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**Essays on
Hope**

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EDITORIAL

The Center for Pastor Theologians is pleased to announce that our print journal is now being published by Glossa House (www.glossahouse.com), a publisher co-founded in 2012 by Michael Halcomb (CPT Fellow) and Fredrick Long. Glossa House specializes in resources to help students and researchers advance in their acquisition of biblical languages, and has graciously offered to publish the CPT's print journal, make it available in their online store, and distribute it at conferences. In light of this new partnership, we have changed the name of our print journal to the *Center for Pastor Theologians Journal (CPTJ)*. The newly named *CPTJ* will continue to be available on Amazon, and for free digital download on the CPT website.

At the Center for Pastor Theologians, we are engaged in a project reflecting on virtue formation. The essays contained in this volume of the *CPTJ* pursue a deeper understanding of hope and how followers of Jesus are formed in hope. This volume continues our project of bringing theology into conversation with the findings of the social sciences, finding in that conversation areas of agreement, as well as places of tension, that enable us to develop a rich picture of hope.

Hope is a word we use regularly in daily life to describe an aspiration, a wish, or a dream of something we long for in the future. To hope for something is to have a desire for that thing to come to pass. And while this definition certainly resonates with the biblical and theological usage of hope, when we ground our understanding of hope in the narrative of God's work in Christ and the Spirit, a much fuller picture emerges.

Biblically, hope is not a wish or a dream; hope is a settled conviction that what is not yet will be, that the promises God has made will come to pass. As such, a hopeful life is one lived from this settled conviction. Biblical hope is fundamentally eschatological; it orients our hearts and minds to the reality of God that calls us to live in the world of appearances and suffering as those whose lives are built on the foundation of hope for the promised eternity in God's presence.

The essays in this volume of the *CPTJ* explore many dimensions of a hopeful Christianity. In the first essay, Cole Hartin writes, ". . . while psychology is descriptive, theology is prescriptive and thus offers insight into how humans ought to order their hope as well as what hope means for creatures in relation to the triune God who has created them." Hartin explores the psychological and theological dimensions of hope through the

poet Christina Rossetti, focusing on her most celebrated poem “Goblin Market.” Hartin’s essay offers us a vision of hope grounded in the eschatological deliverance of salvation through Christ.

Neil Martin then engages with Paul’s vision of the person in interaction with Susan Eastman’s book *Paul and the Person*. Martin’s essay explores how Paul has been viewed as “the apostle of individualism,” against the textual evidence that demonstrates that Paul’s vision of the person is rooted in the dynamic of habituation in community with the past, present, and future. Through this, we can see aspects of how hope shapes us as persons and why our habituation is essential to understanding hope. Next, Paul Morrison offers a guide through the present state of virtue ethics. Starting with Alasdair MacIntyre, Morrison takes us through the major emphases of virtue formation, as well as highlighting weaknesses in the tradition. Focusing on the communal nature of virtue, Morrison invites pastor theologians to reflect on our work of shepherding a congregation toward Christlikeness.

Matt O’Reilly offers a vision of hopeful pastoring in the age of anxiety. Unearthing the roots of our anxious age, the essay ultimately offers pastoral wisdom for shepherding congregations through these anxious times, making the connection between hopelessness and anxiety, and so painting a vision of communities of Christ followers whose lives are a witness to the hope that is ours in Christ. Daniel Slavich continues the line of reflection on the age in which we live by engaging the fearfulness of our time, drawing on the deep resources of the biblical and theological vision of the Holy Spirit. Reflecting on the traditional naming of the Spirit as both “Love” and “Gift,” Slavich shows that these descriptions are deeply connected to the biblical vision of hope, so grounding our life of hope in our life in the Spirit.

The volume concludes with Cory Wilson’s essay on the nature of virtue formation in the works of Lesslie Newbigin and Paul Hiebert. Pointing to the widespread evidence that evangelical Christianity has failed to create communities that reflect Christ’s character, Wilson looks to two figures known for their missiology and their understanding of the church and culture to tap into the underutilized resources found in their theological visions for virtue formation. The essay, and so this volume, concludes with a timely call for pastors to shepherd their churches to be faithful missionary communities, formed in virtue, living lives that are filled with the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus.

Our mission at the CPT is to equip pastors to be theologians for today’s complex world. This world needs a church rooted in hope that resists the fearful posture that so marks our world, and this church needs pastors who are equipped to shepherd in hope. We commend these essays to you and pray that they will encourage all who are engaged in the pastoral vocation that is undergirded by hope.

Dr. Joel Lawrence
Executive Director
The Center for Pastor Theologians

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI AND THE VIRTUE OF HOPE

COLE WILLIAM HARTIN¹

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last century, psychologists have attempted to offer theories to define and explain the phenomenon of hope. While the literature is vast, C. R. Snyder's theory of hope has proved the most influential.² One of the fundamental assumptions of Snyder's theory of hope is that "human behavior is largely driven by the identification and pursuit of goals."³ In other words, Snyder's influential theory of hope is tied to the belief that humans have agency to reach toward their desires. But hope is not only the belief that one can attain some set of discrete goals. Hope is also related to more general *dispositions* regarding human and divine agency. The disposition of hope impacts one's commitment to social justice and is related (along with spiritual stability) to petitionary prayer.⁴ All of this is to say that hope is foundational to understanding what it means to be a human; it underlies the motivations and methods that humans have for reaching toward the objects of their desires.

While psychological theories of hope are helpful for describing the mechanism of hope more broadly as well as offering granular studies that describe the role of hope in relation to specific human attitudes and actions, one must turn to theology to understand hope in its theological, and therefore truest dimensions. To put this another way, while psychology is descriptive, theology is prescriptive and thus offers insight into how

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² For an overview of recent theories of hope that includes additional information on C. R. Snyder see Matthew W. Gallagher, Jennifer Teramoto Pedrotti, Shane J. Lopez, and C. R. Snyder, "Hope" in *Positive Psychological Assessment: A Handbook of Models and Measures*, eds. Matthew W. Gallagher and Shane J. Lopez, 2nd ed. (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2019), 77–95.

³ Gallagher, Teramoto, Lopez, and Snyder, "Hope," 79.

⁴ For example, Sandage and Morgan suggest that hope is associated with commitments to social justice while Paine and Sandage examine the connections between spiritual stability, hope, and prayer. Steven J. Sandage and Jonathan Morgan, "Hope and Positive Religious Coping as Predictors of Social Justice Commitment," *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture* 17 (2014): 557–67; David R. Paine and Steven J. Sandage, "More Prayer, Less Hope: Empirical Findings on Spiritual Instability," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 17 (2015): 223–28.

humans ought to order their hope as well as what hope means for creatures in relation to the triune God who has created them.

There are a variety of ways that theology might address these questions. For example, we could turn to Christian Scripture and systematics to develop a biblical theology of hope, or we could look to the history of the church to see theologies of hope in practice.⁵ This paper seeks to examine the virtue of hope through the work of the nineteenth-century poet and exegete Christina Rossetti.

Rossetti was born in London in 1830 to her Neapolitan father and Italian/English mother. Rossetti's father, Pasquale Giuseppe, was a Dante scholar. He offered an education to Christina as well as her three siblings. When Rossetti was a teenager, she suffered ill-health that plagued her recurrently. Her decline in health seemed to coincide with a burgeoning devotional life connected to worship at Christ Church, Albany Street. She rejected suitors, opting instead for the single life. In 1872, she was diagnosed with Graves' disease, which eventually led her to settle into a rhythm of life at home with her sister and mother. In 1862 she published *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, her most celebrated work. Despite her success, Rossetti went on living a quiet life with her family until her death from cancer on December 29, 1894.⁶

To turn to Rossetti for an essay on the theology of hope might seem strange at first glance. She was not a cleric. She did not hold a university post. While generally well-educated, she did not have formal training in biblical studies or systematic theology. Yet for all of this, Rossetti occupies an important place as an ecclesial theologian. She wrote devotionally, for the good of the church, with a broad but unspecialized education in Scripture and theology. In fact, it is precisely in her role as a lay Christian deeply committed to the church that she was able to avoid many of the controversies of the academy while still offering theologically substantive contributions that have had significant influence well beyond her life.⁷

⁵ For the former, see Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM, 1967); and for the latter, see Sang Yun Lee, *A Theology of Hope: Contextual Perspectives in Korean Pentecostalism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018).

⁶ For biographical treatment of Rossetti see Georgina Battiscombe, *Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981); and Jan Marsh, *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994).

⁷ Rossetti's most significant theological influences come from Tractarianism, or the Oxford Movement, as it is sometimes known. The Oxford Movement is the name given to the theological ferment in the Church of England that sought to recover the English Church's Catholic past. In part, this included a renewed emphasis on the importance of holy orders (especially apostolic succession), a recovering of patristic methods of interpreting Scripture, as well as an appreciation for the doctrine of reserve. The doctrine of reserve refers to the veiling of certain theological truths by the uses of images and figures so as not to squander the depths of the Gospel for those who are unprepared for them. This is linked to Jesus's teaching about scattering pearl to swine (see Matt 7:6). See also Emma Mason, "Christina Rossetti and the Doctrine of Reserve," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 7, no. 2 (2002): 196–204.

Rossetti's work provides fertile ground for examining the virtue of hope. Rossetti's masterful grasp of Christian Scripture and the keen psychological insights of her work make her especially suited to this endeavor. Moreover, Rossetti provides an important female perspective on the virtue of hope in a society in which men had far more power at their disposal to identify and attain their goals.⁸ Finally, the growing interest in Rossetti's work, and renewed focus on her theological contributions more generally, provide a timely opportunity to explore her contribution to the virtue of hope.⁹ In the following pages I argue that Rossetti situates the virtue of hope as an invitation from God present in the figures of nature and the figures of Scripture. I suggest that, according to Rossetti, while nature provides images for hopefulness, it is only fully realized in Christ through the figures of Scripture. For Rossetti, this hope does not come to fruition save in the life of the world to come. And our response to hope, for Rossetti, is utterly dependant on God's prevenient grace. Drawing from Rossetti's prose works, as well as her notable poem "Goblin Market," I argue that she offers a thick description of the virtue of hope that stands up to recent psychological findings.

II. HOPE IN THE FIGURES OF NATURE AND SCRIPTURE

Rossetti is a biblical theologian. In order to best understand Rossetti's theology of hope, then, one would do well to begin with her interpretation of Scripture. Like other Tractarians such as John Keble, John Henry Newman, and Edward Bouverie Pusey, Rossetti believed that Scripture ought to be read typologically in addition to reading for its literal sense. Rossetti believed that the images and figures in Scripture were placed there by the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth that God has for his people. In other words, it was not just the message of the Bible that mattered, the images that conveyed this message were themselves signs laden with meaning. Tied closely to this belief was Rossetti's perception of the seamlessness of Scripture and nature. The images of Scripture conveyed truth, but their appearance in the natural world reflected this truth as well. Moreover, the phenomena of nature exist to communicate the truth of God, even if this truth remains somewhat veiled. Thus, for Rossetti, Scripture and nature reinforce one another as they draw the human to God.¹⁰

⁸ For discussion on Rossetti's role as a female interpreter see Robert M. Kachur, "Repositioning the Female Christian Reader: Christina Rossetti as Tractarian Hermeneut in 'The Face of the Deep,'" *Victorian Poetry* 35 (1997): 193–214; and Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi, eds., *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 425–28.

⁹ Recent studies on Rossetti's faith have focused on its relation to ecology. See for instance, Emma Mason, *Christina Rossetti: Poetry, Ecology, Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); and Todd O. Williams, *Christina Rossetti's Environmental Consciousness* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

¹⁰ For a discussion of this see Christina G. Rossetti, *Seek and Find: A Double Series of Short Studies of the Benedicite* (London: SPCK, 1879).

To make this more concrete we can look at an example from Rossetti's *Seek and Find*, a commentary on the Benedicite (a canticle taken from the Septuagint translation of Daniel 3). In commenting on the roles of the sun and the moon in the Benedicite ("O ye Sun, and Moon, bless ye the Lord: praise Him, and magnify Him forever"), she notes that

The Sun, to our unaided senses the summit of His visible creation, is pre-eminently the symbol of God Himself: of God the giver, cherisher, cheerer of life; the luminary of all perceptive beings; the attractive centre of our system. The Sun, worshipped under many names and by divers nations, is truly no more than our fellow-creature in the worship and praise of our common Creator; yet as His symbol it none the less conveys to us a great assurance of hope.¹¹

Here Rossetti draws an image from nature and exegetes its meaning, then situates it within Scripture. She notes that the sun is a "symbol" of God because it is "the luminary of all perceptive beings," and "is the attractive centre of our system." This is evident to Rossetti because in many cultures the sun was the object of worship, though she sees that Christians now recognize the sun as another creature meant to bring glory to God. Moreover, the sun "conveys to us a great assurance of hope." Rossetti does not explain why she sees the sun to be connected to hope, but perhaps it is obvious given its sustaining role in human life and its constancy in bringing light and warmth day by day. It brings hope itself, but it also brings hope as a "symbol" or sign that conveys something of the faithfulness of God. Rossetti then goes on to note the various appearances of the figure of the sun in Scripture, alluding to the further lessons one might draw from it. The point here is that Rossetti begins with a liturgical text that is laden with naturalistic imagery, and then expands upon these natural images before rooting them once again in the text of Scripture.¹² In this particular example, she is interested in the ways that the sun brings hope.

Rossetti contemplates the virtues of hope in other passages of Scripture as well, as is especially evident in her commentary on Revelation, *The Face of the Deep*.¹³ Commenting on Rev 5:13 (in which all creatures in heaven, on earth, and under the earth bring glory to the Lamb), Rossetti notes, "since all Holy Scriptures are written for our learning, this thirteenth verse cannot but be meet for us to ponder over. And it strikes me that whoever conscientiously and unflinchingly puts and keeps himself in harmony with this text, must find that for practical purposes even predestination itself is

¹¹ Rossetti, *Seek and Find*, 34.

¹² For Rossetti, letting the images in nature and Scripture interplay with one another is a theological move, and a deeply traditional one at that. But in some of her works, she is also influenced by the emblematic tradition. See Heather McAlpine, *Emblematic Strategies in Pre-Raphaelite Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 85–145.

¹³ Christina G. Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep: A Devotional Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1893). For further discussion see Dinah Roe, *Christina Rossetti's Faithful Imagination* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 168–96.

shorn of difficulties and terrors.”¹⁴ She goes on to explain that this vision of the whole creation giving praise to “Him that sitteth upon the Throne” (Rev 5:13) self-evidently portrays the eternal victory of God in Christ. Thus, for Rossetti, no matter the difficulties that Christians face, even this one passage laden with symbolic imagery (a throne, a lamb, etc.) is enough to stoke the fires of hope. In light of this beatific vision, everything that might trouble the conscience about predestination is stripped away, for all creatures are in submission to the Lamb. In a characteristic move, she goes on to weave in passages from throughout the canon, noting that,

This is to take our Master at His word when He said: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.” This is with Job to hold fast integrity come what may. This is with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to silence the adversary: “O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God Whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”¹⁵

The upshot of Rev 5:13 for Rossetti is that all these heroic acts of faith (Jesus’s command to cease worrying; Job’s fidelity to God; and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego’s willingness to be martyred) are grounded in an eschatological hope. Later on in the same commentary, Rossetti can sum up the book of Revelation by noting, “this point of the Revelation, after so many Fatherly Lovingkindnesses and terrors of the Lord have been laid bare—for amid unfathomable mystery the great Love wherewith God loves us, and the tremendous woe from which He would fence us, stand out as clear as day—at this point, patience once more meets the pilgrim soul.”¹⁶ Rossetti’s point here is that hope, even though it is deferred, is sustained because of the vision of God’s great love. Even the shadow side of providence, the “terrors of the Lord,” is meant to serve the end of God’s love.

To return to Snyder’s theory of hope, we remember that hope presumes the identification and pursuit of goals. While Rossetti’s deep reading of the Apocalypse does not lead her to a discrete goal that she has power to attain on her own, it does serve as a kind of goal, a vision of what will be in God’s time, and thus it sustains her hope. This is not to say that the Christian has no agency. However, the role of the Christian is not to achieve some delineated list of goals but rather to cultivate the disposition of hope through patience. To quote from Rossetti once more, “All I have read, then, is to lead me up to patience: patience under ignorance, patience under fear, patience under hope deferred, patience so long as free will entails the terrific possibility of self-destruction; patience until (please God) my will freely,

¹⁴ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 190.

¹⁵ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 190.

¹⁶ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 360.

finally, indefectibly, becomes one with the Divine Will.”¹⁷ Rossetti does not want to look to the end of the consummation of all things in Christ as an inevitability in which she has no role to play. There remains for her “the terrific possibility of self-destruction” as she notes, but by patience she is able to see the goal for which she is striving, in which her will becomes one with Christ’s.

That this oneness with the Divine will may not come to fruition is cause for some holy fear. “Hope and fear in this life are interdependent,” writes Rossetti, “indeed hope without fear might perhaps be viewed no longer as hope but rather as longing expectation, fear without hope as desperate anticipation. But during probation such distinctions are beside the question. Fear is the ballast of Hope, Hope the buoy of Fear.”¹⁸ For Rossetti, hope is fragile enough that it can only grow in certain conditions, in a state of tension between “longing expectation” and “desperate anticipation,” between certainty and dread. Hope is tied to possibility, and this is nowhere more evident or vital than in contemplating the eschaton.

As Rossetti draws from the figures of nature and Scripture, then, she suggests there is reason to hope. Her suggestion that hope is necessarily tied to a kind of “goal” in which humans have some level of agency affirms the premises underlying Snyder’s theory of hope. Rossetti’s understanding of the “goal” is a theological vision of what God will do in Christ, and the agency that she does have is the ability to wait patiently in cooperation with the work of God. How this works out raises questions about divine and human agency, as well as the nature of grace. In the next section I will address Rossetti’s understanding of each and how they interrelate to one another.

III. HOPE AND DIVINE AGENCY

While psychology offers various theories of hope, it does not take into account the underlying theological questions that emerge in attempts to understand hope in relationship to God’s activity. Rossetti’s work describes the virtue of hope along these lines. By taking soundings in Rossetti’s work, we can see that she viewed hope to be virtue that begins and ends with God. However, by means of God’s “preventing” or prevenient grace, he gives human beings a roll to play in the cultivation of hope.¹⁹

¹⁷ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 360.

¹⁸ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 464.

¹⁹ When Rossetti uses the term “preventing” grace she is referring to what is commonly called prevenient grace. This was a customary term in the Church of England. See also the discussion of “preventing” grace in Article X of the Church of England’s *Thirty-nine Articles of Religion*.

Rossetti kept a reading diary, *Time Flies*, that includes brief theological and biblical reflections, as well as verses of poetry. In her reflection on Ember Friday²⁰ in Trinitytide, she writes,

Nothing but the love of God can account for or can justify an indomitable hope. Hope seems the more intimately allied to love, inasmuch as fear, its opposite, will be cast out by perfect love: wherefore? . . . Hope contrariwise is a pleasure. Hope, like the rainbow, can be evoked out of clouds and gloom to supply a bridge between earth and heaven: but can only be evoked by the sun-like love of God.²¹

We see here that for Rossetti hope is both justified and evoked by the love of God. To have a vision of God's love is to instill the possibility of hope, for without that vision, one cannot see aright. Rossetti felt this reality deeply, and in addition to writing about it, her prayers themselves are dependent upon this principle. She prays, "Good Lord Jesus, our only Hope; because we cannot help ourselves, help Thou us."²² She goes on to petition God for quickening, cleansing, and healing, because we are not able to attain these by ourselves. This only underscores the point that Rossetti recognized her utter dependence upon God for all things, but especially for hope.

That hope begins with God's love, however, does not mean that humans are without a role to play. Rossetti picks up on this in her commentary on Revelation, noting, "because our God is Almighty, therefore can He demand of us purity and perfection, for by aid of His preventing grace we can respond to His demand."²³ God's commands are only intelligible qua commands because of his "preventing grace" that gives us the ability to respond to them. In this sense, Rossetti sees nature to be endued with a certain kind of grace, and therefore human beings do have some real agency and opportunity to cooperate with this grace.

Rossetti offers further clarity of her understanding of prevenient grace in her discussion of the ways that Christians can share with the author of Revelation the tribulation and patience required to testify to Jesus Christ. She writes that we too can share in this journey, "yet neither effectually nor in maturity unless our own free will co-operate with God's predisposing grace."²⁴ There is a sense in which all Christians, by virtue of their baptism, are on the same journey toward God's consummation of all things in Christ, yet this only becomes the case "effectually" and "in maturity" when we choose to cooperate with that grace. Rossetti's position here fits nicely with Snyder's theory of hope, except she has done the theological

²⁰ Ember days are sets of three days in each of the four seasons that are to be devoted to prayer and fasting for agriculture. They are also opportunities to pray for ordinands in the church.

²¹ Christina G. Rossetti, *Time Flies: A Reading Diary*, 7th ed. (London: SPCK, 1902), 278–79.

²² Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 537.

²³ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 25.

²⁴ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 26.

ground-clearing necessary to prove humans have agency to identify goals in the first place. It is not “natural” to the human condition, but it is a gift of God’s grace. This only deepens how we might understand the nature of hope. It is a gift not only because it provides a telos for our lives, but because to move toward that telos of our own volition is itself an evidence of God’s grace, whether we have attained our goal or not.

The end of hope for Rossetti, in an ultimate sense, is eschatological, as I have noted above.²⁵ The end of hope is laid out in Scripture’s plain sense, but Rossetti also sees it figured into the signs of Scripture. Using the Authorized Version, Rossetti quotes Rev 2:10, the letter to the church in Smyrna, “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” She comments on this, noting, “there is comfort in the certainty that though the limit of any trial be hidden from me, by God that limit is prefixed and is all along well known; the end is planned and adjusted from the beginning.”²⁶ Here Rossetti suggests that God’s providence both allows for trials, but also sets their end. This means that hope can have as its object a definitive end in God. She draws this conclusion not only by observing the logical implications of God revealing this plan, but also by the figures that he uses. The “ten days” of tribulation signify the number of testing throughout the canon, and they always come to completion. She goes on,

Let us recall some Bible Tens, and fortify hope by cheerful meditation. Ten commandments compose a complete scheme of righteousness. Ten days even of tribulation will not be an excessive period wherein to practise their observance. David had his instrument of ten strings whereon to worship God. Our ten days of weeping may emit as sweet a harmony of prayer and praise, and as triumphant a note of victory.²⁷

Rossetti goes on to enumerate other instances of testing wherein the number ten serves as their completion. Thus, Rossetti sees that the prophecy about tribulation for Christians will serve its purpose in leading them to righteousness. This time of testing, however, is not the final word. Rossetti exhorts the reader,

We dwell upon terrors of Judgment: let us also dwell on its hopes.
It will have a great sound of a trumpet, and the trumpet-blast is

²⁵ Brad Sullivan suggests that Rossetti’s hope “for meaning and clarity and completeness must be ‘deferred’ until she can escape from the self-destructive cycles of world existence,” in Brad Sullivan, “Grown Sick with Hope Deferred”: Christina Rossetti’s Darker Musings,” *Papers on Language & Literature* 32 (1996): 228. However, Sullivan is missing the point that here, death is not the “end” for Rossetti, but the door to more life. He is correct that for her the end of hope is on the far side of death. However, that hope is not in life’s termination, but its fulfillment in the world to come.

