenor, and mode components of the context of situation. Such a definition crucially transforms the often-mysterious notion of cultural background into a "reservoir of meaningful data,"[129] in which the context of situation helps determine which elements from the broader culture are relevant for a specific text.

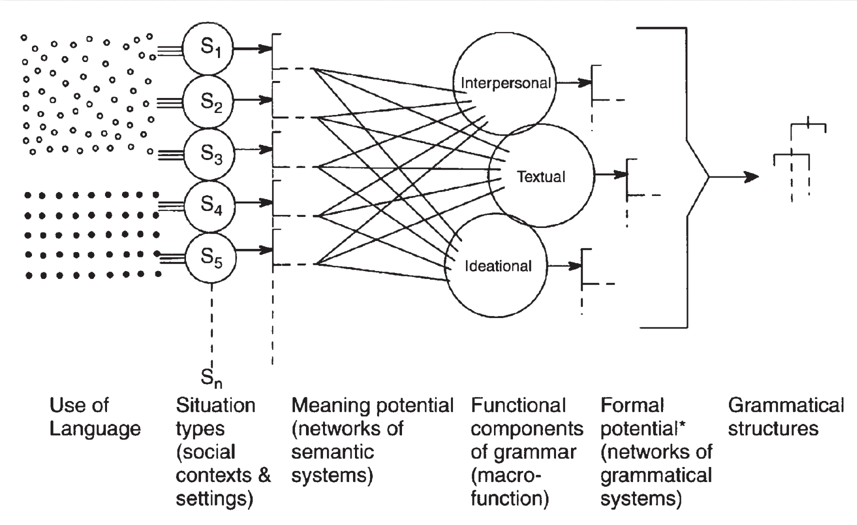
With this background in place, Porter sums up his proposed mechanism for using a text to reconstruct its original context based on the dialectical relationship between text and situation. To do this, he first turns to Hasan's diagram, which contains a horizontal axis of "instantiation" with the "system" and the "instance" on opposite ends. Meanwhile, the vertical axis is "realization," with "context" at the top and "language" at the bottom. Within the "system" column, this puts "context of culture" in the "context" row and "language as system" in the "language" row, while in the "instance" column, "context of situation" is in the "context" row and "language as text" is in the "language" row.[130]



This schema allows for an interpretive process in which one can use a given text to "reconstruct the set of meaningful choices of the language system, and the knowledge environments of which the context of situation is an instantiation."[131] The second illustration offered by Porter is a flowchart by Hasan (see below) that captures the process of language production, moving successively through "situation types" (defined as "social contexts … [and] settings"),[132] "meaning potential" (defined as

128 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 127–28.
129 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 129.
130 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 131.
131 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 132.
132 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 132.

"networks of semantic systems within the language"),[133] "functional components of grammar,"[134] "formal potential,"[135] and finally the "grammatical structures" (that is, the actual language used) of a given instance of communication.[136]



The takeaway for analysis here is that one can work backwards from a text and place it "within its own context of situation as an instantiation of the context of culture."[137]

Porter also provides a sample application of this model to John 1:1. Porter summarizes the linguistic data regarding patterns of cohesion, lexical metaphor, word order, and parallelism in John 1:1–18, and uses this data to draw conclusions about the field, tenor, and mode components in its context of situation.[138] From this information, he infers that the field must be "religious and philosophical."[139] The field in John 1:1–18 largely describes the nature and actions of the "Word" (λόγος) and how it functions alongside other entities. The tenor describes the

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133 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 133.

134 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 133. These "functional components" are Halliday's three kinds of meaning at the clause level, along with their grammatical realizations. These correspond to the field, tenor, and mode, in the context of situation described above.

135 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 133. This is "a series of networks of grammatical systems that represent the (semantic) potential of the language and are then realized in the actual grammatical structures chosen."

136 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 132.

137 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 133.

138 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 75. To review the definitions of these three terms, "The field is concerned with what the text is about, the tenor with relationships among the participants, and the mode with the role that language plays in constructing the text."

139 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 138.

social positioning of the Word as compared to God, John, and others. The mode reveals that this section is a "prologue" that demonstrates the connection between the Word and other key characters. Turning to the usual interpretive question of whether the Word here better aligns with the "Jewish … creative and prophetic word" or "Hellenistic (and possibly Jewish) … Greek philosophical thought,"[140] Porter concludes:

> The depiction of the independent character of the "Word" has many similarities to the personified word of Hellenistic Judaism that is seen to be at the beginning, in relationship with God as would be a son, in some ways functioning as a second or parallel God, related to light and grace, and the performer of the divine will.[141]

This analysis does not identify a "specific historical context," but rather uses the available linguistic data to infer "its situational context within a larger cultural context."[142] While this model still may leave some open questions—for instance, regarding the roles played by ideology,[143] metaphysics,[144] assumptions about social roles and hierarchy embedded in SFL itself,[145] or the challenges raised by multiple historical contexts being represented in a single text[146]—the fact remains that there is often much within a text itself that significantly clarifies its overall point without surrendering to outright anarchy or nihilism,[147] striking a fatal blow to Moore's chosen interpretive framework and consequent treatment of the text.

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140 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 139.

141 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 139.

142 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 140.

143 See discussion in David J. Fuller, "The Sublime Object(s) of Idolatry: Prophetic Aniconism and the Ideological Formation of the Subject," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 16.1 (2020): 117–39 (120), and also the discussion of how merely looking at empirical facts cannot expose an operative ideology in Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 2nd ed. (London/New York: Verso, 2008), 48–50.

144 For one example, see the Christian Platonism of Craig Carter, which follows certain patristic precedents by allowing the "literal" meaning of the biblical text to be controlled by a theological metaphysic (which he contrasts to the naturalism of the Enlightenment), as explained in Fuller, "Fault Lines," 42–49, with evaluation on pp. 49–55. See further discussion in the context of a critique of the canonically-grounded literalism of Provan in Fuller, "Fault Lines," 74–81.

145 See David J. Fuller, "The Limits of Linguistics: Subjectivity, Metaphysics, and the Interpretive Enterprise," in *Linguistics and the Bible: Retrospects and Prospects*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Christopher D. Land, and Francis G. H. Pang, McMaster New Testament Studies Series 9 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019), 112–42 (137–38).

146 See M. A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (Baltimore: University Park Press, 1978), 145–47. See also David J. Fuller, *A Discourse Analysis of Habakkuk*, SSN 72 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 26–27. See examples in Mark J. Boda and Mary L. Conway, *Judges*, ZECOT 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), 44–46.

147 See also the similar analyses performed on the Hebrew Bible in Colin M. Toffelmire, *A Discourse and Register Analysis of the Prophetic Book of Joel*, SSN 66 (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Colin M. Toffelmire, "*Sitz Im* What? Context and the Prophetic Book of Obadiah," in *The Book of the Twelve and the New Form Criticism*, ed. Mark J. Boda, Michael H. Floyd, and Colin M. Toffelmire, ANEM 10 (Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 221–44.

Parables: Overview

Moore's treatment of the parables is significant enough to deserve its own section. Following the blunt statement in Mark 4:11–12, he notes that the parables "[keep] those explicitly labeled outsiders outside."[148] While Mark 12:12 shows that the religious leaders had some level of awareness that Jesus was criticizing them, their reaction shows that they did not have the "understanding" described in 4:12–13, and, therefore, "In seeking to arrest him they have been taken captive by his theory."[149] Moore curiously declares a parable to be "a speech deeply scored with the traits of writing,"[150] nodding appreciatively to Miller's description of the prefix παρά, "signifying at once proximity and distance … the screen which is a permeable membrane connecting inside and outside."[151] Thus, parables not only keep outsiders out, they have a tendency to alienate insiders as well.[152] Moore even suggests a connection with the word παράβολος ("counterfeit," "false")[153] to suggest that a parable is "duplicitous."[154]

Parables: Discussion

While Moore accuses the parables of being hopelessly "abstruse,"[155] their contextual function is far more nuanced.[156] While Mark's citation of Isa 6:9–10 may at face value appear to confirm Moore's view—that the parables intentionally bar access to the message of the kingdom—this was certainly not the case in the original context of Isaiah, as Isa 6:13 eventually turns to hope ("'like a terebinth or an oak whose stump remains standing when it is felled.' [The holy seed is its stump.]"),[157] and this promise of eventual restoration is even more pronounced by Isa 9. Isaiah 6:9–10 can also be taken as an ironic reminder that the prophet's message will meet with widespread rejection rather than a command to deliberately alienate the audience.[158]

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148 Moore, *Mark*, 13. Of course, as documented in the above section, the distinction between insiders and outsiders is hardly airtight in Mark.

149 Moore, *Mark*, 14.

150 Moore, *Mark*, 21.

151 Cited in Moore, *Mark*, 21, from J. Hillis Miller, "The Critic as Host," in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1979), 219.

152 Moore, *Mark*, 22. A parable is thus "a pocket in Mark, one that turns (the) inside(r) out."

153 Moore, *Mark*, 23.

154 Moore, *Mark*, 23.

155 Moore, *Mark*, 13, 14. He later (22) states, "Possibly *parabolē* is the key to this pocket book, Jesus's address book, the book of his enigmatic addresses.… But does the key unlock the book or ensure that it stays shut? Could the author have used it to lock the book, and then thrown the key away—into the book? If so, Mark cannot be contained in the pocket we cut for it; Mark is what makes a hole in our pocket."

156 For conventional guidelines to interpreting the parables, see Craig L. Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); Richard Lischer, *Reading the Parables* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014).

157 Strauss, *Mark*, 186.

158 France, *Mark*, 201.

In the context of Mark 4:11–13, then, this reference serves to clarify that "the line between insider and outsider is not the line that separates Christianity and Judaism or church members from others, but is determined by one's response to Jesus."[159] Parables thus only serve to reveal the preexisting state of one's heart.[160] For those who do respond in faith, this is a reminder that the capacity for response is a gift of God, not grounds for human boasting.[161] As France states regarding the "secret of the kingdom of God" in 4:11, "it takes nothing less than divine revelation to enable people to grasp it."[162] This is evident in the characterization of the disciples, whose own poor understanding and shortcomings (4:10, 13) teach much about God's patience and the need for simple dependence upon him.[163]

In the larger context of Mark, future hope is visible in the increased understanding that would happen at the resurrection, meaning that this apparently dire warning is hardly "the last word."[164] Even within Mark 4 itself, vv. 21–22 speak of everything eventually coming into the light, leaving open the possibility that those who are outsiders can still become insiders.[165] The case of Mark 12:12 can be understood in a much more straightforward way—here Jesus was perfectly clear and the leaders simply choose to reject him.[166]

Finally, Moore's *linguistic* claims must be addressed as well, as he appears to have made a major discovery if the meaning of the word for "parable" is not what it seems to be. His citation of the παρά prefix as having the features of a "membrane" is not supported in recent grammatical resources. Porter defines the core meaning of παρά as "position 'alongside, parallel to or beside.'"[167] But more fundamentally, this appeal to a prefix to ascertain the meaning of a word is itself fallacious, as compound forms inevitably have usages unique to the whole that cannot be explained in terms of the component parts. Carson refers to this error

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159 Boring, *Mark*, 123.

160 Robbie Booth, "The New Testament's Use of Isaiah 6:9–10: A Call to Faith and Repentance" (MDiv thesis, Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary, 2015), 63.

161 Boring, *Mark*, 127–28.

162 France, *Mark*, 197.

163 Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, WBC 34A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 220–221. Similarly, Strauss, *Mark*, 186 comments, "Jesus is the only true model of discipleship in the gospel."

164 Boring, *Mark*, 128. Booth, "New Testament's Use," 63, additionally points to the description of the obtuseness of the disciples in Mark 8:17–18 as an example of something that even insiders could barely comprehend prior to the resurrection.

165 France, *Mark*, 201.

166 Boring, *Mark*, 332–33. See also Francis Watson, "The Social Function of Mark's Secrecy Theme," *JSNT* 24 (1985): 49–69 (54).

167 Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., Biblical Languages: Greek 2 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994), 166. See the virtually identical definition in David Mathewson and Elodie Ballantine Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar: Syntax for Students of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 104, and the similar definition separated by case in Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 378. Rodney A. Whitacre, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 5.255 closely follows Wallace.

as the "root fallacy,"[168] and its problematic nature is obvious if one considers a modern English example, such as trying to understand the word "butterfly" by breaking it down into "butter" and "fly."[169] This principle of lexical semantics likewise disproves Moore's attempt to associate "parables" with παράβολος.[170] Additionally, the thorough treatments of BDAG[171] and *TDNT*[172] make no room for such a connection.[173]

The Genre of Mark: Overview

Moore takes great care to justify his reading on the grounds that Mark is intentionally impressionistic and full of the kind of symbolic juxtapositions that might emerge in Freudian dream analysis, as opposed to the more straightforward biography or historical narrative that it is often treated as being. He frequently utilizes comparisons to (along with quotations from) James Joyce's legendarily impenetrable *magnum opus*, *Finnegans Wake*.[174] To flesh this out, he approvingly cites Berg's reading of Mark 5:25–34, which inserts the story of the healing of a woman who had bled for twelve years (v. 25) within the larger account of the healing of a twelve-year-old girl (v. 42). This connection with the number twelve leads Berg to conclude that Mark has "the qualities of a Freudian dream landscape, where linguistic logic rather than narrative logic causes things to happen."[175] Moore similarly points to Tolbert's identification of connections between the various Greek words beginning with κατά ("down") throughout Mark 15, in which "Reporting the splitting of the curtain from top to bottom (15:38) immediately after Jesus's death as the conclusion of this series of wordplays connects the tear with Jesus's cry [of desire to join his Father above] and further supports its symbolic role as an image of transportation from realm to realm."[176] For Moore, these support the

168 D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 28–33.

169 Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 30. See also Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 49–51; Benjamin J. Baxter, *"In the Original Text it Says": Word-Study Fallacies and How to Avoid Them* (Gonzalez, FL: Energion, 2012), 14–15.

170 See the similar example from Hebrew given in James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 103.

171 See entry in BDAG 759–60.

172 See TDNT 5:745–51 for discussion of usage in non-biblical and LXX Greek, where no such sense is evident. Likewise LEH s.v. provide glosses of "proverb … byword … poem, figurative discourse … taunt, mocking speech." Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, rev. ed. (Louvain: Peeters, 2009), 524–25 uses two categories, "mocking or hurting speech" and "proverbial saying."

173 See also James Diggle et al., eds., *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 1063, which likewise has no such sense in its six glosses.

174 Moore, *Mark*, 71.

175 Cited in Moore, *Mark*, 69, from Temma F. Berg, "Reading in/to Mark," *Semeia* 48 (1989): 187–206 (199–200).

176 Cited in Moore, *Mark*, 70, from Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979), 282.

conclusion that Mark is "more like a dream than a dissertation,"[177] and that it is similar to "unconscious discourses"[178] full of "concrete word-images."[179] Moore later explains that his analysis seeks to allow the potentialities of the images in Mark to come into bloom through the Joycean strategy of playing on the multiple potential meanings of single words,[180] and affording significant agency to language itself.[181]

The Genre of Mark: Discussion

While Moore expends many words claiming that Mark is a much different literary creation than it is usually believed to be, his main pieces of evidence (aside from his playful Joycean intertexts) are the number twelve connecting the bleeding woman to the young girl in Mark 5, and the recurrence of words beginning with κατά in Mark 15. Regarding the former, mainstream scholarship has found other ways to explain the significance of this shared number. The general consensus is that these two twelves should not be taken as having symbolic import.[182] Furthermore, plausible explanations exist for both occurrences of "twelve" (δώδεκα) in Mark 5. For the woman (v. 25), twelve years of suffering is a long time and makes it clear that she had a dire condition.[183] For the girl (v. 42), being twelve years old indicates that she is "ready to launch on a meaningful and fulfilled life."[184] The fact that two accounts featuring this same number are arranged together could point to their originally being transmitted orally and linked by this number.[185]

Regarding the case of the words beginning with κατά in Mark 15, I was unable to find a discussion of this claim elsewhere. However, the assumption that this shared prefix alone indicates shared meaning constitutes the root fallacy, as explained in the discussion of Moore's analysis of the parables above. Doubt is also cast on the relevance of this claim when considering the sheer number of words with this prefix. In the UBS[4] dictionary, I counted 116 words beginning with κατά alone, not counting the additional forms in which the final vowel of the prefix is contracted. Additionally, the presence of wordplay alone cannot be determinative for the genre of a work.

Although Moore does not explicitly frame his claims about the nature of Mark

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177 Moore, *Mark*, 71.
178 Moore, *Mark*, 72.
179 Moore, *Mark*, 72.
180 Moore, *Mark*, 82. Towards this end, Moore offers a short list of uncontroversial instances of wordplay in the Bible (83–84).
181 Moore, *Mark*, 83. In a footnote acknowledging some overlap between poststructuralism and precritical modes of interpretation, Moore mentions that his consequent constructions of Jesus have precedent in Gnosticism, but does not develop this further.
182 Collins, *Mark*, 286.
183 Stein, *Mark*, 267; Collins, *Mark*, 280.
184 Boring, *Mark*, 162. Similarly, see France, *Mark*, 240.
185 Stein, *Mark*, 275.

in terms of genre, it is still worthwhile comparing his conclusions with those of more conventional scholarship. Given that his outright textual evidence is quite thin, as documented above, the question remains whether it is possible to derive from the evidence of the text alone what kind of writing Mark is. Much recent discussion of the Gospels in general has centered around their possible similarities with "Greco-Roman biographies or Greek and Jewish 'historiography.'"[186] In the particular case of Mark, proposed options include a new genre altogether, Greek tragedy, biography, or historical narrative.[187] More recent linguistic approaches have critiqued previous approaches to the notion of genre in Gospel studies as lacking clarity and relying on problematic illustrations.[188] This has led to the use of functional linguistics to redefine genres based on their social functions[189] with quantifiable analytic criteria found in different linguistic features and their organization in a text.[190] Applications of methods derived from this framework include the work of Wishart, who looked for the social functions advanced within the four Gospels,[191] Pitts, who compared select linguistic features in Luke-Acts with those found in Greek histories and biographies,[192] and Brown, who similarly used specific linguistic features to compare Mark with historical and fictitious narratives from Second Temple Judaism.[193] Turning back to Moore, while debate continues regarding the precise genre of the Gospels and the degree of overlap they may share with preexisting Greek or Jewish genres, a comparative approach using

186 Blomberg, *Jesus*, 173. See the broader historical survey in Nathan L. Brown, "Mapping Mark: Quantitative Study of Clause Thematization as a Means of Illuminating the Gospel Genre" (PhD diss., McMaster Divinity College, 2020), 9–26.

187 Stein, *Mark*, 19–21. For a more detailed discussion, see Collins, *Mark*, 15–43, who surveys multiple options and concludes that Mark is best described as "an eschatological historical monograph" (18).

188 Zachary K. Dawson, "The Problem of Gospel Genres: Unmasking a Flawed Consensus and Providing a Fresh Way Forward with Systemic Functional Linguistics Genre Theory," *Biblical and Ancient Greek Linguistics* 8 (2019): 33–77 (51–52). Dawson argues that the widely adopted work of Burridge incoherently blends ideas from different literary theorists, and that the concepts he draws from are problematic as well. Similarly, Ryder A. Wishart, *Gospels or Biographies? The Gospels as Folk Literature*, Linguistic Biblical Studies 25 (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 88–89 argues that the concerns of genre studies are ultimately inadequate on their own, as they try to discern what kind of literature the Gospels are without sufficient room for the role of sociological factors and literary style.

189 Dawson, "Problem," 60–61.

190 Dawson, "Problem," 63.

191 Wishart, *Gospels*, 251. Wishart defines a "Gospel" as: "a folk literature collection about Jesus that does the following: it invites a polarized and galvanized response to an existing conflict by creating a complete account of Jesus's ministry and teaching that vilifies unsympathetic readers, warns and instructs sympathetic readers, and attempts to persuade its unsure readership."

192 Andrew W. Pitts, *History, Biography, and the Genre of Luke-Acts: An Exploration of Literary Divergence in Greek Narrative Discourse*, BibInt 177 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 173–74. Pitts concluded that Luke-Acts is closer to the Greek histories than the biographies based on his chosen criteria.

193 Brown, "Mapping Mark," 375–76. Brown argues that Mark is more closely aligned with the historical than the fictional (his terms being "referential" and "non-referential") narratives, although by a slim margin.

quantitative criteria such as those used in the studies referenced above would undoubtedly reveal that the use of language in Mark (or the other Gospels) is still hopelessly far removed from the avant-garde modernism of *Finnegans Wake*.[194]

Textual Criticism and the Ending of Mark: Overview

In a manner perhaps surprising of an archetypal "postmodern" critic, Moore is adamant that 16:8 is the authentic ending to Mark's Gospel. He appeals to a scholarly consensus on the short ending of Mark being original,[195] and revels in the way this brings the narrative to a shocking conclusion with the women in silent terror. In contrast to the other Gospels, which end with Jesus commanding proclamation, Mark lacks such an ending, which, for Moore, means that Mark provides no evidence of the possibility of oral witnesses leading to its composition.[196] Moore later suggests that the long ending of Mark "embodies … the desire to circumvent physical pain and death,"[197] as exemplified in the disciples' fleeing when Jesus was arrested (14:50).[198] The longer ending of 16:9–20 also exemplifies the "closure," "circumvention of contingent human response," and the "unambiguous presence of Jesus" that was "thwart[ed]" by the short ending in 16:8.[199]

Textual Criticism and the Ending of Mark: Discussion

Of course, much more needs to be said about the ending of Mark. While few believe that any of the extant longer endings are authentic,[200] much discussion exists regarding whether 16:8 was intended to be an ending, and if so, what its significance is. On the first point, Stein provides eight arguments for why the original ending, extending beyond 16:8, must have been lost.[201] For example, he points to Jesus's prediction of what would happen after the resurrection in 14:28, which would be unfulfilled if the book ended at 16:8.[202] Similar literary arguments are made by Evans.[203] France finds the viewpoint that Mark deliberately ended at

194 For a readable summary of the basic concept behind the *Wake*—a dreamworld in which history repeats itself in the tropes of the unconscious—see Anthony Burgess, *Re Joyce* (New York: Norton, 1965), 188–93. For an exposition of the basic themes present in the characters throughout the book, see Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake: Unlocking James Joyce's Masterwork* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2005), 4–13, especially the discussion of universal "polarities" on pp. 12–13.

195 Moore, *Mark*, 5.

196 Moore, *Mark*, 6–7. He compares this situation in which "Mark's ending undercuts its beginning" (7) with the Freudian death-drive.

197 Moore, *Mark*, 29.

198 Moore, *Mark*, 29 lists 15:50 in parentheses but this almost certainly was intended to mean 14:50 instead.

199 Moore, *Mark*, 29.

200 Evans, *Mark*, 545.

201 Stein, *Mark*, 734–36.

202 Stein, *Mark*, 736.

203 Evans, *Mark*, 539.

16:8 to be overly "modern"[204] in that an ancient audience could not conceivably have recognized the supposed literary effects that have been detected in it. But while there are notable voices (although they may be a minority) arguing that 16:8 was not intended to be the end of the book, it is also worth considering other interpretations of a possible end at 16:8.

In contrast to Moore's maximally skeptical interpretation of the implications of Mark ending with 16:8, Boring has worked out the literary implications of this scene in a different direction, arguing that it functions as an "address to the reader."[205] Faced with the women silent and fearful in 16:8, Boring states, "the readers stand at the brink of the incomplete narrative in which all have failed, and, with terrible restraint, the narrator breaks off the story and leaves the readers, who may have thought the story was about somebody else, with a decision to make.…"[206] Thus, rather than casting doubt on the coherence of the account, the ending in 16:8 can be taken as a challenge for the reader to consider how they will respond to the story.[207] The readers are encouraged to put themselves into the position of the women and consider their personal response. In other words, this abrupt ending is a literary device to force the audience out of a detached, distanced way of reading and toward personal commitment. Thus, there are more plausible ways to account for the significance of this literary feature than Moore's interpretation.

Understanding after the Resurrection in Luke: Overview

While a thorough overview of the five chapters Moore devotes to Luke is beyond the scope of the present study, it is appropriate to cover one of the most relevant and unique (as compared to the treatment of Mark) examples found in this section.

Moore makes the observation that, although the resurrected Christ provides spoken instruction on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:25–27), it is not until he breaks bread that the audience recognizes him (24:30–31, 35).[208] Moore then points out that in the appearance in Jerusalem the next day, although the narrator says that Jesus opens the audience's minds (24:45), there is no explicit affirmation that they comprehended his message, which he connects with the apparent failure for illumination to take place on the road to Emmaus when Jesus "opened" the Scriptures (24:32).[209] Moore concludes from this that in Luke, understanding is not dependent on the words of Jesus alone, but on their connection to previous

204 France, *Mark*, 671, 673.
205 Boring, *Mark*, 449.
206 Boring, *Mark*, 449. Ellipsis in original.
207 See Boring, *Mark*, 451–52 for a summary of other interpretations.
208 Moore, *Mark*, 96.
209 Moore, *Mark*, 100.

revelation (24:44–45).[210] Moore thus states, "Jesus opens his disciples' minds not to the self-sufficiency of his word but to its intertextuality,"[211] a point he bolsters by noting the key role played by the Hebrew Bible in the preaching at the end of Acts (Acts 28:23).

Moore similarly argues that it is actually Jesus's eating of the fish (Luke 24:42–43) that decisively inspires belief in the disciples, rather than the preaching, appealing also to the testimony of Acts 10:41 about those who ate and drank with the post-resurrection Jesus.[212] He punctuates the textual observations above with examples of secondary sources that draw the opposite conclusion, that is, that Jesus's words were the primary means of nurturing faith in the disciples. The implication drawn by Moore from these observations is that scholarship fixated on authorial intention is really a "fixation with voice and presence" that leads to a "search for an absent author"[213] and is ultimately a quest "to return the material text to an immaterial intentionality."[214] This "intentionality sought in the text is ghostly or ideal quantity,"[215] one that scholars fruitlessly seek to reconstruct from the polyvalent witness of the written text.

Understanding after the Resurrection in Luke: Discussion

Comparing Moore to conventional scholarship on these matters is a challenge, since their respective guiding questions are widely divergent. On the matter of Jesus being recognized in the breaking of bread, current approaches take a both-and approach, seeing the conversation and teaching working together to facilitate recognition.[216] Green notably connects this account to other places in Luke where illumination takes place during a meal.[217] Regarding Moore's argument that the "opening" of minds (Luke 24:32, 45) did not necessarily lead to comprehension, Marshall deduces that the disciples were only later able to understand the experience they had on the road to Emmaus.[218] Moore's apparent dichotomy between the words of Jesus and the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament is apparent when one considers that most scholars simply do not see a problem here,

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210 Moore, *Mark*, 100–101.
211 Moore, *Mark*, 101.
212 Moore, *Mark*, 101.
213 Moore, *Mark*, 102.
214 Moore, *Mark*, 103.
215 Moore, *Mark*, 103.
216 David E. Garland, *Luke*, ZECNT 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 956; John Nolland, *Luke 18:35—24:53*, WBC 35C (Dallas: Word, 1993), 1206; François Bovon, *Luke 3: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28—24:53*, Hermeneia, trans. James Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 375.
217 Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 849–50.
218 I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 899. For a similar argument, see Darrell L. Bock, *Luke. Volume 2: 9:51—24:53*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1920–21.

as the most conventional interpretation is that Jesus made it possible for his audience to understand what was being predicted in the Old Testament.[219] Moore's final textual point, that Jesus eating a fish was the real cause of the disciples' belief, rather than his teaching, is somewhat easier to bring into dialogue with current interpretive trends.[220] The general consensus is that eating the fish primarily served to validate that Jesus was truly physically present.[221] Green concludes that it is the "scriptural illumination" that ultimately serves to inspire belief, pointing to multiple places in the chapter where merely witnessing the resurrected Christ does not itself bring people to the correct response.[222] Nolland specifically argues against the eating being decisive on the grounds that (1) vv. 44–49 have similar occurrences of "scriptural exposition"[223] as do vv. 25–27, which suggests that it is the Old Testament exegesis that is ultimately key for overcoming unbelief; and (2) that the "great joy" of v. 52 builds on the "joy" of v. 41, indicating that Old Testament interpretation, along with other factors, inspires faith in a way that simple physical evidence cannot.[224]

As seen above, Moore's textual arguments swing rather wide of the mark and are mostly dependent on false dichotomies. However, this still leaves open the question of his application to the concept of authorial intention. Is the search for an authorial "voice" hopelessly doomed to failure? While a simplistic approach to authorial intention that seeks to dig into the psyche of the author would be vulnerable to Moore's critique, far more nuanced models of our ability to recover authorial meaning exist. Pertinent here is the discussion provided by Porter, who provides a critical evaluation of the canonical dismissal of authorial intent by Wimsatt and Beardsley,[225] and similarly identifies some shortcomings in the reactionary works of Hirsch and Juhl (although ultimately being sympathetic to the goals of the latter).[226] Shifting his attention to the field of linguistics, Porter notes that intention has always been a core part of how linguists have conceived of the nature of meaning.[227] However, in many cases this has been articulated using a problematic distinction between "sentence and utterance meaning,"[228] resulting in a situation where these types of meanings are hopelessly disconnected, and

219 Marshall, *Luke*, 905; Bock, *Luke*, 1937–38.
220 See Merrill G. Greene, "'A Ghost Does Not Have Flesh and Bones': An Apotropaic Reading of Luke 24:36–43," *Canadian-American Theological Review* 10.2 (2021): 1–19, for an important study on the significance of the fish from the perspective of its role in warding off demons in contemporary Jewish and Greek literature.
221 Garland, *Luke*, 966; Marshall, *Luke*, 903.
222 Green, *Luke*, 855.
223 Nolland, *Luke*, 1214.
224 Nolland, *Luke*, 1214–15.
225 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 52–58.
226 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 59–61.
227 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 61.
228 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 64.

the analysis only moves in a bottom-up direction. As a means of moving forward, Porter proposes two relevant points that insightfully reorient how interpreters should view authorial intention: "the psychology or consciousness of the author is ultimately inscrutable and finally irrelevant to interpretation and not necessary to have a useful theory of authorial intention,"[229] and "the text itself is the product of intention, and therefore in some definable way reflects the intention of the author as a linguistically embedded textual intention."[230] This nuanced understanding of intent helps interpreters focus on the evidence available rather than an elusive authorial psyche, and, at the same time, dismantles Moore's position that intentionality is entirely unavailable.

