



Preachers and Preaching, II

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CONTENTS

Editorial iv

THEME: Preachers and Preaching, II

ARTICLES

The Pastor as Prophet
OWEN STRACHAN 1-15

The Landscape of the Character of Preaching
SCOTT M. GIBSON 16-37

The Ecclesiology of Charles. H. Spurgeon
GREGORY A. WILLS 38-53

Preaching against the State
JASON G. DUESING 54-82

John Williams, 1767-1825
MICHAEL D. McMULLEN 83-93

BOOK REVIEWS

Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (2015)
(Reviewed by Jason K. Allen) 94-95

Peter Sanlon, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching* (2014)
(Reviewed by Coleman M. Ford) 95-98

Craig R. Koester, <i>Revelation: A New Translation</i> (2014) (Reviewed by Radu Gheorghita)	98-102
J.C. Paget and J. Schaper, <i>The New Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume 1</i> (2013) (Reviewed by Radu Gheorghita)	102-106
Philip G. Ryken, <i>Loving Jesus More</i> (2014) (Reviewed by Abigail Odin)	106-108
David M. Allen, <i>Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews</i> (2008) (Reviewed by Ched Spellman)	108-113
A.L. Chute, N.A. Finn and M.A.G. Haykin, <i>The Baptist Story</i> (2015) (Reviewed by Jason G. Duesing)	113-116
Books Received	117-118



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EDITORIAL:

Welcome to the Fall 2015 issue of the *Midwestern Journal of Theology*. In this, the second of our Issues examining the theme of Preachers and Preaching, we are again seeking to reflect on the great gift of God to the Church, that of Preaching. I hope that all those who give so sacrificially of their time and talents to bring this Journal to fruition, are aware of my very sincere thanks for all they do.

This Issue begins with *Midwestern's* own and very new, Owen Strachan's, as he shares with us his Article, 'The Pastor as Prophet: Christic Exposition in the Age of Audio'. Strachan challenges and encourages Pastors to remember that they have been called as Prophets, God's mouthpieces delivering God's words on the battlefield of the world. We are then honored to have a most helpful Article from Scott Gibson, who is the Haddon W. Robinson professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell. His paper explores the landscape of preaching today and investigates the challenges that preachers face on a number of levels—moral challenges, consumer-driven challenges, the challenge of the cult of personality, and the challenges of seminary education in the training of preachers.

Our third piece comes from the pen of Gregory Wills, Dean at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and is an excellent analysis of Charles Spurgeon's Ecclesiology. Our penultimate Article, a scholarly yet very practical examination of the persecution of the Anabaptists in the 16th Century and the lessons we can draw from it for today, is from *Midwestern's* Provost, Jason Duesing. The final offering in this Issue, is an historical biography of John Williams, a Welsh Baptist preacher, whom God used mightily in the New York of the 19th Century, not only in his role as a preacher, but also as a pioneer in the support of Baptist foreign missions.

We again, conclude this Issue with several relevant and thought provoking book reviews.

The Pastor as Prophet: Christic Exposition in the Age of Audio

OWEN STRACHAN

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In the middle of the world's greatest city, he prayed.¹

It was 11:20am in London on June 18, 1944, the era of Churchill, Hitler, Roosevelt, larger-than-life figures. It was a period of terrible, totalizing war, when all the world seemed a mix of fire and smoke. The British Empire had effectively ended. In recent decades, it had controlled nearly a quarter of the globe's territory, making it the largest superpower in human history. Now, the city at the center of it all was under siege. In the midst of the aerial invasion, with sirens blaring and chaos reigning, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones stood before his people. He was a few hundred feet from Buckingham Palace, but he sought the ministrations of a higher kingdom.

It was a frightening time in London. The Germans' remote-controlled bombing of the city had begun only days before, and had already caused tremendous casualties—over 10,000 in a week, according to historian Iain Murray.² It was the stuff of madness, and catastrophic for the city. “The Doctor,” however, was not deterred. The whole church could hear the plane closing in, but Lloyd-Jones had begun his “long prayer”—his pastoral prayer—and did not stop. The whine overhead grew too loud, though, for him to continue, and so he paused. All the congregation held their breath.

Then the bomb fell. There was a massive explosion, debris fell

¹ This article is adapted with permission from “Of Prophets, Priests, and Kings: A Brief Biblical Theology of the Pastorate,” in Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen D. Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian: Reclaiming a Lost Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015).

² Iain Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, The Fight of Faith, 1939-1981* (Edinburgh & Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1990), 113-115.

from the ceiling, and the structure of the chapel cracked. One woman had closed her eyes moments before; she opened them, saw fine white dust covering her fellow parishioners, and thought she was in heaven. The congregation rose to their feet; panic was in the air. The church members waited to see how their pastor would react. Would he weep, or run, or panic?

He would not. With sirens screaming, the Doctor resumed his pastoral prayer. At its close, he told the people that any who wished to do so could move under the gallery for safety. A deacon then took the podium, dusted it off, and returned to his seat. Lloyd-Jones resumed his place at the chapel's front and opened his Bible. Without missing a beat, he began to preach God's Word to the people.

The text was Jude 20, which reads in context with verse 21: *But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*³

The Prophet of the Old Covenant Era

In this remarkable scene, we witness a stunning portrait of public courage. We find also a memorable portrait of the nature of Christian ministry in a fallen world. Even as the world burns, the pastor leads the church to continually build itself up in the Spirit's power. We may not all minister in such a visceral setting, but there is indeed a battle in which every pastor fights. Pastoral ministry is a local campaign in the broader war between the living God and the principalities and powers of the air (Ephesians 6:12).

The effects of this conflict are many in number: dispirited people. Fighting. Constant criticism of the staff. Adultery. Susceptibility to false teaching. Families riven by poor leadership. Once-vibrant disciples walking away from the faith. Despair at finances. Depression. If many modern battles are fought block-by-block, the spiritual conflict is fought

³ This was no mean act of courage, whether spiritual or otherwise. Several days later, Murray reports, a high-ranking officer in the British army said to a fellow officer, "I have seen many things in the trenches in France but I have never seen anything more remarkable than the way that man went on with his prayer as though nothing had happened" (115).

person-by-person. The site of this conflict is the human heart, the inner core encompassing all the hopes, thoughts, dreams, schemes, and conflict of a God-imaging person.

If the site of this conflict is the human heart, standing at the center of the congregational battlefield is the pastor. In the momentous conflict between God and the devil, the pastor goes ahead of the people, representing them to God, protecting them from Satan. Yet despite the central role of the pastor in the church's work to advance the kingdom of Christ in the great war of the ages, there has been relatively little biblical-theological reflection on this role. In what follows, I wish to make clear that the pastor is the inheritor of the privilege and responsibility of leading the people of God in the new covenant ministry of reconciliation. As we shall see, this divine appointment requires as a matter of the gravest urgency that pastors, like prophets before them, speak God's word to God's people, for the Word of God is the very means of supernatural reconciliation.

To best understand the pastor of the new covenant in Christ's blood, we must take pains to understand the prophet of the old covenant. If pastors today would reclaim the dignity and power of the pastoral office, they must look back through time at the figures who preceded them in their duty as homiletical agents of God. To understand the pastor, we must understand the prophet. To that ancient figure we now turn.

Proclaimer of Objective Revelation

The Old Testament prophet was set aside by the Lord to speak the will and announce the mind of God. Through declaration, exhortation, scorching rebuke, and entreaties to taste God's lavish mercy, the prophets interpreted the times through an unflinchingly theocentric perspective. Fools for God, they were seized by Yahweh, and they spoke for him. Walter Brueggemann has said that "In their appearance, Yahweh is taken to be directly and palpably present in Israel."⁴ The prophets did not only manifest the mind of God, but his very presence. He was with his people. He had not left them. When they

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 623.

wandered, as they frequently did, he wanted them back.

As the ruler of all things, Yahweh appoints his prophets to speak with no less than divine authority. The call of Jeremiah to the prophetic office shows that he was given just this role.

Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me,

Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.
See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant. (Jeremiah 1:9-10)

Many years before Jesus interpreted these words as a statement of his kingship, Jeremiah spoke them as an act of transcendent proclamation. Jeremiah's words, we could say, ruled. His declarations and teachings from God could be rejected by his hearers, but that would not mean they could choose a different path than that promised them by the Lord.

The prophets exercised the ministry of truth-telling. Truth is not something outside of or beyond God. Truth is rather a matter of the reliability of God's word – of God's covenant faithfulness. He *is* truth, according to the prophets (see Isaiah 25:1; 65:16), for there is nothing more reliable than the promises of Yahweh. His character never wavers; his word never fails (Isa. 55:11). The prophets served the people of Israel by continually reminding them of this fact. God's promises would not fail. Even when it seemed otherwise, when his faithful remnant felt Assyrian boots and Persian spurs on their neck, Yahweh had not forgotten his covenant people. Even in the worst of times for God's chosen, grace was at hand, even as judgment would eventually come on sin.

God was not shouting across no man's land. There were no empty threats. God's warnings too were truths stated to a wayward people, a people who continually strayed from the covenant of grace that called them to faithful trust and holy living. The prophets reminded the people of their identity even as they took on the role of prosecutors on behalf of God's broken covenant. Even in times of captivity, the people had a divine commission. The prophets shouted themselves hoarse in exhorting Yahweh's people to keep the covenant and not forget it.

If God's people would listen, they would find another way that did not lead to destruction. This was the way of preservation and salvation. Despite the terrors of Yahweh's justice, the people of Jacob—the wrestler—were not to cower before their Lord.

But fear not, O Jacob my servant,
nor be dismayed, O Israel,
for behold, I will save you from far away,
and your offspring from the land of their captivity.
Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease,
and none shall make him afraid (Jeremiah 46:27).

We learn much about what prophets did from such texts like. He warned of judgment and assured the people that they could not outpace the Lord. He called them to account for their sins and urged them to repent, promising them the grace of God should they follow the Lord—and even, because of Yahweh's regular forbearance, if they did not. Walter Kaiser has noted that Jeremiah, with fellow prophets, offered “objective revelation” that was true—and not only true, but “food for the prophet's own soul,” a summation that captures the living nature of prophetic witness.⁵ The prophets were the media of communication of the word of God, a word that was divine, steadfast, and true. What God said came to pass. When the people doubted this, or denied the truthfulness of God's ways and the certain outcomes of his plans, the prophet stood up in their midst and refuted their wisdom, which was no wisdom at all.

To be a prophet was not only to declare what was unchangingly true, but to address the changing times of the people of God from a God-centered perspective. Egypt might seem promising; Babylon might seem indestructible; but the prophet existed to handle these contextual challenges, and to remind the followers of Yahweh that a greater sovereign reigned in the world of men. In this way the office of prophet was an office unlike any other. “Accurate mediator of God's will” as Paul

⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 228.

House has said, “interpreter of the world, and herald of lavish, even shocking, grace”—this was the prophet.⁶

In sum, the prophet spoke for Yahweh. Such a claim sounds audacious in the present day, when one scarcely dares to speak even for one’s own mind, unsettled as it may be. The prophets did not have the luxury of citing cognitive dissonance for their inability to speak up. They were charged by Almighty God to voice his mind, and they were given the very words of this divine figure to say. This was a powerful commission. As Wayne Grudem has noted, “The prophets’ words are words of God; therefore the people have an obligation to believe and obey them. To believe God is to believe his prophets (2 Chr. 20:20; 29:25; Hag. 1:12), for the words of the prophets are the very words of God (2 Chr. 36:15-16).”⁷

The prophet trembled at this responsibility. When called to his office by Yahweh, the prophet did not customarily beat his chest and roar. One thinks, for example, of Ezekiel. Confronted by a vision of the likeness of God’s appearing, he did not instinctively bask in the light of the holy. He fell to the ground, eyes nearly bleeding from the sight of the holiness of the divine presence, straining to crawl into the ground for shelter from the luminous, air-compressing weight of the Lord (Ezekiel 1). Yet then Ezekiel rose, empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak the words of the Lord to a people who, shockingly, did not often want them. So it was for Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and many others.

The prophet did not generally minister from a position of earthly power but rather by entering into the people’s suffering. Abraham Heschel describes Hosea’s ministry as one of “suffering together.”⁸ Suffering visited many of the prophets not in spite of God’s word, but because of it. In a world corrupted by a lie – the devil speaks just three false sentences in Genesis 3 – truth-telling is neither easy nor easily accepted. In situations laden with temptations to worship false gods – and when does idolatry not abound? – the prophet dares to speak the truth, taking captive every convenient illusion.

⁶ Paul House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 222.

⁷ W. A. Grudem, “Prophecy/Prophets,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 704.

⁸ Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 73.

The Pastor as Herald of the Gospel

Thus far, we have sought to establish how the prophet foreshadowed and in some way presently informs the work of the pastor, and in particular, the inescapably *theological* work of the pastor. The focus of the present section expands upon the foregoing by examining how the New Testament builds upon and fills out the preceding model of the prophet.

Prophetic ministry was centered around the proclamation and application of the law. Pastoral ministry is centered around the person and work of Christ. In speaking of his love for his church, Jesus used numerous metaphors and images to indicate his sacrificial centrality. In John's Gospel, we learn that he is the good shepherd:

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. (John 10:9-15)

Jesus did not intend his ministry as "good shepherd" to involve merely generic protection. On the contrary, ministry is pictured here in terms of bloody conflict with a foe – "the thief" – who would savage the sheep, the people of God. Jesus, however, will not let this happen. The good shepherd protects not by defensive maneuvers but by laying his life down for his flock (John 10:11, 15). Jesus here expands on the Psalmist's conception of Yahweh's shepherding ministry in Psalm 23. Not only will Christ lead his people to true and lasting peace, but he will do so by a vicarious and effectual death. Without this wretched self-sacrifice, there can be no lasting peace beside still waters, no restful sleep in green pastures.

The institution of the Lord's Supper, the cross-centered fulfillment of the Passover meal, further clarified Jesus' high-priestly work. When Jesus directs his band of disciples to feed on him in the

upper room, he teaches them that his blood will be the provision for their sins. The old covenant has passed away. In Christ the new has come: Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:26-29)

Just hours after this meal, Jesus did indeed go to the cross, gave his body, and poured out his blood. The new covenant had dawned, and at the apex of its inauguration is Jesus the center of all things, hanging on cursed wood for the "forgiveness of sins." The great high priest, long-anticipated and long-desired, served, as his predecessors had, by making sacrifice for the people of God. But Jesus did not offer the blood of bulls and goats (Hebrew 9:13; 10:4). He offered himself, and invited all who called upon his name, and ate his holy meal, to be washed, once and for all time.

For the apostles and the early church pastors they trained, the gospel was not merely one resource among several. It was rather the very core of their proclamatory work:

The fundamental element of Paul's ministry was the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:17). This, he recognized, was the means by which God had chosen to make himself known to people (1 Cor. 1:21); this was the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18). He was under obligation to preach this gospel, and faced dire consequences if he did not (1 Cor. 9:16-17).⁹

The pastor's work centers in the preaching and teaching of the gospel message, the good news of reconciliation in Christ. Here we may recall Karl Barth's famous response when asked what pastors should preach. Instead of indulging his expectant listeners with tricks of the homiletic trade, Barth responded simply, "Christ!" Similarly, when pastors consider how they may minister grace to their people in all their pastoral duties, we may answer simply: "Christ!"¹⁰ The law is fulfilled. The

⁹ C. G. Kruse, "Ministry," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, & Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 605.

¹⁰ We are reminded of the judgment of Sam Wells on the centrality of Christ: "the Bible is about Jesus," for "Jesus was God's plan all along." Samuel Wells,

rituals are retired. The bloody sacrifices have ended. But in all the preaching, teaching, counseling, training, and visitation, the pastor, like the priest ministering grace before him, offers gracious provision on behalf of the people: all of Christ for all of life.

Minister of Truth

The foregoing matters greatly to the pastor, for the pastor has nothing to preach save for the Word and the gospel. These are fighting words today. We often hear that preaching is outmoded, and even that expository homilies are “cheating.”¹¹ Once, goes the thinking, it made sense to ascend an aged pulpit and preach a lengthy sermon. Like an aged family member whose glory days are long behind him, however, today we treat the homily with reverence but no longer see it as the centerpiece of our worship. We’re in a post-homiletical age where communicate in tweets and emoticons, not declamations and discourses.

The era of the spoken word is, in point of fact, not over. Media personalities continue to fill the air with political analysis, discussion of sporting events, and comic-book dissections. According to the Pew Research Center, over 2.5 billion podcasts were downloaded in 2014, a historic amount.¹² Movies have never been longer; your average earth-saving superhero spectacle—the kind that draws millennials in spades—regularly clocks in at nearly three hours long. Thanks to commercials, sporting events have never taken longer to view, and one should keep in mind that the live action is accompanied by an unending stream of commentary. The idea that people won’t sit and listen to discourse of one kind or another is not simply off, it’s historically off. In one form or another, we’re living in the midst of a golden age of audience-captive audio.

Speaking the Truth: Preaching in a Pluralistic Culture (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 40.

¹¹ See Ed Stetzer, “Andy Stanley on Communication (Part Two),” *The Exchange*, March 5, 2009, accessible at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2009/march/andy-stanley-on-communication-part-2.html>.

¹² Pew Research Center, “Podcasting: Fact Sheet,” April 29, 2015, accessible at <http://www.journalism.org/2015/04/29/podcasting-fact-sheet>.

In such a time as this, pastors do well to reclaim their prophetic mantle. It is not the psychologists, or advertising executives, or life-coach gurus that should train the pastor. It is not the latest sociological trend but the prophet, charged with the often-unpopular task of speaking forth God's word, who should inspire pastors to preach with fresh power and zeal today. The pastor, like the apostles, stands firmly in the oratorical tradition of the prophets, who heard the word of God and explained it, applied it, and commended it to the people. The prophet's ministry was a ministry of God's word, and hence a ministry of truth.

To understand the prophetic aspect of ministry in the New Testament, consider the sermons in the book of Acts. Peter preaches the first recorded apostolic sermon in Acts 2. He quotes Joel 2 to inform his Jerusalem audience that the day of Pentecost, marked by the outpouring of the Spirit on all hearers, has now come. This event signaled that the day of salvation has dawned: "Now, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). Peter grounds this call of salvation in the person and work of Jesus Christ:

Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. (Acts 2:22-24)

Peter's sermon was not delivered in a formal ecclesial setting. He was outside, preaching in Jerusalem, just after flaming tongues of fire had descended from heaven. If the setting was slightly atypical, the content of Peter's message was not.

The apostolic preaching of the gospel of Christ flowed from the conviction that Christ had fulfilled the Old Testament, that he is the exclusive savior and pathway to God, and that everyone who hears the message is summoned to respond in faith. Like the prophets, the apostles offered their hearers truth, not in the abstract, but truth that impinged on every aspect of each person's life. All have fallen short of the glory of God, all have been judged by the *kerygma*, yet all have also been offered eternal life in Christ.

The apostles preached Jesus, and they preached him fearlessly, even in the midst of tremendous hostility and opposition to their

message (as did the prophets before them). The world was their parish, and they were soon dispatched to the Gentiles. When Paul came to Mars Hill, he delivered a remarkable sermon in the Areopagus. After noting the religious instincts of his audience, Paul revealed the identity of the unknown God:

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.” Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:26-31)

Paul’s message might initially seem rather different from those of Peter, but in reality, it is similar. Both apostles reference the canonical authorities of the culture in which they speak. Both built off the Old Testament. Paul not only cited the teaching of Genesis, but also the great poets and philosophers of the Greek world, including Epimenedes and Aratus. Especially noteworthy, however, is Paul’s explanation of the purpose of the resurrection, which is not simply the vindication of the church, but the “assurance” of future judgment of the world, including those who live in “ignorance” of the living God. Once again, the *kerygma* leaves an audience without excuse. The resurrection entails the truth of Christ’s lordship, and the apostles were at pains to make it subjectively relevant, whether in Jerusalem, the religious center of the ancient kingdom, or Athens, the philosophical center of the pagan superpower.

The apostles did not perform rhetorical flights of fancy or participate in the Greco-Roman codes of public discourse but kept their discourse prophetically simple. As Paul said to the church at Corinth: “my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:3-

5).¹³ As an apostle and pastor to many churches, Paul's was largely a verbal ministry, a ministry exercised through words.¹⁴ He spoke not his own words, but God's, and thus offered his listeners the mind of Christ.¹⁵ He trained the next generation of pastors to do the same, and to guard the gospel, the "good deposit": "By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (2 Timothy 1:14). If this deposit—the gospel—was lost, then all was lost.

Pastors have not only to guard this message, but also to feed their people a steady diet of it. According to Hebrews 5:11-6:3, preachers had the divine charge of giving their people "meat" and not "milk." There is no clearer call in Scripture for pastors to embrace a theological pastorate and an expository preaching ministry than this. The people will not grow and flourish and find full health through a diet of milk alone. They need to grow up, to eat more complex food, to be richly sustained for a life of spiritual exertion. This means knowing the Scripture better, which flows out of hard pastoral work and careful study of biblical and systematic theology. To offer this, however, the pastor must first have embraced the very nature of pastoral work, which is to say, its theological identity: helping the word of God to dwell richly in the people of God (and

¹³ Timothy Keller notes in relation to this text that "Paul says he deliberately eschewed the typical forms of rhetoric and logic used by Greek orators." Instead, "He wanted the Spirit to work with power on the hearers, and therefore he was careful not to make his messages too much like a logical "lecture" ("Preaching the Gospel in a Post-Modern World," unpublished manuscript, 15).

¹⁴ See Colin Kruse's words on Paul's ministry: "Through his apostolic preaching of the gospel he betrothed people to Christ....Such devotion was under threat when their thoughts were led astray by false teaching, and so the apostle sought by all means to make plain to them the truth of the gospel." Kruse, "Ministry," 606.

¹⁵ Paul was the preeminent pastor-theologian: "Paul's letters are a clear testimony to his pastoral heart. Indeed his letters are a product of his pastoral care, for through them Paul exercised a pastoral role in regard to the churches which he or his converts had founded. Paul was no academic theologian, far removed from the realities of church life; rather it was his concern for the churches which proved to be the springboard for his theology" (P. Beasley-Murray, "Paul as Pastor," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, & Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993], 654).

vice versa). The pastorate is a position which would not exist without a body of God-fired revelation. It exists to offer people a nourishing meal of the same.¹⁶

Every pastor, then, stands beside Peter as Jesus tells him three times, “Feed my sheep” (John 21). This is a remarkable charge. Jesus does not say “Teach my sheep,” as he conceivably could have. The metaphor he uses is much more evocative and informative. It tells us what the core of gospel ministry is: it is feeding the people of God the Word of God. The church is not submitting itself to an odd but historically prominent practice in sitting underneath the preaching ministry of the pastor each week. The church is eating together. In restoring his benighted disciple, Jesus summons Peter to a feeding ministry that is in truth a preaching and teaching ministry. The takeaway is clear: if Christians today are hungry, if they wonder why they wrestle with a certain malaise and a less-than-vital spiritual walk, it is perhaps because they are not being fed.

The foregoing leads to a simple but deeply meaningful conclusion: pastoral ministry, like prophetic ministry of ancient times, is largely a ministry of words. The pastor, like Peter, is a shepherd, but this shepherding work is not physical, with rod and staff, but spiritual, with verbs and nouns. The burden of the pastor’s work is the declaration of the mind and will of God, as Carl Trueman has pointed out:

[I]t is hard to see how the identity of God and his action in Christ and in the church could be more adequately expressed than by the use of words. In fact, the sermons in Acts and in the epistles indicate that the prophetic model of Moses (exposition, application, exhortation rooted in God’s revelation) is the standard; and as this action is clearly connected to a theology of God as a speaking God, the preacher simply cannot see that his task as mere communication of information.¹⁷

¹⁶ “The preacher who loves God with the mind and thinks with the heart will thoughtfully and lovingly ask, how, theologically speaking, shall this specific congregation be addressed?” (John M. Stapleton, “Loving God with the Mind and Thinking with the Heart,” in Wallace M. Alston Jr. and Cynthia A. Jarvis, eds., *The Power to Comprehend with All the Saints: The Formation and Practice of a Pastor-Theologian* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 211).

¹⁷ Carl R. Trueman, “The Preacher as Prophet: Some Notes on the Nature of Preaching,” in Iain D. Campbell & Malcom Maclean, *The People’s Theologian: Writings in Honour of Donald Macleod* (Glasgow: Mentor, 2011), 205.

God is not a pantomiming or play-acting God. His fundamental product is a body of verbal revelation and the human body of Jesus Christ, the word made flesh. The work of the preacher is found not in walking through the Bible as in a how-to seminar, but in expositing the biblical text, applying it, and exhorting the people to live according to it in union with Christ and by the power of the spirit.¹⁸

The pastor, seeing in full what his predecessors knew only in type and shadow, speaks not his own mind, but the mind of God. Like the prophets of old, the pastor calls the people not to misery and anxiety, but to the world-righting, soul-renewing station of repentance. Babylon has faded and Persia is no more, but the world is still ruled by forces of darkness that would enslave the people of God. The pastor, as one captured and enraptured by biblical doctrine and theological truth, takes up the prophet's mantle, calling the church to remember the covenant and to be transformed by the grace that pours from it. All this is a ministry of words, but not words for their own sake—words invested with the authority of the divine. The pastor's preaching ministry is the ministry of God's truth: the way and life of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion: The Prophetic Pastorate as Theological Office

When D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones stood up in Westminster Chapel to pray and to preach in the midst of a wartime attack, he offered powerful testimony to the work of the minister in a fallen world. To a people who crave reliable words in a culture of unstable images, the pastor acts as prophet, delving into all the Scripture to exposit Christ and call the people to fresh repentance and reinvigorated faith. Today, as in ancient times, pastors act as theologians of the church, shining into yearning hearts the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

This is not to lay upon ministers the mantle, much less the yoke, of academic theology. It is to say that the pastorate is, like covenant officers of old, an office grounded in theological realities: salvation,

¹⁸ Without the personal dimension, preaching will be a lecture, a well-intended but insufficient intellectual exercise. We mark Lloyd-Jones's classic description of preaching: "logic on fire." See D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 97.

wisdom, and truth – in a word, Christ. Take away God and the gospel of Jesus Christ and the pastorate—and the prophetic word he preaches—ceases to exist. From this Christological foundation, the pastor preaches, but also counsels, disciples, leads, acts, stewards, manages, administers, puts chaos into order, evangelizes, rebukes, and teaches. In all this work, the set-apart pastor serves the set-apart God by feeding his set-apart people. This is inherently theological work, hence every pastor works as a theologian, and a prophet besides.¹⁹

The pastor does so whether stones rain down in the encroachment of death, as in the martyrdom of Stephen, or rockets splinter the surrounding city, as in the ministry of Lloyd-Jones. All pastors minister amidst sin and a Satanic foe that would undo them. Bombs may fall, or they may not. Whatever the case, every pastor has the privilege of ministering in the power of Christ, and taking great hope from this truth. The buildings may crash, the sirens may wail, the culture may implode, but the prophetic pastor, and the kingdom he serves, will never be shaken.

