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## Editorial

Following the lead of the articles in this issue, please allow me to suggest several characteristics that Christian leaders should have present in their lives. This list is not meant to be exhaustive but certainly challenging.

*Christian leaders should be prophetic.* Many persons do not speak out and take biblical stands on issues. In our lead article R. Philip Roberts goes against the grain of the culture's same-sex marriage mentality as he introduces the Kansas City Declaration on Marriage. This document prophetically declares that God established the definition and morality of marriage as the union of one man and one woman for life, and thus, it should not be changed.

*Christian leaders should be preachers of God's word.* Many people today say that the preaching of the word of God is obsolete and that church leaders need instead to come up with creative new possibilities for their congregations. David Larsen soundly refutes this view in three featured addresses that answer the question: "Is Preaching to be Passé?"

*Christian leaders should especially look to Christ and his example when serving the Lord becomes difficult.* Michael McMullen introduces a previously unpublished sermon on leadership by Jonathan Edwards, the 18th century preacher, whose message on Moses' complaint about a task that God had given him is especially relevant for us today.

*Christian leaders should support corporate worship in song.* In "Leadership of the Church Choir," Lee Hinson examines the church choir's connection to biblical and historical models, along with any implications for 21st century ministry.

*Christian leaders should refute non-Christian religions and their teachings.* Sadly, many people embrace religions that are not within the bounds of Christianity. In "Was Black Theology Another Religion?" Kevin Smith places Black theology outside of the Christian sphere.

*Christian leaders should treat people with respect and not be arrogant.* So many leaders today are full of ego and treat others with contempt. In "Isaiah's Theology of Pride," W. Creighton Marlowe warns against arrogance and provides a sober reminder for any leader, would-be leader, or nation to depend upon the Lord rather than relying on themselves.

I trust that this issue will be useful to you. Enjoy!

Terry L. Wilder, Editor

## **Kansas City Declaration on Marriage**

Introduction by R. Philip Roberts

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### **Introduction**

The family is the pillar of society. This fact is clear primarily from the Bible, the word of God itself. It was the first institution the Lord himself established. There, in the Garden of Eden he created Adam and Eve and gave them direction to be fruitful and multiply. The family—one man and one woman, bearing and parenting children in a lifelong relationship—was God’s idea.

Appropriately, the church, the regenerate, baptized people of God—followers of the Lord Jesus Christ—is also designated as his “family.” The apostle Paul wrote, “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the *household of the faith*” (Galatians 6:10; cf. Ephesians 3:14-15; 1 Peter 4:17).

The concept of the church following the form and fashion of the original creation for human development—the family proper—is therefore understandable. It was the family first and the church following after it. The point is that the family is primary in God’s creative order. More practically, then, as the Christian family goes, so goes the church. As the family goes, so goes society as a whole. It is a fact of history that when the family dissolves and disappears so does society. Civilization cannot stand on its own two legs without God’s primary unit for social relationships. Society needs the family to provide a healthy nurturing environment for children and adults.

At the moment the family in the West is under attack. Firstly, from within internecine guerilla warfare is destroying its essence as couples get married but are not serious about the concept of one man and one woman, “for better or worse, through sickness and health, richer or poorer, till death do us part.” Rather, it is rewritten to be understood as “until I am unhappy or unfulfilled”—whatever those two words may mean; or, “until I meet someone more attractive, appealing” or “responsive to my needs.”

Divorce is currently ending fifty percent of all marriages. This rate may increase if not addressed and corrected. Even one unhappy ending to

marriage is undesirable. But at this rate, divorce will continue to erode the foundations of Christian union under God. It will continue to leave children unsettled and cynical about God's chosen institution for human community.

Secondly, marriage is under attack from without, largely from gay rights advocacy groups who wish to redefine marriage as one man and one man; or one woman and one woman. A simple study of human physiology would demonstrate the unnatural and distorted view of marriage this concept presents.

If state and national governments are enticed by this re-crafting of God's institution what would next be allowed? Bestiality, bigamy, polygamy? Maybe somebody marrying themselves or a tree in their yard. "Ridiculous," you might say. But believe me, if marriage in the traditional sense goes out of style and is replaced by a caricature, then expect that anything else might develop. Consequently, civilization, no doubt, hangs in the balance on this very issue.

Following is the Kansas City Declaration on Marriage. Framed by a number of scholars and thinkers in the area and mainly crafted by Barrett Duke of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Alan Branch of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Dan Heimbach of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, it provides a fabulous overview of marriage as it should be understood and embraced by those committed to the health and well-being of humanity. It is a response to the current challenges directed at biblical/traditional marriage. And it helps to articulate in a crystal-clear fashion the essence and importance of marriage.

You will find this document biblical, helpful, insightful, and practical. And when called on the spot to answer the question—"Why does one man-one woman marriage matter?"—this document will give you content for your answer.

In a chapel service and subsequent consortium held at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary on November 12, 2003, participants inscribed and endorsed this document. You are invited to do the same. Visit the MBTS website ([www.mbts.edu](http://www.mbts.edu)), go online, and add your signature to the list of supporters.

My hope and prayer to God is that the family will be strengthened, encouraged and rebuilt through the efforts of ventures such as the Kansas City Declaration on Marriage. May God grant it.

### **Kansas City Declaration on Marriage**

Marriage is the union of one man and one woman for life. This has been the definition of marriage in Western culture for millennia. Recent events and trends have threatened to undermine this definition in the West. Homosexual marriages already are recognized in some European countries and parts of Canada. In the United States, the Vermont legislature created civil unions to provide a government-sanctioned quasi-marital relationship for homosexuals. The movement toward homosexual marriage in the U.S. is also evidenced by the proliferation of “domestic partner registries” and corporate benefits for same-sex couples. The U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* prevents society from enforcing any laws discouraging homosexual sexual acts as corrupt or immoral. These current practices along with other pending judicial mandates threaten to throw wide open the door to full legal and moral affirmation of homosexual marriage.

We agree with the *Baptist Faith and Message* that “Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God’s unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.”

Any weakening of the traditional, Judeo-Christian definition of marriage will undermine the foundation of Western culture and result in deep, permanent fractures that will fundamentally alter American culture, indeed all of Western civilization. The *Colorado Statement on Biblical Sexual Morality* reflects our rejection of demands for redefinition of marriage when it says, “We affirm that God established the moral definition of marriage, and that it should not be changed according to the dictates of culture, tradition, or personal preference. We deny that the morality of marriage is a matter of mere custom, or that it should be allowed to shift with the tide of cultural opinion or social practice.” We reject the claim that homosexual unions should be granted equivalent moral status to heterosexual monogamous marriage, regardless of the terminology used to describe those unions. We affirm the biblical model of marriage, the union of one man and one woman for life, as the only appropriate model for uniting people in marriage. We deny that this conviction is incompatible with redemptive ministry to homosexuals. Homosexuals need the Gospel of Jesus Christ and they need the ministry of the church, just like everyone else. We call on our fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord to reach out in redemptive ministry to homosexuals,

while at the same time opposing the unbiblical concept of homosexual marriage.

We hold these beliefs for the following reasons:

**Marriage is the foundational institution of human culture** (Gen. 2:18-22; Matt. 19:3-9; Eph. 5:22-33; Eph. 6:1; 1 Thess. 2:7, 11; 1 Tim. 5:4).

The first social institution was marriage. As the foundation of the family, marriage is the foundational cultural institution. The family is a critically important institution in society because it supplies certain essential components to the bedrock upon which all other human relationships depend. In the family people learn compassion and mercy, essential elements that enable society to care for the weak among us. They learn how to cooperate with each other, an essential trait that enables individuals to combine their energies to accomplish great tasks. They learn commitment to others, an indispensable characteristic that assures unity and success. Most important, they learn to sacrifice for the needs of others, the linchpin of all healthy human relationships.

A family established on the marriage between a man and woman forces the cultivation of these characteristics in ways that other relationships do not. For heterosexual marriage demands the purest cultivation of these characteristics in order to succeed. Modern marriage counterfeits fail in significant ways to develop and model these characteristics. By their very nature cohabitation and same-sex relationships avoid some of the dynamics that a husband and wife must address. For example, those who cohabit often are reluctant to make a permanent commitment to each other; and same-sex relationships are never forced to deal with the fundamental differences between the sexes.

**Marriage is a covenantal relationship** (Gen. 2:23-25; Mal. 2:14-16; Matt. 19:5-9; Eph. 5:31).

The first commitment ceremony between a man and a woman involved a commitment to a relationship. Marriage is more than a legal contract between two individuals. Marriage, within Judeo-Christian teaching, is a covenant relationship. It is the beginning point for successful long-term relationships. Its basis is not performance but relationship. Marriage according to the words spoken at the first marriage ceremony involves leaving parental relationships and creating a permanent new relationship, in which the two enjoy a pure, selfless intimacy. Therefore, we reject

current efforts to equate civil unions with marriage or to treat marriage as a contractual relationship.

**Marriage creates one unity out of the two corresponding genders** (Gen. 2:23-24; Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:22-33).

In marriage the male and female form a single intimate union. When God created man, He created a male and a female. As the *Baptist Faith and Message* states, “The gift of gender is thus a part of the goodness of God’s creation.” Neither gender comprises the sum of all that it means to unite human beings in a sexual relationship. God chose to typify certain characteristics of humanity in the male and other characteristics in the female. By definition, homosexual marriage is incapable of achieving this “one flesh” union. Therefore, we reject the notion that homosexual marriage is equal to heterosexual marriage.

**Marriage provides the best environment for the personal, social, and economic well-being of children** (Eph. 5:22-33; Eph. 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:8; Titus 2:4-6).

The biblical model of marriage reveals a husband and wife working together, complementing each other, to provide a stable, successful home in which children are equipped to fulfill their greatest potential. Long-term homosexual relationships, especially among males, are extremely rare. Children who grow up in single-parent/adult homes are more likely to live in poverty all their lives. The absence of the support structures provided by marriage results too often in underperforming, emotionally distressed children who do not reach their fullest potential. The result will be an ever-expanding government that must assume more and more of the burden of taking care of the emotional, physical, and economic well-being of its citizens. Therefore, we reject the practice of adoption by homosexual couples.

**Marriage encourages the development of healthy sexual identity in children** (Gen. 1:27-28; Gen. 2:18; Deut. 6:4-25; Prov. 1:8-9).

God designed the family to be a learning environment for children. Children learn about sexuality by observing their parents. The absence of both sexes as role models will make it more difficult for children to be able to form a healthy understanding of their own sexuality and to appreciate the differences of the other sex. Homosexuality violates three fundamental principles of human sexuality. It violates the principle of exclusivity. The creation record acknowledges God’s creation of only two sexes—male and female (Gen. 1:27). It violates the principle of

fertility. The man and woman were designed to propagate their species through sexual union (Gen. 1:28). While the gift of sex is not limited only to this function, it is a fundamental expectation of sexuality that homosexual sex is incapable of fulfilling. It violates the principle of complementarity. God created a female to complete the male (Gen. 2:18-25). Therefore, we reject the notion that children can be raised as effectively in homosexual relationships as they can in heterosexual marriage.

**Marriage is life-affirming** (Gen. 1:27-28; Gen. 2:18; Prov. 5:18-19).

God instituted marriage as a means toward good. It was designed to improve quality of life and enable healthy reproductive behaviors. Homosexuals, especially males, do not tend to form long-term relationships; and they tend to die of causes directly attributable to their lifestyle 20-25 years earlier than heterosexual males. Therefore, we reject the notion that any homosexual relationship can be the equivalent of heterosexual marriage.

**Marriage is the only appropriate context for sexual relations** (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:18-32; Heb. 13:4).

We affirm the Colorado Statement's clear and extensive pronouncements on biblical, sexual morality, and its conviction that the biblical standard for sexual expression is heterosexual, monogamous marriage. We reiterate its claim that "sexual behavior is moral only within the institution of heterosexual, monogamous marriage." Therefore, we reject the claim that homosexual sex between consenting adults constitutes an acceptable, biblical sexual relationship.

**Marriage is the ideal model for the family** (Prov. 31:10-31; Eph. 5:22-33; Eph. 6:1-4; 1 Thess. 2:7, 11; 1 Tim. 3:1-7, 8-12; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

We affirm those who have been forced for various reasons to live in single-parent families. We commend those parents who have determined to do the best they can to provide for and nurture their children in these situations. We acknowledge that children can and do thrive in these families. However, we do not believe that these represent the best environments for children to reach their fullest potential for reasons we have already stated.



**Therefore, in order to cherish and protect marriage as a crucial asset to our society and in view of what we have expressed, we call for the following:**

- The immediate passage of a Federal Marriage Amendment that will place in the U.S. Constitution the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman.
- The strengthening of marriage laws in all states that will emphasize the covenant nature of marriage.
- The restriction of marriage by every state to the union of one man and one woman, including civil unions or any other marriage-like union.
- The abolition of no-fault divorce.
- A greater determination by Christians to honor their marriage commitments and to resolve their differences in Christ-like, God-honoring ways rather than divorcing.
- Greater commitment from churches and other religious institutions to provide mentoring for married couples that will model and sustain healthy marriages.
- A commitment by church and other religious leaders to help prospective couples prepare for marriage before they marry through premarital counseling.

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## **The Indispensable Proclamation of the Word: The Case from Scripture and Theology\***

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The critical issue with which I want to wrestle and grapple during these morning lectures is—to put it boldly—“Is preaching to be passé?” Is preaching done for, as many voices around us are telling us? Has preaching had it? Is it to be an endangered species among us? What I want to do in these lectures is to review the case for the ongoing viability of biblical preaching, and more than that, the urgent necessity of biblical preaching in God’s order and plan in all ages and times. That’s the burden that I have on my heart. A very thoughtful observer awhile back wrote these words, and I quote him:

Many today think preaching is outdated. They argue that there is too much preaching and it is of a low quality. So many are afraid of extreme views they take no view of course. We see grave general weakness in doctrine in our time. Many are forgetting the priority of the Word of God in worship. Preachers are involved in too many other activities. No wonder that standards for preaching are in serious decline.

That was J. C. Ryle in 1850. So the question is not a new question.

Preaching has always had its detractors. Premature obituaries have been written for preaching again and again and again. Of course those outside of Christianity do not have any notion whatever of what preaching really is and how important it is. Walt Whitman, called by some, sadly, the great American poet, mocked and scoffed at preaching. 1860s, now I’m quoting him; he said, “It could just as well be that measles and small pox could be cured by sermonizing as to believe souls could be saved by these tactics.” Well, the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. He did not know the difference between his head and a hole in the ground when it actually came down to it as far as spiritual things are concerned. But very unhappily there are some

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\* Dr. Larsen delivered this address on February 25, 2003, as part of Midwestern’s annual Hester Preaching Lectures. It is transcribed here as delivered with his permission.

among us who trumpet from the rooftops the idea that preaching is basically over. David Maines tells us that within ten years the pulpit in evangelical churches will be replaced by the roundtable on Sunday morning—if it is to be Sunday morning, of course. And experts will sit and engage in dialogue. This will replace the sermon he says. One prominent evangelical denominational leader says that preaching is like the maraschino cherry on top of a chocolate sundae: it isn't absolutely necessary but it is a rather nice conclusion. We've had an interesting series of seminars being offered up in our part of the country. The basic thesis of these seminars is that in the first thousand years of the history of the church it was doctrine. The second thousand years, preaching. Now the third thousand years is going to be worship. I say this is a very serious misreading of the fact. Doctrine, preaching, and worship are indissolubly inter-threaded and linked. You can't have any one of them without the others. But this is the kind of thinking that is quite pervasive and adding to our discomfiture in these discussions. I think most unfortunately, quite obviously, there is at this time a marked decline in the exegetical, theological, and rhetorical quality of evangelical preaching. This is not a great day of preaching. And that fact adds to our burden in restating a case for biblical preaching.

Now I would like to begin just with the words of the apostle Paul which we know so well. Here is the flavor of Holy Scripture with regard to preaching and its place and its importance. This is in 2 Timothy chapter four. The apostle Paul has just shared with his young spiritual protégé that the Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise to salvation; that all Scripture is God-breathed, *theopneustos*, and it is profitable in field after field after field. And then he comes to what seems to be a kind of crowning climax and counsel to this young pastor. Chapter 4:1:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead in view of his appearing in his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word. Be prepared in season and out of season. Correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.

Well there's Paul's admonition and exhortation to Timothy as he brings his thoughts and concerns toward a conclusion.

I want to state two aspects of the case this morning, first from Scripture and then from theology. And I want to assert, first of all, that *we need to feel the pulse of our founding documents*. That's got to be the foundation for everything, it seems to me, that we do and say in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Samuel Freedman is a brilliant Jewish thinker; he's at Columbia University. He has just written a fascinating new book in which this American Jew, not an observant Jew himself, quite liberal, ponders the splintering and the secularization of American

Jewry. And he's pained; he's in agony as he sees what's happening. This is his conclusion. Here is the bottom-line of Samuel Freedman's epical volume. He said,

There is no question the Orthodox are right. It is only fidelity to our founding documents; it is only fidelity to Torah that will save us from the beguilements of a secular culture all around us which are threatening to destroy us. This is the only way we are going to survive. Stay with the founding document.

Now, dear people, here is our founding document (the Bible). I mean this is what states it once and for all. When we turn to our founding document, on the very first page we meet a talkative God. God said; God speaks, and in my view, the communication, that mysterious communication, within the councils of the Triune God-head, they in fact are our charter and our contract for communication. The case begins in Genesis 1. We who are made in the image of God reflect from our great and glorious God, speaking, communicating. He started it. He guarantees it. God said, *dāvar*. And you know that in the Hebrew that's more than just sound waves spinning off into the ether. For the Hebrews a word is a deed. It's an act. Language is performative. And I'm convinced that speech-act theory, taking the author's intention seriously, the speaker's intention seriously, is one of our greatest apologetics against deconstructionism, which so superciliously dismisses an author's intention as unknowable, simply irrelevant. Folks, what a person says is an act and it reflects meaning and reveals something of the character and personality of the one who speaks. Words, language is relative; it's culturally conditioned. But language is sufficient to carry meaning, not exhaustively, but adequately and truly. As anyone of you who translates from another language knows, you don't get it exactly or fully, but you can get it. God speaks his words—personal, powerful, translatable. That's a very important foundation for preaching. God spoke, human beings responded to him in speech. This primary orality was inscripturated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and now in discourse and in preaching it becomes oral once again, secondary orality. But it's all based on the validity and significance of the original communication. And when you stop to think about it in the Vulgate, John 1:1: *In principio erat sermo*—"In the beginning was the Word . . ."—our Lord Jesus, the Word, the communication from God, the Word. And it's an amazing thing when you stop to think about it. The Second Helvetic Confession: *Praedicatio verbi dei est verbum dei*—"The preaching of the word of God is the word of God," i.e. to the degree that a preachment, a sermon, a lesson, a testimony, a message, to the degree that what a human being speaks says what God has said in his word, to that degree

that is the word of God. Now that's awesome. Folks, and this is something which has not changed, nor will it change—praise God.

Well, you go on through the Old Testament and you meet all of these messengers of God. Here's a Moses. Here's a Samuel. Here are human beings who bear the word of God—who carry God's revelation and truth to their times. They speak for God, his word. Then we come to that most amazing aggregate, the *n<sup>e</sup>bi'im*, the prophets, who speak for God. What the prophets said, these were more than pep talks to the troops, you know. This was more than just a little adulation and encouragement along the way. The word of the Lord came too, the burden of the Lord, thus says the Lord. I think your Gary Smith's book, *The Prophets as Preachers*, is an outstanding piece. They were preachers to their time in a most extraordinary and incisive way because, of course, they were under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Here's the case for human beings speaking God's word to a generation.

We come to the New Testament—221 references to preaching and teaching. Dear people, this is not a side issue. This is not a peripheral matter. Suffusing all of the New Testament is the paramouncy of preaching and teaching. Thirty-seven Greek words employed to describe differing aspects of communication. John the Baptist came preaching. Our Lord Jesus Christ, God's only begotten son, was a preacher. He said I've got to preach. The book of Acts is full of preaching. Most of it is evangelistic preaching. Folks, here's our charter. Here's the basis for it all. This wasn't an idea somebody had, you know, in the Middle Ages. This is just anchored and rooted in everything Holy Scripture presents to us. "How shall they hear without a preacher?" Paul argues. And the apostles were all preaching. And in my judgment, some of the epistles are quite sermonic, even in their structure and form. We do not stand in the temple-altar priest tradition. We stand in the synagogue pulpit-prophet tradition, the reading of the Scripture and the exposition of the Scripture. That's where we have come from; that's what we are—sharing this word of God.

We, looking back now at 2000 years of Christian proclamation, ask, "How can anyone advance the idea that we are the ones who are going to crack the continuity?" Folks, we are the midgets standing on the shoulders of these giants. And I say it is most presumptuous to argue that we shall cut loose from this heritage. I know you won't and I know I won't.

Our generation is very, very reluctant to accept any inspired universals, any authoritative universals—that just can't be. We're hearing these voices now on every side. I read these in most preaching magazines these days: "pomos," postmoderns won't listen to preaching. You know, propositional communication—coming to an end—linear

reasoning—it's pretty well gone; forget it. My friends, our generation is in a revolt against deduction, against authoritative, revealed universals. We prefer induction and induction has a very important place in preaching. But remember that with our view of Scripture when we have read the text we have announced the conclusion. It is really in no further doubt whatever. It's kind of like in counseling you can be rogerian and non-directive to a point. "Oh you are not feeling well today, I see. It is poignantly painful. I appreciate that, yes." But, you know, at one point we have got to come to "Thou shalt not commit adultery." That's jarring to people who eschew universals. All have sinned. But in preaching we basically begin with the inspired universal and then deductively move from the universal to particulars. Now, I think good preaching is a felicitous combination of deduction and induction because we will seek particularly in the introduction of a sermon; we will seek univocal points of contact with our audience: "There you are . . . come with . . . we will go here . . . we will move there." But folks, this is essentially by its very nature a submission of our wills to a revealed set of universals. And this is where they are. This is an awesome responsibility for a human being to bear the word of God, to stand in a pulpit, and say, "This is what God says. And this is what it means for you and for me today, and for our generation." But it had better be the word of God that we are trumpeting here. I was up in northern Minnesota at a Bible conference once. There was a delightful gentleman and his wife who had as their avocation the feeding of hummingbirds. These little bz-z-z-ts, I think they're just fascinating. And these hummingbirds will come and stick their long proboscii down through these narrow-necked little things and they'll suck up the nectar that has been prepared and provided by these people in this instance. Well the gentleman said to me, "You know, it is a very awesome responsibility to feed hummingbirds." I said, "It is, I have never really pondered that." He said, "You know, as we prepare the nutriment, if we don't give enough nutriment in relation to the amount of water, these birds will drink this not realizing they are being systematically weakened. And if they don't get enough nutriment, over time they will be unable to fly all the way to the south for the winter. I've got to be sure that the ratio of the nutriment is sufficient in relation to the amount of water." I thought to myself, "Week by week, as we share the word of God, is there enough of the word of God in what we are sharing? Is it thin? Is it lacking in substance? Is it too much human speculation? Is it too much stand-up comedian? What is it we are actually doing, occasion by occasion? Are we sharing the word of God?" So, that's my first point in reviewing the case for biblical preaching in our time, in all times. I think we've got to feel the pulse of the founding document. And in my view the founding document is crystal clear—preaching is

important, critical and indispensable. But I want to go on to a second observation.

I think we need to think theologically about preaching. That is to say, *our view of Scripture will determine our view of preaching*. Our view of Scripture will determine our view of preaching. What we believe about revelation and inspiration is going to shape how importantly we regard preaching. If this is the very word of God, if the Bible is always trustworthy, factual in everything that it represents, as I believe it is, then I tell you, the preaching of the word, biblical preaching, is of the utmost importance. But in my view it is not only, I must say, the inspiration and integrity of Scripture which I think is at stake right now. I think we are having a very big battle on the issue of the sufficiency of Scripture. Is Scripture enough? That is to say, a very well known youth speaker, whom I have much regarded I must say, has decided in the last year to move away from the Bible in his youth conferences and to use the tales of Dracula. He says, you know, this is a very interesting change, “creative new possibilities.” My friend, is brilliant creativity the be-all and end-all? I ask you, “Is the Bible one of a number of books sitting on the shelf or is it alone and unique?” Is it the Bible to be replaced by the tales of Dracula when Terry Waite was in captivity in Beirut those seven or so years and never saw another human being? And you remember that, finally, in the last few months of his imprisonment someone slipped him a little transistor radio. And good Anglican that he was he said, “I can’t wait to hear the Church of England hour. I can’t wait! I can’t wait!” And he hadn’t heard Scripture; he hadn’t had a Bible for seven years. And hear comes the Church of England hour in a rather unctuous voice, “Oh my dear friends, I am delighted to share with you today. I want to open my heart to you on some spiritual lessons from Winnie the Pooh.” And I will tell you: Terry Waite just sank. “Dear God,” he said, “I need the word of God. I need Scripture.” And I don’t care how brilliant you are and how creative you are; Winnie the Pooh, Tigger won’t suffice. I love what C. E. B. Cranfield says, whose great commentary on Romans is epical. Cranfield says and he’s right, “This hearing of the Word of God, hearing what the Lord of the church wants to say to his church and to humanity in their actual situations, this is the primary task of the church.” This is our ecclesiology. This is what the church is about, sharing the word of God and the plan of salvation and redemption. This is of the very essence; it’s hearing God’s word. It’s not rearranging, you know, the chairs on the decks of the Titanic. It’s the word of deliverance and salvation. This preaching of the word of God; now I’m emphasizing the more of the word, the better. Let the text shape the sermon. The kind of preaching I like is when the sermon tells us what the text says and means and moves it from then to now. Now that’s preaching. With a

careful hermeneutic—we are not entitled to just do anything we like with the text. There's got to be exegetical integrity. Always was the sense, as Luther said, that the Spirit is in, with, and under the word at every stage in the preparation of the text for preaching. Its reliance upon the Holy Spirit, its divine author, to illuminate and guide our minds and hearts and keep us from going over this edge or that of which there are plenty edges to go over. My friends, I've been preaching by the grace of God well over fifty years. Don't talk to me about the maceration of this preacher. Listen, while my schoolmates, my boyhood friends, are stockbrokers and doctors and lawyers and some unmentionables—listen, by the grace and in the sovereign call of God, this bag of bones and hunk of hair has been allowed to spend just about every one of his days studying the word of God and preaching the word of God. And I've been paid to do it. I mean, such a privilege! Such an honor! I've never been able to understand but then that I should be paid for it. I say, "Praise be to God; the devil's defeated!" And if you are one upon whom the call of God has been placed to prepare, study, and proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, my dear friend, you may not be the elite of the elect, but we are most fortunate and blessed human beings who have this privilege. And let's never forget it because this preaching of Christ is God's order for this time and until the Lord returns; do not doubt it. When Dietrich Bonhoeffer came to New York City to study just before the Second World War, this man who wrote *Cost of Discipleship* and who in other books I don't always understand, this man had a hunger for the word of God. And he went to all of the stylish, elitist, Fifth Avenue churches in New York City. And he saw beautiful form and he heard well-chosen words magnificently presented. But he went from church to church and he left starved. He was hungry—it was ashes; it was sawdust; it was of man and of the flesh. It was brilliant, but it was unenlightened. Then he found a little church at Eighty-First and Broadway. It was the old Broadway Presbyterian Church. It was the maverick in the New York Presbytery. And there was a little Scotsman there by the name of John Macomb, insignificant and unimpressive in appearance and delivery. But Bonhoeffer describes his experience as Lord's Day by Lord's Day he came to the Broadway Presbyterian Church and this little preacher. He just opened up the Scripture and he began at the beginning of a text and he did what ought to be done and he moved on toward the end of the text. And he shared the word of God; he just opened up the word of God, and Bonhoeffer said it was a feast—it was a feast. John Macomb and his second wife, after his first wife passed on, his second wife was a Regius professor of education at the University of Minnesota. And they would attend the congregation I was privileged to serve many years in downtown Minneapolis. I'd look out in my gallery to the right and I'd



see Dr. and Mrs. Macomb. I'd say,

O, dear Jesus, I pray, I long for, I passionately want dear God, people who come under the preaching of this pulpit to experience what John Macomb shared with Dietrich Bonhoeffer—that folk won't go out saying, "Well, there was a lot of commotion; there was a lot of movement, but my soul is starved."

Dear people, you know no matter what we believe about the Bible, if we don't in fact preach the Bible, what is it? What is it? This wonderful word—praise be to God—what a treasure, our supernatural miracle book, the Bible, able to make folk wise to salvation. And we have the privilege of sharing it. Well, in some brushstrokes, I have shared with you the beginnings of a biblical case and a theological case. What I want to do tomorrow, God-willing, is share with you the case from 2,000 years of the history of preaching. What does the actual doing of it show us?

Dear God, have your way with us. Have your hand on us. Bless each of us here bowed before you. When so many shrill and strident voices tell us it's all over and ours is just an unctuous pursuit of the futile, O Lord, we believe you, believe your word, trust in your Spirit and rejoice. But forever, O Lord, is your word settled in heaven. You have magnified your word above your name. You have entrusted to us this precious word. Dear God, may we be found faithful in sharing it. I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

## **The Alarming Peril of Textual Subsidence: The Case from Church History\***

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Reading from St. Paul to Titus, chapter 1; Titus 1—

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior.