General Discussion

The analysis of the present study looks at five different areas of *MLPP* that can be placed in conversation with mainstream scholarship. In the vast majority of cases, it is documented that Moore neglects to consider more plausible interpretations and narrowly fixates on ways of reading that support his chosen allegorical application. When considering these allegorical applications on their own merits, the plausibility of their level of skepticism regarding the possibility of meaning to be effectively transmitted through language is significantly diminished when these positions are placed in conversation with recent developments in theoretical linguistics regarding mechanisms for using texts to reconstruct their social contexts, principles of lexical semantics, the nature of and criteria for discerning literary genres, and definitions of authorial intention. As a result, in none of these test cases did Moore's poststructuralist approach succeed in generating textual observations that could challenge traditional interpretations on their own merits.[231]

Conclusion

Is it, then, appropriate to say that the emperor simply has no clothes? That judgment ultimately lies in the eye of the beholder. Indeed, readers fervently committed to the underlying (anti?)metaphysical stance of deconstructionism would likely dismiss most of the above analysis as missing the point. But the above exercise is nonetheless a crucial task, that of clarifying exactly what is being claimed in a landmark work of biblical criticism and placing such claims in their broader

229 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 65.
230 Porter, *Hermeneutics*, 65.
231 Although the present study sought to chart a fresh course away from the usual critiques of the monochromatic conclusions about meaning and language that are typical of much deconstructionist criticism, it is hard to avoid agreeing with Vickery, review of *Mark and Luke in Poststructuralist Perspectives* (by Moore), 346, as he states, "In each case, if the initial claim for cogency lies in the nature of language and the text, then the same assertions can be made in connection with any language and any text and thereby the significance of the particular instance is diminished."

context in the field of biblical studies. Returning to the trends in reception noted above, this need for careful review of what exactly is being advocated in oft-referenced works of scholarship, and the consideration of these works in their respective intellectual contexts, remains more pressing than ever, and thus should be a priority for all practitioners of academic biblical studies.[232]

232 For example, see the detailed studies encompassing biography, intellectual context, methodology, and interpretive examples in the Pillars in Biblical Interpretation series: Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, eds., *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 1: Prevailing Methods Before 1980*, McMaster Biblical Studies Series 2 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016); Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, eds., *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 2: Prevailing Methods After 1980*, McMaster Biblical Studies Series 2 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016); Stanley E. Porter and Zachary K. Dawson, eds., *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 3: Further Essays on Prevailing Methods*, McMaster Biblical Studies Series 6 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021); Stanley E. Porter and Zachary K. Dawson, eds., *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation, Volume 4*, McMaster Biblical Studies Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, forthcoming).

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

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Abstract

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, law enforcement, and churches. To date, no Canadian studies have examined the applicability of Collins's framework to the church leadership context. The purpose of this paper is to examine how Collins's 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.

Introduction: The Need for Healthy Church Leadership

It is no secret that the evil that exists around us also presides within us. Church leadership is not immune. In the last few decades, the church leadership stories that have been unearthed and publicized featuring immorality, sexism, financial greed, and more are shameful and frightening. In a conversation about evil and darkness, it is vital that the church looks inward and considers her own realities. As we become familiar with the lack of virtue that surrounds us and permeates us, it is helpful to look at practical models of goodness. When it comes to church leadership in Canada, what does goodness look like? What are some of the principles of church leadership that intentionally resist the evil that we are susceptible to and promote and facilitate goodness?

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, law enforcement, and churches.[1] To date, no Canadian studies have examined the applicability of Collins's framework to the church leadership context. Then, Collins's leadership framework, alongside the research findings, will 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.

Brief Framework of Greatness Study (2024)

As gleaned from a 2024 research study conducted at the Canadian Institute for Empirical Church Research (Wycliffe College—University of Toronto), markers of healthy church leadership were identified within Canadian congregations.[2] This qualitative research study consisted of 31 semi-structured interviews with pastoral leaders across Canada, across community sizes, and across Christian faith traditions to learn what it means to be a "great" or growing church in Canada.

The framework for this project comes from the bestseller, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... And Others Don't*, by Jim Collins (2001). He offers insights on why some companies thrive while others do not. Later in a second book, Collins (2005) notes that, while the principles of "greatness" are

1 Jim Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors: Why Business Thinking is Not the Answer* (Jim Collins, 2005), 3.

2 This study was part of a larger research project called "The Divine Pulse Project: Exploring Life, Death, and the Pursuit of 'Greatness' in Contemporary Canadian Churches." Three key focus areas were church decline, new immigrant congregations, and church growth or "greatness."

different for businesses compared to those in the social sector, many leaders who have embraced the good-to-great principles have found them to highly resonate in their social sector contexts, albeit with slight adaptations to each of the principles.

Collins highlights five themes to be considered when applying the framework to the social sectors.

1. Defining "Great"—Calibrating success without business metrics.
2. Level 5 Leadership—Getting things done within a diffuse power structure.
3. First Who—Getting the right people on the bus within social sector constraints.
4. The Hedgehog Concept—Rethinking the economic engine without a profit motive.
5. Turning the Flywheel—Building momentum by building the brand.

The focus for this paper will be primarily on the second theme, in which Collins describes the characteristics of a "great" leader, referred to as Level 5 Leadership. Collins realizes that leadership is different in the social sector, as a leader cannot simply demand or threaten compliance with the mission of the organization. Neither can prestigious promotions nor financial rewards be generally used within the social sector, particularly the church setting. Instead, he argues that Level 5 leaders must master legislative leadership skills, rather than executive skills. Legislative leadership "relies more upon persuasion, political currency and shared interests."[3] It is more than merely being well-liked or easy to get along with, as consensus building and listening are key skills. Of course, both types of leadership skills—executive and legislative—are needed, and Level 5 leadership exhibits a blend of these skills. A Level 5 leader is "ambitious first and foremost for the cause, the movement, the mission, the work—not themselves" and they have the will to make sure what needs to happen happens.[4] Level 5 leadership, according to Collins, is robust with humility, diplomacy, communication skills, and intentionality.

To investigate this theme, research participants were invited to respond to interview questions like the following:

- What do you love about your job? Your church?
- What are you most proud of?
- How do you think people in your congregation/community would describe you as a leader?
- In terms of living out the vision of the church, how are those decisions made?

3 Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors,* 11.
4 Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, 11.

Based on Collins's framework, Level 5 leadership characterizes growing organizations, like churches. Therefore, how do Collins's principles of "great" leadership align with "great" churches? What are these principles that we can recognize and intentionally seek as pastoral leaders in Canada? If "greatness" is a matter of conscious choice and intention, as Collins argues, how can we help direct church leadership towards goodness?

Markers of Healthy Church Leadership

Throughout the research study, three markers of church leadership emerged from pastoral and lay leaders. The interview questions were designed to discover how they thought people might describe them as leaders or how they have heard others describe what they appreciate about them as leaders. First, "great" leadership was characterized by an obvious love for the congregation and a high priority on relationships. These leaders were often specifically called to their particular congregation. Their love was embodied through presence, which was recognized and appreciated by their congregants. Second, a "great" leader could be described as someone who is educated and direct but understandable and approachable. "Great" leaders were able and willing to have difficult conversations and approach contentious issues. Finally, the process of decision-making revealed a humble and collaborative leader.

Love and Presence

Again and again, pastoral leaders expressed their appreciation for the relationships they experience within the church and the love they feel for their congregations. When asked what they enjoy about the job, the responses primarily centered around these relationships. In fact, a couple of pastoral leaders identified their people as the greatest asset of the church. From a church in British Columbia, Sophia said this: "I love our community. I love the people. The greatest resource we have is this collection of people that have found their way to our church. They are people who are wise, deep, committed, spacious, open." When I asked Pierre what he liked about his church in Quebec, his response was "All the people particularly." This was persistently echoed by pastoral leaders. The relationships they experienced within the congregational setting were often the source of job satisfaction. When asked if she loves her congregation in Ontario, Vera responded:

> I do. The hymn — "Here I am, Lord" — at the end of the chorus talks about how I will hold your people in my heart. That is how I feel about the congregation. Or when I'm coming to a new congregation. I don't know the congregants, or my congregation could necessarily

> understand what that is. That's how I feel. Some of them are really hard to take sometimes. But I don't kick them out.[5]

Ted said that the "biggest blessing" of being a pastoral leader is "to be able to love" the people he works with and serves on the prairies. He even said that he told them he loves them, admitting that "in some cultures they say—I appreciate you or this is what I like. I can't always easily say I love you. So I guess that's another huge thing for me."

Pastoral and lay leaders who felt a distinct calling to their churches described it as "God's grip on my heart for this community," a feeling of finding home, a stirring in their heart, or like "something niggling" and then "everything clicked." Often it was a persistent feeling or stirring that would not go away or they could not ignore. Other leaders described it as "God's will" and "this is where God wanted us." One leader said, "I felt directed by God, I felt a real, you know, I don't even know how to describe it. Probably the greatest burden that I've ever experienced in my life." The sense of calling is often described as an intimate experience with God, in which God directs and speaks in an uncommon way. In some cases, there were extraordinary stories of calling to a particular town or city. A leader said it was not just a general call to ministry, but it was ministry to a particular town in southern Ontario. Another leader had the strange experience of his son asking him one morning over breakfast if they were moving to a particular city—not knowing that his father was considering a position there. This was a little bewildering for the father, but it also helped confirm that perhaps this was the place where God was calling him. Another leader felt "very, very drawn to the core values" and that the church "won my heart." Another pastor prayed for years about doing ministry in a particular town. Both she and her husband wondered how that would ever work. To their surprise, it all came together, and they are engaged in pastoral ministry in the town that had been on their hearts for years. The origin of the calling and the ability to live out the calling are both very much connected with an intimate experience of God. The divine sense of calling that pastoral leaders experienced seems to lay the foundation for and assist with building a loving relationship with the church.

The love for their congregations and deep sense of calling, however, does not obfuscate an awareness of the potential financial and career stability challenges. Antoine from Lavender Lane Church recognized the Lord's calling to ministry but also acknowledged that better compensation could be found in other employment. He said, "I know, for example, that my wife's salary is almost double than

5 As qualitative outputs, these quotations from research participants are unedited verbatim responses. Also note that pseudonyms for pastoral leaders and churches have been used for confidentiality purposes.

my salary. I will receive a better salary if I work somewhere else." Isaiah from House of God Church was also realistic about the financial challenges associated with ministry. He referred to the stability his former career held and the assurance it gave for the future. Now, being in full-time ministry, he said, "I don't know what I'm getting into for the next 25 years. For a young person like myself, with a young family with two kids—that's a hard thing." And yet, the call to ministry and the desire to love and serve their congregations persist.

A tangible expression of love for the congregation and staff was observed through the practice of presence, both in the physical and relational sense. Living life with and among the congregation was something that congregants communicated as important to their pastoral leaders. Mark indicated that, as he began work at Stonehouse Church, it was made clear to him that people wanted their pastor to live in the same town. He desired the same thing, saying "I just didn't understand how I could be a pastor without really brushing shoulders with people in daily life. That was what they wanted, and that was very much what I wanted as well." Other pastoral leaders also spoke about being physically available Sunday mornings and throughout the week for face-to-face interactions, phone calls, and conversation. While physical presence is highly valued, another form of presence is also referred to that indicates relational availability.

This relational way of presence is described as being easy to talk to, interested in people, and offering care. Presence seems to be marked by a quiet faithfulness, rather than a large personality or charisma. Stanley from Harbour Passage Church described it as "a steady presence" and likened it to "being more of a shepherd than this rah-rah leader." For instance, Sophia from Wellspring Church said, "I have heard people describe me as spacious. As somebody who is present to people and makes space for them to be seen." Garth from Big Sky Church also remarked that people appreciated him because they know that "he isn't just doing his job but loves us and cares about us." Loving and caring people require a sort of proximity that is inherent to the practice of presence. Even in a church that has a weekly attendance of over 1,000 congregants, Lane from Elderberry Church commits himself to being "very presence driven." He said, "I try to be very present with people, relational … even in a church our size, I'm in the lobby every Sunday interacting with people, meeting people, praying for people." Similarly, at Main Street Church, Mike said that the "green room" is a "nonsense concept," explaining that pastors cannot "just go on stage and do their thing and then disappear." He said this:

> I still go before the service. I greet all the people that I see. I talk to them at the door. I'm praying for people. I'm keeping track of what's going on in their life. I'm talking to them. No matter how big this

> church becomes, they have personal access to me. They can make appointments and come and see me personally, and I'm happy to do that. Yes, the accessibility.

Lay leader Maria described this posture of presence as "this openness to truth and holding on to each other," indicating that even in times of disagreement or "in the midst of super hard conversations," they were learning how to be present with one another in the presence of Christ.

Regardless of the size of church or denomination, pastoral leaders being present in a generous and genuine manner was a prominent theme that pastoral leaders identified as being important to their congregants. Relational presence is closely related to physical presence, as the proximity that physical presence requires seems to allow for relational presence and opens the door to increased love and care. The pastoral leaders demonstrate a desire and a willingness to draw close to those in their congregations.

Educated and Direct (But Understandable and Approachable)

A second major theme that emerged from the data is an appreciation for both academic learning and accessible communication. Though these two competencies are often at odds with one another, pastoral leaders were able to translate their theological academic learning into accessible language for their congregants. Even in those traditions where further education is not integral to pastoral leadership, there was an appreciation for biblical knowledge and "knowing the Word." It was not only "being educated" that was valued, but it also meant having the necessary skills to speak in such a way that people in the pew could comprehend and find meaningful. In a Mennonite Brethren church, the pastor said that people in his congregation would recognize his education credentials but would also say that he "speaks in language that I can understand," that "he doesn't use technical language." The congregation appreciated that he "makes things very, very relatable and understandable when we look at Scripture and with contemporary issues," with the goal of learning to live the faith they share. He was most appreciative of this affirmation from a congregant: "When you preach, your voice doesn't change." To the pastor, it felt like a compliment and was very meaningful. When I asked him what it meant to him, he replied, "Nice to hear back because they need to be able to hear me as a fellow human speaking to them as fellow humans, not something from on high."

Meanwhile, in a Baptist church, a lay leader described the pastor by saying that he is "a man of incredible academic intelligence and has the creds to go with it but manages to communicate it in such a way that people get it." There was an appreciation for "deep" sermons that are also understandable and relatable, as illustrated by the pastor's story:

> I don't say this publicly very often, but there's a young man in our church who I've known since he was like a teenager. He has fetal alcohol syndrome, and his parents were telling me that he comes whenever I preach. And he can follow and track it. And he can say back the main points to the parents after. And I told them I've had a few accolades in my life, but that's way up there—it's connecting with this precious young guy. You know, who works at Burger King and lives in assisted living.

The pastor confessed that this is one of the most important affirmations that he has received— that a young man with learning difficulties can understand and relate to his sermons.

There is a similar appreciation for academic learning in the Lutheran and Anglican traditions. A lay leader promptly answered the question of what she thinks the congregation appreciates about the pastor. She says, "I know what they like about him. Number one—the academic aspect of his knowledge. They really respect his education, time, thought, and application of that to his sermons. Really stimulating sermons. Really thought provoking and engaging." This is the same pastor who places a high value on living side by side with his congregants and being involved in the community. Notice that the pastoral leaders are minimizing the distance between themselves and their congregations through their communication skills and approach. It is important for them to be *with* their congregation as they worship and learn together.

Along with being educated and accessible, pastoral leaders recognized appreciation from their congregation for being approachable but also direct or straightforward. Although these two attributes are held in tension, pastoral leaders are able to present as both. For example, Andrew from Trinity Church said that he wants "to be approachable so that people can talk with [him]" and that they would know that he is willing to talk with them. Ron, a lay leader at Olive Lane Church, explained that congregants like their pastoral leader because "she's so genuine" and "there's none of that sort of fake minister sort of thing." Sylvia, the same pastoral leader, said that she is "not a titles person;" instead, she would like people to know: "I genuinely care about them."

Although "approachable" and "easy to talk to" may be descriptions that may incline a person to shy away from difficult conversations, this approachability seems to be combined with a kind but fearless directness. Antonio said, "I've always been very approachable. But people have said that I can be quite straightforward at times also. And they appreciated that." Lane echoed a similar sentiment, saying that he is "bold" and not afraid to address issues in the day from a biblical framework and perspective. In my preaching, I'm not afraid to address hot topic issues," going on to mention some of the controversial issues surrounding politics and gender that he has included in his sermons. Jill said that people want to see that "we're willing to get our hands dirty. Like we're not sitting and asking everybody else to do the thing." Then she went on to say co-pastor Steve particularly is

> quick to say—nope, this person is upset, but we're not letting them just be upset. I'm going to their house and we're going to have a conversation. We're going to have a meeting about this. We're going to talk about this. We're going to make sure that the board, our pastor's council, is aware and on side and just really not letting things fester.

Jill expressed the desire to bridge any gaps that may be perceived between the pastors and congregation and wanted to make it known that they were working alongside the congregation, rather than dictating what ought to be done. Co-pastor Steve demonstrated the ability to have uncomfortable conversations, while simultaneously communicating solidarity and love for the congregation. There is a proximity that the pastoral leaders practice that generates a sense of teamwork and affability, but that same proximity also seems to give permission for pastoral leaders to speak plainly and directly into people's lives.

"Confront the Brutal Facts"

One of Jim Collins's markers of a "great" leader is the willingness to "confront the brutal facts," referring to Admiral Jim Stockdale who was captured during the Vietnam War. Stockdale was imprisoned and tortured for 8 years, while never losing faith that he would eventually be free. However, he noticed that the men who did not make it out were the optimists who died of a broken heart, believing that they would be free by Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter, and then being disappointed. Stockdale said, "you must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."[6] Stockdale would say—"we're not getting out by Christmas; deal with it!"[7]

Some leaders were able to articulate their specific challenges and describe how they are addressing those challenges. For example, Ethan honestly acknowledged that a missional focus is lacking at his church: "I think we haven't created the presence in our community where people, if the question often is that if the church wasn't there, would people miss you? And I would honestly say, I don't think they would miss us. I don't think so." He went on to say, "I think we can do

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6 Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't.* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 85.
7 Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies*, 85.

better" and then listed several initiatives that they have undertaken to address this issue. Sonja noted the "real sense of pessimism and loss after COVID" and the fact that people were just not returning to church as part of the "big resignation." Her response was to celebrate the "little wins" and to fan the flames of the things that were going well. She said that this turned the tide of hopelessness as the church started to gain traction again. Recognizing the negative historic reputation of his church is the challenge that Seth is facing, and he is countering it with regular, faithful involvement at the local school. These leaders not only recognized the difficulty they were encountering (which requires an intimate knowledge of their church story, the life situations of their congregants, and their community), but they were able to respond with appropriate corrective action.

Decision-Making: Humble & Collaborative

Level 5 leadership is explicitly displayed through decision-making. Asking how decisions are made, who makes the decisions, and paying attention to the postures held surrounding decision-making reveal how pastoral leaders were or were not humble and collaborative, which are key characteristics of Level 5 leaders.

As lead pastor of Caragana Street Church, Ben did not insist on unilateral decisions. Instead, he referenced his wife, who sometimes accuses him of asking too many people for help or for directions. He said, "Well, why not? If I don't know the way, why wouldn't I ask someone who knows the way?" He saw no shame in asking for help and listed a number of people he has gone to for help over the years—other pastors, his superintendent, counselors, lawyers, etc. Referring to her congregation, Trish, pastor of Cinnamon Spring Church, said that they "recognise that the minister isn't the boss" and that working collaboratively is what she prefers. Jim from Riverside Church acknowledged that this sort of leadership is not always easy because as a leader, he wants to be liked, and he wants them to act and think in certain ways. It is a struggle, but, in his words, the ideal heart posture of a church leader is "Sorry, Lord. It's not about me. Right. Let me make this about you." Pastoral leaders often defer and submit to an overarching divine leadership that recognizes God as their higher authority.

A couple of pastors noted that it was important to establish this understanding of leadership and authority at the beginning. When Brian first arrived at Hilltop Church, congregants started to tell him that he needed to stop coming out to everything and encouraged him to spend more time at home with his family. His response was "but I never wanted anybody to think that I was not willing to wash the dishes, you know, or anything like that." He intentionally wanted to communicate that he does not wield positional authority but wanted to establish relational authority. Antoine also said that when he came to Lavender Lane Church, he did not arrive and want to change everything, which would have indicated that "everything you did in the past is wrong." Instead, he adapted first and took a learning posture because, most importantly, people need to be cared for. Trust needed to be established first and occurs when people know that their pastor is somebody who will "help them and guide them in the Lord" and that "the Lord will provide," as he put it.

Mack, an elder at Sugar Maple Church, commented that this was the thing that convinced them to hire their new pastor, Johnny. He sums up Level 5 leadership nicely:

> One thing that really came across to us was a humility. It wasn't always there with all the candidates because I was on the search committee there as well. There's a real humility there, which was something that we valued. We weren't necessarily looking for someone that was going to come in and tell us a hundred percent how to do everything. It's my way or the highway. We were first really looking for someone that had a more shepherding mindset as opposed to a leader mindset. A shepherd says—come on with me. A leader says—hey, get in line behind me. And so that was something that our church was looking for.

A pastoral leader's approach to decision-making often reveals what sort of leader they are and what they value. From the interviews, it was noted that pastoral leaders and lay leaders appreciated collaborative decision-making, which depends upon mutual respect. Humility and good interpersonal skills are required to navigate these situations. Although this way of decision-making is somewhat more cumbersome, it seems to produce increased trust and a healthy relationship between pastoral leaders, lay leaders, and congregants.

Summary of Research Findings

Referring back to the research question, what do church leaders and lay leaders believe about their leadership role? Quite simply, they believe that God often calls them to particular congregations in order to serve and love that group of people and that community. At their best, humility and collaboration mark their decision-making specifically and leadership in general. They are leaders who are present, understand deep spiritual truths but can communicate them in an accessible manner, and are both approachable and direct. They are not afraid of the hard facts and can face uncomfortable or unflattering truths and then respond appropriately. "Great" church leaders place a high importance on relationships and exhibit a deep love for their congregations.

Collins notes that, while we often look to the business world for models of leadership skills, he suspects that we are more likely to "find more true leadership in the social sectors than the business sectors."[8] Church leadership is not so much about the exercise of power as people in church settings have the freedom not to follow. As Collins says, "perhaps tomorrow's great business leaders will come from the social sectors, not the other way around."[9] This means that Canadian pastoral leaders have leadership expertise that could benefit other leaders in various settings, including the business sector.

Theological Conversation with Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer

The research findings reveal leadership principles that can be considered theologically. *A Church Called Tov* and *Pivot* are two books born out of the unfortunate events in the late 2010s at Willow Creek Church in Chicago involving pastor Bill Hybels.[10] Theologians Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer responded to these events with a constructive love for the church. Their critique of unhealthy leadership helps to identify toxicity, along with offering practical instruction as to the nurturing of a thriving and robust church culture that honours God and each other. They advocate for a *tov* culture, which is characterized by empathy, grace, a people-first culture, truth, justice, service, and Christlikeness.[11] A *tov* culture actively resists evil. According to McKnight and Barringer, a good leader has authority due to their character and leadership or relational abilities. They are approachable. They show appreciation for those around them. People trust them. Their power is not derived from fear but born out of respect and admiration. As a result, "people thrive when they feel appreciated by their supervisors and colleagues."[12] There is a sense of working together towards a common goal, not for the approval of a leader. People are not afraid to talk to a good leader. If a culture of fear develops within a church, rather than a culture of trust, leaders can wield their authority effectively and achieve desired results for a while.[13] As McKnight and Barringer say, "power and fear are close companions," and if combined with narcissism, "a toxic culture is sure to form."[14] An expert on dysfunctional churches and pastors, Ronald Enroth argues that "authoritarian leaders are ecclesiastical loners" and that "they are fiercely independent and refuse to be part of a structure of accountability.

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8 Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors,* 12.
9 Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, 13.
10 In 2018, Bill Hybels, the founder of Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, was accused of sexual assault and misconduct.
11 *Tov* is a Hebrew word for "good" or "goodness." God is *tov* or goodness and *tov* is God's design for all creation, including our moral virtues. For a further exploration of *tov*, see McKnight and Barringer, *A Church Called Tov* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2020), 83–97.
12 McKnight and Barringer, *Pivot* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2023), 69.
13 McKnight and Barringer explore the false narratives that arise in a toxic culture, such as discrediting the critics, demonizing the critics, spinning the story, gaslighting the critics, making the perpetrator the victim, silencing the truth, suppressing the truth, and issuing a fake apology. McKnight and Barringer, *A Church Called Tov*, 55–80.
14 McKnight and Barringer, *A Church Called Tov*, 31.

Rather than moving towards connection, they seek to separate themselves. To put it crudely, they operate a one-man (or one-woman) spiritual show."[15] He goes on to add that these leaders often cultivate a "faithful inner circle of clones that implicitly accepts all that the leader sets forth," creating distance from the lay leaders and congregation.[16] This often works for a while. Eventually, however, the abuse of power destroys the faith community and causes serious harm to many of its members.

Essentially, according to McKnight and Barringer, good leadership does not rely upon fear or power. This echoes Collins's principle of Level 5 leadership that depends upon legislative skills, rather than executive skills. Rather than demanding, Level 5 leaders know how to initiate action, generate conversation, listen well, and adjust as needed. They know how to handle differences of opinion in a way that does not alienate people or create conflict. Level 5 leaders know how to move forward in a way that does not leave people left out, unheard, or afraid. Instead, others want to come along because there is mutual respect and appreciation.

McKnight and Barringer also note that in a toxic culture, leaders are very much concerned with their own success. A toxic leader "makes himself the center of attention," and the ministry becomes a way to garner "praise for himself—his vision, his ministry, his success, his glory."[17] In contrast, in a *tov* church, leaders are more interested in empowering others in order to pursue God's mission. McKnight and Barringer acknowledge that it is not always initially apparent in a toxic church culture, but if you "scratch beneath the surface, you'll find that people don't matter, the institution matters; power and fear dominate the culture; the only narratives told are those that prop up the pastor's vision and success; and loyalty is the supreme virtue."[18] However, Collins's description of a Level 5 leader, as quoted earlier, that a Level 5 leader is "ambitious first and foremost for the cause, the movement, the mission, the work—not themselves" and they have the will to make sure what needs to happen happens.[19] It is no coincident that the "great" pastors in the research study were able to articulate the mission of their church and to contextualize God's mission for their own community. The focus was clearly oriented towards God. There was a genuine love for their congregants and often for their communities. There was sometimes confession about the things that they were not doing well and there was an honesty about the challenges they were facing. Their own glory or success was not central.

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15 Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 202–203.
16 Enroth, *Churches That Abuse*, 202–203.
17 McKnight and Barringer, *A Church Called Tov*, 175.
18 McKnight and Barringer, *A Church Called Tov*, 176.
19 Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, 11.

Conclusion: The Practice of Presence as an Embodiment of Goodness

The practice of presence for leaders is a thread that runs throughout the research study. It is implicitly embedded within Collins's framework of "greatness," and is supported by McKnight and Barringer's urgings of a *tov* church culture. In terms of pastoral leadership, the practice of presence can be understood as an embodiment of goodness. It is a way of being that God inhabits and demonstrates for us throughout Scripture. In the early chapters of Genesis, evil enters the world and separation is the natural result. Instead of a deep sense of togetherness and unity, Adam and Eve experience aloneness and discord. Rather than friendship with God in the garden, they experience separation in the wilderness. In the New Testament, the Incarnation is the outrageous act of God coming near. God is purposefully breaking the separation between the divine and human as God becomes one of us. While evil separates and disconnects, God, as the ultimate picture of goodness, comes close and is present with us. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, we see Jesus *with* humanity. In essence, the Incarnation is about the practice of presence in the wildest way possible. The newly established church draws people together into close, loving community and sends them out to serve others.

The Dutch theologian Henri Nouwen names this the ministry of presence. While discerning his possible vocation in Nicaragua, he discovered the power of simply being with people. He says the desire to walk with people, greet people, be in their homes, sit on their doorsteps, and to be known as someone who wants to live with them grows. He counts it a privilege "to practice this simple ministry of presence."[20] The ministry of presence, according to Nouwen, is an embodiment of the love of God. Nouwen says that

> ministry happens when you participate in the mystery of being with. The whole incarnation, God-with-us, Emmanuel, is first of all being with people.… Jesus is first of all God-with-us.… The mystery is that he shared our lives.[21]

Throughout the research interviews, "great" *tov* pastoral leaders seek proximity to others and desire the same for their congregants. Welcome and hospitality are valued highly. Pastoral leaders find ways to bridge gaps between themselves and their congregants, increasing connection and understanding, as compared to power-hungry and narcissistic leaders who seek to distance themselves from others and limit or distort communication. Through their actions and their communication, with a posture of humility, they are fostering goodness by the ministry of presence.

20 Henri Nouwen, *Gracias: A Latin American Journal* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983).
21 Henri Nouwen, *Returning to God* (St. Louis, All Saints Press, 2014), 21–22.

There Is Hope

Upon completion of the research project, there is a double reason for hope. First, the pastoral leaders from the research study are revealed to be people who are devoted to God, obedient to their callings, and committed to loving their congregations. They are missionally minded and care for their communities. The conversations that occurred sparked hope as the study discovered godly and passionate pastoral leaders across Canada and across Christian faith traditions. Second, in order for the Canadian church to grow in both numbers and goodness, there needs to be a path to follow. Collins's principles, as affirmed by the research project and McKnight and Barringer, offer a picture of leadership defined by specific approaches and postures. A practical way forward is also hopeful because there is a road map of sorts with distinct leadership principles to emulate. Something can be done. *Tov* or goodness can characterize Canadian pastoral leadership and vitalize churches across our country. There is hope.

Harmonizing with the Spirit: Rethinking Prophetic Ecstasy in 1–2 Samuel

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Abstract

This article challenges the dominant scholarly interpretation of prophesying in 1–2 Samuel as ecstatic madness or uncontrolled raving. Since Hölscher (1914), commentators have characterized prophesying in the Saulide narratives as frenzied, orgiastic behavior. This study employs narrative-rhetorical analysis to demonstrate that prophesying in 1–2 Samuel should instead be understood as musically attuned activity empowered by the Spirit of Yahweh.

The consistent association of musical instruments with prophesying (1 Sam 10:5) distinguishes Israelite prophecy from ancient Near Eastern parallels and situates prophetic activity within structured cultic performance rather than chaotic trance. Close reading of Saul's disrobing at Naioth (19:24) reveals prophetic submission rather than madness, paralleling Isaiah 20:2–3. David's explicitly musical and Spirit-empowered "last words" (2 Sam 23:1–7) function as a hermeneutical key for interpreting earlier unlyricized prophesying, creating an *inclusio* with Hannah's prayer (1 Sam 2:1–10). This reading demonstrates that prophetic activity is validated by its origin in divine Spirit rather than the prophet's moral character. The music metaphor structuring these narratives invites readers to hear prophesying as attunement to divine harmony.

