emissionibus deduxere conjugationes, accep-
habent matrimonium. Basilidis autem sectato-
‘Cum interrogassent, inquiunt, apostoli, num-
 melius uxorem non ducere, dicunt respondi-
Dominum: ‘Non omnes capiunt verbum
Sunt enim eunuchi alii a nativitate, alii ve-
necessitate.’ ‘Hoc dictum autem sic in-
pretantur: ‘Quidam ex quo nati sunt, nat-
ter feminam aversantur, qui quidem homi-
tentes temperamento, recte faciunt, si uxo-
non ducant. Hi, inquiunt, eunuchi sunt ex-
tivitate. Qui autem sunt a necessitate, ii
theatrici exercitatores, qui, gloriae studio re-
se continent. Quinetiam qui casu aliquo e-
sunt eunuchi facti sunt per necessitatem.
ataque eunuchi sunt per necessitatem, non
eunuchi secundum logon, seu rationem.
num regni sempiterni gratia seipsos castra-
ud ad declinandas, inquiunt, conjugii mole-
fecerunt, quod procurandæ rei familiaris onu-
sollicitudinem timerent. Et illud: Melius
Stromata

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Is Elohim Allah?

Wageeh Y. F. Mikhail

The purpose of this paper is to serve as a discussion of the missiological implications of the doctrine of knowing God in both Christianity and Islam as two religions believing in one true God. It should be made clear, at this point, however, that the route the researcher takes is not systematic, in terms of looking at the historical and theological aspects of this issue, though these aspects will be pointed to in some capacity. The main emphasis of this paper is, however, missiological. The researcher is much concerned about the missiological implications of this issue when wisely used in the dialogue between the two religions. He therefore pleas for a deep appreciation of the theological heritage Christianity and Islam have in common—especially of the belief in one God.

Preliminary notes

First, God loves people and reveals Himself to them in numberless ways. Despite their religious affiliations, people remain the subject of divine love. This divine love necessitates, in turn, that people strive to love each other, as a natural result. A major part of this mandate demands understanding, without which love becomes just an abstract and ideal thing. This premise leads to dynamic dialogues and productive talks.

To illustrate, one might use the simple fact that some Muslims still think Christians worship three gods: the Father, the Son, and the Virgin Mary. This, to be sure, is based on the Qur’anic attacks on an ancient Christian heresy which was in existence during the rise of Islam. It taught that God married the Virgin Mary and physically produced Jesus. Therefore, assuring Muslims that this is not the biblical Trinity, but an ancient heretical doctrine to which no one holds anymore, is imperative and essential for a productive discussion on the Trinity. Therefore, in order to love one another and thus manifest God’s love, each is to understand the theological convictions of the other.
It has been said that one main reason Christians do not like to claim God as Allah is because of the long history of Muslim persecution—particularly in the Middle East. This long and aggressive history towards Christians in the Middle East makes it hard for Christians to say, “Yes, we worship the same God.” Christians in the Middle East desperately need God’s love to heal their history from this bitterness, which is the main hindrance to Muslim evangelism.

Second, the sensitivity of the issue is a key element in this discussion. Some evangelicals, sadly, have been arguing that Islam is a religion initiated by the devil. They claim that the God of Islam, Allah, is not the God of the Bible. Allah, according to them, was a tribal idol, which was worshiped even before Muhammad in the Arabian Peninsula. Others say that Allah was the moon god of ancient Arabia. This destructive attitude towards Islam is futile and thus, it is of no value whatsoever. Reformed people, nevertheless, are more sensitive to issues dealing with other people’s systems of beliefs. The presupposition here is that Christians from a Reformed worldview know that there is just one true God to begin with. Therefore, they are not called to takfeer (designate the others as disbelievers), but to tadkeer (remind) the entire world that there is a God, a true God.

Third, there should be no doubt that the issue of the uniqueness of Jesus is not questionable. Jesus Christ is not another founder of another religion; He is God incarnate. His work was not to teach people how to be good; His work was, and still is, to redeem people and thus, to give them peace with God. In that sense, then, one does not feel embarrassed to say that Christianity is an exclusive religion. We cannot have inter-religious dialogue at the expense of Jesus’ uniqueness. If the uniqueness of Christ is disregarded, then Christianity is left with nothing. Yet, the plea—the missiological plea—is for relevant communication of the gospel. There are, no one should deny, some major differences between Christianity and Islam. “In Islam,” Pope John Paul II says, “all the richness of God’s self-revelation, which constitutes the heritage of the Old and New
Testaments, has definitely been set aside.”¹ Not to mention, there is no cross in Islam. It is “not a religion of redemption.”² Yet, the Christian-Muslim dialogue is still possible.

The Thesis

Having noticed the aforementioned points, the thesis of this paper, therefore, is that Christians and Muslims know and thus worship the same God. Both worship Allah whose will and love is revealed in human history. There are, doubtlessly, some clarifications, which will be discussed later in the paper. Nonetheless, it should be avowed at this part of the paper that this knowledge has no redemptive value for it lacks the salvific dimension. This thesis will be discussed thoroughly in the subsequent areas of argumentations: Biblical, Theological, Epistemological, and Linguistic. It will be concluded, then, with some missiological implications.

The Biblical argument

Two biblical passages are considered here. The first is Paul’s conversion story and the second his evangelistic message at Athens.