²⁶ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 62.

²⁷ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 62.

music. It will be with clouds, and God Almighty of old set His bow in the cloud. It will bring to sight angels. It will bring back saints; the particular saints we having loved and lost, long for. Yet, after all, these are but its minor hopes. It will bring back Christ; our supreme Hope, or else our supreme Fear. But the hope is in Him, the fear is in ourselves. From ourselves and from our fear, good Lord, deliver us.²⁸

We see here that, for Rossetti, our secondary hopes might lie in our reunion with those who have gone to be with the Lord. Indeed, in cultivating the virtue of hope we might have any number of goals that we've identified to be worth pursuing. That being said, the end of all hope is our "supreme Hope," Christ himself. And there can be no fully developed theory of hope without Christ as the explicit telos, for he is, for Rossetti, the measure by which we can measure all other hopes.

The end of hope also raises interesting questions about the utility of psychological theories of hope. They are useful in so far as they provide a description of the means by which humans identify and strive toward certain goals, but they do not provide a normative account of which goals are worth hoping for, nor do they provide the evaluative measures by which we might parse worthwhile goals from those that, however desirable, might lead toward evil ends. In the last section on this paper, I draw from Rossetti's "Goblin Market" to show the consequences of disordered hope and how we might realign our hopes to their proper end.

IV. MISPLACED HOPE AND THE CROSS

Perhaps Rossetti's most lasting theological influence comes not from her works of commentary or devotion, but from her poetry, especially one poem prepared with children in mind. This is Rossetti's famous poem "Goblin Market." "Goblin Market" is a longish narrative poem with an alternate rhyme scheme. The poem follows the misadventure of two sisters, Lizzie and Laura, who are tempted, day and night, by throngs of goblin men who are selling the most sumptuous and delicious fruit. As readers, we are warned of the danger lurking behind this offer of forbidden fruit. Laura, however, cannot resist and eventually gives in and purchases some fruit with a lock of her hair. The result is that she feasts on the dizzying array of produce and returns home only to be upbraided by her sister, Lizzie.

The next day, Laura longs to taste the fruit once more, but finds that the goblin men have disappeared and remained hidden from her. This realization, and the craving for more fruit, leads her to a quick decline that seems to be leading toward her death. Lizzie, seeing Laura's state, eventually decides that she will go to retrieve some fruit for her sister, to whom the goblin men have become inaccessible. Lizzie pays for the fruit, but since she will not eat it herself, the goblin men try to force her, squishing the ripe fruit and their juices all over her in a violent attempt to subdue her.

²⁸ Rossetti, *The Face of the Deep*, 82.

She resists their violence, and eventually struggles home to her sister Laura. The texts reads:

She cried, "Laura," up the garden,
 "Did you miss me?
 Come and kiss me.
 Never mind my bruises,
 Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
 Squeez'd from goblin fruits for you,
 Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
 Eat me, drink me, love me;
 Laura, make much of me;
 For your sake I have braved the glen
 And had to do with goblin merchant men."²⁹

Laura does as Lizzie asks. The fruit juice tastes terrible to her, and acts as a kind of purifying poison. Eventually, the same fruit juice that caused her decline becomes the means of her salvation:

Life out of death.
 That night long Lizzie watch'd by her,
 Counted her pulse's flagging stir,
 Felt for her breath,
 Held water to her lips, and cool'd her face
 With tears and fanning leaves:
 But when the first birds chirp'd about their eaves,
 And early reapers plodded to the place
 Of golden sheaves,
 And dew-wet grass
 Bow'd in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
 And new buds with new day
 Open'd of cup-like lilies on the stream,
 Laura awoke as from a dream,
 Laugh'd in the innocent old way,
 Hugg'd Lizzie but not twice or thrice;
 Her gleaming locks show'd not one thread of grey,
 Her breath was sweet as May
 And light danced in her eyes.³⁰

The narrative ends with the two sisters grown, healthy, with their own children, passing on the warning about the dangers of the goblin market.

²⁹ Rossetti, *Complete Poems*, 17.

³⁰ Rossetti, *Complete Poems*, 19

Interpretations of this poem are quite varied.³¹ For the purposes of this paper, however, it is useful as a means of illustrating the consequences of disordered hope. If hope is the belief that one might attain some goal or end, then theology's task, in part, is to clarify which goals or ends are worthy of attainment. For example, if one hopes to achieve some end that is to their detriment, besides describing the mechanism of hope with psychological theory, we must also have a means to determine if the hope is rightly ordered. "Goblin Market" reveals that Laura's desire for goblin fruit, though it appears to be good, is in fact the cause of her illness. Laura's hope is disordered both because it is illicit (Laura goes against the warnings of Lizzie) but also because it is self-destructive. We might still say that Laura identified a goal (to eat the goblin fruit) and attained her desire (by eating the fruit), but this is clearly neither useful nor positive. This is to say that the *virtue* of hope is necessarily laden with a moral framework, and that moral framework is bound to both the community as well as a certain vision for the telos of human life. We can recognize Laura's hope as disordered because it fails to meet both standards, but those standards exist outside of psychological description.

"Goblin Market" is also powerful for its description of the ways the negative effects of disordered hope might be healed. In a Christological reading of the poem, for instance, Lizzie becomes a Christ figure who bears the wrath of the goblin men and is smeared by the forbidden fruit. This defilement, however, becomes the key to Laura's own purification and healing. The fruit that poisoned her, crushed against the flesh of her sister, becomes the medicine by which she is healed. Her disordered hope becomes reordered by recognizing the damaging effects of her desires, and by "kissing" and "sucking" the violent reality to which these desires led. This brings healing and restores to her mind a proper moral framework that is passed down to her own children.

Much more might be said about the theological genius of "Goblin Market," but for our purposes here, it is enough to focus on what it has to say about hope. In short, Laura's desires for goblin fruit illustrate the psychological dimensions of hope. She sees an object of desire and is

³¹ Simon Humphries argues for *some kind* of religious reading in Simon Humphries, "The Uncertainty of *Goblin Market*," *Victorian Poetry* 45 (2007): 391–413. More specifically, for a reading that looks at the eucharistic themes in the poem see Marylu Hill, "Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me': Eucharist and the Erotic Body in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*," *Victorian Poetry* 43 (2005): 455–72. Victor Roman Mendoza offers readings "inflected rather intimately, if not somewhat idiosyncratically, by Marxist and psychoanalytic theoretical work" in Victor Roman Mendoza, "Come Buy': The Crossing of Sexual and Consumer Desire in Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*," *ELH* 73 (2006): 913–47; while Kathleen Anderson and Hannah Thullberry suggest an ecofeminist interpretation in Kathleen Anderson and Hannah Thullberry, "Ecofeminism in Christina Rossetti's 'Goblin Market'," *Victorian Poetry* 126 (2014): 63–87. Anna E. MacDonald even reads the poem in relation to lactation and breastfeeding in Anna E. MacDonald "Edible Women and Milk Markets: The Linguistic and Lactational Exchanges of 'Goblin Market'," *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies* 11 (2015), <<https://www.ncgsjournal.com/issue113/macdonald.html>> [last accessed March 18, 2022]. And this is to name only a handful of the many theological, economic, and ecological readings.

motivated to obtain that object, even if at a price. But the poem also indicates the importance of rightly ordered hope. According to the logic of “Goblin Market,” a hope can be said to be rightly ordered when it is aimed to the end of human flourishing and when it aligns with the values of the community. Moreover, a rightly ordered hope must have its ultimate end in the eschatological fulfillment of what God is doing in Christ. In the world that Rossetti creates in “Goblin Market,” the analogy to this eschatological vision is the safeguarding and care of Lizzie’s and Laura’s children. While eating the goblin fruit damages the future flourishing of each of their offspring, Lizzie’s act of redemption for her sister secures the future of their children and becomes a cautionary tale of both the dangers of the goblins and the hard-won freedom Lizzie secured. Lizzie’s sacrifice illustrates that even when a disordered hope is actualized there is hope for redemption.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I will briefly review the arguments of this paper. In short, while psychological theories of hope are necessary for their description of the mechanism for identifying, desiring, and attaining goals, they fall short of grounding the phenomenon of hope in theological terms. To that end, we must turn to theology, and in the case of this paper, the theology of Christina Rossetti has proved fruitful as one point of departure for exploring the virtue of hope.

According to Rossetti, hope is defined by reference to the figures of nature and Scripture, both of which reveal, in their respective ways, the truth of God. Moreover, Rossetti shows us through these figures that hope begins and ends with God. The possibility that there might be something to hope for—in any ultimate sense—derives from what God is doing in Christ. God’s prevenient grace gives us the capacity to cooperate with that hope and sets within our sights the object of our hope, Jesus Christ. It is easy for us to find that our hopes are disordered, as Rossetti’s “The Goblin Market” illustrates, but they can be reoriented through the sacrifice of Christ to their proper ends in him.

PERSONHOOD AND HABITUATION IN PAUL

NEIL MARTIN¹

I. INTRODUCTION

Susan's Eastman's compelling interdisciplinary book, *Paul and the Person*, has propelled the question of *personhood* in the apostle's letters to an overdue prominence. What did Paul think it meant *to be* a human person? What did he think it was about *being* a person that made it appropriate to talk about consequence-bearing human agency? Did Paul consider personhood something innate or acquired? Were there certain criteria in his mind that constituted a human being as a real person, in the absence of which their personhood might be considered *less than* real? As New Testament scholars, we rarely step back far enough from our text to ask such foundational questions but, as soon as we *do*, it becomes apparent that many of the key theological consequences of Paul's writings hang on the answers we give, not to mention vital applications of his theology to the life of the modern church.

In this paper, my goal is to briefly summarize Eastman's work, to bring it into conversation with Paul's surprisingly voluminous material on the subject of habituation, and to explore how the interaction not only expands the range of useful applications for Eastman's model but also goes some way to explaining why the model itself has remained hidden in plain sight for so long.

II. PAUL AND THE PERSON

Eastman's project begins with the prescient contribution to the debate about personhood in Paul made by Ernst Käsemann who argued—over against the views of his teacher, Rudolph Bultmann—that human beings are “relationally constituted agents.”² Our concept of ourselves *as selves* does not, in fact, on Käsemann's view, begin with some kind of innate,

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² Susan Eastman, *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017): 2. Eastman devotes a significant section of the book to summarising Bultmann and Käsemann's distinctive takes on *sōma* in Paul, see Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 96–102.

autonomous, self-determining consciousness. Rather we come to a sense of self as we relate to the outside world and to the other selves that inhabit it.³

A. STOICISM

Stoicism is the first port of call on the whistle-stop intellectual tour that follows, facilitating the introduction of several key concepts. Does a human being need a functional abstract idea of themselves in order to be a person? Seneca says “no.” A baby has *experiential* awareness of themselves as a real person, rapidly learning that eyes are for looking and lungs are for screaming, long before they can clearly *articulate* what is going on when they choose to use them in these ways (*Ep.* 121.9–13).⁴ As Eastman settles on Epictetus as her primary conversation partner, however, it becomes apparent that, in his view, abstract awareness of the self is necessary for personhood in the fullest sense. For Epictetus, the self is a citadel upon which the sunshine and the storms of external circumstances shine and break respectively, and personhood is that feature of human existence that allows us to choose how to respond in each case.⁵ The impressions presented to us by our senses are beyond our control, but *it is within our control* to respond to them positively—to embrace them with equanimity whatever they may be as manifestations of the divine will framed in broadly pantheistic terms. “When you see someone weeping in sorrow,” says Epictetus somewhat chillingly, “keep before you this thought: ‘It is not what has happened that distresses this man . . . but his judgment about it’” (*Ench.* 16).

Personhood for Epictetus is consequently characterized by “self-talk.”⁶ The wise person does not neglect their body, but neither are they ruled by its demands. Instead, they talk to themselves, detaching themselves from emotional reactions and physical reflexes, evaluating their experiences and choosing always to accept the role marked out for them in the larger drama. Epictetus doesn’t deny human *embeddedness* in the created world—there is none of the existential isolation we see in the later Enlightenment tradition. But it remains the case that, to truly live well, a person must impose *their will* on the impressions presented to it—*the citadel must not be breached*.⁷

B. EMERGING CONCEPTS OF THE SELF

Risking a class action lawsuit from readers affected by philosophical whiplash, Eastman then whisks us away immediately to the cutting edge of twenty-first century neurological and psychological research where a very different vision of personhood is under construction. Observations of infants interacting with parents and studies of severely autistic adults bring

³ Ernst Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1971): 18–21, 31.

⁴ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 11–12, 40.

⁵ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 80.

⁶ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 46.

⁷ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 95, 118–19.

us crashing into the world of our own experience and broach the question of whether the self is really quite so self-contained as Epictetus imagined. Mimicking behavior begins in babies before they have any concept of their own faces—indeed it seems that the act of *being mimicked* is one of the very factors that triggers the development of their sense of self.⁸ Patterns of neurological activity normally associated with particular physical actions fire even when the subject merely *observes* those actions being carried out by another agent.⁹ Studies documenting the shocking neglect of children in Romanian orphanages denied ordinary human contact in infancy under the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu highlight the catastrophic psychological consequences endured by the victims in later life.¹⁰ Mimicking and being mimicked by other selves actually *creates* our sense of significance as distinct agents. The act of smiling teaches the brain what smiling means, not the other way around. “A baby . . . learns what it is to see by being seen . . . her awareness of herself begins with the interaction rather than preceding or motivating it.”¹¹

C. FIRST-PERSON AND SECOND-PERSON PERSPECTIVES

To capture this paradigm shift in attitudes to the formation of the self, Eastman categorizes her observations using “first-” and “second-person” terminology. Epictetus, by and large, presents us with a “first-person” account of personhood.¹² The self stands apart from—and, indeed, in judgement over—external impressions. It is a continuous part of the created world—an expression of the larger good and complete divine will. But conformity to that will entails mastery over those impressions, obtained by a discrete and solitary “I.” The self must not be imposed upon, it must impose itself on the circumstances in which it is placed.

The self for the neurologists and experimental psychologists introduced in the second chapter of the book, however, is a “second-person” phenomenon—it begins with and grows under the stimulus of significant

⁸ The insight here comes from the clinical psychologist Vasudevi Reddy: “The experience of *being imitated* communicates a sort of recognition of oneself as distinctive and worthy of attention . . . it is *being imitated* that is crucial for intimacy.” Vasudevi Reddy, *How Infants Know Minds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008): 64–65.

⁹ Here, Eastman is launching into the controversial topic of “mirror neurons” following the published contributions of Shaun Gallagher and Vittorio Gallese. See Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Vittorio Gallese, “Being Like Me’: Self-Other Identity, Mirror Neurons, and Empathy,” in *Perspectives on Imitation: From Neuroscience to Social Science*, ed. Susan Hurley and Nick Chater, vol. 1 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005): 101–18.

¹⁰ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 77. See also Susan Eastman, “The Shadow Side of Second-Person Engagement: Sin in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5, no. 4 (2013): 125–44.

¹¹ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 75.

¹² Eastman dialogues briefly with alternative interpretations which stress the connectedness of all things in Stoic thought, rejecting individualistic readings as retrojections from the post-Enlightenment world, noting especially Christopher Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 325–407.

“I-thou” relationships and “I-it” relationships (although, in the latter case, the grammatical sticklers among us will be frustrated by the absence of a “third-person” category in Eastman’s analysis). Eastman argues that in second-person models, the boundaries of the self are radically redrawn, widened to include our environment and the other significant actors within it.¹³ My self is *not* just the inner citadel of my decision-making and impression-assessing faculties. It is distributed among the many others on whom I make impressions and who react to me, just as their selves are distributed and partly manifested in my reactions to them.

For Eastman, second-person models are not only more realistic but hold promise for more hopeful views of personhood than the first-person alternatives we have inherited from the Stoics, and which have been refined into even more individualistic schemes as the centuries have gone by. In a world where criteria like “intellectual capacity” are assumed all too easily to define true personhood and where personhood is summarily denied to those who lack them, second-person models point in a more inclusive direction.¹⁴ Eastman briefly introduces the touching illustration of an elderly person severely affected by dementia whose personhood is preserved in the lingering impact of her life on others that is still evident in the way they treat her, even though her ability to manifest those fondly-remembered attributes is gone.¹⁵

D. SECOND-PERSON PERSPECTIVES IN PAUL

Despite these exciting glimpses of more expansive vistas (some of which Eastman identifies as possible subjects for future books), the real value of the contrast she draws out between first- and second-person concepts of the self in *Paul and the Person* lies in its application to the apostle’s letters. In two passages in particular, Eastman finds Paul engaged in what sound very much like second-person descriptions of personhood in the context of talking—or at least seeming to talk—about *himself*.

Rom 7:7–25

The first is the notoriously intractable second half of Rom 7 where, with conspicuous use of first-person pronouns and present tense verbs, Paul presents an agonized description of the relationship between the self and sin, coming to a climax in verses 15–20:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in

¹³ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 65–70.

¹⁴ Eastman comments provocatively on the tendency to “criterialise” personhood, so that one only counts as a real person if one has the capacities required to conceive of oneself as an autonomous individual. Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 11–14, 171–72.

¹⁵ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 182.

me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. (Rom 7:15–20)

Scholarship is spectacularly divided on the exegesis of this disturbing text, and Eastman excuses herself upfront from any sense of obligation to “explain” it. What she does instead is explore how other people’s explanations handle the question of personhood and, in the process, draws out their overwhelming dependence on first-person models of the self.

The passage begins with a rhetorical question that is answered—in the minds of some commentators at least—with logic that would not have been out of place in the works of Epictetus. “What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful?” asks Paul (Rom 7:7). And he responds with a solution that locates sinfulness *in the self*. Admittedly, it takes some interpretative ingenuity to *see* that—a lot of interpretative ingenuity, in fact, given that we have some breathtakingly dualistic language to rationalize along the way. But this doesn’t deter Mark Seifrid, for example, from declaring that Paul pronounces absolution for the law here on the basis that radical evil is ascribed “to the human being” considered as a discrete, autonomous whole.¹⁶

Others are not so easily persuaded. Stanley Stowers, who argues that Paul’s appeal to the role of sin as an external agent in this text (personified and invasive, overwhelming the self and bending it to its will) reworks Greek ideas about the fragmentation of the personality attributable less to Stoic influences than they are to Plato and his picture of conflict between the mind and rebellious passions and desires.¹⁷ Stowers’ exploration of Greco-Roman paradigms for both the form and content of the passage is immensely illuminating, especially the possibility of an allusion to the Euripidean drama, *Medea*, whose eponymous heroine speaks in strikingly similar terms to the problematic “I” in Rom 7, and is imitated in a host of derivative classical representations of inner moral conflict (Euripides, *Med.* 1077–80; see also Ovid, *Met.* 7.17–21; Epictetus, *Diss.* 1.28.6–8).¹⁸ With Eastman, I also find Stowers’ diagnosis of “speech-in-character” here broadly persuasive, seeing ample signs of dissonance between the “I” under discussion and the believer delivered from “[slavery] to sin” in Rom 6:6, and set free from “the law of sin and death” in Rom 8:2.¹⁹ But his radical internalization of the interaction between the “I” and “sin living within” in Rom 7 jars awkwardly with his acceptance of the Spirit as a real *external*

¹⁶ Mark A. Seifrid, “The Subject of Romans 7.14–25,” *NovT* 34 (1992): 313–33. See Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 112–13.

¹⁷ Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994): 260–64, 271–72.

¹⁸ Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 260–64.

¹⁹ Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 16–21, 269–72.

agent in the balancing paragraphs of Rom 8, a problem which Eastman's second-person reading elegantly solves.²⁰

Eastman, of course, is gracious enough to acknowledge Käsemann as the forerunner here, even though she doesn't accept his dated-sounding conclusion that the "I" is a pious Jew who remains bound to place their confidence in the law "so long as the Spirit of Christ is not given to them," or that such a person is so enslaved (even possessed) that they might not be worthy of denomination as an individual at all.²¹ But her dialogue with contemporary authors like Vasudevi Reddy takes her further, beyond the realization that selfhood is a construction of internal and external factors called forth and shaped through interaction with external influences, to the conclusion here in Romans that the "I" Paul talks about—whoever he/she might be—has agency on the basis that *all human agency* emerges from intersubjective relationships with external others.

Gal 2:20

The second text where Eastman detects an underlying second-person concept of personhood is Gal 2:20. Here, her realization that Paul deploys the same underlying logic that pervades Rom 7—"I no longer [verb] but [subject plus verb] in me"—is, I think, a profound insight that will require the attention of serious interpreters of *both* passages going forward.²² Once again we have an external agent directing affairs within a self who nonetheless remains capable of description as the subject of active verbs. "I have been crucified with Christ," says Paul, "and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." And yet, in the succeeding paragraphs, he attaches significance to the fact that he does not "set aside the grace of Christ" (Gal 2:21), that he wants to learn the origin of their new attitude to religious laws (Gal 3:2), that he has a distinctive personal view of covenant continuity either side of the "Christ Event" (Gal 3:15–18), and so on.

As in Rom 7, first-person models of selfhood struggle to account for these data. "Such mutual indwelling," says Eastman, "does not square well with an anthropology premised on the notion that human beings are essentially autonomous, discrete, and self-directing individuals."²³ With the second-person alternative, new possibilities emerge.

In Rom 7, Paul describes a situation where sin (or "the law of sin") has influence *within* the self (Rom 7:17, 20, 23), but this doesn't mean sin entirely *constitutes* the self (Rom 7:18–19, 22) or that *there is no self*. In second-person models, substantial dialogue with external entities *establishes* selfhood rather than undermining it, even if the external entity in question is

²⁰ Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 283.

²¹ Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London: SCM, 1980), 203; Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 99–102, 113–14, 118.

²² Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 6.

²³ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 163.

inherently toxic. And similar logic—albeit working in an altogether different direction—seems to be at work in Gal 2. An external entity—this time, Christ—has influence *within* the self, and yet the self is not annihilated. In Romans, the relational connection Paul has in mind is one that the “I” seems unable to resist; in Galatians, he is bold enough to tell us the external agent is the source and basis of his life itself. But with a second-person account of personhood in our interpretative toolkit, all of this emerges as more of a condition of agency than a threat to it. Personhood requires and includes the influence of external agents; responses are always individual, but that doesn’t mean they have to be autonomous.²⁴

III. HABITUATION

In addition to these two surprisingly parallel texts, Eastman explores several other Pauline passages that emerge with fresh clarity when considered from a second-person perspective. Philippians 2 occupies a whole chapter, expounding the incarnation as a divine imitation of humanity—even to the very extremity of our guilt and weakness. And with it comes transformative power—a new “cradle of thought,” as Eastman describes it—re-forming the personhood of believers in much the same way our personhood was formed at first through the imitative interactions of infancy. The subsequent challenge to “work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling because it is God who works in [us] to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose” (Phil 2:12–13), emerges as less a detached philosophical conundrum than it is a consequence of the preceding narrative, expressing our fundamentally “intersubjective constitution.”²⁵ The reason there is an “us” with a salvation to work out in the first place is God’s work on our behalf through Christ, through *his* transformative, empathetic interest in our situation. Several other Pauline texts are given more glancing attention.

In this paper, however, I want to turn to some passages that Eastman does not consider but which I think may have something to contribute to her project, not just in relation to the *present* influences of sin and of Christ on our formation as persons, but in relation to the ongoing power of influences encountered *in our past*.