Preaching was not incidental for the apostle Paul; nor should it be for us. In these lectures we are attempting to build the case for the ongoing viability of preaching in our time, for the urgent necessity of biblical preaching in our time. I think that it's a case that needs to be made again and again, particularly in the face of a mounting chorus of critics and challengers who keep insisting the day of preaching is over. We tried to canvass briefly yesterday the biblical case and the theological case. And now this morning I want to share with you concerning what we learn from the history of preaching, 2000 years of going at it. What do we deduce? What can we learn from preaching as it has existed, flourished, and anguished in the 2000 years of its history? Biblical preaching is, of course, preaching which says what the Bible says. Now that's the only kind of preaching we are interested in—preaching which says what the Bible says. In that broad sense, actually a topical sermon can be a biblical sermon. Now we, with some reluctance, use a topical sermon. But in the history of preaching, much of the great preaching has been topical, and probably because it's relentlessly unitary. It tends to have one thought that stays with you, and, after all, if that's the topic you do remember it. But there's nothing inherently wrong with topological thinking; after all, biblical theology and systematic theology are

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topological. And every pastor knows—I'm not sure all homileticians and scholars I have known realize this—but all pastors know there are occasions when the pastor needs to deliver a topical sermon. There's a topic which needs addressed. Let's say abortion. One text, or will it be a collage of texts? The place of women in the church; what the Bible teaches about divorce; what is God's attitude toward homosexual behavior? There's not a single text in these instances. But the great challenge of topical preaching is to use a battery of texts and use these texts in their context. And you've got to reproduce that effort with every text that you use. It's formidable, and, of course, you present to your congregation the fruit of your own labor. The glory of expository preaching, on the other hand, not only does the expository sermon say what the Bible says, the expository sermon says what this text of Scripture says, the natural thought unit, a paragraph, two paragraphs, whatever, which has been selected and has been read in the congregation in the experience of worship. And now we are going to look at this text; we are going to bite into this text; and there's something which resonates very, very warmly in the hearts of those who have a high view of Scripture with a sermon which is so oriented to a text of the Bible. Now, of course, the great danger in Bible exposition is that we have the unraveling of a ball of twine, that we have a series of sermonettes, clusters of one great truth after another, not particularly organized. This is the challenge of the expository sermon. It should not be running commentary. There needs to be a division of the text in the interest of marking progress, advance in thought, which is reflected in the divisions of the sermon. That's expository preaching. There needs to be a correspondence of ideas obviously between what the text says and what the sermon says. That's the beauty of exposition. There needs to be a correspondence in mood. If the text is a dirge you do not preach it with euphoria and ebullience. If the text is Psalm 11, you don't preach that like a dirge. There needs to be a correspondence in proportion. We have no right to build a temple where the text has only a tent. There's got to be a correspondence in proportion and in emphasis. This is a big challenge. That's the glory of expository preaching. And beyond that in biblical exposition we are modeling for the congregation how you handle Holy Scripture. You see that has it all over topical preaching or textual-topical preaching. We're showing people how to work their way through a text. How do you handle Scripture? How do you interpret Scripture in its context? Now, there is a chipping away at that definition and my definition there is the broadest Anson Phelps, Lloyd Perry, Haddon Robinson definition. That's "big idea" preaching and that's not a bad company to be in as far as I'm concerned. That's "big idea" preaching, and that's where we seek the basic thought of the passage, preach it as

developed in the passage, drawing our mains and our subs from the natural order of the text. Now I'm a little uneasy with my friend, Harold Bryson, in his book on biblical exposition; he's so good in urging us to *lectio continua*—that is, preach book series—not *lectio selecti*. I mean, preach in series so you are dealing constantly with the issue of the context of that particular book. But he says exposition consists of this: if you take the main thought out of the passage and preach that, that's exposition. But, my friends, there's a difference between preaching *out of* a text and preaching *the* text. You've got to preach that thought as it is argued and developed in the passage. That's exposition. And I'm afraid that many times we preach over a text. We really disregard what the inspired writer is saying to support and strengthen the big idea. And my good friend, Bryan Chapell, in his book, *Christ Centered Preaching*, which in my view is one of the finest more recently published, he argues, and I do take issue with him, he says, "The pattern of the text does not need to appear as the pattern of the sermon." And I say, "Why not?" Would there be any better pattern for the sermon than the one that is in the text itself? But all of this I say in view of a major paradigm shift which is happening right now in evangelicalism in this county and around the globe. And I lament it; I bemoan it, and I am prepared to joust against it. And here's what's happening in evangelical preaching now. We are seeing, very widespread, a move from text-driven, text-derived preaching to need-driven, audience-centered, problem-solving preaching. Folks, that is not right. We are getting away from the text—dismissing the absolute indispensability of grappling with that text. The word of God, that's all we've got to give in the final analysis. We can't leave the word in that way. In one jurisdiction, up our way, they made a study—ninety preachers. Almost all of them are graduates of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School who were schooled and taught within the definition I have just given of what expository preaching is. One-half of those preachers have given up any serious wrestling with the text. And they move right on to stories and application and blah-blah. Now that just terrifies me. One-half! Look, if there's nothing more to exegesis than that, we had better totally reconfigure seminary education. I'm not going to make that surrender, one bit. Ours must be a fascination with the text, a fixation on the text, an obsession with the text. We've got to have that text; then we move to its application. But everything depends on grasping that text and being gripped by that text. Let me as an analogy suggest: here's a playwright. The playwright has written a play—let's say William Shakespeare or Ben Johnson. Look, the director and the actors better take the text seriously. This is *Measure for Measure*, or *Macbeth*, or whatever it is. I mean, we owe that to the author of the text. Now the individual directors and actors get into the text. They make it

their own. Each will play the part, say, of Hamlet just a little differently, but there must be fidelity to that text. Here is Terrence McNally, a well-known modern playwright and I quote him,

If you think that one of things I look for in an actor or a director is 100 percent fidelity to my text, you are 100 percent right. “Who do you think you are, Shakespeare?” one actor snarled at me when I objected to his nonverbal emendations to my text. “No,” I replied, “I think I’m Terrence McNally and the only way you will find the characters I intended is to speak and use the text exactly as I wrote it.”

Folks, I think that is God’s expectation of his preachers. I love what they used to say about Sir Lawrence Olivier, “He really stood in awe of the text.” Don’t you love that? Now the same goes for musicians, be they conductors or virtuosos on the violin or piano. They’ve got the score. I mean, they don’t have license to just do whatever they please with it. They’ve got to pay attention to what was written and the directions that are given. But no two artists will do it exactly the same. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, after all. When Eric Leinsdorf retired, here is what *Time Magazine* said about Eric Leinsdorf, the great symphonic conductor, “It was perhaps just that paradoxical combination of regard for the text,” I love that, “with fresh thinking.” That’s the combination. Regard for the text with fresh thinking that made Leinsdorf a world-class conductor and vaulted him to his legendary leadership of Philadelphia and Boston. Christoph Eisenbach, who leads our Ravinia in the summer, the *Tribune* critics said of him, “He knows the importance of the text.” I love that! Do our auditors realize we know the importance of the text? Here was a pianist at Orchestra Hall in Chicago, Richard Goody, “when it comes to Beethoven’s works for solo piano, the sonatas especially, Goody is unique. No other performer puts a masterly technique so totally at the composer’s service. He seems intent not just on playing well, but on having us meet Beethoven face to face.” Folks, that’s what the preacher is to be and do. And of another guest conductor, the *Tribune* said, “He is self-effacing to the point of disappearing altogether into the music.” But our critic was very displeased last summer when Lang Lang took off at Ravinia, on Grieg’s piano concerto particularly: “He so far exceeded the limits of interpretive license as to amount to gross musical distortion.” Oh, he really goes after him with tooth and tongue: “This array of swooning expressions, choreographic nonsense, it was hard even to watch him. And the conductor indulged the soloist’s shameless behavior. He always seemed happy to play co-conspirator as Lang’s slowed tempos ingrieved to a funereal crawl or tore through Rachmaninov’s faster variations as if he had to catch a train for Philadelphia.” Folks, you know, what do we do to the text is the issue. That’s the issue.

Now, in this obsession with the text, this concern for the text, here's what the history of preaching shows us. P. T. Forsyth stated it so succinctly. Forsyth said—and factor analysis would certainly indicate there are a number of factors in this—but this is what Forsyth said, “Where biblical preaching has been strong, the church has been strong. And where biblical preaching has been weak, the church has been weak.” I say there are a number of factors, but that is a constant factor. And I want to suggest that over the 2000 years—and you are not all going to agree with me on every one of these, but put me on your prayer list if you feel that I'm off the mark—I want to indicate to you in a number of concrete examples out of the 2000 years of the history of preaching, where the subordination of the text, the effective loss of the text in preaching, has been disastrous. It's a kind of negative series of lessons from church history, but we need the power of negative thinking as well as positive thinking.

*First, the subordination of the text to liturgy has been disastrous in many circles.* Thomas Torrance in Edinburgh wrote an amazing little book, *The Doctrine of Grace and the Apostolic Fathers*, and he shows how quickly by grace through faith alone, *sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura*, how quickly that was lost. And you've got a smothering and a suffocating of high church sacramentalism very quickly setting in. And my friends, you see that in the post-Constantinian era. Preaching becomes less and less significant in the church. And you've got a further sacralizing in the fifth and sixth centuries, in which, by the time you come to the Middle Ages, there are many local churches where there is no preaching at all. The only preaching that is going on is in the monasteries. And the local pastors did not preach; it was the bishops who preached. Folks, just think what a perversion that is. At Port Royal, this is before, of course, that marvelous Augustinian renewal, Jansenism, hit them, out of which came Pascal and all of that. For thirty years there had not been a single sermon preached at Port Royal. Now what do you have here? The text is subordinated to liturgy. And folks, I think, I'm speaking as a low churchman, but free liturgy. Folks, whether you come to Roman Catholicism, or whether you come to Anglo Catholicism in the Church of England, whether you come to Eastern Orthodoxy, I mean, think of the great preachers in Eastern Orthodoxy: Chrysostom, the Cappadocian Triad, Gregory and the Basils and all of that—there was a great history of preaching. Today, there is virtually no preaching whatever in Eastern Orthodoxy, in Russian Orthodoxy, the pulpit is not there. There is no exposition of Holy Scripture. There is some gospel in the liturgies, especially the Russian liturgies—but folks, no preaching. The only preaching actually going on of any consequence in Eastern Orthodoxy today is a Coptic priest in Alexandria, Egypt, who is filling the Cathedral

every Friday night with expositions from the Gospel of Matthew. That's just scarce as hen's teeth. Now there was, and I treat it in my history of preaching, the Isaurian dynasty in Asia Minor in the seventh century where they left all of this high sacramentalism aside, scrapped the priority of liturgy, put the pulpit in the center—folks, if that seventh century revival in what is today Turkey had really persisted, think of the challenge it might have been to the rise of Mohammed and Islam to the south; and the whole history of the Middle East and North Africa might have been different. Here was sort of a last gasp protest and I say the subordination of the text to liturgy can lose the text. I had a marvelous low church Episcopalian as a doctoral student, a marvelous fellow. But he said to me, "You know, really I've just got one problem with you, Dr. Larsen." I thought, well that's encouraging. But he said, "You know, with what I need to do in the sixty minutes there is only room for a fifteen minute sermon." Well now, dear people, I think he's only moving on one cylinder there. This is a serious problem. I don't see how you can do justice whatever to a natural thought unit of the text if you don't have at least thirty or thirty-five minutes. And I want to tell you it's happening as we are losing our evening meetings around the country in evangelicalism and the announcements expand and the other things take more time and the thing that always is cut and suffers is the sermon.

*The second point I would like to make: the subordination of the sermon to doctrine is dangerous.* Oh, oh, oh, oh, what is this? I'm a doctrinal animal. I mean, doctrine twelve times in the pastoral, sound doctrine. Doctrine is of the essence. But the subordination of the text to doctrine is dangerous and we see it in Puritanism. I'm going to make a critique of Puritan preaching. We love the Puritans. I mean, really, there's never been a culture in which the sermon was so prominent. Studies in New England, the average New Englander heard 5,000 sermons in his or her lifetime—listen, 17,000 hours to preaching. That's unheard of, unparalleled. But I've got some students, former students; I call them my "neo-Puritan yahoos." Their dedication in life is to recover Puritanism for our time. Forget it. God does not repeat past epics like that. Besides, there is a downside to the Puritans. I like Christmas. I like Easter. I like musical instruments and I don't like that legalism. And great as their preaching was, it had a downside and that downside was one of the factors which ended Puritanism in Britain and in America. I'll argue that. They were not expositors. Now, there may have been a few. It's hard to make sweeping statements. There were Arminian Puritans, you know; mild Calvinists, some systems Calvinists; it's hard to say for every single one of them. But in the main, they were not expositors. They preached textual, topical sermons. They exposed a very small piece of text. They did not take a natural thought unit. They exposed—I call it the

inverted pyramid—expose a small piece of text and then ransack Scripture for its doctrinal reverberations, implications, corroborations. This is how one of my favorite preachers, Martin Lloyd-Jones, could preach 7 years of Sunday mornings through Ephesians. I mean, he took a sentence, half a sentence, one word, for a sermon. I mean, I'm hooked on him, but he is not the model. He was not an expositor. Look, John Howell, Puritan preacher, preached 18 sermons on the expression, "We are saved in hope." Now I think that's remarkably ingenious. I would like to expose a little more of the text than that. John Howell preached 17 sermons on "that which is of the flesh gives birth to the flesh, and that which is of the Spirit gives birth to the spirit." 14 sermons on "if you can't love people you see, how can you love God whom you don't see?" Thomas Brooks preached 58 sermons on Hebrews 12:14, half a sentence: "without holiness, no man can see God." He didn't even take the whole verse. Over one year on "without holiness, no man shall see God." Now that's a principal statement. But how about the whole counsel of God? Thomas Manton did 190 sermons on Psalm 119. Thomas Shepherd, the founder of Harvard University, spent 4 years Sunday mornings on Matthew 25:1-13, the Parable of the Ten Virgins. It is a fertile parable, but I tell you—four years? What about other literary genre in the Bible? What about the whole counsel of God? Can you really find the whole counsel of God in the Parable of the Ten Virgins? I say it's ingenious. I think there was a mistake. William Gouge spent 31 years in Hebrews. One Puritan spent 21 years in the first chapter of Isaiah. One Puritan preacher never preached from any book beside Ezekiel in his 60 years of pastoral life. I say that's not our model. We've got to have more text. Don't you see? This is one of the factors which I think weakened the Puritan fabric. With all their strengths, this was weak. And it warns us. The subordination of the text to anything is dangerous.

*Thirdly, the subordination of the text to a higher-critical worldview is disastrous.* Here is Scotland, that little country, small population. What country has given us the preachers in the 19th century that Scotland gave us? The theologians? I mean, the Spirit of God had moved so powerfully; the divinity halls were full—an amazing phenomenon. In 1844 Thomas Chalmers led in the Disruption as the Free Church of Scotland was formed and a new college in Edinburgh. But a brilliant young man, Robertson Smith, educated in enlightenment rationalism in Germany, came back, brilliant, gifted, and began to write articles for *Britannica*, which reflected enlightenment rationalism—the whole evolutionary underpinning that everything begins primitively, denied Mosaic authorship, two Isaiahs, Daniel is history, not prophecy. You know, the whole schmeer—big church controversy. Listen, the people in the Free Church of Scotland almost to a man were sound, but they were irenic



many of them to the point that they didn't realize the issue. William Raney, who presided at the trial of Robertson Smith, he was a sweet man; he did not grasp how critical this issue was. Alexander White, the greatest preacher living at the time, had Robertson Smith as an associate at Free St. George's, and he would not speak on the issue. A. B. Davidson, the Old Testament professor was silent. Robertson Smith is convicted of heresy by one vote. The conservatives won the battle but they lost the war. They lost the heart for really facing this issue any more. And my friends, by 1920, the Free Church is back in the Church of Scotland and the present result is there. What happened? The text was subordinated to a higher-critical worldview. And you can repeat that again and again and again and again, where the precious text of God's holy word is lost in the maelstrom of human rationalistic and evolutionary thinking. No question.

*Fourthly, the subordination of the text to rhetoric or oratory is dangerous.* Now, as one who loves to cavort about a little bit in public, an old Shakespearean actor like myself, this is a dangerous thing. But dear people, by too ornate a delivery and too much attention to style we can lose substance. Do you believe that's right? You've got some examples of that in the Southern Baptist Convention—I mean, some great preachers. I mean, they were barnburners; they were paint-peelers. I mean, they titillated with alliteration. They could alliterate every second word. And it was a volcanic and a seismic production. But it almost made you lose what was being said. George Lorimer in the north was the same, preached in Chicago, in New York City, in Tremont Temple, Boston. I mean, there was such a mass of impressive oratory. The verbiage was so thick, you just sat there saying, "How can a man do that? Oh, by the way, what did he say?" I'm just saying, there are many ways we can lose the text. I don't want to speak, you know, as if it's only some others that have the difficulty and the temptation. I wish I had time this morning to talk to you a little bit how in the modern move on narrative we can lose the real text. I'm into learning how to do narrative. There is so much narrative in Scripture. Two-thirds of our Old Testament, Bruce Waltke says, is narrative in his definition. We've always loved narrative and we've done narrative a lot. But we've tended, basically, to impose a rather rationalistic grid on the narrative, often losing the power of the storyline. And I've got in the fifth chapter of the book to which our president made reference a method by which we can divide a narrative into its narrative blocks. I think there is no escape from dividing a text and then letting the divisions of the text be reflected in the sermon, but with some little squiggles of ongoing application, so we're not telling the story and then kind of giving a commercial at the end which is easily dismissed. This thing of narratology and, of course, we've got down

narrative theology and narrative ethics and narrative spirituality, in large portions of which there is no concern whatever for historicity. I trace in the book—now this really goes back—this present renaissance of interest goes back to H. Richard Niebuhr in 1940, *The Meaning of Revelation*. We've lost it all pretty well to higher criticism; but look, let's tell stories. No one ever asks too much about the historicity of Jack and the Beanstalk. Tell the story. But the problem in narrative in the mainline—and I think we evangelicals need to learn some things about doing better our narrative preaching—but the problem in the mainline is reducing the canon to just narrative. Buttrick says, you know, "I've never preached from the wisdom literature or eschatology. That just doesn't fit into my can. It's got to be story." Well, how sad! What a loss! The problem in this movement is that the story becomes my story. That's the problem in it. And Fred Craddock comes to the point, he says, "It is condescending and patronizing to tell anyone what a story means, so there is no application." You know, that's not right. But it fits in after all with the modern approach and sense today because you don't build doctrine off stories. Stories illustrate doctrine. You don't build doctrine on a narrative. That's what liberalism did with the Parable of the Prodigal Son and the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. They built soteriology on a parable. No, you learn the doctrine from the didactic teachings of our Lord or the apostles. And the stories illustrate that teaching. Here is the peril, the subordination of the text. Sacramentarianism, doctrine, in our time the danger is the subordination of the text to application. That's what is happening. When you move from text-driven, text-derived preaching to need-driven, audience-centered, problem-solving preaching, you see what you are doing is you're feeling the poignant sufferings of people in the congregation. So you read the text and then you jettison any serious interaction with the text, and you cut to the bottom line right away, and you want to begin to help them with stories and palliatives; you know, suggestions of how you can feel better and get out of this jam. I'm saying that is not the pattern in the word of God. Ephesians 1 to 3: God, who God is, what Christ has done, what the Holy Spirit does; then 4 to 6: application. Application is critical and it's essential. But you can't begin with the application. There's a lot of preaching today which is application. Rick Warren says, "My mains are the application. The content you get in the Sunday School." Careful with that. You look at the Epistles, in the main, Romans, you start with who God is. Here's the contrast. Preaching in the tradition of the enlightenment, theology has become anthropology. Preaching in a tradition of the Reformation, it's God-centered, Christ-centered. Now, you know, which way are we going to go on this? You cut to the bottom line—you're leaving God out. And his is the power and the grace and the mercy. You can't preach 1

Corinthians 13, “Now abide faith, hope, love, and the greatest of these is love.” Look, you need the chapter which builds love is essential, love is expressed, love is eternal. Now we are ready to say, “and the greatest of these is love” because this is what God says and what God through his Holy Spirit has inspired and authorized. Dear friends, I’m sorry I’m getting a little carried away, but I feel this so deeply in my soul that the temptation to be helpful now is causing us to too quickly abandon serious exegesis which is going to set forth God, and he is the answer. Little Gypsy Smith was such a darling little man; he was in the Salvation Army after his conversion. Rodney Smith, Gypsy Smith, I heard him; my brother was converted under his ministry. He was invited by Alexander MacLaren to come to the Union Chapel in Manchester where MacLaren had presided in regal splendor for many, many years. He was there forty-five years. Smith felt intimidated. He says, “I’m just a little gypsy preacher. I’m an evangelist. What can I do? This man is so scholarly. He is such an expositor, the prince of expositors. I mean, what hope is there? I don’t think I’m going to go.” And then the Holy Spirit wouldn’t let him desist, and he went. For two weeks he preached in the Union Baptist Chapel in Manchester—500 people came to know the Lord Jesus Christ. God blesses his word. That’s what he has promised to bless: the text of Holy Scripture held up, interpreted, explained, shared. That’s what we’ve got to do, and I’ll tell you, the history of 2000 years of preaching says, “Yea and amen. That’s what you’ve got to do.” Amen.

## **The Undiminished Power of the Word of God: The Case from Practical Theology\***

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The apostle Peter speaking in the house of Cornelius, Acts 10:42, “God commanded us to preach to the people.” Preaching is not a human invention. God commanded us to preach to the people. 1 Corinthians 9:16, the apostle says, “Woe be to me if I preach not the gospel.”

The question we have been facing during these days: “Will biblical preaching be passé?” And we have been seeking to make a case brick by brick, stone by stone, for the ongoing viability of biblical preaching, for the urgent necessity of biblical preaching. We have turned to the Scripture. We have turned to theology. Yesterday, we turned to church history and today we want to turn to practical theology in the actual outworking in the pragmatic experience of the church, even in our own time.

There are those who will concede that preaching has been of the essence. But they tell us, no longer; times have changed; the situation is different today. They tell us we are now living in postmodern times. And I would ask, “In your congregation how many are postmodern? Do you have some that are not postmodern? What percentage is postmodern?” Well you see, we’ve come to the point where propositions are really done in communication. It has to be the personal. Well, is it an either-or? With my sweetie, quite personal, but it is also propositional. We speak. Isn’t this a false dichotomy? This is not an either-or—it’s a both-and. Yes, but the linear thinking is over. I mean, one of the doyens, one of the gurus of homiletics among evangelicals in a recent issue of *Preaching* magazine said, “Linear thinking is done.” Oh, indeed, is it? Aren’t you speaking linear patterns? Do you know any books recently that are basically linear? As a matter of fact, of the thousands and thousands of books published in this country every year, there about five that aren’t linear and they don’t sell. I think we’re still fairly linear in our thinking. Well, but we’re inductive now, and, you know, the idea of universals,

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that's just not acceptable today. People won't listen to that kind of thing. We've got to become thoroughly, if not altogether, inductive in our preaching. Well, you know, it's an interesting thing, the postmoderns don't care for either induction or deduction, and so we're into narrative. You see, narrative is the whole thing. Isn't narrative linear? I mean narrative, a good narrative, is quite sequential. That's linear. Folks, we've got to reflect a little on some of the bilge we hear in conferences on preaching.

Now George Barna is seen by some as a prophet and others as a false prophet. And he tells us that "our discourse must be non-threatening and non-dogmatic, and our discourse needs to supply inspiration, not exposition." I'm quoting him directly. Oh, I see. Non-dogmatic. You mean like, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me, I think?" I mean, to what degree and extent will you now reduce the dogmatic assertions of Holy Scripture? At what point does being user-friendly become a betrayal of the gospel? Will we be the first generation that succeeds in removing the offense of the gospel? Is that really a worthy objective? To sanitize Christian discourse of what is conceivably objectionable? Now really, our generation seems to revel in books like entertainment evangelism, an oxymoron if I ever heard it. So, I mean really, isn't there a line, how much concession we can make? How far do we go without giving away the store? That's the issue.

So, I read in one periodical that a certain church advertising itself as "God's country goodtime hour" promises line dancing following the worship service. Their band is called "Honky Tonk Angels" and the pastor participates in the charade.

The *Wall Street Journal* describes a church in the buckle of the Bible belt that calls itself the "fellowship of excitement." It runs an advertisement for their Sunday evening meeting circus. "See Barnum and Bailey bested as the magic of the big top circus comes to the fellowship of excitement. Clowns, acrobats, animals, popcorn, what a great night!" Ugh! The same church had the pastoral staff put on a wrestling match during a Sunday service. They hired a professional wrestler to train them how to throw one another around the ring, pull hair, kick shins, without actually hurting one another. Now folks, all of this in the name of "I become all things to all men that I might by all means save some." But remember, in that same context the apostle says, "Woe be to me if I preach not the gospel."

I knew a man who said, "I'm going to get close to the boys down on Main Street in the pool hall." And he resorted to the pool hall night-by-night, week-by-week, month-by-month. He was in the pool hall. He was in the cigarette fumery of the pool hall. He was in the alcohol surroundings of the pool hall, and one night a young man said to him,

“You know Reverend, strange thing, you’re becoming more like us than we’re becoming like you.” There’s the danger.

In my class at Fuller Theological Seminary back in the 50s we had the son of the distinguished Christian preacher and apologist, Dr. Harry Rimmer. His name was Brandon Rimmer. A very interesting chap, I found him quite an engaging fellow. But he had the mission and call, he felt, to cocktail evangelism. We called him Brandy Rimmer. He became an alcoholic. I had a preacher in class one night, I think one of the finest preachers I ever had; his name is Tom. He came from a church way on the south side of Chicago. And he was going to preach for me the pericope, the raising of Lazarus from the dead—John 11. Listen, I mean to tell you the young man could preach. Wow, he preached. It was powerful on the empathetic Christ, how compassionate Jesus was to Mary and Martha in the loss of their brother. And he really had us almost in tears as he pled with us to be empathetic and sympathetic and compassionate, and it was beautiful, and he said, “Amen,” and he sat down. And I said to him in the instructor’s review after the sermon, “Brother, what happened to the raising of Lazarus from the dead?” I said, “It looks to me that this passage really is about the miracle of the raising of Lazarus. Where did it go?” “Oh, but you’ve got to understand, we can’t preach on things like that in our church.” I said, “You can’t?” “Oh no, we hope to get to issues like that somewhere down the road, but for the present, such miracles, that is offensive to the modern mind. This is a problem to talk about them. That gets people all mixed up.” “Brother, ‘F,’ you didn’t preach that text. And as to your approach, do you realize bait and switch is a felony in the state of Illinois? You pull people in on one pretext and give them something else, you can go to jail for that.” Folks, we’ve got too much of that right now.

I preached in a church not long ago and the pastor gave me instructions about the day of his absence. He said, “Now, whatever you do, don’t quote the Bible.” I said, “I beg pardon?” “Don’t carry your Bible into the pulpit.” Folks, this is an earnest man. This is a sincere man. He was trained in our school. He is a great success. But you don’t quote from the Bible in a church. Folks, there is something wrong there. He may be listening to George Barna, a man who always asks, “Which way is the wind blowing?” As far as I’m concerned, George Barna is gone with the wind. I can take just about so much because, folks, God commanded us to preach to the people. Now, where are the people to whom we speak? Let’s get to their basic attack, you know, on the historic strategy and conviction of the Christian church with respect to the efficacy of the preaching of the gospel under the Holy Spirit. We’ve got to be concerned about our audience. We don’t just pipe into the breeze.

Arthur Baird is an interesting student in his audience criticism and he points out that in eighty percent of the logi of the New Testament, the hearers are designated, whether it's the apostles or the multitude or the religious establishment; I mean, in the preponderance of discourse in the Gospels to whom it was spoken is clear.

We've got to be concerned; to whom are we talking? This is not always easy. Sometimes I feel like a hen trying to lay an egg on an escalator. The target keeps moving. And I think, from my standpoint, the kind of audience analysis that I make yields the fact we are speaking to a very, an increasingly heterogeneous population that is very hybrid.

The analysis that gives basically in the seminars that are legion about preaching in postmodern times—a title that annoys me a bit—is that of course there was historic Christianity, which for so many hundreds of years even if people were not Christians, they recognized Christian morality and ethics as the norm, believed in God, believed in hell, believed in heaven, whether or not they had actually made a commitment of their lives to Christ. Then beginning with the fall of the French Bastille in 1789, to the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, we have the Enlightenment. This is the primacy of human reason. There still is a recognition that there at least are high probabilities through the scientific method of discerning what truth is. But opinions may differ as to what the truth is, but there is truth. Now we have gone beyond that and we are in postmodern times.

I think that is a faulty analysis. It is convenient. It is simplistic. It is reductionistic. It's too easy. Folks, let's face it; there are still a lot of post-enlightenment rationalists in our society. Science is not done. The man of the century was Albert Einstein. He is an Enlightenment product. Not far from here, just recently by Professor Pascal Boyer at Washington University-St. Louis, a book in the spirit of the French Enlightenment, Basic Books, entitled, *The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought*. Folks, it is pure enlightenment rationalism. It is not only in the academy in the biology department, but there are a lot of people in our culture for whom science is the be-all and the end-all—and that is a fact; a lot of them. You can't say it's all postmodern. That's an overstatement. That's too quick a generalization. We've got a lot of historic romanticists. Romanticism was the protest by people who basically held enlightenment presuppositions but to have said they are a little too sterile as you state them. This is Goethe in Germany. This is Wordsworth. This is Coleridge. You know, look there is feeling. There is art. There is poetry. Let's not just reduce it down to some theorem or some laboratory experiment. We've got a lot of classic romanticists left. They just flock into Orchestra Hall and into Ravinia in season. You know, we've got a lot of New Agers. We've got people, millions of people in this country,

into horoscopes. You know, they basically have been pre-evangelized. They're conceding that science can't tell us everything. But they're of course in the mists as to what is spiritual reality. But they are half prepared for the gospel already. They've made some basic concessions in thought. New Age—say, in all this discussion, why have we forgotten about existentialism? There still is a lot of existentialism. It rose after the Second World War, a kind of despair, epistemological agnosticism, the foundation of Barthian neo-orthodoxy. You know, this is not all new, some of this.

And then we do have genuine “pomo”—postmodernism. I think many of these are orphans of the disaster which befell Marxism. Marxism—kaput. They are now “pomo.” I think that postmodernism with its denial of meta-narrative, no lines between the dots, its denial of objective truth, I herald it as a challenge to the sterilities of enlightenment rationalism, to be sure, but I think it's a kind of Gnosticism turned in on itself. And I think that enlightenment rationalism and postmodernism have a great deal in common. One is, a sense, the further step beyond that's logical. You've got pluralism; you've got relativism; you've got secularism; you've got narcissism. All of these “isms” and “sisms” and “asms” and “spasms,” you know, it's all there in a hodgepodge. There is no doubt that with literary deconstruction at its core there are postmodern vibes, not only on campuses, but we feel these in society. No truth—that filters down at a popular level. I do not think it is, you know, just sweeping the field. Gertrude Himmelfarb points out that already in Europe there is post-postmodernism. Our variety of postmodernism is not political enough, you understand. And they would say that narrative is oppression, you know. Grammar is oppression. But how do you live that way? That's the issue. We have in Chicago one of the princes of postmodernism, Stanley Fish, the provost of the University of Illinois, Chicago campus, lured from Duke by a salary of \$250,000 a year with endless perks. Now here is a man on “Larry King Live”; Larry tried to push him to concede that Hitler and the Holocaust were evil. He would not be pushed. He would not concede within his premises that Hitler and the Holocaust were evil. And yet, Stanley Fish has just published his second book on John Milton, and he said—I quote—“Now I will show you what Milton really meant.” How does that fit? It's a blooming, buzzing confusion. That's what it is. And Richard Rorty, a professor at my alma mater, Stanford on the west coast—fascinating, this man who has majored, you know, in destroying truth structures on every side—is now on record as saying, “I will live my life, not by the first table of the law, but by the second table of the law, and what I want you to know is, and nowhere is it said better than in 1 Corinthians 13 . . .” That's Richard Rorty. How do you figure it?



I want to say, brothers and sisters, I think we have a very hybrid audience, and add to this, post-9/11 stress. There are people in our audiences—my daughter lives in Westchester County, New York; in her small community eight dads will never come back. You mean to tell me that's not a factor in Christian communication? All these seminars? Look, you begin talking about “pomo” and enlightenment rationalism and New Age, and we've got the Builders, and then the Boomers, and then the Busters, Generation-X. And then we've got the Bubbles, the Millennials. And we've got some of our hearers who are more visual, and some are more auditory, and some are more kinesthetic, and I am a preacher, and I am preparing my message. They're all out there. What's my time allocation going to be? I mean, are you going to say, “Well, five minutes I will aim toward the kinesthetic postmoderns?” If I did not believe in the Holy Spirit, I would go bonkers. But folks, look, contextualization is nothing new. Our missionaries have been doing it in the most bizarre circumstances. We are doing it every week, and I believe in the Holy Ghost.

Now remember, when John Calvin was in St. Peter's there in Geneva, when he'd go into the pulpit his lips were always moving. And you know, nobody was thinking, well he's practicing his opening lines, because they were never great opening lines. You know, it was, we left off last time in chapter 58. But some of the officary became curious. What is John Calvin saying? So someone slipped up close enough to hear among the wheezes what he was saying and I will tell you what he was saying, “Come Holy Spirit, come. Come Holy Spirit, come.”