¹⁹ We are reminded of the words of R. Albert Mohler, Jr. on the nature of the pastorate: “There is no more theological calling than this—guard the flock of God for the sake of God’s truth.” Mohler, *He Is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 107.

The Landscape of the Character of Preaching¹

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“There are some things that are expected of you
just because you are a preacher.”²

ABSTRACT: This paper explores the landscape of preaching today and investigates the challenges that preachers face on a number of levels—moral challenges, consumer-driven challenges, the challenge of the cult of personality, and the challenges of seminary education in the training of preachers. The author offers initial conclusions.

Introduction

As preachers and teachers of preaching we want to gain a perspective as to the nature of preaching today. By so doing we will be able to see where we are and what we are to do about it as we engage with preaching and its concomitant inscription of character in the process of discipleship. The question, then, what does the landscape of preaching look like in North America? To answer this question, we will explore the challenges preachers face, the moral challenges of preachers, the challenge of consumer-driven Christianity, the challenge of the cult of personality, and the challenges of seminary education in the training of preachers. We will end by drawing some conclusions.

¹ This Article is adapted from a Paper presented at the annual meeting of the 2014 Evangelical Homiletics Society.

² Theodore Adams, “A Preacher Looks at His Preaching,” 1956 E.Y. Mullins Lecture on Preaching in *Preaching with Purpose and Power*, ed., Don M. Aycock (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982), 133.

The Challenges Preachers Face

These are not necessarily great days for preachers. Preachers are facing termination, experiencing marginalization, confronting conflict in the church, and undergoing stress that is evidenced in stunning ways. A study conducted in 2012 discovered that 28 percent of Christian ministers faced a forced termination, while another study notes that anywhere from 19 percent to 41 percent of all ministers are terminated.³ The 41 percent statistic reflects the high termination rate among Assembly of God ministers.⁴ The 2003 study by London and Wiseman notes that about 20,000 preachers a year leave the ministry for good, some of them are the result of forced termination.⁵

The unintended consequences of poor health are reflected in preachers who have been terminated or have experienced difficulties in pastoral ministry.⁶ In 2010 the Clergy Health Initiative, which is a seven-year study of 1,726 Methodist ministers in North Carolina, published its first findings and noted, "Compared with neighbors in their census tracts, the ministers reported significantly higher rates of arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure and asthma. Obesity was 10 percent more prevalent in the clergy group."⁷ Similar results are found in internal surveys conducted by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They report that 69 percent of their pastors stated that they were overweight,

³ Daniel Schutz, "Forced Clergy Transitions," *Congregations Magazine* 2:2 (July 2013): 1. Interestingly, Schutz notes, "Some congregations are repeat offenders: one study found that just 7 percent of congregations were responsible for 35 percent of the total reported conflict" (p. 1).

⁴ Marcus N. Tanner, Anise M Zvonkovic, Charlie Adams, "Forced Termination of American Clergy: Its Effects and Connection to Negative Well-Being," *Review of Religious Research* 54:1 (March 2012): 1-17. Religion and Philosophy Collection, EBSCOhost (accessed 17 January 2014), 1.

⁵ Tanner, Zvonkovic and Adams, 1, quoting London and Wiseman, 2003.

⁶ Tanner, Zvonkovic and Adams, 12.

⁷ Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell and Sara LeGrand, "High Rates of Obesity and Chronic Disease Among United Methodist Clergy," *Obesity*, 18 (9), 1867-1870. DOI: 10.1038/oby.2010.102

<<http://www.nature.com/oby/journal/v18/n9/full/oby2010102a.html>>

See also: Paul Vitello, "Taking a Break From the Lord's Work," *The New York Times* reprints (1 August 2010).

with 64 percent reporting high blood pressure and another 13 percent admitting to taking antidepressants.⁸

A study on pastor well-being conducted among Canadian evangelicals noted that on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is no stress and 10 is high stress, the question was asked, "How stressful is your pastoral work right now?" The results showed, "The average was 5.86, although nearly a quarter of the pastors (23.8%) rated their stress at 8 or more, and another 20% rated it at 7."⁹

It is not surprising that preachers are facing difficult challenges in ministry with a church and culture in turmoil. Pastoral Care, Inc., reports the top ten reasons why pastors leave the ministry. These include, (1) Ministers have a vision, the church doesn't; (2) lack of denominational support; (3) feeling alone; (4) stress on family and health; (5) can't be real but have to be most spiritual; (6) not appreciated; (7) stress and burnout; (8) lack of motivation; (9) low income resulting in low self-esteem; and (10) lack of vision.¹⁰ In light of this list, Spencer, Winston and Bocarnea provide the following insight:

The term vision conflict does not exist as a named dimension in any literature associated with research involving clergy. However, numerous scholarly and popular press sources discuss clergy's feelings of disparity between what they expected to happen by answering the call to ministry and the events that actually take place.¹¹

Preachers face the challenge of their calling in the midst of a changing landscape. Their health, family relationships and church expectations,

⁸ Vitello. The Duke study on Methodist pastors will have additional information on depression in a forthcoming pdf article. See: <divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/clergy-health-initiative/what-we're-learning/published-research-0>

⁹ Sam Reimer, "Pastoral Well-being: Findings from the Canadian Evangelical Churches Study," *Church & Faith Trends* 3:2 (August 2010): 3.

¹⁰ "10 Reasons Why Pastors Leave the Ministry," Pastoral Care, Inc., 2013 <<http://www.pastoralcareinc.com/articles/10-reasons-why-ministers-quit/>>

¹¹ J. Louis Spencer, Bruce E. Winston, Mihai C. Bocarnea, "Predicting the Level of Pastors' Risk of Termination/Exit from the Church," *Pastoral Psychology* 61 (2012): 91-92.

among other concerns, provide us with a picture of the challenging personal life of a preacher as he or she intends to live out the call to ministry even at the risk of losing it.

Consumer-Driven Christianity

North American culture is dominated by consumer-driven, technologically-powered Christianity. Christians and the wider culture view churches more as worship “stores” where if one is dissatisfied with the product (sermons, programs, etc.) then one goes to a different store to find what he or she wants—most likely not what he or she needs.

This trend toward consumer-driven religion has demonstrated growth over the last fifty years. A Gallup poll reports that only 15 percent of all Americans in 1955 noted that they had turned from the faith of their parents. But by 2008 the number had risen to 44 percent.¹² Pastors have seen their job descriptions reworked in light of these changes. There is a new way clergy are expected to operate in this consumer-driven culture. Theologian and social critic David Wells notes, “Modern clergy are inclined to let professional functions determine the shape of their ministerial service.” He continues:

In this new clerical order, technical and managerial competence in the church have plainly come to dominate the definition of pastoral service. It is true that matters of spirituality loom large in the churches, but it is not all clear that churches expect the pastor to do anything more than to be a good friend. The older role of the pastor as broker of truth has been eclipsed by the newer managerial functions.¹³

Wells made these observations over twenty years ago—and the challenge has only increased. The impact that a consumer-driven cultural stance has on preaching is palpable. One preacher observes that preachers are “no longer expected to offer moral counsel in pastoral care sessions or to deliver sermons that make the comfortable uneasy. Church leaders who

¹² G. Jeffrey MacDonald, “Congregations Gone Wild,” *New York Times* Reprints (7 August 2010). MacDonald quotes the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

¹³ David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 233.

continue such ministerial traditions pay dearly.” He reports, “A few years ago, thousands of parishioners quit Woodland Hills Church in St. Paul, Minn., and Community Church of Joy in Glendale, Ariz., when their respective preachers refused to bless the congregations’ preferred political agendas and consumerist lifestyles.”¹⁴

G. Jeffrey MacDonald, a pastor in Massachusetts decries the pressures he feels as tries to minister in the midst of North American consumerism. His story is baldly clear:

In the early 2000s, the advisory committee of my small congregation in Massachusetts told me to keep my sermons to 10 minutes, tell funny stories and leave people feeling great about themselves. The unspoken message in such instructions is clear: give us the comforting, amusing fare we want or we’ll get our spiritual leadership from someone else.¹⁵

Navigating the contours of consumerism and the call of the sacrificial gospel is a pressure which preachers face as they strive to be faithful in this ever-changing society. Personal pressures and a culture of consumerism are two challenges to preachers.

Technology and Theology

Another cultural challenge that often locks arms with consumerism is the rise of the use of technology in preaching and worship. The virtual self is projected from one venue to another, on the computer screen or in a video—without the face-to-face engagement with the preached Word. I am no Luddite, but I do question the headlong rush into the use of technology without considering the theological implications.

The seemingly lack of careful thoughtful theological reflection and justification for technologies that enable, for example, multi-site ministry that uses projected or virtual communication for worship services, among other resources raises some questions, including: what is worship? What is the church? What is presence? Are our pragmatic approaches squashing our ability to consider the broader theological

¹⁴ MacDonald.

¹⁵ Ibid.

implications of why we do what we do? Was Marshall McLuhan right when he says, “The medium is the message?” Is the medium the message? Or has the medium become the message?¹⁶

Lori Carrell who has engaged in considerable research on the preaching of the sermon notes what she calls, the “diminishing power of the spoken word with new technologies....” She says that such decline in the strength of the spoken word “is only imminent if we choose such a route, if we allow the disintegration of face-to-face public interaction. Might we? Yes. Must we? No. Should we? These are questions worthy of our thoughts and actions as we examine the vitality of preaching....”¹⁷

In a later study commissioned by the Alban Institute, Lori Carrell provides these assuring words: “Though some analysts predict that a few podcasting superpreachers will soon proclaim to a great global pew, right now, Christ-followers are seeking spiritual direction from the public spoken words of their pastors.” She continues, “Your physical presence in the congregation creates the opportunity for relationship with the listening community. The credibility emerging from that relational connection is a critical contributor to the potential power of your preaching.”¹⁸

The personal challenges preachers face are real and unavoidable. Navigating a consumer-driven culture and engaging and evaluating the preacher’s relationship with technology is also a stark reality for preachers. These realities push at the core of our commitment to Christ and our calling as preachers.

The Moral Challenges of Preachers

Preachers are tempted like anyone else, but it is how they respond to temptation that makes the difference. Scanning the newspaper headlines may not provide the best encouragement for those who preach. Larceny, sex-abuse, assault, homosexuality, plagiarism, and other offenses make the headlines about wayward preachers.

¹⁶ See: Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT, 1964, 1994).

¹⁷ Lori Carrell, *The Great American Sermon Survey* (Wheaton: Mainstay, 2000), 23.

¹⁸ Lori J. Carrell, *Preaching That Matters: Reflective Practices for Transforming Sermons* (Herndon: Alban, 2013), 9.

In 2010 Vaughn Reeves was sentenced to 54 years in prison for “pocketing millions of dollars that investors believed would be used to build churches.”¹⁹ Still other pastors are accused of embezzling.²⁰ Alberto Cutie, a former Roman Catholic priest admitted to having a girlfriend and fathering a child with her while a priest. He later left the priesthood and married the girlfriend.²¹ Ted Haggard had his own troubles when he was discovered to have had an ongoing homosexual relationship while he was pastor of his church and president of the National Association of Evangelicals.²² Serial philanderer Pastor A.B. Schirmer was placed behind bars for the murder of his first and second wives.²³ One preacher, Rev. Slim Lake was arrested for food stamp allegations. He queried, “How can you put someone in jail for feeding the hungry? If that’s a crime, then put me in jail.”²⁴ He served three years

¹⁹ Associated Press, “Ex-pastor gets 54 years for bilking investors,” Boston Globe 8 Dec. 2008: A2.

²⁰ Associated Press, “Pastor, wife charged with embezzling,” Boston Globe 30 Jan. 2010: B2; “Pastor resigns amid finance investigation,” Boston Globe 20 June 2010: B5; Emma Stickgold, “Priest is charged with stealing from Haverhill church,” Boston Globe 8 Nov. 2010: B12; David M. Halbfiner, “Authorities arrest 44 in N.J. corruption case,” Boston Globe 24 July 2009: A2.

²¹ Eric Gorski, “Celibacy questions plague Hispanic priest at heart of scandal,” Boston Globe 17 May 2009: A13; Associated Press, “‘Father Oprah’ preaches in Episcopal Church,” Boston Globe 3 June 2009: A2; Associated Press, “Miami priest in scandal weds girlfriend,” Boston Globe 17 June 2009: A2; Associated Press, “Ex-priest rips church leaders on romance,” Boston Globe 4 Jan. 2011: A2.

²² Kim Nguyen, “Colorado Evangelical tied to sex scandal dismissed,” Boston Sunday Globe 5 November 2006: A25; Colleen Slevin, “Evangelist confesses to ‘sexual immorality,’” Boston Globe 6 November 2006: A2; Associated Press, “Disgraced pastor to launch new church,” Boston Globe 30 June 2010: A2.

²³ Michael Rubinkam, “Arthur Shirmer, Retired Pastor, Killed Both Wives, Jewel Schirmer And Betty Jean Schirmer, Cops,” Huffington Post 29 September 2012 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/29/arthur-schirmer-pastor-killed-wives-jewel-betty-jean_n_1925198.html>

²⁴ Associated Press, “Robin Hood or hood? Preacher charged,” Boston Globe 17 Nov. 1996: A20.

for that crime and subsequently ended up in prison for six more years on a separate charge of money laundering and forgery.²⁵

My work in the area of preaching and plagiarism reveals similar concerns in which preachers engage in questionable activities.²⁶ Since the publication of the book in 2008, I have continued to gather material on plagiarizing preachers. However one regards the act of plagiarism, it is a failing of judgment and will have consequences.

Spurgeon puts it bluntly, “Open immorality, in most cases, however deep the repentance, is a fatal sign that ministerial graces were never in the man’s character.”²⁷ Whether or not Spurgeon’s perspective is correct, preachers, like others, are confronted with temptations common to men and women and still other temptations common to people in their position as public figures and moral leaders.

We are well aware of fallen preachers and the carnage they leave behind. From the fictional—yet all too real Elmer Gantry²⁸ and Rev. Jonas Nightengale in Steve Martin’s portrayal in “Leap of Faith”²⁹—to the indictment of Pastor David Yonggi Cho founder of the largest church in the world for an alleged stock scheme³⁰ to the denial of faith as expressed by former evangelist Charles Bradley Templeton who preached widely with Billy Graham.³¹

D.L. Moody reportedly said to a group of preachers, “The man I have had the greatest trouble with in all my ministry is a fellow by the

²⁵ Casey Sumner, “Preacher returns to streets, ministry after prison release,” *The Blade* 16 July 2012 <<http://www.toledoblade.com/local/2012/07/16/Preacher-returns-to-streets-ministry-after-prison-release.html>>

²⁶ Scott M. Gibson, *Should We Use Someone Else’s Sermon? Preaching in a Cut and Paste World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).

²⁷ C.H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1960), 14.

²⁸ Sinclair Lewis, *Elmer Gantry* (Oxford: Oxford, 1983, 1927).

²⁹ *Leap of Faith*, dir. David Pearce, perf. Steve Martin, Debra Winger, Paramount, 1992.

³⁰ Melissa Steffan, “Founder of World’s Largest Church Could Face Indictment for Alleged Stock Scheme,” *ChristianityToday.com* 1 March 2013 <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2013/march/founder-of-worlds-largest-church-could-face-indictment-for.html>>

³¹ Charles Templeton, *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1996).

name of Dwight L. Moody.”³² I tell my students that as preachers we can easily get in our own way. Whether it is a distracting mannerism while preaching or a glaring moral or spiritual failure, we get in our own way and prevent others from seeing the Savior.

The Challenge of the Cult of Personality

Bishop Gore wrote over a century ago, “the disease of modern preaching is its search after popularity.”³³ “There is a disease sweeping through the body of Christ,” states Pastor Steve Hill in 2008. “It’s infectious sickness I call ‘the man of God syndrome’ or ‘the celebrity syndrome.’ It rears its ugly head in the form of self-adulation and self-promotion.”³⁴ It has long been a problem in a consumer culture that takes advantage of technological advances with comfort and ease and with little critical theological engagement, that we are not surprised to observe the rise of the cult of personality among preachers. Star preachers appear on television, the Internet, conferences, the publication world through books, tours, the speaking circuit, magazine features, polls, etc. These preachers are raised to pedestals and platforms, adored, almost worshiped in a twenty-first century marketed way. We live in a culture of self-importance.

Of course, the tendency of people being attracted to star-power is not new to the human race. Throughout the ages men and women have been hailed by their contemporaries and adulated. The Bible charts the cry of Israel for a king—and they got one, even though their king took attention away from God, the ultimate King.³⁵ Saul the first king was compared in the popular culture of the day to the up and coming eventual candidate for king, David. Following David’s defeat over the threatening Philistine Goliath, the heart of the crowd went toward the young,

³² Quoted in Adams, 132.

³³ Quoted in James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1946, 2001), 29.

³⁴ Steve Hill, “Celebrity Syndrome: Jesus called His followers to be servants but in today’s flashy church scene some leaders have become superstars,” *Charisma and Christian Life* (1 February 2008): Christian Periodical Index, EBSCOhost (accessed 19 January 2014).

³⁵ Deut. 17:14-20; 28:36; 1 Sam. 8.

handsome victor. “Saul has slain his thousands,” the people chanted, “and David his tens of thousands.”³⁶ The cult of personality has begun!

Popularity has become part of what it means to be a preacher in popular culture. There has been Luther, Calvin, Whitefield, Wesley, Edwards, Spurgeon and thousands of others. In his 1893 lectures on preaching Robert F. Horton laments, “And before I go any further, let me utter my protest against the danger of popularity. Popular preacher! it is a term that fills one with misgiving. What has a preacher to do with popularity! It is not enough that the disciple should be as his Lord?”³⁷

Andre Resner comments, “And all things being equal, who would not want a minister who was tall, thin, athletic, well-dressed, good-looking, game-show-host-gregarious, permanently smiling (with really straight, white teeth), positively peppy and never sad or negative, with a good sense of humor, nice and friendly to children, older people, and animals, and always available for a chat, a cup of coffee, a tee time (or tea time), or to be a reassuring shoulder to cry on—oh, yes, and non-judgmental of our greed, prejudices, and any other glaring ways in which we are inconsistent with the gospel?” He continues:

Show me such a person, add a soothing, upbeat message of health, wealth, and happiness, and I will show you someone whom American Christianity will reward generously. American pop culture triumphs when the mind-set of churchgoers increasingly turns from understanding of church as a community of disciples formed by its prophetically cruciform-shaped beliefs and practices and instead reflects a consumer’s mind-set where people’s unreflective appetites and felt needs are fed, entertained, even pampered, and whose cultural prejudices are tolerated and even reinforced, if necessary, so long as they attend and give money. This is a picture of church and ministerial character sold out to culture.³⁸

³⁶ 1 Samuel 18:7b.

³⁷ Robert F. Horton, *Verbum Dei* (New York: Macmillan, 1893), 245-246.

³⁸ Andre Resner, “Character,” in *The New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, eds., Paul Scott Wilson, et. al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008): 225-226.

The problem is not particular to evangelical Christianity—with our wide margins of expression—from rigid conservatives to fluid Pentecostals. Yet, regarding the cult of personality one Catholic writer complains:

We have seen it over and over again with entertainment celebrities, businesspeople, politicians, and world leaders. Sad to say, we also have cults of personality in our church—on both sides of the ideological spectrum. In fact, you can quickly identify which way a Catholic leans by who their heroes or heroines are: Mother Angelica or Joan Chittister? Fr. John Corapi, or Fr. Roy Bourgeois? Padre Pio, or Oscar Romero?³⁹

A possible reason for the emphasis on popularity in the current landscape of preaching may have to do with the desire for power as Os Guinness notes: “Confusion about the character issue also stems from our preoccupation with power.”⁴⁰ Not only does power feed one’s ego, but it also displaces the Lord with the much less important popular preacher.

Another reason for the preacher’s desire for popularity may be the lure of ambition. One’s ambitions are to be checked by the microscope of motives. Web Garrison notes, “In order to be used for the highest ends, the element of ambition must be recognized. One cannot dam a destructive stream and turn its waters into irrigation ditches until he discovers that the problem exists.”⁴¹

Some years ago I asked one of the young men whom I was mentoring at the time what he wanted to do in ministry. He replied, “I want to be famous.” Gratefully, fame has not yet paid a visit to this now more mature preacher. But, obtaining recognition for the wrong or the even right reasons can be dangerous. Kent Edwards acknowledges,

³⁹ Heidi Schlumpf, “Dangers of Hero Worship: Cult of personality feeds *human love for stories, but we need to keep focus on God*,” *National Catholic Reporter* 47:16 (27 May 2011): 22-23. Religion and Philosophy Collection, EBSCOhost (accessed 19 January 2014), 23.

⁴⁰ Os Guinness, *When No One Sees: The Importance of Character in and Age of Image* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2000), 19.

⁴¹ Webb B. Garrison, *The Preacher and his Audience* (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1954), 39-40.

“Pride is the Achilles heel of many preachers.”⁴² Or, as Cornelius Plantinga puts it, “The Bible and Christian tradition tell us that sinful pride (*hybris*) is an enemy of God.”⁴³ Edwards continues, “We can preach, teach, engage in ministry all for the wrong reasons. Furthermore, he says, “When some measure of fame comes knocking, it often holds the door open for pride to pay you a visit. When your ego gets tied up with the success of your ministry and popularity begins to become important to you, you are in serious trouble.”⁴⁴ We begin to believe our own press. Our motives become mixed and we begin to drift. When this happens Warren and David Wiersbe note:

The servant of the Lord can’t minister effectively if mixed motives compete in the heart. Love of attention and praise, love of money, love of authority, even love of ministry, can never glorify God or carry God’s servant through the hills and valleys of spiritual service. Only a love for Christ can do that.⁴⁵

William Still agrees, “Many men make names for themselves in these pursuits as speakers, organisers, writers, good committee members, even as entertainers. They sustain a calling almost independent of, or that has very little to do with, the task of the pastoral ministry of feeding their sheep, from which they derive their daily bread.”⁴⁶

But to their detriment because of crowd mentality, those who listen to sermons are more drawn to personality than to content, further exacerbating the problem. John Koessler laments, “Today’s listeners are more conscious of a speaker’s image than they are of a sermon’s line of reasoning, strength of argument, or its biblical content.” He continues, “We who preach to them have also been steeped in this culture and are

⁴² J. Kent Edwards, *Deep Preaching: Creating Sermons That Go Beyond the Superficial* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 54.

⁴³ Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 84. See Prov. 8:13; Jer. 50:31; James 4:6.z

⁴⁴ Edwards, 54.

⁴⁵ Warren W. & David W. Wiersbe, *10 Power Principles for Christian Service* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997, 2010), 40.

⁴⁶ William Still, *The Work of the Pastor* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1984, 2001), 86.

tempted to try to hold their attention by the power of personality alone.”⁴⁷

The soup is mixed when it comes to the cult of personality. There are popular preachers whose content is insipid, while other famous preachers are solid theologically. Yet both have this in common, their ministries are often defined and determined by the person, the pastor—themselves. My doctoral research focused on the life and work of Boston Baptist preacher A.J. Gordon (1836-1895). Gordon was theologically sound. He was not a huge personality, but widely recognized in his day. His preaching and ministry attracted thousands. He served the Clarendon Street Baptist Church for twenty-five years and died suddenly at the age of 58. The church was never the same after he died. No pastor could fill his shoes. No one could match the strength of his gentle personality. The church died a long, slow death, finally closing in 1982.⁴⁸ This story is repeated again and again in churches where the personality of the preacher dominates the ministry. Consider Russell H. Conwell and his ministry at the Baptist Temple in Philadelphia, or Charles Haddon Spurgeon at New Park Street Church, London, or Martin Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel, London, or William Henry Porter at Walmer Road Baptist Church, Toronto.

The painful episode of the fall of pastor Ted Haggard of the 14,000 member New Life megachurch in Colorado Springs in 2006 raised the question in the press, “So when Haggard fell spectacularly from grace in a scandal involving drugs and allegations of gay sex, many wondered if New Life, so tied to his public persona, would crash with him?”⁴⁹ The church did crash and declined in attendance by almost half.⁵⁰ As Phillips Brooks reminds us, “It was not good that the minister should be worshipped and make an oracle.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ John Koessler, *Folly, Grace, and Power: The Mysterious Act of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 94.

⁴⁸ Society Minutes, Federal Street Baptist Church (Rowe Street/Clarendon Street), Archives, Jenks Learning Center, Gordon College, Wenham, MA.

⁴⁹ Rachel Zoll, “Haggard case raises questions about ‘superstar’ pastors,” *The Salem News* 11 November 2006: A10.

⁵⁰ Patton Dodd, “New Life After the Fall: How the megachurch healed—by remembering what it means to be the church,” *Christianity Today* December 2013: 36-43.

⁵¹ Phillips Brooks, *Eight Lectures on Preaching* (London: SPCK, 1959), 66-67.

Fill in the blank, “That is so-and-so’s church.” Whether it is New York City, Toronto, Los Angeles, Dallas, Halifax, or Boston churches are often identified by who the preacher is. What are we doing? Is it really the case that Piper or Hybels or Young or Keller or Chan or Evans or any preacher is the focus of any church?—“I will build *my* church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.”⁵² These words from Jesus are a fresh reminder of who really is in charge. Preachers come and go, but the Lord’s church will continue.