A. 1 COR 8

First Corinthians 8 affords no formal equivalent to the “I no longer [verb] but [subject plus verb] in me” logic of Rom 7 and Gal 2, but it does still conceal a profoundly important insight into the complex relationship that exists between what believers want to do and what they do in practice.²⁶ This is the part of the letter where Paul is beginning to engage with a list of

²⁴ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 75.

²⁵ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 181.

²⁶ This section follows the argument set out in Neil Martin, *Galatians Reconsidered: Jews, Gentiles and Justification in the First and the Twenty-First Centuries* (London: Apollos, 2022): 105–11.

specific questions his correspondents have raised with him—each signaled with the same characteristic transitional marker, “*Peri de.*” Paul deals, in chapter 7, with questions about marriage; in chapter 12, with gifts of the Spirit; in chapter 16, with the collection for the church in Jerusalem; and in the same chapter, with Apollos’ travel plans. In chapter 8, however, the topic is food sacrificed to idols, and this is where we begin to discover the present significance of the Corinthians’ past.

The question under discussion here is whether it is advisable for the Corinthian believers to continue to eat as they used to in the idol temples that formed such a noticeable feature of the city’s recreational infrastructure. Paul begins by affirming the staunch monotheism that seems to have been attested in the letter from Corinth to which he is now responding. “An idol is nothing at all in the world,” he repeats with an implied “Amen,” and “there is no God but one.” But this does not yield a straightforward affirmation of his correspondents’ apparent preference for eating wherever they like. Eating in idol temples may be acceptable *theologically*—it might even create opportunities to *affirm* the Corinthians’ new monotheistic faith. But that doesn’t make it sensible *pastorally*. Paul’s *readers* may know the idols they once worshipped are powerless to harm them now, but “not everyone possesses this knowledge.” In fact, he says, “Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled” (1 Cor 8:7).

Follow Paul’s logic here carefully: The people he is talking about are no less persuaded on the question of monotheism than their neighbors. But their years of exposure to idol worship have left such a deep impression on them—they have carved such a deep and enduring connection between the physical act of eating in the temple and the fear and reverence that used to go with it—that, *if they return to the same situation*, these same spiritual expectations will rise up again unbidden. They are victims of *habituation*. If they return to the same situation, whether they want to or not, they will be drawn back into “the whole symbolic world of idol worship” in which they used to live, unable to perceive what’s happening to them until after the damage is done.²⁷ And this is no trivial matter. Here, and when the same kinds of issues come up for discussion in Rom 14–15, the threat as Paul sees it is not just some mild inconvenience to the weaker brother or sister in question, but *spiritual destruction*. Something from outside the self seems to act within the self, and despite the self, in such a way that the self is fundamentally damaged.

B. GAL 4:8–11

In my doctoral thesis and in my subsequent book, *Galatians Reconsidered*, I have argued that the same relationship between habituated expectations and present religious practice provides a solution to one of the most

²⁷ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 140.

troublesome interpretative problems in the letter to the Galatians.²⁸ Why does Paul accuse his readers—who show every sign of being recently converted Gentiles now coming under pressure to keep the Jewish law—of going back *to something they have done before*? Taken at face value, the allegation makes no sense at all. Augustine throws up his hands in horror in his commentary on Gal 4:8–11: “When [Paul] says *turn back* he is certainly not saying that they are turning back to circumcision—they *had never been circumcised*” (*Com. Gal.* 33.3, emphasis mine). And yet the charge of regression punctuates the entire letter.

In chapter 5, the familiarity of Paul’s well-known exhortation to freedom masks the underlying oddness of his argument: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). Why “*again*”? In what possible sense can Jewish law be imposing a burden the Galatians have experienced *before*? In the famous Hagar and Sarah allegory in chapter 4, the very heart of the argument depends on the idea that the Galatians have been “sons of the slave woman” *in the past*. In chapter 3, the same thing can be said about the transition from life under a guardian to life as a mature adult or, a little later, from life as an heir to life as the master of the estate.

But the whole issue stands out with clanging clarity in Gal 4:8–11 where, four times in the space of just fourteen words in the Greek original, Paul drives home the danger that his Gentile readers are about to return to something they have done *before*. They are not just turning back. They are turning back *again* to the weak and miserable *stoicheia* (elements). They wish to be enslaved by them “all over again”—the underlying phrase here being used by extrabiblical writers to describe making things according to previously-used patterns, performing calculations according to previously-used formulae, and assessing medical cases according to previously-used diagnostic procedures.²⁹ Paul is willing to describe his own religious past as one of enslavement to the same *stoicheia* (Gal 4:3) but he is surely not so irreverent as to claim that life under the Jewish law was functionally indistinguishable from life under the pagan gods (Gal 4:8). Remember, in Gal 4:4 he implies that even Jesus was willing to live “under” the Jewish law.

The resolution of all this confusion, however, lies in the same observation about the power of habituated expectations we identified in 1 Corinthians. Galatian Gentiles, steeped from the earliest age in the idea that their chances of being blessed by the gods could be maximized (and their chances of being cursed minimized) by participating in religious festivals, who pledged thanks to the gods when asking for favors and scrupulously fulfilled their vows with costly offerings when blessings were received, would not have responded to Jewish rites in the way the Jews

²⁸ This section follows the argument set out in Martin, *Galatians Reconsidered*, 43–54, 118–58.

²⁹ See *Wis. Sol.* 19.6–7; Nichomachus of Gerasa, *Int. Arit.* 1.22.2.24; Galen, *Plac. Hip. Plat.* 2.4.1.1–7; *Sem.* 4.566.8–9; and especially *Hip. Aph. Comm.* 17b.794.8. We use a similar phrase in English in musical contexts when we say, “take it from the top.”

who propagated them imagined. Whatever it was that motivated Paul's opponents to insist on circumcision and observance of the Jewish calendar in Galatia, it was not the hope that these rites would be appropriated with the same expectations the Galatians had invested in their former religious observances. But that, it seems, is exactly what was happening, at least according to Paul's reading of the situation.

When Galatian Gentiles got circumcised they did not think "Here, at last, is a wonderful way to show my thanks to the God who took the initiative to draw Abraham and his children into relationship with himself out of sheer, unmerited love." They thought "Here, at last, is a way to incentivize my new God to bless me just like I did with my old gods." They may not have *set out* to think like that. But neither were the weak believers in Corinth *setting out* to resurrect their former attitude to idols. And in both cases, Paul was smart enough to know that the result was potentially catastrophic.

"Mark my words!" he tells them, "If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all" (Gal 5:2). He does not say that because circumcision itself had become fundamentally evil after Jesus' remarkable advent (Gal 5:6; 6:15). He says it because the practice of making costly offerings was so strongly linked to pagan ways of thinking in the minds of his readers that anything even notionally similar risked a return to the same *expectations*. The problem was not that the Galatians wanted to persuade the God of Israel that they were worthy of his favor. The problem was that they had invested their entire religious past in toxic "I-thou" relationships with gods who *did* expect that kind of persuasion and in *similar* circumstances—even when the similarities were merely superficial—they could not help returning to the same underlying patterns.

IV. SECOND PERSON PERSPECTIVES AND HABITUATION

A. MIRRORS, SPONGES, AND PATHWAYS

How then should we approach these peculiar interactions between the present self and the legacy of past selves? Certainly, scholars and pastors alike are unfamiliar with thinking this way. Our vision of the Christian life is based far more typically on the idea that conversion constitutes a "reformatting" of the self—that new believers are *tabulae rasae* on which new things can be built without regard for residual features of their past personal topography lurking beneath the surface.³⁰

For all her sophistication, this assumption is reflected even in Eastman's account of the self. Eastman tells us, almost as a throwaway comment, that "human personhood, as intersubjectively constituted in relationship with Christ, belongs to the future, not to the past," and that Paul's letters are "completely forward looking."³¹ There is little engagement with the

³⁰ Martin, *Galatians Reconsidered*, 191–201.

³¹ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 175.

possibility that personhood remains in dialogue with past “I-thou” and “I-it” relationships as well as being actively shaped by present relationships or any discussion of how that might work.³² Epictetus’ interesting reflections on the power of habits make a brief appearance in Eastman’s text, but much more space could have been allotted, given Paul’s interest in the same question, which occupies three chapters in 1 Corinthians, one and a half chapters in Romans, and an entire letter in Galatians, if I am right to expound it as a case study in what happens when the power of habituation is neglected.³³

For Epictetus, responding positively to challenging external stimuli becomes easier when we do so repeatedly, but more difficult if we allow negative patterns to become entrenched:

For when once you conceive a [self-destructive] desire . . . if reason be applied to bring you to a realization of the evil, both the passion is stilled and [your] governing principle is restored to its original authority, but if you do not apply a remedy, your governing principle does not revert to its previous condition, but, on being aroused again by the corresponding external impressions, it bursts into the flame of desire more quickly than it did before. (*Disc.* 2.18.9)

Though he might have quibbled with Epictetus’ language about a “governing principle” here, Paul, I think, would have agreed wholeheartedly with the underlying sentiment, and second-person models of the self hold considerable promise as we seek to flesh it out.

The self, according to the second-person account, is constituted relationally; it emerges and continues to be formed under the influence of relationships with external entities. But it is not, for all that, a mere mirror of the external world. It is the product (to revert to a pop-psychological trope) of nature *and* nurture. Even if selfhood is awakened through relationship with others, the relationship is always bidirectional and never a matter of mere control. Our genetic inheritance affects our responses to the external world contributing—along with a host of other factors—to our emerging (and developing) sense of vocation. Epictetus spoke famously about his vocation as a distinctive “purple thread” in the otherwise white fabric of Greek society (*Disc.* 1.2.17–18). He didn’t think he had “chosen” this path. It was innate and his task was simply to follow, or not to follow, where it led. But the point—as Eastman herself concedes—is that there is more to the self than a mere reflection of our external influences.³⁴ We are formed by *interactions* with external others that disclose and constitute our identity as unique *interactors*. No two people reflect or refract the same interactions in the same way. And neither do these interactions produce the same legacy.

³² The possibility, mentioned earlier, that the past self of a person with dementia is preserved in the kindness of the family members and friends who care for them in the present is one of the few places in Eastman’s book where the temporal aspect of second-person intersubjective relationships is explored. Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 182.

³³ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 54–55.

³⁴ Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 75.

Selves are formed through intersubjective interactions *sequenced in time*. And the interplay between present interactions and our memories of past interactions is just as important for identity formation as the interaction between subjects considered only in the present.

The self is less like a mirror than it is like a sponge (if you will allow a crass but helpful analogy). Immersed constantly in intersubjective interactions, it absorbs them and “rebroadcasts” them by osmosis (and when squeezed). It has *memory*—not only reflecting the world but assembling it into a hybrid with the worlds it has been immersed in in the past, receiving influences from its environment (including all the other selves—or sponges—that surround it) and influencing its environment with traces of environments it has previously absorbed. It has its own distinct internal structure, affecting its capacity to absorb and retain information of different kinds in unique and unpredictable ways. And all of this affects its character, informing its stability and flexibility, according to the norms and anomalies of the moment.

Or perhaps the self (to recycle another well-worn trope) is like a field across which paths are continually being established and re-established by the passage of many feet. Unlike one-time travelers who leave few traces of their presence, travelers walking repeatedly to and from specific destinations form clear, broad tracks through the grass that are easy to follow and to which other travelers are forced to conform, unless they are persistent enough to break new paths, leaving old ones to fall into disuse. The same thing is obviously true of our own external “I-thou” and “I-it” interactions, the legacy of which depends on factors like duration, repetition, and intensity such that an external influence that generates a mirror image in one person may have no noticeable effect on another at all.

Neither analogy is complete nor completely satisfying, but each, I think, sheds light on the significance of the second-person relationships *in time* that seem so significant in Paul’s pastoral practice. In Corinth, his instructions are based not only on the fact that selfhood is formed under the influence of external interactions, but on the durability of past influences and their capacity to co-opt and reinterpret present influences in unhelpful ways. In Galatia, the situation is even more interesting. Here, past *pagan* influences have so thoroughly contextualized and co-opted common religious practices (sacred days, ritual purity, memorialisations of devotion, costly offerings—these practices, in my view, *are* the “elements” or *stoicheia* that Paul mentions in Gal 4:3 and 4:9) that participation in Jewish “versions” of the same behaviors is reawakening the pagan expectations that used to accompany their pagan predecessors.³⁵

³⁵ On *stoicheia* as elements of religious practice, see Neil Martin, “Returning to the *stoicheia tou kosmou*: Enslavement to the Physical Elements in Galatians 4.3 and 9?,” *JSNT* 40, no. 4 (2018): 434–52. See also Martin, *Galatians Reconsidered*, 124–31.

B. HABITUATION IN ROMANS 7 AND GALATIANS 2

All this holds potential, perhaps, for a modest extension of the progress Eastman has already made in the familiar debates about Rom 7 and Gal 2.

In Rom 7, Eastman's second-person reading allows Paul to speak about sin as a power existing *outside* the person without eviscerating its power *inside* the person, or negating the reality of its ongoing identification *with* the person. If we interpret Rom 7:7–25 with Stowers as an example of speech-in-character (as I think we should), I believe Paul's intention is to confer embodiment—in the edgiest possible way—on the comprehensive anthropological portrait he developed in chapters 1–3. The fallen human state thus personified provides a “drum roll” for the spectacular summary of God's gracious response to our predicament that he goes on to unveil in chapter 8 (a two-part structure foreshadowed by the compact “contents page” statement at Rom 7:5–6) showing, in the process, how sin is constitutive of the self for all human beings in Adam. The “I” “sold under sin” in Rom 7:14 is humanity “handed over” to the “sinful desires,” “shameful lusts,” and “depraved mind” of Rom 1:24, 26, 28.³⁶ The sin-awakening command “do not covet” (Rom 7:7, lit. “do not *desire*”) alludes back to the same passage.³⁷ The reference to “[delighting] in God's law” in Rom 7:22 maps to the inner appetite for “glory, honor and immortality” described in Rom 2:7 (see also Rom 2:10), reminding us of the chilling catena of quotes from the Psalms and Isaiah with which that section of Paul's argument concludes (Rom 3:11–18), anticipating the same hopelessness the “I” expresses in Rom 7:24, just before Paul himself interjects with hope in Rom 7:25.

Add in the element of habituation, however, and we begin to see that sin personified as an external presence provides more than a mere recapitulating backswing for chapter 8. Though speech-in-character is, I think, the most plausible reading of Rom 7 *exegetically*, the alternative present, autobiographical reading remains attractive *experientially*, despite the fact that Paul seems to associate it with a life as yet unawakened to the transformative potency of the gospel. And habituation may provide the reason. If Paul conceived the person less as a mirror in relationship with external realities and more as a sponge, or as a pathway bearing the enduring impressions of past usage, it is possible for us to affirm that the “I” is unregenerate humanity and that the “I” is still a Christian *at the same time*.

The self of the believer, says Paul, is no longer enslaved to sin (Rom 6:6–7)—it is no longer immersed in sin, it no longer “squeezes” sin out only to be filled with sin again from its external influences. But even having died to sin's power and living in radical, liberating relationship with the Spirit, it is still influenced by sin in the external world and by the habits sin has formed—and continues to reinforce wherever it is accommodated—within. Sinful attitudes drawn deep into the self by repeated “squeezing” and “unsqueezing” over the years continue to seep out even

³⁶ Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 273.

³⁷ Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 278–79.

when the composition of our spiritual environment has been fundamentally renewed. Sinful trajectories worn into the very fabric of our personhood through habitual use (as well as through the simple fact of our constitution as human persons in Adam—as I think Paul would also want to add) remain paths of least resistance long after the beginning of the decisive, concerted, Spirit-enabled redrawing of our internal moral maps that Paul associates so relentlessly with faith in Christ and his death and resurrection on our behalf. Indwelling sin, as the Reformers called it—configured as the coalition of original sin and our habitual consent to it ingrained through years of practice—cannot help but continue to “construct” us even after the dawn of new spiritual life for as long as we remain exposed to the enduring impressions it has made on us within and to a world of external reinforcements without.

Something similar might be said about Gal 2. “I no longer live but Christ lives in me” serves as the rallying cry for this painful letter, a picture of the transformation the apostle longs to see accomplished in the lives of his immature readers through deliberate (Spirit-empowered) alignment with the Spirit’s priorities (Gal 4:19; 5:16–6:10). But it is *the absence* of this transformation that drives Paul to address it. In Galatia, the power of the past is in the ascendent. His readers are being “squeezed,” and the norms of the environment they formerly inhabited (and that *still* surrounds them) are reasserting themselves. The pathway marked “religious actions” in the Galatians’ minds is so wide and so familiar and so deeply associated with the idea that divine-human relations can be promoted by toeing its well-trodden lines that their tentative efforts to establish a different spiritual sensibility have provided no defense at all against its (probably unintentional) reinstatement under the influence of law-observant Jewish Christians.

Personhood considered in dialogue with the past, then, is the key that opens the lock of Paul’s pastoral argument. And that, I think, is the trajectory along which Paul enters the passage that Eastman seeks to expound. In Gal 2:15–16, in his response to Peter’s withdrawal from mixed table fellowship in Antioch, Paul appeals to their common *identity* as Jews for a solution: “*We who are Jews by birth* and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ” (emphasis mine). Immersion in a life-long, life-giving “I-it” relationship with the story of God’s dealings with his people in the past has constructed a form of personhood in both these men that is pre-attuned to this single distinctive fact: acceptance with God is not contingent on acceptability, blessing requires no incentives to bless. Like Abraham their father, Jews knew from long immersion what it meant to believe in God and to have it “credited to [them] as righteousness” (Gal 3:6–9). And it is the *absence* of this immersion (not its presence) that creates and explains the problem the letter was written to address. The problem in Galatia was that “sinful Gentiles” lacked this element in their self-formation. The “sponge” of their personhood had never absorbed it, the “field” of their interior life had never been transected by its repeated steps. When Jewish laws were proffered to

them, they lacked the Jewish expectations needed to receive them safely. In Galatia, Jewish laws were being received with pagan expectations, because pagan expectations had shaped the underlying contours of their very selves.

V. CONCLUSION

Why has it taken us so long to realize that our sense of self is not entirely innate and autonomous and to apply this lesson to our understanding of Paul? Certainly, Paul says nothing explicit about the nature and origins of human personhood; he provides no standalone philosophical excursus on the question of what it means to be a choice making self, or how selfhood should be viewed in the light of the gospel. But there are clues, as we have seen, and our insistence on anointing Paul as the apostle of individualism seems peculiar, to say the least, in the light of their testimony, as Eastman capably shows.

But perhaps our tentative exploration into the realm of habituation offers a partial solution to this problem too? Adding influences from the past to the range of present influences that constitute and shape the self has led us to a surprisingly rich seam in Pauline thought. Pastoring the impact of significant former “I-it” relationships in his readers’ backgrounds shapes Paul’s comments about idol food in Corinth and about “special days” and circumcision in Galatia. Attending to the crosstalk between past and present, between the “now” and the “not-yet,” has refined our reading of Rom 7:7–25 and may completely revolutionize our perspective on the Galatian crisis. But it also reminds us that our own dedication to first-person perspectives is a matter of habituation. We see individualism in Paul—we see the person as “an island, entire of itself”³⁸—in part because we ourselves have absorbed it for so long and have followed its path so consistently and obediently that we are unable to register contrary data even when we see it. Paul promotes an individualistic concept of the self today, in part, because his readers have been conditioned to embrace individualism, and are unable to hear him saying anything else.

³⁸ John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (Oxford: 1841), Meditation 17.

WHOSE VIRTUE? WHICH ETHICS?: THE ECCLESIAL TASK OF VIRTUE FORMATION

PAUL J. MORRISON¹

I. INTRODUCTION

In late 2019, our local theologian fellowship took up the task of virtue. The plan was to initially move through two books within the group's next quarterly meetings to orient us to the topic, each book assigned and read by half of the fellowship and then switching for the next meeting. Knowing my interest and doctoral work around the subject, I was asked to recommend a book or two on the matter. The readings were divided and assigned, and we each read and returned to the fellowship. I was in the half of the fellowship that began with N. T. Wright's popular, *After You Believe*,² an edifying and practical work that I had not read prior. The other half read my recommendation—Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.³ Admittedly, it had been three or four years since I had last picked up the classic in a doctoral research seminar, but I recalled it to be insightful, thorough, and fascinating. I did not recall that it is also dense. The assignment was apparently an intimidating and arduous one for that unfortunate half-fellowship, I think for two reasons.

The first is that intense tomes of ethics are better enjoyed by the moral philosopher's rose-colored memory than they are by its unsuspecting victims. The second is that MacIntyre, like so many other brilliant men and women, seems at times to forget that his audience is not as smart as he is. He picks the strings of history and philosophy like a Spanish guitar, reverberating with every summary and critique. And while it is a thing of beauty to see and hear, there is little instruction, it seems, for those of us holding cigar boxes with plastic strings, unsure how to begin or if this

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² N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012).

³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

would even qualify as the same instrument. Such is often the task of virtue formation in the church.

So, rather than sending an Amazon link or loaning out a personal copy of a well-loved, though possibly faintly remembered, book—even with the supposed advantage of insightful underlines and marginal notes—this essay will offer the present state of virtue ethics. Even as MacIntyre’s work is a profound one, it has been nearly forty years since it was published. As such, there is a tautness to note between the immutability of virtue and the constantly shifting contexts to which virtue is applied. This essay hopes to present a snapshot of virtue ethics over the past several decades, its present landscape, and some questions and observations of how it may be best applied in an ecclesial setting.

II. THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

To understand the present state of virtue formation, it might be most beneficial to ask another question or two, tied again to our Scottish herald of moral thought: “Whose virtue?” “Which ethics?”⁴ The state of virtue today is by no means one of homogeneity. Even as this essay is taking up the question in an ecclesial landscape that is broadly evangelical,⁵ virtue has wider expressions in Hinduism, Buddhism, Naturalism, and other faith traditions and schools of thought.⁶ Virtue’s definitions can further be wide ranging and its applications ethereal, at times. To offer lucidity, it will be most helpful to outline today’s most common critiques of virtue theory, the modern forms of the theory offered in response to those critiques, and a few noteworthy applications.

A. VIRTUE’S MODERN CRITIQUE

Like any ethical system, virtue ethics is not impervious to critique. Traditionally, these critiques have been that virtue tends to be ambiguous as it relates to concrete action compared to systems which offer definitive lists of approved actions or duties like divine command theory. Another common critique is that as virtue is found in such wide and disparate thinkers as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, there is little consensus regarding an authoritative list of virtues. Many have answered and accommodated these traditional critiques through clarity of application or through adaptation of the system itself.⁷ Still other critiques remain. Within the church, particularly, critiques can trend towards issues with philosophy and social science or towards biblical and theological concerns. It is argued that either

⁴ A common, if perhaps overdone, form of reference to Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

⁵ Evangelical here is intended as the broad theological category of a mere Protestantism, often typified by Bebbington’s quadrilateral.

⁶ David McPherson, “Homo Religiosus: Does Spirituality Have a Place in Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics?” *Religious Studies* 51 (2015): 335–46.

⁷ See for example Deontological Virtue Ethics in Mark Liederbach and Evan Lenow, *Ethics as Worship: The Pursuit of Moral Discipleship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2021), 271.

the church has elevated the biblical in a way that passes thematic readings as psychological diagnoses, or that it has elevated the extrabiblical in ways such that social theory would upend biblical insight and distinction.