I hear the problems and the objections to linear reason and all of this, but what else is new? This is not sufficient cause for jettisoning the supernatural gospel. What do our listeners need? Kuyper, Abraham Kuyper, founder of the Free University in Amsterdam, as you know, prime minister of the Netherlands, parish pastor, he was unloading week-by-week a lot of philosophic jargon, and I mean there was a little lady, Pietje Balthus, and she sent a little note in her scratchy handwriting, “Dear Pastor Kuyper, you are not giving us much Bread of Life these days.” He was shaken. The Lord smote him. He said, “I repent,” and he began to preach Jesus and he kept her picture in his study to his dying day. My friends, I want to give them the Bread of Life. Is not our call, to use Needworth's categories, at this point to be counter-cultural in order to win culture? It's Flannery O'Conner—when the world pushes me hard, I push back harder. What is the empirical data? What is the evidence? All right, I'll lay it out. Haddon Robinson, clear as a bell, as always: “More people are converted through preaching and teaching than by any other means.” He supports it empirically. I think he is right. Howard Hendricks: “The preaching of the word of God is still the bread

and butter.” A *Christianity Today* survey about worship preferences: fifty-two percent say, I prefer preaching-centered worship. That’s by far and away the leader—fifty-two percent. Next, seventeen percent: praised-centered; sixteen percent: liturgical; nine percent: creative drama. Fifty-two percent—I’m laying out the case. What are the facts in local ministry? Lyle Schaller, perennial church consultant, a man always on the move, I quote him, “The most effective preachers whose preaching is life changing are expository preachers.” That’s Lyle Schaller. I’ll take him for an ally. I say, “Thanks Lyle; that’s what I’ve thought all along.” The leader of the Billy Graham Schools on Evangelism—interesting statement—“Those converts in our follow-up that we send to churches where the pastor expounds Holy Scripture are inevitably and invariably the most healthy and the quickest to mature.” Amen. All Southern Baptist studies show preaching is still number one. It’s what the people want, what the people expect. Let’s not forget it. Church growth studies—look, from *Bib Sac* I have actual empirical data. I don’t want to be impaled on generalities and vague nebulosities. Here is a study—by far the aggregate total for sermons showed that biblical preaching was the significant factor in growth. Now I’m not one who genuflects at the shrine of the church growth movement, although I have found many, many blessings out of the earlier leaders in that movement, particularly. But I’ll tell you, their data shows it’s where the Bible is preached that churches will grow. Now there’s a quick growth that can come in other ways, flash fire, strange fire; and in the analysis of the sermons that matter, the biblical content of the messages was cited as the most significant factor. I’m just wanting to give you a battery of data which really supports staying with the word of God and not hastily or precipitously jettisoning what is the genius of the growth of the Christian church through the Holy Spirit. The solid word of God—it’s there. That’s it.

Interestingly enough, even some of the liberals are getting shaky. How do you understand Roland Allen, quintessential left-wing homiletician of Indianapolis, has just published a book, *Preaching Verse By Verse*? I mean, he says, “You never expected to hear this from me, but look, I’ve got to face the facts. Most people really want the Bible in the services.” He’s talking about his liberal constituency—the people who suffered in Methodism and Campbellitism of the left-wing variety all these years. He says, “Give them verse by verse. Preach forty-five minutes.” Hallelujah! I mean, here are the Lutherans, the ELCA, which is really an apostasy, but look at Luther Seminary, their large seminary in St. Paul, they have doubled their Bible requirements for preachers because their polls and studies of Lutheran parishioners indicated the

people want pastors to know their Bibles inside and outside and to teach from it.

Folks, widespread evidence here, the Barabbas syndrome should not be our tool. Give them what they want? No, they won't grow. Give them what they need; that really will satisfy; that's the direction we need to move. There are those who say, "But you're not speaking and answering the questions people are asking." Folks, people don't always ask the right questions. We've got to give the answers to the questions people need to ask, instead of just fawning and collapsing into towering pillars of Jell-O. Listen folks; bottom line: the word of God is living and powerful. This is seed to the sower and it's bread to the eater.

And you and I are living in the greatest day of gospel harvest in the history of the Christian church. Now, we're not keeping up with the birth rate—just a caution to you post-millennials. But apart from the North American church and the European church, the great sending senders, we're in the blahs; there is no question about that. We're severely acculturated, a very serious problem. But look, go with me, Central and South America, 300 people an hour are coming to Christ. Countries like Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay—something is happening. Folks, the word of God! Sub-Sahara black Africa, 700 people an hour are coming to Christ despite militant Islam. Folks, the challenge is there. Missiologists are saying that what's happening today in the People's Republic of China may be the greatest chapter in the history of the expansion of the Christian church. Folks, what an hour in which to live! Now folks, this is not the time to step aside from the power of the word of God; it's the power of the word of God that's doing this. This is what the Holy Spirit is doing. And we suddenly get apologetic for the old gospel and for the word of God and for exposition and we're going to drop the ball. That's what's going to happen if we are not careful. Go with me to Korea, South Korea; only 1,000 Christians there in 1900. Today a third of the country professes Christ. God knows those who are his. I can't say how much of this is genuine, but I'll say this: Sweetie and I go to Seoul, city of twelve million people, and at night every Christian church—the biggest Methodist church in the world is there; the biggest Baptist church, the biggest Pentecostal church, the biggest Presbyterian church—they're all in Seoul. It's just amazing. And every one of these little churches or big churches has a lighted red cross at night and I look out and in every direction, little crosses in Asia. And in India today, folks, hold your seat; listen, 1 out of every 6 Indians is a Dalit, an untouchable. They are arrested. They are sick and tired of Hinduism. It is apartheid as far as they are concerned. They have just been dispossessed all their lives. They're sick of it. And they have decided to move out of Hinduism.

They're going to go Buddhism or Christianity. Folks, right now the fat is in the fire. What a tremendous hour of gospel opportunity! And folks, even in our own land, I mean, something is happening in Generation X. Read Colleen Carroll's book, *The New Faithful*. You see, it is these sweeping generalizations that are so dangerous.

Who is to say where God will break forth next, you know? Would you have picked Generation X? I think they would have entered the bottom of my list. Something is happening. It is very mixed. It is happening in Judaism, Catholicism, evangelicalism, but not in modernism, not in mainline, old line, sideline churches. Nope—not there. Fully ten to fifteen percent of Generation X wants traditional theology, traditional worship, traditional ethics and morality. Would you have ever thought this possible? But folks, our God! This is not the time for us to dump the Bible and our confidence in the supernaturalness of Jesus.

I'm all for serious contextualization. But folks, the studies show, and now I'm leaving soon, so I can say this. The studies show that comparing, say, the Hudson Taylor or the John Nevius approach, one very contextualized, you know, the other not always so concerned to look Chinese or Korean—I am Western; I'm just going to preach—the results are no different. Do with it what you would like. William Lyon Phelps was probably one of the greatest lecturers at Yale since its origin, a wonderful Christian, a Browning scholar. He used to say, "I think on the cover of every Bible it should be embossed in big gold letters, 'Highly explosive, handle with care.'" You know, that's what I believe, and that's what you believe. Will preaching be passé? Unh-unh. No, nein, nyet, because God said preach to the people, and "woe be to us if we preach not the gospel." Amen.

## Jonathan Edwards the Preacher

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Jonathan Edwards' literary output was immense, as B. B. Warfield put it, "Born with a drop of ink in his veins, Edwards had almost from infancy held a pen in his hand."<sup>1</sup> And from that vast corpus of Edwards' manuscripts, this previously unpublished sermon has been selected for this volume for its content on the subject of leadership.

One of the things that becomes very clear very quickly, is that Edwards' sermons, no less than his other writings, are full of living and rich doctrine, and whether this was something he should do or not, whether the sermons would thereby be practical enough, was an issue to which Edwards himself gave serious attention. In his *Miscellanies* Edwards writes,

I used to think sometimes with myself, if such doctrines as those of the Trinity and the decrees are true, yet what need was there of revealing them in the gospel? What good do they do towards the advancing [of] holiness?

Well as Amy Plantinga Pauw noted in her well-researched 2002 study of Jonathan Edwards' thought, *The Supreme Harmony of All*, Edwards proceeded to answer his own question in typically Puritan fashion. "I know by experience," Edwards argued,

How useful these doctrines be. Such doctrines as these are glorious inlets into the knowledge and view of the spiritual world, and the contemplation of supreme things; the knowledge of which I have experienced how much it contributes to the betterment of the heart.<sup>2</sup>

And as he stated in a later *Miscellany*, since

Duties are founded on doctrines, . . . the revelation we now have of the

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<sup>1</sup> B. B. Warfield, "Edwards and the New England Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (1912), 712.

<sup>2</sup> *Miscellany* 181 as quoted in A. P. Pauw, *The Supreme Harmony of All* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 28.

Trinity, of the love of God, of the love of Christ to sinners . . . make[s] a vast alteration with respect to the reason and obligations to many amiable and exalted duties, so that they are as it were new.<sup>3</sup>

If this gives us an insight into one aspect of the content of Edwards' preaching, then what can we learn about Jonathan Edwards the preacher himself? There is a poem written by Phyllis McGinley, which has Edwards as its subject. It is an amazing but very mistaken poem, though it expresses very succinctly, as Richard Niebuhr later rightly commented, "the highly popular widespread impression of Jonathan Edwards."<sup>4</sup> The first part of the poem, which Niebuhr himself quotes says,

Whenever Mr. Edwards spake  
In church about damnation  
The very benches used to quake  
For awful agitation.

But then McGinley continues:

And if they had been taught aright  
Small children carried bedwards,  
Would shudder lest they meet that night  
The God of Mr. Edwards.  
Abraham's God, the Wrathful One,  
Intolerant of error—  
Not God the Father or the Son  
But God the Holy Terror!<sup>5</sup>

I say it is mistaken because it is based on a caricature of Edwards and his writings, a caricature which I would argue has as its source the continuing general unwillingness to read Edwards for himself, and a caricature that I have spent much of my scholarly life attempting to correct. At the same time, however, I am not arguing that Edwards' God was not "a sin-hating and a sin-revenging God," because that is a truth which Edwards preaches very clearly. As Edwards himself preaches,

His blood which he spilled, his life which he laid down, was an infinite price because it was the blood of God, as it was expressly called, Acts 20:28. Now upon this account, the price offered was equivalent to the demerit of the sins of all mankind, [and] his sufferings equivalent to the

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<sup>3</sup> *Miscellany* 343.

<sup>4</sup> H. R. Niebuhr, "The Anachronism of Jonathan Edwards," in *Theology, History and Culture: Major Unpublished Writings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 79.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

eternal sufferings of the whole world, [of] all mankind.<sup>6</sup>

McGinley was obviously by no means alone in her dismissal of Edwards' unique contribution to our understanding of divine truths. For example, how could it possibly have been the case, that a scholar of the stature of Perry Miller, after having been exposed to the writings of Edwards to such a degree as Miller was, could ever, as Laurence rightly identified in his critique of Miller, interpret Edwards and his Christianity in terms of a naturalistic, empirical philosophy? This is an interpretation that Miller does with such thoroughness that a reader, unaware that Edwards was even a Christian, could come away from Miller's book with his ignorance on that score safely intact!<sup>7</sup>

Edwards too has had more than his fair share of actual detractors, one notable example being Angoff in his *A Literary History of the American People*. It is from this work that come the now infamous words, that Edwards was a pathetic, sickly, angry Puritan, a rabid theologian, the bitterest hater of man the American pulpit had ever seen. Quite simply says Angoff, there was no love in Jonathan Edwards for the human race.<sup>8</sup>

In another work, one with a very misleading title, *Great Revivalists*, one might expect a sympathetic treatment of that subject, but what one actually discovers is that the author must have scoured a dictionary of behavioral disorders. For in his book, Godwin seems to call Edwards every one of them, so Edwards is described as a sadistic, self-tortured, morbid, introvert, half-insane, emotion-defective, psychopathic, spiritual quack.<sup>9</sup> Godwin seems to have seen his work as some kind of damage limitation exercise. If Edwards has written so much, and if it is all so bad, then he must warn people about him.

Consequently, Godwin sees the Great Awakening as nothing more than mass hysteria, and Edwards as the one who brought fear, terror, suicide, and melancholia to the simple folk of New England. In fact it was a blessing for Godwin that Edwards was forced into solitude to keep him from doing more harm. The irony Godwin obviously misses is that it was really in his enforced solitude at Stockbridge that Edwards produced what is often seen as his most influential pieces.

Those who belong within what we might call the mainstream of those who have assessed the role of Edwards in the Awakenings, do rightfully paint quite a different picture. For many, Jonathan Edwards remains "the most significant theologian of the American awakening,"<sup>10</sup> and again,

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<sup>6</sup> Unpublished sermon: "The Sacrifice of Christ Acceptable."

<sup>7</sup> D. Laurence, "The Foolishness of Edwards," in *Worldview* 18 (1971), 49.

<sup>8</sup> C. Angoff, *A Literary History of the American People* (1931).

<sup>9</sup> G. Godwin, *The Great Revivalists* (1950).

<sup>10</sup> J. L. Gonzales, *A History of Christian Thought* (Vol. 3; 1975/1986), 288.

“Jonathan Edwards, the greatest theologian of the Awakenings.”<sup>11</sup>

In 1958, R.G. Turnbull produced his major work, *Jonathan Edwards: Preacher*.<sup>12</sup> It is an analysis of more than one thousand sermons still then in manuscript. He calls them the work of an artist and craftsman and he puts Edwards in the first rank of preachers of all time. By every test, says Turnbull, Jonathan Edwards stands out as one of the most vital and challenging, yet mysterious figures in the life and the work of the Christian Church.

Turnbull was certain that he knew why Edwards had been neglected as a preacher: “Sinners”. It is a reflection upon the church, says Turnbull, that the reputation of one of the quietest and least oratorical of preachers should have been estimated in this way. He rightly calls the judgment unwarranted and unjust. “Sinners” has in fact been called “one of the most effective pieces of hell-fire and damnation rhetoric to come out of the American Puritan period.”<sup>13</sup>

When revival came to New England it did not come at that time with hell-fire preaching as is usually thought. One Sunday, Edwards preached “Sinners” in his home church and nothing untoward is recorded as having happened. However, three months later, Edwards was asked to preach at “unmoved” Enfield. Edwards again used the manuscript of “Sinners,” admittedly a little reworked, but surely not enough to account for the revival that broke out that Sunday and spread across a wide area. No, says Turnbull, it is a token that the Holy Spirit will blow where he will. What has been discovered in research on that famous sermon, is that Hopkins, Edwards’ first biographer, never even mentioned it. In his life of Edwards, S. Dwight did, but only in connection with other pulpit successes of Edwards; in fact, it was not until much later that its present reputation would begin to be built around it. By the late 19th century the tradition of interpreting the sermon as predominantly an occasion for frightening the congregation with threats of hell-fire was well established.

The close of the 20th century and the start of the 21st century have seen no abatement in interest in Edwards; in fact we find ourselves in the midst of a current resurgence. Of those who recognize the unique contribution he has made to theology, there are probably not too many though, who would hold it to the degree that John Gerstner did when he wrote,

I am afraid I am guilty somewhat of the adulation of Edwards that Jean

<sup>11</sup> R. T. Handy, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada* (1976), 114.

<sup>12</sup> R. G. Turnbull, *Jonathan Edwards the Preacher* (1958).

<sup>13</sup> R. L. Stuart, “Jonathan Edwards at Enfield,” in *American Literature* 48 (1976), 46.



Cadier . . . showed towards Calvin when he was asked whether he thought Calvin was infallible. He answered that he was sure Calvin was not infallible, but he could not detect an instance of his fallibility.”<sup>14</sup>

However, there was an interesting book, *Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of Revival*, written by the pastor and British Member of Parliament, Ian Paisley, which was also very honoring to Edwards. He condemns those he refers to as the “super intellects of contemporary America, who are so eager to claim Edwards as the greatest thinker and philosopher of colonial New England and yet not only reject but reprobate the faith of Edwards.” Paisley argues that they will give credence to anything about him, but his belief in an infallible Bible and the consequence of that belief in his conforming behavior to biblical precepts.<sup>15</sup>

He is not slow either, to identify how such thinking has arisen. He says that with the coming of infidelity in the form of evolution, higher criticism, and what he refers to as falsely so-called modernism, Edwards has been attacked “with a venom easily discerned as satanic.” It happened whilst he was alive and it will continue to occur as long as Christ and His servants are hated, argues Paisley.<sup>16</sup>

McGinley was also mistaken because it is a caricature that is very far from the truth, an assessment that L. I. Sweet also agreed with in his article.<sup>17</sup> Sweet argues that Edwards is too often portrayed as a clenched-teethed apostle whose spit-fire sermons skewered sinners with the threatenings of a spine-chilling God, and who is at the same time, incapable of writing one humorous sentence; that the last thing one expects to find in Edwards is rollicking good humor. Sweet believes such images tell us more about ourselves than they do about Jonathan Edwards. The first part of our problem, said Sweet, is that Edwards is too large for “ordinary measuring rods.” For the truth, argues Sweet, is that Edwards was full of joy, a joy that sprung from knowledge of sins forgiven. His house was full of laughter.

McGinley was also mistaken, because Edwards has much to say concerning the great love of the God who himself came to die in our place as our substitute, and who suffered both in life and through death to win our salvation. He suffered in life, argues Edwards, in that the Incarnation itself was even an act of real suffering, arguing that the life of Christ is itself expiatory. Edwards argues in one unpublished sermon

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<sup>14</sup> J. Gerstner, *A Mini Theology* (Wheaton, 1987), 11.

<sup>15</sup> I. R. K. Paisley, *Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of Revival* (Privately printed, 1987), 7-8.

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

<sup>17</sup> L. Sweet, “Good Sense and Good Humor: The Modern Cult of Common Sense,” (paper presented at the Jonathan Edwards Symposium at Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, NJ, 1973).

that Christ's sufferings actually began with the Incarnation, for there was real suffering in his taking upon himself human nature in the "low, weak, debased state in which it is since the fall." It was necessary that the nature he assumed was our present nature, and here Edwards is clearly following the doctrine that only that which is assumed can be redeemed. The nature he took, preaches Edwards, was not as it was before the fall, but

in that broken suffering state where it is since. The human nature since the Fall is but the ruin of what it was formerly, he took the human nature upon him with all its infirmities that it labors under excepting those that have the nature of sin in them he took it on him with those infirmities that are the sad fruits of sin and therefore he is said to have been made in the likeness of sinful flesh, Romans 8:3.<sup>18</sup>

McGinley was also mistaken because, in actuality, Edwards' central message was not just that sinners might know God, but that they would come to delight in God, that they would savor him and even relish him. That is why McGinley is so mistaken. That is the element of Edwards that John Piper has done the church such a great service in recovering for us. As Piper says, "For all his intellectual might, Edwards was the farthest thing from a cool, detached, neutral, disinterested academician."<sup>19</sup>

In his own *Personal Narrative*, Edwards himself gives us some confirmation of that fact:

The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception . . . which continued near as I can judge about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud.<sup>20</sup>

So if McGinley gives us a very distorted picture of Edwards' theology concerning the nature of God, then what would consist of a much more accurate account of Jonathan Edwards the preacher? One starting point would have to be the clear truth in Edwards that redemption was a work involving all three members of the Trinity, together with the belief that one cannot separate the person of Christ from his work. I mention the first aspect because Edwards has several times been a point of attack for those who charge Edwards, as Michael Jenkins does in his doctoral work, with differentiating not simply between the divine hypostases but the

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<sup>18</sup> Unpublished sermon on Isaiah 53:7.

<sup>19</sup> J. Piper, "The Pastor as Theologian" (paper presented at the Bethlehem Conference for Pastors, Minneapolis, Minnesota, April 15, 1988), 12.

<sup>20</sup> *Personal Narrative*.

divine *ousia*, thereby making a “tri-personality” of the Trinity. In fact, Jinkins accuses Edwards of almost breaking up the Trinity into divine subjects whose character may or may not be identical. But as Jinkins himself quotes, “God not only gives us the Mediator and accepts His mediation, and of his power and grace bestows the things purchased by the Mediator; but he the Mediator is God.”<sup>21</sup>

Following on from this, I want to focus particularly on the second aspect, on that which Edwards is concerned to focus our attention on, and that is the willing, suffering, agonizing nature of the Redeemer, so that it is impossible to separate the glorious person from his gracious work. This is a central concept in Edwards, that the person and work, the incarnation and atonement are bonded together in his thought. That is why we cannot look at the doctrine of the atonement on its own. According to Edwards, Christ has come in our nature, that he might now, “. . . . invite and encourage us to ascend to the most intimate converse with him and encourages us that we shall be accepted and not despised.” Christ took on a nature, “infinitely below his,” that we might have the full position and enjoyment of him.<sup>22</sup>

So in Edwards’ thought, the atonement means

that there is now nothing hindering our intimate union and communion with the Godhead, nothing now that will cause the least injury to the honor of the majesty of God, because that majesty has already been fully displayed, vindicated and glorified in Christ’s blood.<sup>23</sup>

Here we see something of the richness of the thought of Edwards. Though Christ will be in a state of exaltation in heaven that will not distance him from his disciples, “but he will rather take them into a state of exaltation with him. This will be the improvement Christ will make of his own glory to make his beloved friends partakers with him, to glorify them in his glory . . . .”<sup>24</sup>

The second thing that we find in Edwards is that, following Athanasius, he makes it clear that it is in Christ’s condescension that our ascension lies. Man becomes a member of the household of God because we are admitted by the door, the Son, “that he and his Father and they should be as it were one society, one family, that his people should be in a sort admitted into that society of the three persons in the Godhead.”<sup>25</sup> And so, Edwards tells us the church becomes “the daughter of God”.

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Jinkins, *A Comparative Study in the Theology of the Atonement in Jonathan Edwards and John McLeod Campbell* (New York: Mellen Press, 1992), 111.

<sup>22</sup> *Miscellany* 741.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

This was in fact the whole reason for the creation of the world according to Edwards. The reason why the church is regarded as God's daughter is because she is the spouse of Christ. In fact, using Matthew 25:1-12, Edwards preaches a lengthy series of sermons which are still unpublished, on the very subject of the church's espousal to Christ and all that flows from that. And in the introductory sermon to that series, this is part of what he teaches,

Hence we learn the wonderful grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he should receive such poor, unworthy creatures as we are, into such a blessed union with himself. How wonderful is that condescension of such a Divine and infinite glory, that he should seek to espouse worms of the dust and should call little, feeble, poor insects to be his bride.<sup>26</sup>

This was the heart of the plan and that is why says Edwards, "the Church is said to be the completeness of Christ . . . as if Christ were not complete without the Church, as having a natural inclination thereto. We are incomplete without that which we have a natural inclination to."<sup>27</sup>

That is the third thing about the work of Christ in Edwards' thought. It is a remarkable statement that Christ could be considered as incomplete without the church, but this is what Edwards says, "Heaven and earth were created that the Son of God might be complete in a spouse." A spouse,

. . . that might enjoy him and on whom he might pour forth his love. This design was according to the wisdom of God, bestowed in such a way as should abase men and exalt the free grace of God. That man's entire and absolute and universal dependence on God should be most evident and conspicuous.<sup>28</sup>

The last facet of the truth Edwards preaches concerning the work of redemption is that Christ's work is a work which is genuinely offered to all, and if it is rejected, makes everyone thereby inexcusable. So, for example, Edwards preaches,

If God offers you a Saviour from deserved punishment, and you will not receive him, then surely it is just that you should go without a Saviour . . . If, when he has given an infinitely honourable and glorious person, even his only begotten Son, to be a sacrifice for sin, in the fire of his wrath, and so provided salvation, and this Saviour is offered to you, you be not suited in him, and refuse to accept him, is God therefore

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<sup>26</sup> Unpublished sermon on Matthew 25:1-12.

<sup>27</sup> *Miscellany* 104.

<sup>28</sup> *Miscellany* 103.

unjust if he does not save you?<sup>29</sup>

One thing that Edwards also makes crystal clear, is that, “The invitations of the Gospel are always in universal terms.”<sup>30</sup>

But where does all this take us? What is Edwards hoping to achieve through his preaching? I would argue that it is not primarily obedience, or to fear hell, or even to hope for heaven, but as Edwards himself declares,

The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows; but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams. But God is the ocean.<sup>31</sup>

**Moses’ Complaint of the Great Burden and Trouble of that Office and Work which God had Appointed Him to of Leading the Children of Israel. February 1739/40**

Jonathan Edwards

Numbers 11:10-15

“Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families . . . and Moses said unto the Lord, ‘Wherefore hast Thou afflicted Thy servant?’”

I shall depart something from my usual method in discovering from these words. The method I propose to take is this, viz.:

- I. To observe something in the words, and then
- II. To make some reflection on those observations by way of improvement.

I.1. I would observe some things in that portion of Scripture that has been now read. In them is exhibited Moses’ complaint of the great burden and trouble of that office and work which God had appointed him to, of leading the Children of Israel through the wilderness to Canaan. And do ’tis worthy of our observation who the person is that complains. It was Moses, of whom it may here be proper and profitable to take notice of several things:

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<sup>29</sup> Sermon, “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners.”

<sup>30</sup> Sermon, “Great Guilt No Obstacle.”

<sup>31</sup> *The Christian Pilgrim* (Yale Works; Vol. II), 244.

i. That he was one of the most eminent saints that we have any account of. God Himself seems to speak of him as a far more eminent person and a greater favorite of heaven than ordinary prophets in what God says to Aaron and Miriam when they manifested that they thought they were worthy of as much honor as Moses because God had spoken through them as well as by him. See what God says of Moses on the occasion, Numbers 12:5-8, And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

And there are many other evidences of his great eminency that might be mentioned, the many extraordinary privileges he was found with, as his converse with God on the Mount till his face shone, the high office to which God called him, and his holy behavior on one occasion and another.

ii. He was under God the head of the congregation of the Children of Israel. He was in an extraordinary manner called to be in many respects, the prophet, priest and king of the people, to be their deliverer under God, their redeemer out of Egypt. To be their captain and leader, to be a kind of mediator for them between God and them. To carry their words to God and to bring God's words to them. To be their intercessor, to be instrumentally their lawgiver and their chief judge on earth in all causes, to whom was made the last appeal.

iii. He was the head of the ancient legal dispensation as Christ is of the evangelical, as John observes in John 1:17, The Law was given by Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. It was by him that God founded the Israelitish church in that state and economy manner of worship and form of government in which it was under the Old Testament. He was as it were the Father of the Old Testament prophets and the Israelitish church is called the body of Moses as the mystical church is the body of Christ, which is what intended in Jude 9, by Michael disputing with the devil. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee, referring to the dispute in Zechariah 3 at the beginning. The dispute is about Jerusalem as the

Jewish church that were returned from captivity, a brand plucked out of the fire.

iv. In these things he was a very eminent type of Christ, and therefore when God reveals to Moses the future coming of Christ he tells him that he would raise up a prophet like unto him, Deuteronomy 18:15,18, The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken; I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.

v. We have divine testimony for this that he was the meekest man of all upon the face of the earth, as Numbers 12:3.

vi. His love to that people was very great notwithstanding all their abuses of him, as appears by his doing the part of an intercessor for them from time to time and praying so earnestly for them. And so when they had so greatly provoked God and also provoked the spirit of Moses in making the golden calf and God said unto Moses in Exodus 32:9, Let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them that I may consume them, and promises him that he would make a great nation of him though this seemed to be a great honor offered to Moses and very tempting to Moses to be willing that it should be so, yet Moses earnestly besought God to spare the people and forgive them and begs of him that he would turn from his fierce wrath and repent him of the evil and pleads the Covenant that he had made with Abraham, and so God at Moses' intercession repented him of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

And so when the people murmured against Moses and Aaron and seemed to be in such an unreasonable tumult and rage at the report of the spies and Moses had the greatest temptation to be provoked and incensed against them as in Numbers 14:14, yet at that very time when he saw that God was dreadfully provoked with them and God said to Moses in verse 11, How long shall this people provoke me and how long will it be ere they believe me for all the signs which I have showed among them. I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they. Yet even then Moses earnestly besought God for them and entreated him to spare them and so he turned away his wrath again. So great was his love to the people, that if God would not forgive their sin he prayed, Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written, Exodus 32:32.

2. The second thing that I would observe in the text is what that is which Moses complains of and is unwilling to bear, viz. the burden and trouble of leading that people through the wilderness to the promised land. He objects against it that God should require it of him to do that great and difficult service for the children of God though God should say to him carry them in thy bosom as a nursing father beareth the sucking child unto the land which thou swearest unto their fathers. Though he was so good a man and so full of love to that people yet he is not willing to bear the burden of such a service.

3. We may observe wherein consisted that burdensomeness of this service that Moses objects against and that is the bearing the frowardness and perverseness of that people. They are so froward and so full of their murmuring, so unwilling in their obedience, so prone to rebellion and so unreasonable in their behavior to God and him, that he was not willing to bear the burden of it. This was what Moses was displeased with in verse 10, Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased. This is what he objects against in verse 13, Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? For they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.

4. We may observe how earnestly and to how great a degree he objects against it. Which appears in several things.

i. He complains of it as if it were an argument of God's displeasure against that he had laid it upon it wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant and wherefore have I not found favor in thy sight that thou layest the burthen of thy people upon me.

ii. He accounts the burden so great that he doesn't want to see his wretchedness or misery, Let me not see my wretchedness, says he, in verse 15.

iii. He speaks of the burden as quite unbearable, says he in verse 14, I am not able to bear all this people alone because it is too hard for me.

iv. He earnestly prays that God would rather kill him out of hand than oblige to this difficult service. He had rather die immediately than live to bear the trouble leading such a forward and perverse people to the land which God had promised them, verse 15.

v. The thing that I would observe in the words is a particular objection by



Moses against its being required of him to bear the perverseness of that people, viz. that he had not conceived nor begotten them, verse 12. As much as to say, If I were the father or the mother of that people there would be more reason why I should be content to bear their frowardness and perverseness and to carry them as a mother or a nursing father carries a very forward or perverse child in his bosom with great love and tenderness notwithstanding all its perverseness as natural parents must bear the frowardness of their children however perverse they be. Let it cost them never so much trouble to lead them and carry them about and bring them up, yet they must do it because they have either begotten or conceived them. But Moses objects that this was not his case with respect to the people of Israel and he earnestly insists that he should be excused from this trouble.

Thus I have done with what I proposed in the first place in discovering from these words, viz. making some observations or remarks on the text.

I come now in the second place,

II. To make some reflection on those things that have been observed in the text by way of improvement, and the reflection that I would make is what has been observed of Moses in the text may lead us to reflect and observe how far the love and patience and kindness Jesus towards his people exceeds that of the meekest and best of men.

Christ is the prophet God raised up like unto Moses as has been already observed. The mystical, universal church is his body as the Israelitish church is the body of Moses. He is the Redeemer of the church from sin and Satan and hell, as Moses was the redeemer of the children of Israel out of Egypt. He is the captain and leader of the hosts of the spiritual Israel, as Moses was the captain and leader of the physical Israel. He is the head of the evangelical dispensation as Moses was of the legal. His office was to lead his people through the wilderness of this world to the heavenly promised land. He is the greater teacher and lawgiver and intercessor of the universal church.