Nineteenth-century preacher R.W. Dale reflected on the challenges of the popular preacher. He wrote, “But preaching may seem to be very effective, may attract great crowds, may produce intense excitement, may win for the preacher a wide reputation, and may yet be practically worthless and even mischievous.”⁵³

Our culture is one fascinated with personalities. We live our lives through the lives of others—and we sometimes do the same thing with preachers. Every generation has done it. We follow after the preacher who meets our needs, agrees with our perspective, has all the answers, says the right things, is the best looking, has the most convincing ethos, etc. What is worse, since we live in a culture of self-importance some preachers have believed their own press and have encouraged the cult of personality by promoting themselves on blogs or personal websites—selling oneself, leveraging marketing techniques, even enjoying recognition, or falling prey to the lure of money, among other insidiously destructive tactics.⁵⁴

The cult of personality shows up in North America with the establishment of satellite sites. Instead of planting churches where other preachers can nurture a congregation, one’s “influence” is leveraged. Instead of personal presence the preacher is piped in virtually—raising all kinds of issues regarding ecclesiology, worship, etc. Surely there are trained pastors who could be given the privilege of shepherding a congregation on their own. Do we really think that the building of the kingdom depends on the building of our own personal empire? The

⁵² Matthew 16:18.

⁵³ R.W. Dale, *Nine Lectures on Preaching* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1896), 25.

⁵⁴ Warren Wiersbe and David Wiersbe note: “When God decides to magnify a servant’s name, that’s one thing. When we start promoting ourselves, however, that’s quite something else” p.78.

Apostle Paul nurtured pastors in order to pastor. They were to imitate him as he did Christ. What about us?

The cult of personality is real, dangerous, even poisonous. It is something that will not soon go away. But preachers and people have the responsibility to recognize it and to quell its dreaded impact on the soul of the preacher and the soul of the church, Christ's Church.

The Challenge of Seminary Education

Where does theological education fit into the landscape of preaching? Why include this category in this study? I am convinced that one of the most strategic places in which character development through discipleship can be enhanced, engendered and modeled is in the seminary. The discussion on the why and how of discipleship and character formation in seminary education has been taking place among academics for decades. As one theological educator observed over thirty years ago:

Character development has, does and will take place in theological education. Frequently this development occurs haphazardly and with a significant number of hazards and casualties for both the teacher and learner. I think that theological educators and theological institutions should be intentional in educating character for ministry.⁵⁵

Theological training has tended to take on the features of the academy rather than the inspiration of discipleship and development of character. Classes have become substitutes for discipleship and grades replaced the markers of maturity and character.⁵⁶ Theological educator Douglas John Hall remarks:

⁵⁵ Henry Edward Everding, Jr., "Shaping Character for Ministry: A Task for Theological Education," *Illiff Review* 40:2 (March 1983): 11.

⁵⁶ Barna notes: "Getting good grades on papers and exams about ministry does not ensure that these students will be able to apply that knowledge and to be effective ministers," in *Today's Pastors: A Revealing Look at What Pastors are Saying About Themselves, Their Peers and the Pressures They Face* p., 141.

To speak concretely: for how many thousand of seminarians has it been the case that their earlier, no doubt tentative and vulnerable sense of vocation to Christian discipleship has been replaced, in the space of two or three years, by a more comfortable if not unquestioning confidence in the capacity for the ministerial office? This transformation of “the freshman” into “the graduate” is regularly regarded as a success story; and indeed the educational process seems to demand some such movement from hesitancy to confidence. But the pedagogical gain is frequently (not always!) accompanied by spiritual loss. Over the course of three or four years, the candidate has acquired the knowledge and skills which fit him or her for ‘professional ministry,’ as this has been enshrined in the conventions of this or that ecclesial community; but the very possession of this ‘know-how’ may have deprived the candidate of many of those qualities of character that, from the perspective of biblically-informed faith and theology, at first commended him/her: the sense of personal unworthiness, inadequacy to the task, humility *vis a vis* the tradition and the disciplines which seek to comprehend it, respect for authority, anticipation of discovery, awe before the unknown, a feeling of comradeship with those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness,” including those who are not given the opportunity for higher theological learning (the laity!), etc.⁵⁷

The call to character development and the uncertainty of how to do it is echoed in the conclusions of two Canadian authors who studied a broad spectrum of master of divinity students in Toronto. The authors complain:

However, despite foundational courses in spirituality and the existence of chapel services, seminary administrators and faculty members sometimes seem uncertain about how to foster the

⁵⁷ Douglas John Hall, “Theological Education as Character Formation?” *Theological Education* Supplement I (1988): 62–63.

spiritual growth of their students or how to relate spirituality to the “academic” offerings.⁵⁸

The emphasis in the study leaned to the importance of developing personal piety with no real reference to a life of discipleship, which led the authors to note, “We conclude that many current seminarians are, to a considerable degree, missing connections between Christian spirituality and public life.”⁵⁹

The curriculum or the structure of the courses and how they relate to each other and the practice of ministry is a challenge in an entrenched tradition of theological education. One critic of theological education comments:

The seminary curriculum does little to produce a coherent understanding of the *telos* of ministry. The division of the curriculum into separate areas of specialization, developed under the influence of the German model at the end of the nineteenth century, exacerbates the problem by separating ministry from the other theological disciplines.⁶⁰

Seminaries are between the proverbial rock and a hard place. They have a product to offer—the degree—and need students to fund it. A study done by the Alban Center for the Study of Theological Education reveals, “Theological schools are not highly selective (data from other sources show that half accepted 87 percent or more of those who apply). A majority of students apply to only one school. Only a handful says that they were not accepted by their first choice of seminary.”⁶¹ Barna made a similar observation:

⁵⁸ Jeffrey P. Greenman and Yau Man Siew, “Spirituality and Public Character: A Qualitative Cross-Sectional Study of Master of Divinity Students in Toronto,” *Theological Education* 38:1 (2001): 1.

⁵⁹ Greenman and Siew, 19.

⁶⁰ James W. Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry according to Paul: A Biblical Vision* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 10.

⁶¹ James P. Wind and Gilbert R. Rendle, “The Leadership Situation Facing American Congregations: An Alban Institute Special Report,” (September 2001): 12. The full text of the study: Barbara Wheeler, “Is There a Problem: Theological Students and Religious Leadership for the Future” (New York: Auburn Center

Indeed, we also found in our research that because of financial difficulties, seminaries are less demanding of the eligibility requirements they place upon applicants. In other words, because seminaries are forced to be financially stable, which requires a certain number of students to pay the bills and justify the scope of programs and facilities available, the quantity of students invited to attend has superseded the quality of students who are admitted.⁶²

The above observations present a challenge to theological educators and even the churches from which these students come and to which these students will go.

Conclusion

What is the landscape of preaching today? What is its over-all health? From what we have discussed above, one may conclude that the landscape of the character of preaching is in a serious predicament. Mainline African-American professor of preaching Katie Geneva Cannon gives a dour assessment of preaching in the mainline. She comments:

Generally speaking, it is most definitely shallow and in the shallows. It is shallow in content as it relates to the deep issues in contemporary life. And it is definitely in the shallows in interest as it relates to being significant to most people trying to find answers to problems of life here and now. Most people, when they got problems, they don't even think about the preacher any more. The preacher is that fellow who gets up there and talks real light and doesn't know anything.⁶³

for the Study of Theological Education, 2001), p. 3. Available online at www.auburnsem.org/studies/pubs.shtml

⁶² George Barna, *Today's Pastors: A Revealing Look at What Pastors are Saying About Themselves, Their Peers and the Pressures They Face* (Ventura: Regal, 1993), 140. Although the data are twenty years old, the issues seem to remain the same.

⁶³ Katie Geneva Cannon, *Teaching Preaching: Isaac Rufus Clark and Black Sacred Rhetoric* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 57.

What are we to make of this vast landscape of the character of preaching? Reflecting on what we have explored, I suggest the following to consider as we move forward in the examination of the way discipleship shapes character—particularly in the life of a preacher of the gospel.

First, in light of consumerism and the challenges of technology, preachers have sometimes failed to navigate these challenges well. Instead of critically analyzing the onslaughts of culture, we have welcomed cultural shifts with open arms. We want thoughtful, theologically engaged preachers who understand the challenge of living a life of discipleship in the midst of an alien culture. As Jonathan R. Wilson notes, “True discipleship to Christ and life in the kingdom make no sense in the context of modernity and a consumer culture.”⁶⁴

Second, the position of the popular preacher as demonstrated in the cult of personality is a poisonous challenge for the present-day preacher. As Peter Kreft acknowledges, “Our civilization’s fundamental goal is one of pride....”⁶⁵ We could become disheartened by the rough terrain this portion of modern landscape exposes—proud, self-promoting preachers who preach one way but live another. The rawness of what we hear and see challenges us in how we are to live and preach. In trying to piece together the sinfulness we have and the life to which we are called to live, Cornelius Plantinga comments:

Observing character ironies of these kinds, we naturally conclude that human beings are inexpressibly complex creatures in whom great good and great evil often cohabit, sometimes in separate and well-insulated rooms and sometimes in an intimacy so deep and twisted and twined that we never get to see the one moral quality without the other.⁶⁶

Although Plantinga’s words bring a measure of comfort, we want to move beyond the observation that we are complex creatures and to determine to have our lives shaped by Christ, our singular focus, in order to put to death—sanctify—our lives in becoming more and more like Christ.

⁶⁴ Jonathan R. Wilson, *Why Church Matters: Worship, Ministry, and Mission in Practice* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 94.

⁶⁵ Peter Kreft, *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom For Modern Moral Confusion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), 101.

⁶⁶ Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, 81.

Pride, self-promotion, pursuit of recognition shields us from Christlikeness. Kreft notes, “The deepest reason God hates pride, the reason pride is so hellish, is that it keeps us from knowing God, our supreme joy.”⁶⁷ And we want to remind the church that Christ is the head of the church, not any pastor. We do damage to the preacher and to the church when we amplify the preacher and not our Lord.

Third, diligent commitment to Christ is key for pastoral integrity and character. Recommitting ourselves to the biblical markers of believers—which we will discuss in another lecture, obtaining a mature mentor, among other helps will reinvigorate our lives as disciples of Christ. Puritan Richard Baxter encouraged pastors toward this end when he wrote:

Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine, and lest you lay such stumbling blocks before the blind, as may the occasion be of their ruin; lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labours.⁶⁸

Fourth, theological seminaries, Bible Schools and Christian higher educational institutions would benefit the Kingdom—and those under their care—by taking a fresh and bold look at why they do what they do—and retool themselves. To make theological education fit into the broader goals of discipleship we are called to rethink what we are about. As Douglas John Hall suggests:

If it is true that spiritual maturity is the consequence of a trust in God which entails transcendence of self, then such maturity can only be expedited by an educational method which *concentrates* on the ‘study of God’ (*theou-logos*). The one engaged in such ‘study’—the disciple—is by no means excluded; but his/her role is understood from the outset as being one of

⁶⁷ Kreft, 102.

⁶⁸ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1979 reprint), 63.

discernment (*discere*), of orientation towards ‘the other,’ of ‘following’—in short, of discipleship.⁶⁹

Hall clearly articulates, “The end in relation to which theological education is a means is Christian discipleship—meaning not only the discipleship of the individual student of the theological disciplines but of the Christian community of which the learner is a one ‘member.’”⁷⁰

A reorientation about what is done in theological education to shape disciples toward maturity in Christ is key. This rethinking means an overall theological/philosophical commitment in all aspects of the institution. Trustees, administrators, faculty, staff and students will understand what it means to be a maturing disciple if everyone is committed to the same goal. Ten Elshof and Furrow similarly advocate:

Christian theological education has to look less like an impersonal institution producing candidates for ministry employment, and more like a biblically nurtured Christian education community. Within this community the mentoring and nurturing of students has to become a priority so there is training for godliness, Biblically, holding to sound doctrine is essential for church leaders, but godly character and attitudes are expected to accompany such doctrine (Titus 2:1).⁷¹

If institutionally there is a commitment to a discipleship model of theological education, the difference will be seen in the seminary or Bible college community and the impact will be felt by everyone. “The part of the equation that is sometimes omitted is the growth of Christian character,” as one study notes. “It cannot be developed simply by taking courses, attending chapels, and hearing sermons. Christian character must be learned by seeing living models—such as professors, advanced

⁶⁹ Hall, 59.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷¹ Judith K. Ten Elshof and James F. Furrow, “The Role of Secure Attachment in Predicting Spiritual Maturity of Students at a Conservative Seminary,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 28:2 (2000): 106.

students, and campus leaders in the faith—who inspire students to become more mature.”⁷²

Pastor Mark Sayers observes that there is a common problem shared among megachurches, medium-size churches and small ones, too—and dare I say theological education. Sayers writes:

As I traveled around speaking at churches of all shapes, approaches, and flavors, I noticed that despite their completely different approaches, they had a common problem. It did not matter if the church was a small, emerging missional community; a traditional liturgical church on the corner; or a multisite contemporary megachurch. There was a basic problem of discipleship. The best way to describe the problem was to say that it was a crisis of identity.⁷³

The crisis of identity is discipleship, the consistently missing ingredient that makes mature believers and preachers in the church and through theological education. The call is for a robust theology of discipleship for the preacher, the church and academy.

⁷² Carey Lampton and Gary J. Oliver, Everett L. Worthington, Jr. and Jack W. Berry, “Helping Christian College Students Become More Forgiving: An Intervention Study to Promote Forgiveness as Part of a Program to Shape Christian Character,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 33:4 (2005): 278.

⁷³ Mark Sayers, *The Vertical Self: How Biblical Faith Can Help Us Discover Who We Are in and Age of Self Obsession* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), xviii.

The Ecclesiology of Charles H. Spurgeon: Unity, Orthodoxy, and Denominational Identity¹

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Charles Haddon Spurgeon established his ecclesiology squarely on the experience of regeneration or new birth. His commitment to the centrality of regeneration shaped his ecclesiology from local polity to evangelical union. His religious identity was first and foremost in broad evangelical dissent. His diminished ecclesiology reflected that of Victorian-era evangelicalism.

His ecclesiology comprised his views of local church polity, Baptist denominationalism, and evangelical unity. Spurgeon based his broad cooperation with other dissenters on the foundation of regeneration. He worked for evangelical unity among Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and evangelical Anglicans. All who were born again were members of the church of Jesus Christ. They were, in fact, one body.

Spurgeon's local church polity included three commitments: regenerate church membership, believer's baptism, and congregational church polity. Spurgeon sought to organize his church, London's Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle, on these principles. He thought all three were revealed in the Scriptures, but regeneration was the only essential element of local church polity. Congregational polity, and especially believer's baptism, promoted regenerate church membership, but regeneration alone defined the church.

Spurgeon's Baptist identity grew from his commitment to regeneration. He believed that believer's baptism and cooperation promoted regeneration. On this broad platform he participated in such Baptist organizations as the Baptist Union, the cooperative agency of

¹ This article first appeared in the Journal of the Baptist History and Heritage Society, Autumn 1999, and is reprinted here with the kind permission of Dr. G. Wills and the BHHS.

British Particular and General Baptists roughly similar to the missionary conventions of the Southern and Northern Baptists of the same period. In 1887, Spurgeon resigned from the Baptist Union because the group tolerated modernist ministers in its membership. Modernism, Spurgeon believed, undermined regeneration. He altered his Baptist denominationalism to protect regeneration.

When Spurgeon withdrew from the Baptist Union and stood for orthodoxy, American Baptists applauded. Before about 1880, American Baptists based their ecclesiology in large part on their denominational distinctives. Many American Baptists therefore were uncertain of Spurgeon's claim to Baptist identity because he taught open communion. As modernism grew more popular, American Baptists based their ecclesiology increasingly on evangelical essentials.

When Spurgeon withdrew, they therefore hailed him as a great Baptist champion. They altered their estimate of him because their ecclesiology changed under pressure from modernism and approached his.

Local Church Polity

Spurgeon held that the polity of the church was a matter of revelation, not of expediency. Christ commissioned the apostles to establish the church according to a specific pattern. All churches are obligated to follow this pattern. "The tabernacle in the wilderness was framed after the pattern which God gave to Moses in the mount; and, verily, Christ's Church is built after God's own model." Pastors may not alter it; they may merely manage it faithfully. They were stewards of the apostolic model. "Some may talk of a liberal polity in their church," Spurgeon said. "Let them be liberal with what is their own; but for a steward to boast of being liberal with his Master's good, is quite another matter."²

Spurgeon insisted that Christ required the churches to admit only regenerate persons. The Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle went to

² Spurgeon, "The Church of God and the Truth of God" (14 September 1856), in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* (Pasadena, Texas: Pilgrim Publications, 1978) [hereafter MTP, 54:243; Spurgeon, "Stewards," in *An All-Around Ministry* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1900), 264.

great lengths to admit to membership persons who gave credible evidence of regeneration. Candidates for membership applied to the elders on any Wednesday evening. The elders examined the candidate's profession of faith and if satisfied entered his or her name on the candidate list. The associate pastor, Charles's brother, James A. Spurgeon, then met each candidate and likewise inquired into their conversion. If satisfied, he appointed someone to visit and inquire about the "moral character and repute of the candidate." If the candidate had a good reputation, he or she attended the next church conference. The moderator, ordinarily Spurgeon, questioned the candidate in the presence of the congregation in order "to elicit expressions of his trust in the Lord Jesus, and hope of salvation through his blood, and any such facts of his spiritual history as may convince the church of the genuineness of the case." The candidate withdrew, the visitor reported on the candidate's moral reputation, and the church voted. Although the Tabernacle's process was more involved than most Baptist churches, Baptists traditionally examined the testimony and character of applicants before admitting them to membership.³

Spurgeon insisted also that Christ required the churches to baptize those only who professed faith in Christ. The Tabernacle practiced "strict membership"- they admitted to membership those regenerate persons who had been immersed after a profession of faith. Some Baptist churches practiced "open membership" allowing unimmersed believers to join. Spurgeon insisted, however, on "having none but persons who had been baptized in the membership of the Church. . . . He would rather give up the pastorate than admit any man to the Church who was not obedient to his Lord's command." Christ commanded those who believed in him to submit to immersion. Spurgeon made obedience to this command a condition of membership because this was the apostolic practice.⁴

Spurgeon insisted finally that Christ required congregational church government or independency. Each congregation should govern

³ James A. Spurgeon, "Discipline of the Church at the Metropolitan Tabernacle," *Sword and Trowel*, 5 (1869): 53-54.

⁴ Spurgeon expressed his views on baptism in many places. See, e.g., his *Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society [1897-1900]), 1:147-55; Spurgeon, in "Meeting of Our Own Church" (April 8, 1861), in *MTP*, 7:260.

itself independently from all other churches or church hierarchies. Each church was autonomous and capable in itself of exercising all the functions of a church of Christ. The members of the church jointly exercised church power - Christ delegated final authority to the congregation. "The independency of Scripture is to be practiced still," Spurgeon taught. "Each church is to be separate . . . without being disturbed by the opinion of any other church." Each church made its own decisions, Spurgeon taught. "I believe in the glorious principle of Independency. Every church has a right to choose its own minister."⁵

Spurgeon taught that the New Testament specified the basic organization of each congregation. According to Scripture each church should have a pastor who was the overseer or bishop of the congregation. He was the "captain of a vessel and led the church by counsel, instruction in the Scriptures, and godly example. He also ruled the church in its meetings, discipline, and institutions, by exerting his influence and initiating action."⁶

Spurgeon did not, however, believe in ordination. This sentiment had been growing among English Baptists for about a generation. Since each church governed itself, it was fully authorized to choose and install its own ministers. Ordination ceremonies involved gathering a council of pastors who formally examined and commissioned a candidate as an authorized minister of the gospel. Such a ceremony, Spurgeon held, implicitly denied congregational authority and implied apostolic succession by delegating ministerial authority from one minister to another. Spurgeon added that churches do not in fact have authority to ordain ministers: "God alone ordains ministers; all that the Church can do is to recognize them."⁷

⁵ Spurgeon, "The Church of God and the Truth of God," MTP 54:242; Spurgeon, Letter to Mr. James Low, 2 May 1854, in *Autobiography of Charles H. Spurgeon*, 1:357.

⁶ Spurgeon, "A Meeting of Our Own Church," MTP, 7:257; James A. Spurgeon, "Discipline of the Church at the Metropolitan Tabernacle," *Sword and Trowel*: 50-51.

⁷ Spurgeon, Letter to Mr. James Low, May 2, 1854, *Autobiography*, 1:356-57; Spurgeon, "The Holy Spirit Glorifying Christ" (17 August 1862), in MTP, 8:459. On ordination practices, see J. H. Y. Briggs, *The English Baptists of the Nineteenth Century* (Didcot, England: Baptist Historical Society, 1994), 86-87.

Spurgeon taught that each church should also have a body of elders. In 1869, his church had twenty-six elders elected by the congregation upon nomination by the elders. Most Baptist churches had no such elders. The Tabernacle's elders counseled persons who inquired about the way of salvation; visited and examined candidates for church membership; sought out absentee members; cared for the sick and troubled; conducted prayer meetings, catechesis classes, and Bible studies; and oversaw the congregation's missionary and church planting efforts.

Spurgeon taught finally that each church should have a body of deacons. In 1869 the Metropolitan Tabernacle had nine. They had responsibility to care for the needs of the ministers, help the poor of the church, manage the church's property and finances, and provide for orderly worship. Both elders and deacons had responsibility to maintain the purity of the church by looking into matters of church discipline. Spurgeon believed this arrangement was scriptural polity and referred to it as a "modified form of Episcopalian Presbyterian Independency."⁸

Spurgeon believed that the Bible required each church to exercise discipline. Christ designed the church to be separate from the world. Christ instructed the churches to protect their purity in both doctrine and practice through the exercise of discipline. Immorality could not be tolerated. The design of discipline was to restore the wayward to righteousness: "The object of church discipline should always be the good of the person who has to endure it." Those who committed outward offenses received rebuke, and if they did not repent, the church excluded them to preserve the purity of the fellowship. "If we know that members are living in gross sin," Spurgeon said, "and do not deal with them either by way of censure or excommunication, in accordance with the teaching of Christ and his apostles, we become accomplices in their sin." When members of the Tabernacle acted immorally, the elders corrected them privately; when necessary they laid it "before the church, and recommend

⁸ James A. Spurgeon, "Discipline of the Church at the Metropolitan Tabernacle," *Sword and Trowel* 52; Charles H. Spurgeon, "A Divided Heart" (25 September 1859), in *MTP* 5:413; Spurgeon, in "A Meeting of Our Own Church," *MTP*, 7:257.

the course of procedure to be adopted, whether censure or excommunication.”⁹

In worship his approach was outwardly like that of the Puritans. The service had the preaching of the word at its center. The congregation sang without a musical accompaniment and had no choir. Spurgeon's reasons for rejecting organs and choirs were different, however, from those of the Puritans. The Puritans believed that Christ prohibited such because He approved only those forms of worship which He commissioned His apostles to establish. Spurgeon seemed to think them unspiritual, worldly, and superficial additions rather than violations of the apostolic model.¹⁰

Baptist Denominationalism

Spurgeon rooted his understanding of Baptist denominationalism in a common commitment to believer's baptism. He supported denominational cooperation with those evangelicals who practiced the immersion of professing believers. He frequently attended the meetings of the Baptist Union, the cooperative organization of British Particular Baptists roughly similar to the Southern or Northern Baptist Convention. He supported its efforts to raise money for its various causes. He sometimes supported the Baptist Missionary Society, the most successful of the Particular Baptists' cooperative ventures. He was instrumental in the re-establishment of the London Baptist Association and was active in its meetings.

Spurgeon's denominational cooperation came from commitment to promoting denominational prosperity. He labored for the spread of Baptist churches throughout the nation. He sought to assist other Baptists in all prudent ways. He cooperated because of his ecclesiological commitment to believer's baptism. But the Baptist organizations needed him more than he needed them. Spurgeon's Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle was in many ways a denomination unto

⁹ Spurgeon, "Serving the Lord" (15 August 1869), in MTP, 15:453; Spurgeon, "Accomplices in Sin" (30 March 1873), in MTP, 53:427; James A. Spurgeon, "Discipline of the Church at the Metropolitan Tabernacle," 54.

¹⁰ See Lewis Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Kregel: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992), 351.

itself. The church supported wide-ranging evangelistic activity. Its elders engaged in preaching at its distant chapels. It organized many new chapels and churches. It coordinated a large association of evangelist-preachers. It engaged colporteurs to distribute Bibles, devotional literature, and evangelistic tracts throughout the land. The church established a college to train ministers. The church engaged in benevolent activity on a remarkable scale. It established an orphanage and aided the poor in other ways. The church published religious literature. The New Park Street Pulpit and its successor the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit published Spurgeon's sermons weekly and disseminated them widely. Through its monthly magazine, the *Sword and Trowel*, it promoted its causes and programs—conversion, believer's baptism, missions, evangelism, and benevolence. It possessed all the earmarks of a denomination: large-scale publishing, missionary activity, theological education, and social benevolence.

After the down-grade controversy, Spurgeon lost confidence in denominational unions. He did not oppose them in principle. He argued, however, that they ought to bind themselves confessionally to broad evangelical orthodoxy. When other separatist-minded Baptists urged him to form a new denomination, he refused. "There are denominations enough," he replied. He reasoned also that a new denomination would not be any safer than the old - heretics could enter a new one as well as an old.¹¹

Evangelical Unity

Spurgeon regarded evangelical unity based on regeneration the most important of his ecclesiological commitments. Local church polity and denominational cooperation were not as important. In Spurgeon's presidential address to the 1872 conference of the Pastor's College, he enumerated the various doctrines that make up the content of the Christian faith. He included belief in God, who created the universe and who is sovereign, faithful, and true; belief in Christ, the incarnate God who suffered on the cross to make atonement for our sin; and belief in

¹¹ Spurgeon, "A Fragment on the Down Grade Controversy," *Sword and Trowel* 23 (1887): 560.

God the Holy Spirit, who empowers the word of God for the salvation of sinners. But he did not include belief in the church.¹²

Spurgeon depreciated the importance of local church and denominational ecclesiology. Most earlier British Baptists and most contemporary American Baptists reversed Spurgeon's ecclesiological priorities. But Spurgeon sought first to promote evangelical unity, and his ecclesiology aided him. Evangelicals differed in polity and doctrine. Baptists and Independents practiced congregational church government; Presbyterians placed government in the joint eldership of many congregations; Episcopalians granted the rule to bishops. Many Baptists, Presbyterians, Independents, and Episcopalians adhered to such Calvinist doctrines as eternal, personal election, effectual calling, and particular redemption. Methodists and many other dissenters adhered to the Arminian alternatives.