Beginning with the first category, some social scientists have questioned the categories of virtue and vice in the assessment of habit and behavior. This is easily the newest critique but is still one that has been a point of debate for more than two decades, at least. The brunt of the critique is that virtue ethics oversimplifies unified themes which modern empirical psychology attributes to micro-shifts in acute situations and factors. The result is situationism, or the situationist critique. John Doris was one of the first to level this charge when he asserted that at their core, “character-based approaches are subject to damaging empirical criticism.”⁸ Since then, there has been an ebbing and flowing tension between a total rejection of character traits and the virtues and an integration within positive psychology of traditional virtue categories and modern empirical psychology.⁹

On the other extreme is the critique that virtue—and habits in particular—miss a biblical-theological justification in their assessment. Some even go so far to say that the theory is more closely aligned with legalism than biblicism. Consider J. Gary Millar’s critique of James K. A. Smith’s “Cultural Liturgies” trilogy,¹⁰

[Smith’s] contention that habits (or liturgies) change people, may be Augustinian, but it is a long way from being “Reformed” in any meaningful sense. . . . Smith shifts the focus very firmly and decidedly to external actions. One is left with the sense that the solution to disordered desires is simply to do things differently together, and all else will fall into place. By attempting to overcome the power of secular liturgies with “thicker,” better Christian ones, he is inadvertently flirting with legalism. The trouble is that, ultimately, liturgies cannot fix the heart. Despite his intentions, in tackling some of the excesses of post-enlightenment and rationalism, Smith has, to a large degree, lost the centrality of the gospel, which itself has the power to change people.¹¹

Note Millar’s critique. Habit is a purely external action. Its works are simple, even legalistic. It has lost the centrality of the gospel. This portrayal of Smith’s approach as philosophical to the point of lacking biblical or theological categories, and even downplaying the effects of sin, is a common one. In nearly every reflection, the history of virtue begins in Athens rather

⁸ John M. Doris, “Persons, Situations and Virtue Ethics,” *Noûs* 32 (1998): 520.

⁹ See Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Mark R. McMinn, *The Science of Virtue: Why Positive Psychology Matters to the Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2017), as two such integrationist approaches.

¹⁰ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013); and *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

¹¹ J. Gary Millar, *Changed into His Likeness: A Biblical Theology of Personal Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 192.

than Eden. As such, there seems to be an immediate suspicion that virtue and habit do not align with a biblical ethic. But this is not so.

In both the Old and the New Testament, when believers yield willingly to God . . . The Christian *new being* that emerges in surrender to God is enriched by the attitudes and dispositions that both Testaments extol. In that way the biblical virtues are greatly instrumental in reinforcing the moral character that is hidden in God.¹²

Perhaps the best evidence for this is to see the ways in which virtue theory is embodied today.

B. VIRTUE'S FORM

As a whole, virtue is a teleological framework in the sense that it looks to the end to determine ethical or moral good—that is, whatever is virtuous.¹³ But virtue's end is a knotty affair. In the historic sense, goodness ascribes to a platonic form and pursues *eudaimonia* (flourishing) through virtue. This traditional understanding of virtue possesses no essential connection to the triune God or the Bible and is likely the form of virtue which biblicist critiques have in mind. But it is not the exclusive form. Two other forms are worth mentioning here.

The first is Christine Swanton's target-centered virtue, which "is a disposition to respond to, or acknowledge, items within its field or fields in an excellent or good enough way."¹⁴ The shift from goal to target may seem insignificant, but it is a notable departure from Plato. Rather than an idyllic form, good enough is perfectly virtuous, so long as it satisfies the target virtue by what it promotes or defends. In this regard, target-centered virtue is more permissive of vice than its ancient form, moving further away from a biblical-theological category. Enter its contemporary, exemplarist virtue ethics.

Rather than targeting a desired result or pursuing the good and flourishing life, exemplarist virtue identifies the normative motivations of virtuous individuals. Think of it as providing a philosophical rootedness to the 1990's popular church idiom, "What Would Jesus Do?" Linda Zagzebski, one of the leading proponents of exemplarist virtue ethics, writes, "We do not have criteria for goodness in advance of identifying the exemplars of goodness."¹⁵ By seating virtue in an exemplar of virtue, namely God in Trinity, the question shifts from a definitive list to a definitive person. This perspective makes virtue an effectual fruit within the Christian life in step

¹² Benjamin Wirt Farley, *In Praise of Virtue: An Exploration of the Biblical Virtues in a Christian Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 161.

¹³ This is putting aside the aforementioned adaptation of Deontological Virtue Ethics.

¹⁴ Christine Swanton, *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 19.

¹⁵ Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 41.

with the image of God revealed in Christ. This form of virtue is the one best equipped to examine and apply virtue formation in an ecclesial setting.

III. VIRTUE'S MODERN APPLICATION

Today, virtue formation's revival has only grown since its renaissance at Notre Dame. Its study has branches in elements of positive psychology,¹⁶ artificial intelligence,¹⁷ politics,¹⁸ and other increasingly diverse applications. The John Templeton Foundation, as one example, has devoted a significant portion of its grant initiatives specifically to character virtue development. Between 2019 and 2023, Templeton is expected to fund related projects with up to \$325 million.¹⁹ As these fields develop and take new forms and applications, they will inevitably move through two spheres—the individual and the community.

A. THE INDIVIDUAL AND VIRTUE

The individual is the primary sphere of concern within virtue formation. Be that in the traditional framework of habits which form neural pathways in the brain, or spiritual disciplines which shape the soul, the individual ultimately bears the weight of change in virtue or vice. The very question of right versus wrong, which has historically driven so much of moral philosophy, is framed primarily as individual decision-making. Even the communal questions of moral dilemmas, in their concern for a greater number of people, are phrased not to inquire of the masses but of the sole person. But life rarely comes in moral dilemmas—simply not enough people take the trolley anymore. Instead, “even our trivial desires, choices, and acts have moral meaning because they have some effect—no matter how small—on the person we are in process of becoming.”²⁰ The better question then, it would seem, is how the individual ought to consider virtue formation—more than that, how the Christian ought to do so.

There are at least three ways for the individual to embody a distinctly Christian virtue formation. The first is to foster habits which deepen an experiential knowledge of the Divine Exemplar. Consider the call of the people of Israel in Hos 6:3, “So let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. / His going forth is as certain as the dawn; / And He will come to us like the rain, / Like the spring rain watering the earth.”²¹ As the Christian pursues a deep relational knowledge of the person of Christ, the Spirit

¹⁶ McMinn, *The Science of Virtue*.

¹⁷ Shannon Vallor, *Technology and the Virtues: A Philosophical Guide to a Future Worth Wanting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁸ Gisela Striker, “Aristotle’s Ethics as Political Science,” in *The Virtuous Life in Greek Ethics*, Burkhard Reis, ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 127–41.

¹⁹ See <https://www.templeton.org/funding-areas/character-virtue-development>.

²⁰ David L. Norton, “Moral Minimalism,” in *Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue*, Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr., and Howard K. Wettstein, eds. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 186.

²¹ All Scripture will be in the New American Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

gives growth to the believer, shaping them into greater likeness of the true Image of God. He is as certain as the dawn, as life-giving as the spring rain.

The second habit of the Christian is in pursuit of spiritual discipline and the fruit of virtue. Here, mundane habits and practices develop deep rewards in the Christian faith. Take, for example, the application of prayer to just one facet among the full fruit of the Spirit. Joseph Kotva writes,

Learning to pray thus means learning to wait, learning a different sense of time's passage, learning patience. . . . The pastor who desires her own moral transformation, who desires the moral growth and transformation of her parish or congregation, and who desires a more just community, must learn patience. Patience is vital if she is to avoid despair over the slight moral progress, backsliding, and failure that are so often a part of church life. Patience is vital if she is to resist the temptation to manipulative or corrosive means in the name of a just cause. Patience is vital if she is to communicate a gospel that claims that salvation comes, not in frantically working for it, but as a gift.²²

Such applications can be extended into similar practices of reading Scripture, fasting, generosity, worship, fellowship, confession, and more. Habit and spiritual discipline are a synonymous work in the life of the believer.

The final habit of virtue is the application of virtue into the context and social location of the individual. This is more than the fruit of the Spirit or other universal applications of the character of God into the regular practices of the individual's week. This is an attunement to the unique needs to which the Christian can respond, through the Holy Spirit, with the virtue of Christ. Situational to a degree, this would include a virtuous response to racial injustice, spiritual and physical abuse, issues of sexuality, poverty, or whatever else the individual's social location might merit. The world may constantly shift and squirm in birthing pains, but Christ and his virtuous character do not, nor should the Christian.

B. THE COMMUNITY AND VIRTUE

If the individual is the primary target of virtue, the community is the oldest. Plato and Aristotle did not write in a bubble. Their politics and philosophy engaged individuals and considered the citizen, but they did so almost always in relation to the greater *polis*. If Christ leaves the ninety-nine in pursuit of the one, Plato forfeits the one for the ninety-nine. This is not a question of utilitarianism, but an extension of being and doing for the individual as a member of the *polis*. Moreover, it is the question of the Christian within the church and the church's role in the Christian's formation. Evan Hock explains,

To foster the corporate nature of life heightens the awareness of the church as an ethical community. . . . Our discipleship then

²² Joseph J. Kotva, Jr., "The Formation of Pastors, Parishioners, and Problems: A Virtue Reframing of Clergy Ethics," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 17 (1997): 276.

must never be abstracted from the sense and duty of membership in the church . . . by modeling virtue: keeping promises, honoring commitments, speaking to edify, showing forgiveness and such examples.²³

There is an obvious and significant place of the community in virtue formation.

As such, the church would do well to consider the ways in which its corporate nature fosters virtue or emboldens vice. Even the structure of the church gathering can be an intentional part of virtue formation. Scott Aniol writes, “How a church worships week in and week out forms the people—it molds their behavior by shaping their inclinations through habitual practices, because the shape of the liturgy transmits its values.”²⁴ Essentially, a congregation’s regular use of “Scripture-shaped gospel liturgies will inform people’s liturgies of life, which will in turn form their moral behavior.”²⁵ The ecclesial community is one that reinforces existing character through habit. It is also one which reveals and imparts the initial seeds of the garden-bed of virtue. As Michael Rhodes reflects, “Formative practices do not just *require* character, political practices, a shared story, and a communal *telos*. They *cultivate* virtues, *embed* participants into a narrative, *shape* a community’s politics, and *orient* the community towards that shared *telos*.”²⁶ This is the proper love of one’s neighbor, doing good to all, and especially to those of the household of faith (Gal 6:10). The community’s role in the individual’s virtue formation is a palpable necessity and should not be understated. But it should also be asked if the community itself is capable of virtue.

It is one thing to speak of community as comprised of individuals and another to speak of that same community as having a single personhood or conscience beyond that of the individual. This has often been described as a corporate personhood.²⁷ The corporate person is a claim of ontological being. This is more than a singular representative expression given to a plurality of individuals in the sense of name or identity, such as that of a group, entity, nation, or corporation. Instead, this is towards the possibility of a corporate person as holding a unified conscience, unique to itself. For example, in the Hebrew Bible when Israel is indicted by God for its idolatry, it is not simply that some, most, or even all of the individuals within Israel are culpable, but that collectively the nation as a unified person would also be indicted. The corporate person is often represented in a single person or group, such as the king or priests, that serve as a single proxy for the

²³ Evan C. Hock, “Theology and Ethics,” *Reformation and Revival* 5 (1996): 46–47.

²⁴ Scott Aniol, “Practice Makes Perfect: Corporate Worship and the Formation of Spiritual Virtue,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 10 (Spring 2017): 101.

²⁵ Aniol, “Practice Makes Perfect,” 104.

²⁶ Michael Jemison Rhodes, “‘Forward unto Virtue’: Formative Practices and I Corinthians 11:17–34,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 11 (2017): 136.

²⁷ David McClendon, “It’s Not Business, It’s Personal: Implicit Religion in the Corporate Personhood Debate,” *Implicit Religion* 17 (2014): 47–61.

unified whole. This representation stands less as a symbolic representative and more as an embodied envoy of the larger whole.²⁸

The principle of corporate personhood is most often applied to the question of corporate culpability, and it demonstrates its limitations in that regard. A corporate person does not possess an agency outside of its individual actors. It is unable to act apart from the persons which constitute it. If it is guilty or innocent, vicious or virtuous, it does so as an extension of the agency of its individuals. Further, the term “person” carries with it a connotation seemingly unique to human persons, as those individuals possessing a soul or bearing the image of God. Perhaps it would be better then to speak of the conceived entity not as simply a corporate person in an economic sense alone, but as one possessing an objective spirit.²⁹ The question that remains concerns the unique ways in which any group can speak of a representative conscience beyond the consciences of its individual actors.

If this is possible, it would be most apparent, and most relevant for our purposes, in the church. More so than any other grouping, the body of Christ is unified in conscience as it submits itself to the will of the triune God. This submission of the individual will joins the reciprocal will of others in a declaration of subserviency to the greater body. Dietrich Bonhoeffer refers to this structure as the objective spirit which, “thrusts itself as a third entity right between the two who are bound together . . . Thus the persons themselves experience their community as something real outside themselves, a community that distances itself from them without their willing it, rising above them.”³⁰ Perhaps it would be best to illustrate the claim by way of example.

If there is a representative conscience which is capable of vice or virtue, it would be evident in instances of corporate error and guilt. Corporate culpability speaks to the unity of a group in a mutual accountability which recognizes that the actions of individuals within the same body have bearing and reflection beyond them. This speaks to the continued existence of the corporate person beyond the participation or even lifetimes of its members. This is most obvious in corporate persons which exist across

²⁸ An analogy to aid this distinction might be the difference between those who view communion strictly as a memorial practice and those that view it as possessing a real spiritual presence.

²⁹ Adam Kotsko, “Objective Spirit and Continuity in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer,” *Philosophy and Theology* 17 (2005): 17–31. Both the term “corporate person” and “objective spirit” have nuances which separate them. In general, the former term finds its primary function in the economic, while the latter finds its function in the sociological. The terms are by no means synonymous, nor are they innately theological. For the purposes of this essay, I have chosen to speak of them distinctly as corporate persons possessing objective spirits. Hegelian to a degree, the perspective I wish to draw out is more by way of Bonhoeffer, who roots the spirit in theological categories rather than in Hegel’s expression of Reason. See Kotsko, “Objective Spirit and Community,” 22.

³⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 98.

several generations, such as Israel's confession of sin for themselves and for the sins of their fathers in Neh 9:2 or, more recently, in consideration of the Southern Baptist Convention.

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) was hardly birthed from virtue. The SBC formed through its departure from the Triennial Convention in 1845 in order to allow slaveholders to serve as missionaries.³¹ The SBC was not only complicit in slavery and racism, it was a leading proponent.³² One hundred and fifty years later, the SBC publicly repented of this past in its 1995 "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention." Most relevantly, the resolution states,

WHEREAS, Our relationship to African-Americans has been hindered from the beginning by the role that slavery played in the formation of the Southern Baptist Convention; and WHEREAS, Many of our Southern Baptist forbears defended the right to own slaves, and either participated in, supported, or acquiesced in the particularly inhumane nature of American slavery; and WHEREAS, In later years Southern Baptists failed, in many cases, to support, and in some cases opposed, legitimate initiatives to secure the civil rights of African-Americans; . . . Be it further RESOLVED, That we lament and repudiate historic acts of evil such as slavery from which we continue to reap a bitter harvest, and we recognize that the racism which yet plagues our culture today is inextricably tied to the past; and Be it further RESOLVED, That we apologize to all African-Americans for condoning and/or perpetuating individual and systemic racism in our lifetime; and we genuinely repent of racism of which we have been guilty, whether consciously (Psalm 19:13) or unconsciously (Leviticus 4:27); and Be it further RESOLVED, That we ask forgiveness from our African-American brothers and sisters, acknowledging that our own healing is at stake; and Be it further RESOLVED, That we hereby commit ourselves to eradicate racism in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry . . .³³

The language of this resolution is not one which overwhelmingly affirms the concept of corporate personhood, even limiting its language to "racism in our lifetime." In fact, the concept would likely ruffle more than a few feathers in a denomination which holds firmly to local church autonomy, the priesthood of the believer, and a ready insistence on the place of the

³¹ Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archives, 1845 Proceedings of the Southern Baptist Convention (Southern Baptist Convention, Richmond, VA): 12–18. http://www.sbhla.org/sbc_annuals.

³² See Paul J. Morrison, *Integration: Race, T. B. Maston, and Hope for the Desegregated Church* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022), 25–29.

³³ "Resolution on Racial Reconciliation on the 150th Anniversary of the Southern Baptist Convention" (1995). <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/resolution-on-racial-reconciliation-on-the-150th-anniversary-of-the-southern-baptist-convention/>.

individual.³⁴ But the need for such a resolution speaks a different word. The existence of a corporate personhood would sustain the SBC's culpability as an entity beyond the lives and sins of the individuals which founded it. Its corporate voice here has been seen through its resolutions, policies, and statements of faith. Even as some might point out that the SBC is not strictly a denomination, but a convention made up of local autonomous churches, its individual churches face the same problem. This is not to depart from the question of virtue, but to establish its need.

If the preceding does in fact show the reality of the objective spirit of a corporate person's culpability and sin, it demonstrates the reality of corporate vice. As such, corporate virtue also has its place. Corporate repentance reveals and fosters the fruits of corporate humility and self-control. Its ongoing work and progress of repair would then be a corporate virtue formation. Not only does the individual who commits themselves to the virtue of Christ grow, but so does the corporate person of whom they are part. To be sure, there are a great number of questions which follow this digression, but if there is an objective spirit, the church and her shepherds ought to consider well the obligation they bear to not only foster virtue in the individual, but of the community itself.

IV. THE PASTOR THEOLOGIAN AND VIRTUE FORMATION

The role of the pastor theologian in helping form virtuous communities is one of great opportunity. One future direction of virtue formation in the church is the expansion of the virtuous being through knowledge of the full person of Christ. Rather than a reductionist vision of virtue, Stephen Bilynskij advocates against the temptation to oversimplify virtue beyond the cardinal and instead to a single fount. He writes,

For the Christian, we might be tempted to single out love as the distinctive mark of Christian character. Love is certainly given a prominent place in the Christian story. But to base all of Christian ethics on a single principle of love, a la Joseph Fletcher's *Situation Ethics*, is to forget that the story we live as Christians is a complex story. It is no accident that love abides with faith and hope, for, in the complexity of the story that God is telling in the life of Christ and his people, love could not abide without faith and hope.³⁵

³⁴ This of course would depend on the individual member, pastor, or church within the SBC. It is interesting to note that at this point the conception of individual versus systemic or corporate guilt ranges greatly between racial groups. Specifically, the gap widens most between White evangelicals and Black evangelicals, as White evangelicals will emphasize the individual to the severity of an exclusion of the corporate altogether. See Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Kindle Location 2350. Further, this is not to say that the doctrines of ecclesial autonomy or the priesthood of the believer are at any way at odds with the concept, but simply to show the tradition's emphasis on the individual.

³⁵ Stephen S. Bilynskij, "Christian Ethics and the Ethics of Virtue," *The Covenant Quarterly* 45 (1987): 130.

Not only is this a complex story, but it is also finds its source in a complex, yet simple, God. The root of virtue is found in the eternal character of God. Love is not an action which God carries out, but a standing disposition which radiates from God's very person. It is not that God is loving, but that God is love. Such is the case with all of virtue.

The virtues are not divisible attributes of God, but the essence of God himself.³⁶ Divine simplicity then would push the pastor theologian to consider which virtues are essential to the person of God, and which masquerade as such, but are altogether glittering vices. This could be done through a systematic approach through any classical list of virtues, such as the compilation of Aristotle's golden mean by Benjamin Farley,³⁷ and placing it within the formula, "God is *x*" to measure its veracity. It could also be done through an application of virtue to questions and topics of ethical, pastoral, and theological concern. Pastor theologians have much to consider to this end.

Ecclesial theology is a weighty task. Christ has charged those who keep his sheep to protect, feed, and love them as he would. His is a charge to exhort, admonish, and equip the saints to grow in Christlikeness. If virtue is seated in Christ, then pastor theologians must embody virtue, model it, and encourage it in their spheres of ministry. Its future study holds the potential to greatly edify the church, and its neglect similarly to cause and perpetuate much harm.

V. CONCLUSION

It is my hope that I have presented an accurate picture of virtue formation in general as well as specifically as it relates to the church today. I believe that virtue offers an opportunity for a fresh engagement of theology and ethics in ways which move to the heart of our growth in Christ rather than trendy issuism and moral dilemmas. The question of virtue's form and the spheres of its practice ought to be of particular interest to the members of the body of Christ, to grow into good and generous neighbors in the kingdom—individually and corporately.

³⁶ Matthew Barrett, *None Greater: The Undomesticated Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019).

³⁷ Farley, *In Praise of Virtue*, 15.

PEOPLE OF HOPE IN AN AGE OF ANXIETY: POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND THEOLOGICAL VIRTUE

REV. MATT O'REILLY, PH.D.¹

“Even before the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and its aftermath, the Western world had been experiencing a growing crisis of hope.”²

–Timothy Keller

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

–Romans 15:13, NRSV

I. INTRODUCTION

The suggestion that we are in a “new age of anxiety” will resonate with many.³ Despite major industrial, scientific, and economic advances over the last two centuries, pessimism about the future is on the rise.⁴ Political polarization, global terrorism, the decline of the middle class, rising mental health problems, the threat of recession, and the pandemic are among the issues that lead people to worry about the quality of life their children and grandchildren will have.⁵ Timothy Keller suggests that our increased pessimism about the future is related to a loss of social trust

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² Timothy Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear: The Resurrection and the Meaning of Easter* (New York: Viking, 2021), xv.

³ Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear*, xv.

⁴ Kim Parker, Rich Morin, and Julianna Menasce Horowitz, “Looking to the Future, Public Sees an America in Decline on Many Fronts,” Pew Research Center, Washington, DC (21 March 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/03/21/public-sees-an-america-in-decline-on-many-fronts/>.

⁵ Cf. Pankaj Mishra, *Age of Anger: A History of the Present* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017), 9–10. See the discussion of Mishra in Joel D. Lawrence, “Pastoring in an Age of Anger,” *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 9, no. 1 (2022): 49–58.

which undermines the institutions on which our society is built. He notes that our advances have, ironically, produced new major challenges. We can travel quickly around the world by air, but that convenience made it nearly impossible to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶ We are more connected than ever through technology and social media, yet many feel isolated, lonely, and discontent. Andrew Sullivan puts it this way, “As we have slowly and surely attained more progress, we have lost something that undergirds all of it: meaning, cohesion, and a different, deeper kind of happiness than the satiation of all our earthly needs.”⁷ Counterintuitively, perhaps, the progress we have made has not made us happier.

The church stands in this age of anxiety as a people whose shared life ought to be marked by hope. Even a cursory reading of the NT demonstrates that followers of Jesus are called to embody hope, whether in peace and ease or suffering and difficulty.⁸ Consider the benediction of Rom 15:13, where God himself is identified as “the God of *hope*” who is able to make his people “abound in *hope*.”⁹ The experience of abundant hope is grounded in divine agency because it is God who “fills” believers with “all joy and peace.” The Holy Spirit is named explicitly as working powerfully to make the people of God “abound in hope.” Passages like this would suggest that, though the world at large feels growing anxiety about the future, the church is called and empowered by God to bear witness to a different future—one marked by light more than darkness, promise more than fear.