Therefore 'tis the more natural for us to compare the one with the other, to observe how far the meekness and patience and love of one exceeds the other, though the other was so eminent for these things. But that we may be the more distinct and full in this reflection I would mention the exercises of Christ's love towards his people.

1. I would take notice how much otherwise the case was with Christ from what it was with Moses. That would bring indeed the same exercises of

patience and kindness in him more wonderful manifestations of love and grace.

2. Show how the exercises of patience and kindness in Christ towards his people go beyond those of Moses.

3. I would apply this particular to the church of Israel in the wilderness to that visible church in general, and to the universal, mystical church and particular persons.

4.i.a. I would take notice in some instances how much otherwise the case was with Christ than what it was with Moses that would have rendered the same patience and kindness more wonderful in Christ.

b. Christ was an infinitely greater person than Moses. Moses was but a servant in the house of Israel under Christ but Christ is the builder and lord and owner of the house, Hebrews 3:3-6, For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

Christ was the God of Moses. He was the person that appeared to Moses in the bush out of reverence to whom Moses pulled off his shoes. He was he that spoke to Moses face to face. Christ is that Angel of the Covenant that was with Moses in the wilderness whose glory Moses entreated that he might see and that he might know his name, and who Moses adored. Acts 7:38 when speaking of Moses says, This is he that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spoke to him in the Mount Sinai and with our fathers who received the lively oracles to give unto us.

Christ being so much greater a person than Moses it is a more wonderful instance of condescension in him to bear the frowardness and perverseness of his people than it was for Moses who was only a fallen worm. It was a greater instance of condescension in him to undertake the burden of bringing such a perverse people to the promised land.

c. Christ has infinitely greater injury received him from the frowardness and perverseness of men than Moses had. Moses indeed was very much abused. They murmured against him time after time though he had done

them no wrong but was the greatest benefactor under Christ that they had in the world. They unreasonably wearied him and often were in a fiendish rage with him. But Christ is far more injured by the perverseness of men than Moses was. The perverseness of their heart is more especially leveled against him and their enmity is chiefly against Christ, this Moses himself observed in Exodus 16:8, And what are we? Your murmurings are not against us but against the Lord.

And also as 'tis an infinitely greater injury and provocation to oppose Christ than to oppose Moses therefore the same forbearance is proportionably and manifestly of more wonderful patience in him than it was in Moses. To be froward towards a fallen worm is but a little thing in comparison of what it is to show perverseness against the infinitely glorious Lord of heaven and earth. And therefore for the former to be borne patiently is not to be compared with a forbearance under the latter.

d. Moses as he was in himself was a fellow offender but that is not so with Christ. It would have been no such great thing for Moses in his goodness to have overcome the perverseness of Israel, for he was only a fellow servant and as he was in himself under the same condemnation for he wholly had the same perverse and froward heart in him, and also was in many things guilty himself. He manifested his perverseness when God first called him to send him to the children of Israel in his continuing so manifestly to object against it when God had commanded him again and again to go, and gave him so much encouragement to go. And in the text he is not altogether without perverseness and the perverseness of his heart was again manifest at the waters of Meribah. So that he had never had such a corrupt view of his own might. But Christ who is Lord of all had no sin, never had any perverseness in his heart, never in any wise offended God or offered any such offence to men, for him therefore to exercise love and patience towards perverse worms or rather, a generation of vipers was the more wonderful.

e. Moses was under obligation to kindness and forbearance towards that people but Christ in his original circumstances was free. No thanks to Moses for exercising love and kindness towards a perverse congregation for he was naturally in a state of subjection to God and God required this of him necessity was laid upon him, yea woe to him if he did not love and bear this froward people.

But Christ as he naturally and originally is free from any subjection and exercises no love or forbearance towards his people but what is the fruit of his free and sovereign grace. These things would have rendered the

same acts of kindness and forbearance in Christ far wonderful manifestations of grace and patience in Christ than in Moses. But I come

ii. To show how the exercises of patience and kindness in Christ towards his people so beyond those of Moses. Not only do the different circumstances render his acts of forbearance and kindness more wonderful but the acts of patience and love in themselves are far beyond those of Moses.

a. Christ bears with all the frowardness of his people. Many of his own redeemed people before their conversion behaved with as great perverseness as the worst of that congregation and yet Christ never punishes them for it but after they continued long in a froward and obstinate opposition to him he convicts them and wholly forgives them and bestows Canaan upon them. With many thousands and millions of perverse sinners does Christ deal thus. And he bears all the frowardness that all his people are guilty of after their conversion, after he has bestowed such infinite mercy upon them, yet he never forsakes them, whom he loves he loves to the end. His mercy endures forever towards them.

Moses bore the perverseness of the congregation of Israel a great while, but at last their frowardness continuing of so many means used with then he can bear it no longer, he quite gives out. Christ never gives out, his patience never fails, though they often behave themselves very ungratefully after his redeeming them out of the spiritual Egypt with a strong hand. Yet he bears their frowardness through the wilderness till he brings them to the land of promise.

b. Christ carries them to the promised land in his bosom as a nursing father does a sucking child. This was what Moses was unwilling for and objected so strenuously against, Have I begotten them that thou shouldest say unto me Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swearest unto their fathers?

But Christ freely does it though they are froward children. Isaiah 40:11, He shall lead his flock like a shepherd. He shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom. Christ with great long-suffering and love towards his people as a mother bears a little child, Isaiah 66:13, As one when his mother comforteth so will I comfort them. So Christ when on earth was often wont to call his people his little children, and bear with all their unbelief and childish instability and cowardice and dullness and backwardness to their duty, so Isaiah 63:8-9, For he said, Surely they

are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Savior. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. Moses said to God, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant that thou hast laid the burden of this people upon me? But Christ was willingly afflicted and tormented for the sake of a perverse people, his enemies.

c. Moses was unwilling to do the service of the temporal salvation of Israel, he suffered so much by their perverseness. But Christ undertook the eternal salvation of his people though he therein he suffered much more by their perverseness. All the dreadful sufferings that Christ underwent when on earth were the fruits of his people's frowardness and perverseness. The iniquity of them was laid upon him. He bore the burden of all the rebellion and perverseness of all his people that have been committed from the beginning to the end of the world in his own body and soul that he might by that means bring them to the heavenly Canaan. He bore a thousand times as much as Moses would have needed to have begun to carry.

d. Christ was willing to bear all this burden himself alone. What Moses very much objected against bearing the burden the perverseness of that people alone. Christ is the only Savior of his Church. He had none to bear a part with him in that exceeding great and difficult work of bringing his elect to the heavenly Canaan. He was alone in bearing all that dreadful affliction that was the fruit of that perverseness. He bore it all in his own body. It all fell upon him, the whole weight of the affair came upon his shoulders, all the floodgates of Divine wrath were opened upon him. All God's wrath was spent on his soul. There was none to fit to lift a finger to help bear a part, Isaiah 63:3, I have trodden the winepress alone and of the people there was none with me.

e. Moses grievously complains of the burden laid upon him, but Christ never complained of the vastly greater burden that was laid upon him. He never once objected against it when God called him to this work. He readily made answer, Lo! I come. I delight to do thy will O God! Though he knew that the work would be exceeding difficult and cost him so dear, yet such was his love to his people that he thought of it with delight. He could not bear to hear any objection against it when Peter objected against his undergoing so much, crying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee, Matthew 16:22, he rejected his objection with abhorrence, Matthew 16:23, But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savorest not the

things that be of God, but those that be of men.

f. Moses gave that reason he need not bear their frowardness, that he had not begotten nor conceived them. But Christ just loved them and bore their sins and frowardness that he might beget them and be a father to them. He loved them when he had not begotten nor conceived them. He loved them when they were aliens and strangers and enemies so as to undertake to bear immeasurably more for them than Moses bore and had need to bear for Israel. His suffering the fruits of the perverseness of his people were the fruits of that love that Christ had to them before he begat them and he suffered to make way for their being spiritually begotten by him and so becoming his children and that so he might be their nursing father and that he might bear with them under all their perverseness consistent with the honor of his holiness and justice.

g. Moses desired to be killed to be delivered from bearing the burden of the sins of the Children of Israel, but such was Christ's love to his people that he desired to be killed that he might bear, take the burden of their perverseness upon him. Moses desired to be killed rather than have the ungrateful service of carrying such an untoward people to Canaan, but Christ desired to be killed that he might thereby bring them to the spiritual Canaan on that day by that service which he did not account an ungrateful work but a delightful one notwithstanding all their ungrateful and untoward opposition to him.

h. Moses' patience was worn out before he had born the frowardness of Israel for two years but Christ's patience holds to his elect church from the beginning to the end of the world. It was not yet two years since Moses was first sent but . . . Christ beholds all the sin and notwithstanding all wrongs and murmurings and never has destroyed it.

III. I come now in the third and last place to apply this reflection particularly to the children of Israel in the wilderness to the visible people of Israel in general, and to the mystical church or to particular persons.

1. What has been observed in the text may lead us to take notice how much the patience of Christ towards the children of Israel in the wilderness exceeded Moses. He was the principal object of all their murmurings but did not cast them off as a people from being his people. They provoked Christ, grieved and vexed his Holy Spirit for forty years in the wilderness, yet Christ bore them as a nursing father does a sucking child. Deuteronomy 1:31, And in the wilderness where thou hast seen

how the Lord thy God bore thee as one doth bear his son in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place.

2. This may show us how much the love and patience of Christ exceeds that of the best and meekest of men. If we consider Christ's dealings and his visible people in general, Moses did only suffer such kind of treatment in His visible church during that forty years but that is commonly such kind of treatment offered Christ in that visible church in all ages.

3. If we consider Christ's dealings towards his elect church in all ages. For those he has died. The punishment of all their frowardness he has born in his body. Bears with all.

4. This should lead particular persons to consider how much Christ's forbearance and kindness towards them exceeds that of the meekest and best of men towards any. Consider how often you have rejected him, cast contempt upon him when he has stood at your door. How much kindness you have received and then abused. And then Christ has renewed his calls; has corrected you; has given you influences of his Spirit; has given you many special advantages; has renewed his calls and winning invitations setting forth the glory of his benefits; given you very considerable illuminations. Yet Christ bears with you. If you are one that is one of the mystical church of Christ, then consider how great sins before conversion; how much is this kindness beyond all; and how great your frowardness since.

Let these things be considered now by every one that is about to sit down at the table of the Lord and to attend the solemn memorial of his wonderful love to such froward and perverse creatures as we are.

# **Leadership of the Church Choir: An Examination of the Connection to Biblical and Historical Models with Implications for 21st Century Ministry**

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## **Introduction**

“Nobody listens to choirs anymore.” So said an extremely talented musician who was being asked to help a smaller church in our community a few years ago. They were trying to make a transition from a traditional music ministry to a more contemporary model and the pastor wanted at least to keep the choir going while building a praise team. The musician I was talking to honestly did not understand why they wanted even to bother with a choir. No one had ever said anything like that to me before. Having a church choir was just taken for granted. If you did not have a choir at your church, it was assumed that a choir would be one of the first things you would work to organize after getting a handle on your congregational music. For this church musician a choir was an antiquated liability, something to be left behind. The question of a choir’s relevance did not go away. A couple of years later I was brought up short again in a seminary class when one of the students asked me, “Why do we have a choir?” After a brief offended breath, I gave a partial answer. That question helped to spur on the writing of this article. It may be that a generation of ministers has arisen that knew not the choir. Yes, we find choirs in Scripture, but is having a choir a biblical mandate? Is there a historical precedent we ought to follow, or have we passed beyond all choral tradition in this day of praise teams and contemporary Christian music? Are today’s choirs even connected to the biblical and historical models? In addition, are there practical and administrative reasons to have a church choir? Can choirs ultimately survive the transitions of 21st century music ministry and continue to have a place of leadership? Perhaps it is time for music ministers, worship leaders, and pastors to grapple seriously with the reasons to have a choir.



There is a need to define some terms and focus the purpose of this article. By “choir” I am referring to the choir that leads in worship in regular worship services, not necessarily every choir of any age group a church can organize (commonly known as graded choirs, preschoolers through high school). Though there are examples where regular worship choirs contain both youth and adults, most groups will be adults. In the majority of evangelical churches today these choirs will be composed of volunteers. Historically and in Scripture, however, that has not always been the case. The dynamics of the paid versus volunteer choir may appear to be something of a peripheral issue but must be discussed, since many church choirs have been compensated throughout history. While volumes have been written on choral music, much of the literature has focused on the history of the organization of the choir, choral technique, or choral music and its composers. Implications for the development of the choir’s role as a worship leader are less obvious in the literature. The focus of this article will be the leadership of the choir in worship.

Therefore, I shall approach the subject with two surveys. First, there will be a quick review and discussion of what the Scriptures can tell us about choirs. Secondly, I will attempt to pull together the high points of the activities and status of choirs throughout the history of worship. Finally, armed with the perspective of Scripture and history, we will come back to our original question (“Why have a choir?”) and see if there is a connection between what is happening currently and the record of Scripture and history. Based on those conclusions I will discuss implications for the choir in music ministry in the new century ahead.

## **Biblical Survey**

### *The Choir in the New Testament*

If the mere mention of a worship tool in Scripture could be seen as a command, then choirs as worship leaders would appear to be required for the church to worship. There are several clear and obvious references to choirs in worship settings in the Old Testament. In fact, the Lord himself gave King David detailed instructions for setting up Temple worship, including the Levitical choir and instrumentalists (1 Chronicles 28:11-19). In the New Testament, however, references to choirs are almost non-existent. From this lack of material the complete opposite might be inferred, that choirs are part of the old sacrificial system and should be done away with or marginalized as worship leaders. Of course, there is the account in Luke 2:13-15 of the angel chorus which announced the birth of Christ to the shepherds. They were proclaiming a message from God to men, a function often assigned to choirs today, especially in evangelistic settings. There is another angelic choir or quartet in John’s vision where he sees the four living creatures engaged

in praise around the throne of God (Revelation 4:6-9). They seem to be singing their own unique song while the wider group of worshipers, the twenty-four elders, sings a different song (Revelation 4:10-11). This time the choir is engaged in direct praise to God. Another New Testament example is the spontaneous praise of an implied children's choir in Matthew 21:15-16 when Jesus came to Jerusalem at His triumphal entry. This group of children echoed what the multitude had been crying in verse nine. They were not likely a formal choir but did function in an act of direct praise to God, again similar to an expectation of worship choirs today. The apostle Paul told the Colossians to sing *to* one another (Colossians 3:16). While this is probably congregational and may even imply the use of antiphonal singing as a technique, it is possible this could apply to choral singing as well. This fellowship aspect of exhortation is a function that choirs often serve in today's churches. Barry Liesch calls this "*koinonia* worship" and considers it a major Pauline doctrine. "It is body-life worship in action. The church as a body was Paul's dominating, overarching metaphor."<sup>1</sup> In this role, the choir sings both to the congregants and to themselves, being simultaneously part of the body and a leader of the worship for the body.

### *The Choir in the Old Testament*

Old Testament references concerning choirs are more specific and detailed than those in the New Testament. There are several organized choirs and instrumental ensembles: David's Tabernacle choir of ten men and a director (1 Chronicles 15:12-22; 16:4-5); Solomon's Temple choir of 4,000 voices including 288 teachers and directors along with an orchestra (1 Chronicles 23:5, 27-32; 25; 2 Chronicles 5:11-14); the Levitical choir which marched before the army (2 Chronicles 20:14-22); King Hezekiah's choir used in the restoration of Temple worship (2 Chronicles 29:25-30); Zerubbabel's Temple choir of 200 men and women returned from exile (Ezra 2:65, 70; 3:10-13; 7:7); and Nehemiah's Temple choir of 245 men and women returned from Babylon (Nehemiah 7:1, 44, 67, 73; 12:27-30, 45-47). There are other examples of group singing that might also be classified as choral music, such as Miriam's group of ladies leading an antiphonal response to the song of Israel (Exodus 15:20-21), the women praising David's victory (1 Samuel 18:6-7), and Saul prophesying with the band of prophets (1 Samuel 10:5, 10). While it is uncertain whether this was an organized choir, Solomon apparently collected men and women to sing for him

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*, with foreword by Donald P. Hustad (exp. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 167.

(Ecclesiastes 2:8), perhaps simply for entertainment.<sup>2</sup> One scholar, commenting on Miriam's choir, felt that there must have been some sort of choral tradition kept alive among the Israelite slaves. It seemed doubtful that the terrified slaves who fled the Egyptians simply made the song up on the spot.<sup>3</sup> The most unusual of these accounts is the one found in 2 Chronicles 20 where the choir preceded the army into battle. In response to the promise of God's help, Jehoshaphat fell down and worshiped while the choir stood to sing God's praises. The next day, the king ordered the Levite choir out in front of the battle lines "in holy attire" where they sang, "Give thanks to the Lord, for His lovingkindness is everlasting" (vv. 20-22). When the choir sang, the Lord ambushed the invaders and they were routed.

With the notable exception of the song in praise of David and perhaps Saul with the prophets (depending on what they actually prophesied about), Old Testament choirs were mostly engaged in praise of God or of God's activity and directed to God rather than in proclaiming a message from God to the community of faith. Miriam's choir responded to the praise of God voiced by the congregation, thus aiding and supplementing congregational worship. The choir in battle is often touted by evangelical choir leaders as something of a spiritual example for the choir. While interesting and perhaps inspiring parallels can be drawn from this passage, it must also be remembered that this was a response to a specific and unique prophecy. There is no other choral event like this one in Scripture. The highest musical form of choral work found in the Old Testament is that of the Levitical choir at the dedication of Solomon's Temple. Not only was the choir massive in size, but it obviously performed complex musical works which had to be rehearsed. This created something of a natural division between the people and the choir, both in function and in membership. "The highly artistic structure of levitical singing excluded *a priori* the extensive participation of a non-Levite. Therefore, the role of the people at large was confined to a passive listening."<sup>4</sup> 1 Chronicles 23:3 says that levitical singers entered into their special service at age thirty, at which time they were considered "skillful." Alfred Sendrey believes this implies significant training before that time, "otherwise they could easily start their professional career at the age of twenty-five or even sooner."<sup>5</sup> 1 Chronicles 15:22 says that Chenaniah, a chief Levite skilled in singing,

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<sup>2</sup> I. E. Reynolds, *The Choir in the Non-Liturgical Church* (Fort Worth, TX.: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1938), 15-16.

<sup>3</sup> Edmunds Lorenz, *Music in Work and Worship: a Discussion of Church Music as an Applied Art* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1925), 214.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel* (London: Vision Press Limited, 1969), 219.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

set up a school of instruction. It may have been that some of the young men or boys apprenticed to the levitical choir were allowed to sing with the group.<sup>6</sup> Based on references in the Mishnah, Sendrey concludes that since the levitical singers had no known musical notation, all of their music had to be memorized. Training for such a choir might have indeed started in childhood, and children may have sung with the choir at times.<sup>7</sup>

All of this training and the need to be from a certain tribe made the levitical choir an exclusive group. Participants had to be qualified by both virtue of their birthright and their innate skill as a musician. In addition, these choirs of Levites were compensated, both in the provision of training and in their personal incomes (Nehemiah 10:38-39; 13:5, 10). Other examples of Old Testament choirs seemed to be more spontaneous, less organized, and more open for participation. However, they were not as consistent or long lasting as the Levite choirs.

Did the exclusivistic structure of the Levite choir and the presence of compensation contribute to abuse or sinful attitudes as worship leaders? They indeed stood condemned along with the other priests when the Lord declared through the prophet Amos, "I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies . . . take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps" (Amos 5:21, 23-24, NASB). The Scriptures do not specifically equate the problems of the Levite priests to their status, and certainly volunteerism is no guarantee of righteous worship leadership by choir members. However, as the review of history will show, church choirs that operate out of a sense of entitlement or special privilege can become something less than a spiritual activity. The Temple Choir of the Old Testament may have eventually struggled with the pitfalls of a paid choir.

## Historical Survey

### *The Choir Prior to the Reformation*

Most worship scholars agree that the New Testament church borrowed from the worship of the synagogue to build its own worship traditions.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> James G. Smith, "Chorus—Antiquity and the Middle Ages," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (29 vols.; 2nd ed.; London: Macmillan, 2001), 5: 767-69, 768.

<sup>7</sup> Sendrey, *Music in Ancient Israel*, 171.

<sup>8</sup> Sources on this subject run from the scholarly to the popular. Representative resources include: Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1993); Barry Liesch, *The New Worship*; W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925; reprinted by Oxford University Press, 1965); Franklin M. Segler, *Understanding, Preparing For, and Practicing Christian Worship* (2nd ed.; Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996); Eric Werner, *The Sacred Bridge: the Interdependence of Liturgy and Music in Synagogue and Church during the First*

Synagogue and Temple worship existed side-by-side. There may have been as many as 394 synagogues in Jerusalem when the Temple was destroyed by Titus. As the transition was made from Temple to Christian worship, the importance of those synagogues cannot be underestimated.

Right at the outset it should be remembered that it was not the Temple but the synagogue that set the pattern for the divine service of the Christian community. The monopoly of the Temple, its festivals of pilgrimage, its minutely regulated sacrificial rituals were the jealously guarded prerogative of the aristocratic hierarchy of Priests and of the nationalistic Zealots.<sup>9</sup>

Few references can be found regarding the role and function of the choir during this transition. While some pieces of the Jewish liturgy can be traced with some reasonable certainty to the emerging Christian liturgy, links to choral function in the synagogue are far more difficult to make. Psalm singing was an important part of the synagogue. There are some talmudic sources which list various lections, benedictions, and other prayers. The Babylonian Talmud gives a description of the musical portion of a synagogue service which seems to intimate the use of a choir.<sup>10</sup> It is not inconceivable that levitical singers who had either served their time or who found themselves cut off from Temple worship may have brought some of their experience and skill into the more intimate synagogue community. Jewish choral music was monophonic with a single melodic line but was often performed antiphonally or responsorially in worship. Nehemiah 12:31-39 describes the use of antiphonal choirs (which, incidentally, also engage in some choreographed pageantry). Whether such elaborate performances were used on a regular basis in the Temple or even transferred to the synagogue is not known for certain. However, Philo of Alexandria describes congregational antiphony in the worship of one Jewish sect.<sup>11</sup>

Due to persecution and the underground nature of the early church, singing was likely limited to the congregation. Like the Levite choirs in exile, the formation of choirs for the early church was probably difficult. The Edict of Milan in A.D. 313 ceased the persecution of the church and allowed public Christian worship. This event gave impetus to the training of choirs. Special schools were set up almost immediately. St. Sylvester, pope from A.D. 314 to 336, established the first *schola cantorum* to prepare musicians for musical service in the church. This type of school existed for centuries and had a significant impact on choirs and choral

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*Millennium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

<sup>9</sup> Werner, *Sacred Bridge*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Sendrey, *Music*, 192.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, "Chorus," in *The New Grove Dictionary*, 5: 768.

music. Gradually, trained choirs of clergy began to take over more of what later became the Mass.<sup>12</sup> I.E. Reynolds, the first director of the school of sacred music at Southwestern Seminary, described the development of choirs from the fourth and fifth centuries:

The Council of Laodicea (367 A.D.) [*sic*] voted to confine the musical execution of the services chiefly to the clergy and choir. This was done because the congregational singing had drifted into a type of singing and character of music which the church fathers believed unworthy of use in the service. Since the rise of the Papacy in the fifth century it has continued to be the policy of the Roman Catholic churches to have the clergy and choir render the music program. From the fourth century on the practice of evening and morning prayers became customary and these had their choral parts.<sup>13</sup>

Reynolds was writing before the influence of Vatican II in 1965 opened up Catholic worship by allowing the use of the vernacular, thus enabling more congregational ownership of worship. However, the domination of clerical choirs in the Mass did persist through the Reformation. The training and support of these choirs was, so to speak, a cost of doing church business. Elwyn Wienandt well summarized the situation which existed in the Middle Ages and Renaissance:

In the *schola cantorum*, we see a church-fostered, church-nurtured organization whose numbers are entirely supported by and dependent upon the Church. We see singers who are singers primarily, but not marketing their talents freely. Instead, their abilities are entirely directed to the organization that supports them - they are resident members, students, priests, and monks.<sup>14</sup>

Wienandt also indicates that “secular singers” (laymen singers looking for employment) also sought musical opportunities with the churches. St. Peter’s Basilica attracted paid singers not only from Italy, but also from around Europe. A study of papal patronage by Christopher Reynolds also suggests that the ornate style of polyphonic music, which had developed by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, encouraged the employment of skilled musicians, particularly those from musically influential northern Europe.<sup>15</sup> Paid choral positions at important venues were highly coveted

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<sup>12</sup> Edwin Liemohn, *The Organ and Choir in Protestant Worship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 8-9; see also Smith, “Chorus—Antiquity and the Middle Ages,” in *The New Grove Dictionary*.

<sup>13</sup> I. E. Reynolds, *The Choir in the Non-Liturgical Church*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> Elwyn A. Wienandt, *Choral Music of the Church* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 16.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher A. Reynolds, *Papal Patronage and the Music of St. Peter’s, 1380-*

and were sometimes requested by fellow church musicians when their colleagues died. They used a document called the *perobitum* to make the request, and the earliest date on the petition to Rome received the position. Indeed, this is the most common form of supplication found in the archives of the Vatican. Due to the slow communications of the time, some enterprising clerics badly second-guessed the deaths of their colleagues. Such was the case for Johannes Vincenetius who had to write a petition of his own in 1443 to tell the Pope that rumors of his death had been exaggerated.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the dynamics of the paid choir, the choral music itself had an effect on the function of the choir as worship leader. Early medieval choral music moved from monody to crude polyphony. Composers of the time were more concerned with the technical and theological organization of the composition than with its actual sound. This produced choral music that, to twentieth-century ears, might sound both discordant and confusing. Church music of the early fourteenth century began to be unified using isorhythms, rather esoteric rhythmic patterns assigned to the various texts of each vocal line.<sup>17</sup> Occasionally choral pieces were organized around a *cantus firmus* (i.e. “fixed melody”), a predetermined melody that could be from the chant, a secular piece, or even another choral composition. Sometimes only a fragment of this melody was used, its notes augmented and stretched out so as to render them unrecognizable to the ear. Other voices were piled on top of the *cantus firmus* in free counterpoint or imitative writing.<sup>18</sup> The textual overlap and the introduction of music from secular sources into liturgical music became elements of concern that were eventually addressed in the Counter-Reformation.

Conservative leaders of the Church became increasingly disturbed by such developments, for in the one case, the text was made largely unintelligible because of the text-phrase overlappings, and in the other, the sanctity of worship was diluted by the presence of popular tunes and secular fragments in the sacred forms.<sup>19</sup>

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1513 (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1995), 5-8.

<sup>16</sup> Pamela F. Starr, “Strange Obituaries: the Historical Uses of the *Perobitum* Supplication,” in *Papal Music and Musicians in the Late Medieval and Renaissance Rome*, ed. Richard Sherr (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 177-79.

<sup>17</sup> Wienandt, *Choral Music*, 79-83.

<sup>18</sup> Homer Ulrich, *A Survey of Choral Music* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

The Protestant Reformation challenged the Catholic Church to revise some of its own practices, including the problems of its choral music. The result was the Council of Trent.

In 1545 a general council of the Church was called at Trent to deal with these problems. The Council lasted, with numerous long interruptions, until 1563, the relationship between music and sacred texts coming under discussion in its final year. Although the recommendations that resulted were very general and went no further than calling for greater intelligibility of the text and the avoidance of impure (that is, secular) influences in the music, they did hasten the development of a restrained, pure, and balanced style, introduced by Jacob Kerle (1531-1591) but carried to its highest point by Palestrina.<sup>20</sup>

If the vehicle used by the choir to lead (i.e., the music sung to communicate the text) proved to be ineffective, then the ability of the choir to actually lead the congregation in worship would be impaired. Many of the choral composers of the Renaissance were godly men, but they were also musical products of their day. While this is a rather sweeping generalization that may border on oversimplification, it is a reasonable conclusion that many church choirs prior to the Reformation, particularly from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries, struggled with their role as worship leaders due to the general fascination of the composers with the mechanics of the music. The communication of the message had been subjugated by the music itself. This does not even deal with the question of setting Latin texts instead of the vernacular. I do not mean to say that the music is not beautiful or cannot be meaningful to those who appreciate its form and construction. Since this early choral music *was* the music of the church (instrumental forms had not really developed yet), there is a sense that we still stand on the musical foundations laid down then, and church musicians today should study it. As far as secular influences are concerned, centuries removed from the context of the late Renaissance, the secular tunes used at that time would not offend today. However, the concern over worldly influences was significant to both Catholics and Protestants of the sixteenth century and continues to be something of a hot topic.

### *The Choir in Europe after the Reformation*

The Protestant Reformation was something of a double-edged sword to choirs in worship. Cutting one way, it freed them to plainly declare biblical truth and God's praise in the language of the people. Slicing back the other direction, the Reformation cut choirs off from worship entirely, leaving them with no leadership role. Much has been written

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



about the influences of the Reformation on church music in general, and congregational music in particular. However, a brief summary dealing with its effects on choirs in leadership is in order.

Martin Luther was a champion of the church choir, including it in a trinity of church music techniques—the choir, the unison chant, and the congregational hymn. Choirs and chant were holdovers from the Roman Rite. For Luther, the choir served two purposes: to lead congregational singing (mainly because he felt the organ was not well suited to the task) and to add beauty through music to the worship. He required that the choral music itself be appropriate for worship, and he did not want the choir to monopolize the service.<sup>21</sup> Despite Luther's good intentions, his use of the choir as an aid to congregational music was initially somewhat hampered by his insistence on using the German chorale melodies, which were always placed in the tenor part. "What was needed was a new type of music in which each note of the chorale melody would have its own harmonic structure and the movement of the various parts would for the most part coincide with that of the melody."<sup>22</sup> This new music did eventually come, resulting in a more homophonic structure that was the precursor of the hymnic format still used today.

In sharp contrast to Luther's Germany, both church choirs and organs became practically non-existent in Protestant churches in Switzerland and the Netherlands under the influence of John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. Zwingli was himself a talented musician but maintained the conviction that no music at all should come into worship. He railed against the polyphonic choral music of his day. "Since church music, as Zwingli knew it, was inseparably connected with the Roman liturgy - of which he wanted no part - and since the choral texts were in Latin, which made them unintelligible to the people he served, he suspended choir singing in 1525 and two years later had the Zürich Cathedral organ destroyed."<sup>23</sup> Calvin was also a musician, favoring its use at home, but "fearful that its seductive and distracting charm would be harmful to pure, public worship. Consequently, he disregarded the choir and its literature completely."<sup>24</sup> This harsh view of choral music in worship did not mean that the art and beauty of the music itself was not appreciated. It was removed so as to avoid any temptations of idolatry, to avoid proclaiming any doctrinal error, and to remove any possible distractions from the worshiper. After the abuses of choral music and choirs that had been experienced leading up to the Reformation, this view was not totally unreasonable. It did moderate with time, however. Liemohn

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<sup>21</sup> Liemohn, *Organ and Choir*, 14-15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-26.