Paul’s conversion

The Book of Acts records the story of Paul’s meeting face to face with the risen Lord Jesus. On the road to Damascus, where Paul was going to persecute Christians, the Lord appeared to him. Being overwhelmed with this experience, as a result, Paul’s career was altered and his concept of zeal, God, and ministry was ultimately changed. It has been argued that Paul did not begin to worship a new God after his conversion. He was already introduced to the God of the Old Testament, yet his concept of who God was, was totally and fundamentally revolutionized after meeting Jesus. God became known in a different way.

Muslims, like the pre-conversion Paul, have some knowledge of God. Theirs, like his, is not full however. Their knowledge of

² Ibid.
God, primarily taken from the Old Testament, carries some truths. For that reason, it should not be denied that the Qur’an has some truth about God. This truth comes from the credibility of the primary source, i.e. the Old Testament. The very fact that so many Qur’anic stories and accounts were taken from the Old Testament shows that Muslims already worship the God of the Old Testament—again, not in a full recognition of His attributes. Yet one should accentuate that neither their knowledge nor Paul’s, though based on biblical texts, were full.

Paul’s experience further affirms that a personal meeting between Christ and Islam has to take place in order for Muslims to come to know God in full. This personal meeting is valid only if the knowledge of the historic New Testament Jesus is attained. Paul’s knowledge of God and His worship were not completed until he was introduced to Jesus. This meeting gave him a new concept of God. After being so self-confident because of his keeping of the Law, he became more dependent on God. When Muslims meet Christ, their knowledge of God takes a dramatic change. God’s “beautiful” names, for example, become even more beautiful and His character becomes “real.” Paul’s experience thus, can be seen as a paradigm for Muslims. It, however, emphasizes that without Jesus Christ, the knowledge of God is incomplete.

Like Paul’s renewed and well-directed zeal, Muslims’ zeal for Allah will be much greater than before. Once Jesus is in the center of their worldview, the zeal for Allah takes a different twist. It becomes a true zeal, not only for Allah but also for Allah’s name. The difference rests on the fact that when Christ is in the center, the glory of God becomes the glory of a personal God. People will have zeal for the name of their own Allah—that makes it stronger.

That is not to say that the Old Testament account of God is not enough in its redemptive value. Paul himself affirms that people can know God from the entire Old Testament. “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) RSV.


Many Muslims do not think of God as a personal God who reveals His character; what He reveals is His will. What people have to do is just follow it.
and genuine. If, for that reason, Muslims believe in Christ as the full and the last revelation of God, their worship of Allah, their knowledge of Him, and therefore, their lives will be spectacularly different. That is to say that the knowledge they now have which has no redemptive value will be a saving knowledge. And it will, in turn, move them from an impersonal relationship with Allah to a deeper level of knowing Him and worshiping Him.

In sum, one finds himself in total agreement with John Stott in saying:

There are many Sauls of Tarsus in the world today. Like him they are richly endowed with natural gifts of intellect and character; men and women of personality, energy, initiative and drive; having the courage of their non-Christian convictions; utterly sincere, but sincerely mistaken; traveling, as it were, from Jerusalem to Damascus instead of from Damascus to Jerusalem; hard, stubborn, even fanatical, in their rejection of Jesus Christ. But they are not beyond his sovereign grace. We need more faith, more holy expectation, which will lead us to pray for them (as we may be sure the early Christians prayed for Saul) that Christ will first prick them with his goads and then decisively lay hold of them.7

Paul in Athens

The book of Acts, in the second part of chapter 17, records Paul’s evangelistic encounter in Athens. Paul, looking and thinking deeply about the city’s idolatrous religiosity, had a holy zeal for the name of the Lord. The idols in the city and the attraction people had towards them made him “angry in the spirit.” As a result, he could not pass by them without sharing the good news of Jesus with them. Yet, as he approached them, his methodology was unique. He looked at their idols and said that he knew that they worshipped the “unknown god,” about whom he then tells them.

First, however, he praised them and their religious commitment. Then he began to speak about the unknown god. In

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6 It is needless to say that Muslims are required to believe in Christ as a prophet of Allah. Believing in Allah’s messengers is part of the Five Pillars. Yet, what is meant here is the salvific redeeming knowledge of Jesus Christ as the Way, Truth, and Life.

his sermon, he preached about God 1) as the Creator of the universe, 2) as the Sustainer of life, 3) as the Ruler of all the nations, 4) His nearness to all, and 5) as the Judge of all. These truths are primarily universal. Surely, one might argue, that the message of the cross is not clear here. Yet it would have been almost impossible for Paul to preach on the resurrection, as recorded in the end of the sermon without pointing out to the cross of Jesus Christ. The universal truths Paul preached were “Christianized,” for Jesus was the center of the Pauline message.

This incident affirms that Muslims, as the people of Athens were, do have some truth about who God is, what He does, and what He will do in the future. Yet, it must not be ignored that though this knowledge is valuable and valid, it again, has no redemptive value. What redemption can people wait for when they acknowledge God as a Judge? However, the question here should be whether Paul authenticated the Athenian knowledge of God or if he voided it in order to preach the Christian Gospel. It would be an unfaithful handling of the text if we claim that Paul voided the Athenian concept of God. What he did actually seems to be an enlargement of their theology and knowledge of God. He told them what they needed to know about God that related directly to their salvation, because what they knew was not salvific—the same issue regarding the Muslim knowledge of God. In addition, Paul was making a point of contact with their worldview. It has been well said that this “made what historically could not have been the meagerest and most causal of contacts into a moment frozen in time, the exemplary meeting between Jerusalem and Athens, and the anticipation of the Christianized Hellenistic culture.”