Spurgeon reasoned that no denomination had all the truth, and none had perfected church polity. "I am persuaded that neither the Church of England, nor the Wesleyans, nor the Independents, nor the Baptists, have got all the truth. ... I would persuade you, my Baptist friends, that your system is not perfect." Nor could church polity prevent heresy and spiritual death. "You cannot, by Presbytery, or Independency, or Episcopacy, secure the life of the Church." Ecclesiology did not preserve spiritual life in a denomination, but the "presence of the Lord" in its midst.¹³

These differences might require separate denominational organizations, but they did not damage the unity of faith, because they were not the grand essentials of the soul's salvation. Spurgeon argued that the differences that divided evangelicals were unscriptural human inventions. These human traditions must fall before the authority of the Bible. "You shall have thrown before you the tenets of Independency, and the minutes of the Wesleyan Conference, or some dogma of close communion or open communion of the Baptist Church. To the dogs with it all! What matters it all - what rules and regulations we may pass?" Such doctrines were secondary.¹⁴

¹² Spurgeon, "Faith," in *An All-Around Ministry*, 12-19.

¹³ Spurgeon, "Things Unknown" (1858), in MTP, 46:105; Spurgeon, "Christ Is Glorious - Let Us Make Him Known" (20 March 1864), in MTP, 10:163.

¹⁴ Spurgeon, "The Family Likeness," in MTP, 61:515.

Spurgeon's view of the church encouraged his emphasis on evangelical unity. He held that there was only one church and it comprised all believers. The universal church was both visible and invisible. The invisible referred to the regenerating work of the Spirit hidden from human eyes. The visible church referred to the work of the Spirit as made visible by the profession and department of believers. Since the church comprised all believers, ecclesiological differences had little importance. There were many denominations, but only one church.¹⁵

Spurgeon based his commitment to open communion on this broad ecclesiology. It is perhaps the best known of Spurgeon's ecclesiological principles. He held that the only proper qualification for participating in the Lord's Supper was conversion. Hence he invited all who believed in Jesus to receive the bread and wine. Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, whether immersed on a profession of faith or sprinkled as infants, were all welcome if only they were born again.

During Spurgeon's lifetime, few Baptist churches in America practiced open communion, but most in England did. Many practiced open membership as well - they admitted persons to membership based on their profession of faith alone, whether they had submitted to believer's baptism or not. Open communion Baptists in England claimed an impressive heritage. John Bunyan, the great Baptist preacher of Bedford, whose *Pilgrim's Progress* was and remains a devotional classic, practiced open communion and ably defended his practice. In the early nineteenth century, Robert Hall Jr., the brilliant and eloquent Baptist preacher whose writing brought him extensive fame, persuasively defended open communion views. Baptist Noel, the immensely popular Baptist preacher whose defection from the clergy of the Church of England brought considerable notoriety, promoted open communion from his prominent London pulpit.

Spurgeon's church combined open communion with strict membership. The combination reflected well his commitment to evangelical unity and believer's baptism. Spurgeon's zeal for evangelism encouraged his commitment to evangelical unity. Questions about

¹⁵ Spurgeon, "The Church of God and the Truth of God," MTP 54:242-243; Spurgeon, in "A Public Meeting of the Various Denominations" (3 April 1861), in MTP, 7:242.

predestination, believer's baptism, and church government did not contribute to evangelistic effectiveness. "If you speak to a man about his soul, he will ask you, 'Are you an Arminian or a Calvinist?' To this we reply, 'Dear fellow, are you saved?' 'Well,' he says, 'what is your opinion in reference to baptism?' 'Our answer is ready enough, for we see the Lord's will plainly enough in his Word, but we beg you to think more of Jesus than of ordinances.' 'But,' says the caviler, 'are you Presbyterian in church polity, or do you favor Episcopacy?' 'Dear friend, what has that to do with you? Have you passed from death unto life?'" The doctrines and polities that separated evangelicals were secondary matters. All doctrine was important, Spurgeon affirmed, but the doctrines necessary for the salvation of sinners constituted the immovable fundamentals.¹⁶

Although Spurgeon boldly asserted the truth of Calvinism, this also was secondary, because saving sinners was more essential than commitment to the five points of Calvinism: "To swing to and fro on a five-barred gate, is not progress; yet some seem to think that it is.... Our one aim is to save sinners." John Gill, the seventeenth-century high Calvinist whom Spurgeon much admired, also said that the salvation of sinners should be the primary aim and activity of ministers. But Spurgeon's rhetoric suggests an antithesis between doctrine and activity that Gill rejected. Spurgeon in fact rejected it too, but his language reflected his belief that the fundamental orthodoxy consisted of the doctrines necessary for salvation.¹⁷

In this context Spurgeon appears a poor sectarian and a weak fundamentalist. He trusted the orthodoxy of evangelical dissent. "We are not to be always going about the world searching out heresies, like terrier dogs sniffing for rats, and to be always so confident of our own infallibility that we erect ecclesiastical stakes at which to [figuratively] roast all who differ from us." His concern was for the unity of evangelicals bound together by the experience of regeneration.¹⁸

¹⁶ Spurgeon, "Questions of the Day and the Question of the Day" (26 January 1873), in MTP, 19:55.

¹⁷ Spurgeon, "Forward," in *An All-Around Ministry*, 62. On Gill's views, see my "A Fire That Burns Within: The Spirituality of John Gill," in Michael A. G. Haykin, ed., *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 206.

¹⁸ Spurgeon, "Forward," in *An All-Around Ministry*, 55.

Orthodoxy, Unity, and Denominational Identity

At the same time that Spurgeon was committed to broad evangelical unity he was committed to purity of faith and practice, to orthodoxy and separation from the world. He held that Christians should never compromise divine truth through an alliance with error. Believers' baptism, for example was not a fundamental truth, Spurgeon held, but Baptist preachers must teach it. Preachers must advocate every truth revealed in the Bible, no matter how trivial. "The omission of a doctrine, or an ordinance, or a precept, may prove highly injurious. Even points which others think trivial must not be trivial to the man who would make full proof of his ministry. Do not, for instance, fail to be faithful upon believers' baptism."¹⁹

Since Christ was the head of the Church, preachers could not ignore any command of Christ. They should not omit any of Christ's known rules, not even the divisive rules concerning baptism and the Lord's Supper. "I am sorry," Spurgeon said, "that there are disputes in the Church as to baptism and the Lord's Supper; but it is not a moot point in the Church of Christ whether baptism and the Lord's Supper are to be practiced at all. How, then, can these ordinances be set aside by those who admit that they are Scriptural?"²⁰

In the down-grade controversy, Spurgeon expressed his commitment to orthodoxy in no uncertain terms. Many dissenting ministers embraced modernist theology. Spurgeon judged that modernists rejected the essentials of the soul's salvation. To unite with those who denied the fundamentals was to participate in their rebellion against Christ. Modernists invented a new religion, Spurgeon said, in which "the Atonement is scouted, the inspiration of Scripture is derided, the Holy Spirit is degraded into an influence, the punishment of sin is turned into fiction, and the resurrection into a myth."²¹ Spurgeon desired union among all believers on the platform of the essential saving truths of the gospel. But he held that modernism denied these essential truths. No union with modernism was possible because it could not be based on

¹⁹ Spurgeon, "How To Meet the Evils of the Age," in *An All-Around Ministry*, 118.

²⁰ Spurgeon, "The Minister in These Times," in *An All-Around Ministry*, 385.

²¹ Spurgeon, "Another Word Concerning the Down Grade," *Sword and Trowel* 23 (1887): 397.

the essential doctrines. Spurgeon wanted union, but not at the expense of essential truth. He pleaded for "love of truth as well as love of union." But "to pursue union at the expense of truth is treason to the Lord Jesus." Unions of orthodox evangelicals with modernists were not Christian unions, Spurgeon judged, but 'Confederacies of Evil.'²²

Spurgeon distinguished between essential and nonessential doctrines. The essential doctrines were the deity of Christ, the plenary inspiration of the Bible, substitutionary atonement, justification by faith, and sanctification. The ecclesiological doctrines of regenerate church membership, congregational government, and believer's baptism were revealed - Christ commanded them. But they were nonessential. But even nonessential doctrines were important, Spurgeon held. Errors in nonessentials did not hinder salvation, but they were obstacles to individual piety and church prosperity. Baptism, for example, was nonessential for Spurgeon because persons could be saved whether they endorsed infant baptism or believer's baptism.

Spurgeon's zeal for evangelism encouraged his commitment to orthodoxy. The reason that orthodoxy was absolutely important was that it was foundational to salvation. Heresy destroyed the power of the gospel for salvation because it perverted the truths at the heart of the gospel. "Conformity, or nonconformity, per se is nothing; but a new creature is everything, and the truth upon which alone that new creature can live is worth dying a thousand deaths to conserve."²³

Spurgeon worked for evangelical unity and separated from the Baptist Union on the same basis. Regeneration was the basis of evangelical unity. But when modernists rejected doctrines essential to salvation, they undermined the gospel itself and hindered regeneration. Since union was based on regeneration, Spurgeon could not unite with those who in practice opposed it.

²² Spurgeon, "Notes," *Sword and Trowel* 23 (1887): 196; Spurgeon, "A Fragment upon the Down-Grade Controversy," *Sword and Trowel* 23 (1887): 558.

²³ Spurgeon, "Another Word concerning the Down Grade," *Sword and Trowel* 23 (1887): 399.

Spurgeon's Baptist Identity and American Baptists

Before the down-grade controversy, Baptists in the United States expressed ambivalence toward Spurgeon. They generally appreciated his zealous evangelism and robust Calvinism. But the fact that he taught and practiced open communion gave them pause. Some sought to excuse him and pointed to mitigating circumstances. But many thought him a good evangelical but an unsound Baptist for his communion practices. Such judges regarded him as they would an evangelical Methodist or Presbyterian - he was worthy of their respect and love as a faithful preacher and Christian brother, but not as a Baptist. His communion views discredited his Baptist identity.²⁴

The Columbia Baptist Association in South Carolina in 1859 called Spurgeon a "semi-Baptist" for his open communion views. The same year, and for the same reason, Joseph Walker, the editor of Georgia's Baptist Champion, judged that Baptists could not recognize Spurgeon as a "sound Baptist preacher." A writer to North Carolina's Biblical Recorder in the same manner argued that "Spurgeon is a great man but no Baptist." Joseph Otis, editor of Kentucky Baptists' Western Recorder, did not consider Spurgeon a Baptist at all in 1860. He classed "Spurgeonism" with "Beecherism" and relegated both "beyond the pale of the Baptist faith." He believed that most Baptists in America agreed with his evaluation.²⁵

²⁴ For examples of such pre-controversy praise, see Francis Wayland, "Spurgeon's Sermons," and E. T. Winkler, "Spurgeon," both in the Southern Baptist, 24 March 1857,2; E. B. Teague, "Rev. C. H. Spurgeon and His Theology," Christian Index, 9 October 1856, 162. For pre-controversy statements excusing Spurgeon's views, see D. R. Campbell, 'Letter from President D. R. Campbell,' Western Recorder, 26 September 1859,2; Joseph Walker, "Spurgeon of England," Christian Index, 4 February 1857,18 (Walker initially thought that Spurgeon practiced close communion); "Spurgeon and Close Communion," Baptist Courier, 8 May 1884, 1 (reprinted *ibid.*, 18 June 1885,2). For criticisms see below.

²⁵ Columbia Baptist Association, Minutes, 1859, 44; Joseph Walker, "Spurgeon's Fencing," Western Recorder, 31 October 1859, 2; Querist, "Is the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon a Baptist?" Biblical Recorder, 24 February 1859, 2; Joseph Otis, "Spurgeon on Church Government," Western Recorder, 21 January 1860; Otis, "Elder W. C. Buck's Views Respecting Spurgeon's Theory and Practice of Eucharistic Communion," Western Recorder, 11 February 1860, 2.

After the down-grade controversy, Baptists in America muted their criticisms of his open communion practices. In 1907, G. W. Gardner quoted John A. Broadus to enforce a claim that his open communion sentiment was an anomaly: 'I heard Dr. Broadus remark once that the statement made by Spurgeon to the effect that he had never given the communion question serious consideration was unworthy of Spurgeon.' Others argued that he hardly qualified as an open communionist. J. T. Christian, professor of church history at New Orleans Baptist Bible Institute (now New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary), made Spurgeon an honorary member of the close communion club in his 1892 book defending close communion.

After he proved that Spurgeon was wrong to invite unbaptized persons to the Lord's Table, he proceeded to enlist him as a close communionist. He quoted William E. Hatcher who in 1892 visited Spurgeon. Spurgeon confessed to Hatcher that "if I were to come to America to live, I would join a close communion church and conform myself to its practices on the Communion question." He quoted Cleveland Baptist minister W. A. Perrins, a recent graduate of Spurgeon's College who claimed that Spurgeon was "at heart a close communionist." Spurgeon confessed to Perrins that "if I had to begin my ministry again, I should certainly commence with a close-communion church. I am led to believe the American Baptists are right, but cannot alter the usages of my church, which have been of so long standing."²⁶

They now praised him primarily because he upheld orthodoxy. They overlooked or discounted his open communion views. Modernist theology was beginning to threaten all the evangelical denominations. Spurgeon opposed it forcefully. He separated from those Baptists and other dissenters who rejected the plenary inspiration of the scriptures and the substitutionary atonement. In the nomenclature introduced later, they respected him as a fellow fundamentalist.²⁷ Virginia preacher

²⁶ G. W. Gardner, "The Lord's Supper," *Baptist Courier*, 15 Aug. 1907, 5; John T. Christian, "Close Communion": Or, Baptism As a Pre-requisite to the Lord's Supper (Louisville, Kentucky: Baptist Book Concern, 1892), 243-44.

²⁷ Their respect for Spurgeon endured - Baptist newspapers reprinted his sermons for years after his death. For an estimate of his influence, see George W. Pruett's 1934 Albert Hall address (Truett, "C. H. Spurgeon Centenary," *Baptist Courier*, 30 August 1934, 8, 17, 22-23). Truett pointed particularly to

Robert Williamson, for example, appealed to Spurgeon for this reason. He was alarmed that modernist theology was spreading among Baptist preachers. Among “our young preachers just from the seminaries,” Williamson complained, the old theology was eclipsed and the “new theology bids fair to come into vogue.” But Spurgeon separated from the modernists and “left the Baptist Union on account of the new theology.” Williamson applauded him because he took a decided stand for orthodoxy.²⁸

Baptist newspaper editors applauded him likewise. T. T. Eaton, editor of *Kentucky Baptists' Western Recorder* and tireless inspector of theological credentials, saw Spurgeon's action as the proof of his orthodoxy. He was the “greatest man living,” Eaton wrote. When others questioned whether Spurgeon was still a Baptist, Eaton responded that “he is more of a Baptist today than ever before.” Eaton defended close communion doggedly throughout his career but seemed to indulge the error in Spurgeon. Perhaps Spurgeon would now adopt close communion, Eaton hoped.²⁹

The changing context of American religion precipitated the changed interpretation. Before about 1870, the pastors and theologians of the popular denominations shared a common belief in such evangelical essentials as the deity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, the necessity of repentance and faith, and the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures. Few seriously challenged these fundamentals. But evangelicals challenged one another on such secondary truths as believer's baptism and church polity. Other denominations attacked the Baptists for their practice of close communion and believer's baptism. The defense of these two commitments in large part informed Baptist identity in the United States. Since Spurgeon rejected close communion, he was a marginal Baptist.

After 1870, the battle lines shifted dramatically. Many young pastors and theologians embraced modernism. In their own denominations, pastors and teachers challenged the central doctrines of

Spurgeon's twin commitment to Calvinism and evangelism as the source of his spiritual power.

²⁸ R. W. [Robert Williamson], “The Preacher's Library, etc.,” *Biblical Recorder*, 14 March 1888, 1.

²⁹ T. T. Eaton, “Mr. Spurgeon Again,” *Western Recorder*, 2 February 1888, 4; Eaton, “Rev. C. H. Spurgeon,” *Western Recorder*, 22 December 1887, 4.

the gospel. Baptists began to turn their attention to a defense of the fundamentals. This defense shaped a new Baptist identity. In this context Spurgeon passed muster - he was a true Baptist. American evangelicals did not mobilize against modernism until the early twentieth century. But many leaders raised the alarm between 1870 and 1900. The most visible expressions of the spread of the new theology among Baptists occurred in the South. In 1879 the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary forced the resignation of Crawford Howell Toy when he embraced the new theology's views of inspiration. Two years later, the Foreign Mission Board withdrew its appointment of John Stout and T. P. Bell when it learned that they adopted similar views.

The new threat facing evangelicals had little to do with ecclesiology. It jeopardized evangelicalism itself. It addressed the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. Most evangelicals considered ecclesiology to be vital to the gospel. When therefore Spurgeon stood against the encroachments of new theology, American evangelicals applauded. Baptists who were becoming more concerned about modernism found in Spurgeon's example a heroic act to defend the fundamentals of the faith.

Before the down-grade controversy Spurgeon's identity was primarily in evangelical dissent. After the controversy, it was in a separatism based on assertion of the fundamental truths of traditional Protestantism. But in both modes, Spurgeon expressed little concern for ecclesiology compared to his predecessors. Ecclesiology was not a fundamental truth of eternal salvation. Nor did rigid attachment to modes of church government and the ordinances assist in the salvation of sinners. Ecclesiology passed neither the test of fundamental truth nor the test of evangelistic effectiveness. In these ways Spurgeon's career was an early example of how the identity of British and American evangelicals realigned under pressure from modernism. In the realignment evangelicals further diminished the role of ecclesiology in conservative Protestantism.

Preaching Against the State:
The Persecution of the Anabaptists
as an Example for 21st Century Evangelicals

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Packer's Dusty Discovery and the Music of the Anabaptists

During J. I. Packer's second year of undergraduate studies at Oxford, he was invited to serve as the junior librarian at the Christian Union student organization. Having been converted only a year earlier, Packer was new to the Union but, as he would soon discover, so were a recent donation of books.¹ An octogenarian clergyman had recently concluded that he could no longer make use of his library and thus gave them to the Union who, upon receipt, proceeded to pile them in the basement of their meeting hall for an unknown future. Thereafter, as is now famously told and retold, Packer discovered, as a nineteen year-old, the works of the Puritan John Owen—and the evangelical world has not been the same since. At the time of this discovery, Packer would later relate his life “was all over the place” emotionally and thus “God used [Owen] to save my sanity.” More than just sorting out Packer, his literal “recovery” of the Puritans would start a movement that not only would bring great and good revived interest in these evangelical forebears, but also would help provide an anchor to the Word of God during the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s in the United Kingdom and abroad. One could argue, that had not Packer discovered that box of books, his tremendously influential and life altering works, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (1958) and *Knowing God* (1973), may never have appeared—not to mention the republishing of the *Works of John Owen* themselves as well as many other volumes in

¹ This essay originated first as a presentation at the Ninth annual conference hosted by the Andrew Fuller Center for Baptist Studies in Louisville, KY, September 15-16, 2015.

the Puritan canon readily available today.² Truly this is an example of one man's discarded tomes serving as another man's lifelong treasure.

While it might at first sound odd to start an essay on the persecution of the Anabaptists with a story of the 20th century rediscovery of the Puritans, the latter actually serves as a fitting metaphor for the topic I seek to address. For the Puritans, from the sixteenth century to the present, have endured misunderstanding and misinterpretation, yet when rediscovered and redeployed by earnest evangelicals over the years, have also proven to serve as timely companions and guides for the clear teaching and preaching of the Bible and the proclamation of the New Testament message of the gospel.³ Whether it was Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, or even Packer, himself, relighting the paths back to the archives containing the treasures of Puritan wisdom and help, their rediscovery across the years has proven to bolster and encourage in times of cultural and spiritual darkness. While to many, the Puritans are worthy of nothing more than an dusty pile of books in a basement corner, to many others they have, like for Packer, been used of God to provide theological clarity and life-giving gospel reorientation. Well, if the Puritans have been seen frequently as objects of discard and neglect, the Anabaptists are more often thought of as clanging nuisances of history many have sought to mute or dismiss much like most of America must treat the musical acts that frequent the end of *The Tonight Show* with Jimmy Fallon—sounds of history that are more noise than melody, more cacophony than symphony. But like the Puritans, who in many ways were made most useful for doctrinal instruction in times other than their own, the Anabaptists, as I hope to show, can serve, perhaps surprisingly, a similar function in our own day especially when we observe how and why they endured persecution in the Beatitudinal fashion (Mat 5:2-12). Indeed, what many may have sought to silence in eras past as mere

² Leland Ryken, *J.I. Packer: An Evangelical Life* (Crossway, 2015), 265-267.

³ As a helpful working definition of Puritanism, B. R. White indicated that it “seems right to define the period of true Puritanism as 1570-1640 and a Puritan as an earnest Protestant, his understanding of the Bible shaped by a theology which was broadly Calvinist in type, who, while remaining a member of the established Church of England, sought its further reformation often, though not always in the direction of Presbyterianism,” in “Introduction,” in *The English Puritan Tradition* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980), 12.

footnotes or sideshows in the history of Christianity, may well now serve well as the music the future of Christianity needs most to hear. Truly, this can serve as an example of one man's cacophony serving as another man's symphony.

In what follows, I intend to review the topic, "Preaching against the State: The Persecution of the Anabaptists as an Example for 21st Century Evangelicals" by answering the following questions. (1) Who were the Anabaptists? (2) For what were they persecuted? and, (3) Why are they of value for us today? In my answering of each of these, I seek to present selections from the lives and thoughts of a few of the key leaders of the movement.

Who Were the Anabaptists?

Definitions

In the years following Martin Luther's first strides toward reformation, the sirens of the Anabaptists concussed in strident discord to Huldreich Zwingli and the Swiss Reformer's idea of a Magisterial Reformation.⁴ What is more, most of the historical tradition that followed until the twentieth century agreed with Zwingli that the Anabaptists were disorderly radicals of extreme dissonance. Many were stamped with the label of Munster revolutionary, a mischievous sect, who many solemnly swore were up to no good. Yet, as William Estep argued, the main and most influential stream of "Anabaptism might well be, outside the Reformation itself, the most influential movement the sixteenth century spawned" for "concepts such as religious liberty and its concomitant, the separation of church and state, may be directly traced to sixteenth century Anabaptism."⁵ George Hunston Williams, noted scholar and former professor of ecclesiastical history at Harvard University, sought to recognize the Radical Reformation as a "Fourth" Reformation as distinct as "Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anglicanism" in terms of significance for the "rise of modern Christianity."⁶ Williams also provided the most extensive treatment showing that not all sixteenth

⁴ Portions of this paragraph are adapted from Jason G. Duesing, *Seven Summits in Church History* (Rainer Publishing, forthcoming).

⁵ William R. Estep, Jr., *Anabaptist Beginnings (1523-1533): A Source Book* (B. De Graaf, 1976), 2.

⁶ George H. Williams, ed., *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (Westminster John Knox, 1957), 19.

century Anabaptists were a part of a “program for violent destruction of Europe’s religious and social institutions.”⁷ Williams identified three groups of Anabaptists: revolutionary, contemplative, and evangelical—with the latter most theologically close to the Magisterial Reformers in terms of their doctrines of the sole authority of Scripture and justification by faith alone. In the doctrine of salvation and especially the doctrine of the church they differed, but never to the point of violence or mass social revolution. For Williams, the evangelical Anabaptists “understood that the imitation of Christ, from hazardous rebaptism at some Germanic Jordan to a martyr’s pyre, represented the fullness of the Christian way. As Christ began his public ministry at baptism, so many Evangelical Anabaptists felt compelled to imitate him in an itinerant ministry of proclaiming the gospel of repentance.”⁸ What, then, makes them radical? Though the Radical Reformation in its broadest expressions consisted of many branches, nevertheless, Williams shows that all “agreed in cutting back to that root [of faith and order and the ultimate source of divine authority among them] and in freeing the church and creed of what they regarded as suffocating growth of ecclesiastical tradition and magisterial prerogative.”⁹

Identification with the Magisterial Reformers

For the purposes of this essay, I am focusing on the evangelical stream, in part, because they remained most closely identified with the Magisterial Reformers. The early Anabaptists in Zurich were trained by Zwingli in the humanist tradition of returning to the original sources for doctrinal development.¹⁰ Through this training, many of the Evangelical

⁷ Walter Klaassen, “A Fire that Spread Anabaptist Beginnings,” in *Christian History* 5 (1985), available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/1985/issue5/507.html>. See G. H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd edition (Truman State University Press, 2000).

⁸ Williams, *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, 30.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁰ This paragraph taken from Jason G. Duesing, “Maintaining the Integrity of Churches for Future Churches” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (Kregel, 2007), 247-248.

Anabaptists first encountered the *sola fide*,¹¹ *sola Christus*, *sola gratia* gospel and as a foundation embraced with deep devotion the concept of *sola Scriptura*.¹² Indeed, this careful study of the Bible in its original languages led several of the Anabaptists to press Zwingli for New Testament fidelity when it came to ecclesiology. Estep also documents the ways in which both Balthasar Hubmaier and Pilgram Marpeck used the Apostles' Creed and the Athanasian Creed their works.¹³ While there is not much evidence to show that the Evangelical Anabaptists used the creeds as a test of fellowship, it is abundantly evident that they shared agreement with them. In addition, all of these Anabaptists would affirm the traditional articulation of the nature of God as Trinitarian. The Evangelical Anabaptist movement did not endure long enough to establish much of a written tradition, but one gathering in 1527 did produce a confession of faith. *The Schleithem Confession* intentionally reads more like a church manual and its silence on the broader Protestant doctrines speaks to the agreement of the Anabaptists in these areas and reflects the determination only to speak to areas of disagreement, namely ecclesiology.

Differences with the Magisterial Reformers

In the doctrine of the church, the evangelical Anabaptists, as we have seen, disagreed with the Magisterial Reformers. The basis for much of this disagreement arises over the placement of what they Reformers called "the fall of the church." For the Anabaptists, they concluded and maintained that the point at which the church fell or entered into a period of sustained corruption was the point at which "church and state were united under Constantine."¹⁴ Estep explains that the Reformers by and large saw the Constantinian era "as a period of the church's triumph" and thus did not come to see the church as ever achieving a complete fall.