Introduction

This paper seeks to make no small claim. Put succinctly, "prophesying" in 1–2 Samuel should not be understood as ecstasy (interpreted as raving like madmen) but as musically attuned to the Spirit. In the history of interpretations of the prophetic in the Old Testament, in the books of the Former Prophets, and even more so with regard to prophesying in 1–2 Samuel, claims are made of "ecstasy" (defined as madness and raving) for many of the characters described as "prophesying" with wide use of the Saulide tales as exemplar.[1]

As a prime example, Joseph Blenkinsopp's *A History of Prophecy in Israel* claims the *hithpa'el* form of נבא is used in order to emphasize the "wild and uncontrolled behavior" of the prophetic band and Saul joining them (1 Sam 10:5–13; 19:20–24) and Saul's prophesying as "deranged" (1 Sam 18:10–11).[2] He further claims the *niph'al* stem of נבא "is also used of communal, orgiastic ecstasy" in 1 Samuel 10:11 and 19:20. He makes this claim in his argument that both stems *may* include "ecstatic behavior" that is out of control or orgiastic even as he has earlier left open that such stem usage does not of itself indicate (negatively) uncontrollable or orgiastic prophesying.[3]

This paper seeks to address such arguments (which are rather widely held) and notes the ways in which music seems intentionally rhetorically to inform the prophesying of Saul and David (rather than madness and ecstasy as focus or perhaps even present). It is the contention here that such intent is potentially central to understanding the prophetic within 1–2 Samuel overall. The Chronicler's explicit identification of Levitical musicians as prophets who prophesy with instruments (1 Chr 25:1-3) might be regarded as a fortissimo theological affirmation of what the Samuel narratives present more subtly. However, this study argues that the Samuel narratives themselves already present this theology, providing the foundation for the Chronicler's later development. It should be noted that the connection between music and prophetic activity appears to be distinctive to the biblical tradition. While prophecy is well-attested in the ancient Near East—notably in the Mari texts (18th century BCE) with the *muḫḫum* and *āpilum*, and in Neo-Assyrian prophecy (7th century BCE)—these prophetic figures are not described as using musical instruments in their prophetic performances.[4] This makes the consistent association of music with prophesying in 1–2 Samuel all the more significant as

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1 The foundational work of Gustav Hölscher seems to have set this trajectory, *Die Profeten: Untersuchungen zur Religionsgeschichte Israels* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1914). The origins and some earlier history up to about 1970 is found in James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect Upon Israelite Religion* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1971), 7–8. Many others simply follow this even within their own nuanced perspectives: Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel: From the Settlement in the Land to the Hellenistic Period* (The Westminster Press, 1983); Bogdan Mărcăşan, "Ecstatic Hypostases in 1 Sam. 10:10–12; 19:18–24," *Astra Salvensis* 1 (2021): 49–62; Martti Nissinen, "Prophecy and Ecstasy," pp. 171–200 in, *Ancient Prophecy: Near Eastern, Biblical, and Greek Perspectives*, ed. Martti Nissinen (Oxford Academic, 2017), online edition, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198808558.003.0005, accessed 6 Nov. 2022.

2 Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 37.

3 Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 37.

4 For a monograph that precisely argues against the musicality of ANE literature in prophesying that is proposed to have been read into such via hearing the OT texts and then reading music into the ANE texts, see Jonathan Stökl, *Prophecy in the Ancient Near East: A Philological and Sociological Comparison*, Ancient Near East Monographs 56 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012).

a characteristic feature of Israelite prophetic tradition that warrants careful interpretation rather than dismissal as mere "ecstasy."

Methodological Consideration

This study employs a narrative-rhetorical approach to the prophesying texts in 1–2 Samuel, attending carefully to the literary contexts and rhetorical framing of each prophetic episode. Rather than imposing predetermined definitions of prophetic behavior derived from comparative anthropological or ancient Near Eastern studies, this analysis allows the narrative contexts themselves—particularly the consistent association of musical instrumentation with prophesying in 1–2 Samuel—to guide interpretation. The method involves three key moves: first, close attention to the Hebrew lexical range and stem usage without presupposing negative connotations; second, intertextual analysis examining how later explicit prophetic songs (Hannah's prayer, David's psalm and postlude) might inform our reading of earlier unlyricized prophesying; and third, narrative-theological reading that traces the development of Saul's character in relation to the Spirit (רוח) across multiple prophetic episodes. This approach prioritizes the final form of the Masoretic Text while noting significant textual variants that may affect interpretation.

One immediate objection made is that the problem is not so much with the terminology of "ecstasy" that itself is widely used in the literature to describe the prophetic within 1–2 Samuel. The functional definition of "ecstasy" or "ecstatic" is often used to speak of alterations of one's normal state of mind. So far, so good. This would be acceptable if the definition did not slip into discordant uses almost immediately in a way that denigrates such experiences as contrasted with "acting rationally and delivering coherent messages."[5] The alteration of one's normal state of mind need not mean "mad" or "orgiastic." It can actually speak of heightened knowing of the divine mind and viewing life as meant by the Spirit of Yahweh. In this sense, it means to harmonize with the divine rationality. The sense of which way to interpret statements of prophesying would then not be predetermined but would allow contexts to offer their own sense.

The basic tendency in the literature has been to claim that the *hithpa'el* (and sometimes *niphal*) stem of נבא points toward raving or madness in prophesying as a negative reading. However, this seems to miss the rhetorical cases of such usage and, after misreading such applies the madness carte blanche to a wide range of texts across the OT as if the finale has begun and we have only to hear the reprise of earlier madness. The discussion of the function of the *hithpa'el* to bear the prophetic without recourse to madness in the texts examined within 1–2 Samuel is meant as a prelude to the discussion of other texts to be examined in future projects.

5 This contrast is stated clearly in Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98.3 (1979): 322.

In this way, Robert Wilson, following anthropological leads, contends that the *hithpa'el* form may more basically indicate "characteristic prophetic behavior" that identifies the person as doing *whatever it is prophets do* rather than specifically *ecstatic experiences* as one of the two functions of the stem.[6] If only he had heeded his own advice when he goes on to call for a rejection of "generalizations" to be avoided "in future research" with care taken to address "each description of prophetic activity … individually."[7] Instead, he predetermines the negative reading of Saul's prophesying. The only other explicit connection between music and prophetic reception in the Former Prophets appears in 2 Kings 3:15, where Elisha requests a musician: "But now bring me a musician. And when the musician played, the hand of Yahweh came upon him" (ועתה קחו־לי מנגן והיה כנגן המנגן ותהי עליו יד־יהוה). This scene demonstrates music's role in prophetic reception, but notably, it results in a clear, rational, strategic oracle about military victory—nothing about raving or loss of control. The music facilitates prophetic receptivity, creating space for the "hand of Yahweh" to come upon the prophet, but the result is coherent speech. This single other explicit music-prophecy connection in the Former Prophets suggests that music serves as an aid to prophetic attunement rather than an inducer of irrational ecstasy, supporting the interpretation of the musical prophets in 1 Samuel as engaged in structured, Spirit-led activity. With this in mind, let us turn the page to hear Saul's overture to the prophetic in 1 Samuel 10:5–6, and 10.

Saul's Overture (1 Sam 10:5–6, 10)

> "After this you will come to Gibeah of God that is near a garrison of the Philistines and when you enter that town you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place. They will have harps, tambourines, flutes, and lyres, and they will be prophesying. And the Spirit of Yahweh will come rushing upon you and you will prophesy with them and you will be changed into another man.… And when he arrived there, at Gibeah, there was a band of prophets to greet him and the Spirit of God came rushing on him and he prophesied among them." (1 Sam 10:5–6, 10)[8]

6 Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy," 330–37.
7 Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy," 337.
8 All translations are the author's own unless otherwise indicated. It will be left aside that the fulfillment has "God" for the prediction of "Yahweh" concerning the changing and the Spirit in relation to Saul as well as the shift from "another man" to "another heart." For an attempt at accounting for the distinctions in relation to the S/spirit and Saul, see John M. Ragsdale, "Rûaḥ Yhwh Rûaḥ ʾĕlōhîm: A Case for Literary and Theological Distinction in the Deuteronomistic History," Dissertation (Marquette University, 2007).

The text shifts from predicting “the Spirit of Yahweh” (רוח יהוה) will rush upon Saul (10:6) to describing “the Spirit of God” (רוח אלהים) actually rushing upon him (10:10). While this distinction may reflect different textual sources, for the purposes of the final form it suffices to note that both phrases indicate divine Spirit agency rather than human-induced trance states. The variation in divine names does not alter the fundamental claim that Saul’s prophesying is Spirit-initiated rather than self-generated ecstasy.

The specific enumeration of four musical instruments—harps (נבל), tambourines (תף), flutes (חליל), and lyres (כנור)—seems rhetorically significant. This is not a generic reference to “music” but a carefully detailed inventory that emphasizes the material, embodied nature of the prophetic activity. These are not instruments associated with inducing trance or frenzy in biblical literature (which would require the circularity of reasoning that this exact usage is the example); rather, they are the instruments of worship, celebration, and royal court performance (cf. 2 Sam 6:5; 1 Kgs 10:12; Ps 150:3-4). The נבל and כנור appear together frequently in contexts of praise and Spirit-inspired song (1 Chr 15:16, 28; 25:1, 6; Ps 33:2; 57:8; 108:2). If the narrator intended to depict wild, uncontrolled ecstasy, the choice to specify these particular instruments of ordered musical performance seems counterproductive. The detail suggests intentional portrayal of structured, musical prophetic activity rather than chaotic raving.

The prophets are “coming down from the high place” (מן־הבמה), indicating they have been engaged in cultic activity at a sacred site. The במה serves throughout Samuel–Kings as a legitimate (if sometimes contested) site of worship and sacrifice to Yahweh prior to the Temple’s construction (cf. 1 Sam 9:12–14 where Samuel himself sacrifices at a במה). This cultic-liturgical context further distances the prophetic activity from chaotic ecstasy and situates it within structured religious performance. The prophets appear to be processing from worship, perhaps carrying instruments used in liturgical service, making their prophesying part of an ordered cultic event rather than spontaneous madness.

Saul encounters minstreling prophets on their way to a sacred meal. His encounter alters his identity with a “new heart” where he becomes a “new man” and joins the prophetic band. The language of transformation is crucial: Saul receives “another heart” (לב אחר, 10:9) and becomes “another man” (לאיש אחר, 10:6). This is the vocabulary of fundamental identity change, not temporary insanity. The “heart” (לב) in Hebrew anthropology is the center of intellect, will, and moral reasoning—the very faculties that would be lost in madness. To receive a “new heart” suggests enhanced capacity for understanding and alignment with divine purposes, not diminished rationality. This transformation language finds its echo in the prophetic promise of a “new heart” in Ezekiel 36:26, where it explicitly means moral-spiritual renewal, not ecstatic frenzy. The Spirit’s work here is constructive and formative, preparing Saul for kingship by aligning him with prophetic wisdom, not deconstructing his sanity. This serves as a rhetorical element key to the questioned identity of Saul as "also among the prophets" (1 Sam 10:11; and also 19:24). Some commentators understand the rhetorical question as necessitating a negative response. Others simply leave the question open.

The rhetorical question of 10:12 and 19:24, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (הגם־שאול בנביאם), admits of multiple interpretations, but the narrative context favors a positive reading. The question arises from witnesses who are surprised, not horrified. The surprise stems from Saul's social status and background—he is the son of Kish, from Benjamin, not from a prophetic guild or priestly family. The question "Who is their father?" (10:12) points to issues of lineage and social belonging, not to the quality or legitimacy of the prophetic activity itself. If the prophesying were manifestly mad or shameful, one would expect expressions of concern, mockery, or attempts to restrain Saul. Instead, the narrative presents communal observation and questioning about identity and belonging. The proverb-like quality of the question (it becomes a משל, a "byword," 10:12) suggests it entered common usage as a way of expressing surprise at unexpected spiritual gifting, not as a term of derision for madness.

Are the readers to think Saul has become *manic* in joining this prophetic band? Are readers to suppose this prophetic instrumentation is itself an ecstatic "orgiastic"? Robert Wilson assumes that because musical instrumentation was used by the prophetic band encountering Saul, "that trance may have been involved, for music is frequently used to induce trance."[9] If this is a trance, then it is one to Saul's benefit. However, we have no real reason to suppose such a state.

The language of the text is such that readers find Saul so overwhelmed by the Spirit that he enters a state of being outside of himself (not necessarily a trance), but is this outside of sanity or outside of his un-Spirited self? Perhaps the Spirit opened up the possibility of a new identity that itself was better aligned with the rejected divine ruler, Yahweh. Is the rejection of Yahweh's rule identified earlier in 1 Samuel 8:7 now taken up in the Spirited rule of this newly endowed prophetic monarch? This seems precisely the trajectory of the Former Prophets and tracing the exemplars of Spirit-empowered deliverers in the Judges.[10] Such matters might elude the reader at this point if we presume we do not know what the content of Saul's prophesying entailed. If the only basis of his prophetic life is the actions of joining the band, we might wonder what this band was doing with their instruments or what their instruments were doing to them. What does our collection

9 Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy," 332.

10 For several extensive treatments of this trajectory, see Lee Roy Martin, *Judging the Judges: Pentecostal Theological Perspectives on the Book of Judges* (CPT Press, 2018), 75–108, and Rick Wadholm Jr., *A Theology of the Spirit in the Former Prophets: A Pentecostal Perspective* (CPT Press, 2018), 119–138.

of 1–2 Samuel reveal about the contents of musical prophesying? The books of Samuel do not leave us with an unmetered rest but move us to find Saul later overcome by Yahweh's troubling רוח and in need of an instrument of the liberating רוח to attune Saul yet again to the space of life.

Harping on Saul (1 Sam 16:14–23; 18:10; 19:20–24)

The freshly Spirited David of 1 Samuel 16:13 enters the court of the dis- and re-spirited Saul in 16:14. The departing רוח does not mean absence of רוח for Saul. It means a troubling רוח. While the רוח of liberation rushed upon Saul at his anointing to be king (10:6, 10) and to deliver Jabesh Gilead from Ammon (11:6), he now has a troubling רוח that rushes upon him from time to time (18:10).

This will lead to a number of episodic moments in which Saul's is overwhelmed and finds some temporary reprieve at the harpistry of David (1 Sam 16:14–23). David's Spirited instrumentation brings "relief" (the verbal cognate with רוח) to Saul in Saul's moments of troubling spirit ("and it was a *relief* to Saul," 16:23). Perhaps following the reading of Basher (and others), the reader is meant to hear in this that Saul can now "breathe freely."[11] However, this relief will not always last. In 1 Samuel 18:10, Israel's victory songs over the Philistines and her champion seem to heighten the troubled spirit of Saul, who is described as "prophesying in his house while David was playing the harp."[12]

Many read Saul prophesying in 1 Samuel 18:10 (and later in 19:20–23) as "raving" and in direct contrast to his initial joining of the prophetic band at Gibeah in 1 Samuel 10.[13] This is by those who may see themselves as generous in their

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11 David E. Basher, "Saul and the Not-So-Holy Ghost: 1 Samuel 16:14–23 and Ghost-Induced Illness," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 144.3 (2025): 437–439. Basher provides an extensive discussion of ANE Ghost-induced illness as potentially behind what is happening to Saul, where he may suffer from the inability to catch his breath from such. Of further interest to this study is his noted connections for ANE treatment of such ailments, which involved the specific use of music.

12 The entire episode of 1 Sam 18:10 is absent from Codex Vaticanus (LXX^{B}) and minuscule 845, suggesting a possible later insertion into the Hebrew textual tradition. However, this variant strengthens rather than weakens the present argument: the episode's presence in the MT demonstrates an editorial willingness to retain prophesying language even for Saul's troubled episodes, suggesting that prophesying itself was not understood as inherently negative by the final editors. If the Vorlage of LXX^{B} lacked this episode, its inclusion in MT may represent an intentional narrative parallel to the prophesying episodes in chapters 10 and 19.

13 Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel* (TOTC 8; InterVarsity, 1988), 139, argues that "outwardly the two experiences [of his prophesying in 10:10 and here] were similar"; Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (NAC 7; Broadman & Holman, 1996), 201; Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, 37, 66; Robert P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (The Paternoster Press, 1986), 160; Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, 2nd ed. (WBC 10; Zondervan, 2000), 188; J. Robert Vannoy, *1–2 Samuel* (CBC 4a; Tyndale, 2009), "This clearly does not mean that Saul gave a message from God, the most usual meaning of the verb 'to prophesy' (*naba'*). This is one of several places in the OT where 'prophesy' apparently has reference to some sort of frenzied behavioral activity (cf. 1 Kgs 18:29)—probably in this instance it was a display of an uncontrollable and raging anger," 179n2; Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98.3 (1979): 321–37.

reading of the prophesying of Saul following his anointing. By this point in the stories of Saul, commentators have turned upon him in full force and cannot seem to help but denigrate his prophesying. Robert Bergen will go so far as to claim this tale "identifies Saul as a false prophet (cf. 1 Kgs 22:21–23) and therefore one who was not to be feared (Deut 18:22)." Bergen contends this is due to Saul's "raving" identified by the unspoken murderous thoughts of Saul as if these are the contents of his prophesying.[14] More tentatively, V. Philips Long indicates such a choice among translations, yet says nothing further either *for* or *against* such a reading of Saul as falsely prophesying and prefers to leave open the possibilities.[15] This presupposes the contents of the prophesying based on the internal thoughts of Saul revealed by the narrator. Such inward violent thoughts may actually be in *response to* Saul's own prophesying as opposed to the very contents of his prophesying.

The best that can be claimed directly from the text of 18:10 is that Saul prophesied, and in the midst of the prophesying, he acted in rage to kill David with the javelin he found in his hand. Perhaps Saul has taken on an objectified characterization where he prophesies at the instrumentation of David and a troubling spirit of God. The Hebrew construction warrants closer attention: ויתנבא שאול בתוך־הבית ודוד מנגן בידו ("and Saul prophesied in the midst of the house, and David was playing with his hand"). The *hithpael* stem (ויתנבא) grammatically indicates reflexive or iterative action—Saul found himself prophesying or prophesied repeatedly. The construction with בתוך ("in the midst of") and the circumstantial clause with David playing creates a scene of simultaneity, not causation. The text does not say David's playing *caused* Saul's prophesying, nor that the prophesying was itself violent. Rather, two activities occur simultaneously: prophesying and David's musical performance, followed by Saul's violent action (ויבקש, "and he sought/tried"). The narrative structure distinguishes the prophesying from the violence, suggesting they are not identical activities but sequential or competing impulses.

Should we understand David's playing as provocative of Saul's prophesying or, at the very least, suggestive of the songful nature of that prophesying? Is it possible that Saul has joined in prophetically singing declarations of victories for Israel and thus for Yahweh—perhaps even echoing the very songs of triumph sung by the women (1 Sam 18:7)—all the while troubled that such prophetic singing might include the victories of David alongside, or even surpassing, Saul's own victories?

While we might expect the troubling רוח of God to grant space to Saul at David's Spirited playing (1 Sam 16:23), it appears in this text that, instead, Saul's

14 Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 201.
15 V. Philips Long, *1 and 2 Samuel* (TOTC 8; InterVarsity, 2020), 190.

blues turned outright *bellicoso*. Is this a song being played and sung that suggests something akin to the prayer of Hannah that Yahweh "raises the poor … seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor" (1 Sam 2:8) in light of his previous day's hearing of the viral pop limerick that received playtime in Philistia: "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands" (1 Sam 18:7; 21:11; 29:5)? Perhaps that very tune gets playtime on David's harp without intent of greater victory for David, except in the troubled spirit of Saul. Has Saul found himself joining in the chorus of that pop song that grates upon his last string?

The contents of what Saul may have "prophesied" are not given. One would need to discern from other passages the potential nature of such contents and activity. Is his violent response to David one *in accord with* his prophesying (as Bergen argued)? Or is it one in which his madness responds *against the very language of* his prophesying?

The javelin incidents (18:10–11; 19:9–10) present the most significant challenge to reading Saul's prophesying positively, and they require careful attention. In both instances, Saul is described as prophesying while simultaneously attempting violence. However, several factors suggest the violence contradicts rather than expresses the prophesying. First, in 16:23, David's playing provides relief (רוח) from the troubling spirit—the music and Spirit work together for Saul's good. The later episodes reverse this: the troubling spirit rushes upon Saul (18:10; 19:9), and music no longer brings relief but becomes the context for internal conflict. Second, the narrative distinguishes the prophesying from the violence temporally and grammatically: "and Saul prophesied … and David was playing … and Saul sought to pin David to the wall" (18:10–11). The prophesying and the violence are sequential actions, not identical ones. Third, the text never says Saul prophesied *against* David or that the prophesying itself was violent or incoherent. If the content of his prophesying resembled other prophetic songs in Samuel—declarations of Yahweh's sovereignty, reversal of fortunes, exaltation of the humble—then his violent response may be an attempt to silence or resist what the Spirit is declaring through him. Saul becomes the tragic figure who speaks divine truth while rejecting it, who sings the Spirit's song while rebelling against its implications. The prophesying remains valid as Spirit-speech; Saul's heart remains rebellious.

If we take seriously the possibility that Saul's prophesying in 18:10 involves actual prophetic content rather than mere raving, Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1–10 provides the most obvious template for what such Spirit-inspired musical prophesying might sound like. Hannah's prayer-song celebrates Yahweh's reversal of fortunes: "He raises the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a throne of honor" (2:8). This theme of the humble being exalted would be particularly provocative for Saul to hear or sing in the context of David's rising popularity. Hannah's song is explicitly described as a prayer that assesses divine activity in human affairs—it is forth-telling about Yahweh's character and ways, not foretelling specific events. Yet it is presented as paradigmatic of Spirit-inspired speech (note how it anticipates themes that recur in the Magnificat, Luke 1:46–55). If Saul's prophesying follows this pattern, he may be singing truths about Yahweh's exaltation of the humble (David) that his own pride cannot accept, creating the internal conflict that erupts in violence. The Spirit speaks through him truthfully, while his heart rebels against that truth.

His prophesying would be noted again later as he seeks to kill David in chapter 19. David has fled to Samuel at Naioth near Ramah. When Saul discovers this, he sends three troops of soldiers to capture David. In each case, the troops encounter prophets prophesying and find themselves joining this ever-growing prophetic choir. Finally, Saul goes to Naioth and finds himself overcome by the divine Spirit and prophesying. Here at Naioth, he "fell naked … and prophesied … all that day and night" (19:23–24). This story has been read as a clear indication of the madness of prophesying in 1–2 Samuel. Yet, readers may be missing the rhetorical significance of the context.

First, the prophesying reads as closely tied to that experienced at Gibeah when Saul was first overcome by the Spirit of Yahweh and joined that prophetic band. One can hear the echoes of encounter and joining ringing through the movements of each account. This is also signified by the refrain of Saul "also being among the prophets." In neither case are the contents of the prophesying ever given explicit lyrics. The vagaries leave open the question of content.

Second, it is stated that Saul "prophesied before Samuel." If we are to read this as madness, then the prophets already in the presence of Samuel (and all too likely, Samuel himself) are a part of the madness. Wilson argues that the story of 1 Samuel 19:18–24 reveals "typical prophetic behavior to be a form of *uncontrolled* trance" and, thus, that "there is no question that typical prophetic behavior is evaluated negatively" in the thinking of the compiler of 1–2 Samuel.[16] Is this how the text intends for the readers to perceive such prophesying? Or might we hear the presence of Samuel as harmonizing Saul with the prophetic band (and by implication, with Samuel) in confessing the ways of Yahweh rather than opposing Yahweh? The narrative specifically states that when Saul's first messengers arrive, in 19:20, they see "the company of the prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing as head over them" (וירא את־להקת הנביאים נבאים ושמואל עמד נצב עליהם). Samuel is not merely present but "standing appointed over them" (עמד נצב), a phrase suggesting leadership and oversight, not passive observation. This is structured, organized prophetic activity under prophetic leadership. When the messengers

16 Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy," 334–335, original emphasis.

and eventually Saul himself join in the prophesying, they are incorporated into an activity that Samuel is directing. To read this as mass insanity would make Samuel the conductor of madness—an interpretation that contradicts his role throughout 1 Samuel as a reliable prophetic voice and judge.[17] The more natural reading is that Samuel's presence sanctifies and validates the prophetic activity, and that those who encounter this Spirit-filled community find themselves overwhelmed by that same Spirit and incorporated into legitimate prophetic expression. The text portrays not contagious madness but contagious inspiration.

Third, the disrobing of Saul in 19:24, often interpreted as "naked," may not mean "naked" (ערם) in the absolute sense (cf., Job 22:6; 24:7, 10; Isa 58:7).[18] The semantic range of ערם encompasses both complete and partial nudity, with context determining the precise meaning. Isaiah 20:2–3 provides a particularly relevant parallel, where the prophet walks "naked" (ערום) for three years as a prophetic sign—a passage widely understood by commentators as referring to the removal of outer garments rather than complete nudity. Similarly, in Job 24:7, 10, those described as ערום still possess some covering but lack appropriate or adequate clothing for their circumstances. Micah 1:8 likewise employs ערום in the context of prophetic mourning, almost certainly indicating the removal of outer garments rather than absolute nakedness. The term itself is morally neutral, describing a state of being without inherently positive or negative connotations. In Saul's case, the prophetic and royal context strongly suggests a parallel to Isaiah's prophetic disrobing: in fact, only that Saul removed the clothing fitting to his office. To remove his royal garments would be to remove his kingly claims in the very presence of the one who anointed him king and of the one he fears may become king. To be "naked" in this way is to indicate the laying aside of claims of his royal prerogatives for the sake of David. This prophetic act serves as Saul's submission to the mind and will of Yahweh rather than opposition to such. Saul's prophetic stripping in this narrative evokes the earlier telling of Jonathan's previous disrobing in order to give David his accoutrements of royalty (18:4). What Jonathan did out of love for David in chapter 18, Saul may be doing out of yielding to the overwhelming Spirit in chapter 19. Yet Saul is doing so following the lead of the prophetic Spirit.

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17 Notwithstanding the well-argued claims of J. Richard Middleton concerning narrative indications of Samuel as undermining Saul in "Samuel Agonistes: A Conflicted Prophet's Resistance to God and Contribution to the Failure of Israel's First King," in *Prophets, Prophecy, and Ancient Israelite Historiography*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Lissa M. Wray Beal (Eisenbrauns, 2013).

18 Against a preponderance of commentators on this passage that read "naked" in its absolute sense rather than culturally mediated and understood in its literary sense here. As one example of what seems a failed attempt at careful readings of clothing regarding the Saul/David narratives in 1–2 Samuel with specific regard to these texts, see Ora Horn Prouser, "Suited to the Throne: The Symbolic Use of Clothing in the David and Saul Narratives," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 21.71 (September 1996): 27–37 (32).

Thus, it is here that one might find suggestive elements of the prophesying of Saul as indicating his prophetic act of debasement before Samuel (and David) as submission to the will of Yahweh. Here we may encounter Saul actually in his right[eous] mind as yielded to Yahweh. A mind, for that day, attuned to the Spirit. His embodied prophesying would thus accompany his vocal prophesying as declaring Yahweh's will rather than embodying and speaking madness. Perhaps the books of Samuel might offer a clearer indication of lyricized musical prophesying to accompany the unlyricized prophesying of Saul.

David's Postlude (2 Sam 23:1–7)

The (almost) last words of David in 2 Samuel 23:1–7 (and its preceding song in chapter 22) provide precisely the sorts of explicitly lyricized prophetic material to be sung and instrumentalized that the earlier Saulide narratives implied but never quoted. That our text has called these the "last words of David" (דברי דוד האחרנים) is significant despite further Davidic words following in 2 Samuel 24 and into 1 Kings. The significance of such a postlude (whatever its earlier origins as a textual tradition) lies in its explicit identification of David's prophesying as simultaneously musical ("Israel's singer of songs," נעים זמרות ישראל), Spirit-empowered ("the Spirit of Yahweh spoke through me"), and oracular (נאם). That our text has called these the "last words of David" is significant despite further Davidic words following in 2 Samuel and into 1 Kings. These "words" follow upon an extended Davidic psalm in chapter 22 (cf. Ps 18), which itself prophetically lays claim to the victory of Yahweh and the salvation of Yahweh's anointed.

However, the postlude of David is emphatically the "oracle of David…Israel's singer of songs" whom "the Spirit of Yahweh spoke through" (23:1–2).[19] The language of "oracle" or "utterance" (נאם) is only used as the voicing of two other human characters in the OT—Balaam (Num 23:3–4) and Agur (Prov 30:1)—but is used extensively of the divine voice across the prophetic writings.[20] It has been argued that Agur says nothing which would not already be apparent, and Balaam should be "viewed as an ecstatic"—meaning negatively.[21]

Mahri Leonard-Fleckman contends that *ne'um*, as indicating the "prophetic," is not actually prophetic if such utterances "communicate neither insights about the future nor any new information beyond already known truths."[22] This begs

19 According to Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, McCarter actually proposes that verse 2 describing David as speaking by the Spirit is a late addition based on "much later, extrabiblical references," however, Leonard-Fleckman contends that by such criteria as McCarter proposes would mean also the deletion of verse one as late addition, "Utterance of David, the Anointed of the God of Jacob," *JBL* 137.3 (2018): 667–683 (675).

20 Leonard-Fleckman, "Utterance of David," 673–674.

21 Leonard-Fleckman, "Utterance of David," 674.

22 Leonard-Fleckman, "Utterance of David," 673.

the question about precisely what “prophecy” entails. The presupposition being that the prophetic is foretelling rather than prominently forth-telling, that may or may not include foretelling. The prophets of the OT are not prophets because they are predictors but are prophets for declaring the words and embodying (in some fashion) the will of Yahweh. This would not require clear predictive elements. It can be the assessment of divine involvement in life that proclaims the revelation of the God of Israel.

The postlude draws upon the song which precedes it (2 Sam 22, paralleling Ps 18) and ties up the message of the books of Samuel as an *inclusio* with Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1–10. Both songs celebrate Yahweh’s exaltation of the lowly and the salvation of Yahweh’s anointed (משיחו, 1 Sam 2:10; cf. 2 Sam 22:51; 23:1). Both are explicitly prayerful-prophetic poetry that declares divine reversal: “He raises the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes” (1 Sam 2:8); “You delivered me from the violent” (2 Sam 22:49). The echoing vocabulary of divine rock (צור, 1 Sam 2:2; 2 Sam 22:3, 32, 47; 23:3), salvation, and anointing creates a theological frame around the entire narrative. The exaltation and salvation of the anointed of Israel by the Rock. The turning of lives from suffering and lack to blessing and plenty, but for the wicked to destruction and undoing. The lyricized emphatic prophetic words of 2 Samuel 23 become the lens of hearing and seeing the prophetic songs of 1–2 Samuel and thus of Saul. It is here, in the spelled-out words of sung prophesying, that readers seem meant to hear the contents of singing oracles in the extended saga. This plays a later foundational role in the reception of Davidic hymnody as prophetic, not for its predictive values alone (or even requiring such), but for its declarations of the revelation of Yahweh’s person and plans.

The connection between musical instrumentation and prophesying, evident throughout the narratives of 1–2 Samuel, receives explicit theological affirmation in the Chronicler’s reception of this tradition. Specifically, 1 Chronicles 25:1–31 organizes the Temple musicians who “prophesy” (מתנבאים) with musical instruments—cymbals, harps, and lyres. This later text makes explicit what the Samuel narratives imply: that musical performance attuned to the Spirit constitutes a genuine mode of prophetic activity, not a descent into madness.