This contrast between the pessimism that characterizes much of the West and the hope that ought to characterize the church raises questions. How do we cultivate hope among the people of God? How do the people of God embody hope in relation to a world often marked by anxiety? How do pastors guard those under their care from the temptation to participate in cultural pessimism?

Our consideration of the psychology of hope in relation to Christian hope will proceed in three steps. We first begin with a survey of two major conceptual models in positive psychology to describe and measure the experience of hope. The first is a cognitive model and the second is an integrated model. Second, we turn to Paul’s letter to the Romans to consider whether and to what extent Christian Scripture and theology may have categories that resonate with what we have learned about the psychology of hope. Third, we conclude with a pastoral reflection on the need to cultivate hope and strategies for doing so among the people of God. As we proceed, it will become increasingly clear that attention to the way God has created us as psychological beings is a valuable tool for articulating and nurturing the theological virtue of hope.

⁶ Keller, *Hope in Times of Fear*, xvii.

⁷ Andrew Sullivan, “The World Is Better Than Ever. Why Are We Miserable?” *New York*, March 9, 2018, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/03/sullivan-things-are-better-than-ever-why-are-we-miserable.html>.

⁸ See, e.g., Acts 23:6; 24:15; 26:6; 28:20; Rom 4:18; 5:2, 4–5; 8:20, 24; 12:12; 1 Cor 13:13; 2 Cor 3:12; Gal 5:5; Eph 1:18; 2:12; 4:4; Heb 3:6; 6:11, 18; 7:19; 1 Pet 1:3, 21; 3:15.

⁹ Emphasis added.

II. POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY AND THE QUESTION OF HOPE

As a discipline, psychology deals with mental processes, the way those processes are expressed in behavior, and the causes of those processes. A significant amount of attention is given to mental disorders and abnormal behaviors. In 1998, Martin Seligman, then president of the American Psychological Association, suggested psychologists should also devote time to considering positive experiences. His comment contributed to the rise of positive psychology. As Mark McMinn recounts, “Almost overnight a vibrant contemporary science of virtue was born.”¹⁰ Seligman and Christopher Peterson later described positive psychology as a focus on “what is right about people and specifically about the strengths of character that make the good life possible.”¹¹ When it comes to the virtue of hope, positive psychology has tended to work around two theoretical frameworks—one cognitive and generally associated with C. R. Snyder, and the other more integrated and associated with Anthony Scioli. We will take each in turn.

A. THE COGNITIVE MODEL (C. R. SNYDER)

In a 1995 article, C. R. Snyder defined hope as, “the process of thinking about one’s goals, along with the motivation to move toward (agency) and the ways to achieve (pathways) those goals.”¹² Snyder takes human beings to be fundamentally goal-oriented and suggests that there are two aspects to this feature of our psychology. The first is the agency component, which involves “the cognitive willpower or energy to get moving toward one’s goals.”¹³ The second is the pathways component, which is “the perceived ability to generate routes to get somewhere.”¹⁴ Thus, as we think about our goals, we engage in a process of cognitive evaluation in terms of agency (“goal-directed determination”) and pathways (“planning of ways to meet goals”).¹⁵ Do we have the motivation and will to move toward our desired future? And can we see a legitimate path toward achieving that future? Some people may be motivated to move toward a goal, but without a feasible path toward that goal their level of hope in achieving it will be lower. Similarly, a person may see legitimate paths toward a certain future, but without the motivation to take one of those paths, their sense of hope in relation to that future will be lower. Higher-hope persons will approach various situations with an increased sense of agency and pathways. They

¹⁰ Mark R. McMinn, *The Science of Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2017), 2.

¹¹ Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004), 4.

¹² C. R. Snyder, “Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope,” *Journal of Counseling & Development* 73 (1995): 355, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676>; cf. C. R. Snyder et al., “Hope and Academic Success in College,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 94 (2002): 820–26, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.94.4.820>; see further C. R. Snyder, *Psychology of Hope: You Can Get Here from There* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

¹³ Snyder, “Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope,” 355.

¹⁴ Snyder, “Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope,” 355.

¹⁵ Snyder, “Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope,” 355.

tend to approach goals with positive emotions and focus on success rather than failure. Goals are seen as challenges rather than barriers. In contrast, lower-hope persons see things more negatively in general and tend to focus on failure over success. Snyder sees this as the result of their poor perception of agency and pathways.

To measure a person's general level of hope, Snyder employs a "hope scale" (or "future scale").¹⁶ Individuals are asked to respond to twelve statements with one of the following numbers: 1 = definitely false, 2 = mostly false, 3 = mostly true, and 4 = definitely true.¹⁷ The items on the scale are mixed in such a way that statements 2, 9, 10, and 12 measure agency, while statements 1, 4, 6, and 8 measure pathways. A person's hope scale score is determined by adding the value of their responses to those questions. Items 3, 5, 7, and 11 were included to obscure the content of the scale. Statements to gauge agency include: "I energetically pursue my goals"; "my past experiences have prepared me well for my future"; "I've been pretty successful in life"; "I meet the goals that I set for myself."¹⁸ Statements to gauge pathways include: "I can think of many ways to get out of a jam"; "there are lots of ways around any problem"; "I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me"; "even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem."¹⁹

The Hope Scale provides counselors a tool for diagnosing low-hope persons and crafting strategies for nurturing hope in them. For persons who may have difficulty regarding agency, Snyder suggests a process of clarifying goals. Goals should be concrete, not vague. Higher-hope people tend to have very vivid goals that they easily describe to others. Lower-hope people will often struggle to articulate their goals. Thus, learning to identify specific goals may provide a heightened sense of energy for attaining those goals.²⁰ Snyder also suggests that hope can be nurtured by focusing initially on step-by-step processes to achieving short-term doable goals. That is not to say long-term goals should be avoided. It is to say that completing several goals in the short-term carries potential for increasing one's sense of agency and pathways with a sense of self-satisfaction at achieving a desired future.²¹ A person's sense of agency and pathways may be built or rebuilt by learning to talk about success, thinking of difficulties in terms of strategy rather than talent, reflecting on previous successes, listening to testimonials about other people's successes, developing friendships with goal-oriented people, seeking goal-oriented role models, physical exercise, and proper nutrition.²²

¹⁶ Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," 357.

¹⁷ Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," 357.

¹⁸ Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," 357.

¹⁹ Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," 357.

²⁰ Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," 356.

²¹ Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," 356.

²² Snyder, "Conceptualizing, Measuring, and Nurturing Hope," 356.

Mark McMinn has raised concerns about Snyder's cognitive model for hope, particularly as it relates to a Christian understanding of hope. The critique focuses primarily on the way Snyder sees hope as a matter of individual vision and willpower.²³ While these dynamics are certainly present in each of us, McMinn argues that our sense of hope is also formed in relationship to others, whether God, members of our family, or our community of faith.²⁴ McMinn's encouragement to consider relational dynamics of hope reminds us that we are necessarily embedded in communities that shape our sense of self and our perceptions of the future. This means we should seek out models for conceptualizing hope that go beyond "will and ways." This suggestion is likely to resonate with Christians who understand the will to be damaged by sin and our vision darkened by depravity.²⁵ A deeply Christian account of hope will take into consideration the way our agency and vision are restored in relationship with the triune God and in the context of local church. As we will see below, positive psychology and social psychology provide tools for conceptualizing hope in ways that take these relational dynamics into account.

B. THE INTEGRATIVE MODEL (ANTHONY SCIOLI ET AL.)

In a 2011 article, Anthony Scioli, Michael Ricci, Than Nyugen, and Erica R. Scioli defined hope as "*a future-directed, four-channel emotion network, constructed from biological, psychological, and social resources.*"²⁶ This approach is grounded in the conviction that the preference among psychologists for purely cognitive goal-oriented models of hope neglects crucial affective and religious dimensions.²⁷ The four channels they identify are: mastery, attachment, survival, and spiritual systems.²⁸ The advantage of conceptualizing hope as an integrated network of interrelated parts is that it provides a range of metaphors for articulating processes often associated with hope. To make the point, Scioli et al. suggest that hope for power can be understood in light of a control network, while hope for presence or relationships can be understood in terms of a social network, and hope for protection in terms of a safety network.²⁹ The four channels are said to develop in a semiautonomous way. That is, one channel may feed two or more of the others. A person with a strong religious background may have spiritual sensibilities that shape his or her mastery, attachment, and survival responses. Alternatively, a person's mastery, attachment, and survival systems

²³ McMinn, *The Science of Virtue*, 127–29.

²⁴ McMinn, *The Science of Virtue*, 132, 136–37.

²⁵ For a recent and comprehensive account of the doctrine of sin and its implications, see Thomas H. McCall, *Against God and Nature: The Doctrine of Sin*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).

²⁶ Anthony Scioli et al., "Hope: Its Nature and Measurement," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 3 (2011): 79, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020903>. Italics original.

²⁷ Scioli et al., "Hope," 78.

²⁸ Scioli et al., "Hope," 79.

²⁹ Scioli et al., "Hope," 79.

could flow together to impact his or her spiritual experiences and growth.³⁰ This approach looks at hope more thoroughly than the cognitive model by taking into account aspects of behavior, faith, relationships, social context, fear management, integrity, culture, levels of support, etc.

Since the cognitive model of hope described above is focused largely on goals, it offers no way of evaluating the attachment, survival, or spiritual aspects of hope. The result is that higher scores on the hope scale often correlate narrowly with achievements (e.g., college grades).³¹ The integrated network approach seeks to measure levels of trust (attachment), perceptions of skill (mastery), one's ability to handle difficulty (survival), and sources of inspiration (spirituality).³² The question remains, however, as to whether these psychological approaches resonate with a theological understanding of hope. That is the question to which we now turn.

III. ROMANS AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HOPE

Positive psychology has given us two frameworks for conceptualizing hope. The question before us now is the extent to which these scientific frameworks resonate with hope as a theological virtue. As an initial step toward that question, we turn to the way hope is portrayed in Christian Scripture. Since an extended analysis of hope in the Bible is beyond the scope of this essay, we will, instead, take Romans as a case study to consider how the psychology of hope might bring fresh insight to our reading of Scripture. Coming to the motif of hope in Romans from this angle will involve keeping our eyes open for the sorts of cognitive and affective concepts we have encountered in the above survey. How might Paul's portrayal of hope relate to questions of agency and pathways? To what extent do questions of mastery, attachment, survival, and spirituality occupy his understanding of hope? Does one psychological framework resonate more deeply with Paul's account of hope? To be clear, the goal is not an anachronistic reading that imposes modernist scientific categories on an ancient text. I am not suggesting Paul was operating with models from the field of positive psychology. Rather, these categories function as a lens we might place over the text to see what emerges. We are not looking to force these categories on to Romans. In fact, if none of the categories resonate with Paul's concept of hope, it would raise further potentially valuable questions for us. That would provide space to consider how and why present-day conceptions of hope differ from Paul's.

When we think of scholarship on Romans, the theme of hope is probably not the first to come to mind. That does not mean, however, that hope as a motif is not significant for Paul's argument in his longest extant letter. It is certainly true that *ἐλπίς* does not appear as frequently as *δικαίω* and its cognates, nor as often as the *πίστις* word group. But it does show up in several key moments in the overall argument of the letter. The language

³⁰ Scioli et al., "Hope," 79.

³¹ Scioli et al., "Hope," 82.

³² Scioli et al., "Hope," 84.

of hope is associated with the Abraham narrative in Rom 4:18 (twice); it bookends Rom 5–8, the second major segment of the letter (Rom 5:2, 4, 5; 8:20, 24 [3x]); and it appears twice in the climactic benediction of Rom 15:3. In what follows, we will look specifically at the end of Rom 4 and the beginning of Rom 5.

A. ABRAHAM'S HOPE IN ROM 4:18

The language of hope in Romans appears first in association with Abraham. Paul says of Abraham, “Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become ‘the father of many nations’” (4:18 NRSV). This double use of hope language comes in the context of Paul’s discussion of Abraham’s faith as justification for his patriarchal relationship not only to Jews but to Gentiles also. Paul is reflecting on Gen 15 and 17, in which God promises Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky (15:5) and that he will be the father of many nations (17:5). Abraham’s well-known problem is that both he and his wife, Sarah, are too old to have children. Paul’s repetition of *ἐλπίζω* in the phrase *ἐλπίζω ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι*—which the NRSV translates “hoping against hope”—emphasizes the strength of Abraham’s hope in what would otherwise be deeply *hopeless* circumstances.

Taking this passage of Scripture through the lens of Scioli’s hope network, we quickly recognize the role of trust (or attachment) in the formation and maintenance of Abraham’s hope. Paul grounds the patriarch’s hope for descendants in his trust in God: “He did not weaken in faith (*πίστις*) when he considered the deadness of his own body, which was about one hundred years old” (4:19, author’s translation). Paul’s language of faith here cannot mean mere intellectual assent. This is no shallow belief. Rather, Abraham exhibits a deep level of trust in God that undergirds his optimism about the future.

That Abraham exhibits optimism about the future despite circumstances that normally would mean he must remain childless also resonates with the category of survival in Scioli’s hope network. Abraham is in a situation that would be unspeakably difficult for an ancient Near Eastern man. Without a child of his own, a slave in Abraham’s house would be his heir (Gen 16:3) and his name would not be carried on after his death. The significance of this difficulty is highlighted by the Ishmael narrative in Gen 16. That Abraham attempted to secure an heir by conceiving a child with Hagar illustrates the lengths to which a man (and his wife!) in his situation would go. After the failure of that plan, Abraham found himself in a position where his dependance on God was essential for the survival of his name. His increasing trust in God thus grounds his hope and enables him to persevere in a situation of great difficulty. Taken this way we can conclude that Paul’s portrayal of Abraham’s faith resonates with Scioli’s hope network and can be framed in terms of attachment and survival.

When we take Paul’s account of Abraham’s faith in light of Snyder’s agency/pathways framework, two points can be made. First, in and of himself Abraham has neither the power to provide himself an heir nor a

pathway for doing so. As Paul indicates, at one hundred years old, Abraham's body might as well be dead when it comes to fathering a child. He lacks sufficient agency to have a son. Further, with Sarah's barrenness, the pathway for having a child is not present. He has neither power nor opportunity. If hope is framed exclusively in terms of personal will and way, as Snyder frames it in his conception of hope, then we find little that resonates with the Pauline account of hope. Second, if we read Paul's account of Abraham's hope with a view to agency and pathways, then both are exclusively attributed to God, who brings life out of Abraham's dead body (cf. Rom 4:17). Thus, if we are talking about hope as a theological virtue, we must include the agency and power of God to create pathways for moving forward.

B. CHRISTIAN HOPE IN ROM 5:2

Hope is understood in relation to trust and survival again just a few verses later in Rom 5:2. But this time, instead of the particular case of Abraham, Paul is discussing Christian hope in general. As he did with Abraham, Paul frames Christian hope in relation to justification by faith (5:1). Justification has an instrumental role as the means to peace with God and hope of sharing in the glory of God. This should be understood in relation to Paul's claim that "all have sinned and now fall short of the glory of God" in Rom 3:23. If sin means humanity is unable to participate in God's glory, then justification deals with the consequence of sin and reintroduces hope for sharing in God's glory (Rom 5:2). Notably, justification is not said to bring glory presently. Rather, justification brings *hope* for glory, which is framed as something to be received in the future (cf. Rom 8:17). This optimistic vision of the future is then grounded on and maintained by trust in God.

Paul does not use the language of spirituality here, but in so much as his favorable vision of the future is inspired by the work of Christ to reconcile believers to God, his view could be said to resonate with Scioli's way of describing spirituality. What does come to the fore, given Scioli's model, is Paul's insistence that "we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Rom 5:4 NRSV). While Paul's way of framing hope is not identical to Scioli's, there are points of overlap. For Paul, hope is the result of character transformation forged in suffering after a believer has been reconciled to God. It is hope of participating in the glory of God—a favorable vision of the future if ever there was one—that enables the believer to handle difficulty and see it in light of God's work to transform her character.

If we take this through the lens of agency and pathways, we may say once again that any concept of human agency must account for the priority of divine agency. Left in our sinful state, we have neither the power to attain future glory nor the pathway toward future glory. For Paul, God takes the initiative in giving Christ for our justification (Rom 3:24–25). Human agency only comes into the picture after God takes the initiative to

provide for our reconciliation. Individuals have agency in that we respond to God's initiative, but that agency depends on God's prior work. Human agency also shows up for Paul in terms of enduring suffering. But again, this is not absolute agency; it is dependent on "this grace in which we stand" (Rom 5:2 NRSV).

Our consideration of Rom 4:18 and 5:2 would suggest that Scioli's hope network carries more potential for relating the psychology of hope to hope as a theological virtue. When we consider agency and pathways apart from divine agency, there is little for Christian theology to say. Christian hope must include an anticipation of participating in divine glory. Left to our own agency, we are left without hope. That does not mean Snyder's model is altogether useless. By raising the question of agency, we are invited to consider the agency of God to rescue us from sin as an expression of his grace.

IV. PASTORAL REFLECTIONS

We return now to the question of the church's vocation to cultivate hope in our new age of anxiety. The very suggestion that we live in an age of anxiety would suggest that we need to be thinking about hope in relation to Scioli's notion of survival. Anxiety itself is a sort of difficulty, and a growing number of people dealing with growing levels of anxiety regarding a range of cultural difficulties would seem to indicate that the time is ripe for the church to offer hope. To that point, the fact that increasing numbers of people are dealing with anxiety should motivate the church to embrace the vocation of proclaiming and offering a fresh vision of hope to the world.

A. ANXIETY AND HOPELESSNESS

The very fact that we are in what can be called an age of anger or anxiety should draw our attention to the question of expectations. Anxiety (and possibly) anger arise because expectations go unmet, or because our previous expectations appear increasingly unlikely to be realized. And what are the faltering expectations that have given rise to this new age of anxiety? Mishra points to the increasing loss of confidence in the American Dream. Earlier generations believed deeply that hard work and determination would give rise to a life generally marked by comfort—home ownership, picket fences, 2.5 children, and a dog. This idealized image of the American life was prevalent in the middle of the twentieth century. But that expectation of the good life has, for many, given way to constant worry over how the bills will be paid, whether groceries can be afforded, and fear that the car may break down.³³ The very presence of anger and anxiety in this situation suggests some amount of presumption about what life should be like, what we deserve, and how much privilege we think we have. Why do we think we deserve a life free from hardship, especially when so many people in so much of the world live with daily hardship and no expectation of relief?

³³ Mishra, *Age of Anger*, 278–79.

Given the expectation of a life of comfort free from difficulty (and the disappointment-induced anxiety experienced by so many), it is striking to note how frequently the NT reminds believers to expect hardship. “In this world you will have trouble,” Jesus tells his disciples, “But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 NIV). Freedom from anxiety or anger or fear is not here portrayed as a life free from difficulty; rather it is framed as a life of hardship in which believers persevere with hope—“take heart!”—because of their communion with Jesus in his victory. In 2 Tim 2:9, the apostle Paul draws attention to the hardship he suffers for the gospel. But his hardship is no occasion for despair. Rather, he celebrates the counter-intuitive advance of the gospel despite his apostolic chains (cf. Phil 1:12–18).

We may consider that one feature of the church’s vocation is to articulate accurate expectations regarding life and the answers to questions of comfort in relation to hardship.³⁴ When believers embody hope despite hardship, we model for the world both an accurate accounting of what we may expect from life and an appropriate posture in which to engage the challenges that will inevitably come. In doing so, we may be able to increasingly untangle the deceptive merging of the American Dream with the gospel of Jesus Christ, which teaches us to expect hardship rather than ease and to hope in the one who endured infinite suffering on our behalf.

B. THE NECESSITY OF DIVINE AGENCY

If pastors, theologians, and psychologists are going to engage one another around the question of hope, it will be necessary to carefully distinguish between divine and human agency. For the Christian theologian, human agency can only be understood in relation to divine agency, but not all psychologists will acknowledge the category of divine agency. We found repeatedly that Snyder’s conception of hope shared less in common with Paul’s understanding of hope, particularly as these different conceptions relate to agency. Scioli’s hope network, however, was more useful for reading Paul because the relationship of divine and human agency could be articulated in relation to attachment and trust. In both Paul’s account of Abraham’s hope and his general statements about Christian hope, the apostle assumes the priority of divine agency. For Paul, human hope ultimately depends on God’s provision for us. Left to ourselves, we have neither power nor opportunity to attain hope. Human agents are enabled through the work of the divine agent.

C. PREACH THE MEANS AND THE END

Our readings of Rom 4:18 and 5:2 both highlighted the instrumental relationship between faith as the condition of justification and hope for the future. Faithful preachers will consistently articulate the rich truth of

³⁴ See the discussion of divine promise in Lawrence, “Pastoring in an Age of Anger,” 55–58.

this comforting doctrine that we are accepted by God, not for any worth or merit in ourselves, but only on the basis of the perfect and sufficient work of Christ. We may at times be so focused on justification that we preach it as an end in itself. This, however, is not the way justification functions in Paul's theology. Justification is not itself an end. It is a means to the proximate end of present hope for the future and the ultimate end of participating in the glory of God. Attention to the function of justification by faith in relation to hope will help us cultivate hope among the people of God. We are reminded that Christian hope is always eschatological. Scripture does not promise the full realization of the freedom for which we hope in the present life. That awaits the future resurrection of the body when the last enemy will be defeated. The sanctified character of the believer's life between justification and future bodily resurrection serves to remind all—believers and unbelievers—that our risen Lord is able to give us hope in the present and actualize our hope in the future.

D. PRACTICES THAT CULTIVATE HOPE

If the people of God are to be a people of hope in an age of anxiety, it will require attention to practices that cultivate hope. Peter Leithart says that “The church’s existence, activities, and ministries nourish hope because they are specific avenues of communion with God.”³⁵ From a Christian perspective, true and lasting hope will not be mustered through self-referential perceptions of agency and pathways. Rather, hope comes from being rightly related to God and communing with him through word and sacrament. Paul remarks in Rom 15:4 that Scripture is an instrument for cultivating hope. The practice of reading Scripture with the church is not merely a matter of information or education. The biblical narrative of God’s saving acts is formational. It forms hope in us because it calls our attention to God’s faithfulness in the past and calls us to expect God to be likewise faithful in the future. The crucial thing is to be specific.³⁶ Pastors will be wise to explicitly highlight the power of Scripture in forming hope in the hearers of Scripture. Different texts and different genres will do this differently. Narratives invite us to consider hope in story form. Epistles exhort us to be people of hope. The Psalms invite us to take hardship seriously and yet to trust in God for hope. Texts of lament do the same. Apocalyptic literature invites us to imagine a world in which a lamb reigns in an eschatological garden, to remember that the powers that carve up the world for their own ends will not finally stand victorious. The practice of reading Scripture—both publicly and privately—is necessary for moving from despair to abiding hope. And the link between that practice and the cultivation of hope should be articulated explicitly and frequently.

If the reading and proclamation of Scripture is a practice that narrates hope, the sacraments are a practice that dramatize it. The waters of baptism

³⁵ Peter J. Leithart, *God of Hope* (West Monroe, LA: Theopolis Books, 2022), 84.