¹¹ Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 199, explains that while the Anabaptists took issue with Luther in the way in which justification related to infant baptism, "There is no repudiation of the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith, but rather a new interpretation which attempted to read into the term more biblical and ethical content than they felt Luther ever gave it, without resorting to a soteriology based on a works righteousness."

¹² Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 190.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

Rather, they focused on Papal corruption and sought to reform the existing structure from within.¹⁵

An obvious area of disagreement, of course, occurred over the doctrine of baptism. However, when the Anabaptists moved to embrace believer's baptism (not yet immersion), it was a move they felt was obligatory not because they saw baptism now as participating in the act of salvation, but rather because they saw it intrinsically linked to the establishment of a free church separate from the state. As Estep explains, "Each of the terms [they] used was intended to convey the meaning of baptism as the deliberate, voluntary act of a committed disciple of Jesus Christ. Therefore, baptism for the believer symbolizes his newness of life and his determination to follow Christ even unto death Without it, the visible church could not exist."¹⁶ Further, as will be seen in what follows, the Anabaptists saw the recovery of the church as intrinsically connected to the recovery of the gospel itself. Estep says, "The nature of the gospel and of man's response to it are also reasons [for rejecting the baptism of infants]. Faith, man's response to the proclaimed Word, is the foundation of the church. Only the faithful are qualified for baptism and church membership."¹⁷

Thus, it was in Zürich on January 21, 1525, the first Anabaptists left the prevalent and state-mandated tradition of infant baptism and followed their biblical convictions that true baptism should be administered solely to believers, and that such believer's baptism should function as the entrance into membership of the local church.¹⁸ Estep recounts the significance of this event.

¹⁵ Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 241.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁸The Anabaptist leader, Pilgram Marpeck, articulated in light of the order given in the Great Commission that one was made a disciple (i.e. is conversion as the result of the placing of one's faith in teaching received) before receiving baptism. Combined with the statement of Jesus inaugurating the church upon the confession of Peter in Matthew 16, believer's baptism served as the public confession of faith for the believer's entrance into the local church. See Pilgram Marpeck, "The Admonition of 1542," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1978), 227. See also Jason G. Duesing, "Pilgram Marpeck's Christian Baptism," *Faith & Mission* 23:3 (Summer 2006):3-16.

On this fateful night the concept of a Believers' Church based upon a voluntary confession of faith confirmed by the act of public baptism found concrete realization in history. Thus, from a handful of radicals in Switzerland and South Germany who preferred to call themselves Brethren in Christ, the Free Church movement sprang.¹⁹ Among these evangelical Anabaptists, Balthasar Hubmaier emerged as the chief theologian and spokesman and thus he will serve as our first case study to explore these themes further.

Case Study: The Life of Balthasar Hubmaier (1480?-1528)

Though born into the peasant class around 1480, Hubmaier grew to be called the "Doctor of Anabaptism" in recognition of his educational attainments under the famous Roman Catholic apologist, Eck of Ingolstadt.²⁰ By the 1520s, the scholar-priest served the parish church in the town of Waldshut, on the South German border. He began there faithfully, as he had in all his other places of ministry, carrying out the Roman Catholic traditions and rituals with zeal. But unknown to many, he also studied the Scriptures. The more he studied and conversed with those participating in the Swiss Reformation, Hubmaier realized he had been preaching for some years "yet had not known the way unto eternal life." After his conversion, he took up both the preaching of the gospel and initiating reforms in his church following those in Zurich. Abandoning celibacy, he married Elizabeth Hügline, who became a sustaining and faithful compatriot. The rapid pace of change in Waldshut attracted the governing authorities and rather than harm his congregation, in late 1524, Hubmaier fled. During this time he wrote his influential pamphlet on religious liberty, *Concerning Heretics and Those Who Burn Them*.

After some time passed, Hubmaier returned to Waldshut welcomed by great fanfare. He gave himself further to the study of Scripture and preaching the gospel. As a few disciples of Zwingli were separating from the Zurich reform movement over the doctrine of infant baptism in 1525, Hubmaier began questioning the doctrine's biblical

¹⁹William R. Estep, "A Believing People: Historical Background," in *The Concept of the Believers' Church: Addresses from the 1967 Louisville Conference*. Ed. James Leo Garrett, Jr. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1969), 45.

²⁰ Timothy George, *Reading Scripture with the Reformers* (IVP Academic, 2011), 223.

foundation. On the Saturday before Easter, Hubmaier submitted to believer's baptism (by effusion not immersion) by a colleague of the former Zwinglian group. Now both Reformer and an Anabaptist, Hubmaier's days again were numbered in Waldshut and again he left. On the run toward Zurich, he was arrested by Zwingli and after considerable interrogation, Hubmaier recanted his Anabaptist convictions. After his confession, the free though humiliated Hubmaier traveled with his only companion, Elizabeth, to the more tolerant Moravia.

Regaining his courage and strength, Hubmaier took up his pen and wrote somewhere near seventeen tracts or pamphlets reasserting his Anabaptist convictions in matters relating to baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church discipline. He also published *Freedom of the Will*, which articulated his distance from the Reformed theological tradition on the doctrine of salvation. Hubmaier's theology emphasized the Christian life as one of consistent discipleship and while most evangelical Anabaptists pursued pacifism, Hubmaier argued for a place for governmental use of the "sword" and supported Christians serving in places of civil authority. The agents of King Ferdinand I apprehended Hubmaier and his wife in August 1527. Held in prison in Vienna until spring, Hubmaier endured trial and torture but refused to recant. Led to a pile of wood, the authorities rubbed gunpowder in his beard for explosive effect. As the fire was lit, he called out, "O my Heavenly Father! O my gracious God!" "His clothes were stripped from his back and he was placed in the torture rack . . . A large crowd followed the heretic to a pile of wood . . . Refusing the last rites and confession to a priest, the fire was lit . . . Hubmaier shouted, "O gracious God, forgive my sins and my great torment. O Father, I give thee thanks that thou wilt today take me out of this vale of tears. With joy I desire to die and come to thee. O Lamb, O Lamb, that takest away the sins of the world! O God, into thy hands I commit my spirit." To the people he said, "O dear brothers, if I have injured any, in word or deed, may he forgive me for the sake of my merciful God. I forgive all those that have done me harm . . . O Lord, into thy hands I commit my spirit." As they rubbed sulfur and gunpowder into his beard he said, "O salt me well, salt me well." And raising his head he called out,

“O dear brothers, pray God that he will forgive me my guilt in this my death. I will die in the Christian faith.”²¹

Balthasar Hubmaier’s *Concerning Heretics* pamphlet, though written before he joined the evangelical Anabaptists, served to build a foundation upon which the Anabaptist movement later advanced their belief in the separation of the state from the church. The true “heretics” were those who “wickedly oppose the Holy Scriptures,” and these “inquisitors” condemned and executed any who chose the Bible over the church. For Hubmaier, the issue was that true faith cannot be coerced. He stated, “A Turk or a heretic is not convinced by our act, either with the sword or with fire, but only with patience and prayer.” Hubmaier defended the existence of the state to put “to death the criminals who injure the bodies of the defenseless (Romans 13:3-4),” but advocacy and enforcement of “a law to burn heretics is an invention of the devil.” In Hubmaier’s Europe, a person found to hold a view contradictory to the Roman Church was first given the opportunity to recant. However, if he persisted in his view, he was condemned by the church and then handed over to the state for execution. Hubmaier countered this practice by reminding that the sword of the church is the “Word of God,” not a physical weapon that wounds. Neither the attempt to coerce faith nor to execute those who deny the faith are functions of a New Testament church in any society. Hubmaier and his evangelical Anabaptists foresaw, beyond their own lifetimes, that the defense of every citizen’s right to pursue what they believe or do not believe only exists when the church operates independent of the state. For the Anabaptists and later evangelicals, the defense of this civil right ensures the proclamation of the gospel for all either to accept or reject freely, without coercion. Further, it prevents the state from using its sword of civil protection for matters of the soul and Spirit.

While some may still consider Balthasar Hubmaier mere dissonant noise of little value and continue to hear the Anabaptists through the overtures of Münster radicalism, a reexamination of Hubmaier can reveal a theological harmony with contemporary evangelicals—especially those rediscovering the vital doctrine of religious liberty. Such can be seen in the advice of contemporary religious

²¹ Henry Clay Vedder, *Balthasar Hubmaier: The Leader of the Anabaptists* (Knickerbocker, 1905), 244.

liberty advocate Russell D. Moore, “While we must engage politically to protect our inalienable religious rights and those of our neighbors, we must do so first as conservative Christians and not first as Christian conservatives. We must call the state to justice, but our ultimate concern should be for a place at the table of the marriage supper of the Lamb, not a place at a political party platform committee meeting. As we find in Paul’s discourse in 1 Timothy 2:1-10, our concern for the temporal political order is built on our much more significant concern for the gospel and the covenant community.”²²

For What Were the Anabaptists Persecuted?

Treason: Separation of Church and State

There is an episode in the great early 2000s television series, *The West Wing* that depicts the Ivy-League-PhD-President, attempting to boil down complex arguments of foreign relations and the economy into pithy 10 word statements in order to show his ability to play political-ball with his home-spun, down-to-earth, challenger for his re-election. After attempting to do such over several weeks, the president finally concludes that some things are just too complicated for 10 word statements. He says, “It is not the first 10 words that matter anyway. It’s the next 10. And the 10 after that.” Such is the case when attempting to formulate a concise answer for why it was that the Anabaptists were hunted and put to death by the hundreds and thousands. As I will attempt to explain, there were many factors, and like much of most of the history of persecution, even dating back to the death of our Lord Jesus, there are lies, misunderstandings, and overall failures to agree exactly why it is that Group A is seeking the death of Group B. However, if I were to attempt to boil it down to one word, even, that word would be treason. As Estep helpfully notes, “Any deviation from the established churches was considered a crime of treason.”²³

Further, this was complicated by the fact that the Anabaptists developed multiple enemies for their actions. Leonard Verduin describes

²² Russell D. Moore, “Conservative Christians in an Era of Christian Conservatives: Reclaiming the Struggle for Religious Liberty from Cultural Captivity,” in Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, Malcolm B. Yarnell, III, ed. *First Freedom: The Baptist Perspective on Religious Liberty* (B&H Academic, 2007), 144.

²³ Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 29.

the developments among the Anabaptists as the “second front” of concern for Magisterial Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. On the one hand, the Magisterial Reformers’ first front of concern was clearly the actions and reactions of the Roman Catholics to their call for church reformation. The Magisterial Reformers desired to *reform* the Catholic Church in all areas of corruption by rightly establishing the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ by faith alone as the center of faith and practice. On the other hand, the Magisterial Reformers were concerned with the Anabaptists’ desire to move beyond church reform to complete *restoration* of the church to its New Testament origins.²⁴

By and large, the Magisterial Reformers were not looking to make many ecclesiological changes. They saw the economic and political ramifications of separating the church from the state and looked at the melding of these two under Constantine as a fit exercise for Christian civil and religious expression. Therefore, the Magisterial Reformers retained two things as a part of their ecclesiology. First, membership in the church (as well as recognition of citizenship with the state) was contingent upon one’s baptism as an infant. Second, just as the state carried the sword for the purpose of maintaining and establishing justice, so too did the church support the sword for the purpose of maintaining and establishing truth. Capital punishment was the sentence for acts or beliefs that many evangelicals today freely endorse. The Anabaptists attempted to conserve the doctrine of the believers’ church in a climate far more hostile, yet they did so not because they saw it as a gospel essential, but because they realized that the believers’ church functioned as the vehicle to protect gospel essentials.²⁵

While Western theologians today are quick to place doctrines such as ecclesiology, eschatology, and perhaps even variances of anthropology on the lowest rungs of what is essential for twenty-first century New Testament Christianity, it is a mistake to view the cultural

²⁴Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Sarasota; The Christian Hymnary Publishers, reprint 1997). This paragraph taken from Jason G. Duesing, “Maintaining the Integrity of Churches for Future Churches” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (Kregel, 2007), 248-249.

²⁵ This paragraph taken from Jason G. Duesing, “Maintaining the Integrity of Churches for Future Churches” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (Kregel, 2007), 249.

climates of past centuries, such as the sixteenth century, as operating under the same doctrinal classifications. To be sure, in modern America where differences over the doctrine of the church do not merit the sentence of capital punishment, such issues do not seem as essential as to how one answers the contemporary evangelical question, “If you died tonight, how certain would you be that you would be in Heaven?” However, because the Anabaptists’ cultural milieu was far more complex and costly, ecclesiological distinctives became the battleground for conserving the gospel essentials.²⁶

The Anabaptists saw the marriage of church and state under Constantine as both harmful and unbiblical. One can articulate a pure gospel, as the Magisterial Reformers, did with great effect, but to do so within the confines of a corrupt and false church only convolutes the message one hopes to proclaim. In addition, by allowing and mandating individuals into the membership of the church that are not regenerate, the Magisterial Reformers left themselves open to further corruption.²⁷

For the Anabaptists, the only way to accomplish biblical purity in the Church was to separate completely from the existing institutions and establish a believers’ church. These early baptized churches no longer supported the use of the sword in church matters and refused to call for the death penalty even for those with divergent doctrinal views. Entrance into these new churches was by profession of faith (something infants could not do) in the form of believer’s baptism. Furthermore, the purity of these churches was protected by the regular practice of the ban, or church discipline, on those members who continued in unrepentant sin and thus showed themselves not to have believed what they said to have professed.²⁸

Therefore, one can see how the organization of a believers’ church was not only a radical departure from the societal status quo but also the symbol of one’s commitment to a greater ideal of church and gospel purity rooted not in the sacramental tradition but rather in the text of the Bible.²⁹

²⁶ Duesing, *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, 250.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

What the Roman Catholics and Magisterial Reformers Thought of the Anabaptists

For the sake of time, I think it helpful to recognize that the Roman Catholics of this era largely failed to understand the Anabaptists simply because they were, as Hubmaier was previously, largely “ignorant of the Bible and the true nature of the Christian faith.”³⁰ This simple yet enormous foundational difference, led to the entirety of the reasons for Roman Catholic persecution of the Anabaptists.

Regarding the Magisterial Reformers, I will give just two basic examples that center around disagreements over the doctrine of baptism. In 1527, Martin Luther was asked by two Roman Catholic priests for his thoughts on Anabaptism and his connection to them. The result was his *Concerning Rebaptism* (1528) in which he said, “the Anabaptists proceed dangerously in everything. Not only are they not sure of themselves, but also they act contrary to accepted tradition and out of their own imaginings.”³¹ John Calvin references Hubmaier throughout his treatment on baptism in the *Institutes* specifically to respond to *On the Christian Baptism of Believers* and the argument that infants are incapable of faith.³²

*Case Study: Pilgram Marpeck’s Christian Baptism*³³

This brings us to our second case study and a further treatment of the Anabaptist doctrine of baptism as a basis for persecution. Pilgram Marpeck (d. 1556), although a lay-theologian, was nevertheless the number two writing theologian of the Anabaptist movement behind Hubmaier. His value to the state as a civil engineer brought him longer life and thus ample time to write and engage the defense of Anabaptist doctrines. With regard to the doctrine of baptism, Rollin Armour considers Pilgram Marpeck to have “articulated perhaps the most thoughtful interpretation of baptism among the Anabaptists.”³⁴

³⁰ Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, 218.

³¹ LW 40:229-262 and included in Timothy F. Lull and William R. Russell, eds., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Fortress, 2012), 250.

³² *Institutes* 4.16.17-23,25.

³³ This section adapted from Jason G. Duesing, “Pilgrim Marpeck’s Christian Baptism,” in *Faith & Mission* (Summer 2006), 3-16.

³⁴ Rollin Stely Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1966), 113. Research related to the writings of Pilgram Marpeck

And John Wenger concluded that Pilgram Marpeck was “loyally Biblical [*sic*]” not only in his daily life, but also his theological life, especially in the development of his theology of baptism.³⁵ In one sense, Marpeck is much like Tolkien’s Faramier, the younger, lesser known Anabaptist brother, but who, in his own way due to his outliving Hubmaier and many others, makes his mark and contributes significantly to the Anabaptist movement and its future manifestations.

By way of introduction, it is helpful to examine three of Marpeck’s summary statements concerning baptism. First, it is foundational to see that Marpeck’s understanding of baptism draws its definition from the biblical text. In the midst of a rare comment on his own testimony of conversion Marpeck states, “I have been baptized precisely because it is written that one should do so, and I have been baptized because according to the testimony of the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:3, 4), it is written that our Lord Christ died for our sakes.”³⁶ Second, it is helpful to recognize that Marpeck’s understanding of baptism sees its significance even in its descriptive terminology. In response to South German Spiritualist, Casper Schwenckfeld, Marpeck asserts, “We don’t simply call it ‘water baptism’ as Schwenckfeld does, for God’s word and action precedes and accompanies it. For this reason, and not because of the element, it is called Christian baptism.”³⁷ Thus, this author will use the terminology “Christian baptism” when exploring Marpeck’s view. Finally, it is important to note that Marpeck’s understanding of baptism finds its essential nature in the role it plays as a matter of ecclesiological integrity. He summarizes, “If these three things, the true proclamation

was almost non-existent until the mid-twentieth century. Since that time, nearly all of Marpeck’s writings have been translated and published in English with the exception of his concordance, *Testamentserläuterung*.

³⁵ John C. Wenger, “The Theology of Pilgram Marpeck,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* XII, no. 4 (1938): 205-206.

³⁶ Pilgram Marpeck, “A Clear and Useful Instruction,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1978), 94. Also known as Marpeck’s *Klarer Unterricht*.

³⁷ Pilgram Marpeck, “Response to Casper Schwenckfeld,” in *Later Writings by Pilgram Marpeck and his Circle*, ed. Walter Klaassen, Werner Packull, and John Rempel (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 1999), 87. Also known as Marpeck’s *Verantwortung*. Schwenckfeld, known Anabaptist critic, prompted Marpeck’s defense through his own critique of Marpeck’s *Admonition of 1542*.

of the gospel, correct baptism, and correct communion, are in doubt, there can be no true church of Christ. If one of these parts is missing, it is not possible outwardly to maintain and support a true Christian church."³⁸ Therefore, in light of Marpeck's understanding of baptism according to its biblical definition, significant terminology, and ecclesiological necessity a presentation of four descriptive statements regarding Marpeck's Christian baptism follows.

The essence of Marpeck's critique of infant baptism can be summarized by seeing the practice as a failure to follow Christ's command.³⁹ Marpeck believes that this command of Christ, found in Matthew 28, contains more than just instructions, but also a specific order for baptismal practice.⁴⁰ For Marpeck's immediate audience, this was an important point of clarification as there were many Spiritualists who claimed that with the death of the Apostles there were no longer any pertinent commands in Scripture concerning baptism.⁴¹ Thus, Marpeck

³⁸ Pilgram Marpeck, "The Admonition of 1542," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1978), 292. Also known as Marpeck's *Vermanung* or *Taufbüchlein*.

³⁹ To clarify this connection between Christ's command and the perils of infant baptism, Marpeck states, "If people would have stayed with Christ's one simple order or command it would not have been necessary to raise so many other orders of baptism." He continues to say, "But, because of infant baptism, this command and order has been totally obscured and darkened, yes, even completely destroyed and rejected," in "The Admonition of 1542," 213.

⁴⁰ With regard to Matt 28, Marpeck states, "Christ gave the commandment to baptize only in Matthew 28," in "The Admonition of 1542," 180. In *ibid.*, 172, Marpeck states further that "it is true and correct Christian baptism only if it happens according to the command of Christ." And later, "A Christian baptism is one which is carried out according to the command and order of Christ," 185. In his "Response," Marpeck states with regard to Matt 28 that Christ "gives a whole commandment and not half a one," 139.

⁴¹ Marpeck, "A Clear Refutation," 47. Bender explains that in Strasbourg at this time Marpeck faced opposition from both the Spiritualists and the Reformers. The former, led by Schwenckfeld and Bänderlin, preferred only to have "the invisible church and inward spirituality without outward forms and ceremonies." Marpeck provided the Anabaptists in their midst with "Biblical [*sic*] realism" that ensured a future for his followers as the Spiritualist philosophy did not lead to any future or "permanent 'church,'" in "Anabaptist Theologian and Civil Engineer," 246-7.

gives ample evidence for why not only are Christ's commands still applicable, but also the commands of the Apostles with regard to baptism. He states, "It will be found in Scripture that such ceremonies must remain as long as there are Christians, that is, until the end of the world, for, in His command to baptize (Matt 28), Jesus had in mind not only His present disciples but also all future disciples throughout time until the end of the world."⁴² Jesus Christ commissioned this new order and practice of Christian baptism for "not only the world of His time, but also the world which will remain and the nations which exist until the end or the last day."⁴³ This order Marpeck finds in Scripture is the *modus operandi* for the church with regard to Christian baptism.

Upon combining Matt 28 with the writings of the Apostles,⁴⁴ Marpeck distills the order of Christian baptism to teaching, faith, baptism, and entrance to the church. When discussing Peter's plea for all to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins in Acts 2:38, Marpeck explains, "Those who gladly accepted his word were baptized. There the order of God and man was observed: first teaching, then faith, and only then baptism."⁴⁵ He repeats this order in his *Admonition of 1542*, "If a man is to come in an orderly way to salvation and to the kingdom of God, he must first of necessity hear God's Word and be instructed in it. It is then the task of a man to believe the gospel, to receive willingly the knowledge of Christ, to be obedient to the truth. Only then does it follow that a man is to be baptized."⁴⁶ Entrance to the church naturally follows these three

⁴² Pilgram Marpeck, "A Clear Refutation," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1978), 47. Also known as Marpeck's *Clare Verantwortung*.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 51. Marpeck cites the following as support: Matt 24; Mark 13; Acts 2; Rom 15; Deut 31; Ps 78. He reiterates this in his "Response" as well saying, "In his baptismal commandment in Matt 28, Christ gives it not only to his present disciples but to all future disciples, i.e. those who would believe in him across time until the end of the world," 99.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65. Here, Marpeck surveys the various writings of the New Testament for what he terms "Apostolic Order."

⁴⁵ Marpeck, "Confession of 1532," 154.

⁴⁶ Marpeck, "The Admonition of 1542," 212. Also he states, "John baptized people unto repentance; they should confess their sins and improve. The apostles, however, baptized believers in the name of God or of Christ; those who were baptized turned themselves over to God and were joined to Him in Christ,

in Marpeck's view, as will be shown.

While the command to teach appears to follow the command to baptize in Matt 28, Marpeck's order sees teaching as the equivalent to "making disciples" or teaching the unbeliever the gospel of Christ. Marpeck would define the instruction to teach in the latter part of Christ's commission as something that happens to believers after they have been baptized or admitted to the church. Marpeck asserts, "First and foremost, the apostles had to teach the people with the instruction of truth so that they would be willing to come to baptism, be moved to be baptized, and then rightly allow themselves to be baptized."⁴⁷ Teaching, in the sense of leading people to Christian baptism, comes first.

Faith follows teaching in that Marpeck believes it is necessary that "whoever seeks to bind himself with God in baptism must first be a newborn spiritual man."⁴⁸ Marpeck recognizes this as a clearly articulated biblical principle and he cites the example of Christ's statement in Mark 16 as evidence, "Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved; whoever does not believe is condemned [Mark 16:16]; where there is no faith all teaching is of no avail and baptism is no baptism."⁴⁹ Furthermore, Marpeck points to the teaching of the Acts of the Apostles, as taught specifically by Philip in Acts 8, which led the eunuch to believe the gospel followed by his concluding that immediate baptism was an appropriate response to his new faith.⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Marpeck emphasizes that baptism "springs from faith in Christ,"⁵¹ and must be "through one's own faith, and not that of another."⁵² Faith is the essential prerequisite for New Testament Christian baptism.

Only after right teaching and personal faith does Christian baptism follow. The fourth section below will outline Marpeck's understanding of the meaning and significance of the practice as a

whom the confessed by faith in the gospel, and according to whose standard they were to conduct themselves," *Ibid.*, 176.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁴⁹ Marpeck, "Confession of 1532," 111.

⁵⁰ Marpeck, "A Clear Refutation," 65-66. Marpeck states clearly that "faith always precedes baptism."

⁵¹ Marpeck, "Confession of 1532," 110.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 153.

witness, but it is helpful here to state that Marpeck clearly saw Christian baptism as an external act. The internal baptism is that work done by the Spirit at conversion and is also the result of faith. But it is the external and outward act that serves as the expression of Christian baptism.⁵³ It is also helpful to note that by 1542 when Marpeck wrote his *Admonition* he was not precise as to the mode of baptism. He states, "To baptize means the same as to immerse in water or dip in water, and baptism is the same as immersion or sprinkling with water."⁵⁴ In addition to this ambiguous commentary on the physical practice of Christian baptism, Marpeck provides in his *Response* a sample confession for use by the baptismal candidate,⁵⁵ and also explains that Christian baptism is a singular event without need of repetition.⁵⁶

Entrance into membership of the local church is the final stage of the baptismal order. Ironically, this is one point of common agreement between Marpeck and those who advocate infant baptism.⁵⁷ All agree that "this is the common function of baptism in the church."⁵⁸ For Marpeck, it one's public identification with Christ's death and

⁵³ Marpeck states, "Whoever has been inwardly baptized, with belief and the Spirit of Christ in his heart, will not despise the eternal baptism and the Lord's Supper which are performed according to Christian, apostolic order," in "A Clear Refutation," 65. Also, he says, "Likewise, it is a portal of entrance into the holy communion or church of Christ," in "The Admonition of 1542," 186.

⁵⁴ Marpeck, "The Admonition of 1542," 172.

⁵⁵ Marpeck writes, "Baptism is an externally offered and inwardly given truth. Before it is given, the candidate says as follows: 'The Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished in me what he offered me. I attest to this gift before God and those who offered it to me, as he already attested to it in me. They ask me if I have received it and if I desire from the witness of baptism.' This kind of form is intended to make clear that the whole transaction has to do with an offer and the reception of that offer," in "Response," 79.

⁵⁶ In contrast to the repetitive nature of the practice of the Lord's Supper, Marpeck explains, "There is one difference between outer baptism and Lord's Supper as they were instituted by Christ. The believer needs outer baptism only once, namely, his entry into Christendom or into becoming a Christian," in "Response," 107.