Conclusion

It is here at our finale that we may find ourselves now coming to hear the types of Spirited singing that the prophesying of 1–2 Samuel intends. The lyrics of these songs give voice to the instrumentation without words in the middle. If one is to hear the prophesying of Saul and the unnamed prophetic bands, one should hear the prophesying of David (and Hannah). Though many see Saul among the crazed, the shape of our text suggests he is better viewed in his contrast to “Israel’s singer of songs" who "utters" the songs of the Spirit of Yahweh but also submits to such and remains attuned. Saul speaks the words and joins in the harmony, but he will not, in the end, commit. His discordant ways rebel against the melody of the Spirit. The very Spirit who sings through him and to him. In this way, Saul is raving, but not according to the Spirit. He raves against the Spirit. Yet when he prophesies, he harmonizes with the Spirit and (even if for a brief moment) is made new, unfolding and participating in Yahweh's will.

This reading challenges scholarly consensus not merely for the sake of revisionism but because it appears to better account for the narrative's own rhetoric and theology. If the Samuel narratives intended to portray prophesying as inherently mad or orgiastic, they would not have consistently associated it with divine Spirit activity, musical instrumentation, and the submission of even a failed king to Yahweh's purposes. That Saul prophesies in response to the Spirit—even when he later rebels against that Spirit's direction—suggests that prophesying functions as a category of divine address that transcends the moral character of the prophet. This has implications for understanding prophecy throughout the Former Prophets: prophetic activity is not validated or invalidated by the prophet's subsequent obedience or disobedience, but by its origin in the divine Spirit. The music metaphor that structures these narratives invites readers to hear prophesying as attunement to divine harmony—an attunement Saul briefly achieves but ultimately abandons, while David sustains it as "Israel's singer of songs."

The implications of this reading extend beyond 1–2 Samuel to our understanding of prophecy throughout Scripture. If prophesying can be authentic Spirit activity even when the prophet subsequently rebels (as with Saul) or when the prophet's character is questionable (as with Balaam, Num 22–24), then prophecy functions less as validation of the prophet and more as testimony to the sovereignty of the Spirit. The Spirit speaks through whom the Spirit chooses, even using that speech to judge or redirect the speaker. This understanding resonates with the New Testament's distinction between spiritual gifts and spiritual fruit (1 Cor 12–13; Gal 5:22–23)—one may prophesy accurately while lacking love or maturity. It also helps explain how the Psalms attributed to David could be received as prophetic Scripture despite David's moral failures: the Spirit's use of David as a conduit for musical prophecy does not require David's perfection, only his attunement in those moments of inspiration. The music metaphor proves apt precisely here: an instrument can be badly maintained or poorly used most of the time and still, in skilled hands and in moments of proper tuning, produce beautiful and true music. Saul was such an instrument—capable of harmonizing with the Spirit when overwhelmed by it yet ultimately choosing discord.

BOOK REVIEWS

Zachary K. Dawson. *The Message of the Jerusalem Council in the Acts of the Apostles: A Linguistic Stylistic Analysis.* Linguistic Biblical Studies 22. Leiden: Brill, 2022. Pp. xiii + 350. Hardcover. ISBN 978-9-0045-1008-1. $251.00 (USD).

The Book of Acts is widely recognized as a crucial link between the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles, unique in its historical, literary, and theological significance. At its core is the call to bear witness to Christ "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth" (NET). In this context—and especially in light of the New Perspective on Paul—no small debate exists regarding the role and influence of the so-called Judaizers. These figures, who arrived from Judea to Antioch (see Acts 15:1 and following), accepted Gentiles into the Church yet opposed Paul and Barnabas on the matter of circumcision, the physical sign of the covenant.

Zachary R. Dawson's *The Message of the Jerusalem Council in the Acts of the Apostles*, a revision of his 2021 doctoral dissertation undertaken at McMaster Divinity College, argues that Luke's construal of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 and its co-thematic passages aims to persuade Jewish believers of Luke's audience not to separate from multiethnic churches; this is accomplished through subverting the value orientations of a prominent Noahic tradition within Second Temple Jewish literature which promoted strict Jewish isolation from Gentiles (2).

In addition to an extremely helpful glossary of methodological terms (306–12) and three appendices covering the Transitivity Structures of Acts 10:1–11:18; 15:1–29; and 21:17–25, *The Message of the Jerusalem Council* is divided into seven chapters. A markedly thorough bibliography (313–36) and two indices (Author and Ancient Sources) round things off.

Chapter 1, "The Relationship between Purpose and Parallelism in Acts: A Literature Review" (1–27), surveys the history of scholarship on the Book of Acts—often referred to in German scholarship as *Actaforschung*—tracing how discussions of parallelism (i.e., structured regularity used to create foregrounding and invite interpretive reflection; cf. p. 309) have shifted over time. Dawson notes that, for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, parallelism was understood primarily in typological terms and that only more recently has it become nearly synonymous with repetition. Moreover, it is only in the past fifteen years or so that parallelism has begun to be defined through the lens of modern linguistic approaches to literature (27).

In chapter 2, "Linguistic Stylistics: Theory, Model, and Methodology" (28–76), Dawson seeks to address this lacuna by accounting for parallelism in the Book of Acts through a stylistic analysis grounded in an explicit Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) framework. Despite the density of material (social-semiotic stylistics in conversation with Mikhail Bakhtin, anyone?), Dawson is an exceptionally clear writer. He supplements his analysis with thorough definitions (note the glossary mentioned above) and illustrative diagrams (see p. 40 for an excellent example). For those unfamiliar with the technical nomenclature—such as dialogism, mode(s), markedness, register, taxis/tactic system(s), thematic formation, and transitivity—this chapter can be overwhelming. Nevertheless, I remain firmly persuaded that an appropriate method is essential to effective exegesis. As such, I advocate: "the method is [often] the magic."[1]

The bulk of the book consists of analyzing various portions of Acts (and certain other texts, such as Jubilees, for instance). Chapter 3 (77–132) is titled: "The Story of Cornelius and Peter: A Transitivity Analysis of Acts 10:1–11:18." Using Ronald D. Witherup as his primary discussion partner for analyzing repetitions in the Cornelius story, Dawson notes:

> Peter functions consistently as a more dynamic character than Cornelius, being the active agent of more process types and even the foregrounded participant in scenes where Cornelius is the primary participant. Thus, Cornelius is never elevated in the story so that he can be demoted as Peter rises; Peter, from the first pericope, is established as a foregrounded agent, whose actions are patterned to contrast against the background of Cornelius's. (128)

While the significance of this point might not be fully appreciated by Witherup (and others):[2]

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1 Dustin G. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation: A Rhetorical-Critical Reading of Noah's Flood in Genesis* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022), xxii. As Stanley E. Porter (and Steven M. Studebaker) assert: "having an appropriate theological method is the first step in helping to ensure that one can determine what counts as evidence and that one has a means of evaluating this evidence to form coherent theological findings. Without a method, it is only an accident if one arrives at important or viable conclusions (and how would you know anyway?)." *Evangelical Theological Method: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), "preface." Cf. Zachary K. Dawson, "The Textual Traditions of Acts: What has Discourse Analysis Contributed?" *Biblica* 100 (2019), 560–83 alongside the *Pillars in the History of Biblical Interpretation* series, i.e., *Volume 1: Prevailing Methods before 1980*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), *Volume 2: Prevailing Methods after 1980*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Sean A. Adams, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), and *Volume 3: Further Essays on Prevailing Methods*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Zachary R. Dawson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021).

2 Cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, Review of Dawson within *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 33 (2023), 240–42 (esp. 241).

> Peter is the participant involved in the foregrounded patterns that symbolically articulate the theme, and the patterns of contrast with Cornelous play an integral role in this.… A summary of the foreground patterns from each pericope regarding participants, processes, and circumstances, can reveal the larger trends created across the story as well as the thematic content that is consistently foregrounded for the purposes of symbolic articulation. (128–29)

Chapter 4 (133–73) covers "Peter's Vision and 1 Enoch's *Book of Dreams*: An Intertextual Thematic Analysis of Acts 10:1–11:18." As alluded to above, Dawson concludes that Luke attempted to subvert—that is, to oppose—certain value positions representative of the Noahic tradition as seen especially in 1 Enoch, including a stance against the social isolation of Jews from Gentiles as the necessary measure to maintain their moral purity as well as the belief that the Jews would see the rise of a new Jerusalem and the subordination of the nations to a faithful remnant of Israel prior to the work of the Messiah who would restore the earth to its prediluvian Edenic conditions (173). Concerning Peter's prominence (noted above), Dawson also asserts:

> The additional foregrounded patternings in the Cornelius story that promote Jewish hospitality of Gentiles and table fellowship thus make the value orientations of the Cornelius story emphatically clear to the Jewish believer. However, Luke apparently did not consider this one episode sufficient to communicate the full message of this theme. The full communion of Jewish and Gentile believers entails more than their coming together over meals but includes larger questions about the Law. The patterns of redundancy of this episode are thus carried forward in Acts to the Jerusalem Council. (173)

Chapter 5 (174–217) "The Jerusalem Council and Paul's Alleged Apostacy: A Transitivity Analysis of Acts 15:1–29 and 21:17–25" and chapter 6 (218–44) "An Intertextual Thematic Analysis of the Noahide Laws in Acts 15 and 21," therefore, make these matters clear. In brief (218), Dawson seeks to answer two questions: (1) how can an intertextual thematic analysis shed fresh light on the four abstentions of the Apostolic Decree as a recurrent thematic formation in Acts 15 and 21, and, (2) what can the same analysis help reveal about the value positions at risk in Luke's social environment and Luke's stance towards them? He concludes:

> Luke's theme … is a statement against a Noahic tradition represented in such pseudepigraphal Second Temple literature as 1 Enoch and Jubilees that promoted notions of Jewish purity that required complete separation from Gentiles. The statement however, is not meant to

> negate these values, because he uses the same thematic elements that imply the legitimacy of certain Jewish conservative norms that governed the life of the church, but rather is *subversive*, since Luke uses the intertextual thematic formations of the Noahic tradition to facilitate the unity of the redefined, multiethnic people of God. (262, italics original)

Dawson also argues that Luke's use of verbal artistry suggests that some Jewish believers were tempted to adopt a separatist ideology, distancing themselves from Gentile believers. This may have caused tension in the early (multiethnic) Christian community. Luke's message, therefore, was aimed at addressing this internal conflict and would have required Jewish listeners to understand the symbolic way he communicated the need for unity within a diverse church (262).

The author's command of SFL and koine (NT) Greek is superb, with frequent reference to leading linguistic resources such as Louw and Nida's lexicon and various reference grammars by Mathewson and Emig, McKay, and Porter.

It is difficult to overstate the precision of Dawson's analytical rigor. For example, he offers an impressively detailed examination of the lists of animals found in Jewish literature, with particular attention to certain traditions surrounding Noah's Flood. Dawson concludes that Peter's vision in Acts does not merely evoke intertextual connections with various creation or de-creation narratives, nor solely with Levitical discussions of clean and unclean animals, nor even with apocalyptic literature that employs animal symbolism; rather, it synthesizes and transcends these thematic threads in a rhetorically sophisticated and theologically loaded act of symbolic communication (154). At the risk of belaboring things, Luke's engagement with the Noahic traditions of Second Temple Judaism subverts the values and beliefs associated with Jewish ethnic purity in Peter's vision, where Peter received a message from a heavenly voice, comprised of the language of the Noahic tradition (i.e., lists of animals) along with Jewish apocalyptic tropes (i.e., animals symbolizing nations and the interaction between heaven and earth) that overturns the status of Gentiles as impure and promotes the value position of hospitality between Jews and Gentiles. To anyone who truly understands the significance of this thesis, Dawson is brilliant![3] Another example of astute attention to detail concerns how certain translations give the appearance of a closer co-thematic tie between Daniel 7:5 and Acts 10:13 than exists (153–54).

To quibble, one wishes that Dawson had engaged with more of the Hebrew and/or other textual variants of the Flood narrative (Genesis 6–9) à la *BHQ*/*BHS* and/or Ronald S. Hendel's *The Text of Genesis 1–11: Textual Studies and Critical*

3 Cf. Gregory R. Lanier, *Apocryphal Prophets and Athenian Poets: Noncanonical Influences on the New Testament* (Brentwood, TN: B & H Academic, 2024).

Edition (Oxford University Press, 1998) and that he had leveraged more of the crème de la crème of Septuagint lexicons and grammars.

In closing, Zachary K. Dawson's *The Message of the Jerusalem Council in the Acts of the Apostles: A Linguistic Stylistic Analysis* is exemplary in both scope and execution. It finely showcases the value of a rigorous, linguistically informed approach to exegesis. Scholars across the spectrum—whether focused on the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, the Septuagint, the New Testament, or Second Temple Judaism—will benefit from Dawson's astute, meticulous analysis.

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G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, Benjamin L. Gladd, and Andrew David Naselli, eds. *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023. Pp. xxviii + 964. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-5409-6004-7. $64.99 (USD).

Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament is a truly insightful volume, bringing together the work of ninety-six evangelical biblical scholars, many well-known in the field. Though titled as a dictionary, the volume itself refers to entries as "essays" (xvi), which is a more accurate description. While the essays address the New Testament (NT) use of the Old Testament (OT) from many angles, the volume does not limit itself to the NT use of the OT but also examines the ways the OT uses the OT. This volume functions as a companion to the invaluable *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker Academic, 2007).

Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament contains five types of entries. There are fifty-five surveys of biblical books; each book of the Bible is considered at a synchronic level, specifically focusing on its indebtedness to antecedent revelation. OT essays consider how earlier OT tradition (resting, more or less, on a "canonical" (final form) approach to deal with the challenges of determining which revelation is earlier) influences the book, in addition to considering how the NT authors use that OT book. These OT essays are foundational for understanding how the NT uses the OT and fill a gap that was not able to be addressed given the format of *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament.*

Fifty-four essays address biblical-theological topics and themes, such as "The Day of the Lord" or how the "Image of God" begins in the OT and climaxes in the NT. Jewish Exegetical Traditions are the subject of twenty-five essays, comparing and contrasting how Jewish literature used the OT within the Second Temple period and later. These essays cover the use of the OT in the Apocrypha (four essays), Dead Sea Scrolls (three essays), OT Pseudepigrapha (four essays), Philo (four essays), rabbinic literature (Mishnah, Talmud, Midrashim) (three essays), Septuagint (LXX) (four essays), and Targums (three essays).

Twenty essays consider a wide range of topics related to inner-biblical exegesis, with essays on canonical interpretation, method, typology, and three essays on the history of interpretation (Early Church, AD 300 to AD 1800, and AD 1800 to present), for example. While the vast majority of the essays deal with essential components, not only surveying but advancing the field, there are also a few essays, for example the one on "Letter Couriers," which, though engaging, do not clearly add to the discussion. Stanley E. Porter concludes this article by stating, "we know surprisingly little about the roles that the letter courier played in the process, besides the obvious one of delivering the letter to the intended audience" (460). Finally, there are five essays focusing on categories related to the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament within systematic theology.

The essays are generally four to six pages in length, arranged in alphabetical order, and conclude with recommendations for related essays within the volume, followed by an often-extensive bibliography (some including 60 sources!) focused primarily on books and journal articles. Though the essays only introduce each topic, the reader is equipped with a framework to read the Scriptures for themselves, but then also to dive in, exploring works recommended in the attendant bibliography. The authors of these essays are clearly aware of broader academic perspectives and do a good job of introducing these without getting entangled in them. The reader truly benefits from this approach, being introduced to the field, benefiting from some of the best of current scholarship, and then pointed towards resources that will aid further study if they so choose. Even as they function as introductions, these essays are not simplistic and capture the nuances of many of these topics, often in the words of those who have been making inroads in the field. One example of this is in the essay on canonical interpretation that emphasizes that "the development of the Christian canon was not due to an external force imposed upon the text … rather, even before a more formal list of canonical texts developed, there was a growing recognition of the authority of these texts because of their intrinsic properties. In this way, in the words of Herman Ridderbos (25), 'the canon is not a product of the church; rather the church is to be the product of the canon'" (81).

Following the entries is an extensive Index of Scripture and Other Ancient Writings (891–964), making this dictionary incredibly user-friendly as one can see at a glance where the passage they are studying is addressed. While works such as Schnittjer's *Old Testament Use of Old Testament* (Zondervan, 2021) and the aforementioned *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament,* by the nature of their structure, use an inductive approach, *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* focuses on articulating components of the exegetical, hermeneutical framework, equipping the reader to return to Scripture and see the ways the NT is using the OT (or the OT is using the OT) for themselves.

Interpreting Scripture and specifically detecting where Scripture is using Scripture (whether through quotation, allusion, echo, typology, or another means, however defined) is an art and a science. To be clear, Schnittjer relies on empirical controls, evaluating dependence, presenting evidence, and then rating every potential exegetical allusion using a rating system to ensure that the allusions he presents are both verifiable and transparent (Schnittjer, xx–xxviii). Both the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* and the *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, while relying on criteria to determine dependence, interpret Scripture primarily as literature, using an approach that leans more towards seeing interpretation as an art than Schnittjer's stance does. This approach is not speculative but rather involves careful observation of the text, taking note of the details and nuances the authors of Scripture are taking note of, and building a case through many, many examples.

As a dictionary rather than a commentary, the *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* gives much attention to providing a framework for interpretation. This is especially evident in the essays on biblical books. For example, in his essay on the Book of Acts, Alan Thompson does not look specifically at each quotation and allusion to Isaiah within Acts but rather points out the importance of Isaiah for understanding the Christology and Soteriology of Acts. He identifies examples where this broader framework points to the presence of Isaianic themes in Acts, looks specifically at the allusions to Isaiah in Acts 1:6–8, and points the reader to several authors who have done work in this area. In this way, after reading this short portion of his essay, the reader is provided with new lenses with which to return to Acts and wrestle for themselves with the influence of Isaiah. The authors of these essays find just the right balance here, in my opinion, leaving the reader excited to return to the Scriptures, equipped with a framework to discover the text anew.

These essays will be of benefit to scholars, pastors, students, and, in fact, anyone who is interested in reading the Bible. I will certainly widely recommend this volume!

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Kenneth D. Keathley, ed. *Perspectives on the Historical Adam and Eve: Four Views*. Brentwood, TN: B & H Academic, 2024. Pp ix + 230. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-0877-6490-0. $34.99 (CDN) $24.99 (USD).

Over the last few decades, as theologians and biblical scholars have wrestled with questions regarding the claims of Genesis and its compatibility with evolutionary science, the question of Adam's historical existence as the progenitor of the human race and first sinner has resulted in a variety of perspectives.[1] In 2013, Zondervan released a book that highlighted four views of Adam as part of their Counterpoints series.[2] In the decade since, new perspectives have arisen which this volume seeks to bring to the discussion. The editor of this volume, Kenneth Keathley, sets forward three questions that the authors are to answer: "1) How does your position interpret the biblical witness concerning the historicity of Adam and Eve? 2) How does your position integrate with the current scientific consensus concerning hominids? 3) How does your position impact the message and ministry of the church?" (15). Four authors in this book answer these questions: Kenton Sparks representing the "Non-Historical" perspective, William Lane Craig the "Mytho-historical Perspective," Andrew Loke a recent "Genealogical Adam and Eve" (GAE) model, and Marcus Ross representing "Young Earth Creationism" (YEC). Each author is a recognized authority concerning the intersection of science and the Bible.

Kenton Sparks begins with a brief explanation of why he is not an "inerrantist" (22–25). To be clear, Sparks rejects the idea that Scripture teaches a particular viewpoint about Adam and Eve (30) but affirms that the New Testament authors likely *believed* that Adam was (in fact) historical (31). Sparks identifies Genesis as "aspective works of literature" (34). This term is drawn from the aspective form of art which seeks to project the human experience into the art, contrasted with the perspective form which seeks to depict things as they are (34). Being a work of its time, i.e., pre-[post]modern, Sparks discourages using Genesis as a tool for modern scientific inquiry (40). Sparks concludes with a brief survey of evidence for long ages and [non-teleological] evolution (42–44) and calls

1 A sampling of these perspectives is seen in William Lane Craig's *In Quest of the Historical Adam*, Andrew Loke's *The Origin of Humanity and Evolution*, Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves, eds., *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin*, William VanDoodewaard's *The Quest for the Historical Adam*, John Walton's *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, Dennis R. Venema and Scot McKnight's, *Adam and the Genome*, C. John Collins's, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?*, Peter Enn's *The Evolution of Adam*, and S. Joshua Swamidass's *The Genealogical Adam and Eve*.

2 Denis O. Lamoureux, John H Walton, C. John Collins, William D Barrick, Gregory A Boyd, and Philip Graham Ryken, *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, ed. Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday, Counterpoints: Bible and Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

believers, as a whole, to address the notable contradiction between broadly held beliefs of the church and public knowledge (48).

William Lane Craig defines myth as "a traditional, sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present forms" and "seeks to explain present realities by anchoring them in the prehistoric past and so to validate a culture's contemporary institutions and values (70). Craig identifies ten family resemblances for identifying myth and focuses on the etiological elements in analyzing Genesis 1–11, such as being set in a "primaeval" age and anchoring present realities within this primordial time (71–75). Craig does not provide a concise definition of myth in this chapter, instead leaning into the list of "family resemblances." Craig also highlights the connection to history through the use of chronology to bridge the gap between the primaeval era of Genesis 1–11 to the historical era of Genesis 12ff (75). In addition, Craig concludes that only one passage suggests Adam's historicity, namely Romans 5:12–21 (81). Finally, Craig, seeking to identify biblical humanity, uses a list of criteria of what is "human," focusing on cognitive characteristics such as abstract thinking, planning depth, and use of symbolism to evaluate hominin fossils (cf. pp. 83–84). Ultimately, Craig concludes that Adam and Eve were likely two members (though possibly a small group) of *homo heidelbergensis* who were selected by God and bestowed "rational" souls (88–89).

Andrew Loke begins his argument by surveying Scripture and showing how Adam is treated as a historical person, the first created bearer of God's image (117–19). GAE, as Loke presents it, argues that Adam is created within the Garden of Eden as the first image bearer (117), but outside the garden, the "evolution of 'man'" proceeded as described by contemporary evolutionary scientists (119–20). When Adam and Eve are exiled from the Garden, Adam's image-bearing descendants intermarried with the anatomically identical *homo sapiens* outside the Garden and passed the *Imago Dei* on through their descendants (120–21, 123). This process then continued, spreading the image of God to all humanity by the time of the first century AD (122). Loke cites migration studies as evidence that it is possible for two people in the ANE to be the genealogical ancestors of all people by the first century AD (125). Loke concludes by expressing the importance of resolving any acrimony and conflict between science and religion (Christianity) to better work together to fulfill the cultural mandate as image bearers and to alleviate the doubts that (according to Loke) have caused many people to leave the faith (130).

Marcus Ross begins stating that, if evolution and long ages are true, five statements that contradict Scripture's narrative must also be true, namely: (1) humanity evolved from nonhuman primates and are not distinct from creation, (2) Adam and Eve (if they existed) were not the sole progenitors of humankind, as a whole, (3) the Fall (if it occurred) did not bring death to human beings and had no "cosmic" consequences, see below, (4) violence, evil, and death among humans predates Adam and Eve and was part of God's original "very good" creation, and (5) God never judged humanity with a worldwide Flood and Noah's family did not restart the human race. Ross then walks through Genesis 1–11 claiming that Adam was a historical individual (153–54), the Fall had "cosmic consequences" (154–56, 160–64), and that humanity was wiped out and had to repopulate after a global, catastrophic Flood (156–60, 164–65). Ross next turns to science, giving a brief summation of "baraminology," i.e., the study of created "kinds" ≠ "species" (174–75) and its applications to studies of australopithecines and hominins (176–77). After examining anatomical and behavioral evidence (177–84), Ross points to *homo erectus* as likely being what Adam and Eve and Noah's family were (185). Other hominins developed post-Flood, and *homo sapiens* eventually became the only human morphology remaining. Ross concludes, "what is *written* in the text is indeed what is *meant* by the text, both on the surface and as we plumb its depths" (187, italics original).

Though not produced by the same publisher, from my perspective, this book admirably succeeds in providing an update to Zondervan's 2013 *Four Views* book, highlighting two unique variants of the GAE model in Craig's and Loke's models. NB: one notes that both Craig's mytho-historical[3] and Loke's recent[4] forms of GAE have entire books dedicated to the topic. As such, the current volume helps bring the conversation up-to-date. What's more, while *Four Views* tended to focus (for the most part) on what *Scripture* communicated, this book uniquely prompted the authors to show their perspective's (general) compatibility with *science* (in toto).

An unfortunate weak point in this volume is the engagement with the non-historical and the YEC perspectives. The replies to Sparks's chapter exclusively focus on his interpretation of Genesis and his approach to science, neglecting that the core of his argument is an "errantist" ontology of Scripture. Sparks himself even notes this lack of comment on his core argument in his rejoinder (63). Ross's YEC article unfortunately received less engagement. Sparks's reply compliments Ross's character and briefly notes the differences in their perspectives (188–89) before launching into further critiques of Craig and Loke. Similarly, Craig briefly critiques Ross's hermeneutics on key supporting passages for Ross's argument (190) but then spends as much time criticizing Ross for not showing how YEC can account for distant starlight and not proving "Flood

3 "In Quest of the Historical Adam" in *Sapientia,* January 2022 https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2022/01/in-quest-of-the-historical-adam/

4 "The Genealogical Adam and Eve" in *Sapientia,* August 2020 https://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2020/08/the-genealogical-adam-and-eve-introducing-the-symposium/

geology" (191). Loke's critique is mostly focused on hermeneutics, though his comments seem more focused on further defending his own position than critiquing Ross (193–95). Loke finishes his response by complaining that Ross did not answer how the earth can be young (~6000 years) if there are stars visible from billions of light-years away (195).

One of the best parts of a multiple views book like this is being able to bear witness to how each contributor engages with the other's perspectives through responses and rebuttals in a way that challenges both the status quo and one's presuppositions/preunderstanding (even if the first and last chapters are somewhat lacking in this regard).

Another critique involves the rather cursory nature of the book. That is, due to space constraints, each view is summative rather than exhaustive. This tends to lead to a repeated refrain of "I explain this argument more fully in X" or the use of *very* lengthy footnotes. To get a fuller understanding of these perspectives, one is required to read through the bibliography.

To conclude, *Perspectives on the Historical Adam and Eve: Four Views* edited by Kenneth D. Keathley, serves as an immensely useful tool for acquainting people with the varied perspectives on this hot-button issue. Its primary audience is likely Bible College/Christian University students alongside the curious layperson.

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Takamitsu Muraoka. *A Biblical Aramaic Reader: With an Outline Grammar*. Second, revised ed. Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2020. Pp. x + 85. Paperback. ISBN: 978-9-0429-4397-1. $24.00 (USD).

For those eager to read the account of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Aramaic, the original language of this biblical account, or, perhaps, the story of Daniel in the lion's den, it can be somewhat difficult to find a volume that provides both a thorough chrestomathy and an effective delineation of Aramaic grammar. Enter *A Biblical Aramaic Reader: With an Outline Grammar* from esteemed Orientalist, Takamitsu Muraoka, now in its second, revised edition.

While Aramaic is (by far) the most neglected of the three biblical languages within most Christian higher education programs, something that is not, however, a distinctly "Western" problem (see p. x), the importance of mastering the fundamentals of this language of revelation has acutely increased now that many contemporary Aramaic texts from the Middle East, notably the Judean Desert, are more readily available. Concerning biblical Aramaic, Muraoka states:

> Biblical Aramaic datable to the pre-Christian era and possessing a firm and ancient tradition of pronunciation provides an ideal starting point for those interested in exploring not only part of the Old Testament canon, but also contemporary and near-contemporary texts of cultural, religious, and linguistic relevance (x).

The format and content(s) of the present work assumes that users have a relatively firm grasp of most of the fundamental aspects of biblical Hebrew (see p. xiv). As such, Muraoka offers no elementary explanation of different points of grammar/vocabulary that are shared by Hebrew and Aramaic, and constant references are made throughout the book to biblical Hebrew.

A Biblical Aramaic Reader consists of three main parts: (1) an outline grammar demarcating various aspects of phonology, morphology, and syntax, (2) paradigms, one should know here that both the regular verbs and *lamed-yod* verbs are covered alongside some "simple exercises" (37–38), and, last, (3) the reader. This last section contains grammatical and philological notes on Daniel 2:4b–7:28; Ezra 4:8–7:26; Genesis 31:47; and Jeremiah 10:11.

Users are required to have ready access to Aramaic lexicons/dictionaries, such as Vogt, *HALOT*, *TDOT*, and/or BDB, for instance, as (unfortunately) Muraoka provides no glossary of any type.

The overall format and basic contents of *A Biblical Aramaic Reader* remain relatively unchanged from the first edition (x). While certain anomalies distinct to Muraoka remain unchanged within this second edition, such as the assertion that the vocalic *sheva* does, in fact, mark a zero vowel (4), anyone familiar with the author's other work(s) with the biblical languages will be aware that the quality of analysis is par excellence and sui generis.

It is difficult, therefore, to find much fault with this book. The annotations of the biblical Aramaic texts are succinct yet detailed with ample references being made back to the grammar itself for increased clarity on those especially "tricky" parts. The writing style, too, is remarkably lucid and clear with a number of special "treats," such as when Muraoka (rather unexpectedly but quite appropriately) refers to, for example, "Snowball" (42) in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945).

One wishes, however, that the publisher had included an exhaustive index in this second edition. While the annotated reading section does contain numerous cross-references, this is no substitute for a dedicated Scripture index that makes clear every (!) reference "at-a-glance." At the risk of belaboring this point, not a few times I noticed that certain examples offered within the grammar component of the text failed to appear in the annotations even though their absence appreciably affected the ability to effectively wrestle with the grammar/syntax of the text.

Alongside this, since *A Biblical Aramaic Reader* does not contain either an author index or a dedicated bibliography, finding in-book references is needlessly laborious/time consuming. Would that the publisher had simply included a subject/Scripture/author index this time around.

One does, though, appreciate the fact that each of the exercise "keys" are provided in full (79–84) and that the "Further Studies" section is (mostly) annotated (30–31). That said, however, while one appreciates Muraoka's emphasis on both Vogt's lexicon and *HALOT* (31), Matheus's *A Biblical Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon* (GlossaHouse, 2020) is an up-to-date supplement (at least in different ways) to Holladay's exceptionally good and trusted, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1988), neither of which (regrettably) appear here.

A more significant (inexcusable?) omission, however, is the odd absenteeism of Gzella's (Aramaic) contribution to the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 2018). Of course, LOGOS users are also especially blessed to have *A Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Aramaic* (OT) by James A. Swanson (LOGOS, 1997), but the *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* contains entries covering virtually all the Aramaic known from the ancient world and is searchable freely online (https://cal.huc.edu/). Beyond doubt, one would be hard pressed to find a more exhaustive source of information on the vocabulary of the Aramaic sections of Ezra/Daniel within their linguistic/historical contexts than these volumes.