<sup>24</sup> Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 193.

believes that, had Zwingli lived longer, he might have restored music to his worship services.<sup>25</sup> Later in England, eighteenth-century dissenting congregations eased their restrictions on choirs in worship, resulting in the creation of the futing tune to help country choirs elaborate metrical psalmody.<sup>26</sup>

### *The Choir in England after the Reformation*

The Anglican Church or Church of England made much more extensive use of choral music, borrowing heavily upon the Catholic sources it closely mirrored. Choir members in the city churches made a living as church musicians. In 1679 when Henry Purcell, the renowned English composer, was organist at Westminster Abbey, “the music staff consisted of 4 singing minor canons, 12 lay-clerks - one of whom was the Master of the Choristers - and 10 boys.”<sup>27</sup> The system for training boys for church choirs, which had started in the *schola cantorum* of the fourth century, was still alive in England. The patronage system for choirs was beginning to wane, though. Phillips reports that

under the Stuarts the choir at St. Paul’s [Cathedral] which had contained thirty “gentlemen” was whittled down to contain only six vicars-choral, and Bumpas<sup>28</sup> quotes an anonymous manuscript in the British Museum showing that choirs were depleted so that the existing singers could obtain a living wage by compounding salaries or to line the canon’s pockets.<sup>29</sup>

Since the Anglican country parishes could not afford to pay for the upkeep of a choir, “rude gallery choirs” were enlisted from the congregation, sometimes regardless of musical skill. They sang in the upper gallery (balcony) of the church where the organ was located.<sup>30</sup> “The unsatisfactory state of congregational singing by the late 17th century, particularly in provincial parish churches, resulted in the formation of amateur, initially male, choirs. Unfortunately, their increasing skill and desire for more elaborate music silenced the very congregations they were supposed to encourage.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Liemohn, *Organ and Choir*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Crawford, “Futing Tune,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 9: 317.

<sup>27</sup> C. Henry Phillips, *The Singing Church: an Outline History of the Music Sung by Choir and People*, (new ed. Arthur Hutchings; London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 147.

<sup>28</sup> Bumpas, *A History of English Cathedral Music*, Vol. I, 92; quoted in Phillips, *The Singing Church*, 142.

<sup>29</sup> Phillips, *Singing Church*, 142.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>31</sup> Henri Vanhulst, “Gallery Music,” in *The New Grove Dictionary*, 9: 445-46, 445.

From 1649 to 1660 England endured the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell and a Puritan-controlled government. During this period both choirs and organs were considered an abomination and practically disappeared. What vocal music there was at the time circled around metrical psalmody and the hymn tune.<sup>32</sup> As with the followers of Zwingli and Calvin, most Puritans did not object to music itself. For example, while John Cotton forbade instruments in worship, he did not forbid their use at home. Puritans primarily objected to elaborate church music, particularly that music which did not seem to edify the congregation as a whole. Objections were even raised to antiphonal choral singing of a psalm, not on musical grounds but theological, fearing that the tossing back and forth of the words would somehow mock God and puff up the singers with pride. As Horton Davies commented, "It was not that they disliked art, but that they loved religion more."<sup>33</sup> While choral music and choirs suffered badly during the Commonwealth, they returned during the Restoration when Charles II took the throne after exile in Europe. Charles brought back with him European musical influences introducing instrumental music and florid opera style to the cathedral music. The older style of polyphonic church music based on the old Catholic style fell out of fashion.<sup>34</sup>

### *The Choir in America*

Church choirs began to proliferate in America in the mid-eighteenth century. Development was slow. "It must be remembered that although each county in England supposedly had its professional cathedral choir, there were never any such choirs brought over to this country. Individual musicians migrated, but wherever choirs were established they began with untrained, amateur voices and proceeded to build their own traditions with no professional models for comparison."<sup>35</sup> Most American choirs of the early 1800s were located in galleries in the rear of the church. Sometimes congregations would actually stand and turn around to face the singers.<sup>36</sup> Liemohn described the functioning of a typical American church choir of the time:

While special seats were assigned to the choir, their only function at first was to "set the tune" and to lead the congregation in singing the psalms.

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<sup>32</sup> Phillips, *Singing Church*, 116-17.

<sup>33</sup> Horton Davies, *The Worship of English Puritans* (Dacre Press, 1948; reprint, Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1997), 268-72.

<sup>34</sup> Liemohn, *Organ and Choir*, 55-56.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard Ellinwood, *The History of American Church Music* (New York: Morehouse Gorham, 1953), 19.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

Before long, however, they were beginning to contribute special selections on their own. Hymn books published in the second half of the century would frequently include a few anthems for the choir.<sup>37</sup>

There was still much dissent about even using a choir to lead versus a solo precentor. Some churches held out long against choirs, singing congregational psalms only. Trained choir directors were indeed scarce. Sometime they had to enlist whoever was willing from the congregation or even the town.<sup>38</sup>

In the 1770s the concept of the fugo tune came over from England and influenced a group of so-called Yankee tunesmiths, some of the earliest true American composers. William Billings was perhaps the most well-known of these composers whose influential tune books contained some of the first printed choral music in America. Due to the influence of European music and musicians, the rather musically primitive fugo tunes fell out of fashion and church choirs began to sing more sophisticated music. The melody moved from the tenor to the soprano part (which was a point of controversy for some) and some choirs even began to wear robes. The appearance of choir robes was an outgrowth of the Oxford Movement in England which started in 1833 and spread to American churches by mid-century.<sup>39</sup> Also as an outgrowth of the Oxford Movement, choirs began moving from the rear galleries to the front to be seated in divided chancels. This necessitated a processional by the choir to get to front of the church. This, too, created some controversy.<sup>40</sup>

Another influence on American church choirs from the Oxford Movement was the quartet choir. This was a group of four singers (one per part) who were paid to sing, sometimes by themselves or sometimes imbedded in a larger volunteer organization. Part of the argument for these quartets was the musical unreliability and behavior during the sermon of volunteer choir members. The quartets also had their problems. Quartet members were subject to musical vanity and would sometimes slip out during the sermon. There were actually anthems written which gave each part a featured solo. Liemohn commented that those pieces were not really church music in a functional sense. "It was more of a sporting proposition, with the soloists vying with one another to impress their 'audience,' as in a concert at the opera house, with the soloists singing to the worshipers instead of aiding them by means of their musical contributions to participate in the service."<sup>41</sup> Some of these

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<sup>37</sup> Liemohn, *Organ and Choir*, 115.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-16.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-21.

<sup>40</sup> Ellinwood, *History*, 81-86.

<sup>41</sup> Liemohn, *Organ and Choir*, 125.

quartet choirs persisted in liturgical churches into the early twentieth century.

The revivals of the nineteenth century were another influence on the American church choir, perhaps of more direct influence than anything previous in music history. Using the choir during an invitation was an innovation by Ira Sankey.

Moody, having made his usual plea for those who were willing to be saved to rise from their seats and then come forward to the inquiry rooms, would motion to Sankey; Sankey would gently sound a chord on the organ, and the choir would sing . . . as the penitents walked down the aisles. These songs were called “invitation hymns” and specifically written for the purpose of coaxing people out of their seats and into the inquiry rooms.<sup>42</sup>

The choir was becoming an extension of the message, assisting the preacher in proclaiming the gospel and asking for a response to the claims of Christ. This was a significant step in worship leadership.

Two other music evangelists broke new ground with the choir’s role in the evangelistic services. Charles Alexander worked with R. A. Torrey as soloist and chorister. Alexander preferred the percussive attack and cadenzas of the piano to the organ to help accompany all the music (this was something new that later transferred itself to the churches). He also used the choir to set the stage for the message of the evangelist.

It was a remarkable innovation in revivalism when “Charlie” [Alexander] warmed up a crowd by having the choir of six hundred to a thousand voices sing a rousing hymn like “O Lord Send the Power Just Now” and then turned to the audience and ask them to sing a chorus just to see if they could sing it louder than the choir.<sup>43</sup>

Was this true worship leadership by the choir? Not really. However, the concept of the choir as cheerleader, which is sometimes seen today, began to take hold at this time. “Setting the pattern for a number of song leaders after him, Alexander believed it was his task to ‘warm up’ the congregation with rousing singing, buoyant good will, and brisk choir music before Torrey appeared on the platform.”<sup>44</sup> Homer A. Rodeheaver picked up where Alexander left off with the revival choir. Working alongside Billy Sunday, “Rody” Rodeheaver would sometimes direct choirs of two thousand people. Playing the trombone and working the

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<sup>42</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finny to Billy Graham* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1959), 238-39.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>44</sup> Keith J. Hardman, *Seasons of Refreshing: Evangelism and Revivals in America*, with foreword by Luis Palau (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 221.

crowd with his personality, Rodeheaver used music even more powerfully than had Alexander.<sup>45</sup>

### *The Choir Today*

In the early part of the twentieth century, glee clubs (choirs) were a popular form of entertainment which proliferated across America. While there are still a number of choirs now at the beginning of the twenty-first century, community choruses are not as numerous and school choirs (along with many fine arts programs) sometimes face an uphill battle for survival. In this day of sound bytes, fast television commercials, microwave cooking, instant global communication via the Internet, and widely available recordings of incredible variety and quality, going to sit down in a room and quietly listen to people sing in a choir may seem archaic to the uninitiated.

Church growth experts encourage pastors and worship leaders to listen to the radio, survey the people in the community they want to reach and gear the style of their music accordingly.<sup>46</sup> The logic is that if the musical style is more familiar to prospects, it will not produce unnecessary barriers as these folks attend the worship services. A soft rock style (i.e. music built around a rhythm section of traps, bass guitar, and keyboard) is the musical underpinning for an incredible amount of music found on the radio up and down the spectrum of popular musical styles. If worship leaders are basing their convictions about the relevance of the choir on the Top 40, then choirs as worship leaders may be passé.

The popular formats are also based on small groups of singers or soloists on microphones as opposed to large groups of people singing together (a choir). Popular music inspires something like a karaoke effect, the idea that everyone can be a soloist. Harold Best commented on this development of “soloism” in the arts.

Individualism has metamorphosed into soloism. I don't mean soloists; I mean soloism, that unique and dangerous aberration in the human ego where center stage is the only possibility, and where change, stimulus, and growth become increasingly dependent on the soloistic charisma of an individual; where business, the arts, the media, and lately, our churches, are compelled to seek out the most powerful soloist.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 233-34.

<sup>46</sup> William Easum, *Dancing with Dinosaurs: Ministry in a Hostile and Hurting World* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 84; and Charles Arn, *How to Start a New Service: Your Church Can Reach New People*, with foreword by Leith Anderson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 123.

<sup>47</sup> Harold Best, “What’s Ahead for the Church in the 1990s?” in *On the State of Church Music* (ed. Thomas B. Milligan; Jefferson City, TN: Center for Church Music, Carson Newman College, 1992), 17.

Best may have a point. In one church I served, I had people come to me who were interested in singing on the praise team. I then invited them to choir practice, since all my soloists and praise team members were pulled from the main worship choir. Most were not interested in the choir, however. They only wanted to know when the praise team rehearsed. Few of those people actually followed through with a commitment to the choir to later become a member of the praise team. Praise teams have proliferated in churches, sometimes to the detriment of the choir. The choir has become, for some, a second-class musical citizen.

There are other musical forces at work that are also affecting the efficacy of the church choir. Churches in the last century have largely depended upon the public schools and private teachers to provide the musical training necessary to read music and be competent church musicians. This dependency on outside help is beginning to catch up with the church. For example, there is a shortage of trained keyboard players, causing particular problems for smaller membership churches in need of accompanists. Some of the larger churches have started fine arts institutes to try to remedy this problem. One result of poorer musical preparation in schools is that decidedly fewer people know how to sing in parts. Others simply have problems matching pitch. These difficulties can make choir rehearsals and worship preparation for the choir more difficult.<sup>48</sup> Learning to match pitch goes all the way back to childhood. Lack of exposure to music and singing at that time can musically impair people as adults.<sup>49</sup> In the past just singing hymns in church (which are based on a simple, homophonic, four-part musical structure) encouraged part singing among the congregation at large. This, in turn, fed music readers to the choir. However, more widespread singing of unison choruses and the absence of music to look at during congregational singing (due to the use of projected text) have probably contributed to the erosion of part singing. There has also been a trend in twentieth-century hymnody toward the writing and arranging of unison hymns. A survey of the three Southern Baptist hymnals shows a marked increase in unison writing from the 1956 hymnal to the 1991 edition.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Lee Hinson, "Teaching Music to Your Choir: How Do They Learn," (*The Music Stand, Glory Songs Kit*, LifeWay Church Resources, Winter 2002-2003), 1; and "Teaching Music to Your Choir: Using Their Learning Styles," (*The Music Stand, Glory Songs Kit*, LifeWay Church Resources, Spring 2003), 1.

<sup>49</sup> For information on how children develop musically see Rhonda J. Edge and Barbara Sanders, *How to Lead Preschoolers in Musical Activities* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1991), 31-34; and Mary DeLaine Allcock and Madeline Bridges, *How to Lead Children's Choirs* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1991), 212-17.

<sup>50</sup> The 1956 *Baptist Hymnal* edited by W. Hines Sims only has two unison hymn arrangements, while the *Baptist Hymnal* published in 1975 and edited by William J.

## Conclusion

### *Connections to the Past*

Is the choral activity in our churches connected to historical and biblical models? This is not merely a question for friendly debate among music and worship scholars. The answer to this question drives our entire approach to the choir as worship leader. If what we do does have a connection, then making the church choir work should have some priority. If there is no connection, it really does not matter what we do, and we can turn away from all that has come before without even looking back. For those who ask, “Why have a choir?” we must have a cogent answer.

First, does the Bible mandate that our churches have a choir? I have heard it said that the choir is biblical. Based on the survey of biblical literature, there is no command to have a choir. It is, however, scripturally mandated that we sing and sing corporately. If that singing occasionally finds expression in a choral fashion, then that can add to the worship experience. That being said, simply dismissing choral music in worship would be to ignore how powerfully choirs were used in the worship of the Old Testament. There is a significant biblical heritage for the choir in worship. Like any system that fallen man touches, the choir in worship can be corrupted and mishandled. In spite of that, the choir has the potential and, more importantly, the biblical blessing to bring something unique and special to worship.

The big disconnect for evangelicals with the choirs of Scripture is the fact that most of the choirs described in the Old Testament were paid choirs of professional clergy. Paid choir members are an anathema to most people in the free church tradition. In this sense, there is not really a connection with the biblical model. Interestingly, I. E. Reynolds thought differently. For him, the paid singer should be normative.

The greatest alibi for the volunteer choir is that the church is financially unable to remunerate the musicians and that there is as much reason or scripture for paying the officers and teachers in the Sunday School, and the leaders in Young People’s Work as there is for paying the musicians, all of which is true. The scriptural plan, in both the Old and New Testaments, was to pay all religious workers without discrimination. If present-day churches [1938] were on the Bible plan of financing, they would be able to all they should do financially.<sup>51</sup>

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Reynolds, included sixty unison hymns, *The Baptist Hymnal* published in 1991 and edited by Wesley L. Forbis contains sixty-eight unison hymn arrangements.

<sup>51</sup> I. E. Reynolds, 25.



Reynolds admits in his book that this is a delicate subject and should not be forced on a church. He was merely drawing some personal conclusions from Scripture. For Reynolds, paying would raise the quality of music and increase the dependability of the musicians. The apostle Paul did encourage the churches to take care of the ones who made their living off the gospel, but Scripture tells us that sometimes even Paul refused his salary for the sake of the gospel (1 Thessalonians 2:5-6). The survey of music history also showed that paying the choir does not always produce the desired result in either quality or spiritual service.

Second, does what we do with choirs have a connection to other church choirs throughout music history? As was perhaps obvious in the historical survey, there are many streams of choral music that run through history. Sometimes the streams dried up and went nowhere. Others seemed to overflow their banks and flood the surrounding landscape. Some persisted for centuries while others lasted less than a generation. In a very general functional sense, the choirs found in our churches today are descendents of all choirs that have ever sung in a church. Christians throughout the centuries have had choirs singing as part of worship, probably because of the presence of choirs in Scripture. Until the Reformation this was not even questioned. When the reformers put everything in worship on the table for re-evaluation, they came to different conclusions about the role of the choir in worship. Some overcorrected and abandoned the choir (and even singing) entirely. For them, the choir was just a reminder of other things that were theologically abhorrent and so everything had to go. Even through all this change, the church choir has continued to exist, and the fact that the institution has survived through history should make it difficult to dismiss today.

On a technical level, the connections between the choir of the twenty-first century and church choirs of the past are divided. There are some choral traditions that have no real link to what is done in evangelical circles today. The quartet choir, for example, was a relatively short-lived institution that holds little influence for today's volunteer church choir. The Oxford Movement helped move choirs to the front of the church and introduced choir robes to American choirs, both readily recognizable elements in churches today. Some of the strongest connections are with the revival choirs under the direction of Sankey, Alexander, and Rodeheaver. In fact, a case could be made that the tenor of Southern Baptist worship services in the twentieth century was hugely influenced by the model of the nineteenth-century revival meetings.

Historically, many American evangelical groups first introduced choirs in revival settings of the nineteenth century, and the singers were considered to be an extension of the ministry of proclamation; for this

reason they were usually seated in the center platform behind the preacher.<sup>52</sup>

The choir as a proclaimer of the gospel message and its use to help set a mood (something new in church music history) come directly from the revival choir.

Historical precedent is not a reason to continue using the choir as a worship leader. History can be, however, an excellent teacher and friend.

### *Implications for the Choir in Twenty-First Century Worship*

Luther wanted the choir to aid the congregation in their singing and to add some beauty to the service. Franklin Segler echoes Luther's sentiments.

The church choir has two tasks in worship. First, it should lead the congregation in expressing worship through the singing of hymns. Second, it should provide choral music which will inspire and enrich the worship experience of the entire congregation.<sup>53</sup>

The first of these functions is perhaps the highest and best purpose a choir has as a worship leader. Since a choir can be an effective tool for assisting the uncertain singers in the congregation (and does not require the skill levels of the praise team), that reason alone should keep the choir alive and well. With regard to beauty, some evangelicals are afraid of the artistic side of the choir. There is good reason to fear it, and there are both historical and biblical examples to serve as warning signs. That notwithstanding, making and listening to well-done choral music that praises the Creator and Redeemer can be a magnificently lifting experience.

Admittedly, listeners must avoid the temptations of idolatry; they must not hear a "transcendent" choir for music's sake, nor receive a transcendent experience solely as pleasure. But, if the attitude is right, the imagination can soar on the wings of text and music, both of which reveals something of a numinous God.<sup>54</sup>

Edmunds Lorenz notes that the simplicity of congregational song limits the musical expression that can be applied to worship. For Lorenz, the choir enriches and adds variety to the service while helping the congregation with its singing. In addition to these roles, he believes the choir can help build an enthusiasm or *esprit de corps* for the church

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<sup>52</sup> Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 389.

<sup>53</sup> Segler, *Worship*, 97.

<sup>54</sup> Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 111.

members and attract people to the church. However, he also warns against pride overriding devotion and the concertizing of a worship service. The “artistic choir” which gobbles up the worship time has no place in the church.<sup>55</sup> James White, worship theologian, says churches should rid themselves of that sort of choir.

Choral music . . . should be subject to a careful theological scrutiny. Where a choir does not foster corporate worship, or when it actually impedes it, the choir is expendable. Even excellent music should be rejected if it detracts from the worship of the church. After all, a large portion of Protestantism worshiped for more than three centuries without choirs.<sup>56</sup>

Eric Routley adds one more suggestion to help the choir and the congregation connect in worship. In a time before presentation software and projected text, he said the words of the choir anthem ought to be presented to the worshipers. “This is not an insult to the choir’s diction. It is to give the unmusical person a visual image of the idea that the choir is setting to music.”<sup>57</sup> In today’s visually-oriented society, using video projectors to project not only words but pictures can be a powerful amplification of the choir anthem.

In addition to the previously mentioned purposes for the choir, Barry Liesch adds another: “An additional dimension needs emphasis [in worship] if we are to catch the picture of *kerygma* communication. *Kerygma* includes evangelism. Paul anticipates a time that visiting unbelievers will be converted during worship services (I Corinthians 14:24-25).”<sup>58</sup> The revival choir picked up on this function in worship, and the evangelical choir of today embraces it gladly. Anthems that proclaim the gospel message are a significant part of the choir’s worship repertoire. Special programs such as pageants and other seasonal productions that involve the choir are driven by the desire to evangelize the unchurched.

There are also some administrative reasons to have a choir. A choir provides an entry-level organization in the music ministry for those with little skill or experience in music. In this way, a person can gain some hands-on training in singing and reading music. It allows anyone at any

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<sup>55</sup> Lorenz, *Music*, 216-22.

<sup>56</sup> James F. White, “Church Choir: Friend or Foe?” (originally published in *The Christian Century*, 23 March 1960), cited in *Opinions on Church Music: Comments and Reports from Four and a Half Centuries*, ed. Elwyn Wienandt (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 1974), 180-81.

<sup>57</sup> Eric Routley, *Church Music and the Christian Faith*, with a foreword by Martin E. Marty (Carol Stream, IL: Agape, 1978), 117.

<sup>58</sup> Liesch, *New Worship*, 165.

ability level to have a role in worship leadership. Certainly, they would need more detailed instruction in both music and worship, but the choir would be a practical introductory experience. Praise teams are by nature a closed system. Even if there is some sort of rotation, not everyone can take part (nor would they all be welcome). These teams of singers require a higher level of vocal skills. In an organizational way, they resemble the levitical choirs found in the Temple or the quartet choirs of England and early America. On the other hand, a choir would provide opportunity for involvement without exposing possible weaknesses. One of the great disadvantages of the praise team is a great strength for a choir, even a small one. Voices that do not blend well with others are even harder to hide when they are miked. A choir can better blend harsh tone qualities and correct (or hide) sagging intonation.

There were warnings above regarding the “artistic choir” and what Harold Best called “soloism.” A choir can be a way to filter possible praise team members and soloists, giving them a place to validate their servant spirit. Praise teams are by nature more subject to the “spotlight effect”—a subtle stroking of the ego due to the soloistic performance setting. Although not totally immune from this syndrome, choir members will be somewhat protected. I am spiritually suspicious of the talented person that can never seem to find the time to assist the choir as they lead worship, but will rearrange their entire schedule to make a praise team rehearsal or sing a solo.

On a musical level, a choir can be a real asset, helping a congregation negotiate musical transitions in worship. Today’s worship leaders may weave together many disparate musical materials to make a tapestry of praise. Modulations and interludes can sometimes leave the congregation behind. It must be remembered that many in the congregation are uncertain singers who are not confident in their abilities to match a pitch well, much less do something out of the ordinary with a song. A well-coached choir can help the congregation by making sure the melody is heard or that the modulatory chords make sense to the ears of the listeners. A strong choir augmented by a praise team that is not overamplified is a truly effective combination to aid congregational participation in a musically sophisticated worship service.

Finally, there is one last ministry-oriented reason one may want a choir—outreach. This one is somewhat controversial. For some, the presence of the obviously lost in the choir is inappropriate. This entire article has been about the role of worship leadership of the choir. How can a lost person singing in the choir lead worship? In reality, they cannot. Yet, the choir as a totality is leading worship, not the individual person. If their participation in the rehearsals and services brings them under the influence of the gospel and builds positive relationships with

believers that eventually brings them to faith in Christ, does that not bring glory to God also? Lost people may be engaging in an openly sinful lifestyle that causes the choir problems. However, the same can happen with a believer that is singing in the choir. This is a ministry philosophy decision that balances the needs of worship with the goals of evangelism. The pastor and minister of music should make this decision together. If the worship team decides that lost people can participate in the choir, a system should be put in place that connects them with strong believers in a choir care group or other small group setting.

Can the church choir survive the transitions of the twenty-first century? It has proved a resilient and versatile organization down through history. As White pointed out, believers have done without the choir. Yet it did come back. The forms and music changed with time and it sometimes struggled with its role in worship. But overall it fulfilled its purpose. The church choir will continue to have a place as a leader in worship. There is a rich opportunity waiting for the worship leaders of the future who choose to embrace and not abandon the choir.

## **Was Black Theology Another Religion: What Did Black Christians Think?**

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Was Black theology, in its infancy, another religion?<sup>1</sup> This question is essential to a Christian or Evangelical engagement with Black theology in the 21st century. The placement of Black theology within or without the boundaries of orthodox Christianity during the late 1960s and early 1970s is telling on the placement of its subsequent development. Incidentally, it would be presumptuous to assume that all Black theologians wanted to be considered Christian. Gayraud Wilmore said black experience might need “a unique religion, closely related to, but not exclusively bound by, the Christian tradition.”<sup>2</sup>

This paper will seek to address historically two questions: (1) “Was Black theology, in its infancy, another religion as distinguished from Christianity?” (2) “Was Black theology a prophetic challenge to Christians in America, from within the bounds of Christianity, to actualize biblical Christianity?”<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this historical survey of Black

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented on November 21, 2002, at the Evangelical Theological Society’s annual meeting in Toronto, Canada.

<sup>2</sup> James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology A Documentary History Volume One: 1966-1979*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1993), 132. This identity issue is not new. In 1971, J. Deotis Roberts highlighted the distinction between the call for Black Power and its attendant religious expressions over against Christianity. He says, “Many blacks who are not Christian are associated with ‘the religion of Black Power.’ A black theologian who operates from the Christian faith has difficulty being heard in this company, however angry he may be. Vincent Harding is the braintrust of this Black Power religion. James Cone is on the fence between the Christian faith and the religion of Black Power. It will be necessary for Cone to decide presently where he will take his firm stand. The present writer [Roberts] takes his stand within the Christian theological circle.” J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 21.

<sup>3</sup> The academic architect of Black theology felt that a legitimate gap or void in theology was being addressed. James Cone says, “The appearance of Black theology on the scene is due to the failure of white religionists to relate the gospel of Jesus to the pain of being black in a white racist society.” James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 23. He finds fault in the north (which ignored black suffering in its theology) and in the south (which justified black suffering

theology's infancy will aid current analysis of this cultural, academic, and religious phenomenon. This paper will seek to engage the early responses of black pastors within black denominations, black clergy within white denominations, and black and white theologians. In order to avoid the hypothetical charge that whites cannot, without prejudice, critique blacks due to their lack of experience with slavery, racism, and segregation<sup>4</sup>, this paper will mainly interact with black preachers, black theologians, and African theologians. This type of historical analysis is relevant as one considers the 21st century because James Cone said the second generation of writers, while not merely repeating the first, did build off of the earlier foundation.<sup>5</sup> While there has been expansion<sup>6</sup> and maturation in Black theology, there has been no reorientation or reformation to shift it from its original moorings within or without the bounds of Christianity. Before engaging the above questions, in order to provide vital existential context, this paper will survey three historical realities that contributed to the environment from which Black theology emerged and briefly gauge the pre-Black theology response of black Christians to these circumstances.

This type of historical analysis and critique of Black theology, in the midst of a still racist society (and "Christian" church) must be done with the disclaimer that the racism that provoked the circumstances that created Black theology was, and still is, a legitimate evil to be addressed. Bruce Fields, an evangelical, rightly says, "Black theologians voice insensitivities, inconsistencies, and blatant hypocrisy on the part of the dominant white traditions."<sup>7</sup> Legitimate pain, disappointment, and disillusionment have characterized the African, Afro-Virginian, slave, Negro, N\_ \_ \_ \_ , and Black experience of Christianity in America.

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in its theology). *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, 112. Also, Cone "will not listen to anybody who refuses to take racism seriously, especially when they themselves have not been victims of it." *Ibid.*, 273. However, John H. Carey rightly notes, "When he [Cone] denies that white theology can criticize or inform black theology, he is reinforcing the exclusivism that is characteristic of all sectarian and cultic groups." John H. Carey, "What Can We Learn From Black Theology?" *Theological Studies* 35 (S 1974): 523.

<sup>5</sup> James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume II 1980-1992* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1993), 1-11.

<sup>6</sup> Expansion includes the acceptance, by many in the Black theology community of pluralism, syncretism, radical feminism, anti-supernaturalism, and anti-heterosexism or heterophobia. Black Womanist theology assaults the traditional understandings of suffering and substitutionary atonement.

<sup>7</sup> Bruce L. Fields, *Introducing Black Theology: Three Crucial Questions for the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2001), 48.

### Historical Realities

What was the “problem” Black theology was seeking to address?<sup>8</sup> What pain, despair, or frustration led to the attempt to develop a unique theology that would give expression, dignity, and humanity to the black experience of Christianity in America? At least three historical realities (problems) contributed to the rise of Black theology.

#### *Slavery, Segregation, Etc.*

First, blacks in America had the historical memory of chattel slavery and the contemporary experience of segregation and racial prejudice. This had been, and was, a historical reality both inside and outside of the “Christian” church. Particularly revealing of the influence of slavery among Christians were the denominational splits of the 1840s that occurred among Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists along sectional lines.<sup>9</sup> Regarding the issue of race, many found Christianity, as practiced by white Americans to be complicit or indifferent to issues of racism, both historically (regarding slavery) and in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement.<sup>10</sup>

Historically, blacks have always seen through the hypocrisy of the racist imposter of Christianity practiced in America.<sup>11</sup> The ability to distinguish between genuine Christianity and white American religiosity was always present with slaves. Slave narratives reveal that early in colonial life illiterate slaves, without being able to read the Bible, recognized the lie of their masters and the deception of the truncated gospel that was preached to them focusing on “servants, obey your masters.” As early as the mid-1700s, black Baptists were establishing

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<sup>8</sup> Roger Olson lists Black theology among a number of “problem theologies” that sought to address social, political, and economic problems including theologies developed by blacks, liberationists in South America, and feminists. See *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 602-06. These theologies shift the emphasis of salvation from God’s problem with man, and replace it with an emphasis on man’s problem with man.

<sup>9</sup> Edwin S. Gaustad, *A Documentary History of Religion in America to the Civil War* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 467-502.

<sup>10</sup> The issue of race in Christianity is currently as potent as it was in the 1960s. Nearly thirty years later, major denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, were still seeking to address the issue. “Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention” in Timothy George and Robert Smith, Jr., *A Mighty Long Journey: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 223-25.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Douglass, for example, distinguished between “the slaveholding religion of this land” and Christianity proper. He also spoke of the “Christianity of this land” and the “Christianity of Christ.” See “Evangelical Flogging” in Jon Butler and Harry S. Stout, eds., *Religion in American History: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 222-31.



separate churches in which to worship without the presence of racism. In 1787, Richard Allen founded the Free African Society (which would become the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816) after experiencing racism in Philadelphia's Methodist Church. The nineteenth century is filled with revolts by slaves using biblical narratives for their justification and oratorical attacks against racism in society and especially among those professing to be Christians. The early and mid-twentieth century was never void of a prophetic black Christian thinker to shout against the evils of racism.

During the 1780s, a "window of opportunity" quickly shut. The Awakening, with its accompanying emphasis on conversion and vital religion, "pricked the consciences of the churches on the subject of slavery."<sup>12</sup> During the 1780s Baptists were preaching against slavery, Methodists were passing resolutions against slavery, and Presbyterians were finding slavery wanting for theological justification. However, secular culture prevailed over the conviction that briefly surfaced. By the 1960s, nearly two hundred years later, many black Christians did not want the Christian church to miss another opportunity to be genuine in the practice of Christianity.