⁵⁷ Marpeck, "The Admonition of 1542," 258-260. It is implicit in Marpeck's discussion of the two kinds of infant baptism that both the Roman Catholics and the Reformers both intend to admit those newly baptized into the church.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 294. See also 199-201, 214.

resurrection that show one's willingness to identify with the local assembly. While commenting on Jesus' ecclesiological declaration in response to Peter's confession of faith and its relationship to baptism (Matt 16:13-20), Marpeck writes that "before such individual and true confession has been made, no one may truly be called a member of the community of the church of Christ, a member of the church, for upon this foundation, upon the confession of the faith of Peter, the Lord built His church. Thus, baptism is a door, an entrance into this church."⁵⁹ It is this confessional nature of Christian baptism that serves as the entrance requirement to the body of the church.⁶⁰

However, while the baptismal order ends there, the effects of Christian baptism have only begun, or as Marpeck says, only after Christian baptism does "the school of Christ really begin for the first time."⁶¹ As Estep helpfully concludes, "Like spokes on a wheel, the Anabaptist views of the Scriptures, discipleship, and the visible church find their hub in baptism. Baptism was thus the most effective single distinguishing mark of the sixteenth century Anabaptist movement."⁶²

Why are the Anabaptists of Value for Us Today?

What I Am Not Saying

When attempting to connect the value of the Anabaptists to the present, there are a few things I am not trying to say. First, the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century are helpful lenses through which to find instruction and encouragement, but cannot serve as the *de facto* path for church structure and interaction with the civil and popular culture of the twenty-first century. Nor am I saying that those of us in the Baptist tradition should expend effort to build or rebuild a case for some kind of historical connectedness from Augusta in 1845 to Zurich in 1525. The pursuit of such historical veracity is the stuff of novelty and misses the greater value of a more rooted connectedness shared in the common use of and commitment to the veracity of the Bible. Rather, contemporary Baptists, and truly all free-church evangelicals, share an indebtedness to

⁵⁹ Ibid., 227.

⁶⁰ Marpeck states, "Holy baptism is the second thing with which the church is built. It is the entrance and the gate to the holy church. According to God's order, nobody is allowed to enter the church except through baptism," *ibid.*, 294.

⁶¹ Marpeck, "A Clear Refutation," 76.

⁶² Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*. 235.

the Anabaptists for the ecclesiological principles they pioneered and founded on New Testament truth. Herein lies the basis of a connection to them.

What I Am Saying

What I am saying, therefore, is that the Evangelical Anabaptists can and should serve as helpful models for contemporary evangelicals in a number of areas. As we have seen, in Switzerland and South Germany in 1525 the distance between believer's baptism, the believers' church, the gospel, and death was short. The Anabaptists lived in a state-church environment that did not tolerate those who advocated and advanced biblically-driven ecclesiological absolutes. The price to be paid for defending biblical church distinctives in this climate was more often than not the ultimate price.⁶³

However, it is my conclusion that the Anabaptists were not fanatics so preoccupied with their specific preferences that they no longer saw the forest for the tree in front of them. They did not represent the type of Christian who is so enamored with his peculiar theological eccentricities that he alienates himself and thereby ruins his gospel witness. Furthermore, Anabaptists were not experimenters in the *avant-garde* simply going against the grain to stir up trouble or draw attention to themselves. Rather, these believers were standing under the conviction of what they perceived to be the biblical means for protecting gospel essentials: the preservation and right articulation of the gospel can only be accomplished through the preservation and right articulation of the church.⁶⁴

A church comprised of an unregenerate membership several generations removed will no longer care about proclaiming such essentials the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the way to salvation much less the subjects discussed in this volume. One only has to look at the results of the Half-way Covenant among New England Puritans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries or mainline Protestantism's

⁶³ This paragraph taken from Jason G. Duesing, "Maintaining the Integrity of Churches for Future Churches" in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (Kregel, 2007), 248.

⁶⁴ This paragraph taken from Jason G. Duesing, "Maintaining the Integrity of Churches for Future Churches" in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches* (Kregel, 2007), 250.

increasing indifference to the gospel in the twentieth century to see the effects of the failure to maintain a pure church. The gospel ministry of John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and George Whitefield strengthened and established various denominations, but the churches within these groups failed to use the vehicle of the believers' church consistently to deliver a pure gospel message to the future generations of saints. Thus, is it right to call them martyrs? For what exactly did they understand themselves to die?⁶⁵

In what I follows, drawing from what I have already presented, I put forward three ways in which the Anabaptist testimony functions as a model by explicating their conclusions with biblical reflection.

Models of Endurance

The Anabaptists can serve as model for how to endure and face suffering and persecution especially when such comes due to misunderstanding of one's beliefs or through blatant injustice. This can be seen in the many recorded accounts of Anabaptist deaths and executions in *The Martyr's Mirror*. Timothy George explains that "Second only to the Bible, the single most important document of Anabaptist piety was *The Bloody Theater or Martyr's Mirror of the Defenseless Christians Who Baptized Only upon Confession of Faith, and Who Suffered and Died for the Testimony of Jesus Their Saviour*. This remarkable book, first published in Dutch in 1660 is comparable to John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments of the Christian Martyrs* in the Puritan tradition."⁶⁶

Paul's second letter to Timothy is believed to be Paul's last. While personalized to Timothy and his work in Ephesus, clearly the teaching of the letter was intended for more readers.⁶⁷ At the time of his writing, Paul was in prison likely facing execution, and because of this, as Calvin notes, "all that we read here ... ought to be viewed by us as written not with ink but with Paul's own blood" for what he was suffering and

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, revised edition (B&H Academic, 2013), 316.

⁶⁷ This section taken from Jason G. Duesing, "How Should the Christian Live?" in Russell D. Moore and Andrew T. Walker, eds., *The Gospel and Same-Sex Marriage* (B&H, 2016).

sacrificing.⁶⁸ If you were in prison and facing death, what would your final written letter contain? Aside from the important statements and sentiments made to family and friends, what would be your core aims? As 2 Timothy marks the last words of Paul written from death row, he is using his final letter to strengthen and provide hope for others. Specifically, in the case of Timothy, he is pleading with him.

From his reminder in 2 Tim 1:7 that God did not give Timothy a “spirit of fear” to the command in 1:8 for Timothy not to be “ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner,” we get the picture that Timothy has lost his focus to some degree. Like Peter who, after seeing the wind while walking on the water toward Jesus, began to sink (Matt 14:30), so Timothy seems to be sinking. When Paul uses the word “ashamed” it could be that he has in mind the words of Jesus in Mark 8:38 “For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed.”⁶⁹ Therefore, he pleads with Timothy not to be ashamed of two primary things.

First, Timothy should not be ashamed of “the testimony about our Lord.” Very simply, Paul is saying, “Timothy, regardless of what comes, what happens to me, whatever the authorities do to you or the church, do not be ashamed of the Gospel.” What a wonderful definition of the Gospel is found in this phrase, “the testimony about our Lord.” Second, Timothy should not be ashamed of Paul while he is in prison. But note whose prisoner. Paul states he is the prisoner not of Rome, but of “our Lord.” Paul is in prison per the assignment and plans of Christ. Here Paul is reminding Timothy that no matter what happens in the world, Jesus Christ is still in control of all things and is holding all things together (Col 1:17). This is no Stoic philosopher or the equivalent of a hunkered-down 21st century American Evangelical seeking to endure the inevitable. This is a confident, hope-filled Christian, clothed in the armor of God (Eph 6).

Next, Paul pleads with Timothy to “share in suffering for the Gospel.” The pioneering New Testament scholar, A. T. Robertson,

⁶⁸ John Calvin, Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 179.

⁶⁹ Such is the suggestion of A. T. Robertson in his *Word Pictures in the New Testament: The Epistles of Paul*, Vol. 4. (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), 612.

believed that Paul coined the Greek word behind this phrase to convey joint suffering for the Gospel with both Jesus and Paul. By this Paul reminds Timothy that whatever may come, he is not alone and is not the first to endure the pressures brought by a culture oppose to biblical truth. Further, in 1:16, Paul upholds the legacy of Onesiphorus as an example of this shared suffering. Onesiphorus, perhaps having died in this quest, was not ashamed of Paul or the Gospel, and sought to find Paul “earnestly” so he could refresh him in his labors. This example is in contrast to the two others Paul mentions in 1:15 who were ashamed and who “turned away” from Paul. But the virtue here is not in which individual was stronger or was made of sterner stuff. Paul underscores in 1:8 that suffering done rightly is suffering done “by the power of God.” That is, according to the power of God and the strength he provides. This is not suffering by grit. This is not Stoicism. Paul wanted Timothy to share in suffering that was beyond his strength so he could rely on God’s power. Timothy was weakening, but God’s power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

How do we share in suffering? How should the Christian live when faced with opposition to his stand for truth? Practically, the advice of Paul here encourages the Christian to prepare now to suffer, to expect hardship and a culture of opposition to come, so when it arrives you will not be ashamed and not rely on your own Stoic attempts at self-reliance. Further, Paul’s admonition encourages the Christian to stand with those who are already suffering. In 21st century American culture, the Christian should not sit idly by while his brothers and sisters in other states or cities are undergoing challenges for their articulation of what the Bible teaches about marriage. If our conviction is that God, through his word, is clear on these matters, then we should not be ashamed to stand with those who believe the same and are now suffering for it. Yes, it may attract similar consequences for us, but that is not a reason for us to be ashamed or timid. Yet, as Paul states, such efforts to support like-minded believers should only be done by the power of God and in the Spirit of Christ, which means speaking the truth, yes, but doing so in love (Eph 4:15).

Models of Free Churches

Just as the Anabaptists’ relentless reliance on the Great Commission as a foundational text for their doctrine of the church, later

Baptists also would draw from this text for helping clarify a free church ecclesiology.⁷⁰ Again, though no historical tie can be nor need be drawn from the radicals in South Germany to Southern Baptists in America, there is a shared biblical connection. For example, one of the founding professors and later president of this seminary, John Broadus, in the late nineteenth century, focused on the Great Commission in his sermon, entitled “The Duty of Baptists to Teach their Distinctive Views,” to explain that the commands of Christ, given to the disciples, consisted of both “the internal and the external elements of Christian piety.”⁷¹ The internal elements, Broadus explains, are more crucial to the Christian faith as they relate to individuals and their relationship to their Creator. However, Broadus clarifies that any primacy given to the internal elements does not mean that the external elements have little value or lack importance. Broadus reasons that if Christ and his apostles gave commands relating to external elements such as the “constitution and government” of churches, then it “cannot be healthy if they are disregarded.”⁷²

In fact, both internal and external elements are intrinsic in the prerequisite command of Matthew 28:19. First, Jesus exhorts the disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” This mandate speaks of the ultimately internal act of Holy Spirit regeneration that produces a fruit-bearing disciple. As Broadus states, the internal aspect of these commands does take priority. When one of the criminals crucified alongside Jesus asked in faith, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,” Jesus replied, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:42-43). In this exchange, Jesus’ affirmation came in response to the outward expression of the internal work in the heart of the criminal. Due to the nature of the circumstances, discussion of Jesus’ external commands related to baptism or church order were not as important as the criminal’s life after death. This is not to say such commands have no importance, but rather, simply, that they are less important than the internal commands which address the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Lk. 10:25).

⁷⁰ This section is adapted from Jason G. Duesing, “The Duty of Baptists to Teach their Distinctive Views” in *Upon this Rock* (B&H Academic, 2010), 4-10

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷² *Ibid.*

When Paul writes his magisterial chapter on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, he reminds the believers that what he delivered to them “first” was the gospel, namely that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Paul clearly wrote to them about many other vital items of an external nature for the local church, but the first instructions he relayed to the Corinthians were of an internal and more important nature. The priority of the internal teachings of Christianity appear in Paul’s letter to the Galatians as well. His expressed concern for believers who were deserting the faith did not revolve around their quibbling over the external teachings related to local church order. Rather, Paul intervenes as a result of the believers entertaining a “different gospel,” that is a different teaching of an internal nature than the one Jesus provided (Gal. 1). For those altering the internal message, Paul renders them “accursed” (Gk. *anathema*), a term he does not employ, for example, when speaking of divisions within the church at Corinth over external matters related to church leaders and baptism (1 Cor. 1:10-17). The internal commands of the New Testament that speak of the reconciliation of lost and rebellious men and women to a holy and wise God through only faith expressed in the work of God’s Son bearing the punishment on behalf of humanity are clearly the first commands that the churches should carry forth in obedience to Matthew 28:20.

Second, in Matthew 28:19, Jesus instructs the disciples to baptize the new disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Here, the command to baptize marks an external component in the commission. The external commands are not as important, as they do not directly convey the power to make one “wise for salvation” (Rom. 1:16; 2 Tim. 3:15). However, the external commands are vital for healthy Christian living, preserving the internal message for future generations, and therefore should not be discarded. When Peter “lifted up his voice” and addressed the mocking and perplexed crowd who did not know how to make sense of the arrival of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2, he proclaimed “God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36). In response to Peter’s wielding multiple Old Testament texts as a sharp, two-edged sword, the crowd was “cut to the heart” (Gk. *katenuḡēsan*) and asked, “What shall we do?” Peter responded first with the primary internal command, “repent,” signaling

the need for both confession of sin and faith expressed in belief. Peter's entrance into his proclamation ministry follows the example of Jesus himself, who began his public ministry saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1:15). Peter continues, however, and quickly articulates the external command for the hearers to "be baptized" (Acts 2:38), thus practicing the entire commission of Jesus, with both internal and external in view. As with Matthew 28:19-20, the order prescribed by Peter, first internal then external, shows the importance of one over the other, but it does not negate the essential function of both types of commands. To have eternal life, the soon-to-be disciple must repent and believe (internal). To function as an obedient disciple, professing his faith in the context of a local church community, the new disciple must be baptized (external).

The order and connection between the two commands appears also in the encounter the deacon, Philip, has with the Ethiopian court official in Acts 8. After following the instructions of an angel of the Lord go to "the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza," Philip discovers the Ethiopian reading aloud Isaiah 53 and asks, "Do you understand what you are reading?" From the top of his chariot, the Ethiopian responds, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" and invites Philip to sit with him. As they travel together, Philip proceeds to explain from the Scripture that Jesus is the sheep that "was led to the slaughter" in Isaiah 53, and the account in Acts relates that Philip, "beginning with this Scripture," told the Ethiopian of the internal message regarding eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ. However, Philip appears also to have communicated some of the external commands as well, for when the Ethiopian's chariot came near a body of water, he said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" How would the Ethiopian have known of his need for baptism after he confessed his faith in Jesus if Philip had not already taught him of this external command? The baptism of the Ethiopian reinforces the notion that the external commands given in the New Testament, while not primary, are nonetheless important and should be incorporated properly into any presentation of the "good news about Jesus."

Throughout the New Testament, the local church functions as a repository not only to receive and transmit the internal message of the gospel to the current generation, but also to preserve that message for future generations. As a result, the external commands given for the

purposes of ordering and governing the church are essential for this task, even though they are not as important as the internal message. When Paul writes to Timothy to instruct him in “how one ought to behave in the household of God,” Paul describes the local church as the “pillar and buttress of truth” (1 Tim 3:15). The idea of the local church functioning as a pillar (Gk. *stulos*) and a buttress (Gk. *hedraiōma*) creates a picture of an intentionally designed (i.e. ordered) structure that, through its strength, has been prepared both to uphold (i.e. present or proclaim) an object as well as protect (i.e. preserve) an object. Jesus’ promise in Matthew 16:18 that “the gates of hell will not prevail against” the church, reinforces the idea that the local church has been given as an indestructible fortress of strength held together by Jesus Christ himself (Col.1:17).

As a result, Jesus and his apostles have given commands of an external nature that must be taught and implemented. But for what end? The object given to the local church to uphold and protect is the “truth.” The “truth” is the message of eternal life – the substance of the internal commands of Christ (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25). The New Testament teaches that this “truth” was, and is, to be handed over or delivered from one generation to the next through the local church. Luke speaks of this at the beginning of his Gospel when writing to assure Theophilus of the certainty of the things he had been taught. Luke states that he has written an “orderly account” of the things that “those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word” had “delivered” (Gk. *paredosan*) to Luke and the other apostles (Lk. 1:1-4). Likewise, Paul instructs Timothy and the Ephesian Church to “guard the good deposit” (Gk. *parathēkēn*), a reference to the entire message of the gospel he had taught and given to them. In a broad sense, the purpose of all of Paul’s letters is to deliver the “truth” not only to his immediate recipients, but also to all who will read his letters and implement the commands in local churches (Col. 4:16). Jude reinforces the notion that the “truth” is the object the local church exists to proclaim and protect. In Jude 3, he explains that “the faith,” or the gospel message of eternal life, has been delivered (Gk. *paradotheisē*) to the saints. That is to say, the internal command of salvation through Jesus Christ has been handed down to Christians who live out the Christian life in local churches. Jude states that this delivering was done “once for all” (Gk. *hapax*), referencing the complete and final nature of the message rather than communicating

that the message had no further need of transmission. Therefore, the local church, the “pillar and buttress of truth” exists to “guard the good deposit” and “deliver” it to future generations. The New Testament commands that speak of the “truth” are primary. However, the external commands that speak clearly to the order, practice, and health of the local church, while secondary, should not receive treatment as unessential. Instead, the local church also has a duty to carry forth and teach these commands in obedience to Matthew 28:20.

Conclusion: Bach and the Beatitudes

When I was a child, I would have rejected the thought that classical music, much less the works of J. S. Bach, would one day appeal to me. That style of music, that my own children today refer to as the “kind without words,” was not a welcome companion. In fact, if presented with the option at that age, to listen to Bach or nothing at all, I would have elected silence every time. As I aged, however, something changed. Over time, the more I learned and read, the more I was taught how to appreciate the genius of Bach’s work, the more it grew on me and my mind and appreciation for that music shifted to the degree that nearly all my years of advanced academic study requiring work into the later hours of night have found Bach there with me as a helpful companion. In short, what was once mere noise I rejected, now has become my preference.

My aim in this essay was to show how the Anabaptists of history, often rejected and marginalized as they preached against the State, can actually serve as a helpful tool and example for evangelicals as they navigate the contemporary issues of ecclesiological challenge and the present and future troubles of persecution. For, with increasing frequency, Christians today are aware of the words of Christ when he spoke of sending the Apostles out “as sheep in the midst of wolves” in regard to persecution (Matthew 10:16 ESV). May we look then to the persecution of the Anabaptists in the spirit of the Beatitudes, causing us to “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:2-12 ESV). Given that and other realities, I am encouraged by Timothy George’s reminder in his *Theology of the Reformers*, where he concludes and affirms that “Only in recent years have the radical reformers begun to emerge from the shadow of opprobrium cast over them by their sixteenth-

century opponents The Radical Reformation, then, was not merely a 'wing,' a side effect that revealed a more extreme form of the Reformation; instead it was instead a movement that gave birth to a new form of Christian faith and life."⁷³ In short, what many for years have found cacophonous noise, now might just sound symphonious.

⁷³ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 267-269.

John Williams: 1767-1825¹

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It is the contention of this Article, that the name of John Williams should be far more known in both missionary and ministry circles than it is.² This is argued because Williams has rightly been described as, “the man who was largely instrumental in bringing the new missionary movement into prominence in the American churches.”³ This is quite an accolade, and all the more interesting when one remembers Williams was Welsh. This glaring lack of credit for such an achievement, goes hand in hand with the ignorance that it was also Williams who was one of the founders and leaders of the earliest missionary society in America, the New York Baptist Missionary Society, founded in 1806.⁴

¹ This Article is adapted from ‘John Williams: 1767-1825,’ which appears as a chapter in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2015), and is published here with their kind permission.

² The American Baptist Historical Society in Atlanta, GA., has much of the original correspondence received by John Williams which reflects his close ties with English Baptists and his interest in foreign missions. The correspondents include William Carey, William Ward, Andrew Fuller, John Ryland and John Sutcliffe. For further information see http://abhsarchives.org/docs/Colgate_Manuscripts.pdf.

³ L. and M. Williams, *Serampore Letters: being the Unpublished Correspondence of William Carey and others with John Williams, 1800-1816* (New York, NY: F.H. Revell Co., 1892), iv.

⁴ *Ibid.*

A Need for Ongoing research

The few, brief biographical sketches that exist of John Williams often note the difficulty of the task of constructing a detailed account of his life⁵, for such reasons as given in the following example, “Distinguished for his quiet usefulness, he was no less remarkable for his unpretending modesty; and such was the reserve which he always maintained on the subject of his own feelings and history, that with much difficulty were gathered the materials for the scanty notice of his life which follows.”⁶

Family Background and early life

John Williams was born on the family farm, known as Plas Llecheiddior, near the village of Y Garn in Caernarvonshire, North Wales, on March 8, 1767. His father was William Roberts, and according to the practiced custom of the day, John took his surname from his father’s Christian name. John would have naturally entered into the family work of farming, something that previous members of his family had been doing for at least 150 years at Plas Llecheiddior. However, even though John was described as being sturdy, he also suffered from some physical disability that evidently ruled out that future for him. His father’s wish then became clear, that his son would enter the ministry of the Church of England. It was clear fairly quickly however, that that wish was not shared by John Williams, possessing as he did, a number of serious reservations about the established church. He decided instead to move to the city of Caernarvon with the intent of there acquiring a trade. The most reliable information we have suggests he was converted at the age of 19, and that through a mixture of circumstances. He heard a sermon by David Morris, a follower of George Whitefield which clearly played a

⁵ There are some manuscript collections that need further research, including the Archives of the New York Historical Society, which hold ‘Baptist Church Records, 1793-1862.’ The Records state that the manuscripts in this collection relate mostly to the Fayette Street Baptist Church and to its successor institution, the Oliver Street Baptist Church.

⁶ C.G. Sommers, *Memoir of the Rev. John Stanford, D.D. late chaplain to the humane and criminal institutions in the city of New York: together with an appendix, comprising brief memoirs of the late Rev. John Williams, the Rev. Thomas Baldwin, D.D., and the Rev. Richard Furman, D.D.* (New York: Swords, Stanford and Co., 1835), 345.

part, and also at about the same time, he acknowledges the spiritual impact of a Welsh translation of John Bunyan's, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*. Bunyan published this work 7 years before his death, and even in that short intervening period, a number of Welsh translations appeared.⁷

His early Christian development

John Williams joined a local Independent Church, under the ministry of Rev. Dr. Lewis, and very quickly gained a reputation as an avid student of Scripture and theological books. Upon receiving no satisfactory response from Lewis however, on the meaning of the passage, 'Buried with him in baptism' (Colossians 2:12), and in fact, being told by Lewis that, "I really think the Baptists have, in the interpretation of that text, the advantage over us," he felt God leading him elsewhere.⁸ After further prayer and reflection, Williams soon joined by baptism, the Horeb Baptist Church at Garn. He was at that point just twenty one years old, and though young spiritually, his maturity was soon recognized. Friends encouraged him to develop his evident gifts by becoming a student at the well-respected Bristol Baptist College. Williams chose not to pursue this path however, an action he regretted often in later life, believing his time on earth would soon be cut short by Tuberculosis. He had had experiences of physical pain in his chest in his early preaching, and believing he had contracted the then, deadly disease, decided he would dedicate his remaining time to the ministry. He would soon see God working in that direction, for he had not been long in membership in the Horeb Church, when he was asked to become their minister.

Ministry at Horeb Baptist Church

Williams was very active in that calling, for the congregation met in several location and as their minister, he would travel much throughout both North and South Wales, in the process of which he gained great respect among Welsh Christians. It was at that period of his

⁷ The complete title of the volume is, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ: Or A Plain and Profitable Discourse on John 6:37. Showing the cause, truth, and manner of the coming of a sinner to Jesus Christ; with his happy reception and blessed entertainment* (London: 1681).

⁸ Sommers, *Memoir of the Rev. John Stanford, D.D.*, 348.

ministry, that he became a friend and fellow-traveler of the renowned Welsh Baptist preacher, Christmas Evans, a friendship that would not be broken by geographical distance for they became regular correspondents until Williams' death. After a period of about seven years of being at the Horeb Church, Williams felt called to leave his beloved homeland and emigrate to America with one of his younger brothers. This was not received well by Christmas Evans, who opposed such emigration, resulting as it did he believed, in great loss to the church of Wales of some of her most beloved and respected ministers. In fact, Evans would later say that John Williams was "the only Welsh Baptist who had prospered spiritually in America."⁹ In another letter written by Joshua Thomas to Samuel Jones in 1796, he also very much lamented William's going to America, for Williams "was a very worthy man in the principality, I was very sorry that he quitted his station."¹⁰

Emigration to America

The two brothers landed in New York City on 25 July, 1795, but tragedy would soon strike, for within two weeks, John's brother died very suddenly. John was informed of the tragic event that had occurred in Schuyler's Mines, what is now a deserted copper mine near Newark, New Jersey, and he immediately set out to walk from where he was in New York City. His son William later wrote, that it was this sudden loss that resulted in his father beginning to doubt the call to America was of God, and that maybe he had acted rashly in emigrating.¹¹ The situation was not helped by John himself also becoming seriously ill soon after. It appears that the exertion of the journey to New Jersey, coupled with the suddenness of the loss, resulted in Williams contracting a severe fever. But in God's providence, even as violent as it was, it would pass and John did recover.

⁹ Christmas Evans, 'Hanes y Bedyddwyr ym Mon', Seren Homer (1880) as quoted in H.M. Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren: Rev. Samuel Jones (1735-1814) and his friends* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1995), 237.

¹⁰ Joshua Thomas to Samuel Jones, November 4, 1796, McKesson Collection (Jones Section), HSP, as quoted in Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, 237.

¹¹ Sommers, *Memoir of the Rev. John Stanford, D.D.*, 350.

The beginning of his ministry in America

Maybe because of his lack of command of English together with the newness of his arrival in America, Williams' intention had been to settle amongst other Welsh immigrants and to minister to them in their native language. Beulah in Pennsylvania was one such enclave that he considered might be his next step, but with the leading of God, that never materialized. Williams' first sermon in America would indeed be delivered in Welsh, but it would occur in the church pastored by John Stanford in Fair Street, New York City.