Another critique is the conspicuous absence of certain key commentators (à la Goldingay, for instance, with respect to the book of Daniel and Williamson, for example, concerning the books of Ezra and Nehemiah) in the annotated "Further Studies" section. Might Muraoka have given undue attention to so-called critical and ecumenical voices to the neglect of staunchly evangelical sources? If such is the case, the reader must not come under the (false!) impression (due to this underrepresentation) that such (conservative) works are either irrelevant or subpar.

Finally, while the publisher claims that this work is "suitable for self-study" (see the back cover), only those with especially pronounced skill and adeptness at the biblical languages would be able to truly master its content without (extensive) recourse to other grammars and resources. Many of these tensions, however, have been alleviated since Scott N. Callaham published his superb (nigh incomparable!) volume, *Biblical Aramaic for Biblical Interpreters: A Parallel Hebrew-Aramaic Handbook* (Wilmore, KY: GlossaHouse, 2021), which is (fortunately) directly keyed to Muraoka's grammar.

In sum, it is difficult to find a more up-to-date and linguistically informed volume for biblical Aramaic that compares to Takamitsu Muraoka's *A Biblical Aramaic Reader: With an Outline Grammar*, second, revised edition. Its primary users are most likely to be advanced language students alongside certain faculty, of course, of theological/divinity schools, alongside, one hopes, the studious pastor.

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Stanley E. Porter and David I. Yoon. *Romans: A Handbook on the Greek Text*. Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023. Pp. 416. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-9327-9261-4. $49.99 (USD).

Porter and Yoon's *Handbook* is an example of how the contributions of linguistic tools of grammar and syntax can become useful tools in the interpretation of biblical text. As such, this is not a traditional Bible commentary. The *Handbook* intentionally avoids dealing with the theology or historical issues related to author, date, place, and other issues that may often be considered important for the interpretation of the Bible. The reason is simply that the *Handbook*, as the others in the Series, "is designed to guide the new readers and seasoned scholars alike through the intricacies of the Greek text" (ix).

The *Handbook* begins with an introduction (xxiii–xxx) in which the authors describe their method of analysis as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The *Handbook* provides a brief overview of SFL (p xxiii–xx), although the whole "Introduction" includes discussion of important topics and concepts related to SFL. The SFL approach pays attention to the paradigms of the text and understands the texts as part of a network of systems or means of communication. The meaning intended by the author is decoded by the reader. It also assumes a shared cultural context in which both the author and the reader can communicate with one another. In other words, SFL is interested in showing how "meaning is organized and structured in a meaningful way" (xxiv). For instance, in the interpretation of ἔχωμεν (where the *Handbook* prefers the subjunctive form at Romans 5:1), the understanding of the subjunctive is not as exhortative, but as "Paul's projection of the next stage of his argument, that since they have been justified by faith, they should enjoy or realize the peace that they already had" (106). This is an excellent (although brief) introduction to the issues for those not familiar with it. Given that the intended audience of the *Handbook* includes both new readers as well as seasoned scholars, this introduction serves a double purpose of introducing the SFL to both audiences. In particular, it offers brief discussions of the debates related to tense-form and verbal aspect and their implications for the understanding of the meaning of the verbs in New Testament Greek, as well as discussion on prominence, cohesion, syntactical categories, context, and co-text.

But the *Handbook* deals with more than just grammatical and syntactical analysis of the text. There are many instances in which discussions about text-critical issues are tackled with precise and careful analysis, bridging the issues of textual criticism (such as the discussion on the indicative versus the subjunctive of ἔχω in 5:1) with issues related to syntax and linguistic analysis. The *Handbook* consistently identifies the *hapax legomena* in Romans, such as συνήδομαι in 7:22 and συστενάζει in 8:22. It also includes discussion on issues related to punctuation and its implications for the interpretation of the text, as exemplified by the discussion and interpretation of Romans 9:5 (202–204). Throughout the *Handbook*, we find discussions related to the deponent verbs, and the use and meaning of the genitive (on 3:22, pp. 75–77). Also, the *Handbook* consistently calls "nominative of address" what other grammars call "vocative."The *Handbook* includes many parenthetical references to scholarly sources that may agree or disagree with Porter and Yoon's conclusion. The glossary (363–70) and list of works cited (371–79) are welcomed, especially for readers who may need a quick definition of important terms and scholars who may want to read more on the topic.

I believe that *Romans: A Handbook on the Greek Text* by Stanley E. Porter and David I. Yoon is a great contribution to the study of the Letter to the Romans, as well as a great tool for the discussion of the new insights SFL can offer as another tool in the interpretation of the New Testament. Every student and scholar who wants to be up-to-date in the interpretation of the New Testament, and the Letter to the Romans in particular, should include this handbook. It is a needed tool and helpful supplement to contemporary scholarly commentaries.

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Jonathan Leeman. *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023. Pp. xix + 278. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-4335-8763-4. $22.99 (USD).

The modern West is in an age of widespread skepticism towards authority in its many forms. Wielding power, many think, always means abusing power. In *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing*, however, Jonathan Leeman argues that authority was designed to lift others up, and that when authority is exercised according to the standards of Scripture, it not only aids in human flourishing but is necessary to it. More than that, Leeman offers practical wisdom to those under and in positions of authority so that they might move from simple understanding to transformed action.

In part 1 (chapters 1–3), Leeman explains that authority is something granted to all human beings as part of the dominion over creation given by God to His image bearers in Genesis 1. Authority at its best, then, is simply a reflection of the character of God. It has four purposes: 1) growing those under it, 2) growing those in it, 3) creating and organizing groups, and 4) teaching others what God is like (17–29). Sadly, in a fallen world, authority is not always wielded rightly. Fallen human authority often seeks to steal God's glory and privileges, abusing others in the process. When authority is used in this way, it "cast[s] a false image about God, like a haunted-house mirror that distorts the face it reflects" (37).

Leeman makes clear that this is not just true of the worst offenders, but of all people. Each of us has, at various times, used our God-granted authority in ways that can harm others and lie about who God truly is. Fallen authority, however, is not the end of the story. "Authority-in-redemption reaches down into a world of suffering and bears the cost. It stoops. It goes to where people are and rescues them" (49). In Christ, authority is redeemed and established as a means by which people can flourish. Redeemed authority balances the demands of truth with a heart of grace, the transcendence of commands with the immanence of care. Godly authority looks like Jesus, i.e., being willing to set the agenda and issue commands but also putting itself in a position of vulnerability in order to raise others up.

For authority to exist, however, there must also be people under that authority. Part 2 (chapters 4–5), then, seeks to define the other side in these relationships: submission. Leeman argues that submission is not the removal of one's own agency, but rather "deferring by moral constraint to an authority figure's judgment, even if we don't immediately share those judgments" (65). More than just deferring, however, it also involves "deploying your resources to that same end" (67). Ultimately, submission is given to God, rather than simply to a human individual, and when done in healthy settings is the pathway to growth (cf. Rom. 13:1–7; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5). Leeman is quick to note, though, that submission to humans is never absolute (75–87). Because God is the ultimate authority, when submission to a human authority would require disobeying God or allowing oneself to be wrongly harmed, it can and must be resisted (cf. Ex. 1:15–22; Acts 4:18–20; Acts 16:37–39; 1 Cor. 7:21). "In the final analysis," Leeman writes, "submission to the people whom God has placed over us is the ordinary pathway to life, growth, authority.… Yet our submission is never finally owed to other people.… We owe it to others only when God says we do" (85).

Having established the goals of both authority and submission, part 3 (chapters 6–10), outlines five principles of biblical authority, devoting one chapter to each. First, authority is not unaccountable, but it submits to a higher authority (91–98). Even the highest authorities must ultimately submit to God. Second, authority must not be used to steal life from others but rather to create it (99–111). The goal of authority is that those under it might flourish, not be diminished. Third, those in authority must be teachable and seek wisdom from others (113–20). Authority does not equal infallibility, and those who possess it ought to seek wisdom from others. Fourth, authority must walk the tight rope between authoritarianism and permissiveness (121–30). Both errors cause those under authority to wilt, rather than flourish as God intends. Finally, those in authority must not be self-protective but rather willingly bear the cost that comes with their position (131–46). Like Jesus, good authority forfeits its rights and gives whatever is necessary for the good of others (cf. Phil. 2:1–11). These five principles ensure that one wields their God-given authority so that others might be built up rather than torn down.

Part 4 (chapters 11–17) takes the framework established in the rest of the book and presents how this looks in everyday relationships of authority and submission. Leeman distinguishes between "authority of command" and "authority of counsel" (152–57). Authority of command is one to which Scripture gives enforcement mechanisms: parents (the rod), government (the sword), and local churches (the keys).

Authority of counsel possesses a moral weight but no means of enforcement. This is the kind of authority possessed by husbands and church elders (cf. Eph. 5:22–33; 1 Pet. 5:1–4). With that distinction, Leeman finishes the book by offering practical advice on how biblical authority might look for husbands (167–82), parents (183–95), the government (197–219), managers (221–31), local churches (233–41), and church elders (243–55).

With this book, Leeman made a bold decision to tread into dangerous waters. A volume like this requires drawing careful lines and anticipating how people may twist the truth of God's Word to serve their own ends. For this reason, I have no doubt that anyone who reads *Authority* may find places where they feel that Leeman is being too strict or too permissive, too opinionated or not careful enough in application. This is inevitable in anything like this, given that much of its truth must be applied at the levels of wisdom and conscience. Furthermore, it seems to me that his presentation of a small theology of government in chapter 14 may have distracted rather than added to his overall argument, and one wonders if his section on how managers wield authority contained the same degree of biblical support as the rest of the book did.

Yet, I consider this book to be a triumph! Leeman writes with exceptional clarity and depth but manages to keep it readable and compelling throughout—even despite the above critiques. Leeman is not content to leave his ideas in his readers' minds but wants to press them down into their hearts, using real-life stories and probing questions to ensure that anyone who reads the book cannot ignore God's call to use authority in a way that pleases Him and serves others (cf. Phil 2:1–11).

His definitions and distinctions are particularly helpful, whether it is his lucid presentation of why submission is not dehumanizing (69–70) or his case for the distinction between the two kinds of authority (149–165). The addition of both topical and scriptural indices is also appreciated for future reference. Regrettably, there is no author index.

Jonathan Leeman's *Authority: How Godly Rule Protects the Vulnerable, Strengthens Communities, and Promotes Human Flourishing* is a desperately needed book for our post-postmodern culture, which is rife with both abuse and an anti-authority ethos. Though a worthy addition to anyone's library, it is an especially important read for those whom the Lord has placed in positions of authority, such as husbands (with Leeman arguing from a complementarian position), parents, and local church elders.

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Chris Boesel. *Reading Karl Barth: Theology That Cuts Both Ways*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023. Pp. 174. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-4982-0034-9. $24.00 (USD).

Chris Boesel is Associate Professor of Christian Theology at Drew Theological School in Madison, New Jersey. In *Reading Karl Barth*, he not only provides an introduction to key themes in Barth but reminds readers that Barth's theology challenges our configurations of the theological spectrum, challenging both liberals and conservatives. Boesel asks how Barth's theology might function as a "life-affirming" resource in response to "destructive theological, ecclesial, and sociopolitical principalities and powers facing churches and societies today" (xii). The text is clear, engaging, and occasionally humorous, written for the "theologically interested pastor, layperson, and church congregation" (xii), especially the "perplexed progressive/post-evangelical" (xiv).

After the Introduction, the book is divided into three parts. Part 1, "Approaching Barth's Theology," has two chapters. In "I've Got One Word for You: Jesus Christ," Boesel introduces the reader to Barth's Christocentrism, emphasizing that the eternal Word of God must be concretely heard. He also gives us a helpful summary statement repeated throughout the book: "in Jesus Christ (through the Spirit), God is for us, sinners, and not against us, for us *all*, each and every one, *the last*, *first*—and we are for God, and in God, for each other, *the last*, *first*. *Period*" (4–5, italics original). Boesel adds "through the Spirit" because Barth needed to say more about the Spirit, and emphasizes "the last, first" because be wants to highlight the universal reach of the gospel more than Barth did. What is more, "the name of Jesus Christ always refers to the living, Trinitarian history between God and the creature within creation, in the midst of which we find ourselves addressed and called into responsible, active participation" (6). Boesel also answers a question that those new to Barth might have: why is the *Church Dogmatics* so long? First, theology is paradoxical. Human speech about God seems impossible, though God makes it possible in the gospel, so theology needs to wrestle with this. Second, the reality of God's work "occurs as a history of personal encounter and relation," and so each human being in history has the potential to hear and receive this, which means theological reflection is continuous (10). And third, the church has too often misinterpreted the gospel, and so the church constantly needs correction. In chapter 2, "The News is Good: God *Is* for *Us*, Period," Boesel outlines Barth's doctrine of election. Barth's version of double predestination, God's Yes and No, only means a Yes for creatures since God himself takes on the judgment of sin and death. Boesel helpfully pairs election with Barth's rejection of natural theology, which comes from our desire to control or master the gospel, which can be manifested in any Christian tradition.

Part 2: "The Method, Logic, and Content of Barth's Theology" has three chapters. Chapter 3, "Neither Our Possession nor at Our Disposal," describes Barth's early break with liberal theology and his discovery of the Bible and the transcendence of God. Boesel accurately describes how liberal theology assumed religion as a natural anthropological capacity (especially for the white, educated, and propertied European male). While Barth himself fit this mold, his break with theological liberalism began a way forward. Boesel also notes that Barth never officially broke ties with socialism, though he criticized socialist movements for breaking with international solidarity and submitting to various nationalisms. For Barth, the socialisms across Europe "failed to keep pace with the radicality of a truly Christian sociopolitical vision, at least as he understood it" (36). Boesel ends the chapter by noting how Barth's view of scripture could be viewed as too traditional for progressives and not authoritative enough for conservatives (since scripture is a *witness* to the divine Word that is Jesus Christ). Boesel argues Barth cuts against both sides because "he sees them both as attempts to seize control of and appropriate the free and living Word of God as a human possession, possibility, and capacity" (48).

Chapter 4, "The Movement of Barth's Theological Logic—*from* God," qualifies God's transcendence by discussing divine sovereignty and freedom. Boesel highlight's Barth insistence that all things, especially salvation come *from* God, which also "functions as the ground for and the call to exercise our creaturely freedom and responsibility" (53). And while divine sovereignty puts limits on creatures, "it involves a radically non-competitive relation, such that God's power and control can be seen as the *ground and source* of creaturely power and agency" (59, italics original). However, divine freedom is more important for Barth than sovereignty, as it is freedom to love, which is "an expression of and outpouring of God's eternal Trinitarian life of loving freedom" (62). Boesel wants to make clear that this is not a destructive "power over," but a power *for* creatures: "*for the redemptive well-being, wholeness, mutuality, and flourishing of the creature, of all creatures*, and of *all* creation, *the last, first*" (66, italics original). Barth's insistence on the wide reach of God's freedom in love cuts both ways again. For conservatives, who Boesel sees as limiting salvation (especially by insisting on an "eternally populated hell" (70)—Barth's openness to universalism will be too much. For progressives, saving perpetrators and challenging current ethical constructs will be problematic.

In chapter 5, "The Concreteness of Barth's Theological Logic—*Only* in Jeus Christ," Boesel demonstrates that for Barth we move from the particular and concrete revelation in Jesus to the universal creator and sustainer of all that is. This puts general revelation in the context of special revelation and means that the actualization of God's universal grace only occurs in the particular history of God's work in Christ by the Spirit. The same goes for theological anthropology, as we only truly understand human nature by looking to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This movement from the particular to the universal flips patterns in Western philosophy, which tend to prioritize the universal (and inevitably become exclusionary). The chapter also discusses what this means for religious pluralism and Barth's supersessionism, which needs critique and reconstruction.

The last two chapters in part 3: "The Ethics of Barth's Theology—'How Should We Then Live,'" focus on the basics of Barth's ethics and then on how Barth's ethics might be engaged today. Chapter 6, "We do Stuff Too: Human Agency, Freedom, and Action," puts to rest any suggestion that Barth's theology is too abstract. Boesel explains the *direction* of Barth's ethics as humans turning "back to God" and then "to and for" the neighbour. The *nature* of his ethics as "free obedience," while the *content* is gratitude towards God and proclamation and ethics towards the neighbour. Boesel emphasizes that ethics for Barth is not a pregiven list of rules but a concrete and contextual response to God's Word to us (what Barth calls the "divine command"). What is more, free obedience to this command includes the full use of human capacities and decision processes. However, true freedom only occurs if your life corresponds to God's will, decision, and action in Jesus (through the Spirit). So, Barth's ethics is *concrete* and *situational* but *not relative*.

The last chapter, "Barth and Progressive Christian Ethics in and for Our Time and Place?", highlights the way in which Boesel would like to appropriate Barth towards progressive sociopolitical ends. In terms of economic justice or critiques of racism and colonization, the applications either directly flow from Barth's own view or presuppositions of this theology, while for issues in gender or sexuality, Boesel disagrees with Barth and worries that he may have committed to forms of natural theology. Boesel argues that if God is for humans, then there must be a critique of patriarchy and a more inclusive vision cast, including LGBTQIA+ people. In terms of affirming religious pluralism, Barth would clearly reject the idea that all religions lead to God, though there are dialectical ways to see other religions as providing insight into what it means to be human. In regard to environmental justice and ecological sustainability, Barth needs to be expanded.

Reading Karl Barth is not necessarily a work that will equip readers to dive into the *Church Dogmatics* itself. Rather, Boesel challenges readers to start thinking theologically with and beyond Barth. With such a short text, Barth scholars might also note that certain topics are not given the attention deserved: the doctrine of the trinity as one Divine Subject in three modes, Barth's actualism and historicism, and *Church Dogmatics* IV in general, especially its christological realism. At the center of Barth's theology is the claim that human reconciliation with God occurs in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that the ascended Lord is now directing the Church by the Holy Spirit towards the eschaton. Perhaps more attention to this center would appeal to conservatives or even the progressive- or post-evangelicals Boesel wants to reach. Nevertheless, comprehensiveness is not the aim of the book, and there are other resources to prep new readers of Barth. Boesel succeeds in what he aims to do: to remind readers that Barth's theology centers on the gospel as good news, that the electing God is *for all humanity*, "the last, first." And this means we need to carefully think about how Barth is *received*. Because Barth redirects us to God's objective revelation in Jesus Christ, there is a freedom from obsessing about current configurations of the theological spectrum and freedom to think afresh about major social, political, and ecclesial issues. In other words, Boesel suggests that it is not that Barth is too conservative for liberals and too liberal for conservatives. Rather, it might be the case that Barth is more generous and realistic than liberals and more orthodox than conservatives. He suggests to us that the breadth, depth, and generosity found in Barth's theology might be a key for a theology that is yet to come.

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Heather M. Hoover. *Composition as Conversation: Seven Virtues for Effective Writing*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023. Pp. 161. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1-5409-6603-2. $24.99 (USD).

To preserve the integrity of academic works, individuals' contributions are scoured by editors, peer-reviewed, endorsed by well-known figures, and expected to meet scholarly standards and writing styles. This may result in some postsecondary students interpreting such works as presumptuous or devoid of individuality. Heather M. Hoover, in her book *Composition as Conversation*, proposes a solution for the disillusioned young researcher to "open the door" to inventive, compelling writing by presenting academic composition as a visible form of dialogue—still regarding the author's personality, ideas, and creativity.

Aside from a brief introduction and conclusion, alongside ten appendices (more on this later), *Composition as Conversation* consists of seven chapters—delineated as virtues. In the first chapter, "Be Curious," Hoover highlights kindling one's desire to learn and growing in asking good questions. Hoover comments that, too often, "The writing conversation is predictable" (10), so she recommends students strive for both creativity and excellence! Her practical advice is to research topics to see what sparks interest and develop curiosity about numerous subjects rather than settling for mediocrity and merely completing an assignment.

The second virtue, "Be Attentive," centers on being observant, primarily during one's research. Hoover propounds four principles: (1) exploring different perspectives on a subject; (2) using reputable and widely accepted sources; (3) accurately crediting the sources used; and (4) acknowledging that addressing all possible facets of an argument is an unrealistic expectation. Hoover concludes by encouraging individuals to be attentive by practicing active listening, becoming more aware of personal biases, and engaging with sources that champion opposing viewpoints.

The focus of chapter three is to "Be Relatable." In general, academia can seem aloof. Hoover explains that relating is about respect and connection, and these may be achieved through practical applications. The student can define significant technical terms, craft a relevant and purposeful introduction, provide a topic's history and context, have an organized and logical argument, and invite fellow classmates or peers to evaluate one's work—all while preserving one's genuine "voice" (56).

Hoover's fourth virtue is to "Be on Topic," requiring clarity, time, and repetition. The writer must make a well-paced, unambiguous argument that the audience can follow with ease and enthusiasm. Staying on topic can be aided by creating an outline, repeating concepts (yet avoiding redundancy, which may exasperate the reader), and fashioning a tight-knit conclusion.

Chapter 5, titled "Be Engaging," necessitates the use of clear and applicable language, as even the strategic placement of words in a sentence contributes to its meaning. Because "Being engaging means being in relationship" (88), the writer must establish a connection with sources, their context, and the audience's perspective—thereby inspiring readers' curiosity and delight.

"Be Open-Minded" is Hoover's encouragement in chapter 6. She defines it as having "intellectual humility," willingly acknowledging that one cannot answer every question or is always correct (91). Hoover clarifies that open-mindedness does not require a naïve change of opinion—the goal is dialogue, even if both parties irreconcilably disagree. This interaction is needful, for without such conversations, someone regarding oneself as knowledgeable might simply be unwilling to consider others' perspectives.

The last of the seven virtues is to "Be Generous." Generosity within the academic realm is collaboration, that is, listening and giving of oneself while also receiving. The writing process is not based on one individual's efforts! Citing sources is an example of generosity, as it provides accessibility for others to find the same material.

The book concludes with an exhortation to "Be in Conversation" and listen and learn from others. To support the development of healthy academic conversation skills, Hoover includes ten appendices that provide practical guidelines on research strategies (125–51).

Hoover recognizes a substantial obstacle to the expectations of academia. Rather than seeing academic papers as opportunities to learn, students are increasingly declining in their passion for written assignments. This is a fair point, and Hoover puts in the work to provide practical solutions that assist students in changing their perspectives on academic composition. In short, Hoover understands that real problems require relevant solutions.

Hoover's encouragement for academic integrity with respect to citations is exceptionally commendable. She bases this on the need for appropriate interaction with others' voices, noting, "When we quote others in conversation, we draw on their good reputations, and we do so in a social contract to represent them accurately" (59–60).

In a sense, Hoover supplies a fresh perspective on academic writing. Students are encouraged to be creative and adventurous. This challenges the oft-held generalization that academia exists primarily for the advanced individual with a doctorate and a high-functioning vocabulary. With conversation as composition's stated goal, even the student with no love of the thesaurus or abstract musing may influence a vast audience.

Another positive element of this book is Hoover's knowledge of students' experiences. She provides many examples and stories from her personal involvement as a professor who seeks to foster effective writing habits in her students, and she describes many exercises she has assigned to her students that have assisted them in developing research and writing skills.

Hoover practices what she preaches. *Composition as Conversation* conveys that the heart of writing and good communication is relationship. In addition, her book is straightforward, easy to read, and expertly structured. Although the author does not claim to have all the answers regarding conversational writing, she skillfully adds her voice to this multifaceted topic.

Composition as Conversation must not be mistaken, however, as the be-all and end-all of composition books. In a sense, this book requires a distinct and subjective prerequisite: the drive and initiative of the student. Hoover's input can be a fantastic help if students desire to improve their writing and enjoy the academic process. However, for young postsecondary students, maturity, dedication, and—dare one say—character do not always appear where an instructor would desire. Thus, the effectiveness of a book such as this is influenced by the hearts of its recipients, who may rank paper writing among the most unfortunate experiences of postsecondary schooling.

Another critique is that time can be a severe constraint. For students invested in extracurriculars, the steps to writing effectively can exhaust even the most high-capacity individual. This book's principles are excellent, but for many students, such instruction may be seen as another "outline for success" that eventually finds itself relegated to the bottom of a backpack or the back of a desk drawer.

Hoover shares her experiences and passions, but to provide enough context, she occasionally veers slightly off topic and reveals a few biases, although these may be understood as the author's efforts to connect the conceptual with the practical. The emphasis on climate change (25, 42, 43, 65, et al.), admittedly one of her preferred topics of interest, might be slightly off-putting to some readers. Religious studies are occasionally mentioned in passing, but not to the degree one might expect from a book published by Baker Academic—a (traditionally speaking) confessional evangelical publisher.

Though written for both teachers and students of the writing process (3), this book is not written *to* students, which might narrow its sphere of influence. The author is a seasoned professor, and as such, the primary beneficiaries of Hoover's work are educators who are looking for practical ways to help their students catch the vision of relational research and writing, thus opening the door of academic conversation to whoever desires to enter.

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Rhiannon Graybill, John Kaltner, and Steven L. McKenzie. *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Yale Bible, volume 24H. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023. Pp. xvi + 368. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0-300-20667-8. $85.00 (USD).

Susan Niditch. *Jonah: A Commentary*. Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2023. Pp. xxi + 162. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0-8006-9903-1. $59.00 (USD).

In spite of its small stature, the book of Jonah perhaps tells one of the largest "fish stories" of all time. It is strange, surprising, and, for many readers—be they biblical scholars or not—somewhat "difficult to swallow." Even though Jesus draws comparisons to himself regarding the tale (see Matt 12:38–42, 16:1–4; Luke 11:29–32), the truthfulness of its events remains uncertain in the minds of many. This leads some people to be content with merely gleaning principles and applications from the book of Jonah, while others earnestly argue for its historicity.

This narrative's modest forty-eight verses lend themselves to be enough material for many commentaries to engage in dialogue over. Rhiannon Graybill, John Kaltner, and Steven L. McKenzie, authors of *Jonah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AYB), find themselves in this ongoing conversation. Their offering marks the second commentary on Jonah in the AYB commentary series alone. In it, they pay homage to Jack M. Sasson's initial contribution (AYB 24B, 1990). They explicitly state that "we have built on his work at every stage" (5), and humbly admit "we know all too well that ours is not a final word on this fascinating biblical work" (300). How true. Not only is their commentary not the final word, but it is also not the final commentary to be published on Jonah in 2023. Susan Niditch's *Jonah: A Commentary* (Hermeneia) also brings significant insight to the Jonah discussion. This review will consider and compare each of these commentaries.

This second contribution from AYB on the book of Jonah is not reflected in the title "A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary" (iii). The addition of the word "Another" or a change to "Newer" would have signaled so. A perusing of the table of contents reveals the underlying methodological approach for the series has not changed, even if the order has been slightly modified. This may give reason for altering the original title in only dropping the words "and Interpretation" from the end. Of course, the newest offering does contain interpretation. In fact, it has quite an eclectic collection of interpretive methodologies, some of which are relatively new to the field of hermeneutics and are still developing.

At the onset of the book's Introduction (and with intended irony), the authors share a portion of Father Mapple's sermon from Moby Dick (3). This is meant to not only demonstrate that there are many kinds of lessons to be learned from the book of Jonah, but also to legitimize using it to "reflect on other critical, ethical, and exegetical questions" (3). This is something that they intend on incorporating into their contribution through the dedication of a whole chapter entitled "New Approaches to Reading the Book of Jonah" (51–66), but more on that later. An additional motive is also suggested, namely, to reinforce the idea that true masterpieces are never completed, not by their initiators (a nod to Sasson), or by those who follow afterwards—instead, they remain unfinished and in perpetual construction (5).

The Introduction (1–5) addresses the most pressing interpretive issues of the book. Chapter 1 (5–6) includes a concise summation of the story. Chapter 2 (6–20) delineates the two worlds of Jonah: "the world in which the story is set and the world in which it was composed" (6). Within this parameter, the historical and geographical settings are described as well as the proposed dating for the book. The authors suggest Jonah was written in stages, with the earliest portions dating in the Persian era, and then "reached its final port in the Hellenistic age" (20). Chapter 3 (20–31) acknowledges the wide acceptance of the stability of the text due to it being "virtually free" of text-critical issues (20).

Chapter 4 (31–37) focuses on Jonah's place and relationship within the book of Twelve. One common thread woven throughout this section is the likelihood of Jonah's original inclusion within this corpus, regardless of whether it was a later addition. This, of course, assumes one holds the position that the Twelve is a unified corpus, especially in light of Jonah being the only "work of prose" contained among the Twelve (34). This may justify an argument for a redactor making a poetic insertion to Jonah (á la chapter 2). Additionally, this conclusion stems from the presence of the *gnadenformel* "grace formula" (Jonah 4:2) that harkens to Exodus 34:6–7a and is also present in Joel, Micah, Nahum, and Malachi (34). This impacts one's understanding of redaction (which touches development), as well as shared vocabulary and shared thematic content, and even its historicity. The authors muse:

> A consequence of Jonah's insertion in the Twelve was that its satirical dimension was downplayed or ignored, so it came to be viewed as an account of actual events rather than the mocking critique of another prophetic book that it was intended to be. In this way, the redactor(s) … unwittingly set in motion the wheels that led to a more literal reading of Jonah that endures still today. (34)

Chapter 5 (38–51) gives a characterization of the players and makes note of literary features, the message, and genre of Jonah. Chapter 6 (51–66) is one of the more unique features of this volume. The authors do not eschew the historical-critical hermeneutical approach in favor of contemporary ones; in fact, they affirm, "It remains an important cornerstone of the discipline (and of this commentary)" (51). At the same time, they assert that more diverse contemporary hermeneutical approaches are valid developments because they "yield new insights" and the text of Jonah proves to be "ideally suited for a hermeneutically multivalent reading" (51). The authors also concede that there are more approaches than can be addressed in this volume and, as such, must limit themselves out of a "desire of efficiency and economy" (51) but make no claim that the ones they do address are of greater importance.

Chapter 7 (66–108) illustrates the many areas of tradition and culture that the book of Jonah has been received in and, as a result, has influenced to some degree. The bibliography (109–138) is categorized to reflect these various spheres. The Notes and Comments (143–298) follow and supply the expected verse-by-verse commentary familiar to this series. An Afterword (299–300) serves as the bookend on the point made with respect to Father Mapple's fresh lessons to be gleaned from Jonah and how the authors have attempted to follow suit.

This commentary closes with an Index of Subjects, Modern Authors, and Ancient Sources (no page numbers in the digital edition from Logos Bible Software), all of which replicate the intended purposes of coupling the new with the old in both topic and sources.

While Niditch expectedly addresses many of the same topics that AYB does, the order is not the same. With regard to introductory matters, what takes one hundred and thirty-nine pages to arrive at in the AYB takes a mere twenty-seven pages in Hermeneia. Thus, the related topics of narrative structure, genre, relationship among the Twelve, and textual stability are given far less discussion. This may be a detractor for those more interested in discussions on various fields of criticism, but not for persons concerned primarily with the text itself.