³⁶ Leithart, *God of Hope*, 85.

wash over us, effecting a covenant with “the one who loved us and gave himself for us” (Eph 5:2). This image takes the reality of sin seriously and yet invites us to consider and worship the God who does not run from our filth but instead washes us to make us fit for his presence. This dramatization is deeply hopeful because it insists that our depravity does not have the final word and that God is committed to bringing his people into communion with himself. That communion is marked by movement from our bath of covenantal cleansing to a feast of hope.³⁷ When the apostle Paul remarks that, with the sacrament, God’s people “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26 NRSV), he reveals that the Eucharist is fundamentally oriented towards the future. The language of the Lord’s coming is picked up later in the same letter and indicates the time when the last enemy of God (and of the people of God) will be defeated, when mortality will give way to life, when sin and death will be swallowed up by resurrection life. If our practice of the Lord’s Supper only draws our attention backwards to our Lord’s death, then we have not yet come to see the full formative power of the meal. The eschatological orientation of the Eucharist makes it a meal of hope. Again, our practice of communion should make this explicit.

V. CONCLUSION

It falls to pastors to lead the church to embrace the distinct application of its vocation in this age of anxiety, and positive psychology draws our attention to our creatureliness and the way we experience anxiety or hope. We considered above two psychological frameworks that suggest we experience hope in relation to pathways and agency in the context of relational, spiritual, emotional, psychological, and biological processes. We also considered how Scripture stands in dialectical relationship to those psychological frameworks. And while the studies we looked at do not offer a robustly Christian account of hope, they highlight some of the ways Christian practice might be oriented in relation to our psychological needs with a view to cultivating hope.

We are always to be about the business of making disciples and teaching them to obey all that Christ has commanded. The question is: what does that look like in an age marked by anxiety, uncertainty, anger, and fear? In this age the people of God must be a people of hope. This means taking the reality of hardship seriously and offering hope in the midst of that hardship. That hope will acknowledge the importance of human agency, but it will also offer the reminder that human agency exists relative to divine agency, and that ultimate hope may only be realized through the saving acts of God in Christ and the Spirit. That hope will also be dramatized and embody in specific practices, word and sacrament not least, which offer the church and the world a glimpse of hope where God washes us anxious and desperate folk with clean water and brings us to a table filled with bread and wine.

³⁷ Leithart, *God of Hope*, 92.

Let us not be people who fall to despair and so betray our calling. Rather, let us be people of hope for the glory of God and the life of the world.

“UNDISAPPOINTED”: GROUNDING HOPE IN THE SPIRIT AS BOTH LOVE AND GIFT

DANIEL T. SLAVICH¹

I. INTRODUCTION

Historically, the Latin trinitarian tradition has argued that the biblical testimony names the third person of the Trinity both “Love” and “Gift.” The tradition has at times located Rom 5:5 as a proof-text for this pattern of naming: “God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” This *proof-text* attaches firmly to a *context*, functioning as a ground clause for the first half of the same verse: “*This hope will not disappoint us, because* God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” In other words, the context of this classical trinitarian locus is hope. Recognizing this connection might provide promise for the present moment. In this paper, I will argue that in a world fearing plague and plagued by fear, the historical and biblical pattern of naming the Spirit as Love and Gift may ground an “undisappointed” hope.

I will outline my proposal in four parts. First, we will briefly explore the cultural moment we occupy, a world fearing plague and plagued by fear. Second, I will explicate the traditional Latin trinitarian pattern of naming the Spirit both “Love” and “Gift,” sparked by Hilary, formulated by Augustine, and clarified by Thomas. Third, the contextual and canonical pattern surrounding Rom 5:5 will lead us toward the storyline of the Bible and a biblical theology of hope. Fourth, connecting the classical dogmatic and the biblical theological storylines will allow us to see that a world fearing plague and plagued by fear might navigate such a moment with an “undisappointed” Christian hope, grounded in the person of the Spirit, who offers hope as he is given as Gift, being poured into our hearts as Love.

II. A PLAGUE OF FEAR

We live in a moment fearing plague and plagued by fear. The multi-year global Covid-19 pandemic has collided with another contagion of

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widespread anxiety. Millions (billions?) of people have stacked months upon months of physical isolation and distance, masking and testing, getting sick and recovering or dying. The singularity of the pandemic moment found fertile ground to grow in soil of already-present waves of clinical anxiety. In response, some Christians have sloganeered the moment by calling for “faith over fear” or “worship over worry.” No matter the misuse of such slogans, both faith and worship are helpful as Christian responses to fear and anxiety. If we consider the classical triad of Christian theological virtues, faith and worship (or expressive love for God) occupy the first and third; thus I want to explore below how the classical pattern of trinitarian naming might unlock the second of the three virtues. In a fear-filled world, the Spirit can gift us hope.

III. THE SPIRIT AS BOTH LOVE AND GIFT

Augustine wanted to find a proper, personal name for the Spirit akin to the naming of the Father and the Son, since both the Father and the Son could be called both “holy” and “spirit.”

Definingly for the Western theological tradition, Augustine also argued at this point for the procession of the Spirit from both the Father and the Son. He noted that the Spirit is called the Spirit of the Son in numerous Scriptures, and the Son promises to send the Spirit (John 15:26) and then symbolically did so (John 20:22).² Here Augustine nevertheless retained the trinitarian *τᾶξις*, because Jesus said he will send the Spirit “from the Father” (John 15:26) and that the “Father will send” the Spirit “in my name” (John 14:26). “Thereby,” Augustine argued, Jesus “indicated that the source of all godhead, or if you prefer it, all deity, is the Father. So the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son is traced back, on both counts, to him of whom the Son is born.”³ This allowed Augustine to distinguish between generation and procession, and thus to explain how the Spirit is not a second Son of the Father: “He comes forth, you see, not as being born but as being given, and so he is not called son, because he was not born like the only begotten Son.”⁴ Thus the doctrine of the dual procession of the Spirit arose as Augustine struggled in light of Scripture to find an appropriate pattern of naming for the person and relation of origin of the Spirit. While Father and Son as begetter and begotten were fairly straightforward, he also adopted two names for the Spirit. First, following

² At this point, Augustine’s argument that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque* as it was added to the Latin expressions of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed) was sparked by biblical reasoning on both theological as well as decidedly exegetical grounds. In a decisive way, Augustine could not escape the logic of Scripture in the Upper Room discourse and thus defined the dual procession of the Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7) that became the classical dogma of the Latin-speaking church.

³ English translations taken from Augustine, *The Trinity (De Trinitate)*, trans. Edmund Hill, 2nd ed. (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 2012), 4.29.

⁴ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 5.15.

Hilary, he explicated the Spirit as hypostatic, consubstantial Gift.⁵ Second, he also referred to the Spirit as the consubstantial, hypostatic Love⁶ of the Father (Lover) and the Son (Beloved).⁷

Eight hundred years after Augustine's death, Thomas Aquinas stood on his shoulders and explicated a robust trinitarianism in questions 27–43 of the *Summa Theologiae*. There are two processions in God: the generation of the Son, and the "spiration" of the Holy Spirit.⁸ Because "whatever is in God is God . . . any kind of procession which is not outward is a way of communicating the divine nature."⁹ Thus is God's perfect fecundity (*perfecta fecunditas*) shown.¹⁰ The divine relations are grounded in the processions (*quod relations quae secundum processiones*) and are "real relations."¹¹ Thomas engaged Boethius's seminal definition of person (*persona*) as "an individual substance of a rational nature,"¹² correlating it with hypostasis ("what is distinct through a relation"),¹³ and "subsistence," rather than "substance,"¹⁴ settling on defining person as a "relation as something subsisting" (*relatio ut subsistens*). "Otherwise put, it means the relation by way of that substance which is the subsistent hypostasis in the divine nature."¹⁵ He explicated the proper names of the persons: Father, Word, Image, Holy Spirit, Love, and Gift. In terms of these latter names, he argued that the Spirit proceeds as from the will;¹⁶ therefore the Spirit can be both Love and Gift. Moreover, he argued that the temporal missions of the Son and Spirit reveal the eternal processions of God, yet without change in God; these missions instead produce a change in the creation.¹⁷ In this way, "the verb 'sent' rightly applies to a divine person in that he is newly present to someone; the verb 'given' in that he is possessed by someone. Neither occurs except by reason of sanctifying grace."¹⁸ The salvific and revelatory missions of

⁵ Hilary's trinitarian axiom, "Infinity in the Eternal, the form in the Image, and the use in the Gift," is cited and explicated with conditional approval by Augustine, as well as at some length by Thomas in terms of trinitarian appropriations. See Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity*, trans. Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1954), 2.1; Augustine, *The Trinity*, 6.10; see also 8.1; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. Vol. 7. *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: 1a. 33–43*, ed. T. C. O'Brien (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1a.39.8.

⁶ Augustine, *The Trinity*, 8.7–14.

⁷ E.g., Augustine, *The Trinity*, 15.37.

⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.27.4.

⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.27.3.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.27.5.

¹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.28.1.

¹² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.29.1.

¹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.29.4.

¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.29.1.

¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.29.4 in Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.27.4.

¹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.43.2.

¹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.43.3.

the Son and Spirit are all grace, intended by God for “loving union with the divine person.”¹⁹

About this pattern, Levering concludes that the Latin trinitarian pattern can be endorsed not merely as traditional but also as biblical:

We can—and should—attend to the web of texts [e.g., Rom 5:5; 1 Jn 4:7–13] that associate the Spirit with “love” and “gift” in the economy of salvation, and we can expect to find therein some limited, but precious, instruction from God the Teacher regarding the distinction between the Spirit’s and the Son’s processions in the mystery of the Trinity. The Son is begotten; the Holy Spirit is given—and given as the greatest gift, love. Augustine is right: the Holy Spirit, in the Trinity, is personal “Love” and “Gift.”²⁰

As I have noted, a key text in this nexus is Rom 5:5. “This hope will not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Here the implied biblical pattern of naming the Spirit both “Love” and “Gift” connects to the biblical theme of hope.²¹

IV. THE CONTEXTUAL AND CANONICAL PATTERN OF HOPE IN ROM 5:5

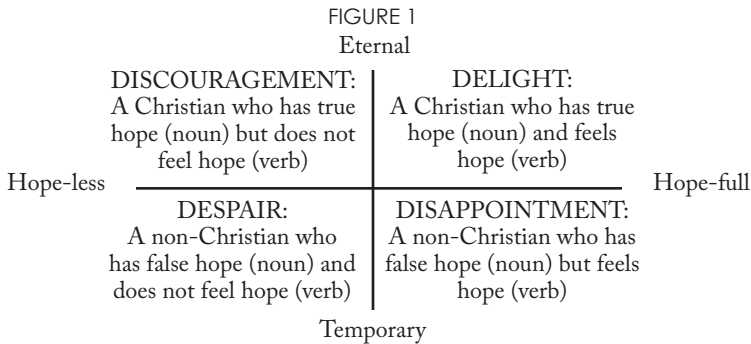
When we look at the canonical pattern of hope in Scripture, we find the word deployed as both a noun and a verb. Hope is both something that someone can *have* and something that someone can *do*. It can be marked in the Hebrew Scripture by verbal or nominal forms of וַיִּחַל, (“wait, expect, hope for”) or וַיִּחַל (“wait, hope, cause to hope”). We see both terms used, for example, in Ps 130:5: “I wait (וַיִּחַל) for the Lord; I wait and put my hope (וַיִּחַל) in his word.” Here the LXX renders both Hebrew verbs with the verb ἐλπίζω. The MT also uses נַטַּח (“security, confidence, hope;” e.g., Ps 16:9, “Therefore my heart is glad and my whole being rejoices; my body also rests securely [ἐλπίζω, LXX, 15:8]”). The NT also uses both the verbal and nominal forms (ἐλπίζω and ἐλπίς). For example, in Rom 8:24, Paul writes, “Now in this hope (ἐλπίς) we were saved, but hope (ἐλπίς) that is seen is not hope (ἐλπίς), because who hopes (ἐλπίζω) for what he sees?”

¹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a.43.2.

²⁰ Matthew Levering, “The Holy Spirit in the Trinitarian Communion: ‘Love’ and ‘Gift?’” *IJST* 16 (2014): 142.

²¹ Thomas himself treats hope in his discussion of irascible passions (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a.40.1–8) and hope as a theological virtue (2a.17–22). Here he argues that “the object of hope is a future good, arduous but possible to attain. . . . in one way eternal happiness, and in another way, the Divine assistance” (*Summa Theologiae*, vol. 17. *Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Laurence Shapcote, 2a.17.7), and “a mean between presumption and despair” (2a.2ae.17.5). Following Gregory and Isa 11:2–23, Thomas argues for seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which are distinct from the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love (*Summa Theologiae*, 1a.68). “The theological virtues have God for their object” (2a.20.3).

We can plot the canonical testimony of hope and its attendant implications on a 2x2 matrix (see Figure 1).²² The horizontal axis is the subjective sense of hope (hope as a verb) with the feeling of hopelessness on the left and hopefulness on the right. The vertical axis is the objective reality of hope (hope as a noun) with temporary or false hope on the bottom and eternal, real hope on the top. In the bottom left quadrant, a person who has false or temporary hope (noun) and does not feel hope (verb) is left in a state of despair. In the top left quadrant is a person who has true, eternal hope (noun), in other words a Christian, but does not feel hope (verb), leaving that Christian discouraged. In the bottom right, we find a person who has false or temporary hope (noun), but feels a sense of hope (verb). Nevertheless, that hope will sooner or later leave that person eternally disappointed.²³ In the top right quadrant, we find a Christian with true, eternal hope (noun) who also feels a deep sense of hope (verb). Such a person’s state is one of delight, or stated negatively, “undisappointed”—they are not despairing, disappointed, or discouraged, but delighted in the nature and work of the triune God.²⁴



At this point, I want to contend that the implied biblical and traditional pattern from Hilary to Augustine to Aquinas of naming the third triune person both “Love” and “Gift” connects in Rom 5:5 with the movement of

²² I developed this 2x2 matrix independently of Kelly Kapic’s matrix of lament and hope, yet I think the two complement each other. See Kelly M. Kapic, *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 33.

²³ This matrix helps explain why those without Christian hope can display and sense more hope than a person with Christian hope in any given moment or season.

²⁴ This rubric in some ways maps onto the point that Horton makes about Moltmann’s theology of hope: “The eschatological newness seems to be *entirely* future, relevant to us in the present only as anticipation. This is the heart of his theology of hope. And, to be sure, this is an important aspect of the believer’s attitude in the wilderness experience of the already and not-yet: ‘For who hopes for what is seen?’ (Rom. 8:24). Nevertheless, the believer’s experience is not all hope or anticipation of future glory for a restored cosmos. It includes incorporation into the newness that has already appeared. Justification and the renewal of the inner self, together with the indwelling of the Spirit as a ‘deposit,’ are announced as part of the ‘already’ that not only anticipates but participates in the ‘age to come.’” Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology: The Divine Drama* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 36.

Christian persons from discouragement (top left) to delight (top right), and the movement of non-Christian persons from despair or disappointment into Christ and “undisappointed,” delighted hope, both as a subjective feeling and an objective reality.

To get there, let’s return to Rom 5 itself. In Rom 5:1, we find that Paul summarizes his argument from chapter 4: “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith.”²⁵ He uses a passive verb here—a divine passive. God justifies, and those who are justified receive this justification. Paul says that God counts us righteous the same way he counted Abraham righteous: by trusting in him and his provision of Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. From here Paul explains the benefits of this justification:²⁶

- we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;
- we have access through him by faith into grace;
- we stand in this grace which we have by faith;
- we boast in the hope of the glory of God;
- we boast in afflictions, because afflictions are the trailhead for the pathway of hope, and hope does not disappoint.

Those last two benefits of justification by faith both center in hope. At that point we learn three aspects of hope: certainty, possibility, and suffering.

First, Paul describes the certainty of hope: “we boast in the hope of the glory of God” (5:2). “We boast in hope of the glory of God” means that hope is an objective reality grounded in the unchanging and unchangeable glory of God himself. God revealed this glory in creation and God will reveal it in the eschatological consummation.²⁷ God revealed this glory to Moses on the mountain (Exod 34). This glory traumatized Isaiah as he saw the curtain of heaven pulled back and heard the angels announce, “Holy! Holy! Holy!” (Isa 6). In Rom 5, Paul explains that the objective hope of the glory of God is so sure that Christians can boast about it like “it’s a done deal,” because from the parade view of heaven it is a done deal. For Christian hope to fail, God would have to fail.

Second, Paul explains the possibility of hope: “And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope” (5:4–5). Christians boast not only in hope, but in suffering

²⁵ This verse likely marks a hinge in the flow of the epistle’s argument, and a shift from justification by faith into the “result” of that justification: hope. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 247–48. Similarly, Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 217.

²⁶ Schreiner argues, “Three consequences of righteousness are articulated: peace, access to grace, and hope” (*Romans*, 253).

²⁷ Our discussion of this point at the annual symposium of the St. John Fellowship of the Center for Pastor Theologians (June 2022) helped me clarify the revelation of God’s glory as the revelation of both God’s character (divine attribute) and God’s conduct (divine action) in creation and eschatological consummation.

and affliction, because these mark the only trailhead of the pathway toward hope. Rest only arrives for the weary. Hope only comforts the afflicted. Those already living their best life have no need for hope, because they already have what they long for. But no one, Christians included, always (or even often) lives their best life. In this world, people groan. In this world, people suffer. In this world, people wait. On this point, Paul posts four checkpoints on the pathway toward hope: suffering, endurance, proven character, hope.

Christian hope starts with suffering. It starts with the uncertain moments when lockdowns threaten livelihood and when viruses threaten vitality, when Christians grow weary of the world's sorrow and sadness, when they come to the end of their ability to fix things. Here we see that our suffering has meaning because it produces endurance. Christians endure and this requires delay. Christians do not endure when there is no delay. We might encapsulate the biblical witness to hope by saying that "hope is faith during the delay." Suffering, Paul explains, teaches Christians to withstand the waiting. First Thessalonians 1:3 says hope inspires endurance. A person knows that they are hopeful when they endure waiting. The word "endurance" shows up thirty-two times in the NT (we might say one for every day of every month, with a bonus for those especially difficult days). Endurance then produces proven character. The word here has to do with something has been documented and verified.²⁸ Christian character is a character that has stood up to the test of the times. Christian character has passed through all phases of the clinical trial and is ready for display to the general public. As character is tested by suffering and affliction, Christian endurance emerges into hope. And here we find the way we may connect hope to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, named in the tradition in light of the biblical testimony as both Love and Gift.

V. THE SPIRIT OF HOPE

In Rom 5:5 Paul describes the Spirituality of hope. This hope does not disappoint, Paul says. It is a certainty and a possibility for a specific reason: "This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." When we say that such Pauline hope is Spiritual, we must capitalize the "S."²⁹ Christian hope is not an ambiguous feeling. Christian hope is grounded in the love of God poured into our hearts through the indwelling of the third Person of the Trinity. As we have seen, the church's classical tradition has argued that the Holy Spirit is properly named Love and Gift, like the Son is named Word and Image. By filling Christians with his Holy Spirit, God *gifts* them *love*, indwelling their heart and life and mind and will and emotion. The axiom of Nicene orthodoxy is that the external works of the Trinity are undivided (*opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*). All three persons of

²⁸ BDAG, s.v. δοκιμή, ᾗς, ἡ, 256.

²⁹ A pattern cogently demonstrated by Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994).

the Trinity do all the works of the Trinity in creation and redemption. Yet specific divine works are also appropriately attributed to specific divine persons. In this light, we can say that the Spirit is the distinctive agent of hope in a Christian's heart because the Spirit is hypostatically, personally distinct as Love and Gift within the Godhead. In God's undivided works outside of the Godhead, the work of filling the people of God with hope is appropriately attributed to the divine person called Love and Gift, the Spirit.

Too often, Christians follow the discourse of this world, with a Walt Disney World Carousel of Progress view of hope: "There's a big bright beautiful tomorrow, shining at the end of every day." The world speaks of hope in generic slogans, and Christians often adopt this mode of discourse. Now, the eschatology of hope demonstrates that tomorrow does shine brightly no matter the darkness of any given today. Channeling Thomas, we might call hope a "wayfaring" virtue.³⁰ But this hope can only be believed as a result of the indwelling of the Spirit inside of a Christian heart; and Christians receive the Spirit not in some mushy-gushy emotional state, but united to Christ upon the stone-solid timbers embedded into the hilltop of Calvary and rising from the garden cave in resurrection life. The gospel thus bookends Paul's theology of Spiritual hope in Rom 5:1-5: "He was raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25) and "while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6)."³¹

So here is the foundation of "undisappointed" hope: Christians will not be disappointed in their hope because of the gift of God's love saturating their hearts through the Gift and Love of the triune God, the Holy Spirit, the distinctive agent of Christian hope. Christians have received the Spirit because of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. From the base of the cross on Calvary and from the emptied cave in the garden, God gives the Gift to fill the Christian heart with Love, and as the Spirit fills the Christian, that Christian will live delighted with "undisappointed" hope.

V. CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the traditional pattern of naming the Spirit both Love and Gift has a long historical pedigree, and this pattern is implied by the pattern of the biblical witness. In Rom 5:5, the text connects the possession and exercise of Christian hope to the indwelling of the Spirit, whom the Father and Son gives to Christians as Gift and with whom the Father and the Son loves Christians as Love in the singular, external, economic, *ad extra* work of the triune God. Christians can move from possession of objective hope but discouragement in their subjective sense of hope as they are filled by the Spirit, the distinctive personal agent of Christian hope. People who are not Christians can move from hopeless despair without real hope or from their feeling of hope that will disappoint them as temporary

³⁰ For example, Thomas refers to the *spes viatorum* "the hope of wayfarers" or "travelers/pilgrims" (e.g., *Summa Theologiae*, 2a.18.4).

³¹ Horton notes the disagreements of the theologians of hope on the role of the resurrection in *Covenant and Eschatology*, 285n78.

at best as they come to Christ and are also filled by the Spirit. In this way, in a world of fear, plague, and apathy, anyone has the possibility to move toward a delighted, “undisappointed” hope.

THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF VIRTUE FOR CHRISTIAN WITNESS: INSIGHTS FROM LESSLIE NEWBIGIN AND PAUL HIEBERT

BY CORY WILSON¹

I. INTRODUCTION

Houston, we have a problem. Disorientation has seized American evangelicalism and a safe landing is uncertain.² The convergence of multiple stress points³ preceding and following 2020 revealed American evangelicalism is rich in material possessions but struggles with a poverty of theological depth. It abounds in political power but is too weak to provide strength to navigate the times with unity or clarity. The ability to nuance and provide a distinct Christian political vision that rises above the fray remains elusive. I do not state this as a judgmental outsider looking in, but as a pastor struggling with why the tradition within the Christianity I have served for over two decades appears not only ill-equipped for these days, but also a contributor to, and at times a source of, the dysfunction. At a minimum, wisdom calls for a long look in the mirror. Where did we go wrong?