The small, pastor-less Baptist Church in Fayette Street, later to become the Baptist Church in Oliver Street, occasionally permitted Williams and other Welsh Baptists to use their sanctuary. Over the course of the next few months, the twenty or so members who worshipped in English, began to see a possible resolution to their pulpit problem. It was recorded that they saw in John Williams, "a deep and fervent piety, and a native vigor of mind, which greatly delighted them."¹² The members had asked Williams to work on acquiring more command of English, with the result that he would begin preaching to both congregations on the same Sunday, one time in English and then later in Welsh. After a trial period of nine months, on 28 August, 1798, Williams received the unanimous call of the Fayette Street Baptist Church to become their Pastor.¹³ This coincided with one of the most virulent outbreaks of Yellow Fever in New York City's history, with Williams himself contracting the fever in its early spread. Several times Williams would suffer from similar contagions, and though the prognosis was not good, he again survived what could easily have been a fatal fever.

The blessing of his ministry

God continued to openly bless John Williams' ministry. In 1800, for example, John Bowen of New York wrote to his former pastor, that Williams' congregation had received "some pleasing additions within the last twelve months."¹⁴ Bowen went on to describe Williams as, "a very zealous, humble man of unimpeachable character."¹⁵ In that same year,

¹² Sommers, *Memoir of the Rev. John Stanford, D.D.*, 351.

¹³ Williams, *Serampore Letters*, 55.

¹⁴ 'John Bowen to John Rippon, February 12, 1800', in Letters to Dr. Rippon from New York, in 'Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society', vol.1, no.2 (April 1909), as quoted in Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, 236.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

with this and additional growth, “the place became too strait, and in 1800, the meeting-house was enlarged to 60 times 43 feet, and galleries were added.”¹⁶ This would itself, later be replaced by a third meeting-house in Williams’ pastorate, when a large stone building was erected measuring 64 times 94 feet. Williams’ ministry was an incredibly busy one, with him generally preaching three times a day. “One Sabbath nearer the end,”¹⁷ was his usual saying before his Sunday evening rest. He personally baptized a minimum of 440 persons, not counting others he baptized on Long Island and elsewhere.¹⁸ Nevertheless, in November 1801, he found time to marry, and the result was a happiness of life he had hitherto not known. His son, William, was born October 14, 1804, and would follow in his father’s footsteps, as he too followed his own call into the ministry. The following very personal testimony was given of John at William’s ordination, by Rev. Dr. Wayland:

“Many years have elapsed since I waited upon the instructions of that venerable man. Since then, I have seen many meek, many holy, many humble, many able, many peace-making ministers of the New Testament; but I have seen yet no one who has reminded me of John Williams.”¹⁹

Williams may have lacked formal theological education, but he devoured books of Christian theology. He studied intently and repeatedly giants in the Faith, such as Jonathan Edwards, John Owen and Andrew Fuller. He also loved the works of the Puritans, “From the more familiar beauties of Henry and Bunyan, up to the sublimity and grandeur of Owen and Charnock, he had attentively perused the most distinguished works produced by that venerable race of confessors.”²⁰ His son, William, was very honest when he wrote that his father, “made no pretensions to learning, but of theological learning he was certainly possessed in a high

¹⁶ Williams, *Serampore Letters*, 55.

¹⁷ Sommers, *Memoir of the Rev. John Stanford, D.D.*, 359.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 358.

¹⁹ H.C. Fish, *Pulpit Eloquence of the Nineteenth Century: Being supplementary to the history and repository of pulpit eloquence, deceased divines; and containing discourses of eminent living ministers in Europe and America, with sketches biographical and descriptive* (New York, NY: M.W. Dodd, 1857), 225.

²⁰ Sommers, *Memoir of the Rev. John Stanford, D.D.*, 361.

degree.”²¹ The size of the library that John Williams was able to gradually acquire was said to be clear testimony of his fondness for books. He was also remembered as one who spent much time and labor in the business of sermon preparation, and after his passing, more than two thousand skeletons of sermons in manuscript were discovered.²²

His influence in the cause of Baptist missions

The early history of the New York Missionary Society is not entirely clear, but it seems to have been formed in 1796. We do know certain specific things, including the existence of letters from Williams to Carey written in 1799, giving him an account of the work of the Society in America, and asking for correspondence in return, detailing the work of Carey in India. Such a reply was written December 9, 1800 in which Carey says,

“We have sent two copies of the gospel by Matthew in Bengallee at the end of which are some other little tracts, hymns, etc., in that language, which we have dispersed, we beg your acceptance of one copy and also that you will present the other in our name to The New York Mission Society as a token of our sincere union with them in the great object of their undertaking.”²³

We also know that in the American Society’s Report for 1801, the name of John Williams appears as one of its Directors. What seems to have transpired, is that as British Baptist Missionaries found it increasingly difficult to gain direct passage to India, courtesy of the intervention by the East India Company, they would be re-routed via America. John Williams soon emerged as an important point of contact between American Baptists, British Baptists on the mission field, and Baptists who remained in Britain.

Many extant letters testify for example, to the indebtedness of English Baptists in the commencement of work in America, as evidenced for example, in the letter William Carey wrote to John Williams in

²¹ Sommers, *Memoir of the Rev. John Stanford, D.D.*, 359.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ For the full text of the letter, see Williams, *Serampore Letters*, 59-64.

October, 1812, announcing the conversion of Adoniram Judson and others to Baptist principles:

“My dear brother.

It is a long time since I wrote to you. My numerous avocations must be my apology, and indeed this apology is the true one, for want of will is not the cause. I shall, however, now write you a short note to make amends for my long silence, and request a continuance of your correspondence. You as well as myself are acquainted with the circumstances of five brethren having been sent from America to begin a mission in the East. They have all safely arrived at this place.”²⁴

He then proceeds to give an account of how the Judsons and Rice became convinced of Baptist principles, and what he believed needed to happen in the light of that development:

“We shall advance them temporary supplies, but we are not able to invite them to become missionaries for the BMS without first writing to England and receiving our brethren’s consent. Our brethren Judson and Rice would also be glad to be American missionaries. Cannot our Baptist brethren in America for a missionary society, either auxiliary to our society in England or distinct from it, as may appear most eligible, and take these brethren as their missionaries? I believe they are men of the right stamp.”²⁵

Soon after this Williams received a letter from Thomas Baldwin, Lucius Bolles and Daniel Sharp, Baptist leaders in Boston, asking for his advice as to the best course of action in the circumstances. As one reads the letter, it is very plain to see therein, the seeds of what would become known as The Triennial Convention:

“We have already two societies formed....but dear brethren, we want your advice and assistance. We would gladly engage all our

²⁴ Williams, *Serampore Letters*, 143.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

churches throughout the United States in this great work of sending the preached gospel among the heathen. The difficulty seems to be, in part at least, to fix upon a proper plan. There must be somewhere a common center, a general treasury into which all the money in whatever way raised may flow. We have no anxiety whether this deposit should be in Salem, Boston, New York or Philadelphia, provided we can only fall upon a plan that will unite all hearts.....We hope your late efforts in raising money for repairing the loss at Serampore by the late fire will not discourage you in the present undertaking, as we will most cheerfully advance the first necessary installment.”²⁶

It should not come as any real surprise then, to learn that because of the growing relationship between Baptists in America and Britain, fruitful in so many ways, that it was said “the interference of the British Government was really a blessing in disguise.”²⁷ As well as letters to John Williams from Carey, letters are extant from Andrew Fuller, John Ryland, Joshua Rowe, John Chamberlain, Richard Marden and several other Baptist ministers and missionaries. The letters repeatedly testify to the mutual interest of Baptists in the progress of the mission work then being undertaken, both in America and in India, particularly at the Serampore Mission. As Carey wrote to Williams in November, 1803:

“Having an opportunity of writing by the return of Mr. Smith and family to New York, I can not let it pass without asking you how you do, and how affairs are going on in America at large, and at New York in particular. Having at this time written to several correspondents at Philadelphia and other places in America all that I can say about ourselves can be only like the dull repetition of a twice told tale. I shall therefore be very short upon that head and enquire about the American Missions. Do the Societies go on with courage?.....Is anything being done towards translating the Bible into the different Indian languages?”²⁸

²⁶ Williams, *Serampore Letters*, 147.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁸ Williams, *Serampore Letters*, 131.

In the midst of such activity, John Williams is also to be found as one of the Founders of the American Bible Society in 1816. Moreover, it should probably not be regarded as any coincidence in the light of all the correspondence previously referred to, that the ABS sent a gift of \$1,000 to William Carey to support his Scripture translation work in India.²⁹

His closing days

From 1823 onwards, Williams was in obvious need of pastoral assistance, and Rev. Spencer Cone was appointed to be his associate. In fact, Oliver Street Baptist Church as it became, would be counted as one of the largest Baptist Churches in New York City. But Williams' labors had begun to take their toll, and "he had about this period, from various causes, begun to decline, and the feebleness of his body seemed to obscure the energies of his mind."³⁰ This was followed by his contracting the flu in the winter of 1824, which only weakened him further. On May 22, 1825, after having had breakfast and spending some time talking with a visiting young Baptist minister from Vermont, Williams then spent a short period reading one of his favorite Jonathan Edwards' volumes, the *Treatise on the Affections*. When his wife entered the room, he said to her that as often as he had read "this work of Edwards," he saw in it new beauties at every reading, "he speaks so sweetly of Jesus."³¹

His son William records that his father then walked into an adjoining bedroom to lay down, soon became uneasy, and expressed his desire to rise instead. His wife helped him to a chair, and a moment later, at about 9.40am, John Williams passed into the presence of Christ. His funeral service was preached by the very same minister, John Stanford, who had allowed Williams to preach in his church, his very first sermon in America. John Williams was temporarily laid to rest in the old-burying ground corner of Amity and Wooster Streets, adjoining the Amity Street Baptist Church, the church at which his son William was the minister. Temporarily, because in 1863, 1200 exhumations were ordered from that burial ground, including those of John Williams, with the remains being reinterred in the Cypress Hills Cemetery. One of the reasons given for the removal of the bodies was so that the land could be sold for

²⁹ <http://Americanbiblehistory.com/history.html>, accessed March 20, 2014.

³⁰ Sommers, *Memoir of the Rev. John Stanford, D.D.*, 358.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 354.

redevelopment, with the realized funds used to release the Baptist Church on Madison Avenue from the then debt it had accrued.³²

Additional works consulted

D.E. Bowen, *Lecture on the Life and Genius of the Rev. John Williams: Senior Pastor of the Oliver Street Baptist Church, New York* (New York, NY: Richards and Jones, 1861).

'History of the First Baptist Church, New York City,' by S.H. Cone, in *Baptist Memorial and Monthly Record*, volume v, number 3, 1846, 43-48, 69-78.

'Sketch of the Life and Character of the Rev. John Williams, in *The American Baptist Magazine*, volume 5, no. 9, 1825, 257-272.

G.H. Hansell, *Reminiscences of Baptist Churches and Baptist Leaders in New York City and Vicinity, from 1835-1898* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication society, 1899).

John Williams, *A Discourse: Delivered April 5, 1803, in the Baptist Church in Gold Street, before the New York Missionary Society, at their Annual Meeting* (New York, NY: Isaac Collins, 1803).

³² 'Our fathers Where Are They? Exhumation of remains in the Amity Street burial ground', in *The New York Times*, February 17, 1863.

***Praying the Bible.* By Donald S. Whitney. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. 112 pp., \$13.99. Printed Caseside. ISBN-13: 978-1-4335-4784-3.**

Perhaps no spiritual discipline is more integral to Christian growth as prayer, yet no spiritual discipline may be as neglected. Prayer is oxygen for the Christian life. It is our spiritual lifeblood wherein we commune with God; but when asked, most Christians—including Christian leaders—acknowledge a shocking dearth of prayer.

In fact, many Christians admit to being adrift in their prayer lives—listing about from one dry, forced prayer time to the next, and living with the sense of guilt such prayerlessness breeds.

Don Whitney argues in *Praying the Bible* that a Christian's main problem with prayer may be more methodological than spiritual. Whitney notes most Christians tend to pray about the same old things (health, ministry, job, future, crises, family, etc.) in the same old way. This is a rote formula, guaranteed to bore even the most fervent Christ follower.

According to Whitney, the answer must be a simple one. Drawing on the practices of Christian luminaries such as the Puritans, Charles Spurgeon, and George Mueller, Whitney gives a simple, yet life-changing antidote to prayerlessness—pray the Bible.

Indeed, fireworks happen when the Word and prayer are joined together. Doing so moves prayer from the static to the dynamic—giving the Christian a vast reservoir from which to pray, and it more assuredly aligns one's prayers with the will of God. Thankfully, *Praying the Bible* not only commends a method, it teaches us how to practice it. Whitney carefully walks the reader through how to pray the Bible, making the practice of praying Scripture understandable and practicable for even the newest of believers.

In the late 1990s, I learned from Don Whitney how to pray the Bible. It changed my prayer life then, and it continues to shape it now. In fact, I can usually see a direct correlation between my consistency in praying the Bible and my relative spiritual vibrancy. That's why I come back, again and again, to the basics of praying Scripture.

Being a pastor or Christian leader does not remedy prayerlessness. In fact, it may exasperate it. Excessive busyness most

always leads to spiritual barrenness. This could be remedied if we learn from Whitney how to pray the Bible, and then resolve to do just that.

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***Augustine's Theology of Preaching.* By Peter Sanlon. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014. 200 pp., \$24.00. Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-1451482782.**

Peter Brown, in the epilogue of his updated definitive biography on Augustine, confesses, “[If] I were to start again to write a biography of Augustine, I would be more aware than I was prepared to be when I began in 1961, of the knowledge of the wider context of his life and thought which recent scholarship has made possible for us.”¹ Though much of Augustine’s writing has been available for centuries, recent discoveries in the last quarter of the twentieth century have brought new material into the Augustinian corpus. Recently discovered sermon material has allowed scholars of more recent generations to further engage Augustine as a premier Christian rhetor and, most importantly, pastor. Even with the flurry of new texts, few have engaged the notion of Augustine as preacher. Peter Sanlon’s entry into this field, *Augustine’s Theology of Preaching*, seeks to fill this void.

Sanlon’s thesis is helpfully simple: “interiority” and “temporality” provide the “undergirding theological convictions” and serve as “hermeneutical keys to Augustine’s preaching” (xvii). Sanlon highlights the need for his study by demonstrating that the majority of recent work regarding Augustine’s *Sermones* focuses on “textual and reception matters” (xxi). Sanlon highlights the primary place of Scripture in the preaching of Augustine. This is no mere observation—rather—Sanlon consistently demonstrates the prime place of Scripture in Augustine’s preaching and the desire to connect his hearers to the words

¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. Forty-fifth Anniversary Edition (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 488.

of Scripture. Sanlon provides a wonderfully personal reflection on this point: “My own experience has been that engagement with the preaching of Augustine over a number of years has deepened my core convictions about God speaking to his people through Scripture being preached” (xxxii).

From here, Sanlon walks readers through the historical context necessary for understanding Augustine’s preaching. In chapter one, Sanlon provides a brief summary of North African Christianity as well as significant preachers who preceded Augustine. This chapter helps readers understand “the commonalities and distinctives of Augustine’s preaching compared to other relevant preachers” (21). In chapter two, Sanlon provides a summary of pagan oratory’s influence upon Augustine as a preacher. While Cicero is a primary and explicit influence upon Augustine’s life, there were numerous “earlier orators whom he engaged with [that] contributed to Augustine’s view of rhetoric” (24). Pagan oratory provided a significant influence upon Augustine as one styled in the “ideal product” of an orator.² It is here that Sanlon introduces the concept of the *cor* (Latin: *heart*) in the preaching of Augustine. The goal of preaching, with this understanding of the “desirous centre of human identity,” would serve as an essential facet of Augustine’s preaching (43). Such a notion took man’s disordered nature into account and thus viewed the preaching act as the process of creating in listeners Christ-like virtue. This concept serves Augustine’s notion of interiority and temporality. Sanlon notes, “The temporal narrative of Scripture had to be preached in such a way that listeners felt themselves drawn into the narrative” (47).

Having established this foundation, Sanlon turns his attention to Augustine’s hermeneutics as discerned through his *De Doctrina Christiana*. Understanding Scripture, for Augustine, comes primarily through Christ as the Inner Teacher. Only those who have the transformed eyes of Wisdom, that is Christ, may rightly understand and teach Scripture. For the one who wishes to understand the true nature of Scripture, he or she is to reflect on Scripture until “led through to the kingdom of love” (63). Sanlon does well to draw together Augustine’s

² Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 24. Brown provides a helpful summary on the nature of Augustine’s training as it led to the art and practice of rhetoric. For more see Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 23–8

concern for interiority, Christianized rhetoric, and the primary place of Scripture as discerned through *De Doctrina Christiana*. This text contains the key to a proper understanding of hermeneutics and art of preaching from the pen of this North African bishop. From here, Sanlon further expands on the notion of interiority, temporality, and Scripture as he continues to build his proposed theology of Augustine's preaching. Chapter four serves as the fully orbed explanation of his thesis. Further elaborating on the already proposed concepts of Augustine's preaching, Sanlon interacts with alternate modern interpretations of Augustine's hermeneutic. Namely, Sanlon interacts with the likes of Coleen Hoffman Gowans, Paul Ricoeur, and Charles Taylor. In conversation with these modern thinkers, Sanlon further demonstrates how his thesis on the interplay between temporality and interiority best fits the evidence found in Augustine.

Upon building the house, Sanlon invites readers to explore the rooms within by means of three case studies. First, Sanlon analyzes various sermons on riches and money, demonstrating how the concepts of interiority and temporality guided Augustine's exhortations. When it comes to riches, for Augustine, "[interior] desires lead to exterior actions in the temporal plane while the shape of temporality shapes interiority" (119). Next, Sanlon examines Augustine's sermons on death and resurrection. Augustine maintains that the effects of Jesus's resurrection in time (temporality) have an effect now on our lives as Christians (interiority). Finally, Sanlon evaluates Augustine's sermons on relationships. In this chapter, Sanlon consistently demonstrates how the concepts of interiority and temporality guide Augustine's view of relationships in the body of Christ, whether parents with children, between spouses, master and slave relationships, or relations between friends. Sanlon is consistent in weaving the thread of his thesis throughout the entirety of these case studies.

This text accomplishes the enterprising task of providing an approachable theology of Augustine's preaching. With this said, I propose two minor observations that could have enhanced this text. While Sanlon introduces his thesis at the beginning, his full explanation of temporality and interiority does not appear until chapter four. Additionally, Sanlon introduces his text by illuminating the practical benefits of understanding Augustine as preacher. While this exhortation is helpful, Sanlon does little throughout the text to connect his work back to this

practical appeal. Certainly readers are competent to draw the practical conclusions, but the book would have been strengthened had Sanlon made consistent and intentional moves to connect the dots in this area.

Peter Sanlon's *Augustine's Theology of Preaching* serves as a fine example of Augustinian scholarship. It fills a noticeable void in assessing Augustine's life as a preacher. It is a book for preachers. It is also a text for those exploring early Christian pastoral ministry. Particularly, it is a must-read for those seeking to understand Augustine's use of Scripture in his preaching act. Others have and certainly will continue to propose additional perspectives, yet Sanlon's work has rightly earned a prime seat at the conversation table.

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***Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary.* By Craig R. Koester. The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 38A. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014, xlii + 881 pp., \$125.00 cloth, ISBN 9780300144888. \$65.00 paperback, ISBN 9780300216912.**

Just a few decades ago, those interested in a reliable commentary on the book of Revelation had few options available. Among them C. Charles' 1912 entry in the ICC series was seriously dated, G. B. Caird's volume in the BNTC series was distinctly more theological than exegetical, and J. M. Ford's contribution to the Anchor Bible suffered from eccentricity. R. Mounce's volume in the NICNT series was, for most, the only reliable exegetical guide. This seemingly deserted land, however, was soon to spring to life with an unprecedented production of top-level commentaries: D. Aune (1997-1998), G. K. Beale (1999), G. Osborne (2002), B. Witherington (2003), S. Smalley (2005), I. Boxhall (2006), D. deSilva (2009, somehow not included in Koester's bibliography) and P. Patterson (2012). These, alongside several notable translations into English, such as E. Lupieri (1999) and P. Prigent (2001), as well as a

steady stream of doctoral dissertations, have given Revelation a fair hearing after decades of either neglect or abuse.

In such a crowded field, and especially in the wake of the exhaustive triad of Aune, Beale, and Osborne, was there room, let alone justification, for yet another commentary on Revelation? After reading Koester's commentary this reviewer gives an unreserved and resounding affirmative answer. Koester has produced a robust piece of scholarship, a commentary that is both highly informed and informative, challenging yet enjoyable, rigorously exegetical yet not devoid of deep spiritual insights. The commentary not only replaces the infelicitous previous entry in the Anchor Bible series (J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Doubleday, 1975); it also positions itself as a reference work for *Apocalypsis* research for decades to come.

The commentary keeps to the established format of the Anchor Yale Bible commentary series, commencing with a new translation of the Greek text and a substantial introduction. The massive bibliography that follows is usefully arranged in chronological order. The body of the volume consists of the commentary proper, with notes and comments for each section of the book.

The translation is fresh and exquisite. It is carefully tuned to the Greek text, as in 13:8, "all those whose names have not been written – from the time the earth was made – in the scroll of life of the Lamb who was slain" (p.15), where eternity past is a temporal clue to the writing of the names in the scroll and not with the slaying of the Lamb. It also reflects faithfully the exegetical decisions and theological stand taken in the commentary, such as the rendering of 1:19, "[s]o write what you have seen, which included things as they are now as well as things to come" (p. 4), construed as a reference to a two-stage vision about the present and the future, not a three-stage one concerning the past, the present, and the future, an alternative for which commentators opt frequently. As with all translations, the roughness and grammatical syllogisms that permeate the book, while acknowledged *in extenso* in the comments, are smoothed out in the translation. One can only hope that a "warts and all" translation of the Greek text will soon be attempted, which would give the English reader the same unusual textual encounter as the original readers and hearers of the Greek text would have had.

The introduction is divided into five major sections. The first offers a conspectus of the history of Revelation interpretation and

influence, diachronically divided into four segments: 100–500 CE, 500–1500 CE, 1500–1750 CE, and from 1750 to the present. Each segment is further divided into various schools of thought, such as the East and the West, for the first segment, or the Reformed, the Anabaptist, and the Catholic traditions, for the 1500–1750 period. It must be emphasized that, while most commentators include brief reviews of previous commentaries, Koester's presentation of his predecessors is significantly more substantial. This rich diachronic analysis is very beneficial for modern exegetes, who are prone to disregard the twists and turns in the history of Revelation studies, a book that shows just how limited, myopic, ideologically-bound, and epoch-determined many of its interpretations proved to be. The history of interpretation is further developed in each section of the commentary proper. While there is inevitably a measure of overlap, no historical exemplification supplied is superfluous.

The second section treats the historical-critical issues, devoting attention to the typical matters: authorship, unity of the text, date, and early Christian traditions. This is followed by a third section devoted to an apt reconstructed social setting of Revelation. Literary aspects, comprising genre analysis, structure, narrative aspects, and intertextuality, coupled with rhetorical aspects, focusing on literary strategy, language and style, receive extensive treatment. Considerations about the text of Revelation completes the introduction. While Koester's stand on these matters could be summarized here, it would not do justice to his rigorous sifting through the evidence, textual, historical, rhetorical, etc., that led him to adopt a particular stance. Leaving out nugget-size summaries will limit the risk of having readers, disagreeing with Koester's position, unwilling to follow the rigorous analysis, evenness in data presentation, fairness both in self and alternatives' assessment, robust logic, and nuanced conclusions that characterizes his research.

Moving onto the commentary proper, Koester divides the book into six sections, construed as a virtual six-cycle drama: Christ and the seven assemblies (1:9-3:22), the seven seals (4:1-8:5), the seven trumpets (8:6-11:18), the Dragon, the Beasts, and the Faithful (11:19-15:4), the Seven Bowls and the Fall of Babylon (15:5-19:10), and from the Beast's Demise to New Jerusalem (19:11-22:5). While this proposed structure is not novel, it is salutary to see a commentary that avoids finding perfect parallelism between the cycles. While some cycles (the first, second, third

and the fifth) develop around a particular septuplet, others do not do so. In the sections in which the septuplets are missing, instead of finding a series of un-numbered septuplets, Koester focuses on the pattern that is manifest in the cycle: a triplet schema for the fourth (the Dragon the Beast and the Faithful), and a linearly developed doublet, from the beast's demise to the new Jerusalem. The title and the introduction to the book (1:1-8) as well as the conclusion to the book (22:6-21) are treated on their own respectively. The analysis of each cycle follows an established pattern comprising of general comments on the cycle, history of interpretation of the main *crucis interpretum*, and the most notable literary features.

Three further accolades of this commentary are justified. First, one must welcome the choice of Koester of not aligning his interpretation with any of the classical four schools of interpretation or even with the recently much-favored eclecticism. While there are other commentaries that attempt independence from the straight jacket imposed by a particular school of interpretation, Koester succeeded in being consistent with his position throughout the commentary. His foremost concern is reading this literary masterpiece in light of its original setting, readers, author, and historical context. Second, it is refreshing to see a commentary that not only refrains from decoding Revelation or making it simple, but maintains the book's multilevel paradoxes of whatever nature, be they theological, literary, or experiential. He surmises that "this paradoxical vision takes readers into a world where a specific number refers to a crowd that is numberless, where blood makes clothing white, and where a Lamb acts as a shepherd" (p. 424). Last, but certainly not least, it should be emphasized that the work is extensive but not overwhelming: from the cultural background information, to the self-imposed limitation of interpretive options worthy of attention, the commentary strikes a very balanced note, with an adequate volume of attention that leaves no stone unturned, yet does not attempt to write the last word on the matter.

Koester's labor will rightfully be ranked among the most important commentaries on the book of Revelation for generations to come, and any further work on this ancient document will have to engage with its distinct approach and conclusions. If there is a downside to Koester's masterful addition to the plethora of commentaries on Revelation, this must be that it has made the task of choosing that one

commentary-to-have even more difficult. Given the quality of Koester's work, at least for this reviewer, the choice has actually been made easier.

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***The New Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume 1: From the Beginnings to 600.* James C. Paget and Joachim Schaper, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, xxviii + 979 pp., £129.99; \$191.09 hardback, ISBN 9780521859387.**

Almost five decades after the publication of the renowned *Cambridge History of the Bible* (3 vols., 1963-1970), the time has come for a completely new edition of this reference work that incorporates and does justice to the enormous advances in the area of biblical studies. *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, in four volumes (2012-2016), was launched to accomplish this much needed and long awaited task. The title under review is the first volume in the series, which covers developments up to AD 600. The justification for the new series is most evident when the two editions are compared side by side. Not only is the volume of information at least double, but so are the number and diversity of topics covered. It is not unusual to see topics which in the old series were mere paragraphs become chapters in their own right. Case in point, the two chapters allocated to the Septuagint is an appreciated development, given the momentum in Septuagint studies during the last decades.