Most of the remainder of the book is dedicated to translation/commentary. This is almost always followed up with a word about the reception of Jonah in comparative folklore, old and recent. Take, for instance, the human instinct of "fight or flight" which Niditch expresses below:

> Jonah, a servant of the deity, assumes the character motif of the runaway servant, a protagonist of various folktales, one extremely popular in African American folklore in which the slave has obvious reasons to escape his servitude. Similarly, folktales such as Snow White include the flight of the young girl threatened by her powerful and murderous stepmother. We might also include the figure of Ahiqar, forced to flee from his ruler when false rumors of treachery are spread about him by his evil nephew. The relative status of the one who runs

> and the person from whom they are running is common and applies, to be sure, to the prophet who flees his God. The motif is also found in other contents, for example … the "runaway cavalry hero." [T]he image of running off, regardless of whether it is an action under the protagonist's own control, initiates a wide range of traditional narrative patterns. (35–36)

Because Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur intentionally exclude the attributes of God correlated with harsh justice but instead focus on mercy and forgiveness, Niditch can remark about what the wider implications Jonah's acceptance within Judaism may imply:

> Several critical themes informed the reception and interpretation of Jonah and explain its place in a communal setting that marks the process of atonement. One involves the efficacy of repentance, another God's capacious capacity to grant forgiveness, and the third the rehabilitation of Jonah and the transformation of his worldview via the interpretive process so that the story and the character of the prophet comport with the themes of repentance and forgiveness. (122)

The commentary concludes with a bibliography (125–46) and index (146–60).

With regard to referencing original languages, AYB exclusively uses transliteration. As someone who loves the struggle inherent to the study of biblical Hebrew, it is disappointing that it is not at least paired alongside the transliteration. Once more, I find transliteration to be of little help because it is essentially a foreign language in and of itself. Why labor to learn it over the real deal? Hermeneia, on the other hand, deserves kudos (IMO) for having used the Hebrew script (in addition to occasional transliteration). However, the inclusion of the *nikud* (vowel pointing) would better serve those in their first years of learning the language, without detracting from its aesthetics or claim of being a technical commentary. Another welcomed inclusion would be an explanation (or visual layout) for the syntactical methodology applied to the Hebrew text, especially for the poetic structure of chapter 2. Too often, what the colometry commentators propose is unsatisfactory because there is no agreed-upon majority standard for division, unlike the ancient established system the Masoretes handed down to us in the *teʻamim*.

Those who appreciate footnotes will undoubtedly gravitate toward Hermeneia as it has four times the amount (over four hundred and thirty (!) compared to just over a hundred in the AYB). Hermeneia alone also has six (black and white) pictures in its art discussion, while AYB has none.

Additionally, while neither book has more than a few tables and figures, neither one incorporates a reference page in either the front or back matter. However, if one is looking for a list of Jonah references in music from the twentieth century through today, they will be pleased to find several pages in AYB that note the Title/Date, Composer/Artist, and Genre (ranging from showtunes, country, rock, reggae, punk, metal, and more, see pp. 103–108).

The AYB and Hermeneia series are both respected and sought-after acquisitions to any commentary collection. These two have earned their inclusion among their predecessors. That said, I believe that Hermeneia is much better suited for the serious student and scholar.

By way of example, Niditch is open to the possibility of another author for chapter 2 of Jonah (57–58) and is uncertain whether the three days and nights are "literal" (55–56). She also spills much ink demonstrating that Jonah is just another common story among scores of other Canaanite, Akkadian, or Mediterranean tales of cosmic chaos, sea monsters, and deities exerting their control over nature. With reference to the "great fish," Niditch neither gives direct commentary for דָּג גָּדוֹל nor imposes any preference over its potential true identification. Instead, she appears to yield to the original author's ambiguity, stating, "The author leaves room for the imagination, and his use of a general term need not be attributed to his lack of precise or taxonomic knowledge concerning sea life" (55).

I highly recommend the procurement of these two commentaries into any serious student of religious studies' personal library due to their inclusion of new hermeneutical approaches to the text, intertextual motif comparisons to folklore, and Jonah's reception over time within Jewish and Christian traditions. These are not insignificant contributions to scholasticism.

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Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, and William T. Fitzgerald. *The Craft of Research*. Fifth edition. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2024. Pp. 368. Paperback. ISBN 978-0-226-82667-7. $19.00 (USD).

Research is both an art and a science. It is an art because researchers must know their intended audience so that they are able to anticipate and answer the questions and objections their audience will make toward the claims being made. It is a science because the researcher must know and apply the proper mechanics that produce the preferred arrangement, which their particular audience expects to see the assertions presented in. *The Craft of Research* has as one of its aims to teach this art and science to the beginning researcher and the advanced alike (xiii).

The authors acknowledge there are already many excellent books that offer a method for achieving valid research (xiv). However, they insist that a research gap remains (xiv). Experienced researchers will agree that research is not performed in a strictly linear process, but rather one that "loops back and forth, moving forward a step or two, going back while at the same time anticipating stages not yet begun, then moving forward again" (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 2000, ix). Other books often neglect to address how to overcome this. Based on this, the authors of *The Craft of Research* find it necessary to include a demonstration of how each individual process influences the others separately and as a whole, as well as how the researcher must work on these various processes individually and simultaneously.

The preface of the book gives a description of the fundamental objective each edition of this book purposes to accomplish, namely, to help readers develop skills in research, critical thinking, and how to present research findings (xiii–xiv). It also explains how the delivery of information and an increased diversity of a global audience have necessitated an updated edition (xvii–xviii). Excluding the introduction, there are five parts to the book.

The "Introduction: Your Research and Your Audience" identifies for the beginning researcher what research is and the need for an honest dialogue with the intended audience. Part I, "Asking Questions, Seeking Answers," teaches the researcher how to begin a research project by discovering a topic of interest, narrowing that topic by formulating questions about it, and then turning those questions into a research problem. Part II, "Sources and Resources," shares how to discover relevant sources of data for answering research questions as well as how to engage them in a manner that draws out one's best thinking. Part III, "Making Your Argument," reveals the necessary criteria for assembling a valid argument in support of a thesis. For instance, all arguments contain five elements: (1) a claim, (2) reasons, (3) evidence, (4) warrants, and (5) acknowledgments and responses. Part IV illustrates the essential components for producing a research paper or presentation. Part V encourages the reader to conduct research in an ethical manner and offers advice for those teaching the "craft of research" to others.

The book concludes with a chapter to acknowledge those to whom the authors are indebted. Finally, there is an appendix of bibliographical resources listed by subject (301–306) and an index (307–14). The lack of an author index does not detract from the usefulness of this resource because of its inclusion of the subject bibliography, which is designed to be a "curated collection of tools for conducting, writing, and presenting research" (301). In addition to suggested databases, websites, and print materials, resources both generic and particular are organized into wide-ranging categories.

The authors recognize that research is no longer restricted to the library, nor is the end goal limited to a presentation of a paper before one's peers (171). They assert that "increasingly, undergraduate and even secondary-school researchers share their work … beyond the classroom" (272). A new generation of researchers is conducting research by means of search engines, digital libraries, and AI—then uploading and streaming it through various application platforms to instantly reach global audiences. This evolution in research has prompted the addition of a new chapter focused on presenting research. It also motivated the authors to change terminology and update illustrative examples.

The newest chapter, "Research Presentations" (272–82), aims to draw the distinction between an audience of readers versus a live audience, designated as auditors (272). The importance is "unless you know and respect the difference between these two types of audiences, your presentation will be tiring and hard to follow" (272). Consequently, the fundamentals of giving live presentations that keep the attention of auditors are explained. They suggest a conversational reading to include eye contact and speed of speech (273), using various means of communication that engage visually and aurally (273–74), and preparing discussion questions for a "Q&A" immediately following the presentation (277).

While this subject is a welcome addition to the book, it gives little indication that it is attempting to address the new generation who is uploading and live streaming their research vis-à-vis social media platforms like YouTube and Facebook or collaboration platforms like MS Teams and Zoom. Instead, it reads more like a lost chapter from the past, which for reasons unknown were never included in the previous editions. In other words, the information regarding live presentations reads more as timeless than contemporary because those items addressed are fundamental for any presenter at any time, such as the previously mentioned eye contact, not speaking too fast (especially in a monotone voice), or simply reading a manuscript to one's audience. This criticism seems fair even in light of the authors' acknowledgment that only "principles to guide online research" (xv) would be discussed while refraining from any effort to "describe the vast array of specialized search tools and databases" (xv).

Another criticism of the book is that swapping terms such as "paper" for "report" or "reader" for "audience" does not deliver on "a refreshing of its presentation" (xv). Additionally, only a few illustrations from previous editions were changed. Changing the first three illustrations for "What Is Research" from 1) looking in the yellow pages to find a head gasket for a '65 Mustang, 2) Googling Michael Jordan's birthday, and 3) searching the internet for newspaper articles—instead to 1) asking friends for a good place for pizza, 2) Googling LeBron James's birthday, and 3) asking AI for suggestions—was an improved modernization (3). Including remote work as an illustration was also an improvement (116–17). However, illustrations such as Franklin D. Roosevelt as an admired historical figure (121) and Crick and Watson's discovery of the helical structure of DNA (121–22) could detach a younger audience unfamiliar with them. This was a missed opportunity to present examples in ways that would appeal to and hold the interest of a younger generation or new audience. Those familiar with any of the previous editions will likely agree that this edition feels more like a reread than a "refreshed" read.

The book's reordered structure, renamed terminology, and the addition of a new chapter and illustrations did not deliver as great a significance as what was expected. This is slightly disappointing since there is a high probability this would have been well received. Also, it is uncertain whether the new chapter alone constitutes a repurchasing of the book. In light of this, it is hard to recommend the purchase of this newest edition over picking up an earlier edition (especially edition four) at a used bookstore. Nonetheless, the book itself, in any edition, remains an essential resource for understanding how to do research, making valid argumentation, and presenting these to others in a meaningful way. Whether one is just learning how to do research or has been doing research for many years, there is value to be gleaned in these pages for all. When it comes to teaching the science and art (craft) of research, one will find many time-honored methodologies offered in this book.

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Brian Brock. *Joining Creation's Praise: A Theological Ethic of Creatureliness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2025. Pp. 1192. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-5409-6326-0. $74.99 (USD).

"Where are you?" and "What is this that you have done?" calls God to Adam and Eve after they have eaten the forbidden fruit. God knows their location and what they have done; the query probes something more fundamental, namely, "their moral orientation in the world" (30). Brian Brock, in *Joining Creation's Praise: A Theological Ethic of Creatureliness*, presents a similar question to readers: "What does it mean to be at home in God's works and to hear and join creation's praise?" (66). A theological ethic of creatureliness is one that recognizes that we as humans are "both *in* creation and *of* creation" (1, italics original), and that "Christian ethics is, in the end, a matter of knowing and loving God" (136). Brock has given an exemplary account of what theological ethics can look like, particularly when it presses beyond "culturally mediated pictures of the good life" (198), emphasizing instead how our creaturehood embeds us in an environment and in relationships with God and other creatures.

Contemplating our creatureliness directs us to the question "Where are we at home?" (239). Taking this question as basic, Brock returns to the protological narrative of Genesis, organizing his work as a commentary, albeit a nontypical one, on the opening chapters of Genesis. As creatures, we, like Adam and Eve, must find how we are morally oriented in this creation "by awareness of, and an outspoken responsiveness to God's works and claims" (147), which is why part 1 centers on the theme of praising God. Learning to worship well requires attuning ourselves to creation around us. We are oriented through our relationships with nonhuman aspects of creation, whether that be in the task of naming animals, whereby in attending to animals, humans discover themselves (415) or in matters of vocation and work that ratify the goodness of the material world (378). Likewise, we are attuned with other humans in matters of kinning, which is a form of traditioning and broader than just parenting (793), and in the task of co- and counter-hearing in the church (650) and between spouses (486). Situating ourselves in creation draws us to "faith and external worship," which Brock says, "are the heart of right action because they organize the perception and comportment that allow moral discernment *to even take place*" (277, italics original).

Having found our orientation—our home—we can consider another question: "How are we to respond to the place—including all its creaturely inhabitants—that we have been given?" (239). Brock suggests that we should "respond faithfully to the materiality of the world, not imposing our designs on it and dominating it, but seeking forms of life that receive with welcome the goodness that creation has independent of our action" (575). He does so not only by addressing various ethical issues but also by embodying an argument for what ethics should be. In the over 1,000 pages (including appendices) that comprise this work, Brock addresses a wide array of topics—questions of vocation, work, and economics (part 2), issues of dominion, human-animals relations, sexuality, and desire (part 3), the matters of sin and dying (part 4), and concerns around kinning, killing, the polis, and the church (part 5). Calling this work comprehensive, however, would miss that Brock eschews a view of ethics that progresses through sequences of arguments leading to closed and settled conclusions. The goal is not to figure "out how an abstract idea applies" (200) to various contexts. Instead, Brock emphasizes developing discernment, a form of "wayfinding" where we "seek out events that we cannot know beforehand" but rather "know as we go" (59). Thus, if one expects Brock to lay out an abstract principle or position and then catalogue topics where he justifies his stance, this work will sorely disappoint. It is not that Brock does not make specific claims, but he holds as a commitment that Christians on opposite sides of moral arguments should be able to "reason together within the terms of a shared confession" (197) avoiding the fate of "a church that has become ensnared in the politics of negation and culture war [that] undermines any genuine liberating word of gospel to its age" (887). Brock, it seems, is suggesting that the purpose of ethics is not (only) to outline what a person should do in a particular situation but to cultivate the facilities needed to discern how to live well where we have been placed.

Undoubtedly, theology is the grammar underpinning Brock's work, which leads to a final question: "What is our part in God's story?" (239). Where we find our home ultimately is in the work of the Holy Spirit, as Brock concludes this project by drawing a link from Babel to the birth of the church at Pentecost. The church is, due to the Holy Spirit, incomparable to all other social bodies. Our ontological foundation is not, after all, in creation but in the Trinity. As Brock says, "the Spirit validates the work of the Creator of human bodies in order to configure them as a polity whose very functioning to edify and build up each of its members becomes a dynamic revelation of Christ" (657).

Brock has accomplished a remarkable feat in the nuance with which he addresses a breadth of topics in stunning prose. The chapters, which each clearly outline the thesis and organization at the beginning, are designed for the potential to be read individually, though the reader will likely benefit more from engaging an entire part, a collection of five to seven chapters, as that provides time to see the more profound aspects of Brock's work unfold. The chapters are not introductions to specific topics, though they cover historical developments at times. In each, Brock attempts to make interventions for how to find one's way through the topic. Even so, the entire work is a coherent story of creation in which we find ourselves and the moral task set before us.

Following the creation narrative opens remarkable insights, though at times it leads to certain organizational oddities. For instance, Brock addresses important issues around race throughout the work, such as monogenesis and racism (666–70), the story of Ham (766–71), or renaming adopted children (420–22), but there is not one particular place that catches the sweep of his treatment of the topic. Likewise, while Brock deals with technology and building (chapter 26), nowhere is there an extended consideration of artificial intelligence, an interesting omission given the relevance of creatureliness to the discussion. Omitting a particular topic, however, is not a shortcoming in achieving the task that Brock set out to do. Brock's aim is not to catalogue comprehensively what *the* ethical thing to do is in all possible scenarios but to draw the reader into the creation narrative such that in orienting ourselves to our home and how to respond to it we learn to make our way through God's story and "discern the good work that God has prepared for *me* to do, *today*, *here*" (957, italics original).

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Mark R. Sneed. *Taming the Beast: A Reception History of Behemoth and Leviathan*. Studies of the Bible and Its Reception 12. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022. Pp. xiii + 288. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-3-11-057931-4. $125.99 (USD).

"You're off the edge of the map, mate. Here there be monsters!" Thus intones Hector Barbossa in the hit 2003 Disney film "Pirates of the Caribbean." In a somewhat similar fashion, Mark Sneed's *Taming the Beast: A Reception History of Behemoth and Leviathan* takes his readers "off-grid" into the various traditions surrounding Scripture's most formidable "larger than life" creatures, which effectively inhabit a liminal space between God's (created) order and chaos.

In the introduction, pp. 1–3, Sneed astutely observes—though with a note of lament— how Behemoth and Leviathan (more or less) "form relatively little part in current Christian theology. Exceptions are fundamentalist creation scientists, who see the beasts in the second divine speech [of Job] as dinosaurs and the best biblical evidence for human cohabitation with dinosaurs" (3; cf. 221).

Sneed concludes (252–55) by judiciously opining "*Chaoskampf* is here to stay!" (255) and "Monsters remind us that we all have dark sides, sides that enable the very construction of our identities—a la Kristeva. Recent films … focus on the monstrosity of humans over against the ostensible 'humanness' of the actual monsters" (254). Sneed also notes here "the Other," i.e., the "monster" which, in medieval Europe, was often the Jew, heretic, and Moor (254).

Aside from a remarkably up-to-date and helpful bibliography (256–77), the book rounds off with a thorough Ancient Citations Index and robust Subject Index, which also doubles as an Author index. Unfortunately, however, several people that Sneed cites in the text itself do not appear within the index, thus somewhat hampering the volume's utility as a reference tool.[1]

Taming the Beast covers a staggering variety of topics in a total of fourteen (!) chapters. These ideas include the Etymology of Leviathan and *Tannim*, Jonah's *Dag* as Leviathan, The Beasts as (De)-Stabilizers: Axis Mundi Tradition, and the Incarnations of Leviathan (and

Behemoth) in Films. Sneed is to be commended for the sheer wealth of information he provides![2]

Perhaps the most engaging component, though, of *Taming the Beast* is the drawings. To be clear, there are over twenty-five illustrations (!) in total, including

1 One scholar also notes that merging the primary/secondary sources in the bibliography can be confusing at times. See Lukasz Popko's critique of Sneed in *Revue Biblique* 130 (2023): 608–12 (NB: this comment is found on p. 611).

2 More space could, perhaps, "have been devoted to Islamic receptions … (beyond a couple of short paragraphs on 166-67 [cf. 7])." See Peter Joshua Atkins, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 47 (2023): 113.

Baal Upon the Sea, Zig, the Giant Bird, Behemoth, the Huge Bull, Leviathan as Huge Fish, Marduk upon Tiamat, Adad Domesticates the Sea, and various depictions of deities defeating Dragons. Among my favorite depictions (due to the unique images and the fine nature of the shading) are "The Devil upon Behemoth," "St. George Slays the Dragon," and "The Antichrist upon Leviathan." Interestingly, Lauren Rachel Sneed, Mark Sneed's "multitalented" daughter, did each of the illustrations (see p. xi, cf. 15). Superlatives scarcely do justice to the exquisite nature of each of the renderings (not to mention the careful attention to detail). They alone could justify the price of the volume.[3] That said, however, one might wish for clearer descriptions and some better source tagging.[4] To critique, not all readers will agree with Sneed's varied and sometimes conflicting conclusions, nor with his somewhat distinctive style of presenting research.[5] Veritably, his goal is to trace the reception history of some of Scripture's most controversial figures by examining their interpretation in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. As such, Sneed does not evaluate the approaches. He catalogs or challenges opposing hypotheses, which has its own pros and cons.

Those individuals looking for a close reading of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, the LXX, i.e., the Septuagint, or the New Testament should understand that *Taming the Beast* is not the traditional type of "commentary." By way of example, even though Hebrew does appear, see, for example, pp. 47, 56, 66, 67, and 92, there are no references to any lexicons/grammars.[6]

One should also be cognizant of the rather long footnotes that can often extend to two, three, and (shockingly!) even four pages in length (see, for example, footnote 52 pp. 62–65).

Finally, I am quite impressed that though Sneed himself was once a Young-Earth Creationist, lived close by Dayton, TN (home of the infamous Scopes or "Monkey" Trial), and distinctly remembers being taught that the only accurate

3 Contrast this with Dan Cooper's critique of Sneed, in which he notes the "steep price" of the volume. *Religious Studies Review* 49 (2023): 64. As something of an aside, perhaps, it is well known that many volumes of this nature are prohibitively expensive for most students and/or researchers. Stanley E. Porter opines: "I personally focus on writing hard-core academic articles that appear in technical journals or books, and books in monograph series that mostly only academic libraries can afford." Porter, *Inking the Deal* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 2. Cf. Andrew David Naselli, "Three Reflections on Evangelical Academic Publishing," *Themelios* 39 (2014): 428–54.

4 This solecism was also noticed by certain other scholars. See, for instance, Popko's review of Sneed (610).

5 See each of the reviews noted above alongside any other publications that I have not formally recognized here.

6 For more details on the current state of commentary writing see *The Genre of Biblical Commentary: Essays in Honor of John E. Hartley on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday* edited by Timothy D. Finlay and William Yarchin (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015) and *On the Writing of New Testament Commentaries: Festschrift for Grant R. Osborne on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday* by Stanley E Porter and Eckhard J Schnabel (Leiden: Brill, 2012). See, too, the sage comments that Stanley E. Porter makes within the (aforementioned) *Inking the Deal* volume.

interpretation of Behemoth and Leviathan is that they were "dinosaurs," seemingly a core value of the Church of Christ, of which Sneed remains a member of, these things did not seem to affect his ability to do effective research (204–213).[7]

To conclude, while some readers may quibble over certain infelicities, Mark R. Sneed's *Taming the Beast: A Reception History of Behemoth and Leviathan* invariably succeeds in doing exactly what the Studies of the Bible and Its Reception series promises: it offers a rich, critically engaged exploration of how biblical texts have been received across centuries, cultures, and traditions. Sneed may not chart every path perfectly, but for those willing to venture "off the edge of the map," there is treasure here—and it is worth the hunt for students and scholars alike!

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7 For even more details on some of these matters, see Marcus R. Ross and Dustin G. Burlet, "The Indomitables: Beyond the Dinosaur Debates over Behemoth (B.) and Leviathan (L.) in Scripture" (forthcoming).

Matthew Barrett, ed. *On Classical Trinitarianism: Retrieving the Nicene Doctrine of the Triune God*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2024. Pp. 832. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-5140-0034-2. $74.99 (USD).

Classical Theism is having its day again, along with the Trinitarianism it includes. Renewed interest in Trinitarian theology during the late twentieth century proved to be a laboratory for dubious experiments with various Social Trinitarianisms. This sometimes led to Trinitarian formulations which would have been unrecognisable to previous centuries of orthodox thought. *On Classical Trinitarianism: Retrieving the Nicene Doctrine of the Triune God* is an answer to all that, a reassertion of the Classical Trinitarianism that resounded in the Patristic, medieval, and early Reformation eras. Matthew Barrett, professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Seminary, has edited a formidable collection of essays from a diverse cast of authors. Each contributor champions the relevance and reasonableness of Nicaea's Classical Trinitarianism—just in time for the 1700th anniversary of the Council.

The book is divided into three broad parts. The first, "Retrieving Nicene Trinitarianism" is a largely historical investigation. Contributors delve into the aspects of the formation of Nicaea's findings as well as individual Patristic (Athanasius, Hilary of Poitiers, the Cappadocians, John of Damascus, etc.) and Medieval (Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, etc.) authors who grappled with the Council's implications. Historian Michael Haykin concludes part I by describing the fading of the Council's influence in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Part

II, "Trinitarian Hermeneutics and Nicene Dogmatics," is a deep dive into the theological grammar that emerges from Nicene readings of Scripture. The various essays engage with Classical articulations of divine attributes and properties such as incomprehensibility, impassibility, immutability, simplicity, the unbegotten-ness of the Father, and the begotten-ness of the Son. The *ad intra* works of the Trinity, such as the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit, are capably described as well. Part III, "The Renewal of Nicene Fidelity Today," tackles issues of present concern, where contemporary controversies are directly addressed. It is also a rallying cry for recommitment to Nicene principles. Barrett shows in his introduction that for previous Trinitarian thinkers, some of these principles were hermeneutical, some metaphysical, some theological, and still others were canonical. Yet, he says, "we should not assume each of these precommitments operated in isolation, as if they were segregated from each other and affirmed at random" (xix, Introduction). Throughout the various essays in *Classical Trinitarianism*, readers will see these principles shared from East to West and across contemporary church traditions, appreciated in their earlier articulations, and reaffirmed for the present.

What is remarkable about *Classical Trinitarianism* is the variety of contributors Barrett has been able to gather. The book is a truly ecumenical achievement. There are low church Evangelical authors such as Ronni Kurtz and Gavin Ortlund, as well as Lutheran and Presbyterian representatives like Carl Beckwith and Carl Trueman. Classical Theism is a bridge that spans even the great divide of the Reformation. A number of Roman Catholic authors are also featured, such as Matthew Levering and Thomas Weinandy. What other subject can bring Southern Baptists and Capuchin friars together? If this project has a foil, it is the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries' experiments with Social Trinitarianism. Various versions, in their own ways, sought to reconceive the Trinity's Three Persons as three centres of consciousness. Their internal relations were reconceived as a model for human community. Karen Kilby's essay "Perichoresis and Projection" takes aim at these efforts (582–593). While the rest of the book's forty essays are new pieces, Kilby's was originally published as a journal article back in the year 2000.[1] The piece's reappearance here is appropriate. Her central critique is that internal relations of the Godhead ought not to be projected upon human relations. The appeal of doing so is to make the doctrine of the Trinity relevant and applicable. But Kilby believes this quest for relevance and application is "where the whole thing actually starts to go wrong." If the Trinity even needs to be relevant, she asks, "What *kind* of relevance does it need to have?" (591–592, italics original). Her critique, published 25 years ago, was an early rumbling of the current

1 It was originally published in *New Blackfriars* 81, no. 957 (November 2000): 432–445.

renewed interest in Classical Trinitarianism. What if the Trinity's primary doctrinal application is just to allow us to proclaim, "Behold Your God" and not some mere organizational principle?

This hefty volume is a work of theological retrieval, but it also has a polemical edge. All forms of Social Trinitarianism are rejected by the authors of *Classical Trinitarianism*. The twentieth century's latter decades saw efforts to reimagine human society in ways that reflected the Trinity: nonhierarchical, communitarian, and so on. This was the Social Trinitarianism Kilby criticized. More recently, though, attempts have been made to deploy the Trinity as doctrinal rationale for hierarchy. Known as Eternal Functional Subordination (EFS) or Eternal Submission of the Son (ESS), this variation of Social Trinitarianism took the example of the Son's obedience to the Father as rationale for distinction, mostly of gender roles. What we have within the pages of *On Classical Trinitarianism* is protest. Various authors, such as Carl Trueman, Samuel Parkinson, and Michael Horton, express very "conservative" critiques against this more "conservative" deployment of Social Trinitarianism. Most of the essays are irenic in their opposition to various forms of Social Trinitarianism, although Glen Butner's essay "The Need for Nicene Dogmatics" borders on scathing when he evaluates the views of EFS/ESS advocates Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware (706–729).

All of the essays are fairly brief. Most are between twelve and twenty-five pages. Select readings could be assigned as classroom readings. A committed reader could profitably read and absorb one per day and get through the whole book in about six weeks (this is how I read it). But it could also be well used as a reference book, to be dipped into as needed when Trinitarian controversy arises. Matthew Barrett has assembled an impressive mini library of writers who explore the different angles and facets of Classic Trinitarianism. For those of us buoyed by renewed interest in Classical Theism, Barrett's is a most welcome contribution. The essays are diverse in their topics but unified in their advocacy for a Doctrine of the Trinity that reaches further back than the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. A diverse community of writers yet unified in a singular effort, just like … but wait, we're not supposed to model things on the Trinity anymore, right?

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Mitchell L. Chase. *Walking the Way of the Wise: A Biblical Theology of Wisdom.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2025. Pp. 192. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-5140-1091-4. $26.00 (USD).

Mitchell L. Chase sets out in his book, *Walking the Way of the Wise: A Biblical Theology of Wisdom*, to provide a biblical theology of the Christian idea of wisdom outlined through the biblical canon. Chase carries out his study by not limiting himself to the wisdom literature of the Bible. Instead, he argues that the entire biblical canon showcases a narrative of wisdom and how human agents in the Bible grow in wisdom through their stories within the broad narrative of the Bible. Through his study, he determines that a definition of biblical wisdom "is believing what God has revealed and seeking to live in light of it" (2). Chase effectively outlines for readers a foundation for understanding biblical wisdom through the narrative stories throughout Scripture that contribute to a unified biblical theology.

Chase organizes his book into twelve chapters. These twelve chapters walk the reader through the grand biblical narrative, beginning in Genesis and ending with reference to the eschaton. The first chapter remains critical to this study as Chase outlines several key themes that will continue throughout his work. According to Chase, Genesis shows God placing humanity as his image bearers to serve as his representative on earth and take part in "subduing the world owned by God" (8). Through Chase's lens of study, he incorporates the idea of wisdom into the fall narrative, where the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would bring about earthly wisdom; however, Adam and Eve sought this wisdom through a lack of trust in God, which makes the action unwise (13). Another example of this comes from the Cain and Abel narrative when Cain does not heed God's command to rule over his sin and kills his brother. Chase establishes the idea that abandoning God's commands leads to consequences because individuals act foolishly.

Building upon this idea established in the first chapter, Chase explores the story of Job in chapter 2. This section shows how the Bible also shows righteous people as sufferers in life, and how Job presents an example of a human trying to comprehend his suffering while still attempting to honor God. Chase highlights how this story shows examples of the folly of human wisdom when compared to the knowledge of God.

Chapters 3–5 follow Abraham and his descendants. Chase shows how Abraham is wise because he listened to God and obeyed. Chase follows this idea of wisdom through Abraham's descendants. He shows how Joseph acts with wisdom through various events that occur, including his "self-control with Potiphar's wife" (37). Chase's scholarship here would have greatly benefited from engaging Lindsay Wilson's book, *Joseph, Wise and Otherwise: The Intersection of Wisdom* *and Covenant in Genesis 37–50* (Paternoster, 2007). Consequently, Chase's book lacks engagement with scholars throughout the book, which may display a confirmation bias of taking biblical stories and making them fit Chase's biblical theology lens to outline core principles that he applies to the lives of his readers, while seemingly choosing scholarship that confirms this avenue of study. His book would benefit from critical engagement from scholars who deny wisdom appearing in certain narratives, such as the work of J. L. Crenshaw's article "Method in Determining Wisdom Influence Upon 'Historical' Literature," *JBL* 88.2 (1969), 129–142, where he denies wisdom's influence on the Joseph narrative.

Upon Chase's examination of the descendants of Abraham, he concludes that biblical wisdom "is hearing with a readiness to obey" (41). This directly applies to God's commands to the Israelites and other individuals throughout the biblical narrative. Chapter 5 highlights David's heart for the Lord. Chase shows how David turns to the Lord with his prayers, which, according to Chase, "show us how and why and when we should turn to the Lord" (72). The Psalms show how wisdom expresses praise for God's love and faithfulness with his covenant while also turning to the Lord during times of sickness and hardship.