Though my confidence in the church to be the primary means of God's redemptive and restorative work in the world is bruised, it is not shattered. Rather than retreat, I long to reflect. In this cultural moment, why does the church seem so ill-equipped? Why does the unity Christ calls his bride

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² For examples, see Michael Graham, "The Six Way Fracturing of Evangelicalism," *Mere Orthodoxy* (blog), June 7, 2021, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/six-way-fracturing-evangelicalism/>; Skyler Flowers and Michael Graham, "One Year Later: Reflecting on Evangelicalism's Six-Way Fracturing," *Mere Orthodoxy* (blog), July 12, 2022, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/one-year-later-reflecting-on-evangelicalisms-six-way-fracturing/>; Michael Barbaro, "The Pastor Being Driven Out by Trumpism," September 23, 2022 in *The Daily*, produced by The New York Times, podcast, MP3 audio, 44:09, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/23/podcasts/the-daily/evangelicals-trumpism.html>; The Center for Pastor Theologians Conference, *Reconstructing Evangelicalism* (2022), <https://www.cptconference.com/>.

³ At a minimum these stress points would include political turmoil associated with Donald Trump, responses to Covid-19, reckoning with narcissistic celebrity pastors, and a host of abuse allegations and scandals.

to seem as distant as Rivendell when walking through Mordor? Why are we so easily enticed with political power as Edmund was with Turkish Delight? Why do we tear one another apart in the public square? Why do we misrepresent fellow brothers and sisters by failing to put forth the best argument of those with whom we disagree? Why do we seem continually tossed about by cultural winds? Why is the gaining and maintaining of political power at all costs unapologetically justified? The answers to these questions are complex and beyond the scope of any single article, much less one I could write. However, that does not mean one cannot chip away at the complexity piece by piece.

My goal is to hopefully provide a small contribution to our larger task of reflection as pastors and church leaders as we seek a way forward. The hope is for a better way that leads us to equip congregations to faithfully bear witness to the kingdom of the risen Christ.⁴ At the heart of the contribution I seek to offer is a haunting quote by Stanley Hauerwas in his “Introduction” to *A Community of Character*. He writes, “Any community and polity is known and should be judged by the kind of people it develops. The truest politics, therefore, is that concerned with the development of virtue.”⁵ A community is to be judged by the kind of people it develops. This is a piercing claim. If Hauerwas is correct, the validity of the worldview of a community is judged by the character or virtue that community forms within its members. The validity of the Christian faith is judged by the character of those who claim the name of Christ.

This naturally leads me to ask, as a pastor, what kind of people is the congregation I serve forming? Are we known for virtue? What about the evangelical church at large? Churches within my own tribe? What type of people make up our congregations? What is the place of virtue within these congregations? Honest answers to these questions should overflow into long reflection regarding what we can do better in our roles as shepherds. Honesty about our shortcomings and those of the church is not intended for despair but for resolve. Hauerwas rebukes, but he also exhorts, “That the church has often failed to be such a polity is without question, but the fact that we have often been less than we were meant to be should never be used as an excuse for shirking the task of being the people of God.”⁶

In reflecting on our responsibility of being faithful witnesses to Christ during this this time of reorientation, the bodies of work belonging to Lesslie Newbigin (1909–98) and Paul Hiebert (1932–2007) continue to provide sources of wisdom and direction for engaging pastoral ministry and navigating the days before us. My hope is to share their wisdom. While neither of their work focused primarily on virtue formation within the church, their writing is rich with insight for guiding us to be a people “concerned with the development of virtue.” In Newbigin, there is the

⁴ John 20:21; Acts 1:8.

⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 2.

⁶ Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 2.

constant cry regarding the missionary nature of the church combined with the realization that Christendom has fallen in the West. As for Hiebert, he pioneered the introduction of cultural anthropology into evangelical missiology in the American context. Though his early seminal works were first published in 1976⁷ and 1985⁸, they remain foundational texts for the integration of tools and insights of cultural anthropology in missiology. In this article, I will outline two broad points of significance for today from Newbigin's work followed by an overview of the relevant benefits of Hiebert's anthropological framework as it relates to virtue formation.

II. NEWBIGIN: CHRISTENDOM HAS FALLEN

Newbigin exhibited the rare combination of theological competence, missiological awareness, cultural insight, and pastoral sensitivity in his lifetime. At the heart of much of Newbigin's work is the conviction that the people of God, the church, find their primary identity as a missionary people and the renewal of Christianity in the West requires a missionary encounter between the church and Western culture. Newbigin's position is not simply that the church should be involved in missionary activity, but the very existence of the church is birthed out of and for God's mission. The church has not been given a mission, so much as the mission has been given to the church.⁹

This foundational understanding of the church's identity shaped much of Newbigin's writings. Significant amounts of his work are devoted to unpacking the argument for and implications of the missionary nature of the church.¹⁰ Newbigin's primary focus was the unpacking of these missiological implications on the Western home front rather than international locations as was the tradition of Western missiology. The impetus for this was Newbigin's realization that Christendom had fallen in the West.

The reality of a fallen Christendom was foundational for Newbigin as he developed his understanding of the missionary nature of the church.¹¹ Though born in England, Newbigin was significantly influenced by his time serving the church in India which, from a Western perspective, was a natural missionary context. Upon his return to the United Kingdom, he realized his homeland was no less of a missionary context, though doctrines

⁷ Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976).

⁸ Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985).

⁹ For a full exploration of these themes in Newbigin's life and work, see Michael Goheen's *The Church and Its Vocation: Lesslie Newbigin's Missionary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018).

¹⁰ See Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989) and Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

¹¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1953), 11.

of the church in the West continued to work from a posture “in which Christendom is taken for granted.”¹²

Newbigin saw that the primary means for the church to faithfully engaging a post-Christian context was as a distinct community living out the truth of the biblical story. Though he does not specifically discuss virtue, it is assumed as part of his framework for how this community is distinct. He writes, “if it is really true that God has done what the Gospel tells us he has done . . . it must, it necessarily must become the starting point and the controlling reality of all thought, all action, and all hope.”¹³ This is a Christian vision for life that maintains its missionary nature only in the context of a community. For Newbigin, “The church affirms the truth of this story [the gospel story] by celebrating it, interpreting it, and enacting it in the life of the contemporary world.” Furthermore, the call of the people of the church is, “to respond to a word of calling by believing and acting, specifically by becoming part of the community which is already committed to the service of the Builder.”¹⁴

For Newbigin, the role of ethics, morality, and virtue—who we are and what we do—have significance in how they define and set apart the distinctiveness of the Christian faith within a cultural context. The Christian vision for life and living provides a radical contradiction to the “assumptions that we breathe” in our Western context.¹⁵ The West does not live in light of the truth of the gospel story, contrary to the assumptions of many within the church at large. The life of the people of the church is a means by which the truth of the gospel story is shown to a culture living by another story. This life must include the presence of virtue consistent with the teachings of Scripture.

If Hauerwas is correct in asserting that a community is judged by the people it develops, understanding virtue within the context of a people with a missionary vocation has significant implications. The people that are formed within a community reveal something not only about that community, but the story by which that community lives. A current assessment of the evangelical community reveals a lack of virtue.¹⁶ This assessment suggests one of two possibilities. First, the biblical story we claim as universal truth is only relative truth, or second, our professed governing story is not our

¹² Newbigin, *Household of God*, 11.

¹³ Lesslie Newbigin, “The Gospel and Modern Western Culture” (unpublished article), Newbigin Archives, University of Birmingham (n.d.), 13.

¹⁴ Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt, and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (London: SPCK, 1995), 66.

¹⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, “Evangelism in the City,” *Reformed Review* 41 (1987): 4.

¹⁶ This is evidenced in multiple ways. First, virtue as a concept is generally not addressed with great significance in American evangelical churches. Second, numerous public failings of well-known pastors point to a lack of virtue. Finally, the turmoil so many evangelical churches have experienced because of political divisions reveals a lack of the fruit of the Spirit. In countless conversations with pastors from around the country and various denominations within evangelicalism, the experience appears to be the same. This is not to suggest the evangelical community is devoid of virtue, but simply that virtue is needed more.

functional governing story. Either option is a problem. I am not ready to put aside the universal claims of the biblical story as mere personal preferences of truth. This leaves the need to address the second option.

Reflecting on Newbigin's work, Michael Goheen writes, "A missionary encounter is the clash between two comprehensive and religious visions of life that are to some degree incompatible."¹⁷ The evangelical community does not have a shortage of clashes with the cultural left in America. The root of many clashes comes from a valid biblical critique of enlightenment and progressive assumptions regarding life and the world. The progressive political vision is not the biblical story and is deserving of critique. However, the lack of the distinctive presence of biblical virtue within the evangelical community is one of many signs that the functional story of our community is equally problematic. The alternative vision being offered by many evangelicals appears more at home in a shifting vision the Republican party has for America than a vision distinctly rooted in the lordship of Jesus.¹⁸

Newbigin knew a failure by the Western church to recognize its changing context, namely the dissolution of the synthesis of gospel and culture forged in medieval times, would lead in one of two directions. On one side is the danger of syncretism, which embraces the non-biblical cultural stories and their idols. On the other side, irrelevancy, with the danger of seeking a "refuge in a ghetto where their faith is not proclaimed as public truth for all."¹⁹ Any attempt to return to Christendom requires syncretism: a marriage between the church and ruling power, a power that is in direct contradiction to allegiance to the sovereign rule of Jesus over all things.²⁰ Newbigin was clear throughout his writings, there can be no return to Christendom, nor should there be.²¹

Additionally, Newbigin did not mince words in his warning to the church regarding any attempt to return to Christendom by merging kingdoms. He writes, "The sacralizing of politics, the total identification of a political goal with the will of God, always unleashes demonic powers."²² Observing from across the ocean the rise of the "Religious Right" in the

¹⁷ Goheen, *The Church and Its Vocation*, 141.

¹⁸ The recent rise of Christian Nationalism manifests in the Republican Party. See Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, updated ed. (New York: Oxford, 2022) and Stephen Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2022). Additionally prominent evangelical leaders John MacArthur and Al Mohler equate true and faithful Christianity as voting for the Republican Party. See Mark Wingfield, "MacArthur says Trump called to support his defiance of COVID orders," *Baptist News Global*, August, 26, 2020, <https://baptistnews.com/article/macarthur-says-trump-called-to-support-his-defiance-of-covid-orders/>; and "Voting the wrong way makes Christians 'unfaithful' to God, Mohler says," *Baptist News Global*, September 19, 2022, <https://baptistnews.com/article/voting-the-wrong-way-makes-christians-unfaithful-to-god-mohler-says/>.

¹⁹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 115.

²⁰ This reality is one of multiple problems with various versions of Christian Nationalism that are gaining momentum on the political right in the United States.

²¹ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 95–123.

²² Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 116.

United States in the 1980s and its association with political power, Newbigin declared, "This confusion of a particular and fallible set of political and moral judgements with the cause of Jesus Christ is more dangerous than the open rejection of the claim of Christ in Islam," because "it uses the name of Jesus to cover the absolute claims of one national tradition."²³ Newbigin's lingering wisdom for today is the realization that because Christendom has fallen in the West, the missionary nature of the church is essential for a missionary encounter between the church and the West. At the heart of this encounter is a distinct people living with an ethic under the political story of the kingdom of Jesus rather than any other political story. A failure to do this is to reject the missionary nature of the church and diminish the uniqueness of the biblical story. The result is a civil religion that is Christian in name only.

III. HIEBERT'S ANTHROPOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF HOW PEOPLE CHANGE

Answering the question of why the American evangelical church appears at times more captured by a distinctly American political vision for life over and against a distinctly Christian vision is multi-faceted and beyond the full ability of this article to address. However, as stated earlier, that does not mean an attempt to contribute to part of the answer cannot be made. As stated previously, one evidence of evangelicals functionally living by a different governing story other than Christ is the dearth of the presence of virtue within the evangelical community.

A strength of evangelicalism is its stated commitment to the truth of Scripture. Generally speaking, there is clarity on the importance of believing the correct things. God created the world. Adam and Eve rebelled against God and sinned. We follow their path as sinners. Sin deserves punishment because God is holy and just. God is love, and therefore, sent his Son Jesus to pay for our sin on the cross. Believe and trust Jesus died for your sins, and you can be forgiven. If you believe in these things, then you can escape judgment and have eternal life with Jesus. These statements are at the heart of so much of what evangelicals believe as a Christian community. Believe these things and you will be saved! Each of these statements can be supported in Scripture and contain truth from Scripture. However, in some ways, summary statements like this can unintentionally function as a reduction of Christianity to a set of logical propositions. As a result, Christianity ceases to be a compelling faith that guides all of life under the lordship of Christ and becomes merely a set of propositional statements to be affirmed.

Hiebert became aware of this problem, not by analyzing Western culture as Newbigin did, but by analyzing the Christianity that Western missionaries were exporting in the twentieth century in non-Christian and non-Western contexts. Hiebert describes the situation as follows:

²³ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 116.

Protestant missionaries began to stress the need for transformations in people's beliefs. People had to believe in the deity, virgin birth, and death and resurrection of Christ to be saved. They had to repent inwardly of their sins and seek the salvation Christ was offering to those who believe. Right beliefs were seen as essential to Christian conversion, and missions set up Bible schools and seminaries to teach orthodox doctrine.²⁴

In Hiebert's analysis, the results of this limited strategy are not encouraging,²⁵

It is becoming increasingly clear, however, that transforming explicit beliefs is not enough to plant churches that are faithful to the gospel. People often say the same words but mean different things. Underlying explicit beliefs is a deeper culture that shapes the categories and logic which people think and view reality.²⁶

The reason for the disconnect, according to Hiebert, is that *only* changing external religious beliefs does not bring about transformation. This is because the cognitive does not encompass the totality of the human experience. The failure to address the fullness of the human experience results in a "reinterpreted Christianity as a new and more powerful form of magic."²⁷ The sum of the Christian faith is not simply belief in the correct things. It is also doing the correct things and being the correct person. Hiebert's contribution to addressing this problem was published posthumously in *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*. In this work, Hiebert utilizes the framework of worldview within cultural anthropology to provide a more in-depth analysis of how people experience transformation. For Hiebert, this framework is essential to understanding and solving this problem at hand.

Conversion may include a change in beliefs and behavior, but if the worldview is not transformed, in the long run the gospel is subverted and the result is a syncretistic Christo-paganism, which has the form of Christianity but not its essence. Christianity becomes a new magic and a new, subtler form of idolatry.²⁸

It is important to note that Hiebert uses worldview through the lenses of anthropology, which differs from the term's more philosophical origin. Worldview as a term originates from the German word *Weltanschauung* as used by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). It was first utilized in English

²⁴ Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 11.

²⁵ Hiebert's reflection is not meant to suggest the absence of genuine transformative work by Protestant missionaries. The explosion of the church in the Global South over the past century is partially a result of faithful Protestant mission work. Hiebert, from his own experience and research as a missionary, is reflecting on a general weakness of Protestant missionary work.

²⁶ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 11.

²⁷ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 11.

²⁸ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 11.

in regard to the Christian faith by James Orr (1844–1913) and Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920). As a concept, worldview was utilized by Orr and Kuyper in response to modernism’s wholesale rejection of the Christian view of life and the universe.²⁹

Hiebert’s use of worldview, however, is rooted in the development of cultural studies within anthropology.³⁰ As the field of anthropology developed and cultures were studied more deeply, anthropologists discovered that “below the surface of speech and behavior are beliefs and values that generate what is said and done.”³¹ Various terms and frameworks³² have been developed and utilized to give voice to the reality that “people live . . . in radically different conceptual worlds.”³³ Despite some weaknesses with the term worldview, Hiebert argues it is the most helpful for providing a holistic understanding of people that can lead to an improved understanding of how to bring about transformation.

Hiebert defines worldview as the “fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives. Worldviews are what people in a community take as given realities, the maps they have of reality that they use for living.”³⁴ Hiebert does not dismiss the importance of the cognitive, or belief in certain propositional truths. However, he argues it only represents one-third of what must be addressed in the process of one’s transformation. The affective (emotions, feelings, etc.) and the evaluative (ethics, morality, virtue, etc.) must equally be addressed.

As the culmination of a lifetime of work, Hiebert’s *Transforming Worldviews* is rich with insights that are beyond what can be fully explored here. For our purposes, focus will be directed at the evaluative aspect of Hiebert’s worldview framework as it is the place for virtue within a person and culture.³⁵ Hiebert acknowledges that transformation begins with cognitive and affective conversions.³⁶ A person can learn they are a sinner in need of forgiveness and this forgiveness can be found in the work of Jesus Christ. This is a truth claim that can be cognitively affirmed and lead to real and meaningful joy and gratitude. When this happens, the process of transformation has started, but it is not complete. He writes, “Christians

²⁹ This more philosophical use of worldview remains popular and useful through the works of Brian Walsh, *The Transforming Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984); Al Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5th ed., (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

³⁰ Hiebert acknowledges a weakness of the term “worldview” is in its primary philosophical origins.

³¹ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 15.

³² See Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 15, for an example of the various terms utilized within the field of anthropology.

³³ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 15.

³⁴ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 15.

³⁵ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 60.

³⁶ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 313.

are called not only to know the truth and experience beauty and joy but also to be holy people.³⁷

Taking Hiebert's insights into the shortcomings of American missionary work in conjunction with the aforementioned observations about the current state of evangelicalism, part of our ailment as evangelicals is one of stunted transformation. The glaring weakness is not in doctrinal affirmations (cognitive)³⁸ or meaningful religious experiences (affective), but in a life of holiness, moral clarity, and virtue (evaluative). This is not to say there is no moral compass in the evangelical church. There is. The problem is that it is a moral compass marked more by a common civic religion from the days when Christendom reigned rather than a distinct moral vision rooted in the kingdom ethic of the resurrected Christ. To use Hiebert's language, it is a "syncretistic Christo-paganism, which has the form of Christianity but not its essence."³⁹ This could partially explain why there can be a large consensus around public issues regarding marriage and abortion among evangelicals, but little emphasis on the beatitudes or fruit of the Spirit.

If this analysis is correct, the remedy is not a devaluing of cognitive truth claims and religious experience as has been the path of some, but an increase of emphasis on formation that goes beyond the cognitive and affective and into the evaluative. This renewed emphasis must go beyond simply declaring, "You should be more virtuous," or more specifically, "You should be more self-controlled." There are two problems with simple exhortations to be more virtuous. First, what is and is not virtuous is culturally conditioned.⁴⁰ Second, even when there is agreement on what a virtue is, like kindness, there can be confusion or disagreement on what it means to be kind. Agreement on this cannot be assumed. Christendom has fallen. Competing cultural narratives supply differing views of what is true, good, and beautiful.

To navigate the cultural complexity of evaluative themes, Hiebert provides three frameworks to help discern how a social context functionally⁴¹ understands what a virtuous life would look like. First, Hiebert provides the work of Robert Redfield regarding moral order. One example Redfield provides concerns how morality is viewed differently in group-oriented societies than in individual-oriented societies. In group-oriented societies emphasis is placed on relationships. Relationships form the basis of morality, and therefore, the breaking or damaging of a relationship is viewed as the most grievous transgression. Additionally, punishment in a group-oriented society is often centered around shunning and ostracism. Exclusion from the

³⁷ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 313.

³⁸ I am distinguishing here between affirmation and knowledge. The state of evangelical doctrinal knowledge is beyond the scope of this paper and is addressed by others.

³⁹ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 11.

⁴⁰ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 60–65; Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 121–25.

⁴¹ I use "functionally" as a reminder of the constant struggle to see our stated belief regarding what is virtuous consistent with our functional belief of what is virtuous.

group is the highest form of punishment. Hiebert provides the following chart to illustrate the various manifestations of moral order among cultures.

IMAGES OF MORAL ORDER⁴²

Focus	Legal order	Right relationships	Cleanliness
Sin	Breaking the law	Breaking relationships	Defilement
Response	Guilt	Shame	Repugnance
Salvation	Punishment, restore moral order	Forgiveness, reconciliation, restore relations	Washing, purification, restore cleanliness
Image	Righteousness	Shalom, peace	Holiness, purity
Example	United States	Japan	India

The second framework Hiebert provides is the category of heroes and villains. Just as every good story has a hero and villain, so does every culture. Based upon a culture's worldview, implicit understandings of what is good and evil, righteous and unrighteous, and pure and defiled are developed. These understandings are established and reaffirmed through cultural heroes and villains. In the American context, to be known is to be celebrated. This is manifested in multiple ways from the adoration of celebrities to the elevation of those with blue checks on their Twitter account.⁴³ The more a person is known the more weight and value she has. Judgment is often not based on the content of what is said, but who it is that said it. The more well-known the person, the more validity is given. This value is not shared among all cultures. Among the Mossi people in Burkina Faso, West Africa the validity of a view is not based on how well a person is known, but on the age and family lineage of a person. The words of the older are valued over the younger and the speech of the village chief carries final authority.⁴⁴

Heroes can manifest in the design of city spaces as well. Hiebert comments, "North Americans have placed a high value on technology and material goods, and business is their central activity."⁴⁵ The result of these values are American skylines dominated by buildings reflecting these values. A small example of the changing dominant cultural narrative of America can be seen in downtown Cleveland, OH. The oldest building in the heart of Cleveland's downtown Public Square is the Old Stone Church, built in 1855. At one time it towered over any building in downtown Cleveland. However, today one can easily miss the historic church building even if

⁴² Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 62.

⁴³ At the time of the submission of this article Twitter still exists. I cannot predicate its state of existence for the time of publication.

⁴⁴ This example is taken from my own experience as a missionary in Burkina Faso.

⁴⁵ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 62.

you are walking in Public Square as it is overshadowed by skyscrapers representing a more modern moral vision for the city.⁴⁶

Third, Hiebert adapts Talcott Parsons' moral dimensions framework. Parsons argues every society has these seven dimensions expressed on a continuum. This is not to suggest that the opposite of what is primary cannot be found, but that each culture gravitates to one end of the spectrum.

EVALUATIVE NORMS AT THE WORLDVIEW LEVEL⁴⁷

Emotional Expression - Seek gratification of senses and desires - Permissive - Examples: Kwakiutl, modern consumer culture, tantricism	vs.	Emotional Control - Delayed gratification, renunciation - Disciplinary - Examples: Hopi, Protestant ethic, monasticism
Group Centered - Collective interests - Corporate responsibility and decisions - Examples: Bunyoro, tribalism	vs.	Individual Centered - Individual interests - Personal fulfillment and decisions - Examples: Kapauku, modernity
Other-World Oriented - Stress other-worldly gain - Examples: Medieval Europe, Buddhism	vs.	This-World Oriented - Stress this-worldly gain - Examples: modernity, post-modernity
Emphasize Ascription - Relations based on one's birth - Value attributes - Examples: caste system in India	vs.	Emphasize Achievement - Relations based on one's achievements - Value performance - Example: class system in United States
Focus on Whole Picture - Take broad context into account - Example: Indian village <i>panchayat</i> cases	vs.	Look at Specific Details - Take only narrow context into account - Example: U.S. court cases
Universalist - Treat everyone alike - Stress universal truths, laws, grids - Universal, absolute theories - Absolute ethics - Examples: Judeo-Christianity, modernity	vs.	Particularist - Treat each person on basis of his or her ascribed role, status, and situation - Stress uniqueness of each situation - Value uniqueness and diversity - Adaptation to situational context - Situational ethics - Examples: Hinduism, post-modernity

⁴⁶ This is a vision primarily dominated by banking and finance.

⁴⁷ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 64.