The first volume in the new series is divided into five parts. Part One is dedicated to the biblical languages, the writing systems and the book production. The original languages of the Scriptures receive attention in the first two chapters. In "The Languages of the Old Testament," G. Khan surveys various aspects related to the Hebrew and the Aramaic languages of the OT, including the earliest surviving records, the composition of the texts, the textual witnesses in the Tiberian Masoretic manuscripts, as well as the biblical scrolls from Qumran. Particular attention is devoted to issues of orthography and phonology behind the text, both in its consonantal form and in various systems of

vocalization. J. Joosten undertakes a similar analysis in “The Greek language of the Septuagint and the New Testament,” and revisits the ongoing question about the nature of the biblical Greek. By looking at the varieties of Greek evidenced in various corpora of the LXX and the NT (book by book), he reaffirms the current scholarly consensus that the biblical Greek has never been a distinct language or dialect. W. Schniedewind and L. Hurtado (in collaboration with C. Keith), survey the culture of writing and book production. The former investigates the ancient Near East (ANE) perimeter, specifically, the way in which the two writing cultures, cuneiform in Mesopotamia and hieroglyphic in Egypt, shaped the writing and book production in ancient Israel. The latter, focuses the attention on the Hellenistic and Roman periods, stressing the importance not only of the classical texts, but also of the phenomena of copying, distribution and reading in this period.

Parts Two and Three are devoted to the core subjects of the volume, the Hebrew Bible (HB)/Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT) respectively. Given the complexity of the subject matter, the space allotted to the OT is the longest section of the volume. In “The Old Testament text and its transmission,” E. Ulrich examines the evidence behind the transmission of the text from its earliest stages to the forms available today. J. Schaper traces the literary history of the HB, first by genre: from prophetic oracles to scrolls, from social regulations to legal texts, from stories to historical books, from proverbs to wisdom books, and from psalms to hymn-books; then by the formation of the HB’s major literary clusters. In “The Old Testament canons,” J. Barton alerts the reader to the complexities of the canonization of the Scriptures, and traces the formation and inter-relationship of various OT canons, including the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and the Ethiopic. Correspondingly, J. J. Collins looks at the non-canonical literary vestiges, in “The ‘apocryphal’ Old Testament.”

The next group of chapters is devoted to the interpretation of the HB. G. Stemmerger’s “From inner-biblical interpretation to rabbinic exegesis” surveys the significant moments in the inner interpretation of Scriptures, an activity older than the final redaction of many of the books, all the way to the various stages of rabbinic exegesis and hermeneutics, including the halakhic and haggadic midrashim, with consideration given to the Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmudim, and Targumim. R. Hayward undertakes a similar investigation with regard to the

Aramaic Targumim, their exegesis, genre, social setting, and dates of composition, while J. Campbell surveys “The Scriptural interpretation at Qumran,” pointing to the role played by the Scriptures in the community, the specific qumranic exegesis and the *peshet* style commentary. K. De Troyer covers the Septuagint, its history and its revisions, in one of the most robust reconstructions of the textual witnesses to the Septuagint in print. W. Horbury deals expertly with the Hellenistic Jewish exegesis evidenced in the Greek compositions of the Greek-speaking Jews. The last three chapters of Part Three deal with the function of the Scripture in several historical settings. R. Hayward looks at its role in the Jewish Temple, in both periods of the first and the second temple as well as in the Babylonian exile. J. Watts addresses the social function of the Scripture, which includes the political interests behind its publication and use. The final chapter is E. Tov’s survey of the modern editions of the Hebrew Bible, including the HUB, BHS, BHQ, Biblia Qumranica and Oxford Hebrew Bible, and ends with an enticing proposal for a multi-column edition.

The New Testament is analyzed through a smaller number of topics. In “The New Testament canon,” J. Verheyden surveys the history of the canon as a project that has aimed at uniformity and consensus, but ended in convenience and compromise. “The New Testament text and versions” allows D. Parker to probe the highly dynamic field of NT textual criticism, as older debates are revisited with sharper and more robust definitions, terminology, and goals. The important field of the NT use of the OT is handled with characteristic astuteness by D. C. Allison. He revisits not only the standard headings (quotations, allusions, larger patterns) but also aspects such as the original readers, context, and Scriptural authority; all pertinent issues seldom included under such a rubric.

In a series of studies unprecedented in the older edition, Part Four surveys “Biblical Versions other than the Hebrew and the Greek.” P.-M. Bogaert examines the Latin Bible, P. J. Williams, the Syriac versions, and W.-P. Funk, the translation of the Bible into Coptic, each contributor offering the perspective of a well-known specialist in his respective field, skillfully synthesizing the major developments in each of these fields over the past several decades.

Part Five also offers a vast expansion of topics compared to the 1970 edition. Its title, “The Reception of the Bible in the Post-New

Testament Period,” confirms the emergence of reception criticism as one of the fastest growing areas in biblical scholarship. In a lengthy tour de force, J. C. Paget surveys the interpretation of the Bible in the second century, dealing with subtopics such as the evolving Christian Bible, institutional settings of interpretation, and modes and goals of interpretation. Similarly, W. Löhr looks at the Gnostic and Manichaean interpretation, bringing more clarity not only in mapping various Gnostic movements, but also tracing the influence they exerted over the emerging Christian exegesis. Several towering representatives of the Church Fathers are singled out for their remarkable contribution to the study of the Bible: Origen (G. Dorival), Eusebius (M. Hollerich), Jerome (A. Kamesar), and Augustine (C. Harrison). Four chapters devote further attention to various important schools of biblical exegesis and interpretation: “Syriac exegesis” (J. Coakley), “Figurative readings: their scope and justification” (M. Edwards), “Traditions of exegesis,” (F. Young), “Pagans and the Bible,” (W. Kinzig), and “Exegetical genres in the patristic era” (M. Elliott). Three chapters devoted to the role of the Scriptures in various venues, “The Bible in doctrinal development and Christian councils,” (T. Graumann), “The Bible in liturgy,” (G. Rouwhorst), and “The Bible in popular and non-literary culture,” (L. Grig), bring this massive tome to a close.

No conventional review could do justice to a volume of such breadth and magnitude. Space is insufficient to present even the main ideas of its 37 chapters, let alone to interact with or critique them. Yet, several overall comments are in order. *TNCHB* is similar in genre and approach to several compendia devoted to the same subject matter. The first volumes in either the *CRINT* series (Fortress Press) or the *HB/OT* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht), the *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, and the twin *The Biblical World* and *The Early Christian World* (Routledge) come to mind. *TNCHB* carves its own niche by limiting itself to the essentials and, just as its title suggests, letting the historical dimension, not the theological or the literary, take first place among equals. Furthermore, it is a paramount expression of the *status quaestionis* in fields related to the Bible, which avoids, on the one hand, providing overwhelming amounts of information, and, on the other hand, migrating into secondary or superfluous topics. More importantly, however, stands its eminence as a true and reliable guide in such matters. In an age of an unprecedented increase of information and its

accessibility, one might question the need for an expensive volume such as this one. When *Google* and *Wikipedia* are one mouse click away, how could one justify the almost prohibitive price of the *TNCHB* volume, if not for libraries, most certainly for seminary students? The potential readers will have to answer this question for themselves. *TNCHB* offers a compendium of essays written by renowned scholars, senior researchers in their respective fields and masters of primary resources, who deliver trail-blazing and authoritative research. While the democratization of information makes the availability of data more convenient, it would never replace the unassailable need for, and value of, true scholarship. The editorial team offers in the first volume of *NCHB* one such work that will set the standard for decades to come.

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***Loving Jesus More* by Philip G. Ryken. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014. 176 pp. \$14.99. Paperback. ISBN 13-978-1433534089.**

In this book, Philip Ryken notes that, “[T]here is hardly anything we need more in the Christian life than more love for Jesus” (14). If indeed, we truly love Jesus, how are we to deal with doubts and prejudices, with those in our church who are hard to love, and with the knowledge that we are incapable of loving as Jesus did on our own? This book was written to help us better understand the love of God, and therefore, to better live and love in the power of the Spirit. Ryken calls us to question our doubts and addresses our lack of love for Jesus with the gracious words of a compassionate friend.

Each chapter of this book is adapted from a chapel sermon preached by Ryken at Wheaton College, where he is currently president. As such, the book maintains a conversational and pastoral tone. Ryken conveys foundational Biblical truths in common terms so that both the new convert and the more experienced believer can be encouraged. The book primarily deals with the motives of our hearts; thus, there is no point where we are given “seven simple ways to love Jesus more.”

Instead, we are offered Scriptural insights and numerous examples of how Christian love has been displayed in other's lives.

From the first chapter, the love God has shown us in salvation is connected with the natural effects it should have on every facet of our lives. The love God has shown us, and now empowers us to show, affects everything from our faith to our pursuit of knowledge to our ability to show forgiveness, as Ryken explains in the next three chapters. Throughout the book, he points us again and again to our constant dependence on God if we are to love like he does. The beautiful truth that is revealed is that the more we understand Jesus' love, the more we will love him. The more we love Jesus the more we will learn to love others like He does. The more we love others, the more we are pushed back to the one who showed us what love is in the first place.

Ryken's writing is rich in theology and practicality. He places quotes from Puritan Thomas Vincent alongside stories of his own children's expressions of love to both clarify and display what Christ's love looks like in the Christian's life. Far too often when we discuss or write about love, especially the love of God, we tend to either be fully wrapped up in our emotions or completely ostracized from them. Ryken, however, makes it clear that love is both affective and practical. He also does well to explain that each of us will experience and exhibit the love of God in a variety of ways.

We live in an age where love is equated with permissive laxity when it comes to morality and behavior. Ryken is intentional in clarifying that, although the love of God is personal, "True love always stands in conformity to the commands of Christ" (79). In stating this truth, the counter-cultural reality of God's love is highlighted. Ryken never points to culture, he doesn't address any hot topics or moral debates. His intent throughout the book is clearly to address our hearts and help us do exactly what the title suggests, to love Jesus more, which means following His commands.

The study guide in the back of the book provides a quick overview of each chapter and a few discussion questions, which seem to be ideal for small group discussion and personal reflection. These are written to probe at the heart of the reader, making the scriptural truths discussed both personal and practical. I have already suggested this book to one friend who has found the book and accompanying study guide useful in their ministry. It seems to me that any time spent pondering the

question of how to love Jesus more, especially with a friend such as Ryken, is time well spent.

Abigail Odin

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***Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews: A Study in Narrative Re-presentation.* By David M. Allen. Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008. 277 pp., \$90.00. Sewn Paper. ISBN – 13: 978-3161495663.**

The first time I taught a class on the book of Hebrews, I was not thoroughly acquainted with the secondary literature on the book. I was only a few feet deep in the swift stream of scholarly discussions.

That semester, I was also teaching a course on the Pentateuch. This experience left a deep impression on my understanding of the writer's argument in the letter. As we worked through the textual strategies of the Pentateuch as a book in the morning, we often came across those same texts, themes, and theological conclusions in the afternoon Hebrews course. There were a few students in both courses, and we agreed that it was sometimes difficult to remember which class we were supposed to be in. In short, the intensive reading and discussion of the Pentateuch and the letter to the Hebrews created an intertextual force field that gave me a line of sight across the terrain of the biblical canon.

In the Hebrews course, we kept returning again and again to the final chapters of Deuteronomy. In particular, we kept hearing hints of the melody line from the so-called song of Moses (Deut 32) as we worked through Hebrews. Several times throughout the semester, I thought, someone needs to write a high-level monograph on the relationship between Hebrews and Deuteronomy, with at least an initial focus on the song of Moses.

Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews

Thus and so, I was pleased to come across David M. Allen's book, *Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews: A Study in Narrative Representation*. In this reworking of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Edinburgh, Allen examines the relationship between the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy and the New Testament letter to the Hebrews.

Recognizing the avalanche of secondary literature on the New Testament's use of the Old Testament, Allen pursues a specific avenue of inquiry: "the way in which an individual OT book functions corporately within the letter" (4). So, Allen examines the use of Deuteronomy in the letter, "attempting to discern how the latter's various OT motifs might contribute to a 'Deuteronomic' reading of the letter" (4). Allen's approach is "intertextual in a broad, though not unlimited sense" (15). He limits his scope to "that exchange between the textual worlds created by Deuteronomy and Hebrews" (15). In particular, Allen argues that it is "perfectly possible that the author's choice of OT materials (quotations, allusions, echoes, characters, themes, et al.) are not merely an apologetic or coincidental proof texts, but rather corporately reconstruct a familiar OT narrative that serves the author's hortatory purpose" (4).

This statement indicates two areas that make Allen's study a unique contribution. First, Allen examines the use of individual citations of Deuteronomy but also couples that with an analysis of the impact of the book as a whole on the writer's argument. Second, Allen seeks to uncover the effect and impact of Deuteronomy on the exhortation sections of the letter. Following broadly George Guthrie's insight that there are discernible strands of both exposition and exhortation in the letter, Allen assesses the use of the Old Testament in these particular sections (12-15). These exhortation sections sometimes do not receive as much intertextual analysis as the exposition sections (e.g., the Christological development of Heb 1:1-14).

In his study of Deuteronomy, as well, Allen focuses on the "Deuteronomic paraenetic material" that has a "life of its own distinct from the legal corpus" (13). Allen argues in this regard that "the vast majority of connections between the two texts are found within their respective hortatory material" (13).

Accordingly, one of Allen's central contributions is to bring together a close study of the use of the Old Testament in the letter (with an emphasis on the book of Deuteronomy) with an extended analysis of the exhortation sections of both writings.

Relating the Letter to the Hebrews and the Book of Deuteronomy

As Allen notes early on, Hebrews and Deuteronomy share some striking parallels (5):

- Both texts appeal to past events/history as grounds for action in the present.
- Both invest the land motif with a soteriological character, and define apostasy in terms of the failure to enter that land.
- Both are sermonic or homiletic in character and appeal for attention to the spoken word.
- Both climax in discourse focused around two mountains, with cursing and blessing motifs prominent in each montage.
- Likewise, each one explicates a covenant that marks the end of the Mosaic era and a consequent change in leadership to a figure named Ἰησοῦς.

"Such surface similarities," Allen insists, "are actually symptoms of, or signposts to, a Deuteronomistic reading of Hebrews" (5). Allen treats Deuteronomy as a compositional whole that includes Deut 1-34, recognizing that "this was the textual form likely available to the NT writers" (9). Further, the "Deuteronomistic posture" is one that accounts for "the narrative's dominant pre-entry perspective" (10, Allen adds, "however 'fictitious' this might be"). The book's final form perspective is "the Moab, pre-entry handover moment of the discourse" (10). The implied audience of Deuteronomy, then, "stand at the threshold of entry into the land and await the prophesied blessing or curse which would subsequently accompany life within it" (10).

For Allen, this whole-book perspective of Deuteronomy is what should impact a reading of Hebrews. To demonstrate the reality of this inner-biblical connection, Allen examines the various ties that bind these books together. In chapter two, Allen provides a study of the text and function of the Song of Moses in Deut 32. This is a strategic text within

the scope of Deuteronomy, and it also has an “independent existence” as a well-cited and often “sung” text in the history of Israel/Judaism.

In chapter three, Allen examines the Deuteronomic quotations, strong allusions, echoes, and narrative allusions in Hebrews. He identifies 6 quotations, 6 strong allusions, 5-6 echoes, and 3 narrative allusions to the text of Deuteronomy. The song of Moses in Deut 32 is referred to at least 8 times. Moses’ song, though, also provides a particularly prominent theological and conceptual backdrop to the exhortation sections of the letter. As Allen writes, “this impressive and consistent textual use of Deuteronomy suggests that Hebrews has reflected upon its source text’s narrative situation in order both to shape its hortatory purpose and to articulate evocatively the consequences of apostasy” (109).

Alongside these strong textual links, there are also a number of other features that coordinate Deuteronomy and Hebrews. In chapter four, Allen highlights three major themes that are prominent in both texts: the centrality of “covenant,” the blessing/cursing imagery, and the focus and appeal to the “land.” In chapter five, Allen uncovers the “homiletical affinities” between Hebrews and Deuteronomy (156ff). The homiletic shaping of Hebrews indicates that “its argument mirrors that of its Deuteronomic source” (198). The story of Deuteronomy, then, is “replayed within the [New Covenant] context of Hebrews” (198).

In chapter six, Allen brings his argument to a climax by examining “re-presentation” in both Deuteronomy and Hebrews. After laying the exegetical (Ch. 3), thematic (Ch. 4), and rhetorical (Ch. 5) groundwork, Allen here constructs his climactic intertextual insight.

The book of Deuteronomy, and in particular Deut 28-34, is designed to interpret and “re-present” Israel’s history. This re-presentation is for the purpose of persuading contemporary readers that the Mosaic covenant is obsolete and a new covenant is needed. The audience, then, is poised on the threshold of an entirely new way of relating to God as his covenant people. The “situational relationship” between the respective audiences is “the common Deuteronomy-Hebrews thread, with both audiences positioned at the critical moment of decision at the threshold of their inheritance” (203).

Accordingly, Hebrews not only cites and draws themes from Deuteronomy. Rather, Hebrews appropriates an entire complex of features (audience, purpose, literary type, and method) from

Deuteronomy. The frequent engagement with the final chapters of Deuteronomy is not an accident; rather, “it happens consistently through the letter’s hortatory material, gives collective explanatory power to the epistle’s admonitions, and in toto composes a perspective of new covenant handover at the threshold of the land” (225).

In other words, these two books share a wide interpretive horizon, and they invite their readers to join them there.

The “Deuteronomic Posture” of Hebrews

After demonstrating the large volume of intertextual exchange between Hebrew and Deuteronomy, Allen is able to argue that the “Deuteronomic posture” is the “unifying narrative for the letter’s exhortations” (225). Allen summarizes the import of this connection:

The frequent textual citation of Deuteronomy, the replication of key themes such as covenant and land, the adoption of the Song and its association with the end of the Mosaic era all point to an overarching representation of the Deuteronomic choice between life and death, apostasy and faithfulness, blessing and curse. Deuteronomy’s paraenesis becomes Hebrews’ paraenesis.

Hebrews, therefore, does not just use Deuteronomy; it becomes a new Deuteronomy and challenges its predecessor’s contemporary hegemony. By undertaking this intertextual engagement with Deuteronomy, the epistle’s writer transfers his audience away from their allegiance to an outdated, redundant Sinai existence, dons Mosaic garments and addresses them afresh on the plains of Moab. Within Hebrews’ new covenant situation, the exhortation to “Choose Life” remains as pressing as ever.

For good reason, Allen’s volume has impacted the discussion of Hebrews’ use of the Old Testament. As noted above, Allen’s work provides a fresh impetus for interpreters to consider the role of the Pentateuch’s narratives in the coherence and artistry of the exhortation sections of the letter.

Further, in addition to the helpful exegesis of intertextual links, the most important contribution of this work is the way it is able to account for the non-citational uses of Deuteronomy within the letter.

Allen’s overarching thesis and many of his textual connections still need to be examined, re-evaluated, and further developed; however,

he has skillfully set these two biblical books in relation to one another and has compellingly demonstrated that this particular construal is not arbitrary but rather a profoundly text-immanent feature.

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***The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement.* By Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, Michael A. G. Haykin. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015. ix + 352 pp. \$49.99. Hardcover. ISBN-13: 978-1433673757.¹**

If I could, I would love to find and sit with the 21st century Baptist equivalent of the Inklings. Regularly meeting with gifted colleagues at a local coffee shop (this is the Baptist version of course) sharing recent thoughts and research, all for mutual instruction and edification. Reading *The Baptist Story* by Drs. Chute, Finn, and Haykin in many ways accomplished this dream for me. In this volume these brothers have presented readers with a timeless textbook that I hope will be read widely and by many.

The Baptist Story is a much needed textbook as due to many of the reasons the authors provide in their introduction, as most other attempts at a Baptist history text are virtually unusable in a classroom setting. Some texts are dated, some are marred by ideological or political agendas and blind spots, and some are simply deficient — either too broad or too narrow. *The Baptist Story* is a conscious attempt to provide an accessible and helpful text for introducing students and readers to the story of the Baptists in history — and I cannot commend it highly enough.

¹ This review first appeared at Books at a Glance on August 17, 2015: <http://booksataglance.com/book-reviews/the-baptist-story-from-english-sect-to-global-movement-by-anthony-l-chute-nathan-a-finn-and-michael-a-g-haykin>

The authors take time in their introduction to state clearly the parameters they have established for themselves. The eschewing of footnotes and the inclusion of recommended readings that will actually benefit the student are just two of the ways the authors have endeavored to make this volume user-friendly for students, not historians. In addition, they have an accurate appreciation of what they can do and have done stating that this volume is “a collation and updating of many stories, one that itself will need to be updated in the future” (3). The authors write with refreshing conviction and humility and yet attempt not to use “history to pressure others into confirming to a particular position” but rather, “provide a history that informs the reader of how Baptists have reached their conclusions” (6).

Were I to have the honor of sitting down with these Baptist Inkings and given the invitation to share my thoughts on their work, I would have much to say, and I can only imagine how enjoyable the time and conversation would be for all. However, for the purposes of this space and the recognition that the reader just might not be as much of a Baptist history enthusiast as the few of us that exist, I will limit my thoughts to five commendations, one critique, and one request.

First, in addition to the above strengths, *The Baptist Story* is truly a work that will help students. The authors state, “We have structured several sections of this book based on questions that students commonly ask and we have included areas of personal interest that we have not found in other textbooks” (4). From beginning to end, the authors deliver on this student-friendly approach. It is a book that is as enjoyable to read as it is informative.

Second, by design the authors are able to provide more detail, interesting and curious anecdotes, and biographical information in the early chapters, but as the book and Baptists expand, the opportunity to continue to include such helpful devices is lost due to the need to attempt to give an adequate portrait of Baptists in their various forms and locations. While, I think the volume would be stronger if such devices were included throughout, this approach does make for a strong foundational first section.

Third, the authors also have made a conscious and fair attempt to explain and explore the role Africans and African Americans have played in Baptist history. Their exposition of events and doctrinal ramifications from the slave trade through the Civil Rights era is

exceptional and heretofore unmatched in a comprehensive history of the Baptist tradition.

Fourth, when reviewing the Southern Baptist Convention's first adoption of the Baptist Faith and Message in 1925, the authors note that "Southern Baptists ironically were far more confessional at their founding [in 1845] than they were in 1925" (249). They rightly have in mind that early Southern Baptists saw no need for a national confession, not because they were anti-confessional as some 20th century Baptists would assert, but rather because all of the churches in that era had adopted and used confessions at the local level.

Fifth, the authors deftly treat the contemporary era with great care — a challenging task for any historian writing about his own context. This is one of the first Baptist histories that has the opportunity to treat W.A. Criswell, Adrian Rogers, Carl F. H. Henry, and Chuck Colson since their passing and *The Baptist Story* is all the better for it. Their contemporary era section is forthright but not polemical or agenda driven. In short, these are chapters I will gladly ask my students to read when looking for answers or help.

Finally, in terms of my one critique, I think this volume has a deficiency in the authors' decision not to address more the Anabaptist Movement or its contribution (at whatever level) to the larger Baptist story. In the Church History courses most students will take in companion to their Baptist history course, the Anabaptists will either receive brief mention at best or often no mention at all. So, if they are not covered in discussions related to Baptist history, when will they receive adequate study? I think they are missing an important opportunity for a textbook of this scope and potential influence.

In their introduction and "Anabaptist Similarities" section in the first chapter, the authors explain well why they have made the decision to focus on "connectedness" more than "indebtedness," with regard to their brief treatment of the Radical Reformers, but I disagree with their basis of determining what is a connected group. While it is true there is no verifiable historical connection between the European Anabaptists and the rest of the Baptist tradition, this does not mean there is no connection at all or that the Baptists are merely indebted to the Anabaptists. As G. H. Williams, W. R. Estep, Timothy George, and James Leo Garrett have noted in their works, the Anabaptists have much light to shed on the development of doctrine among the latter Baptist

tradition. When one reads the authors' fine concluding chapter in *The Baptist Story*, one sees that the Anabaptists share many, if not all of the same commonalities, or distinctives that the authors of *The Baptist Story* have concluded best represent the Baptist tradition. Furthermore, the very biblical texts that the Anabaptists used and were convinced by to adopt practices such as believer's baptism and a regenerate church are the very same texts that motivated Baptists from England, America and beyond. This doctrinal and biblical connection is far more important than any historical connection and it is what distinguishes the Anabaptists as worthy of focus in a Baptist history textbook as opposed to other Christian groups to which the Baptists are merely indebted (i.e. the Elizabethan Puritan Tradition).

My one request for future editions it would be to reframe the scope of the project as rooted in the Reformation. That is, *The Baptist Story: From Reformation Dissenters to Global Movement*. Ideally, the new edition would contain a single introductory section that reviews and clarifies further the Anabaptist landscape, emphasizes their preparatory contributions toward religious liberty, believer's baptism, regenerate church membership, and provides some biographical examples of the lives of Hubmaier, the Swiss & South German beginnings, Michael Sattler, the Schleithem Confession, and Pilgrim Marpeck.

The Baptist Story is a wonderfully engaging introduction to the work of God among people in Baptist churches. As a professor who teaches a Baptist history course, what a joy it is to read and commend the valuable work here produced by some of the finest Baptist history Inklings in our day. May the churches and the nations benefit from the telling.

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Books Received

Dever, Mark and Jonathan Leeman, eds. *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015

DeWitt, Dan. *Jesus or Nothing*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014.

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Elliezrie, David. *The Secret of Chabad: Inside the World's Most Successful Jewish Movement*. New Milford, CT: The Toby Press, 2015.

Holy Bible. Modern English Version. Lake Mary, FL: Passio, 2014.

Jamieson, Bobby. *Going Public: Why Baptism is Required for Church Membership*. Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2015.

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Welch, Edward T. *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2015.

If you are interested in reviewing one of the above books or another recent work, please contact:

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