This was a remarkable approach, to which value the researcher will speak later, by which Paul won the respect of his addressees, and he gained their attention to his message. This was, needless to say, a main factor in the success of his encounter with them. Now, would Christians, following Paul, have

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8 Stott, 283-91.
9 Ibid., 283-84.
sympathy towards the Muslim idea of God? Not to mention that Christians “have far more in common with Muslims than Paul had with his audience in Athens!” Would Christians take the concept of this impersonal Allah, who as mentioned earlier, does not reveal His character but rather His will, and develop it into the theology of the Father of Jesus Christ? Does such an enterprise negatively affect the gospel or cause it to be welcomed among Muslims? What is needed, in this regard, is an authentic Christian recognition of what the Qur’an says about Allah as a valid partial definition of Him. Yet another dimension is as important as this recognition itself. Namely, that the Qur’anic, as the Athenian, concept of God is neither full, nor can it lead to salvation since it is not salvific at its very nature.

One is again reminded of the missiological purpose of this paper. It is both because mission should be taken seriously and that the full revelation of God in Jesus is essential for salvation that every effort is to be made to clearly communicate the gospel with Muslims. Paul did not condemn the Athenians but praised them. Will Christians do the same with Muslims? Paul did not disregard their poets, but he used them to support his arguments. Would Christians agree that what Paul did was “…a fundamental step, (and) an affirmation of human culture not as sufficient in itself, but as a worthy vehicle for the truth of the gospel towards which, unwittingly, it was striving.” Will Christians apply the same principle to Islam, which, to be sure, is an Abrahamic faith, not a faith in idols?

**Theological argument: What is held in common?**

Those who oppose the thesis of this paper say that the Muslim Allah and the God of the Bible cannot be reconciled for they are very different. Further, they should not be identified as one God. To be sure, one sees why people hold such views. There are some fundamental issues involved. Among them are the Trinity, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, the cross of Christ, the

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12 Ibid., 320.
resurrection of Christ, the deity of the Holy Spirit, and some other essential Christian doctrines. These issues are not to be overlooked. Rather, they should be the subjects of deep Christian-Muslim dialogues. Yet, for the purpose of this paper, the commonality between the two faiths is emphasized. Christianity and Islam share many beliefs. They both are Abrahamic in their faith, in that both trace their origins back to Abraham, Isaac, and Ishmael. Both believe in the sovereignty of God. They believe in eschatology, resurrection, and life after death. There are three aspects of this commonality between Christianity and Islam, in that they are historical, scriptural, and teleological religions.

The historical aspect of Islam lays in the fact that it, alongside with Judaism and Christianity, believes that Allah has been actively working in human history. Islam believes that the final revelation is that of Muhammad. In addition, it is to be noted that:

Islam adopts essential figures from both Judaism and Christianity. Moses was a prophet of God, Muslims say, who gave the law of God. Jesus was a friend of God. But when Jesus referred to the Father sending another Counselor, “who will teach you all the things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26), Muslims believe that Jesus was not talking about the Holy Spirit but about Mohammad.

Islam is also scriptural. The Qur’an is the heart of Islam. Muslims, however, have a different view of the inspiration of the Qur’an. They believe in Tanzeel (that it came down from heaven as it is now). It was, they believe, written in heaven in Arabic and then given to Muhammad “over a period of 23 years” as a revelation from Allah. There have been, in the Muslim world, some attempts to deal with the Qur’an as a literary text—attempts that were put to an end even before their launch. Yet few who fled from the Muslim world to Europe have, in fact, succeeded to deal with the Qur’an as a text. Their works, to be sure, are banned in the Arab world. This shows how strong the belief of the divine

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
origin of the Qur’an is. Muslims cannot grasp how the injil (the gospel) could have some textual variations. In fact, for most of them, this is evidence that the Bible has been corrupted. Thus, Muslims have a high view of the Qur’an.16

Islam is also teleological, as it has a specific end to which history and events are aiming. In contrast with Hinduism, Islam does not believe in reincarnation; everything started at a specific point in history and will end on time.

According to Hans Küng, there are however, in fact, more than the aforementioned commonality between the three Abrahamic religions. He concludes that the “fundamental common feature shared by Jews, Christians, and Muslims consists in the belief in the one only God, who gives life and meaning to all things.”17 He also affirms the divine involvement in human history as a feature of this commonality. God, in the Abrahamic faith, is “the creator of the world and man who takes an active part in history: the one God of Abraham who speaks through the prophets and reveals himself to his people...God certainly transcends history, but he is nonetheless immanent in it.”18 Further, he argues that the Abrahamic faiths equally emphasize the fact that God can be reached. He is not far away from the people; they can reach Him through prayers and mediations.19 Elsewhere Küng argues that:

1. In the light of the universalist testimonies that pervade the Old and New Testaments it is quite impossible to maintain that the Bible takes a purely negative attitude of exclusive intolerance towards other religions.
2. It is perfectly clear that the God of the Bible is not the God of only the Jews and Christians but also the God of all men.20

Nonetheless, the question of the commonality between the Abrahamic religions brings rise to more discussions as the issue of

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16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
general revelation is considered. General revelation is God’s gracious work in history, nature, time, human consciousness and experiences by which He makes Himself known to people in different ways. This process is vindicated and supported by the testimony of the Scripture. In Romans 1, for example, Paul argues that the knowledge of God has been made known to humankind through what God has made. Nevertheless, as Paul continues to say, this revelation has not led people to salvation. Though being historically, yet not salvifically, sufficient, the general revelation, as Van Til notes, “is sufficient for the purpose it was meant to serve, that of being the playground for the purpose of differentiation between those who would and those who would not serve God.”