The next four chapters analyze the story of Solomon and what led to the Israelites' exile. Solomon's story shows how "wisdom is necessary" (75) for him and the nation. Proverbs shows how "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (78). Solomon shows how living a wise life comes from "the overflow of a heart that seeks to know and walk with God" (80). Chase concludes that Ecclesiastes illuminates how "Life is short, so they need to remember the inevitability of death and the future judgment. This perspective is necessary for true wisdom that they might fear the Lord and turn from evil" (115). These chapters show the consequences of abandoning wisdom while highlighting the blessings that come from following God's wisdom.

Chapters 10, 11, and 12 express the continuation of wisdom through the ministry of Jesus, who stands to be greater than Solomon. In light of Christ being presented as wiser than "the wisest man who ever lived" (134), Chase displays the importance of walking in the way of the wise. His final two chapters present a call to renewed image bearers to grow in the wisdom of Christ while taking steps to bring others into the way of the wise, such as raising children in the "ways of the Lord" (147). The book ends with a call for Christians to seek godly wisdom.

For Chase's work, readers would have benefited from a brief introduction to the purpose of the book. His introduction provides a clear trajectory of the book. However, the book seems to go back and forth between exploring a biblical theology from an academic study and then providing devotional-like feedback for the reader. Chase seems to intertwine an academic study of a biblical story with a direct application to the reader. Page 33 shows a specific example where Chase speaks about the obedience of Abraham, and then in the same paragraph, states, "Faith is our response to God's revelation" (33). Despite this statement remaining true, it sidetracks the scholarship into a reflective book at times. Although this does not take away from the content of the book, it may distract readers from the academic content when they encounter these reflective questions and statements.

Chase's work adequately presents a contribution to developing a biblical theology of wisdom throughout the canon of Scripture. Due to the niche topic, this book does not appear suitable for most seminary classes unless the course developer wishes to incorporate a biblical theology of wisdom into a biblical theology course. Chase's book presents readers with an easy-to-read book that remains accessible to any adult reader who wants to see the unfolding story of wisdom throughout the biblical narrative. This study allows readers to engage different areas of Scripture beyond the wisdom literature corpus to see how the Lord rewards and honors those who seek his wisdom while punishing those who act out of folly and a rejection of wisdom. While Chase's study remains broad in nature, it pushes an idea for studying Scripture through a renewed perspective. Therefore, I recommend this book to scholars seeking to deepen their understanding of wisdom or to identify areas of further research, specifically analyzing how wisdom functions within a biblical narrative. Finally, I do recommend this book for pastors who wish to survey how wisdom functions throughout the biblical narrative, as this study will greatly inform their sermon preparation.

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Andrew Barron. *Human Difference: Reflections on a Life in Proximity to Disability*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2024. Pp. 168. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-6667-7923-3. $24.00 (USD).

The development of disability theology is a continued and growing field, not only in the reflection upon the multitude of experiences of those with disabilities, but in the constant negotiation of what constitutes disability itself. This very question presupposes a state of normalcy, such that those with disabilities are considered abnormal compared to the standard existence of human beings. It is amid this challenging—yet vital—question that Andrew Barron's book, *Human Difference: Reflections on a Life in Proximity to Disability*, serves as just the sort of reflection to help propel disability theology forward by bringing deep and challenging questions to the forefront of conversation. Barron's work here is deeply personal in his reflection of living with and raising his son Rafi who has Down Syndrome. Through these reflections, the author centers Rafi's experience as an example of "human difference" that ultimately challenges readers to rethink their own views of what normal human experiences are.

True to the subtitle of the book, *Human Difference* is largely a collection of topical reflections related to Barron's life with his son. Barron's work here is short, consisting of twelve chapters and an introduction, each only comprising around ten pages. Additionally, each chapter includes concluding questions for individual or group reflection based upon the subject matter of that chapter. The personal dimension of the book is brought to bear upon the many subjects discussed and is combined with the primary concept of the book—difference—which is introduced within the first chapter. Barron explains the summation of his project as such: "[C]loseness to people who are different from you—in disability, in worldview, in faith, in any of the myriad ways that humans are different—teaches you things you could not learn otherwise.… Being in proximity to difference transforms our mental categories: how we see and think about the world and how we think, how we ask questions and how you reflect on stories" (4). It is this desire to see the beauty in human difference brought about by Barron's own experiences with his son Rafi that pervades the entire book.

Each subsequent chapter discusses either a unique aspect of Rafi's relationship to various concepts such as time, death, and sexuality, or Barron's own reflections upon the challenges of inclusion, suffering, and the hospitality of God while caring for his son. Added to this are chapters 7–9 which offer some (limited) biblical reflection upon disability throughout the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, the Gospels, and the Pauline writings. These aspects of difference are all around us, not limited to the often misunderstood and pejoratively utilized term, disability. As such, this work challenges readers to rethink their own presuppositions about what constitutes normalcy among human beings, and the ways in which differences in thought, belief, experience, and life are all around us.

Barron's work here, though brief, is an important step forward in disability theology in several ways. The personal and deeply relational nature of the book reminds scholars that reflection upon disability cannot be divorced from the real experiences of those with disabilities, nor can it remain a subject whereby disability (and difference) is a mere object to be discussed and analyzed. Additionally, Barron reminds us of the necessity to both expand our understanding of what constitutes disability and to always seek to reevaluate and contest our ideas of what is normal or expected, particularly with concepts that are often taken for granted, such as the perception of time and its passage. To this point, where this book shines are in Barron's topical reflections related to disability, which provide serious, honest, and personal discussions on topics that are at the forefront of questions of disability theology. However, while Barron's reflections offer an important blend between personal experience and theological sensitivity, the analysis of disability within the biblical material is comparatively weaker. For example, in the context of Jesus's healing of the demoniac in Mark 5, Barron comments that "Soldiers would often terrorize local communities and villagers would feign madness as a way of protesting" (80). Unfortunately, no evidence is given for claims such as this throughout Barron's reflections upon the biblical text. While the brevity of the book certainly limits how detailed each chapter can be, the general lack of citations throughout does negatively affect the book. It is also the case that, depending upon the theological tradition of the reader, they will likely disagree with chapter 11, given Barron's affirming connection between LGBTQ and the conception of human difference. That being said, even with such disagreement, Barron is right to remind us that difference cannot be isolated or contained to where we can expect or anticipate its existence.

One exception to my criticism of the author's biblical reflections is in the attention to Paul's counterintuitive theological claim that divine power is in fact found in the weakness of the cross. The implication here extends to all areas of life, including the weakness of disability. As Barron argues, "For Paul, faith is hypocognitive. Faith lives under, beneath, or below the cognitive realm. Rafi's faith is a clear demonstration of this ideal. Unable to access words for certain concepts, he cannot communicate cognitive and linguistic representations. But despite his communication lacks, I have every confidence that the Holy Spirit has a full understanding of what is going on inside" (101). Such observations and their development are but one of the many important points addressed in this book.

Ultimately, *Human Difference* is an important and personal theological contribution to the ongoing work of disability theology. Barron reminds us that difference is all around us; it is not only those with visible disabilities who constitute such difference. The continued theological reflection upon disability must take such experiences into account, always resisting the temptation to view difference as a mere object to be studied. Despite its weaknesses, I certainly recommend this book to disability scholars. Additionally, given the accessible prose and discussion questions of each chapter, both students and general audiences would have much to gain in reading this book. I fully expect that, should scholars follow similar trajectories as Barron, future work on disability theology will be quite fruitful indeed.

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William Lane Craig. *Systematic Philosophical Theology, Vol. I: Prolegomena, On Scripture, On Faith* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2025). Pp. 368. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-394-27873-2. $65.00 (USD).

William Lane Craig. *Systematic Philosophical Theology, Vol. IIa: On God: Attributes of God* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2025). Pp. 576. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-394-27877-0. $65.00 (USD).

If these two volumes are representative of the entirety of Craig's *Systematic Philosophical Theology* (and I see no reason to think they are not), then this is a truly monumental work—perhaps the best that Craig has ever done. The *Prolegomena* in Vol. I alone is itself a truly impressive philosophical achievement as it concisely lays out the philosophical groundwork for everything that is to come while also being rigorous. It should be considered required reading for anyone attempting to do theology and/or Philosophy of Religion within the Christian sphere. Here Craig argues that "the most interesting and important work in exploring philosophical issues in systematic theology is done, not by traditional theologians, but by analytic philosophers of religion."[1] He then outlines how analytic Christian philosophy has spent the last several decades advancing its arguments and ideas to the point that things like Verificationism and the logical problem of evil are effectively dead, but to their own peril, Continental thinkers and theologians have resisted and/or remained ignorant of these advances. If theologians, especially Continental ones, made an effort to adhere to the philosophical rules and guidelines he lays down here, a large number of theological errors would be cut off before they started.

Craig's basic method here is to first explain why the issue/view he is exploring is important. He begins by examining what the scriptures have to say and treats that as basic evidence. He continues by exploring alternatives and variations of the issue/view by way of various interlocutors. He uses these other scholars to engage with the various approaches to the issue and narrows the field down until he finds an answer that he thinks is acceptable. Along the way, he explores the philosophical implications and assumptions of the various views as well as evaluating the arguments and objections for the same. The main criteria he is looking for are adherence with the scriptures, philosophical and theological coherence (both in particular and with the other views he takes), and where it is reasonable and appropriate adherence to the evidence. It's quite likely that this is the only work in philosophical theology that appeals to the theory of relativity to justify a

1 William Lane Craig, *Systematic Philosophical Theology, vol I: Prolegomena, On Scripture, On Faith* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2025), 13–14.

view of God's relation to time, but Craig makes it coherent. There are also points where he will do a targeted historical survey of what the Church Fathers, such as Augustine, Aquinas, and so on, say on the subject. While doing these surveys, Craig warns against reading our own views back into the Church Fathers (as well as Scripture), as he cautions that they frequently used terminology differently from contemporary scholars and each other.[2]

Craig uses a historical-grammatical method to interpret Scripture and the Church Fathers.[3] I think it's probable that some other scholars will dispute him in a few areas, but his interpretations are plausible and reasonable.[4] He also takes pains not to get lost in side issues and weed out the philosophical questions and issues to what is immediately relevant. For example, in relation to God's Incorporeality, he comments that only arguments for physicalism that would have application to God as an immaterial mental substance need to be considered, as this "prevents our being sucked into the black hole of the literature on the mind/body problem."[5]

In vol. I, Craig outlines his project. He explains that a philosophical theology is needed as "contemporary systematic theologies tend overwhelmingly to be philosophically deficient."[6] In the *Prolegomena,* Craig argues that, with a few hedges, "Christian philosophy of religion and Christian systematic theology seem to be very much the same."[7] He then covers the philosophical issues that arise from the nature and reality of Scripture. These are well-known issues like inspiration, inerrancy, and the authority of Scripture. And the third section of this volume is on the nature of faith and its relationship to reason. The issues here are also well known, but Craig has some original points.[8] In vol. IIa, Craig covers the attributes of God, and he attempts to define and justify the coherence of the transcendental attributes of God. These are incorporeality, necessity, aseity, simplicity, omniscience, eternity, omnipresence, omnipotence, and goodness. This is an even greater project than vol. I, but a few minor objections aside, he managed to deal with all the major issues and respond to nearly every objection.

The positions Craig takes are nuanced, sophisticated, and generally conservative

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2 William Lane Craig. *Systematic Philosophical Theology, vol IIa: On God: Attributes of God* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2025), 105, 196.

3 While he doesn't explicitly lay out his hermeneutical principles, he alludes to some of them when he describes the failure of a naïve hermeneutic that fails to recognize that the Bible is not a philosophy or theology textbook. Craig, *vol IIa, 196.*

4 I'm sure Craig will get accused of misreading Aquinas, as it's impossible to engage with Aquinas and not get accused of that. But as someone who went to a Catholic seminary and studied under Thomists, I found no issue with his readings of Aquinas.

5 Craig, *vol IIa,* 28.

6 Craig, *vol I,* xii.

7 Craig, *vol I,* 59.

8 For example, he notes that most Christian philosophers "largely neglect the teaching of Scripture concerning faith." Craig, *vol I,* 206.

theologically and philosophically, and thus should not be controversial to other orthodox Christians (mostly). Craig argues that the Scriptures are the inspired and inerrant word of God, that while faith and reason don't conflict, Reformed epistemology shows a way to have rational belief in God absent arguments and/or public evidence, and while he nuances things, argues that God is necessary, immaterial, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, good, eternal, etc. He does argue that God is simple in the weak sense rather than a strong sense, à la Aquinas and others, but his arguments that strong divine simplicity (DS+) is incoherent, if not absurd, and not supported by Scripture, are quite compelling.[9]

Craig does make liberal use of Molinism, rejects the need for truthmaker theory (in order to overcome the grounding objection to Molinism), and takes an anti-realist perspective on abstract objects (as he sees this as the best solution to the challenge abstract objects present to God's aseity). I suspect that these positions will prove to be quite philosophically controversial. Craig has argued extensively for all of these views before. There is nothing surprising here. I make note of this simply because these philosophical views (mostly Molinism and anti-realism) carry heavy weight for many of the arguments he makes.[10]

Further, this is a high-level work of philosophy.[11] Among many other things, Craig makes significant use of possible world semantics and relies on the internalist externalist distinction in Epistemology. He only offers a brief explanation of possible world semantics toward the end of vol. IIa and doesn't explain internalism and externalism at all.[12] So if you are unfamiliar with analytic philosophy of religion, you may want to brush up on it first.

With that caveat, even if you are entirely against Craig's Molinism and anti-realism, I still recommend that you read these books as Craig has accomplished something extraordinary here. He has, in effect, given us mini-encyclopedias on each of the issues he is working through. Because he takes such pains to engage with so many scholars, if you read his entry on *Eternity*, you'll walk away from it knowing what the major positions are that philosophers and theologians have taken on God's relation to time, what most of the relevant arguments and objections for those positions are, and who some of the major scholars in that area are. So you'll know what Craig thinks, what many other scholars think, and why. I don't think I can state more emphatically just how valuable this is.

While there were many places where I could offer minor quibbles with Craig's

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9 This section will certainly spark lots of cries that "Craig doesn't understand Aquinas!"

10 I'm not attempting to argue against or for them here as even if I wanted to there is not space for it. I'm quite sympathetic to Molinism being what my friend Tim Stratton calls a "mere Molinist," and while I remain skeptical of anti-realist positions and think that there might be a need for truthmakers, Craig's arguments for these positions are quite strong.

11 But Vol IIa is significantly more technical than Vol I.

12 Craig, *vol IIa,* 478.

arguments (I am a philosopher reading books by another philosopher after all), I had only two criticisms that are worth mentioning. The first is that Craig didn't directly deal with the problem of evil (POE) in vol. IIa.[13] The POE is one of the strongest objections to God's transcendental attributes as often the first response is to drop or weaken one of those attributes.[14] But Craig says nothing on it here. Now it's entirely possible this is not an omission, but rather me anticipating what is to come as there are still three more books to come in this series, and the next one will be on Natural Theology, so perhaps Craig will address this there.

The second is that I think Craig missed out on engaging with the best counter-arguments in the first part of his section "The Content of God's Moral Character."[15] I'm grossly simplifying, but Craig argues that claims that God's wrath follows from His love are misguided and don't line up with scripture. I'd argue that the best counter view here is from R. Zachary Manis in his books *Sinners in the Presence of a Loving God* and *Thinking Through the Problem of Hell*.[16] Manis argues, among other things, that to love someone is to both desire the best for them and to desire appropriate union with them. This does not prima facie fit with purely retributive models of God's wrath, and Manis spends a great deal of effort showing how to make it work. Further, in much of the rest of vol. IIa, Craig argues, rightly, that the Biblical authors anthropomorphized God and we must be cognizant of this fact as we interpret scripture. Given that, he owed us an argument as to why verses that speak of God's wrath are not likewise anthropomorphized or metaphorical, and he made no such argument. To be fair, it's entirely possible that Craig was unaware of Manis's work as both books are relatively recent and did not get the attention they deserve.

Still, these are the only substantive criticisms I could find in over 800 pages of extremely thorough, rigorous, and high-level philosophy. I highly recommend these books for theologians, philosophers, and other scholars, but not for popular level readers. They will probably be lost. Craig gave himself a massive and highly ambitious task, and my few criticisms aside, he has pulled it off. I'm eagerly awaiting the other volumes.

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13 There are a few places where he alludes to it but nothing direct.
14 Usually omniscience, omnipotence, or omnibenevolence.
15 Craig, *vol IIa*, 453–461.
16 R. Zachary Manis, *Sinners in the Presence of a Loving God: An Essay on the Problem of Hell* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); and R. Zachary Manis, *Thinking Through the Problem of Hell: The Divine Presence Model* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2024).

Bruce Chilton and Alan J. Avery-Peck, eds. *Targums and Rabbinic Literature*. Ancient Literature for New Testament Studies, Vol. 7. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024. Pp. 464. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0-3104-9573-4. $64.99 (USD).

Ancient Literature for New Testament Studies is a new series from Zondervan, edited by Craig A. Evans and Cecilia Wassén, that aims to provide both students and scholars with detailed introductions to the most important textual corpora for understanding the New Testament in its original historical setting. As of this writing, three of the ten projected volumes have appeared.[1]

Targums and Rabbinic Literature (hereafter *TRL*) covers two vast and interrelated bodies of literature that provide evidence of the reception of the Hebrew Bible from the time of the composition of the New Testament to several centuries afterwards. Since the table of contents for *TRL* is curiously absent from the publisher's website, the structure and chapter contents will be reviewed here.[2]

The main body of the volume is divided into two halves. The first half covers the targums and begins with an overview chapter by Bruce Chilton. It contains four parts, each part beginning with a short introduction to the subcollection at hand. Part 1, "Targum Jonathan," contains chapters covering the Targums of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the Minor Prophets, and the Former Prophets. Part 2, "Targumim of the Pentateuch," contains chapters covering Onqelos, Neofiti, Pseudo-Jonathan, and the Fragment-Targums. Part 3, "Targumim of the Writings," contains chapters covering the Targums of Psalms, Job, Ruth, Song of Songs, Lamentations, and Esther. Part 4, "Targumic Receptions," contains chapters covering Merkavah and the "Targumim from the Cairo Genizah."

The second half of *TRL* covers rabbinic literature and begins with an overview chapter by Günter Stemberger. It also contains four parts (numbered continuously from the first half). Part 5, "The Tannaitic Period," contains chapters covering the Mishnah, Tosefta, Mekhilta deRabbi Ishmael, Sifra, Sifre Numbers, and Sifre Deuteronomy. Part 6, "The Documents of the Earliest Amoraim," contains chapters covering the Talmud of the Land of Israel, Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, Lamentations Rabbah, and the Song of Songs Rabbah. Part 7, "The Documents of the Later Amoraim," contains chapters covering the Babylonian Talmud, Deuteronomy Rabbah, Avot deRabbi Nathan, Pesiqta Rabbati, Pesiqta deRav Kahanah, and Ecclesiastes Rabbah. Part 8, "The Period of the Geonim and Beyond," contains chapters covering Seder Eliyahu, Exodus Rabbah, Hekhalot, Midrash

1 The full series description and a list of planned volumes are available on the publisher's website: https://zondervanacademic.com/promotions/alnts.
2 https://zondervanacademic.com/products/targums-and-rabbinic-literature, accessed August 6, 2025.

Tannaim, Commentaries, and Codes. The volume ends with a bibliography, followed by indexes of Scripture, ancient sources, subjects, and authors. Twenty-two different scholars contributed essays to this book. In keeping with the niche nature of these fields, it is perhaps unsurprising that many of the authors wrote more than one chapter.

Avery-Peck and Chilton's "Editor's Preface" succinctly identifies the key problem the volume aims to address: "despite this long history of the use of rabbinic literature in the study of the New Testament, no consensus reigns in regard to how the New Testament and rabbinic literature relate to one another as bodies of literature. To what extent … and in what ways does either legitimately serve as a source for the interpretation of the other?" (ix). They highlight Sandmel's warning from 1962 against merely comparing passages without considering their larger literary and ideological contexts to drive home the importance of "evaluating … [each] work on its own terms" (x). They explain that this key principle was determinative for the organization of the volume (as seen above), with its emphasis on chronology and the cataloguing of the discrete details of individual texts rather than painting larger corpora with a broad brush. Avery-Peck and Chilton additionally note that although "intersections [of rabbinic texts] with the New Testament are very far from being evenly distributed … comparisons are often instructive, even when no finding of an intersection emerges" (x).

Chilton's "Targums: Overview" chapter at the beginning of the first half of *TRL* lays a crucial foundation for the remainder of the volume. Besides providing an invaluable orientation to the language, purpose, historical development, and original usage of the Targums, along with a list of NT and targumic passages with notable parallels of expression (17–21), Chilton sets forth a four-part taxonomy for the comparison of the NT and rabbinic literature that is used throughout the rest of the volume. The first class, "strong analogy," involves places where the targumic and NT texts have comparable phrasing and contexts while interpreting the same OT passage. A subcategory of this first class involves places where the phrasing and contexts are similar, but a shared OT referent is absent. The second class, "weaker analogy," is used for cases when the same OT text is discussed by both sources but without shared phrasing. The third class, "verbal similarity," covers cases "when characteristically targumic phrases appear within the New Testament" (22), and the fourth class, "thematic similarity," involves shared themes with no lexical overlap. Chilton reminds readers that the literary relationships identified above are separate from the questions of historical relationship or direction of influence.

The main chapters throughout the body follow a consistent format, providing an introduction to the text under investigation, a summary of content focusing on major themes, an overview of issues involved in its interpretation or relationship to the NT, and a selection of case studies of NT texts that can be connected to this targum or rabbinic work in some way.

Several points can be made concerning the evaluation of the content presented in *TRL*. First, readers who previously may have pigeonholed Zondervan as being restricted to introductory textbooks will have their assumptions challenged. This is a detailed resource that will be useful for serious scholarship and not just for assigned reading for students. Second, *TRL* undoubtedly fills a crucial gap between the single-chapter overviews of the Targums or Rabbinic corpora as a whole found in many works covering (for example) the history of biblical interpretation, the literary world of Second Temple Judaism, or NT "background," and the denser treatments that are less accessible for those whose primary interest in these texts is their relevance for NT interpretation.[3]

Third, readers who previously have only a passing familiarity with the texts covered in *TRL* will be greatly equipped with a basic understanding of the multi-layered nature of these works and the diverse ways they can be related to the NT. For example, Chilton's explanation (12) of the differing theologies of the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods, and how these theologies are often interspersed throughout the same text, is tremendously illuminating for the immense difficulties involved in simply reading these texts as unified compositions or making judgments on materials that could reflect Jewish beliefs during the time of the writing of the books of the NT. Fourth, readers wishing to conduct further research in this area will surely appreciate the bibliographies throughout. The individual chapters document the necessary critical editions and secondary sources for each text under investigation, and the bibliography in the back matter is also divided into "Editions and Resources" and "Critical Contributions," allowing interested students to locate materials for going deeper. Fifth, while the series title and focus throughout obviously indicate that this volume was assembled with NT specialists in mind, *TRL* will be appreciated by many Old Testament students and scholars as well.

As should be clear from the description above, anyone interested in the relevance of the targumic and rabbinic corpora for biblical studies will find much to appreciate in *TRL*. It does an exemplary job of treating the historical and social backgrounds of these bodies of literature as well as providing challenging case studies of ways that they and the NT can be compared to one another. It would be an ideal starting point for both NT exegetes concerned with these convoluted textual relationships as well as OT specialists interested in reception history.

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3 An example of this latter category would be Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

Scot McKnight with Cody Matchett. *Revelation for the Rest of Us: A Prophetic Call to Follow Jesus as a Dissident Disciple*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023. Pp. 312. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-310-13578-4. $36.99 (CDN) 29.99 (USD).

As implied by the title, Scot McKnight and Cody Matchett's book, *Revelation for the Rest of Us*, seeks to critique a common approach to Revelation, namely, the futurism made popular by the Scofield Reference Bible and the "Left Behind" series (6–9, 263). Together they argue that Revelation is not a map of future events but a manual for discipleship in the midst of worldly political forces (15–23). Their emphasis on the need to discern "Babylonian" influences in political and economic systems (including current trends in America) is what makes this book distinct and unique from other idealist commentaries on Revelation. McKnight and Matchett reinforce this point when they state: "This is not a commentary on Revelation. It is rather a theology of political discipleship rooted in Revelation and how best to read it" (293).

The book is divided into two main units. Parts 1–3 essentially describe how best to read Revelation, while parts 4–5 unpack what the authors mean by a theology of political discipleship. These five major sections are broken down into twenty-two chapters (about 10–15 pages each). This is followed by twelve brief appendices, a short (non-annotated) recommended reading list, and the "After Words" where McKnight makes clear that Matchett was his graduate assistant whom he desires to acknowledge as a coauthor of this book, given the import of his work (293).

The book also begins with a short introduction where McKnight shares some of his personal testimony and how the failed predictions and speculations of "traveling evangelists" shaped his current outlook (xi–xiii). The book itself contains no footnotes or indices, but the sources cited in each chapter are listed on pages 295–312 in a final section titled "Notes."

As alluded to above, parts 1–3 of *Revelation for the Rest of Us* highlight five interpretive principles (repeated on pages 33, 94, and 168) to help guide a reader of Revelation (and *Revelation for the Rest of Us*) away from speculation and escapism towards John's practical call to follow Jesus as a discerning "dissident" disciple" (12–14; see too the subtitle of the book).

Principle 1 is that "Revelation is not written for speculators" (3–14). According to McKnight and Matchett, "speculation" means reading Revelation as "a roadmap of who does what and when" (5). Speculators might, for instance, suggest that the Pope is the Antichrist, or that the European Union is the "Ten Horns" of the Beast, or that Armageddon is imminent since Russia is working on new military technologies. The main point of the book of Revelation often becomes "you don't want to be there when it happens. So get saved and get ready" (7).

In contrast to this approach, *Revelation for the Rest of Us* suggests that Revelation is written to inspire Christians to be dissident disciples (principle 2) who recognize that Babylon is a clear and present danger, rather than a future capital city for the antichrist (15–23). Such dissidents should notice and resist the "spirit of Babylon" when it is beginning to creep into their governments, economies, families, and churches (47–50, 167–84). Practically, a Christian must learn to properly use their imagination (principle 3) to understand the symbolic nature of the characters in John's vision (principle 4) and the way those characters fit into the dramatic narrative of Revelation (principle 5). Using a helpful chart on pages 38–39, the authors explain the "playbill of Revelation" comprised of "Team Dragon in Babylon" and "Team Lamb in New Jerusalem." They argue that without a sense of this bigger picture (especially the nature of Babylon as described in Rev 17–18), it is difficult to properly understand the earlier chapters of Revelation (33).

Readers are also urged to avoid "flat-footed literalism" (94) and told that it is a mistake to view John's allusions to the Old Testament in terms of prediction and fulfillment (121). Rather, McKnight and Matchett believe John is "re-actualizing" famous OT images, that is, infusing them with new meaning that correlates to his own time, citing Acts 2:14–21 and Mark 13:14 as other NT examples of re-actualization (122).

Parts 4 and 5 represent a transition in the book "from criticism of bad approaches to reading Revelation to exploring the living reality of John's vision of *discipleship*," which is essentially a call to "*dissidence* in the midst of Babylon" (167, italics original). Christians living in the Roman Empire in the first century needed to heed this call (part 4), and Christians living in North America today need to heed this call (part 5). McKnight and Matchett refer to Babylon as "a *timeless trope* for empires and nations and powers that systematize injustices, oppress the people of God, and suppress the truths of liberation" (209, italics original).

North American readers will probably not be offended by the authors' case studies of the Babylonian tendencies of the Roman Empire (167–84), or the Nazi regime (200–02, 234–36), but their critique of America (including American evangelicalism and Christian nationalism) is sure to touch nerves and spark some important dialogue (209–32). To be clear, they define Christian nationalism as "a new iteration of wannabe Christendom" (227) that blurs Christian identity with American identity, and they suggest that the term "evangelical" is becoming synonymous with "Republican" (222). Such trends hinder Americans from "thinking Christianly" about the good and the bad of any government or political power (233, 239).

Whether you agree or disagree with their assessments of American evangelicalism, it is easy to appreciate their practical advice about how to live in a world consumed by the values of Babylon. McKnight and Matchett effectively argue that "the major habit of the book of Revelation is worship" (188). And true worship forms a new imagination (a new faith) that enables Christians to stand up and speak out against the temptations and pressures of Babylon—even if it hurts their reputation or their retirement plans or, in some cases, leads to imprisonment or martyrdom. This kind of worship demonstrates our allegiance to the Lamb who also suffered and was slain (202).

An important question for readers to consider is whether the biblical authors (including John) are really "re-actualizing" past prophecies. When Paul speaks of God's future plans for ethnic Israel (Rom. 11:25–29) or tells the Thessalonians that the clearest sign of the arrival of the Day of the Lord will be the man of lawlessness taking his seat in the temple and proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thess. 2:3–4), is it not reasonable to argue that Paul is legitimately reading the Old Testament in terms of prediction and fulfillment? Since John himself speaks of his visions as depicting the "fulfillment" (ἐτελέσθη) of what God had announced through his prophets (Rev. 10:7), shouldn't one be extremely careful of minimizing the *significance* of Revelation's links to OT prophecies about the second coming of the Messiah?

For example, their insistence on a nonviolent return of Christ (76–81) because the Lion of Judah has morphed into the slain Lamb in Revelation 5 seems unnecessarily reductionistic (cf. the "wrath of the Lamb" in Rev 6:16) and can create an uncomfortable dichotomy with certain Old Testament passages that speak of the Messiah as a Davidic Warrior bringing salvation by destroying the enemies of God's people (Isa. 11; 63:1–6; Ps. 2; Dan. 7; Zech. 12–14). If God crushed the actual armies of Egypt in the Red Sea, or slaughtered 185,000 Assyrians outside the walls of Jerusalem in a single night, is it so hard to believe that something similar could happen at the second coming?

A second question is whether the authors have over-generalized their critique of futurism (particularly dispensational premillennialism). Does this interpretative approach to Revelation inevitably lead to speculation and "newspaper exegesis?" Might it be possible for Revelation to predict the future, *and still be applicable* to the seven churches or to Christians today? The fact that a dispensationalist commentary (Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020) was in the recommended reading list (289) is an interesting foil to McKnight's jibe on p. 9 ("Dallas, we've got a problem") and one of the few hints in the book that he believes there are at least *some* futurists out there who are not "speculators."

As something of an aside, the authors' sense of humor and informal writing are a fun part of the book. For example, on pages 180–81, they state that in His words to the church of Laodicea, Jesus is "riffing off their geographical location" and that "Babylon is creeping into the seven churches because … Babylon gonna Babylon. Always." Readers will also encounter some thought-provoking translation choices and terminology. Instead of "beasts," "judgments," "Son of man," and the nine "songs" of Revelation, the authors speak of the "wild things" (14, 65–66), the "3 x 7 divine disciplines" (128–31), the "Colossus of Christ" (170) and the nine "spirituals" of Revelation (188–91), respectively.