The pre-Black Power Christian thinkers and clergy were committed "to the ideology of integration [that] led them to think of ethnic and cultural background as incidental to the doing of theology."<sup>13</sup> Their belief in the power of Christianity was not eclipsed by bitterness and they were able to consider Christianity's potential in America. Benjamin Mays said, "The Christian religion . . . is potentially, and at times actually, the most powerful weapon a minority group has to press its claim for equal opportunities for survival."<sup>14</sup> However deep-seated were the problems of racism, Mays did not believe Christian teaching had to be discarded in order to address the evil. In contrast to the thrust of early Black theology, Mays acknowledged that black churches could be just as unchristian as white churches regarding the (racial) universality of the church. Rather than suggest any preferred status, "Mays cautioned Negroes not to think that they were more virtuous than whites simply because they were oppressed."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (Cleveland: Menden Books, 1929), 244. Also see Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) and Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>13</sup> Mark Chapman, *Christianity on Trial: African-American Religious Thought Before and After Black Power* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

The history of white Christianity's failure (in America) to address, prophetically, the practice of slavery, the attacks on emancipation and reconstruction, and the dehumanizing act of segregation contributed to the environment from which Black Power/theology emerged.

### *Nation of Islam*

Second, Elijah Muhammad and his Nation of Islam (NOI) were issuing stinging critiques of Christianity as the "white man's religion" that was merely used as a tool of oppression and imperialism. Preceding the rise of Black theology, the NOI's chief spokesman was Malcolm X. His rhetoric provoked and challenged black clergy and laymen to reconsider their affiliation with a religion that had historically sanctioned their oppression and the denial of their humanity. In addition to critiquing Christianity as a whole, Muhammad and Malcolm X often critiqued the ineffectiveness of the Black church as an agent of social change in the Black community and the immorality of the Black church's leadership and membership.

Essential Christian truths, such as the Trinity, the virgin birth, and the resurrection, were being scoffed at by Muhammad. Jesus was affirmed as being merely a prophet. In an environment where the NOI is mocking essential Christian doctrines, a Christian response must, by necessity, affirm those essential doctrines. A small voice of response that was not well known was the National Black Evangelical Association, founded in 1963. In response to the dehumanizing segregation and racism experienced in American Christianity, William H. Bentley said, "Before 'Black Power' became the rallying cry it later did, some Black evangelicals among us were thinking seriously in terms of group [Black] consciousness."<sup>16</sup> This group sought to develop a Black evangelical critique of racism and yet maintain a theological system that would not succumb to experientialism. Bentley warned, "In fleeing from the lion we seek to make certain that we do not fall into the arms of the subjective bear."<sup>17</sup>

Often, instead of contending for essential Christian doctrine, Black theology's writers dismissed these doctrines as "secondary," "unimportant," or "petty." By the time of the rise of Black Power/theology, the NOI had been attacking Christianity for nearly thirty years.<sup>18</sup> At the height of his attack, Muhammad boldly claimed that

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<sup>16</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, 234.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>18</sup> "The teachings and doctrines of Elijah Muhammad's NOI . . . were specifically developed as a critique of Christianity and its disastrous effect upon 'the so-called Negroes in the wilderness of North America' . . . yet, it is important to note that Elijah Muhammad was not primarily concerned about the distinctive theological claims of

“Rev. King is of no good among black people.”<sup>19</sup> Surely, a Black Christian response would defend against such a sustained assault. To the contrary, often the early writings in support of Black theology reflected an embrace of Malcolm X as a comrade rather than a foe ridiculing the faith of the Negro church.<sup>20</sup> Some were shaken by the constant attack and desired to reformulate Christianity.<sup>21</sup> The NOI’s assault on the Negro church (and the Negro church’s response) is important because Elijah Muhammad’s followers may have “prompted the articulation of black liberation theology as much, *if not more*, than the emergence of Black Power in the summer of 1966” (emphasis mine).<sup>22</sup>

### *Black Power*

Third, Stokely Carmichael’s 1966 call for “Black Power” signified the emergence of a new socio-political ideology that was frustrated with the integrationist and nonviolent goals of Dr. Martin Luther King and the Negro Church-based Civil Rights Movement. Black Power called for a separatist approach to race relations with blacks demanding their rights and dignity from whites and being willing to take them by “any means necessary,” including violence. This examination of Black theology will often make reference to Black Power, the socio-political movement in the 1960s. The references are practically inseparable because many of the proponents of Black theology described it as merely the “religious arm” of the Black Power movement. Cone reflected back on himself as the “theologian of the Black Power movement.”<sup>23</sup> Cone said, “Black Power activists . . . welcomed Black theology as an intellectual articulation of the religious dimensions of the black liberation

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orthodox Islam; he was concerned about repudiating Christianity and developing a black religion that could speak directly to the social and psychological needs of poor blacks in the urban ghettos of America.” Mark Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 42, 57.

<sup>19</sup> Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Black Man* (Philadelphia: Hakim’s Publications, 1965), 242, quoted in Mark Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> Cone said, “We did not care whether Black theology met the intellectual criteria for doing theology as defined by the White theologians who had taught us. We were listening to the voice of Malcolm X . . .” Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1980-1992*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 64. Chapman said, “Indeed black theologians would do well to reconsider the theological objections some blacks have to doctrinal Christianity; this might lead to a constructive reinterpretation of Christian theology that addresses the theological concerns of the African-American community.”

<sup>22</sup> Mark Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 9. Also, according to Chapman, “when the theology of Elijah Muhammad joined forces with the cry of Black Power, the trial of Christianity in the African-American community reached a watershed.” *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>23</sup> James Cone, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), xxiv. He further says his “turn to blackness was an even deeper conversion-experience than the turn to Jesus.” *Ibid.*, xxi.

struggle.”<sup>24</sup> These “religious dimensions” of Black Power could not have been Christian, because many Black Power advocates were questioning the very sufficiency of Christianity. According to Chapman, the movement boldly questioned the “integrationist, Civil Rights Movement, and its Christian foundation,” by asking, “could one lay claim to Christian faith and also reject nonviolence?”<sup>25</sup> Great cultural pressure was brought to bear in the black community that made “Black Power the litmus test of authentic black leadership.” In this atmosphere, young activists “labeled Martin Luther King and other ministers as ‘Rev. Sambos’.”<sup>26</sup>

In the 1968 book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, Martin Luther King provided valuable insight into the mind-set that led to the adoption of the slogan “Black Power” by members of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). The weight that should be given to King’s insight is revealed in the comment by Vincent Harding that “no discussion of black religion in America today [1968] can ignore the immensely important figure of Martin Luther King.”<sup>27</sup> James Cone finds King’s significance to American Christianity of long-lasting effect. He says, “after King no theologian or preacher dares to defend racial segregation. He destroyed its moral legitimacy.”<sup>28</sup>

King differed with Stokely Carmichael concerning the issues of: (1) the involvement of whites in demonstrations and (2) the commitment to nonviolent protest. These were non-negotiable for King.<sup>29</sup> The disagreement initially threatened to divide King’s Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) from SNCC and CORE. However, the

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<sup>24</sup>Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1980-1992*, 2. Cone further said, “Since it seeks to interpret Black Power religiously, Black theology endeavors to reorder the Christian tradition...and destroy the influence of heretical white American Christianity.” Cone, *Black Power and Black Theology*, 131. In sharp contrast, Roberts said, “A Christian theologian is not an interpreter of the religion of Black Power. He, as black theologian, may be the interpreter of Afro-American Christianity. He may be conscious and proud of his heritage. He may be in tune with the meaning of Black Power. But he is attempting to understand the Christian faith in light of his people’s experience. His task is not popular. He runs the risk of being misunderstood by black militants and moderates as well as by white radicals and liberals.” J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 21.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 74.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>27</sup> Cone and Wilmore, “Religion of Black Power” by Vincent Harding, I: 61.

<sup>28</sup> James Cone, *Risks of Faith*, xvii.

<sup>29</sup> Martin Luther King, *Chaos or Community* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1967), 63. Also Noel Erskine says, “It goes without saying, however, that King would have problems with the concepts *Black Power*, *Black theology*, and *God is black*” (emphasis his). Noel Erskine, *King Among The Theologians* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), xii.

leaders were able to reach a compromise. Although King understood the frustration of those calling for new tactics, he called their tone radically different. He says, "As I listened to all these comments, the words fell on my ears like strange music from a foreign land. My hearing was not attuned to the sound of such bitterness."<sup>30</sup> No secular ideology or theology is developed void of cultural and historical influences; however, King exposed a particular weakness when bitterness is a significant influence. Describing an unavoidable chain of events, he says, "Disappointment produces despair and despair produces bitterness, and . . . the one thing certain about bitterness is its blindness."<sup>31</sup> For King, Black Power's negative values (rooted in bitterness) outweighed its positive aspects, and opened the door for the pursuit of a "nihilistic philosophy."<sup>32</sup>

Essential to this paper is the assertion that the mind-set that led to the call for Black Power is nearly identical to the mind-set that sought the propagation of a unique Black theology.<sup>33</sup> This mind-set did not gain the whole-hearted backing of the Negro church (represented in the thinking of King as well as Joseph H. Jackson<sup>34</sup> and others). These stewards of the Negro church, perhaps, were the keys to it maintaining its grounding in the biblical faith of the colonial and pre-Civil War slaves and the post-Emancipation Negroes.

### Responses to Black Power/Theology

Before academic theological responses to Black Power in the late 60s and early 70s, black clergymen, in black and white denominations, began to address the call for Black Power. Some also addressed its consistency or inconsistency with Christianity. The black clergy responded in various ways to the call for Black Power. Some felt the call for equality and dignity was consistent with the gospel that the church preached and the historic role the church had always fulfilled in the black community, and while not willing to totally embrace the call for separatism and violence,

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<sup>30</sup> Martin Luther King, *Chaos or Community*, 26. Earlier Benjamin Mays had "urged Negroes to reject the spirit of hatred and revenge, because they too will be under God's judgement if they seek to oppress others." Mark Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 34.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Luther King, *Chaos or Community*, 26.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>33</sup> Note the similarity between King's assessment of Black Power and a West African theologian's assessment of Black theology after spending a year at Union Theological Seminary with Cone and others. Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, 379-84.

<sup>34</sup> History has often cited Martin Luther King and Joseph Jackson as opponents in their philosophies concerning the role of the church in political protest. However, King and Jackson disagreed over politics within the National Baptist Convention but their responses to Black Power were similar. See Edward Gilbreath, "The Forgotten Founder." *Christianity Today* (March 11, 2002), 66-68.

they at least affirmed Black Power's complaints as legitimate. Others acknowledged the sinfulness of racism and understood the frustration and disappointment associated with the call yet rejected the bitterness, militancy, and separatism of Black Power (and then Black theology) as unchristian and un-American. A final group wholeheartedly embraced the political ideology behind Black Power and sought to radically alter the structure of Christianity, as practiced by blacks, or abandon Christianity as insufficient to address the black call for justice, freedom, humanity, and dignity.<sup>35</sup>

In 1968, Albert Cleage personified the wholehearted acceptance of the call for Black Power and the attempt to theologize it and apply it to the local congregation. He sought to "fuse black nationalism of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X to an African-American Christian base . . ." <sup>36</sup> It is worth noting that Cleage's "Christian base" was very accommodating to syncretism. His United Church of Christ congregation would become the Shrine of the Black Madonna and the base of the Black Christian Nationalist movement. Cleage would later even break with mainline clergy that had initially embraced the call for Black Power. He called for a rejection of the New Testament, a rejection of the institutional Black church, and distinguished between a "real Jesus" and a spiritualized Jesus. He criticized the church's "fanatical adherence to the classical doctrine of the atonement . . . [and] insisted that the classical doctrine of the atonement (an emphasis on the salvation of the individual believer by faith in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross) must be discarded altogether . . ." <sup>37</sup> While Cleage's embrace of Black Power was radical<sup>38</sup> it was likewise unique. Very few clergy and churches followed in Cleage's footsteps.

The wholehearted embrace of Black Power had the potential to shift the focus of one's "Christianity" away from the person of Jesus Christ and towards the resolution of the immediate crisis and towards a more existential center. Many of the attributes and teachings of Jesus were marginalized as certain teachings truncated the entire scope of Jesus' teachings.<sup>39</sup> The person of Jesus Christ did not appear to be preminent

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<sup>35</sup> Vincent Harding noted that there was a "tendency among Black Power advocates to repress any reference to the earlier Afro-American religious expressions..." Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, 41. While Black theologians didn't reject such language, they did often introduce vague pluralistic language instead of distinct Christian language.

<sup>36</sup> Mark Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 95.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>38</sup> Although Wilmore suggests that Cleage merely "may have gone too far." Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume I 1966-1979*, 1st Edition (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1979), 251.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce L. Fields, *Introducing Black Theology*, 58. Fields avoids any truncation by

in the 1968 statement by the Philadelphia Council of Black Clergy that stated:

It is our intention that Black clergy and Black theological students commit themselves to the liberation of Black people in the same manner that we have committed ourselves to the faith of Jesus Christ . . . For us there must be no difficulty in viewing Christ and the other founders of the world's great religions as clearly prototypes and examples of revolutionary figures . . .<sup>40</sup>

A more moderate and "timid," according to Gayraud Wilmore,<sup>41</sup> approach was taken by many mainline clergy, both affiliated with black and white denominations. The 1966 Statement of the National Committee of Negro Clergy (NCNC), signed by mainline pastors and even Baptist pastors like New York City's Sandy Ray, affirmed the legitimacy of Black Power's cry against racism.<sup>42</sup> It also denounced the racism of America's white churches. However, the document did not renounce any Christian doctrine nor use the language of a "black God," "black Jesus," or separatism. Three years later, a subsequent statement distinguished "Black theology [as] the product of black *Christian* experience and reflection" (emphasis mine).<sup>43</sup> The statement does not cite non-Christian sources as foundational to its project. One should not assume this "orthodoxy" to be the character of each participant, but the formal statement carried the tone of Christianity, and exclusively Christianity.

Speaking as Christians, the NCNC did not shy away from seeking to convict its white brothers of sin because their theology "sustained the American slave system and negated the humanity of blacks."<sup>44</sup> Also, due to the dehumanizing of blacks in America, the statement encouraged the "black community to affirm itself as part of the kingdom of God."<sup>45</sup> These key statements of the NCNC legitimated the outrage of blacks due to racism but crafted their response within the bounds of Christianity. After Cleage and the NCNC went their separate ways, one may ask which side now represented Black theology in its church-form.

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acknowledging, "I am not arguing that racism is the only issue that the church of Jesus Christ needs to confront."

<sup>40</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, 1st Edition, 279.

<sup>41</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-26.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 37. One has to assume whether statement refers to the black community (in general) or specifically to black Christians.

Other denominational statements were more programmatic in their approach and appeared to affirm the radical approach of Black Power.<sup>46</sup> The statements addressed the policies of white Christians rather than their official theology. As black caucuses emerged in the major denominations,<sup>47</sup> they were able to articulate their protest within the bounds of Christianity. In 1976, black denominations such as Richard Allen's African Methodist Episcopal Church's position paper employed the term "liberation" rather than "Black theology." Also, interestingly, the A.M.E. paper acknowledged the worth and need of non-church organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Urban League, SCLC, CORE, SNCC, and People United to Save Humanity (PUSH). In language of discernment and distinction, they pledged to "make recommendations to the . . . bishops as to which movements would most appropriately correspond with *our* position on liberation . . . and which characterize the *life and teachings* of the AME church" (emphasis mine).<sup>48</sup>

The Negro church's rejection of Black Power and, later, Black theology was personified in the president of the National Baptist Convention, Joseph H. Jackson. After Stokely Carmichael's call for Black Power in the summer of 1966, Jackson denounced Black Power during that year's Chicago meeting of the denomination.<sup>49</sup> Even more politically progressive Baptists, like New York pulpiteer Gardner Taylor, in 1968 denounced Black Power's "excessive rhetoric of violence."<sup>50</sup> Even radically political Baptists, like New York pastor and congressman, Adam Clayton Powell, who coined the term "Black Power" in 1965, said, "Demonstrations and all continuing protest activity must be non-violent."<sup>51</sup> In 1971, after Black theology had church and academic expressions, Jackson rejected James Cone (Black theology's theologian) and Black theology as polarizing and confrontational rather than seeking reconciliation, and failing to acknowledge that "all Negroes aren't full of

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<sup>46</sup> Both the statement of Black Methodists for Church Renewal (1968) and the statement of the Black Catholic Clergy (1968) call for more inclusion of blacks in the programmatic aspects of the church. The timid response of Black Catholics is particularly noteworthy considering Catholicism's propensity towards syncretism as noted by Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion*.

<sup>47</sup> Wilmore cites ten in Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, note no. 7, 223.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>49</sup> Chapman, *Christianity on Trial*, 74.

<sup>50</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979, 1st Edition*, 265.

<sup>51</sup> Floyd Barbour, *The Black Power Revolt* (Boston: Extending Horizons Books, 1968), 259. For Powell's use of Black Power terminology see Noel Erskine, *King Among The Theologians*, 84.



bitterness and hatred.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore, major black Baptists rejected the underlying assumptions and goals of the Black Power/theology project.

This is significant because, historically, Baptists have constituted the largest percentage of black Christians.<sup>53</sup> In 1972, for example, there were roughly 8 million black Baptists compared to 2 million Methodists.<sup>54</sup> If prominent black Baptists had enthusiastically embraced Black Power/theology, in a manner similar to Cleage, black Christianity would have been thrust in a radically different direction. However, when they were confronted with the choice between the call of Stokely Carmichael and Malcolm X, Joseph Jackson, Gardner Taylor, Martin Luther King, and Adam Clayton Powell chose to heed the call of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Had the Negro church (which was being challenged to fully evolve into the Black church<sup>55</sup>) not been so steeped in the Bible, one cannot be sure whether the development of a Black theology would have even been necessary. Gayraud Wilmore said any “school of theology” that black people would embrace must have biblical foundations.<sup>56</sup> One can search further to see that many simply offered the idioms of biblical Christianity to masses that were not able to tell the difference. It appears that the masses of blacks that had been raised and lived their lives centered around the Bible-based religion of the Negro church forced the proponents of Black Power to articulate their socio-political ideology in a manner that gave deference to the biblical language and imagery so familiar to many blacks that, up until the mid 1960s, were supportive of Martin Luther King and his non-violent approach to the evil of racism. Despite the 1960s being a time of “secular religion or a religionless church,”<sup>57</sup> the Negro church, for the most part, still held its roots in

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<sup>52</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, 220. “What we say against white segregationists by the gospel of Christ we must also say against members of our own race who insist on interpreting the gospel of Christ on a strictly anti-white and pro-black foundation.” Ibid., 247. It is appropriate to mention that J. Deotis Roberts suspects that “it is doubtful that Jackson attempted to understand Cone’s book”, although he does not give reason for this suspicion. Ibid., 117.

<sup>53</sup> Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion*. Blacks were attracted to the Baptist preaching of conversion, the freedom that local autonomous churches allowed, and the lack of educational requirements for clergy. Baptists were the first to license slaves to preach.

<sup>54</sup> 1972 *Yearbook of American Churches* as cited in John H. Carey, “Black Theology: An Appraisal of the Internal and External Issues,” *Theological Studies* 33 (D 1972): 687.

<sup>55</sup> Wilmore using C. Eric Lincoln’s distinction of the Negro/Black church says, “it is certain that the ghost of the politically irrelevant, culturally obtuse, and religiously fundamentalistic ‘Negro’ church of the early twentieth century still haunts the leadership of the Black Church today [1979].” Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, 219. Depending on one’s perspective, the “Negro church” was the lifeboat of black Christianity in the redefining and unsettling sixties.

<sup>56</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, 155.

<sup>57</sup> Vincent Harding, “The Religion of Black Power” in Cone and Wilmore, *Black*

biblical Christianity even in the face of white “Christian” complicity with their oppression.

There were other religious-related responses to the call for Black Power besides resolutions and position papers being drafted by major denominations. In May 1969, James Forman, affiliated with the SNCC, interrupted the service at the Riverside Church in New York City and presented “The Black Manifesto.” He rebuked white Christians and called blacks to illegitimately use power as whites had done for so long. He used the language of “demands” and the idea of “reparations.” Finally, in good Malcolm X form, he said, “pressure *by whatever means necessary* should be applied to . . . white churches and Jewish synagogues” (emphasis mine).<sup>58</sup>

The chief theologian and architect of formal and academic Black theology was James H. Cone. Cone provided the most significant theological response to Black Power. “In the summer after Martin Luther King, Jr.’s death . . . [he] introduced the term ‘Black theology’ into the religious discourse.”<sup>59</sup> One must be careful not to dismiss the pain that Cone had experienced. While one may avow or disavow his theological method, it is hard to dispute his critique of white American and “Christian” racism. His foundational works include his 1969 *Black Theology and Black Power*, his 1970 *A Black Theology of Liberation*, and his 1975 *God of the Oppressed*. Other theologians contributed to the early literature of Black theology as they responded in various ways to Cone’s foundational works. He would become the lead Black theologian and the mentor of many Ph.D. students that would expand his work.<sup>60</sup> Along with Cone, early writers such as J. Deotis Roberts, Gayraud Wilmore, Vincent Harding, and William R. Jones contributed significantly to the dialogue of Black theology.

Black theology sat upon socio-political foundations rather than *solī deo glori* foundations. The Bible was merely one of six sources for doing Black theology: (1) black experience, (2) black history, (3) black culture, (4) revelation, (5) Scripture, and (6) tradition.<sup>61</sup> Its germination took place in the call for “Black Power” in the spring of 1966 during Civil

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*Power: 1966-1979*, 41. Christianity was being assaulted from many angles during this period.

<sup>58</sup> Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, 32.

<sup>59</sup> Larry G. Murphy, J. Gordon Melton, and Gary L. Ward, eds., *Encyclopedia of African American Religions* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), s.v. “James Hal Cone.”

<sup>60</sup> Cone and others realized the necessity of encouraging additional scholars to enhance their cause. This author has tried to get his own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, to realize the necessity of encouraging black scholars in order to enhance the cause of evangelical Christianity among black Baptists.

<sup>61</sup> Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 53-74.

Rights protest marches in Mississippi. Unlike many other issues that have confronted Christianity, this issue was not born in the inner workings of church disputes. The New Testament gospel-Judaizer issue arose in the church, the early church councils were disputes within the church, the split of the Eastern and the Western church was over an “in the church” dispute, the Protestant Reformation involved a church issue of authority, the 1840s denominational splits over slavery were provoked by polity issues in the church, and the 1920s Modernist controversies concerned hermeneutical issues in the church. However, the call for “Black Power” did not originate in the church, was not mediated in the church, but was a secular, political affair.

In *Black Theology and Black Power*, James Cone did not write a systematic theology. He sought to address the reality of the Black experience in America using language and categories that formal Protestant (what he called “white”) theologians did not use. In the course of expounding these categories, he admitted that his work was “written with a definite attitude . . . [an] angry black man, disgusted.”<sup>62</sup> The following year *A Black Theology of Liberation* was organized according to traditional theological terms: sources, norms, revelation, God, man, Christ, and eschatology. Finally, in responding to black and white critics, Cone says, “*God of the Oppressed* represents my [his] most developed theological position.”<sup>63</sup> Cone’s initial thesis calls for an embrace of Black Power and its criticism of racist “Christian” America:

It is my thesis, however, that Black Power, even in its most radical expression, is not the antithesis of Christianity, nor is it a heretical idea to be tolerated with painful forbearance. It is rather, Christ’s central message to twentieth-century America. And unless the empirical denominational church makes a determined effort to recapture the man

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<sup>62</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 2. Also Stephen R. Prescott notes the experiences that led Cone to such anger. After being swept up in the call for Black Power, Cone “reacted with blinding anger” to the 1967 Detroit race riots. Stephen R. Prescott, “James Hal Cone: Father of Black Theology.” In *Here I Stand: Essays in Honor of Dr. Paige Patterson*, eds. Stephen Prescott, N. Allan Moseley, and David Alan Black (Yorba Linda: Davidson Press, 2000), 275. Prescott concludes, “Based on Cone’s own testimony, it seems fair to state categorically that Black Theology was born not from the text of Scripture nor from his theological training, but from his deep personal offence at the history of racial injustice in America.” *Ibid.*, 276. Carey says, “The sin which Cone and Cleage see rampant in white society so dominates their rage and vision that they cannot interpret sin as a universal human problem which also is applicable to blacks.” John H. Carey, “Black Theology: An Appraisal,” 697.

<sup>63</sup> Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), ix. Although he says that his earlier works give the adequate attention to the Bible and Christology.

Jesus through a total identification with the suffering poor as expressed in Black Power, that church will become exactly what Christ is not.<sup>64</sup>

Cone conceded that “Black Power . . . [is] not consciously seeking to be Christian”<sup>65</sup> and “many Black Power advocates shun Christianity and the language of love.”<sup>66</sup> Cone realized that the status of Black Power was questionable regarding Christianity. In seeking to establish the possible Christian character of Black Power, Cone freely pointed to two areas of possible tension: the nature of the Bible and the appropriateness of violence as a means of liberation.

Now, of course, the Christian church, and its preachers and theologians, ought to have had a prophetic word to speak to the issues of the turbulent sixties. It did not. Silence in the midst of sin and confusion is unacceptable.<sup>67</sup> With such a quiet Christian church, Cone sought to be a voice crying against the evils of segregation and racism (both individual and systemic). The necessity of his proposed unique “Black” theology was, and is, an indictment against broader American Christianity’s failure to speak out.

James Cone achieved respectability for Black theology in the academy. His example of theological protest contributed to the boldness of liberation theologians around the world as well as feminist, womanist, and homosexual theologians in the U.S. A survey of the credentials of the second generation of black theologians reveals that Cone has intellectually sired many black scholars in the academic disciplines of theology, ethics, and biblical studies.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, one must ask whether Black theology was (and is) a prophetic interpretation of the gospel of Jesus Christ or, as Paul says in book of Galatians, “another gospel.” Before Christians can consider the present and future implications of Black theology, one must ask the question, “Since its inception, has Black theology ever been Christian?”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 1.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>67</sup> R. Albert Mohler states, “Preachers are expected to speak when no one else has any idea what to say.” R. Albert Mohler, “Truth-Telling In A Time Of Tragedy” (chapel address, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 13 September 2001, manuscript), 1. Also consider Martin Luther King’s disappointment with the white church’s silence during the Civil Rights Movement as noted in his “Letter from the Birmingham Jail.” Clayborne Carson, *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Warner Books, 1998), 187-204.

<sup>68</sup> If the local church is the locale of Christianity, then the outlook for Black theology, within Christianity, does not seem promising. Scholastic societies are the locale of Black

Again, a historical survey of Black theology's infancy is insightful because Cone's priorities and methodology have been generally accepted by the second generation of "black theologians."<sup>69</sup> This paper lends itself to at least five insights. First, Black theology did not arise within a Christian context but rather a secular socio-political setting. Second, Black theology did not articulate a whole Christian theology but a truncated ideology respectful black folk's religious idioms. Third, Black theology did not respond to the ridicule, by the Nation of Islam, of essential Christian truths as a Christian voice in the Black community would have felt obligated to do. Fourth, Black theology's fruits must be examined. The pastors and churches that embraced it are no longer within the bounds of Christianity but rather pursue Black or African religion that is open to syncretism and pluralism. Fifth, the overwhelming majority of black Christians either rejected Black Power/theology or only "timidly" embraced it. Was Black theology Christian in its origins? It appears not.

Despite Cone's protest in the preface of *God of the Oppressed*, in 1997, nearly twenty years later, Black theology still appeared to be black ideology.<sup>70</sup> Noel Erskine says, "[Cone's] passion was to relate *Black Power* to the Black church" (emphasis mine).<sup>71</sup> If the label "theology" is conceded, it is conceded in the sense that Cone claims it, with references to many sources Christian and non-Christian. Was Black theology Christian in its origins? It appears not.

While Black theology is clearly beyond the bounds of orthodox Christianity, the racist history of Christianity in America suggests that its complaint is an outside voice that needs to be heard by some, black and white.<sup>72</sup> One white theologian states candidly, "Black theology has

theology. Cone says, "Black theology today [1993] is being defined by seminary and university professors in the context of the Society for the Study of Black Religion (SSBR) and AAR. These are not places where pastors are likely to spend their time. As a result, Black theology and the Black Church have not had a happy time together. Both have suffered a kind of isolation from each other." Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1980-1992*, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Although others were writing in Black theology's early years, Cone was (and is) the main progenitor of Black theologians, biblical scholars, and ethicists. While acknowledging others, Carey says, "in any mode of analysis Cone is a major figure to be reckoned with." John H. Carey, "What Can We Learn," 519.

<sup>70</sup> Bruce L. Fields suggest Black theology was "a theological response, at least in its early forms, to racism." Bruce L. Fields, *Introducing Black Theology*, 12. Wilmore said Black theology "extrapolated from Black Power a theological referent." Cone and Wilmore, *Black Theology: 1966-1979*, 15. One might ask if a socio-political ideology could provide a basis for Christian theology.

<sup>71</sup> Noel Erskine, *King Among the Theologians*, 93.

<sup>72</sup> Carey suggests several things that the broader Christian community can learn from Black theology. Three of them are "(1) The work of black theologians has clarified for us the importance of the black experience as a distinctive but frequently overlooked

become, in my opinion, not only the rallying point for the black Christian community but the conscience for the white community.”<sup>73</sup> Perhaps parts of its critique of American Christianity’s lack of ethical obedience regarding race can be considered a “co-belligerent” in the struggle against the evil of racism. Perhaps the orthodox theology of evangelical Christians will lead them to obey the ethical implications of the Bible, after being exposed by one such as James Cone.<sup>74</sup>

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dimension in the American Christian tradition...(2) Black theology has clarified for us how deeply imbedded the white church is in the American political and economic power structure . . . (3) black theology has registered a telling blow in pointing out the scope and pervasiveness of racism in modern society.” John H. Carey, “What Can We Learn,” 520-22. Carey further states that “Serious engagement with black theology forces one to recognize deep hurts, lingering suspicions, and profound problems of communication between the black and white communities.” *Ibid.*, 525.

<sup>73</sup> John H. Carey, “What Can We Learn,” 528.

<sup>74</sup> John H. Carey, “Black Theology: An Appraisal,” 696. Carey says, “The tragic thing about black criticisms of the white churches is that they are essentially true. White churches have reinforced the culture . . . Many scholars who begin to read black theology to refute its sectarian claims will emerge sobered with how much truth there is in the black charges against the white church.”

## Isaiah's Theology of Pride

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### Introduction

In the Old Testament, "pride" is a major problem against which the prophets, psalmists, and proverbial pundits preach. But of all the books of the Hebrew Bible, Isaiah has the most to say about pride as arrogance or haughtiness.<sup>1</sup> In chapter 14 a powerful, perverted pride is described without using any words for "pride" *per se*, which further reinforces his concern with this topic. So in about twenty verses and fourteen chapters Isaiah talks about the subject of sinful pride. Consequently, this essay will concentrate on Isaiah's doctrinal content for pride and draw some practical conclusions. The condemnation of pride in Isaiah is almost exclusively located in chapters 1-33.<sup>2</sup> Therein, pride is confined to

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<sup>1</sup> Pride and other related terms in the translations represent several different Hebrew words or expressions. In Isaiah the Hebrew term NwOgf@ is used five times (13:11, 19; 14:11; 16:6; 23:9) for "pride," or the like, in a negative or sinful sense; and its cognate term hwfjga@ four times (9:8; 13:11; 16:6; 25:11). Two other related words, h)eg"@ and tw@g@" are used once (2:12) and twice (28:1, 3), respectively, by Isaiah. All these are based on the Hebrew root h)fg@f and are Isaiah's favorite expressions for pride. Twice NwOgf@ means "pride" in its positive sense of "pleased with" (4:2; 60:15). This positive sense appears one other time but based on the term hn@fri (43:14). A different word and root, Mw@r, is employed twice by Isaiah (2:11, 17); and once a close variant, MwOrmf (37:23). Only once (13:11) does Isaiah use the term dz", and there in combination with NwOgf@ for the expression "arrogance of the haughty." Along with the roots h)fg@f and Mw@r, Isaiah uses one other for "pride," hbag@f—once nominally (2:11) and once verbally (3:16). Also, three times, one of two idioms for prideful attitudes is employed in two verses: (1) bbf| ldego@ "greatness of heart" (9:9; 10:12) and (2) wynfy(" Mw@r treje p:t@ "splendor of the height of his eyes" (10:12). In 20:5 only tre)ep:ti@ means "boast." Boasting, in passages that assume sinful pride, is the unusual and contextualized sense of the verbal roots "to say" (rmaf) twice (28:15; 61:6) and "be great" (ldag@f) once (10:15).