General revelation affirms that, in His grace, God put His knowledge, in different capacities and measurements, into the hearts of men and women. This was supposed to lead them to a fuller knowledge of Him, which in turn would give them salvation. Yet what has been occurring throughout history is that people seek to respond to the general revelation in a different way. It can be maintained that “world religions do, though in error, proclaim God’s truth. Though they are far away from God, God is not far away from them.” For this reason, to be sure, many argue that all religions, as legitimate responses to the revelation, are valid. Yet, Christians who cannot compromise the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, hold fast to the fact that general revelation lead people to their judgment. Emil Brunner accentuates the fact that:

Jesus Christ is the Fulfillment of all religion and the Judgment on all religion. As the Fulfiler, He is the Truth which these religions seek in vain. There is no phenomenon in the history of religion that does not point toward Him…. He is also the Judgment on all religion. Viewed in His light, all religious systems appear untrue, unbelieving and indeed godless.

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Historically speaking, the church has affirmed its dogma of Jesus’ uniqueness and His finality from its early days. The creeds of the church make that clear. Jesus was “from the being of the Father, true God from true God, begotten not made, of the same substance...as the Father.” Yet as the church declared Jesus’ uniqueness, it found itself in a pluralistic society. The ancient world was full of idols. As a result, it became clear to Christian theologians that this human search for religion is natural; it is the human response to God’s revelation. However, some of the church Fathers were aware of the universality of the revelation. “Justin Martyr...declared that Socrates and other Greek philosophers were Christian on the ground that the Logos whose presence was focused in Jesus Christ informs the whole of creation.”

Later, Augustine taught that there “were many wolves within the church and many without the fold.” Clement of Alexandria taught that the “Divine Logos was reflected in human thought...philosophy was their (the Greeks’) tutor to bring the Greek people to Christ, like the Law was the tutor of the Hebrews.” J. H. Bavinck points out that the Reformers did not dismiss the value of general revelation. He writes, “They emphatically taught that God showed himself to us in creation.” Further, Calvin, Brunner, and Kraemer, as Leith argues, are so much in favor of seeing religions in that sense, i.e. a natural consequence to the universal revelation of God. Thus, there should be more openness to other religious systems, which, as it has been argued, reflect the response of humans to God’s disclosure of Himself.

Having said that, however, it must not be understood that this is an authentication of all religions as valid paths to God. There is no, and shall not be any, compromise of Christ’s claim that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. On this firm belief stands

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24 Leith, 279.  
25 Ibid., 283.  
26 Ibid.  
28 Ibid.
Christianity, and if this is compromised, then the Christian faith is no more than post-modern relativism. There is another understanding of religion. Religion is not just understood in terms of the human response to the universal revelation of God, “but in particular in the light of the incarnation of the wisdom and the power of God in Jesus Christ.”

Thus, it is quite plain that God has been disclosing Himself to people in different ways through their religions. Christianity, however, bears the witness to the fullness of this revelation in Jesus Christ. Yet, this should go along with the fact that Judaism and Islam have some truth in them. One aspect of this truth is the teaching about the oneness of God, His existence, His ultimate will, His sovereign lordship, His wisdom, His word, His Justice, His mercies, His truth, His interference in human history, His goodness, His judgment on evil and sin, His beautiful names, et al. These are some common elements in all the so-called Abrahamic religions.

Here, again, it should be made clear that what is at stake is neither relativism, nor pluralism; rather it is a genuine support and a call for evangelism. It is because we worship the same God that evangelism becomes achievable. This commonality should be used as a point of contact with Islam, that is to say that Islam would more likely be open to dialogue than Hinduism, for example. Christians and Muslims can sit together to discuss the goodness of God, His providence, His names, and so on. Christian-Muslim dialogue can be built on common aspects of the divinity with no problems. In addition, this could lead both to a deeper appreciation of the richness of God’s role in history and human experience.

**The Redemptive Value**

Should the thesis of this paper be accepted, a natural question will arise. That is, “What is the redemptive value or the salvific worth of Muslims knowing and worshiping the same God as Christians?” Because people like to act like God, it is natural that they judge. They like to sit on the throne and judge who is to go to

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29 Leith, 282
30 Hebrews 1:1 ff.
heaven and who is to perish. Therefore, this tendency is in the very nature of people. Yet, it must be maintained that Christians are not called to judge. The Christian call is a missiological call; a call to bear witness to the very ends of the earth. Its center is not “you will perish;” but “in Jesus, there is life.” In light of that, it is here proposed that the abovementioned question, though being legitimate and reasonable, is unnecessary, or perhaps has less missiological value. Küng rightly argues that the “fate of earlier pagans, or those not confronted with the revelation of Christ, is of only indirect interest to the Bible.”\(^{31}\) It would be even more helpful if Christians do not ask it at all, but go on to evangelize and bear witness to the Lord. Their main concern, to be sure, is not heaven versus hell; rather it is Jesus and his redeeming work. There is a tremendous need in the world today, not to know whether hell exists but whether God is still there to feel for the people and help them in wars, famines, and disasters. Ironically, it has been said that, when Constantinople was falling to Muslims, Christians were heavily involved in discussions over the gender of the angels. Ill theology, it seems, paralyzed them from their mission and the great city fell!