To conclude, *Revelation for the Rest of Us* by Scot McKnight and Cody Matchett convincingly argues that it is a tragedy to read Revelation and miss John's call to be a "dissident disciple" who can discern the ideology of Babylon in their world. It is a poignant reminder for all interpreters of Revelation to do a better job of proclaiming this timeless truth, and to keep asking themselves whether they are recognizing and resisting the presence of Babylon in their own lives and particularly in America. The authors are writing for the layperson (especially those frustrated by failed predictions of futurists), but pastors, Bible College/Christian University College students, and seminarians will find plenty to chew on as well.

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Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024. Pp. 372. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0-3102-3438-8. $49.99 (CAD) $39.99 (USD).

Over two thousand years of biblical interpretation have produced a range of hermeneutical methods, yet biblical studies and theology often fail to read Scripture in a meaningful way that resonates with its intended purpose. Kevin J. Vanhoozer seeks to address this issue with his book, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically*. Vanhoozer engages key historical hermeneutical and theological developments for studying the complete revelation of Scripture. He suggests that Scripture's ultimate purpose is to enable communion and "covenant relationship with the triune God who bespoke it and about whom it bespeaks" (13). Scripture, according to Vanhoozer, ultimately points to Jesus Christ and God's saving work through the cross and resurrection that provides an underlying theological expectation of hope for the future eschaton. Through his well-organized work, Vanhoozer effectively presents scholars with a must-read to evaluate and reflect upon their own studies of Scripture.

Vanhoozer organizes his book into three parts, which effectively build upon one another to walk the reader through the discussion leading to, what Vanhoozer calls, a "mere Christian hermeneutic" (17). This mere Christian hermeneutic appears throughout the book and continues to unfold in a way that brings the reader into a deeper understanding of Vanhoozer's proposed hermeneutical methodology. He outlines his work in a metaphorical way that he refers to as climbing the mountain of the knowledge of God (357). Part 1 sets up the beginning of his climb by surveying developments in the field of biblical studies and theological readings of the Bible. Part 2 begins the ascent by critiquing and forming definitions for the "letter of the text; the literal sense and its interpretation" (358). Finally, part 3 leads the reader to an alternative path up the mountain of the knowledge of God by utilizing Vanhoozer's "mere Christian hermeneutics" (358).

Part 1 begins with a survey of biblical scholarship, which Vanhoozer uses to bridge gaps between various reading cultures that interpret Scripture. These reading cultures are groups that "*instill certain interpretive intuitions and practices, training readers to use certain frames of reference rather than others*" (78, italics original). Vanhoozer notes how the Reformation presented an example of how diverse reading cultures can change the world. He even points out limitations found in the reading culture of the Nicene Creed, stating that the Holy Spirit "spoke … by the prophets" (9). Vanhoozer argues that the Holy Spirit is still speaking through the prophets in the Bible; thus, contemporary readers must acknowledge the work of the Spirit to know the things of God (9–10). The reading cultures of Antioch and Alexandria present a fruitful discussion for Vanhoozer's work. Vanhoozer outlines the school of Antioch's focus on the grammatical literal text and Alexandria's focus on the spiritual reading (57–70). Through this discussion, Vanhoozer acknowledges similarities between the two reading cultures and concludes that "Mere Christian hermeneutics must not pit theology against history or doctrine against grammatical-historical interpretation" (91). Instead, Vanhoozer seeks to provide a unifying hermeneutical approach to Scripture.

In contemporary scholarship's quest for a literal reading of Scripture, Vanhoozer critiques the literal sense within the discipline of biblical studies in part 2. Through his criticisms, Vanhoozer establishes multiple meanings behind reading Scripture literally as it refers to the narrative story within and behind the text and meaning that appears "under and through its literary form" (119). Vanhoozer uses Han Boersma to establish that the "*literal sense is 'the starting point (sacramentum) of a search for the greater, more christological reality(res) of the gospel*'" (131, italics original). Vanhoozer's mere Christian hermeneutic follows a *transfigural* reading of the text that "follows the way the biblical words run across or beyond figures to the realities those figures foreshadow and anticipate" (169). This approach allows for understanding the literal sense of Scripture, which Vanhoozer acknowledges as "*the meaning of the letter, viewed as human-divine authorial discourse, when read in canonical context with an eschatological frame* *of reference*" (179, italics original). This exegesis propels the discourse into part 3 where Vanhoozer shows the methodology in action.

Part 3 showcases Vanhoozer's methodology in practice. He begins by analyzing Genesis 1:3, the history of hermeneutical and scientific findings of the text. In opposition to these readings, Vanhoozer shows that reading the passage within the biblical canon establishes that God himself is light. Thus, through the creation of light, God "makes known and creates the means for further making known" (222). The passage shows a literal divine action that also displays creation as displaying the glory of God, which shows the "driving force behind creation and redemption alike" (221). This conversation, which Vanhoozer describes as the economy of light, expands to the transfiguration of Christ in the Gospels, which shows Christ showcasing the divine light of God. Vanhoozer states how his transfigural interpretation "does not change but, rather, glorifies the literal meaning" (268). Vanhoozer's methodology allows for reading these passages within their literal context and faithfully within the theological outline of Scripture, which ultimately points to salvation through Christ throughout the biblical narrative.

Vanhoozer acknowledges that his work is not the end-all method of hermeneutics. Instead, he remarks that this method "calls churches and seminaries to foster reading cultures that can overcome the modern division of biblical scholarship and theology" (193). His book achieves this goal by challenging the grammatical-criticism approaches to Scripture while challenging allegorical readings that ignore the intended meaning. An example of irresponsible allegorical readings of Scripture stems from Vanhoozer's example of Innocent III's interpretation of Genesis 1:14–19, which claims that the greater and lesser lights indicate the papal and kingly authorities established by God (61). Mere Christian Hermeneutics "helps readers find glory in the letter of the text, not in their own vainglorious interpretations" (355). Thus, Vanhoozer's method allows readers to reflect upon their literal readings that divorce theology and utilize theology in a way to inform Scripture.

Mere Christian Hermeneutics effectively challenges scholars to revisit their hermeneutical principles; however, the work still has its limitations. Vanhoozer acknowledges such limitations when he states that his work cannot "explain satisfactorily the origins of the modern world" of biblical studies (77). Therefore, this book appears most beneficial for well-read scholars who can use this book to supplement their research in biblical studies. Another critique stems from his idea of reading all Scripture within the biblical canon. Since Protestant and Catholic reading cultures have different canons of Scripture, a brief discussion on the canon would benefit his work. However, his book does greatly contribute to the overall hermeneutic corpus, advocating for a spiritual reading of Scripture.

Mere Christian Hermeneutics challenges readers who are well-read in biblical hermeneutical methods and theological principles. This challenge renders the book inaccessible to young Christians in undergraduate studies. However, Vanhoozer's ability to navigate the conversations with scholarship from the Church Fathers to contemporary studies makes the book an essential read for scholars and doctoral-level students. Therefore, this book would be an incredibly influential text for PhD programs to incorporate into their curricula, as well as find a pivotal place on the bookshelves of scholars.

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Rachel Toombs. *Reading the First Five Books: The Invitation of the Pentateuch's Stories*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2024. Pp. 192. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-5409-6590-5. $24.99 (USD).

The Pentateuch has much to offer the reader in the 21st century, but much of its style can be foreign to a modern audience. Rachel Toombs in *Reading the First Five Books* seeks to provide helpful hermeneutical tools for those interested in reading the Pentateuch and the Hebrew Bible at large. Toombs clearly states her purpose for the book, along with the book's outline, in the final paragraph of the introduction:

> In this book, I invite readers into the imaginative and transformative work of the stories we find in Scripture's first five books by looking into three general features of bare-bones narration: brevity, pacing, and characterization. We will also look at two more narrow but intriguing aspects of biblical Hebrew: complexity in characterization and the use of the grotesque. (xxi)

Her book is divided into seven chapters. She begins with "The Invitation of Reading," which frames hermeneutics as an invitation to meaning-making. Toombs describes reading as an event, and the purpose of this event should be centered on the transformation of the reader over the domination of the text into the reader's hermeneutical paradigm. This idea, stemming from Gadamer, is fueled by her view of the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and Biblical Hermeneutics," which she says portrays Scripture as a "modern 'scientific' text employed to do work that it did not set out to do in its historical context" (7). Seeing Scripture as an invitation pulls the modern reader into an ancient context, seeking to be shaped by the text in the way the original recipients were.

In the next few chapters, she then speaks about three features of the concise narrative style of Hebrew storytelling: brevity, pacing, and characterization. Within each of these features, she carries out a case study, noting how that characteristic of biblical narration is present in the Pentateuch. She first notes the brief, "matter-of-fact" tone of the biblical narration, leaving many details to the imagination as a way of creating a wrestle between the text and the reader, which raises questions. When the reader is not supplied with everything in a story, they are left to consider the *why* and discern how the missing pieces in the text might be leading to the imaginative act of wonder, or if it is centering their focus on the given details. For this, she analyzes the deaths of Nadab and Abihu before the Lord in Leviticus 10:1–7. Because this story is sparse in detail, Toombs turns her focus towards the imaginative description of the event behind the text (an act of wonder, as she previously stated). While this is a beautiful retelling of the story, I find that it stops short of the rest of the commands from the Lord in Leviticus 10, which could give the reader the detail needed to provide some background behind the strange fire and the censors in verse 1.

After brevity, Toombs explores the second storytelling feature of pacing, which is a wonderful exposition on exposing factors within biblical narrative that are harder to see for the modern English reader. For example, she notes how geography can act as a tool for pacing a story; however, when modern people do not know where ancient locations are, it can be difficult to feel the distance of a character's travel and how that may affect the pacing of the story. She also notes how the disjunctive *waw* and *wayiqqtol* affect pacing, with the disjunctive *waw* "alerting the reader to a change either in scene or setting or in the action of the characters" (61), and the *wayiqqtol* acts as the simple connector between clauses and scenes of various sizes, calling it the "drumbeat to a story" (74). She notes the use of the *wayiqqtol* in her personal translations within the Pentateuch as "AND … AND … AND …," bringing clarity to the English reader what Hebrew narration looks like.

The third storytelling feature that she notes is characterization, whereby an author directly or indirectly portrays a character throughout a narrative. In biblical narrative, many characters are not given physical descriptions, which means we are left to see other aspects of their person as important: their obedience/disobedience to command (often from God), their consistency/unchanging nature (flat) or their dynamic nature (round), and only occasionally their physical characteristics. What Toombs does see as important is the inherent complexity of many core characters in the Pentateuch, each acting as a kind of mirror for insightful personal reflection due to their relatable, complicated portrayal. Chapter 5 continues on the topic of complexity in characterization by looking at Jacob, Isaac, and Rebekah's complex natures through this lens within Genesis.

Chapter 6 focuses on what Toombs calls "The Grotesque." Within the Pentateuch are many jarring stories that have become increasingly difficult for modern readers to engage with, so this chapter is of much help to many who are in that place. Before doing a case study on Numbers 16, Toombs looks at the bloody sacrifice of Leviticus, the widespread circumcision of Genesis 17, the attempted sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22, and Jacob's hip injury as he wrestled with God in Genesis 32. Through each of these stories, the grotesque is not for entertainment value, but they are meant to shock us and make us uncomfortable in order to view God or ourselves in a fresh way. Toombs' influence from Flannery O'Connor's unapologetic view of Abraham and Sarah's relationship sets the stage for how she thinks we can view the often uncomfortable but essential stories in the Pentateuch.

The final chapter, "Deuteronomy, Eat These Stories," is named after Peterson's *Eat This Book*, and in it, she focuses on the role of Deuteronomy within the Pentateuch. In the retelling of the law, Deuteronomy is a reminder to meditate on God's love for his people again, which Toombs sees as a core function of not just Deuteronomy but the act of reading Scripture in general. She notes how the book retells stories like the Passover, the destruction of the Egyptian army, the giving of manna from the heavens, and the golden calf, all from the frame of remembrance and meditation on God's love and mercy amid human failure.

Reading the First Five Books is a helpful narratological study, as it synthesizes earlier scholars working in biblical narrative, such as Alter, Berlin, Sternberg, and Bar-Efrat (among others), while also providing original scholarship to the field. Because of this, I would recommend Toombs to anyone interested in how the style and shape of the Pentateuch affect our transformation through the reading event.

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Beale, G. K. *Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023. Pp. xviii + 576. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-5409-6042-9. $49.99 (USD).

G.K. Beale's *Union with the Resurrected Christ* continues from his *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Baker Academic, 2011) to concentrate specifically upon the doctrine and implications of the Christian's union with the exalted Christ. This monumental work is founded in Beale's conclusion that union with Christ is a central New Testament theme pivotal to the Christian life.

Beale relies heavily on Richard B. Gaffin's work including but not limited to his *Resurrection and Redemption* (P & R, 1987). Beale borrows Gaffin's idea that redemption and the subsequent elements of the *ordo salutis* are not distinct aspects but are of the single act of being raised from the dead. Concluding that most publications about union with Christ explore this union from the point of view of Christ's atonement and neglect his resurrection, he then extensively demonstrates his central thesis that believers participate in Christ's resurrection life, so that what is true of him is true of the believer.

Throughout, Beale organizes his work around an image of a diamond with the facets being the attributes of Christ at his ascension as a visual cue. The introduction (1–17) makes clear the author's thesis, namely that "Christ's resurrection and ascension place him as the beginning of the eschatological fulfillment of the new-creational kingdom" (1). This thesis is revealed in two main sections containing seventeen chapters in total within a "redemptive-historical" context.

Beale consistently begins each chapter with a summary of previously addressed topics, transitions to connect what is said with the subject of the following chapter, and then provides biblical support for his argument. Typically, he begins with the Old Testament promissory motif and then demonstrates its fulfillment in the New Testament.

Section one, comprising the first two chapters, outlines the biblical-theological storyline of the Old and New Testaments as he points to an inaugurated eschatology. Beale walks the reader through the Adamic significance of this storyline and outlines the eschatological references in the New Testament. As he moves into chapter 2, he connects the resurrection to the end-time new creation and kingdom in the Pauline corpus.

Building from the biblical-theological storyline of the first two chapters, the second section (100–514) explains how Christ, in his resurrection and ascension, is at the center of the eschatological fulfillment of the anticipated glorified kingdom. Each chapter, using extensive biblical support, outlines a characteristic of the resurrected Christ, and in turn how this facet of the Saviour is also present in each believer. Beale concludes his chapters by providing implications for practical consideration. For example, in regard to sharing Christ's suffering, Beale writes, "So when believers come into union with the resurrected Christ, they also take on his suffering status and are, consequently, identified with his suffering" (268). Through this conclusion, he gleans from Philippians 3:10 the comfort for believers that through their fellowship with Christ's sufferings, they are able to endure "by means of participating in "the power of his resurrection" (268).

Beale's work is a commendable volume, but it is not without its shortcomings. First, it is laudable that he provides a description of union with Christ, but focusing on the definition provided by Constantine Campbell without spending time beyond a brief mention of Kevin Vanhoozer's proposal is a weakness of this work. To be clear, Campbell in *Paul and Union with Christ* (Zondervan Academic, 2012), does not provide so much a useful definition as four descriptors: (1) union, (2) participation, (3) identification, and (4) incorporation. These demonstrate how union with Christ is experienced but lack clarity on what it means. With union being the central outcome for the believer that Beale wishes to convey, he has done his work a disservice by not pausing in his efforts to attempt a more robust explanation of union with Christ. This manifests itself in several ways. One is that although Beale strongly communicates the believer's participation with Christ as union with him, he mentions not once the doctrine of theosis (sharing in the divine nature), nor explains its legitimacy outside of Eastern Orthodoxy nor examines it theologically in his treatment of 2 Peter 1:4. At least in his conclusion (510–514) he recognizes the mystical aspect of this participation and that Christians are not deified as they share in Christ's divine nature. It would have been helpful for him to demonstrate how theosis was not another way of stating union with Christ but is a result of this union. Also, the doctrine of the tripart union is not explained when regarding his definition that "union with Christ is an umbrella term for or has overlap with the concepts of 'participation with Christ,' 'incorporation into Christ,' and 'identification with Christ"' (6).

Much of his work focuses on the vital or experiential aspect of union with Christ without providing what he only states with clarity as three temporal stages of union with Christ in his conclusion (510–514). Beale's treatment of Romans 6 and Ephesians 1:3–4 would have benefited from introducing these three aspects of union with Christ earlier in his volume.

Second, his work suffers from unnecessary repetition and conceptual overload, which can leave the reader overwhelmed. This does not facilitate Beale's hope that this work would serve the church not just the seminary (16).

The criticisms of Beale's work are limited compared to the many positive contributions that he provides, of which this review can only supply a few notable examples. First, the comprehensive nature of his work could have been unwieldy, but his ability to take several strands and synthesize them provided a holistic framework valuable for teaching and preaching. His methodology for his argument, which presented his subject matter, provided Old Testament support and then demonstrated how those texts pointed to Christ and to New Testament Scriptures, made for a convincing argument and provided a transferable outline for teachers wanting to incorporate Beale's work into their own.

Beale correctly evaluates that while there are commendable works that provide doctrinal and theological understanding to biblical scholarship, few overtly provide practical applications. Beale deliberately moves from exegesis to exhortation as he applies union with the risen Christ to Christian ethics (186), the importance of missions (263), persevering through suffering (265), and the lure of idolatry (414–415). His efforts to apply his work make his work accessible for pastors and lay Christians for discipleship. Union with Christ is difficult to implement in the Christian life, considering its mystical nature, but Beale's applications help to mitigate that difficulty.

To conclude, G. K. Beale's *Union with the Resurrected Christ: Eschatological New Creation and New Testament Biblical Theology* has offered an expansive treatise on the believer's union with Christ that is exegetically sound, theologically robust, and pastorally applicable. Its primary audience will likely be pastors, preachers, and Christian ministry leaders. Students from Christian universities, seminaries, and Bible colleges will also benefit immensely.

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Adrian Langdon. *Barth and Ecotheology: The Electing God and the Community of Creation*. Routledge New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies. Routledge, 2025. Pp. 272. Hardcover. ISBN 978-1-0326-3925-3. $190.00 (USD).

Adrian Langdon examines a conversation between the emerging field of ecotheology and the theology of Karl Barth, in a form he refers to as constructive reinterpretation. He aims to take the concerns of ecotheologians seriously and introduce others to the conversation. He looks to post-Barthian interpreters for approaches beyond Barth's scope of engagement with the natural world.

Chapter 1 engages the Anthropocene, the history of ecological degradation, and a human response that echoes Barth. Conversation partners include Moltmann, Pannenberg, McFague, and Ruether, as well as decolonializing perspectives and indigenous viewpoints. Believing that Barth's theology offers a foundation for affirming the natural world, Langdon brings these conversation partners to expand or revise Barth's work in response to the current crisis in the creation. This was a helpful chapter, mapping the road from the industrial era to the present—a story of progress marked by violence and exploitation, which created a profound shift in attitudes towards humans and the world. God was marginalized as the will of human progress came to dominate the world and its story.

Langdon advocates for practical reasoning that will restore the relationship between people and land. He looks to Barth for insight and proposes five. First, we must recover the connection between God as creator and reconciler. Second, nontheological perspectives need to be added to theological knowledge. Third, doctrine needs to be recentered away from political power and back to humans and the land. Fourth, a theology of nature needs to refocus on God's will and freedom for His creation. Ultimately, we require a shift from domination to stewardship.

The second chapter explores methods in a theology of nature. Barth's christological method is paired with Pannenberg's interpretation of modern science. Langdon insists that we must have faith, but also the integration of science and practical responses in response to Progressive Dominion Theology (PDT). A theology of nature must begin with faith in God, proceed with nontheological knowledge, and end with practical projects. The question is how to keep faith as the lens for the investigation and not stray into other agendas. Pannenberg offers a post-Barthian perspective, attempting to integrate methods that might overcome the displacement and domination of the world.

Chapter 3 examines an interpretation of Barth's doctrine of election and its scope in relation to all of creation. Bruce McCormack's "ontological receptivity" of the Son introduces a revision that encompasses the fullness of creation, extending beyond Barth's doctrine of election. Langdon extends Barth's election to the whole community of creation, defending Barth against Moltmann's critique, while revising to address the current situation in light of Pannenberg and McCormack's revisions.

In chapter 4, the Son is utilized to articulate the differentiation of creation from the Creator and the work of the Son in creation. Langdon explores how we understand Jesus the Creator in relation to creation in which He is embedded, providing evidence of His distinction from the Father, shaped by His human life, drawing on McCormack's ideas and the concept of the immanent *incarnandus*, modified from Pannenberg.

Chapter 5 shifts to the work of the Spirit, following Pannenberg in connecting the Spirit, seen as the force field of creation, encompassing all things in the presence of the triune God. Langdon calls for a deeper connection between the Spirit and Creation, suggesting the Spirit empowers Jesus and the livingness of the world. He goes a step further, proposing a "new Animism," recovering insights from indigenous cultures. Pannenberg and McCormick are again presented as correcting Barth, integrating theology and science with field thinking.

Human embeddedness and embodiment are considered in chapter 6. Clarifying the relationship between humans and the living world reveals a complex interrelationship and challenges in engaging with it. Langdon hopes to avoid natural theology and to present a Jesus not only for humanity but for the rest of creation, including dialogue with indigenous approaches. Humanity is often abstracted out of the world and needs reintegration. We need an I–Thou relationship with all living things in an inclusive social theory, drawing on Bonhoeffer for insight. Humans are called to lordly stewardship as we are embedded in the world. The whole cosmos is under God's covenantal care. We need to be servants of creation, in an ecological mutuality that respects all.

The final chapter attends to animals and God's concern for their place in the atonement of God. Following the thinking of "deep incarnation," interpreting the place of Jesus's atoning to be for all living things. He focuses on whether animals participate in fallenness, are victims or agents of suffering, and their place in shared space and time with us in a relational perspective. What is the concern of

God for the natural world, and is it expressed in Jesus's death to include all living beings—are "all things reconciled in Him"? What is our ethical response to them? What is the scope of God's concern in space and time?

Langdon structures the book well with the Introduction and conclusion stating and reflecting on his argument in concise paragraphs. His final challenge is for the church to rethink its role as an embedded partner in creation, the ethical implications of a theology of nature, and the need to be a voice outside the church and seminary walls to address the world where the crisis is occurring.

My concerns are several. The conversation begins by providing an overview of the problem addressed by ecotheology. Barth never begins with the problem and then looks for a solution in the life of God. While all the persons of the Trinity were addressed, they were not engaged in the leading work of the God who loves in freedom, accompanies His creation, and reconciles the world by His covenant love. The emphasis was on the human possibility to meet the human problem.

Following revisionists of Barth's theology, especially Pannenberg and Moltmann, is to divert from those Barth felt were misguided. T. F. Torrance was briefly mentioned and would have been a more constructive voice. Gunton was seen answering the revisionists but could have been helpful as a guide. The inclusion of liberation and feminist theologians would have been beneficial to bring in after the course was set, but instead became the cultural chorus for the discussion at the start.

The book would be appropriately titled "Ecotheology and Barth in Conversation." The problem came while searching for answers. There was a constant concern not to appear to be following Natural Theology nor departing from Barth's methodological priorities. Yet revision inevitably wanders. The closing comments called for a revival of the church to form practical projects that participate in the Community of Creation, anticipating the Kingdom of God.

Langdon wrestles with the distinction between natural theology and a theology of nature, which is primarily a question of sequence—what drives the logic? Langdon begins with a world in ecological crisis and looks to Barth through the eyes of others to create a response to the crisis. Some of the strategies work (the community of creation, embodiment and embeddedness, and the relatedness of all things). His revisionary interpreters begin with human concerns that are present within the field of natural theology, making sense from a human perspective. I did not sense the *Dues Dixit*, God speaking, in addressing the concern of this book that I consider the mark of a theology of nature following Barth's unwavering christological commitment.

Langdon ends by clarifying that he has reviewed Barth's work to revise and situate it within the context of the Anthropocene. The context dominated the conversation, and Barth was minimally the authority to be followed, as he was regularly revised and reinterpreted. This does not mean the conversation is not worthwhile, only that it ended feeling like an ethical concern in search of a theology to solve the problem. His final imperative is for the livingness of the world, rather than a recovery of a dynamic theology that listens to the triune God. The reader will need to decide its hopeful prospects.

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David J. Atkinson. *The Message of Genesis 1–11*. Revised Edition. The Bible Speaks Today. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021. ISBN 978-1-5140-0451-7. Pp xiv + 178. Paperback. $27.49 (CDN) $21.99 (USD).

Despite its ancient origins, the book of Genesis continues to speak with divine authority on today's most pressing matters. Originally written in 1990 with Inter-Varsity Press as part of the eminently poignant *Bible Speaks Today* (BST) series, David J. Atkinson's *The Message of Genesis 1–11* was exceptionally well received for its intended audience(s) and purpose(s).[1]

Prior to elaborating on the content of the book itself (or its mostly minor revisions), a basic overview of the BST series is in order. According to the editors (Alec Motyer, John Sott, and Derek Tidball), *The Bible Speaks Today* is characterized by a three-fold ideal: (1) expounding the biblical text with accuracy, (2) relating Scripture to contemporary life, and (3) readability. In this sense, therefore, the BST volumes are not "commentaries" per se. Said otherwise, most commentaries seek to "elucidate the text rather than to apply it" and tend to be reference works rather than distinct literature (ix). This is unlike the BST volumes which are intentionally designed to be read cover to cover. Finally, each of the contributors to *The BST* series is "united in their convictions that God still speaks through what he has spoken, and that nothing is more necessary for the life, health and growth of Christians than that they should hear what the Spirit is saying to them through his ancient—yet ever modern—Word" (ix).

David J. Atkinson is honorary assistant bishop in the Diocese of Southwark and was formerly Suffragan Bishop of Thetford in the Diocese of Norwich. He is also the author of the volumes on Ruth, Job, and Proverbs in *The BST* series of commentaries.

1 See, for example, the (disproportionally) positive comments made by Owen C. Thomas in *Churchman* 107 (1993): 83; Gregory J. McBride, *The Theological Educator* 48 (1993): 115–16; J. N. Boo Heflin, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 34 (1992): 35–36; and Tom Gledhill, *Churchman* 104 (1990): 353, alongside the astute notes that are made by John F. Evans within *A Guide to Biblical Commentaries and Reference Works* 11th Edition (Zondervan, 2025), 71. Cf. C. E. Colton, *Criswell Theological Review* (1991): 304–05; Donald B. DeYoung, *Grace Theological Journal* 12 (1991): 119; and Peter J. Gentry, *Baptist Review of Theology* (1992): 50–52.

Quite interestingly, Atkinson divides Genesis 1–11 into six major units: (1) Majesty and Mystery (1:1–2:3), (2) Expelled from Eden (2:4–3:24), which is further subdivided into two more sections, namely part A. Life in the Garden (2:4–25) and part B. "Adam, where are you?" (3:1–24), (3) Envy and Gratitude (4:1–26), (4) The Eye of the Storm (5:1–8:22), (5) Rainbows in a Fallen World (9:1–29), and (6) God is our Hope and Strength (10:1–11:32). An author's preface (xi–xii) and select bibliography (xiii–xiv) round out the volume. There are no indices.

Atkinson approaches the text as a "literary whole," explicitly stating:

> Whatever views some of us have about the author or authors and editors, the fact remains that it is this text in its canonical form which Christian people have from the beginning received as the opening chapters of their Bibles. It is this text as a whole which the writers of the New Testament had before them. It is this text through which the divine Word comes to us. (xii)

Given the age of the volume at hand, it is unnecessary to delineate its contents at length. Suffice to say that the (aforementioned) accolades are all well-deserving. With respect to sexuality in general, including aspects concerning singleness, divorce, and (even) the LGBT+ community, the author astutely affirms that the *Imago Dei* "is not seen without distortion in any of us" (59) and that we are all "made for fellowship, and whether in marriage and family, or in a life of celibacy, or community, we need to find ways of dealing with the fact that it is not good to be alone" (60). Atkison also believes that the so-called Nephilim (Gen 6:1–4) are "demonic" fallen angels (119) and rightly challenges certain misunderstandings of the impassibility of God.

To be clear, Atkinson judiciously opines:[2]

> Can there be anything more poignant than the phrase *the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart* (6:6)? God is affected by what people make of themselves and do with his creation. God suffers.… Here is the wounded spirit of the artist whose work is rejected, the broken heart of the lover whose love is not returned … Genesis 6 points us to the suffering God. "The tears of God are the meaning of history." (120–21)

2 Do note, however, that I disagree with Atkinson wherein he states (120): "*It grieved him to his heart* could mean 'he felt bitterly indignant'—a mixture of rage and bitter anguish." To be clear, I agree with the latter but not the former. See Dustin G. Burlet, "Impassible Yet Impassioned: The Doctrine of Divine Impassibility in Conversation with the Noachian Deluge of Genesis," *Didaskalia* 28 (2017–2018)" 96–128. Cf. Eli Randolph, "Impassibility, Divine Suffering, and Theodicy: Ancient Answers to Contemporary Concerns," *Journal of Christian Studies* 3 (2024): 29–43.

Even the (oft-controversial!) topic of evolution (in general) is handled quite well in my opinion. To be clear, Atkinson notes that the term itself is somewhat "loaded," noting:

> Some writers use the word "evolution;" in a further sense … to mean more than biological processes. It becomes a shorthand for "evolutionism," which is really a philosophical worldview about the nature of reality.… Clearly, if "evolution" is lifted out of the sphere of biological hypothesis, where it is open to scientific investigation, and is elevated to the status of a whole worldview of the way things are, then there is direct conflict with biblical faith. (18)

There are also some exceptionally adept turns of phrase, such as, with respect to the Flood, "the power of God is not dimmed by the power of the sea" (131). Another is: "God's initiative of grace towards Noah is mentioned before there is any references to Noah's faith and righteousness (6:9). And that is important … 'grace found Noah' … Perhaps we could suggest that, in contrast to Descartes, the Velveteen Rabbit would learn, through relationship, gradually, with pain and struggle to say, 'I am loved, therefore, I am.' That is part of the meaning of grace" (121, 124).

The revisions themselves, however, are (abysmally) minimal. For example, instead of using the Revised Standard Version (1973), all references are from the NRSV Bible text (1995). Direct quotations of Scripture also use in-line citations (versus footnotes), thereby "smoothing out" one's reading at times. While the back cover claims the redesigned edition has been "sensitively updated with more current references," I could not identify anything that was actually "new."

For those encountering David J. Atkinson for the first time, *The Message of Genesis 1–11* is a deeply enriching read—pastoral, wise, and surprisingly fresh despite its age. As noted above, however, the revisions are disappointingly sparse. One wonders if IVP might have served its audience better by rebranding this edition as part of a "BST Classics" line rather than a "Revised Edition," thus making room for some new voices alongside the time-honored ones.

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