<sup>2</sup> In chapters 13-23 especially Isaiah reveals that, in addition to Israel's (the Northern Kingdom's) exile, God will punish all nations, including Judah and Jerusalem, the Southern Kingdom, for their refusal to repent of rebellion against *Yahweh's* rule as the sole Sovereign. "Pride" is specifically mentioned in chapters 13, 16, and 23, which respectively deal with judgment on Babylon, Moab, and Tyre. Other chapters specifically state or suggest a problem with pride for other nations named in this section of Isaiah. For example, to chapter 13 compare chapters 21 and 47 on Babylon. The pride of Judah and Jerusalem is denounced in chapters 2 and 3; and their faults described in chapters 22 and

passages preoccupied with predicted punishment of international and Israelite idolaters.<sup>3</sup>

### The Pride of Judah and Israel

The pride of the House of Jacob is condemned in 2:5-22. In vv. 11, 12, and 17 “pride” is mentioned specifically. The leaders of Jerusalem are the focus in 3:1-15, and a superior and superficial attitude is seen. They are accused of taking advantage of the poor (3:14-15). Their affluence and influence was secured by the sacrifice and service of the powerless, which speaks volumes about their arrogance. They considered themselves as intrinsically worth more than those less graced and gifted. The women of Zion (i.e. Jerusalem; 3:16-26) are said to be “haughty” and then described as carrying themselves about in such a way that dripped with a condescending spirit (v. 16). Pride, here, is vividly depicted as snobbery, as a sense of superiority. These women had a “healthier and wealthier than thou” attitude towards those less fortunate. Pride is the perception that one intrinsically should inherit the finest and the fullest lifestyle. The “Valley of Vision” (22:1-14) speaks of judgment on Jerusalem. The behavior of the inhabitants of Zion indicates the presence of an arrogant attitude. Instead of praising God, they turned to self-glorification and gratification, acting as if they and not *Yahweh* had won the war. The city’s stubbornness is such that Isaiah senses repentance is extremely remote. The sinful pride of Shebna (22:15-19), in charge of the king’s palace, is demonstrated by his presumptuous act of creating, without authorization or basis, a private and prominently placed crypt for himself (v. 16). In vv. 13-16 of chapter 29 the arrogant attitude of Jerusalem is portrayed. The people believe they can lie to God

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29. Moab’s arrogance is announced in chapter 25 in light of Jerusalem’s salvation. Assyria’s pride is pointed out in chapters 10 and 37. Although the word ‘pride’ *per se* is not used in most versions, chapter 14 deals with the subject of the huge and hellish hubris of the Assyrian king. The problematic pride of Israel or Ephraim is revealed in chapters 9 and 28 and its stubborn state in 48.

<sup>3</sup> The author of this article was guided solely in this study by his own exegesis of these texts. No published articles on this subject or books prompted or informed this analysis. A review of *Religion Index One: Periodicals* from 1988-2001 revealed no article dedicated to the subject of Isaiah and pride. Neither was any directly related book or article found from a survey of the past ten years of *Old Testament Abstracts* (under headings “Major Prophets” and “Biblical Theology”), although a few studies on power or anger in the OT appeared. Some indirectly related publications to consult, however, are John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing House, 1986), 299-301; Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Academic Books, Zondervan, 1985), 147-69; Darrell L. Bock, “Arrogance is not a Family Value,” *Christianity Today* 36 (November 9, 1992): 10; and Gary Stansell, “Isaiah 28-33: Blest Be the Tie that Binds” in *New Visions of Isaiah* (eds. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 68-103.



and get away with it. Their presumption and pride is exemplified by how boldly they lie about others and knowingly help create an unjust society for personal gain and glory (v. 21). Stubborn Israelites are the subject of 48:1-11. In these verses “stubborn” is used and related concepts (v. 4; cf. v. 6). In v. 8 the nation is called a “rebel” and “treacherous.” Such expressions suggest a pride or arrogance in which the people cannot or will not admit they are wrong. The pride of Israel and its capital city, Samaria, is the subject of 9:8-21; 17:4-14; and 28:1-29. “Pride” or “arrogance” is pictured as people “thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think” (cf. Rom. 12:3) and resisting repentance at all costs. They cannot or will not admit they are wrong and that they are ripe for judgment. Here the pride God punishes is that of human presumption and self-importance, demanding its own way. Again, also, pride that needs purging is that which defies God and his gracious laws. Proud people abuse God and his gifts; they mistreat and undervalue creation and their less-fortunate countrymen.

### The Pride of Assyria

Woe is pronounced on the Assyrian kingdom and its king in 10:15-19. The pride which characterizes Assyria and its leader looks down on others, pities them, is condescending, and patronizing. This kind of egoism and arrogance is further explained and exemplified by a quote from this monarch in vv. 13-14, which begins with him saying “By the strength of *my hand I have done this*” (italics added). He has an “I” problem. His ego is enormous. Ancient kings were often declared or self-declared as gods or demi-gods. The Mesopotamian king judged in Isaiah 14 is one clear and conscious example in the Old Testament, as is the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28.<sup>4</sup> When this oppression is ended (v. 3) Isaiah

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<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 14 is usually thought to be about a Babylonian king, as an extension of the judgment on Babylon in chapter 13. However, several facts suggest that the subject of this chapter is not a Babylonian but an Assyrian king, specifically Sargon II. First, prophecy about the judgment of Babylon is unarguably the subject of all of chapter 13 as well as 21:1-10. If 14:3-23 is about a Babylonian king, then Isaiah only prophesies against Assyria in 10:5-19 and 14:24-27, two sections where an Assyrian king and Assyria, respectively, are clearly named as the target of God’s wrath. This is possible because “Babylon” is the name given for the nation concerned in chapters 13, 21, and the first part of 14; but if this is the case, then Isaiah’s treatment of the two Mesopotamian powers is surprisingly disproportionate, especially in the context of the section on judgment against the nations (13-23), where Babylon and its king receive one and a half chapters plus ten verses, while the Assyrian nation a mere four verses near the end of one chapter (14). Second, the Assyrian kings at times did refer to themselves as kings of Babylon, making a connection with the rich and ancient history revolving around the past glory of the city of Babylon, which gave birth to the old Babylonian empire, from which grew the Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian cultures and conquests. Third, in chapter 14, this king of “Babylon” (v. 3) is depicted in ways which fit well the rule and ruin of Sargon II,

instructs the Israelites to perform a “taunt” (לְשׂוֹמֵם)<sup>5</sup> over the end of this “Babylonian” king (v. 4a). By the way, soon after the Assyrian ruler Sargon II came to the throne, the Babylonians and Elamites revolted but were subdued, making him the ruler of Babylon, literally. The content of this taunt is given in vv. 4b-21. There is no natural break between vv. 11 and 12. Verses are modern conveniences, so the original text would have flowed seamlessly into v. 12 and beyond, which passage many popularly and traditionally have thought deals with a different king than in vv. 4-11—that new king being Satan, or more exactly, Lucifer. But the text does not allow this interpretation.<sup>6</sup> The king in vv. 4-11 is described in

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an Assyrian monarch of the eighth-century B.C. (722-705). He is named specifically by Isaiah in 20:1 in a prophecy against Ethiopia and Egypt, and is probably the king intended in 2 Kings 17:24-27. He was followed by Sennacherib, who was defeated miraculously when he sought to besiege Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah (701). Sargon was instrumental in the conquest and capture of Israel and its capital city Samaria (723-22). All this happened during the ministry of Isaiah (ca. 740-686). He is believed to have died on the battlefield, a rare and supremely degrading event for such a king. Regardless of whether he is the king of Isaiah 14, that king did experience such a demise (cf. 14:10, 18-20). All that the rest of this chapter says about this king could be said of almost any Babylonian or Assyrian ruler, but Sargon would be no exception and would live up (or “down” maybe is more accurate) to those characteristics of pride and power and presumed deity as much or more than any Mesopotamian monarch of the ancient world. Finally, if 14:3-23 is about an Assyrian king (Sargon notwithstanding), then Isaiah’s treatment of the nations in 13-23 becomes more balanced, with 13 about the Babylonian nation, 14:3-23 about an Assyrian king, and 14:24-27 about the Assyrian nation. It makes more sense that Isaiah would report the specific details of the death and defeat of a Neo-Assyrian (who fancied himself in the great line of “Babylonians”) rather than a Neo-Babylonian king, since his ministry was during the Neo-Assyrian period.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols.; ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1996), s.v. לְשׂוֹמֵם. Hereafter *NIDOTTE*.

<sup>6</sup> For a sample of competing arguments on this issue see e.g. John D. W. Watts, *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah 1-33*, vol. 24 (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 209-11; J. A. Alexander, *The Prophecies of Isaiah*, two vols. in one (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1865; 1953 edition), 295-301; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, vols. I-II (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 259-60; Ronald F. Youngblood, “Fallen Star: The Evolution of ‘Lucifer,’” *Bible Review* 14:6 (December 1998): 22-31; William L. Holladay, “Text, Structure, and Irony in the Poem on the Fall of the Tyrant, Isaiah 14,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999): 633-45; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1-39*, 321-25; Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Major Bible Themes*, rev. John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), 156-64; Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1952), 14-15, 24, 42, 68, 169, 184, 190-91, and 207; Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 6 (ed. Frank E. Gaebelein; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 105-106. Edward E. Hindson, “Isaiah” in *Liberty Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Lynchburg, VA: The Old-Time Gospel Hour, 1982), 1324-25; Jeffrey Khoo, “Isaiah 14:12-14 and Satan: A Canonical Approach,” *Stulos Theological Journal* 2 (1994): 67-77. Oswalt takes the approach that while this text (specifically v. 12) does not refer to Satan it does apply to him (321, n. 13). Cf. Grogan’s hedge that it points to Satan but indirectly (105); and Delitzsch’s comment cited by Leupold, that found here is “self-deification after the manner of the devil and as a forerunner of the

similar ways as the one in vv. 12-21, and no one argues that the former is Satan. The key issue of this passage, as well as that of the king in Ezekiel 28, is his evil pride and its punishment demanded by its catastrophic and cruel consequences for his enemies. The translation of *l"yh* in v. 12 as "Lucifer" by the 1611 Authorized English Version is an error.<sup>7</sup> The claim that the words of this text are impossible to apply to a human is also incorrect. When read in its literary and cultural and historical context, these poetic words are obviously intended to portray the rise and demise of an ancient politician. "Lucifer" came about only through the presupposition that this text is about Satan.<sup>8</sup> Terminology for "pride" is used once in this chapter (v. 11); but, moreover, the psychology of it is very present and pronounced. Immediately after exclaiming the fall of this "star" in v. 12, Isaiah quotes his boastful, almost unbelievable, claim

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Anti-Christ" (260). Cf. F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah in Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, vol. 7, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973 reprint), 311-12.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *NIDOTTE*, s.v. *l"yh*".

<sup>8</sup> The word rendered "Lucifer" is Hebrew *l"yh* "shining one," for which a word like *lucifer* is the Latin equivalent. So "Lucifer" is not even a transliteration, much less a proper translation. Later, for theological more than exegetical reasons, someone turned this into a proper name in English as Lucifer. In Dutch a "lucifer" is a match. And note that nowhere else in the Bible is Satan called by this name, while "Satan" and "Devil" occur frequently. There simply is no such name as Lucifer, except in the imagination of some misguided Bible interpreters and their followers. But how could the king of Assyria "fall from heaven," as it says in v. 12, no matter what his name? Here is where we see how determinative the nature of Hebrew poetry (parallelism) is in answering such questions and clarifying exactly what an OT author intends to say and teach in such a case. "Fallen from heaven" in the first line of this synonymous parallelism is mirrored in the second line by "cast down to the earth." The latter is defined by the surrounding context as being dead (vv. 11, 15) on the battlefield (v. 19). The former is about the "sky" as the heaven(s) and not "Heaven" where God lives, so to speak. The Hebrew term is always plural and only context determines if it means "heavens" or "Heaven." Since the contrast is to the earth, then the idea is that of the "skies." Also this "shining one" is also a "son of the dawn" in v. 12. These expressions together speak of Venus, the bright and morning star, and instead of "shining one" some translations say "morning star" (NIV) or "Day Star" (NRSV). This fact also makes the "sky" and not "Heaven" the issue at hand. So why would this king be compared to Venus? Simple. In the ancient world political figures were often compared to stars (like we say "movie stars"). In the Arab world a political leader is still called a "star of the people." We even see this in the OT in Numbers 24:17, where the Messiah is called a coming star from Jacob. And when Messiah was born in Bethlehem, his star appeared in the East (Matt. 2:2). Isaiah uses this image of the daily "career" of Venus to picture the rise and fall of Sargon. Like Venus, the morning star, he started off brightly, dominating the sky, and with tremendous promise. But before long he, like Venus, was eclipsed and his glare was dimmed and eventually vanished or "fell from the sky to the earth." Much more can be said in detail to prove how this verse, especially, and the rest of this passage is about Sargon and not Satan. However, the purpose at hand is not to exhaust this interpretive debate, but to explain how this chapter contributes to Isaiah's theology of sinful pride, which changes little or none whoever this king is.

to supreme deity in v. 13: “I will raise my throne above the stars of El.”<sup>9</sup> *El* (l)”) is the personal name of one of the chief Canaanite gods. When this arrogant Assyrian king subdued Syria and Samaria, he claimed a divine status above the chief god of these people (and remember that even the Hebrews were idolatrous and syncretized the worship of Canaanite gods like *El* and *Baal* with that of *Yahweh*). He envisioned himself high in altitude and authority: in the clouds at the top of this mountain, equal to the “chairman of the divine board” (cf. 37:24 and Ezek. 28 regarding Sennacherib and the king of Tyre, respectively). No wonder Isaiah told the Hebrews to musically ridicule this one whose death would bring “relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage” (14:3). Greater pomposity and pure pride can hardly be imagined, but sadly such excessive self-esteem has too often been not only imitated but duplicated throughout human history. Such “pomp” led this king to a premature and pitiful death (v. 11).

Another Assyrian king, Sennacherib (named in 37:21), is confronted by God through Isaiah for his pride, specifically noted in v. 23. The emphasis is on the fact that pride has something to do with appropriating a position higher than one deserves. This is clearly the case with Sennacherib. He is accused of mocking and raising his voice against, of all beings, God, the “Holy One of Israel”(v. 23)! In v. 24 he is accused of heaping insults at the Lord, boasting about his accomplishments, for which he gave himself all the credit (vv. 24b-25).

### The Pride of Babylon

Judgment of the Babylonian Kingdom is found in Isaiah 13:1-22; 47:8-15 (cf. 21:1-10; 47:1-5). Here in chapter 13, and in comparison with the passages discussed above, we see that pride by itself is not always intrinsically sinful, but certainly is once identified as arrogant, haughty, or evil. The Chaldeans could and should have been proud of their great city (a “jewel” of the ancient world) and their “hanging gardens” (one of the seven wonders of the ancient world), as seen in v. 19; but the arrogant attitude that led its kings to be oppressive and ruthless tyrants was wicked and deserved God’s wrath. The pride of Isaiah 13:11 and 13:19 is a sinful state of self-glorification and self-gratification at the expense of the good of humanity and the glory that belongs only to God. This kind of prideful attitude truly is ungodly in its actions, which are

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<sup>9</sup> Numerous versions translate this as “God,” meaning the one true God of the Israelites, known as *Elohim*. The Hebrew text here reads l) (“god” or *El*) not MyhiwOl)v (*Elohim* or “God” or “gods”). Hebrew l) is seldom used of the Hebrew God. Since the context is about the claims of an Assyrian and polytheistic king, the most obvious meaning must pertain to one of his gods.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *NIDOTTE*, s.v. MyhiwOl)v, h@awOl)v, l)“.

selfish, cruel, and destructive. Pride goes before destruction (Prov. 16:18) and, following a false sense of security (47:8-10), Isaiah predicts the fall of Babylon (47:11-15).

### The Pride of Moab

Both the Moabite citizens (15:1-16:14) and Moab the country (25:10b-12) are warned of certain punishment; and pride *per se* is mentioned in each case. No other statement as Isaiah 16:6 in the Old Testament brings together so many accusations and variations of pride against one nation. Six different words (four based on the same root, h)fg@f)<sup>11</sup> are employed which have a meaning related to “pride” or “arrogance”: “We have heard of Moab’s pride—her overweening pride and conceit, her pride and her insolence—but her boasts are empty” (NIV). The Lord’s intention of judging Moab is spelled out in 25:10b-12. Moab’s sinful arrogance seems to be their overconfidence in and total reliance on their human resources. Their safety and salvation was sought only in themselves.

### The Pride of Ethiopia and Egypt

From 18:1 to 20:6 Isaiah prophesies against Ethiopia (or Cush; 18:1-7), Egypt (19:1-25), and Ethiopia and Egypt (20:1-6). A hint at pride comes in 18:7, where Ethiopia (Cush) is called an “aggressive nation” (NIV). If this speaks to their pride, then this attitude is characterized as something that, in its most negative nature, leads to harmful aggression and lusts after control of others, deemed less worthy and innately servile, and thereby deserving of subjugation and enslavement. Another suggestion of improper pride is found in 20:5, where those who “trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt” are relegated to a shameful existence. In 28:1-4 is a description of a “fading flower,” which is either the leading city of Samaria or a wreath signifying the rich and rowdy lifestyle of the Israelite leaders. Either way it is something of which these Samaritans have a right to be proud, yet their pride appears polluted with self-indulgence. By contrast, 60:19 and 63:14 emphasize the fact that God wants his reputation (“glorious name”) to be the true glory of his people. The punishable pride of Ethiopia and Egypt is seen as godless self-reliance. They put their hope in a frail and faulty and foolish human solution, so they could boast in or give glory to themselves.

### The Pride of Tyre

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 3rd ed., rev. W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm, vol. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), s.v. h)fg@f.

God's will to humble and humiliate all "pride" or self-glorification, not only of Tyre but of all humanity, is specifically stated in Isaiah 23:9. Pride that will be punished by God is that which is illicitly lofty. The Tyrians made it to the top but were tyrants. In Ezekiel 28:2-19 the great and godless ego of the monarch and marketing genius of Tyre is manifest.<sup>12</sup> He claimed to be a god "with a prideful heart" (v. 2a), wiser than a prophet of God and as wise as a god (vv. 2-3, 6), but God claims he was just a mere man (v. 2b). God is often more concerned about the nature of the journey than the destination. Achievement is not merely for the sake of achievement. The end does not justify any means to that end. One cannot but be reminded of Proverbs 16:18 and 18:12, respectively, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling" and "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, but humility goes before honor" (NIV). Fame and fortune without faith and faithfulness and fairness displeases God. According to Isaiah 23:9 the Phoenicians were judged for their greed for glory. Attaining a successful society was not a sin but how they attained it and then acted towards others was wrong. Pride that God hates is an arrogance of self-glorification and self-importance and plain selfishness that takes advantage of others, legally or illegally, in order to promote one's own power, prosperity, and prestige at their expense. This kind of pride will stop at nothing to get

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<sup>12</sup> Attempts to apply this passage to Satan are misdirected and misinformed. The claim that the words of Ezek. 28:11-19 are impossible to explain for a human king is based on a failure to read this text in light of its historical, literary, linguistic, and cultural contexts. Space and purpose do not permit a review, here, of even the most important data that disprove this text is about Satan. Suffice it for now to direct the reader to the commentary mentioned above and to point out in summary that the king of Tyre, as one who claimed to be a god, fits well the descriptions given in 29:11-19. He "sealed the plan" for the building of the highly successful mercantile empire of Phoenicia. Although he was blameless (the word cannot mean "sinless") at first, such success eventually led to sinful pride, growing greed, and the abuse of others. As a divine representative he had a bejeweled statue (cherub or sphinx) of himself positioned outside the entrance to the Eden-like garden of the gods in the temple at Tyre (cf. his other figurative and metaphorical use of "Eden" in 31:9). Thus he was a guardian cherub. The Hebrew word rendered "God" in this passage is plural and can just as easily be translated "gods," which fits better with the polytheistic beliefs of the Phoenicians. Historical documents and archaeological evidence prove that such statues (called cherubs) existed for these monarchs. Also the king of Tyre was responsible for sending those who looted Jerusalem as it burned when destroyed by the Babylonians (which looters walked through the fiery stones of Zion's rubble). Because of his malicious pride the king of Tyre was judged by God with the fiery demise of his kingdom and death—a spectacle before the other watching kings of the ancient Near East (v. 17). It does no good to say the "king of Tyre" in v. 12 is different than the "prince of Tyre" in v. 2, because if Ezekiel wanted to make the second king out to be a non-human king he should have used another term than *K7leme*, "king," which he also uses for the obviously human king of Egypt, for whom he also presents a prophecy and lament (31 and 32) as he does for Egypt (29 and 30), Tyre (26 and 27), and the Tyrian ruler (28:1-10 and 28:11-19).

what it wants. It justifies any misdirection or manipulation, white or black lies, white or blue-collar crime, in order to obtain its goal. It seeks glory for itself not God.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

The pride that Isaiah condemns is an egotism which believes itself to be much more than is true, and then behaves maliciously or manipulatively towards others based on this inflated and incorrect opinion. Sinful pride, according to Isaiah, follows success because then the person thinks he or she is intrinsically superior and, therefore, deserves special treatment and privileges not to be wasted on an average or inferior person. Discrimination and racism and ethnic cleansing are inevitable outcomes. Proverbs uses Isaiah's favorite root for pride (h)fgf@ in three verses about pride (8:13; 15:25; and 16:19), indicating that problematic pride involves evil speech, abuse of those less fortunate, and ill-gotten gain. Finally, how can the character of sinful pride in Isaiah be summarized? Selfish, greedy, godless, haughty, self-important, self-centered, self-reliant, self-assertive, arrogant, presumptuous, condescending, patronizing, boastful, abusive, independent, and superior or prejudiced. Jesus summarizes the rich fool in much the same way Isaiah does the proud fool: as one who "stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21). How proud are you?

## Book Reviews

*James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage.* By Richard J. Bauckham. London: Routledge, 1999, x + 246 pp., \$26.99, paper.

James has generally languished on the sideline of biblical scholarship, but several recent monographs and commentaries have now focused upon this General Epistle. Of particular note is Richard Bauckham's work appearing in the New Testament Readings series edited by John Court. Though the history of interpretation regarding James has been dominated by the comments of Martin Dibelius in the early twentieth century, Bauckham consciously sets out to consider the epistle in the light of current research which is, in many respects, free from previous assumptions regarding the nature of paraenesis and the pseudo-epistolary character of James forwarded by Dibelius. From this fresh starting point Bauckham offers a helpful work which advances an exegetical and theological understanding of the letter.

Bauckham introduces the reader to a dialogue carried on throughout the book between the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and the Epistle of James. Bauckham juxtaposes Kierkegaard's appropriation of the text of James with the lack of appropriation exhibited by many modern biblical interpreters immured in a historical-critical framework. Here the reader is invited to share in the "hermeneutic of personal engagement" which Bauckham states will make the "difference between learning the life-story of someone one loves and learning the life-story of someone one has never met in order to write a biographical dictionary entry" (9). Here the reader is challenged to consider not only the nature and characteristics of the mirror (the text of James), but also to examine the image reflected in the mirror which James calls the perfect law of liberty. The personal engagement in the text of James promoted by Bauckham sets the tone for the remainder of his comments.

The book itself may be outlined in two sections: (1) chapters one and two consider some of the epistle's traditional historical-critical issues, and (2) chapters three and four engage with the wider canonical and theological context of James. Chapter three addresses the epistle's relationship with the Pauline corpus and the Old Testament, and chapter four considers the issue of the theological application of James to contemporary context.

Bauckham interacts with two prominent concerns voiced in recent discussion on James: (1) the question of whether or not James constitutes a genuine letter, and (2) the need to understand the function of paraenesis. First, taking the epistolary character of the work seriously, he argues that James was sent as "an official letter or encyclical, in which James as head of the Jerusalem church addresses all of his compatriots and fellow-believers in the Jewish Diaspora" (13). Bauckham plausibly argues that James, the Lord's brother wrote this "encyclical to the Diaspora" (chapter one). Secondly, Bauckham wrestles with the genre of James (wisdom paraenesis) and how it provides a general structure



for the epistle (chapter two). He rejects the notion that James lacks any situational immediacy and logical coherence, while avoiding the trap of forcing a Pauline epistolary structuring upon James. To situate James firmly within the Jewish Wisdom tradition, Bauckham offers several literary forms common both in Wisdom literature and in the teaching of Jesus (e.g. aphorisms, similitudes and parables, examples, judgment oracles, and diatribe). Bauckham understands the structure of the letter to be formulated around distinct units of wisdom teaching punctuated and rounded off by wisdom encapsulated in an aphoristic sentence. All of this supports Bauckham's main thesis that "James, as a disciple of Jesus the sage, is a wisdom teacher who has made the wisdom of Jesus his own, and who seeks to appropriate and to develop the resources of the Jewish wisdom tradition in a way that is guided and controlled by the teaching of Jesus" (30). Bauckham is then able to avoid the difficulties identifying gospel "allusions" or "echoes" by referring to the appropriation of Jesus teaching as James' own "creative re-expression" of his brother's wisdom. This indeed is one of the work's great achievements.

In chapter three, Bauckham considers James' most significant canonical relationships by first considering the "Pauline perspective on James." He draws attention to this relationship not because it is primary in the text but because James has been read from a Pauline perspective. That is, James has been understood largely in the light of the Pauline corpus rather than on its own terms. Bauckham maintains that the traditionally held notion that James writes to counter Paul or a misrepresentation of Paul's theology is unnecessary. James discussion is "entirely intelligible and explicable, against a Jewish background, without reference to Paul" (127). On the contrary, he argues that Paul and James stand upon common ground and that the canonical relationship between James and the Synoptics, Torah, Wisdom, and 1 Peter should be emphasized.

Finally, Bauckham offers a theological reading of the text within a modern context. Space is given to the specific appropriation of the text in the Copenhagen of Kierkegaard's day. Though this discussion is interesting, more of the insightful theological analysis found in the next section would have been preferred. Bauckham then turns to consider the reading of James at the turn of the millennium. He marks out the emphasis the epistle lays upon the wholeness and integrity of the believing community in contrast to divided loyalty (double-mindedness). This wholeness is expressed through solidarity with the poor, concern for speech ethics, and prayer. On the whole, this final chapter is a fine piece of theological reflection which contains many treasures of application and ethical formation.

Particularly intriguing is the thesis forwarded here that James, as the Lord's brother, re-expresses the wisdom teaching of Jesus. Understood in this way, James shifts closer to the center of the New Testament proclamation regarding the nature and character of Jesus Christ. This work is not designed to be a verse-by-verse commentary but rather seeks to situate the text literarily, historically, and theologically. The book offers one of the clearest and most helpful attempts at identifying an overall structure for James accounting for both the larger conceptual units and the actual word connections between them. Key in Bauckham's structuring of the epistle is James' use of aphorisms, which encapsulate his teaching in compact, memorable form, in strategic locations

within the text. This structuring appears natural and unforced in contrast to other attempts to identify a Pauline epistolary structure within James. Most importantly, Bauckham has provided a way to view the overall intent of James without forcing an unnecessary historical situation or literary structure upon the text. This book will be a helpful guide to those engaging with James either in the church or the academy, and it would be a welcome read alongside a more verse-by-verse type commentary.

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*The Book Study Concordance of the Greek New Testament.* By Andreas Köstenberger and Raymond Bouchoc. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003, viii + 1528 pp., \$59.99 hardcover.

This is a fantastic book in a never-before-seen format. With the help of computer technology, Andreas Köstenberger and Raymond Bouchoc have compiled a concordance for each book of the New Testament, based textually on the electronic version of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th edition). The authors point out that their work is “not designed to replace conventional concordances,” but is to be used in conjunction with them (vii).

The work’s format follows the canonical order of the NT, and thus, is comprised of 27 concordances. Each concordance begins with the following statistics: (1) total word count; (2) number of words occurring at least 10 times; (3) number of words occurring once; and (4) words whose usage in that book comprises 25 percent of the total NT occurrences. Next, each concordance lists in alphabetical order every Greek word used in that book. Each Greek word entry contains: (1) an English transliteration; (2) the number of times it is used in each book and the entire NT; (3) a basic meaning; and (4) the verses where it can be found. At the end of each concordance are helpful word frequency lists in both alphabetical order and order of occurrence.

The advantages of this concordance are obvious. The most notable benefits are, as the authors rightly point out, that it enables you to see word usage in particular books or by a specific author, allows you to see distinctive vocabulary easily, and provides you with an overview of each book’s vocabulary.

I cannot think of anything that I do not like about this book. Only time will tell, as word lists are pored over, whether or not all of the data contained in this work is accurate. The authors humbly invite readers to make them aware of any inaccuracies so that they may correct them for future editions.

Since this book was compiled using computer technology, why not just instead use any one of the various Greek NT computer concordances available? *Answer:* Having a book in hand and doing the work without relying entirely on computer technology is rewarding. Also, a big difference exists in price between this concordance and the various computer concordances and software. Computer concordances of the Greek NT can be quite expensive. Though the price of this book might seem quite steep, it is actually quite affordable for a work of this magnitude and even less expensive than some of the other Greek NT concordances in book form, e.g. the Moulton-Geden.

Köstenberger and Bouchoc have done a great service for those who do research in the Greek NT. This work will quickly become a standard reference tool. I highly recommend it to anyone who seriously studies the NT.

Will someone now compile a Hebrew OT counterpart?

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*Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews."* By David A. deSilva. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000, xix + 560 pp., \$40.00 paperback.

After a period of notable neglect, the late eighties and early nineties have proven to be productive years for *PROS EBRAIIOUS*, with five major commentaries in less than a decade—Attridge, Ellingworth, and Lane in English, and Weiss and Grässer in German. One would have thought that due to the quality of the scholarship in these commentaries, some time would pass before new commentaries on this epistle would appear. It seems, however, that these commentaries have only paved the way for a generation of new approaches to the epistle, all building on the impeccable textual and exegetical work of their predecessors.

Among this generation of commentaries, David deSilva's work recommends itself as worthwhile contribution, proposing an approach to the investigation of the epistle from a socio-rhetorical perspective. The commentary continues the series inaugurated by Ben Witherington III in the mid-nineties, with the stated goal of engaging the NT writings within the socio-rhetorical context of their writers and original readers. This commentary is an outgrowth of deSilva's doctoral work at Emory. DeSilva's dissertation, the more technical precursor of the present commentary, was published earlier as *Despising Shame: Honor Discourse and Community Maintenance in the epistle to the Hebrews* (Atlanta: Scholars 1995).