That being said, however, it must not be understood that there is a call for relative tolerance. Eternity is eternity. There is, the apostles made clear, no other name under the sun by which people must be saved. Christ is the only Way. Nevertheless, it is because Christ is the only way that Christians should be on their knees praying that the God of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau and Jacob would open the eyes of millions around the globe to know His Name. This conviction should lead Christians to not be quick to condemn, but to be quick to witness and to have evangelistic compassion towards others. Christians are neither to “condemn nor to escape, but to assume (some truth) and to go deeper.”\(^{32}\) Christians should constantly call on the name of Jesus for he is able “to liberate the truth of the world from its entanglement in


error and sin.” 33 The zeal for the name should spring as Christians see millions of people, not only Muslims, not honoring the name of Jesus. Christians pray, “hallowed be Thy name” yet, few are those who have the zeal and the passion to go out and make the name honored. No one can deny, as Küng affirms that “despite whatever truth they (world religions) possess concerning God, the world religions are at the same time in error.” 34 Christ is not, as many relativists may argue, another light to humanity; rather, He is The True Light. One must never forget that the cross of Christ is not an option, nor is missionary work a luxury to the church. It has been rightly said that:

We should never say: ‘they (non-Christians) are so good that they do not need the church.’ We should rather say: ‘They are so good that Christ cannot do without them in his Church; and it is for us an urgent duty to help such good seed to grow into a beautiful flower. They need the Mission to help and sustain that discovery of God which they are already coming to by their own reason and God’s invisible grace. 35

A final Linguistic note

As it is known, the word for God in the Arabic language is Allah. It is closely related to the Hebraic concept of (יו). The exact identification of the Hebrew (י) and the Arabic (ا) cannot be overlooked. Elohim is Allah. That is to say, the Arabic word, being itself a Semitic word, simply confirms the thesis of this paper. The God of the Hebrews is the Allah of the Arabs. This simple premise must not be dismissed, as long as a fruitful dialogue with Muslims is considered. From this, it becomes plain that when fundamental evangelicals claim that Allah is the so-called moon god, they not only they lose their dialogue with Islam as they insult its God; they also do an injustice to Christians in the Middle East.

Christians in that region, even before the rise of Islam, have been using the word Allah as their “only” word for God. How can fundamentalists snatch this beautiful name from Christians in the

33 Küng, “World Religions in God’s Plan,” 54.
34 Ibid., 51.
Middle East? How can they ignore the historicity of the use of this name among Christians in the Middle East? How can this linguistic argument be overlooked? Have Christians in the Middle East, for more than two thousand years, been worshiping the moon god? Or, have they been confusing the God of the Bible with the so-called moon god? Neither, to be sure, is true. They knew the God of the Bible whose name for them, and according to the language they use, is Allah.

The missiological implications

There are, as mentioned earlier, many missiological and practical outcomes of the thesis of this paper. The researcher would like to propose some of them.

If Christians approach Muslims with the conviction that they both worship the same God, they (Christians) will find it a bit easier to speak about the beautiful names of God, or, to put it traditionally, the attributes of God in Christian theology. This could lead both religions to speak of God’s common qualities as signs of unity and cooperation between the two religions.

With this conviction, Muslims will be tremendously open to listen. No one, surely, likes to be labeled as a follower of a false god. If Christians assure Muslims that both parties are dialoguing about the one true God, this will affirm the Qur’anic testimony. This will also open up more Muslims for dialogue.

This conviction will result in mission success to Muslims. It has been agreed upon that one of the most difficult fields of mission and evangelism is that which deals with Muslims. Yet the conviction of worshipping one true God would make mission to Muslims somehow feasible, which in turn would lead to success. Cartledge says:

Christians might argue that Muslims or Jews worship “a different god” because we believe their concept of God is incomplete. It is perhaps more appropriate, however, to think of Muslims and Jews as worshipping the same god, though not in His fullness. Why does it matter? Our terminology can

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36 Ironically enough, some Eastern Christians accuse Western Christians of celebrating Christmas on the sun god’s birthday, i.e. December 25. For this reason, many Eastern Churches celebrate Christmas on the 6th, or the 7th of January.
impact the effectiveness of our witness to any who do not accept Christ. It is essential that we keep channels of communication open by showing respect for people of other faiths, even if we believe their view of God is inadequate. Explaining Christ as the saving fulfillment and ultimate revelation of the same god is a natural and effective means of sharing our faith with Muslims and Jews. Insisting that they worship a different god altogether is bound to be counter-productive. It is possible to be tactful in our speech without compromising our witness.37

This conviction will reflect the Christian commitment and recognition of God’s merciful and immeasurable ways in terms of general revelation to others. J. H. Bavinck asks:

Was it not possible that God, who educated the Greek world to Christ by their philosophy, as Clemens Alexandrinus taught, likewise educated the world of the far East by the sacred books of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam? And is not Christ so the fulfillment of all the beauty and noble thought of these peoples?38