<p>Hierarchy is Right</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See people intrinsically unequal - Give privileges to the superior - Patron-client relationship - Example: Indian caste society 	vs.	<p>Equality is Right</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See people as intrinsically equal - Hold everyone equal in rewards/punishment - Contractual relationships - Example: Scandinavian societies
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The benefit of these anthropological frameworks is they highlight the diversity of views regarding evaluative themes present within a culture at any given time. As we consider the reality of pastoring in a post-Christian context, awareness of what evaluative themes already exist is essential for intentional virtue formation. Biblical virtue formation cannot take place without an awareness of competing visions for what is virtuous in a society. An analysis of the diversity of moral visions possible within a cultural context shows that many are easy bridges to the gospel and a life under Christ. The examples provided in the “Images of Moral Order” are themes identified in Scripture and are present to some degree in every culture.

In light of this, one role of the pastor in teaching, preaching, and shepherding is to seek discernment to recognize which existing evaluative themes are deficient, which are idolatrous, which need to be subservient to others, which need to be reformed in light of the gospel, etc. This is not an easy process and requires an awareness of how to discern which evaluative themes are rooted in Scripture and which are simply cultural idols. For example, one evaluative theme within American evangelical culture is freedom. An example of cultural heroes representing this theme are those serving in the military. Generally speaking, military personnel are highly regarded in the evangelical community as those who protect the freedoms we have. Having lived extensively in multiple contexts outside of the United States, I am thankful for the freedoms and rights I enjoy as an American citizen and for the service of our military personnel. However, the question for us as Christians and pastors is how does the American concept of freedom fit within the biblical story? Why is answering this question essential to virtue formation? Themes of freedom exist within the American story and the biblical story. If freedom, as popularly understood in the American story, is a one-to-one correlation with freedom within the biblical story, then biblical virtue requires courage (among other things) to defend it at all costs. However, if it is not a one-to-one correlation with freedom in the biblical story, then biblical virtue requires patience (among other things) if it is threatened.

IV. CONCLUSION

Freedom in the American story and freedom in the biblical story, though overlapping in some areas, are in many ways singing two different songs. The American song celebrates personal autonomy and rights. At the core is the right to pursue one’s happiness however one may define happiness, regardless of the well-being of the collective whole. The happiness

of the self is paramount. The biblical song counters with a concept of freedom that is found in the unshackling of bondage to sin and the rest that comes in refuge in Christ following this unshackling. It is a freedom that unleashes one to pursue the good of others for the good of a greater kingdom. It is the freedom to serve and sacrifice for the other rather than elevate the self. How one defines freedom influences the virtue that is called for. An authentic Christian faith will bear the fruit of biblical virtue. A syncretistic Christian faith will bear the fruit of pseudo-virtue. Pseudo-virtue is the servant of idolatrous cultural stories; Christian virtue is the fruit of the biblical story. As pastors, we must know our cultural story to ensure the clarity of the biblical story. This requires an acknowledgment that Christendom has fallen in the West and a missionary encounter is now essential for the renewal of Christianity.

I do not know what the future of evangelicalism holds. I know I have a charge to faithfully shepherd the congregation I serve to be a distinct missionary community that points others to the beauty of Jesus's kingdom. This distinctness is not only brought about by believing and feeling the right things, but also by *being* the right people. Newbigin and Hiebert do not provide all the answers to what ails us, but their works are pieces of light that make the night a little less dark.

BOOK REVIEWS

Adam Harwood. *Christian Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Systematic*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022. 796 pp. \$55.49, hardcover.

Adam Harwood has been a theology faculty member of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary for nearly a decade. This volume seems to be the fruit of those years of training men and women for ministry and is aimed at graduate and upper-level undergraduate students (xxii).

His goals are stated plainly enough: “to address most doctrines through a biblical survey, historical survey, and systematic treatment,” aiming to answer several specific questions: “What does the Bible reveal about this doctrine? What has the church believed about this doctrine? What questions arise and what models aid for understanding the doctrine?” (xxi).

With regard to presentation, his book presents the information in an organized and easily-referenceable way. Students wanting to jump in and jump out of the volume, quickly locating relevant information about a particular doctrine, will be pleased. Each chapter begins with an outline of the doctrine, helping to keep the reader from getting lost in the otherwise hefty tome. Additional features will prove helpful in the classroom environment: lists of key words at the end of each chapter, along with review questions and discussion points; helpful charts and diagrams to organize and relate competing ideas (e.g., “Orthodox and Heretical views of the Person of Christ,” Figure 15.1, p. 416); and a selected list of classic, confessional, and contemporary sources for additional reading on the doctrine being examined.

Regarding content, Harwood covers all the major loci of theology in roughly the proportions you would expect. He begins each section with a survey of relevant biblical data, progressing along the canon and highlighting texts. He often includes answers to typical objections given to particular Christian ideas, which many students will likely find helpful.

He then surveys pertinent historical figures or ideas, analyzing and critiquing the progression of thought throughout the centuries. Doctrinal sections conclude with reflection upon the contemporary significance of the doctrine. Here the reader is given some of the “rubber meets the road” material that many students crave. He uses this space to inject some ethical reflection and help the reader apply the doctrine to the modern world.

I found Harwood’s material quite easy to read. He is clear, well organized, and anticipates questions that might arise in the mind of the reader. I also appreciated his even-handedness. He presents contrary positions in a fair way. For example, even though he would not embrace Reformed doctrine, he presented the Reformed position on a doctrine in a way that was honest, even going so far as to praise the contrary position for its strengths. While I may not have been convinced by his doctrinal argumentation, I appreciated the care with which he wrote and the charity he extended to differing doctrinal formulations.

One point which would have strengthened this volume is greater attention to the redemptive historical movement across the canon, particularly the covenantal shape of Scripture. At times, the biblical analysis felt like simply a fly-by of texts that mention a particular idea, without any attention paid to the development of a concept across the canon. More analysis on the escalation of ideas and concepts, with attention paid to typology and covenantal timing, would have strengthened this volume.

One final note, which I wrestled with even mentioning, is the physical edition of the book itself. The lamination on the hardback volume began to separate almost immediately upon arrival, leaving me to wonder about the longevity of such a binding. Additionally, the font selection in the book proved difficult on my eyes while reading. Neither of these observations are the fault of the author, but do impact my desire to reach for this volume while researching.

In sum, Harwood's volume is well structured and clear. However, in the sea of single volume undergrad/graduate-level systematic textbooks (e.g., Grudem, Erickson, Sproul, Berkhof, Frame, Horton, etc.), Harwood's struggles to find its place. While he faithfully presents his material, I am not sure his contribution has bested any of the contemporary volumes mentioned above.

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Justo L. González. *The Bible in the Early Church*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022. 204 pp. \$19.99, paper.

Most pastors and seminarians are familiar with González's work on church history. His two-volume *Story of Christianity* serves as the standard historical text in first-year church history courses, in addition to offering one the best pathways into church history for a general audience. González's work is standard reading for good reason. He has the rare ability to synthesize deep scholarly knowledge and present it in a way that is readable for eighteen-year-olds. He does this, moreover, while still offering enough substance to be informative for seasoned students of theology.

His most recent work, *The Bible in the Early Church*, is another well integrated work of scholarship that is written so that almost anyone can understand it. The purpose of the book is not to make an argument *per se*, but to offer an account of the historical formation of the Bible, including how it was used and interpreted in the earliest centuries of the Church. González writes with both faith and humility. He can write of the formation of the Bible as "providential path" (p. 1) and acknowledge that we

as Christians are tied to Scripture, even as we “must be conscious of our fallibility and sin” (p. 3).

After a preface and introduction, the book is divided into three main parts. The first deals with “the shape of the Bible,” that is, the formation of the canon and the collection of the texts of the Bible. Chapters within this section detail the way early Christians appropriated the Scriptures of Israel, especially the LXX (pp. 8–9), in their worship, and the formation of the NT canon. Chapters in the first part also deal with the physical characteristics of early Bibles, as González sketches the history of writing on papyrus (p. 25) and the later transmission of manuscripts through to printed Bibles.

Part two focuses on the way that the Bible was used in the early church. This includes how the Bible was used in worship (with a special focus on the Psalms), how it was read privately, and how the Bible was used in education and social order. González reminds us that “when today we are told we should read the Bible, what we normally understand is that we should set aside some time to read Scripture in private . . . In antiquity . . . very few people could read the Bible privately” (p. 60). He goes on to point out that “most believers knew the Bible not because they had read it themselves—which most could not do—but because they had heard it read to the congregation of the faithful” (p. 64). The Bible has always found its home in the church, and González’s book reminds us of this important truth.

Finally, the third section of the text covers the way the Bible was interpreted in the early church. González includes plenty of examples, such as the way early Christians read creation, Exodus, and the Word. In these chapters, González points out that “for a sizable number of authors, typology—or ‘analogy,’ as Augustine called it—was the preferred method for relating the Hebrew Bible to the Gospel of Jesus and to the life of the Church” (p. 138). In other words, if we want to understand early Christian thought, we have to grapple with typological readings of Scripture.

The last pages of the text include brief descriptions of important early Christian thinkers, suggestions for further reading, and a couple of indexes.

One of the strengths of all of González’s work is its readability. This holds true for *The Bible in the Early Church*, but this very strength can also be a detraction. What I mean to say is that though Gonzalez accurately summarizes a breadth of historical sources, omitting footnotes and deeper explanations might leave the reader without the tools for further study. This book would have been far stronger, for instance, if the body of the text remained the same, but a spartan set of footnotes pointed interested readers toward primary sources.

Another criticism of the text comes from the way it often drifts from the focus outlined in the title. While the bulk of the text focusses on the Bible in the early church, there are many places where González traces the lines of history through to the sixteenth century. For instance, in discussing the role of the Bible in education, González spends considerable time talking about the Protestant Reformation (pp. 101–5). This happens relatively frequently in the text and means its arguments often go beyond what readers might expect or want to know.

Despite these points, the utility of this book is far greater than anything that might detract from it. It will serve as a great resource for students, pastors, and curious Christians as they seek not only to read Scripture, but to understand its history in the early church.

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R. Robert Creech. *Pastoral Theology in the Baptist Tradition: Distinctives and Directions for the Contemporary Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. xii + 259 pp. \$26.99, paper.

In *Pastoral Theology in the Baptist Tradition*, Robert Creech explores the traditional loci of pastoral ministry in Baptist thought and history. From call to ministry to leadership dynamics, Creech carefully assesses how Baptists have understood the role and function of the pastor. Creech argues that Baptist pastoral theology is most concerned about what Scripture says on specific pastoral functions. Thus, the book explores the Baptist approach of “this is that,” grounding pastoral practice in clear biblical precedence. Baptist theologians and pastors will directly benefit from this work, yet concerned with the office of pastor, models of pastoral theology, and considering leadership in ecclesiastical traditions should value Creech and his work in this volume.

Part one establishes the foundational understanding of “shepherd” and one’s call and ordination to ministry in Baptist perspective. Baptists are not known for a formal ordination process, though a Baptist idea of ordination has existed from the beginning. The thread woven throughout the notion and function of the “priesthood of all believers” is derived mainly from Heb 7:25–28 along with other related passages regarding the equality of individual Christians. Baptists have sought to maintain a balance of understanding the role of shepherd without elevating the position over the value of individual members. Thus, most Baptists have viewed ordination in functional terms, setting one apart for the task of shepherding without affirming extra-biblical authority. In this section, Creech addresses the controversial topic of women in ministry within Baptist life. Stating his position as in favor of women in the pastorate, Creech charitably interacts with all viewpoints. Many Baptists have seen the role of pastor-elder as primarily reserved for men based on texts such as 1 Tim 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. Indeed, for most of Baptist history the “dominant practice . . . has been to have only men preach and serve as pastors” (p. 82). To demonstrate a favorable view of female pastors, Creech recounts several historical examples and highlights the Baptist distinctive of the priesthood of believers as well as local church autonomy. Whether one favors women serving as pastors/

preachers or not, Creech raises a valid concern: women called into ministry should feel valued and supported in that call. Even for Baptists who reserve the role of pastor for men, tangible pathways for women in ministry should be promoted.

Part two focuses on the proclamation ministry of the pastor in preaching and witness. Baptists have historically shined in these areas. While Baptist do not typically claim a prophetic or apostolic office, the role of preaching is heavily influenced from the prophetic oracles and apostolic practice (p. 99). Baptist preaching has traditionally been a central facet of church worship, with the pulpit often being the focal point of Baptist worship and architectural design (p. 111). Like the consistency of preaching in Baptist traditions, evangelism and missions have dominated much of Baptist ministry work. Baptists such as Andrew Fuller, William Carey, and Adoniram Judson represent the forefathers of the modern mission movement. The ministry of figures such as Billy Graham show the predominance of Baptists in evangelistic efforts. The area of missions and evangelism is also populated by several Baptist women such as Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong. Creech identifies the ongoing need of Baptist ministry leaders to create a sense of “sentness” for Baptist congregations (pp. 130–31).

In part three, Creech identifies what he calls the “priestly” function of Baptist pastoral ministry. While maintaining an understanding of Baptist ordination as functional rather than sacramental, Creech maintains that ministers still serve an intercessory role for the congregation. This intercessory notion relates to the aspects of pastoral ministry in corporate worship. Creech capably navigates discussions of how Baptists have viewed the ordinances without getting too distracted from the main task. While Baptists have categorically rejected the sacramental notion of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism, some Baptists have sought to maintain a higher view of these corporate acts in Baptist life (pp. 142–52). Creech issues a compelling challenge to readers: “The challenge for Baptist pastors is to help our congregations hold a high view of these acts of worship, seeing them as more than ‘mere symbols,’ as deputy significant signs that Christ has graciously given to us for our spiritual nourishment” (p. 152). Creech concludes this section with an overview of pastoral care and spiritual formation in church history and the Baptist tradition, with particular attention to Dallas Willard as a significant Baptist influence in spiritual formation. Willard contended that pastors were to lead their congregations with “authentic knowledge of spiritual truth” for the sake of making disciples for the sake of the community and the world (p. 182).

The final section of the book discusses the aspects of pastoral ministry related to leadership. Though leadership insights are dispersed throughout the text, Creech specifically has the notion of “servant” in mind in regard to pastoral leadership. Reemphasizing insights from chapter 2 on ordination, Creech notes how pastoral authority is always tempered by the “priesthood of all believers” in the Baptist tradition. Authority, therefore, is a stewardship from Christ and should be accrued rather than assumed. Pastors who adhere to a servant-leadership mentality will gain authority

while maintaining a humble posture in service to the congregation. Pastoral leadership, according to Creech, is a shared responsibility while directing others with the hope of Christ. These types of pastors understand that “the future is God’s future, and they help others revise their future stories to include God as well” (p. 236).

Creech’s work should prove helpful to Baptist seminary students preparing for ministry, as well as those interested in pastoral theology more generally. *Pastoral Theology in the Baptist Tradition* should be seen as an introduction to the topic, necessitating further reading and research on individual topics. It is valuable as a Baptist perspective, seeking to harmonize other Baptist perspectives in its presentation. Creech’s simple “this is that” thesis to describe Baptist pastoral theology is helpful, but also creates some confusion when it comes to more divisive issues such as women in ministry and the practice of the ordinances in Baptist life. Those advocating for different positions on these issues all claim to stand upon a normal reading of Scripture yet arrive at different conclusions. Hence, a more nuanced pastoral theology in Baptist perspective must consider historical and cultural practices that have influenced Baptist thought and ministry. Events such as the Second Great Awakening, the Modernist-Fundamentalist controversy, the so-called Conservative Resurgence, and the dynamic between Reformed and non-Reformed theologies within Baptist life have all affected Baptist pastoral theology to some degree. Creech is aware of these historical and theological occurrences, yet it would require additional volumes to unpack how each one affected Baptist pastoral theology and practice. Regardless of whether readers agree with all his conclusions, Creech’s work stands as a helpful introduction and handbook to pastoral ministry for Baptist life and should be helpful for many years to come.

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R. B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman. *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. xxvi + 289 pgs. \$24.49, paper.

At the end of his high priestly prayer, Jesus prays on behalf of all his disciples throughout the ages, “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24, ESV). The telos of redeemed humanity is to behold the glory of the triune God. And the aim of the pastor in the present age is to point his flock to this divine glory week in and week out as he opens the Scriptures and directs the faith-filled gaze of his congregants to the wonders of this God’s

redemptive work through the incarnation of the Son and the sending of the Holy Spirit. This is the motivation which lies behind R. B. Jamieson's and Tyler R. Wittman's recent work on dogmatic exegesis. Their argument is straightforward: "Beholding Christ by faith requires that we hear and obey Christ's teaching. In order to understand Christ's teaching, we must reason both exegetically and dogmatically" (p. 235).

The claim they present and defend throughout the book is that these two types of reasoning (exegetical and dogmatic) do not take place apart from each other but are mutually reinforcing and informing. Following John Webster's essay on biblical reasoning, they say that exegetical reasoning follows the text of Scripture (in all its grammatical, canonical, and socio-historical context) while dogmatic reasoning "attends to the theological claims of the text, looking along and with the text to discern the ultimate reality to which it bears witness" (xviii). The one cannot be complete without the other. If exegetical reasoning helps one understand what the text *says*, dogmatic reasoning leads one to understand what the text *means*. Their goal is to demonstrate that there is "two-way traffic" between exegesis and dogmatics (or systematic theology) (xix). Careful exegesis of biblical texts reveals a theological grammar (to use a term that recurs frequently in their book) that in turn guides faithful exegesis.

To demonstrate the necessity of this symbiotic relationship, they turn to theology proper and Christology, showing that the witness of Scripture requires readers to adhere to certain principles and rules (taught and practiced by pro-Nicene pastor theologians) that guide and inform their exegetical conclusions. A helpful table summarizing these rules can be found in the appendix (pp. 239–40).

With this work Jamieson and Wittman help answer the question concerning the relationship between exegesis and theology. They demonstrate, through careful exegesis, that the conclusions of systematic theology are not some superstructure forced upon the witness of Scripture, but are in fact the very foundation which provides its coherence. As they write, "Proper dogmatic reasoning moves not away from Scripture to a final resting place in theological construction but stays within Scripture, moves within Scripture, and delves deeper into the inexhaustible riches of the mysteries declared in Scripture" (p. 233). Thus the interplay between exegesis and theology is a circle, not a line. The two mutually inform and strengthen each other, drawing the exegetical theologian to behold the triune, redeeming God in all his beauty.

Though it is not a polemical work, their project does reveal the deficiencies of a strict biblicism which is reticent to acknowledge the positive role of the historical witness of the church as a ministerial authority to biblical interpretation. Instead, through careful interaction with Scripture and patristic sources, they show how the theological consensus of the pro-Nicene era opens trinitarian and Christological riches which otherwise may remain hidden to contemporary exegetes untrained in patristic theology.

The effect of the work, which is written for pastors, scholars, students, and thoughtful lay readers, is a call for a more theologically robust reading

of Scripture. Recently, after a sermon which heralded the beauty of the Trinity, a pastor confessed to me that he thought the sermon deficient due to its lack of practical application. If by practical application he meant how a parent might address their child's reticence to pick up his room that afternoon, he may have been right. But if practical application can mean heralding our God such that our people are filled with wonder and worship, he was quite wrong. *Biblical Reasoning* is both an invitation and a challenge: an invitation to wrestle with Scripture, refusing to let go until the Spirit blesses with a vision of the Reality behind the text; and a challenge to hold up to scrutiny one's assumptions about how to approach, interpret, and herald the text, assumptions which may need to return, in the spirit of the Reformation, to wisdom from the past.

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Jackson W. *The Cross in Context: Reconsidering Biblical Metaphors for Atonement*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022. xii + 256 pp. \$25.00, paper.

In this work, Jackson W.—a pseudonym—seeks to demonstrate the way metaphors used to articulate atonement theology often conflate the biblical data. After defending the assumption that both the biblical horizon and our own are contextualized, the author performs a detailed analysis of atonement in the OT in its relationship to the purity laws and observes that atonement affects a variety of objects, ranging from people to things like the altar. Key to the argument being advanced, though, is that atonement is not always achieved with the death of an animal but can also be achieved through compensatory gifts (like jewelry in Num 31:48–54). When describing the general purpose for sacrifices, the author summarizes them by saying they “enable people to draw near to God” (p. 66) and achieve this effect “by vindicating God’s honor” (p. 88, italics removed).

As a key part of the overall thesis, the author makes a distinction between the metaphor of sin as debt and punishment for sin (p. 144). According to the author, God’s anger and punishment come on those who fail to deal with their sin, but atonement allows one to avoid this punishment (p. 70). Since atonement can be achieved by means other than killing a sacrificial victim, the author contends “atonement in the Old Testament does not inherently imply a death sentence” (p. 75). Thus, when handling passages like Lev 17:11, the author explains that it is “the giving of one’s life to God” rather than the death itself that effects atonement (p. 86).

In light of this, the author contends that when people say Jesus pays our debt by bearing our punishment, they are overinterpreting the biblical data

and confusing the metaphor of sin as debt with the punishment remaining on unaddressed sin. Despite the distinction, the author still wants to retain the notion of Christ as a “penal substitute,” but says that this needs to be understood in the sense that Jesus pays the compensatory penalty for sin on our behalf “without necessarily implying that God the Father punishes Christ the Son” (p. 146; cf. p. 177).

Those familiar with the history of soteriological reflection will recognize similarities with Anselm’s satisfaction theory, though the parallels are only noted obliquely throughout (p. 186, p. 198). For instance, the author writes, “Honor represents the core problem and solution” (p. 183). Our sin fails to give God what he deserves, and therefore we “have robbed God” (p. 63). Humans thus owe God a debt, and sacrificial offerings were offered “as satisfaction for the debt owed” (p. 185). When these key pieces are utilized to interpret Christ’s death, the answer mirrors Anselm’s: “Christ’s death is a sacrifice of compensation, that is, a payment. This ransom pays the debt we cannot pay” (p. 188).

This volume does several things well. First, while acknowledging the effects of context on meaning and interpretation, the author does not make the case that biblical metaphors of atonement are just metaphor and context with no meaning that needs to be preserved. To put this in the author’s words, “Scripture does not minimize sin by describing it with metaphors” (p. 46). As a result, the reality of God’s wrath at sin and its need for punishment are preserved in this account.

Second, the work captures the vast array of means by which atonement is achieved in the OT. Many Christians today read the Pentateuch in light of their understanding of how Christ’s death saves and assume the same rationale is operative in all sacrifices. The author does a fine job of letting the OT represent itself. However, I wonder if the author has not traded one form of context for another. In short, one might conclude the analysis of OT sacrifices becomes the interpretive key for the NT (p.185). If the biblical horizons are contextualized, as the author averred at the outset, might there not be alterations in how atonement was understood during the intertestamental and NT eras? Does the OT limit how atonement can be achieved in the NT? While the OT’s representation of atonement should not be dismissed, I do not think it should dictate the parameters for understanding atonement in the NT as it seems to do in this work.

This emphasis on the OT side of the equation brings up one of the weaknesses of the book, namely, that some of the key passages used to support penal substitution, like Rom 3:21–26, have minimal treatment that is unlikely to be compelling to its advocates (pp. 190–93). The same can be said for the author’s reading of Gal 3:13 and the dismissal of Christ’s taking on Israel’s curse (p. 187). While the author successfully argues that too much interpretation imposes a penal substitutionary logic on Old

Testament sacrifices, the choice to question all biblical support for penal substitution in the same work might have been a bridge too far.

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