According to deSilva, Hebrews is essentially an exercise in rhetorical persuasion harnessed in the service of theology. The author encourages his addressees, the beneficiaries of divine grace, to persevere in their gratitude to God in the midst of increasingly difficult social challenges as a better and more reasonable response to their divine Benefactor. In order to derive this meaning from the epistle, de Silva undertakes a careful examination of the language of honor and shame, which he proposes as the most appropriate background against which Hebrews should be read.

The first 80 pages are devoted to introductory matters regarding the recipients of the epistle (especially their ethnic background and history), its author (his identity, worldview, use of the OT, and expertise in rhetoric), and, most distinctly, the rhetorical goal and socio-rhetorical strategy of the author of Hebrews. This last part of the introduction includes a very helpful survey of pertinent aspects of ancient rhetoric, with ample examples that underscore its relevance and usefulness for NT studies.

While the commentary remains in line with much of the scholarly consensus in these areas, it brings fresh perspective on each one of them via the socio-

rhetorical instruments. Thus, the community, whose ethnic background seems to be not crucially important for deSilva, had a history “of humiliation, rejection and marginalization. . . . [t]he Christians lost their place and standing in the society, stripped of their reputation for being reliable citizens on account of their commitment to an alternate system of values, religious practices and social relationships” (16). Their challenge was to not allow “society’s means of social control to deflect them from their faith” (16).

Likewise, the author, a “member of the Pauline mission” (39), was in charge of the nurturing and preservation of the apostle’s work in this community of believers. He employs the “resources of the authoritative scriptures and the full spectrum of rhetorical tactics” (39) to challenge his readers to stand firm in their prior commitment to Christ, regardless of social ostracization. It is this reaffirmation of the Christian worldview and culture that will lead his readers “to lasting honor” (39).

The clearest statement of the importance of socio-rhetorical aspects in reading Hebrews comes in the third part of the introduction. De Silva contends that the epistle is a document of deliberative rhetoric which repeatedly presents two opposing courses of action for its addressees, dissuading them from the one less honorable, i.e., turning away from the living God, while persuading and pleading with them to continue in pursuit of the more honorable, the course they chose at their conversion. Everything in the epistle, deSilva argues, from the rhetorical strategy of the author, to the very nuances of the lexical stock employed by him (terms such as *charis* and *pistis*) is best understood against the background of the “social code of reciprocity, the mutual expectations and obligations of patrons and clients” (59). Christ has provided the greatest benefit for his clients, the access to the very presence of God: “He is the broker, the mediator who secures favor from God on behalf of those who have committed themselves to Jesus as dependent clients” (62). In this way, the language of honor and shame, “the primary tools of social control in the ancient world” (64), forms the backbone for the ideological and social strategies of the author.

The commentary proper is divided into ten chapters, following the natural divisions of the epistle: the two opening appeals (1:1-2:18, 3:1-4:13), the central exposition (4:14-10:18), and the climactic exhortation (10:19-13:25). Each chapter begins with an overview of the passage, dealing primarily with its literary structure and role within the book as a whole. The commentary then explores the text of Hebrews, one paragraph at a time, with a fair amount of attention to exegetical details. DeSilva accomplishes this in critical dialogue with other commentators, and consistently within the framework of the honor and shame discourse. Each chapter ends with a brief summary and a very helpful section, “Bridging the Horizons,” an insightful and balanced attempt to explore the relevance of this ancient letter for 20th century Christians. Several issues that deserve more extensive treatment—*inter alia*, angels, priestly Messiahs, minority cultural values, “perfection”, and apostasy—are treated separately in 10 excursus-type analyses, labeled “A Closer Look.”

Reading Hebrews against the background of honor discourse is indeed one of the main strengths of deSilva’s contribution. This background informs and explains several passages in the epistle that usually puzzle today’s reader unaware of the social realities of the 1st century. At the same time, however,

focusing on a rather narrow background for a NT document creates an exegetical risk that renders deSilva's analysis particularly vulnerable.

First, there is the delicate balance between the text itself and the alleged background informing the text. The proposed background, while indeed revealing nuances in the author's argument, at times becomes the controlling factor in exegesis, to the extent that it forces the commentator to reach exegetical conclusions that are not supported by the text itself. As a case in point, the author of Hebrews presents Jesus' affirmation of his association with his brothers by means of three quotations in Heb 2:12. The middle one from Is 8:17, *egō esomai pepoithōs ep' autō*, is construed by deSilva as an affirmation of trust not in God (as the LXX or MT texts and most commentators suggest), but in the believer. DeSilva explains his choice in terms of the intricate relationship between the benefactor and his clients, "the danger of Jesus' honor in associating himself with human beings is that they might fail to prove just and reliable in regard to their obligations to the Son" (116). While this meaning of the text is grammatically possible, it is exegetically the least probable—indicating that the commentator preferred it on ideological, not exegetical grounds.

Second, the proposed background becomes so dominant that other possibilities are not explored or given due consideration. Quite often, for example, one reads statements such as "[this] description of God ... recites a familiar expression from Stoic thought" (113), or "this elliptical phrase echoes yet another Stoic idea" (114), or "this concept resonates strongly with Stoic discourse" (117 n. 70). Even though deSilva adduces evidence from classical rhetoric to support his statements, in all three cases, one can argue, with a higher degree of plausibility, that the Scriptures (LXX), especially the Psalms—where these ideas are profusely represented—constitute the formative and informative influence.

While these aspects of fine exegetical points will continue to be debated by scholars, deSilva's study offers a very readable and illuminating commentary, an important contribution to unlocking, by means of the socio-rhetorical investigation, the meaning of this important 1st century document.

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*Paul in the Roman World: The Conflict at Corinth.* By Robert M. Grant. Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 2001, viii + 181 pp., \$19.95 paper.

Intended to shed new light on 1 Corinthians, *Paul in the Roman World: The Conflict at Corinth* examines the political, religious, and social contexts of the newly Romanized city of Corinth. The book is divided into three sections: *Business and Politics, Religion and Ritual*, and *Paul on Sexuality*. In part one, *Business and Politics*, Grant affirms what many commentators have observed, namely that Paul's primary concern in writing to the Corinthian Christians is that they be in agreement and that there be no divisions among them (1 Cor. 1:10). What is provocative about Grant's position, however, is that Paul's motivation for concord is political in nature rather than theological.

Grant's builds his case upon two presuppositions. First, he states that Paul was insecure about his apostleship and thus needed to defend it. Second, he claims that Paul envisioned a monarchical form of church government where God has appointed the apostle to rule as king (24). Because of these two foundational axioms Grant concludes that the disagreement in Corinth over leadership offers the primary clue for why Paul wrote to the church: *he wanted to re-establish monarchical rule*. The image that Paul uses to describe his ministry, that of an architect, confirms this conclusion, since "[a]n architect chooses subordinates and workmen who will not spoil his work but will best labor together" (29). Other examples of Paul's apostolic insecurity and his desire to maintain monarchical rule can be seen in the following ways: his unwillingness to let women lead or even speak in the church, his refusal to let Christians settle cases outside of the church, and his emphasis on love being "the tie that binds."

Two weaknesses in this section of the book should be noted. First, Grant's two significant presuppositions are just that, presuppositions. Accordingly, he offers almost no argumentation for their validity. Second, and related to the first, Grant neglects to interact with or even mention the recent work of Andrew Clarke in *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians As Leaders and Ministers*, whose research calls Grant's second presupposition into question. Clarke comprehensively analyzes Paul's teaching on church government and concludes that Paul's vision of Christian leadership is quite distinct from the hierarchical/monarchical patterns of leadership modeled in his surrounding contexts (Graeco-Roman city, Roman colony, voluntary associations, households, and synagogues). This distinction explains why Paul preferred to use the terms 'service' and 'co-worker' to describe leadership in the church, rather than more common terms that evoked the hierarchical concepts of power and status.

In Part II, *Religion and Ritual*, Grant turns from his discussion on politics to illuminate the religious context of 1 Corinthians. He does this in two ways. First, he gives his readers a guided tour of the various "lords and gods" that existed in Corinth (1 Cor. 8:5). Using his literary and geographic familiarity with the city, he gives a sort of play-by-play of what it would have been like to walk down its streets, highlighting the various temples and inscriptions along the way, and enticing the reader to sense the drastic contrast between Paul's one God and the Corinthians' many gods.

Second, he offers an exposition on liturgy in the early church, beginning with an analysis of 1 Corinthians, which he considers to be the earliest information we have on the practice of Christian baptism and the Eucharist. However, because Paul's account provides us with only the meaning of baptism and the Eucharist, Grant calls upon the Didache, 1 Clement, Pliny, Livy, Ignatius of Antioch, and Justin for details of what may have actually taken place in these sacraments. Through all of the sources we learn that Christians remained suspect in the Graeco-Roman world because of their liturgical practices. While Grant's description of the practice of the sacraments was quite interesting and informative, his emphasis on the second century failed to shed new light on 1 Corinthians.

Grant's last section, Part III, *Paul on Sexuality*, is also his briefest. In it he uses the early Christian writings of Justin, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, as

well as the Didache and contrasts them with a variety of Roman literature to show how different Christian morality was from its host culture. Grant concludes his discussion stating that Paul's ideas with regard to morality and sex partly replaced and partly assimilated those of the Graeco-Roman world. For example, both Paul and the Roman Empire were trying to make moral pronouncements to promote marriage and the raising of children. However, Paul did not join Diogenes the Cynic in claiming that sex was for the body, the body for sex.

The strength of *Paul in the Roman World* is characteristic of all of Grant's works. He has imaginatively called upon his encyclopedic knowledge of early Christian and Graeco-Roman literature and his intimate understanding of the social, political and religious make-up of the Graeco-Roman world to elucidate the context of the New Testament. However, those who come to the book to see how Graeco-Roman backgrounds help us better understand the specifics of 1 Corinthians may also want to turn to the recent works of Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change*, David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The social and literary Context*, Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, Anthony Thiselton and his introduction in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians (New International Greek Testament Commentary)*, and as has been mentioned, Andrew Clarke, *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians As Leaders and Ministers* for a more detailed argument of the social, political and religious contexts of Corinth and their pertinence to the message of this fascinating letter.

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*Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context.* By Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003, xvi + 538 pp., \$30 hardcover.

The Sermon on the Mount is the ethical pinnacle of the Bible. Yet, Christians have been divided over the modern application of its ethical injunctions. In *Kingdom Ethics*, Glen Stassen and David Gushee attempt to let the Sermon on the Mount set the agenda for a cohesive approach to Christian Ethics. Stassen teaches at Fuller Theological Seminary while Gushee is on the faculty of Union University. Both formerly taught at Southern Baptist Seminary.

Stassen and Gushee choose to focus on the Sermon on the mount because "the way of discipleship and the commands of Jesus are most explicitly taught in this Sermon" (30). Throughout the work, Stassen and Gushee argue that we should follow the approach to ethics that Jesus demonstrated in the sermon. Emphasis is placed on God's reign, deliverance and justice.

*Kingdom Ethics* has several strengths. First of all, Stassen and Gushee should be commended for their insistence that the Sermon on the Mount has a continuing relevance for Christian ethics. Different schemes from both the theological left and right have attempted to remove the ethical force of Jesus'

teaching concerning neighbor love, forgiveness of enemies, and non-retaliation. Though I do not agree with all of their conclusions, the authors are certainly correct to emphasize the primacy of this passage for modern Christian ethics. Second, Stassen and Gushee reflect a high regard for the sanctity of human life. They take a very dim view of both abortion and euthanasia. Gushee argues forcibly against a developmental view of personhood underlying much pro-abortion rhetoric and says, "I would rather be wrong in attributing too much personhood to the fetus than in attributing too little" (222). They also reject euthanasia and say, "There is no right to assisted suicide that can be conjured up from the founding documents or principles of medical responsibility" (250). The authors can also be commended for presenting an approach to sexuality that includes abstinence outside of marriage between a man and a woman and fidelity within marriage. Finally, the authors underscore the need to examine systemic evil as well as personal sin, a constant challenge for evangelicals.

I found myself in strong disagreement with the authors at several points. First of all, though both authors affirm that they are comfortable with the label "evangelical," some of their comments about Scripture itself seem to be influenced by non-evangelical approaches. Most significantly, the following quote illustrates my concern:

The Hebrew Scriptures [Old Testament] are a rich and diverse narrative. The people of Israel were a diverse people—originally an idolatrous people who worshiped and served many gods, including gods of war—who debated with each other how to interpret God's word to them. Jesus showed how to interpret that rich narrative. He never quoted passages that favor killing, war or national supremacy. He quote only the passages that favor peacemaking. Our method of interpretation is to affirm Jesus Christ as fully Lord and fully Savior, and as the key to interpreting the Scriptures (154).

This approach seems to favor the Documentary Hypothesis at some level while perhaps indicating that Jesus viewed some of the Old Testament as more inspired than other parts.

The authors also appear to reflect a certain level of influence from liberation theology. They state, "In the Bible, the poor rely more on God. Just spend some time serving the poor in a homeless shelter and talk with people long enough to get to know them. The poor—as a whole—do have less pride that gets in the way and really do trust more in God" (38). At other places in the book, the bulk of the problems experienced by poor are laid at the door of American capitalism. But do poor people really trust God more? I think the authors to go too far. Stassen and Gushee could strengthen this work by acknowledging more forcefully that many people are in fact poor because of their individual sin and not because of patterns of systemic evil.

Stassen and Gushee appear to downplay the radical nature of the homosexual movement. I do not mean to suggest that either author affirms that homosexuality is within the parameters of acceptable behavior. They say that homosexual conduct "is one form of sexual expression that falls outside the will of God" (311). However, they also say, "It is at least arguable from the fact of Jesus' silence—and the limited discussion in Scripture in general—that the



contemporary fixation on homosexuality in some Christian circles is misplaced” (307). In contrast, I contend that the radical homosexual movement is indeed the most crucial place for a well-informed and extensive Christian response. This issue is the one point where the battle rages most fiercely. The radical homosexual agenda involves eliminating moral absolutes and redefining the family. Both are cause for alarm.

Finally, the work seems to reflect a less than satisfactory view of the force needed to combat evil. For example, they criticize the United States for the 1991 Gulf War because Iraq allegedly agreed to “meet the conditions and get out of Kuwait” (162). In reality, Iraq never made the first effort to leave Kuwait until forcibly removed by coalition forces. Certainly, the authors are correct when they argue that nations are too quick to find a reason to go to war, but the argument at this point seems more like wishful thinking.

*Kingdom Ethics* reflects a pro-life theme while accentuating the broader problems of systemic evil. Overall, the work is somewhat unique and will likely be influential.

J. Alan Branch  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Ten Lies The Church Tells Women: How the Bible Has Been Misused to Keep Women in Spiritual Bondage.* By J. Lee Grady. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2000, 222 pp., \$12.99 paperback.

J. Lee Grady is the editor of *Charisma* magazine, a publication dedicated to promoting charismatic interests. In *Ten Lies the Church Tells Women*, Grady summarizes the significant mistakes he believes the church makes in relation to women. Grady could perhaps re-title the book, *Ten Lies the Church and the Southern Baptist Convention in Particular Tells Women*, for the one denomination that he critiques by name far above any other is indeed the Southern Baptist Convention.

Grady begins his presentation with a summary of the bizarre cultic practices of Steven Butt of Be Free Patriarchal Church in Utah. As one might surmise from the name of his church, Butt advocates polygamy as a universal standard and has three “wives.” After summarizing Butt’s position, Grady states, “[Butt’s Church] is cultic to be sure, but the sad truth is that many bible-believing Christians have ignorantly misinterpreted or intentionally misused the Scriptures to justify a prejudiced view of women that *is just as* misguided as the doctrine Rev. Butt spreads in Utah” (2). A thorough reading of Grady’s work reveals that the ignorant misinterpretation he has in mind is the Complementarian position that women may not serve as pastors. I have added emphasis to the phrase “just as” in Grady’s quote: Complementarians are just as deceived as polygamists! This disappointing introduction sets the tone for the rest of the book. Overall, the book’s flaws can be summed up in three categories: Lack of original sources, factual errors, and logical fallacies.

Grady has done very little original research. Throughout the book, he cites Christian sources such as Augustine, Tertullian, John Knox and the like. However, a brief survey of the end notes reveals that his sources are secondary

citations. For example, he draws most of his quotations from Tucker and Liefeld's *Daughters of the Church* and Carrol Osborn's (ed.) *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*. Occasional secondary source citations are acceptable, but Grady's total absence of primary sources for his quotations from early church history weakens the overall presentation. Over-reliance on secondary sources means one is not certain if quotes are taken in context.

Perhaps Grady's failure to search original sources himself leads him into several factual errors. Grady argues that Paul's purpose in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 was to combat Christian Gnosticism in Ephesus (129). He says, "There is ample historical evidence to prove that at the time Paul's first epistle was written to Timothy, a blasphemous cult had developed in or near Ephesus that taught that Eve was really the "Great Mother"—an incarnation of the goddess" (130). Grady borrows this argument from Richard and Catherine Clark Kroege's *I Suffer Not a Woman*. The problem with this argument is that it assumes a much more developed form of Gnosticism than what existed in the first century. In fact, the evidence contradicts Grady and the Kroegers: Christian Gnosticism was *very* incipient at this stage. Beyond Biblical backgrounds, Grady is also in error about Lottie Moon's position on women in ministry. On page 192 he infers that Lottie Moon would approve of women pastors. While Moon did argue for greater involvement by women, she did not argue for women pastors.

Beyond his poor research and factual errors, I found the logical fallacies to be the most disturbing aspect of *Ten Lies the Church Tells Women*. First of all, Grady presents multiple straw-man arguments. On pages 1-2, he compares his opponents to polygamists. In chapter four, he recounts a terrible story of a husband who refused to let his wife give a child medicine and implies this is the natural result of the Complementarian approach to marriage. On pages 119-123, he compares ancient witch trials to modern opponents of women pastors. On pages 171-173 he tells the tragic story of an abused wife who was murdered by her husband as evidence against a Complementarian understanding of Ephesians 5:22. Most strikingly, he makes no reference to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, the definitive statement of the Complementarian position.

At the end of each chapter, Grady includes "questions for discussion" which are rife with "question-begging." For example, Grady suggests this question, "In light of the fact that the church at Ephesus was threatened by strange Gnostic doctrines, why did Paul have to explain that Eve, and not Adam, was deceived in the Garden of Eden?" (135). But this assumes the point in question, mainly, was there a Gnostic cult of Eve at Ephesus?

Grady utilizes *ad hominem* arguments at several places. For example, he says that the SBC is "anti-women" because it asserts that men should be pastors. At times, Grady commits a false cause fallacy. He says that wife-abuse is swept under a rug in evangelical churches "because their own teaching about marriage relationships . . . is an underlying cause of this ugly dilemma" (185). Thus, his argument appears to follow this syllogism: "Some Evangelicals teach that wives should submit to their husbands. Some evangelical women are abused. Therefore, the church's teaching on submission causes abuse." However, the causes of abuse are multitude. While I do not deny that some crude men have twisted Scripture to justify abuse, I reject the premise that a proper understanding of the Complementarian model leads to abuse.

I have only touched on a few of the problems with this work. At times, Grady moves beyond poor argumentation to sloppy thinking. For example, he suggests that Christian women who affirm the Complementarian view do so “either because they are intimidated by a male-dominated religious system that claims God’s favor rests only on men or because they have swallowed the lie that tells them they are second-class citizens in God’s kingdom” (2). Grady claims that women who disagree with him are intimidated or deceived! This is offensive to the intelligent and bright women who affirm the Complementarian model because they believe it is consistent with Scripture.

Throughout the work, he misrepresents his opponents. He says the first lie women are told is “God created women as inferior beings, destined to serve their husbands” (19). The implication of Grady’s work is that this is what Complementarians believe. But no legitimate Complementarian asserts that women are inferior. Furthermore, he lumps orthodox, Christian women with the doctrinally aberrant. For example, on page 65 he mentions, in this order, Amy Carmichael, Bertha Smith, *Aimee Semple McPherson* and Henrietta Mears as examples of great women ministers. It is offensive to the legacies of Carmichael, Smith and Mears to imply that they would affirm the same view of ministry as Aimee Semple McPherson.

Grady’s work is two hundred and twenty pages of *non sequitur*. The arguments he makes do not warrant his conclusions. This work is fatally flawed by poor research, factual errors and multiple logical fallacies.

J. Alan Branch  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

*The Gospel According to The Simpsons: The Spiritual Life of the World’s Most Animated Family.* By Mark I. Pinsky. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 193 pp., \$14.99.

*The Gospel According to The Simpsons* is second in a series of books exploring the spiritual metaphors and theological musings found in some of today’s most popular cultural icons. Others in this series include a reprint of the 1970’s classic, *The Gospel According to Peanuts*; the soon to be released *The Gospel According to Harry Potter: Spirituality Behind the World’s Most Famous Seeker*; *The Gospel According to J.R.R. Tolkien* and an upcoming volume *The Gospel According to Disney*.

The thirteen chapters in this volume explore the various ways in which *The Simpsons*, the most successful animated series in television history—examines the subject of religion and American Christianity. For the those unfamiliar with the television show—such as this reviewer—it might come as a surprise to discover that many religious leaders, including Tony Compolo, who writes the forward—consider *The Simpsons* one of the most faith-friendly shows on television. For the enthusiast of this pop culture phenomenon, the book provides a summary of the major religious and spiritual themes presented during the first fourteen seasons on the air.

The first three chapters looks specifically at the spiritual life of the members of the Simpson family. Those not familiar with the program might be surprised

to learn that Homer, the overweight, lazy, beer-drinking, donut-eating father, attends church regularly. Likewise, the “star” of the show, his underachieving, mischievous son, Bart (an anagram for Brat), prays at meal times and times of distress, and in one episode becomes a Pentecostal. Just as in many families today, Marge, the long-suffering stay-at-home mom, assumes the role as the real spiritual backbone of the family. The other main character, Bart’s sister Lisa, is the spiritual and social conscience of the family. Pinsky validates the extent of *The Simpsons* spiritual attributes by noting that religious content occurs in seventy percent of *The Simpsons* episodes. In addition, ten percent of the shows were constructed around religious themes.

Like many families, the Simpsons hold to a works-based religion. Tony Campolo writes in the forward, “In the popular mind, salvation is earned, in spite of all our preaching to the contrary. If the writers did the grace thing, as we evangelicals believe it, I am not sure most of the audience would get it...” In one episode, Homer and Bart are watching a Bible based movie where God says, “Remember, the key to salvation is . . .” Just then, a news story interrupts the show. As such, the key to salvation remains ambiguous episode after episode.

Two chapters are devoted to exploring the spiritual dimensions of the Simpson’s neighbors and community. Significant ink is devoted to Ned Flanders, the evangelical, fundamentalist neighbor of the Simpson’s. The writers portray Ned as a good-hearted, somewhat boorish character. His faith and commitment almost always stand firm—even in an episode where he loses his wife to cancer. Another character that appears frequently is Reverend Lovejoy, the pastor of the Springfield Community Church where the Simpson’s and Flanders’s attend. Lovejoy is a caricature of the mainline Protestant minister who treats his calling as a job and has lost his zeal for ministry.

The chapter on the Bible provides more than enough examples of how the characters quote, misquote and make up biblical sounding verses season after season. Just as in real life, the Bible is used (and misused) by the characters to provide comfort, reinforce virtue, win arguments, castigate others, and reprove friends. Other than Ned, most of the characters on *The Simpsons* are biblically illiterate, including the pastor of the Springfield Community Church.

Three chapters explore the show’s treatment of Catholics, Jews, and Hindus. Although special attention is given to these three groups, it should be pointed out that over the years the laughs have come at the expense of Protestants, Pentecostals, Mormons, Atheists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses as well. Pinsky points out that the show has chosen not to address Islam—possibility to avoid a confrontation with the fanatical factions within Islam. This does not mean the show’s creators have avoided the ire of religious leaders. Orthodox Hindus were offended by what they consider to be the show’s promotion of unfair stereotypes, doctrinal error, and distortion. Other who have complained include the Catholic League, Lee Strobel of the Willow Creek Association, Baptist pastor Dan Burrell, former Secretary of Education William Bennett, and former President George H.W. Bush.

The occasional generalizations about evangelicals and Southern Baptists in the book may disturb some readers. It should be noted that Pinsky is a practicing Jew and member of the Congregation of Liberal Judaism. His writing displays respect, understanding, and admiration towards most in the evangelical

community. In the book, he frequently quotes Christians friends and sources, and his esteem for those who practice a living faith in Christ is evident.

Who should buy this book? First, anyone who enjoys *The Simpsons*, but is uncomfortable admitting it to their friends. This volume will provide you with enough information to convince a deacon board that watching *The Simpsons* should be included in the pastor's job description. A second audience interested in purchasing this book would be those ministering to youth or college students, who are looking for ways to connect spiritual truths to a postmodern popular culture. Finally, the pastor whose library budget is more than ample and whose interests are indiscriminate may be persuaded to add it to his collection. If these criteria only partially fit your case, consider instead a subject search on the Internet. Such a search will turn up many of the same "wisdom" identified in the book. Who should not buy this book? Those expecting some good laughs should look another direction. *The Gospel According to The Simpsons* is a commentary on the spiritual aspects of the program and not a rehash of puns and pundits that are the hallmarks of the show.

Rodney A. Harrison  
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*The Listener's Bible*. Narrated by Max McLean. Morristown, N.J.: The Listener's Bible Company, 2002, \$149.99.

Paul instructs Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:13, "Give attention to the public reading of scripture." Sadly, however, many evangelical churches—including those renowned for defending the inerrancy of Scripture—ignore this command about publicly reading the Scripture. Contrast this with most mainline denominational churches, including many who deny the inerrancy of God's Word. In following the Lectionary as a guide in public worship, not only do they "Give attention to the public reading of scripture," they read it *four* times. Every Sunday morning they will read from the Old Testament, the Psalms, the Gospels, and the Epistles. Shame on those churches who claim a high view of Scripture, and then make room for almost anything in a worship service except the reading of the Bible in obedience to 1 Timothy 4:13.

One of the possible factors contributing to the decline of public Scripture reading is the fact that when the Bible *is* read in worship, it is read with the same enthusiasm as reading the phonebook aloud. In other words, the *way* in which the Bible is read often conveys the impression that neither reading the Scripture publicly nor listening to it is very important. One of the benefits of hearing Max McLean read the Bible is the recovery of the vision of how meaningful and worshipful public Scripture reading can be. McLean reads the Bible like it *is* the Word of God. When he reads it, you *want* to listen to it.

Max McLean's path to his life work started at the University of Texas where he enrolled in an oral interpretation course in order to overcome his fear of public speaking. Not long after college he attended a Bible study and through that influence became a follower of Jesus. He pursued an acting career, and although he performed for several years at such noteworthy venues as the Royal Lyceum in Edinburgh, the Riverside Shakespeare Festival in New York, and

Olympia Dukakis' Whole Theater Company, Max found acting to be unfulfilling. According to his website (<http://www.listenersbible.com/maxmclean.asp>), McLean "realized that an actor is nothing more than a hired hand whose job is to communicate other people's ideas regardless of his own feelings about them. Aware of the fact that 'you can not serve two masters,' he made the decision to leave the theater." He enrolled in seminary, and while there a faculty member encouraged him to use his dramatic skills in ministry. "At that time," says McLean, "drama in the church was starting to get quite a bit of attention. But it was mostly sketches to illustrate sermons. I wasn't motivated to go in that direction." Instead, he began to think, "Why not use the skills and techniques developed from acting and the theater, integrate it into what I had learned from preachers and teachers, and apply all of that into word for word dramatic presentations of the Bible?"

Since then, McLean has been presenting dramatic readings (often in costume) of the Scriptures. In a typical performance, McLean quotes an entire book of the Bible—such as the Gospel of Mark or the Acts—from memory. At this writing his radio program of Scripture reading is heard on more than 600 stations.

McLean has a deep and pleasant voice, but not as arresting as the narrators in some other recordings of the Bible. For sheer vocal power, who can excel James Earl Jones' timbrous bass? But what sets McLean's efforts above all others I have heard is his interpretive skill. McLean doesn't sound as though he is reading anything. Rather he sounds as you might expect the writers of the text to sound if they were speaking instead of writing. For instance, hearing McLean read Acts 2 almost has you believing that you're listening to a recording of Peter preaching (in English, of course) at Pentecost. His ability to pause and add inflection to the words spoken by different characters in a dialogue makes you more aware of the give-and-take of conversation in a passage. His enunciation is crisp without sounding contrived. His manner of precisely articulating with lips and teeth, such as the way he bites off words in the imprecatory psalms, adds to the realism and believability of McLean's work.

After all, McLean has been "practicing" for this presentation of the Bible for more than two decades. Unlike some who are paid to read the Bible in a recording studio simply because they have a remarkable voice and years of wide theatrical experience, Max McLean has been traveling the country since 1983 giving dramatic readings of this same Book. Moreover, unlike some professional readers whose Christian credentials and previous private experience with the Bible are dubious, McLean is an active member of an evangelical church, has been ministering in local churches for most of his adult life, and comes recommended by trusted Christian leaders like Ravi Zacharias and R. C. Sproul who have a long-standing personal knowledge of him as a follower of Christ. As opposed to some who might rehearse for a one-time reading of the Bible, McLean says: "I try to devote quality time in the Bible daily . . . in personal study to understand the Bible better and allow the Holy Spirit to evaluate my life." His theology of Scripture is summarized in the statement, "If you want to know the mind of God you must go to the Bible." And his ministry purpose is this: "Our mission is to serve the church by presenting compelling and culturally engaging presentations of the Bible that evoke a deeper desire to know and serve

God. We want to present the Bible in a way that is engaging and enjoyable so that people will be encouraged to devote more time in the Word of God and, therefore, give the Holy Spirit more opportunity to speak through His Word.”

My only criticism of *The Listener's Bible* is a personal preference. The aimless, ethereal sound of a synthesizer serves as a background for McLean's reading. At least one person has commented to me that it enhances the experience. I found it both unnecessary and distracting.

*The Listener's Bible* comes on sixty-six compact discs and in a vinyl case about the size of the NIV Study Bible. In addition to the entire Bible, the producers of this product also make it available in the following divisions: the Old Testament, the Psalms and Proverbs, and the New Testament. McLean's reading of the NIV is also available on cassette. Listeners who prefer a translation other than the NIV, or who have adopted the English Standard Version, will want to know that Crossway released McLean's reading of the ESV New Testament in November 2003. A sample of McLean's skillful reading of Scripture can be heard on [www.listenersbible.com](http://www.listenersbible.com).

I devote one of the days in my Worship Leadership class to the subject of reading the Scripture well in public. At the end of the class, I let the students hear McLean read a psalm, a chapter of a narrative passage, and a chapter from an epistle. Once they hear classroom theory become reality, their view of the power of the public reading of Scripture is never the same. Whether it's just for your own edification or for what McLean can do to transform the public reading of Scripture for yourself and your church, I recommend *The Listener's Bible*.

Donald S. Whitney  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Eerdmans Publishing Company, 255 Jefferson Avenue S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503, (800) 253-7521

InterVarsity Press, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, Illinois 60515, (630) 734-4000.

The Listener's Bible Company, Fellowship for the Performing Arts, P.O. Box 230, Convent Station, New Jersey 07961-0230, (973) 984-3400, (888) 876 5661.

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