This conviction, if people follow the example of Acts 17, can be used as a point of contact with the Islamic worldview. The elements of truth in Islam should be regarded as stepping-stones so that Christians may bring the message of the gospel to others.39 The doctrine of general revelation, as J. H. Bavinck teaches, enables a productive Christian-Muslim dialogue. It makes such dialogue possible simply because there is a universal consciousness among people about God working in all religions.40

Conclusion
In sum, it is evident that the Bible richly speaks of the many ways in which God freely reveals Himself to different people in different times using a diversity of ways. This acknowledgement of the freedom of God, as Paul recognizes in Acts 17, is a Christian

39 Ibid., 51.
commitment to which all should submit. God is not limited; but we are. This freedom of God is gracious. It is also purposeful. God does not reveal Himself in vacuum; He has a purpose, a redemptive purpose, that is to say that He wills that all would be saved. For this reason He has been revealing Himself. This gracious purposeful revelation necessitates appreciation and it demands Christian acknowledgment. Muslims, needless to emphasize, are profound objects of God’s revelation. There are so many biblical truths in the Qur’an. Among them, there is the teaching of one true God, Allah. Christians, as a result, need to acknowledge the Qur’anic doctrine of God as that which has some biblical validity. The Qur’anic doctrine of God however is not full; God is not a redeemer in the Qur’an. This necessitates that Christians, as they accept the Qur’anic teaching, spread the good news of Jesus Christ. He is the full revelation of God, in whom the redeeming quality of God has been displayed in the cross. This aspect brings the Muslim concept of God into completeness and fullness. Without which the Muslim doctrine of God remains insufficient since it lacks the salvific dimension which makes knowing God a redeeming experience.

In conclusion, one finds himself in total agreement with the CRC statement on this issue:

There is only one true and living God.

Jews, Christians and Muslims share certain historical roots with each other.

We accept that by the power of God’s general grace there is knowledge of God also to be found in the faith and prayers of Jews and Muslims (Acts 17:27-28, Ro. 1:18).

The full revelation of God the Father is to be found only in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. He is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6).

We have the inescapable responsibility to witness with humility and respect, especially through the means of friendship evangelism and the offering of practical service, and to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to Jews and Muslims so that they can also experience salvation in Jesus Christ. 41

Sectarianism & Canonization:
Qumran to Yavneh

Steven J. Koster

Introduction

In outlining the whole of Jewish history Jacob Neusner discerns four phases.¹ His first phase covers all of the Biblical period up to the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Yet it is not the Biblical period that he considers definitive for Judaism. It is rather the second phase, which includes the development of the Mishnah, Talmud, and other rabbinic writings. Yet before the Mishnah was written in the late second century, there is a shadowy period associated with Yavneh. It extends from the fall of the Temple in 70 CE to the Second Jewish (Bar Kokhba) revolt in 135 CE. While Neusner’s full Age of Definition is centuries long, the key departure point for all of modern Judaism begins with the destruction of the Temple and the Yavnean period.

1. First Age of Diversity  500 BCE to 70 CE
2. Age of Definition     70 CE to 640 CE
3. Age of Cogency        640 CE to 1800 CE
4. Second Age of Diversity 1800 CE to the present

Neusner’s Phases of Jewish History

This paper endeavors to survey current thought about Yavneh (also called Jamnia), particularly in light of the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS), which illustrate the period before Yavneh. Who was at Yavneh, and what were their activities? Given significant transitions in Jewish sectarianism and Scriptures between the

Qumran period before Yavneh and full rabbinic Judaism after, how does Yavneh explain the transitions?

**Before 70: Light from Qumran**

The publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls has provided significant clarity in our picture of late Second Temple Judaism. They have provided not only literature specific to the sect at Qumran (ca. 200 BCE – 68 CE) and insight to their thought, but also manuscripts of biblical books that are a thousand years older than those previously known. These texts, along with other ancient sources, sketch a diverse Judaism and pluriform scriptures before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

**Sectarianism**

**Multiple Sects**

In the Second Temple period, one could argue that Judaism was more a collection of Judaisms, rather than a single cult. Numerous ancient sources cite a well-known list of Jewish sects including Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, and others. While we know little of their origins in the Maccabean period or earlier, we do know that sometime around 100 BCE, the three groups of Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes were in existence, and well-established in the first century CE. Even the early Christians have their roots as a Jewish movement prior to 70 CE.

**Temple Exclusivity**

Cohen argues that all the sects defined themselves in relation to the temple, with many thinking of themselves as more pure

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3 Grabbe, Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period, 185.
administrations of cultic activity than the others. The Essenes kept a shadow priesthood in the wilderness, the Pharisees sought to replicate the temple altar at the family table along with proper behavior and purity laws, and the Samaritans (and early Christians) rejected the temple. Each was the only true way, particularly in contrast to the temple cult.

**Eschatology**

Further, several had expectations of imminent vindication before their enemies, generally the Jewish masters in Jerusalem or the Roman oppressors. Not only was their way the exclusive way, they expected world events would soon prove it. The Qumranites, for example,

believed they were living in a segment of time called the end of days or the last days, the period that lay just before the decisive end or visitation. In it the forces of good and evil continued their age-old battle for control, but during this especially charged time the small chosen community was playing a decisive role not only for themselves, but also for others. They believed their fellowship had assumed functions normally associated with the Temple in Jerusalem.

They also anticipated the appearance of two messiahs, one royal and one priestly.

Early Christians share some elements of this eschatology. Not only obvious apocalyptic works like Revelation, but also Mark’s use of “the Son of Man,” warnings against false messiahs (Mark 13), and Paul’s admonition (in the oldest book in the New Testament) that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2) show clear links to the messianic and eschatological expectation of the period.

In short, the Second Temple period demonstrates a significant pluralism of parties within Palestinian Judaism that each had a

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certain focus on the temple and varying levels of exclusivity and impending eschatology.

**Canonization**

The scriptures in this period also took multiple forms. A discussion of the biblical *canon* in this period is anachronistic, since final collections of sacred books and text types were not fixed until the second or third centuries CE. Scripture here might better be described as *collections of religiously authoritative writings*. Yet the formation process of what became the canon is our present concern.

*Categories of books*

**Number of books**

During the Second Temple period, there was not a full canon but at least a group of writings considered sacred. Some manuscripts of the intertestamental book of Jubilees, for example, refer to twenty-two special books, but this reference is lacking in the Qumran versions of Jubilees. In addition, Josephus, writing roughly contemporaneously with Yavneh but likely drawing on previous convention, also lists twenty-two books that are accepted as authoritative religious history. Also roughly contemporary to Yavneh, speaks of twenty-four books as public sources of understanding. Clearly, by 70 CE there was an acknowledged category of religiously authoritative books, with a limited number of entries.

**Bi- or Tri-Partite Canon?**

The entries of that broad category appear to have developed in stages, creating subcategories. The modern Hebrew Bible, for example, includes the familiar tri-partite division of the Law,

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8 Against Apion 1.37-41.
Prophets, and Writings. Some Christian Bibles also include Apocryphal books.

Collins suggests the 19th century view of this development involved a series of progressive solidifications through the Second Temple period. First, the Law was canonized in the time of Ezra, then the Prophets by the time of Ben Sira (early second century BCE), and the Writings were closed “at the council of Jamnia, about 90 CE.”

The earliest labels for subcategories are found in the second century BCE. Sirach (ca. 180 BCE) refers to the “law of the most high,” “the Prophecies,” and also the “wisdom of all the ancients.”

The Qumran scroll 4QMMT (ca. 150 BCE) refers to books of “David” which may have meant only Psalms. Other writings from Qumran refer to only a bipartite formula. VanderKam and Flint suggest “the evidence from the scrolls points to at least two series or sections of Scriptures for the Qumran community in the second century BCE” with a third (David/Psalms) or possibly fourth series (history).

Ben Sira (ca. 115 BCE) mentions the Law and the Prophets and “the others” twice. Evans and others argue this is a clear tri-partite formula (though the final category is open and unnamed), but Collins argues not even the Prophets can be definitively defended as a closed category, since there still seems to be controversy over the status of Daniel, for instance.


Thus, in the category of sacred books in the first century CE, it appears some entries had found permanent status in particular

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10 Collins, Seers, Sybils, and Sages, 3.
11 Sirach 39:1.
12 Craig A. Evans, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Canon of Scripture in the Time of Jesus,” in Bible at Qumran (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 72.
14 Evans, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Canon of Scripture,” 71.
15 Collins, Seers, Sybils, and Sages.
subcategories (e.g., Torah), and the others were still forming. As Collins summarizes,

The evidence, then, for the period before 70 CE points to a core canon, consisting of Torah and Prophets, which was universally accepted, although the precise definition of the prophetic corpus seems to have varied, and an open-ended supplement of “other writings” was also acknowledged.16

Textual traditions and editions

Beyond collections of books, the status of individual books is further complicated by multiple, differing copies of each title. Some titles found at Qumran had multiple versions, and the copies often varied in patterns.

Crawford catalogues the types of textual variants in the Qumran literature in increasing order of intentionality. Some variants are accidents or scribal error; some are intentional smoothing or harmonization; some are expansions to better interpret the text.17 Given the expansiveness of the variants, Ulrich has argued extensively that patterns of variations in a single title should be viewed as full literary editions. Some editions, like the Samaritan Pentateuch for example, seem to have been purposely altered to make a sectarian theological point.18

Among the DSS, Waltke,19 like Tov,20 classify the text types in terms of what they later became:

1. Samaritan Pentateuch
2. Proto-Masoretic texts
3. Pre-Samaritan texts
4. Septuagintal texts
5. Non-aligned

16 Ibid., 11.
17 Crawford, “The Fluid Bible.”
One version of Miriam’s Song (Ex.15:21-22), for example, adds lines to make clear that God is the victor at the Red Sea, not Moses.
Furthermore, not only were there multiple text traditions and types during the second temple period, Ulrich argues the multiple traditions were used at the same time by the same people.\textsuperscript{21} The presence of these various text types in quantity in Palestine suggests their wide and simultaneous use.

**Summary**

Waltke, citing F. F. Bruce, takes a traditional position that the canon was simply closed by the first century CE, saying, “Jesus and the apostles held the same OT in hand that protestants do today.”\textsuperscript{22} This is not entirely convincing, given the apparent open-endedness of the peripheral categories and the wide use of text types. Even the New Testament book of Jude cites 1 Enoch as being at least worthy of reflection. The New Testament itself also preserves various text types (Pre-Samaritan texts in Acts 7 and in Hebrews 9, for example).\textsuperscript{23}

As Ulrich summarizes, at the time of the Qumran scrolls, though the inner core of the collection (the Law and the Prophets) were clearly considered authoritative works of Scripture, their order was largely but not fully set. Works nearer the periphery were still finding their place.\textsuperscript{24} Furthermore, the text of individual books was pluriform (as was Judaism). We know some books were in and some were out, but even those “in” had multiple literary editions.\textsuperscript{25}

**After 70: Yavneh Structure**

**Definition**

Yavneh, variously called Jamnia, Jamnia-by-the-sea (Yavneh-Yam), or Yabneh, is an ancient city in northern coastal Palestine. Located south of Jaffa, it is still inhabited today and called

\textsuperscript{21} Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*.
\textsuperscript{22} Waltke, “How We Got the Hebrew Bible,” 32.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Eugene Ulrich, “The Bible in the Making: The Scriptures Found at Qumran,” in *Bible at Qumran* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 57.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 65.
Yabneh. Many decades before the fall of Jerusalem, the inhabitants had opposed the Maccabees, and the city was eventually was burned by the Hasmonean rulers at the end of the second century BCE. Yabneh rose to prominence after the destruction of the temple, and played a key role in Jewish leadership between 70 and 135 CE.

**The Council Myth?**

The traditional view of the activity at Yabneh during this period suggests that, after the fall of Jerusalem, rabbinic Judaism was created in a short, decisive period. Frequently labeled the “Council at Jamnia,” in recent decades this view has been significantly challenged.

This perspective suggests that after the fall of Jerusalem, the Pharisees relocated the seat of Jewish government to Yabneh and ousted all other sects and parties. Most of the others promptly died out in various holy wars, and the Christians in particular were excommunicated. The Pharisees were then left to fix the canon on a single list of books and the text type on what became the Masoretic Text, thus inaugurating rabbinic Judaism.

How accurate is this perspective? Was the seat of government relocated? Did the Pharisees take control? Did they call a council as a definitive act? Did they reject all others groups? Did they fix the Scriptural canon in terms of sections, books, and text-types?

**New Perspective**

**Sources**

Most scholars are clear that our sources of information about Yabneh are rather thin. All of our direct knowledge of the period

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27 Cf. 1 Macc, 4:14, 2 Macc 12:8-9.
29 Neusner and Cohen, in particular, seem to have led this reassessment.
comes from the Mishnah and other writings that followed decades later.\textsuperscript{31} Traditionally, the Mishnah was understood to have been compiled in the late second century, a few decades after the Yavnean period,\textsuperscript{32} supposedly based on earlier compilations by the Yavneh scholar Rabbi Akiba and his student Rabbi Meir.\textsuperscript{33} The Mishnaic writings could very well have been constructed to present Yavneh as its own origin myth, with winners emphasized and losers marginalized, so even our direct sources may be embellished.

\textit{People and Chronology}

\textbf{First Generation}

Grabbe recounts the legend that, that upon the fall of Jerusalem, Emperor Vespasian himself gave Yohannen ben Zakkai permission to establish an academy in the city of Yavneh.\textsuperscript{34} Collins claims Yohannen had founded Yavneh as an academy before 70, and the very reason Yavneh became a seat of power was that an academy was already there. Any significant political or councilar (Sanhedrin) function came later.\textsuperscript{35}

\textbf{Second Generation}

The dominant scholar of Yavneh was Rabbi Gamaliel (aka Gamaliel II), who led the group for several decades. He was old enough to have seen Jerusalem in youth, prior to 70 CE.\textsuperscript{36} While a long-term leader, he often clashed with his colleagues, who tried

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} Grabbe, \textit{Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period}, 117. Cf. also Daniel Boyarin, “Justin Martyr Invents Judaism,” \textit{Church History} 70, no. 3 (S 2001). These and others all disclaim their reconstructions as tentative in the face of the complex composition, compilation, and redaction of the Mishnah.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Newman, “Council of Jamnia and the Old Testament Canon,” 326. “The \textit{Mishnah}, which forms the basis for both the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds, was traditionally compiled by Rabbi (Judah the Prince), who was born in A.D. 135 and died about A.D. 210.”
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Grabbe, \textit{Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period}, 122.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Collins, \textit{Seers, Sybils, and Sages}, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ephrat Habas, “Rabban Gamaliel of Yavneh and His Sons: The Patriarchate before and after the Bar Kokhva Revolt,” \textit{Journal of Jewish Studies} 50 (Spr 1999): 34.
\end{itemize}
to remove him a few times. He was indeed deposed for a time and Eleazar ben Azariah was installed as the head. He was not necessarily the smartest or richest rabbi, and Habas argues that the key to his power was his lineage. He was well-traveled, and appears to have made some semi-official journeys visiting other Jewish areas as some sort of office holder. He disappears from our sources long before 132, suggesting his death, probably before the uprisings of 115-118.

Rabbi Akiba was also a second-generation leader. He disagreed with Gamaliel occasionally, sometimes strongly, but accepted Gamaliel’s authority, and even mediated between Gamaliel and other sages. Akiba is noted for having died in the Bar Kokhba revolts (ca. 135), supposedly having declared Bar Kokhba as the messiah, though Grabbe suggests that many older studies are uncritical in their assessment of the Akiba tradition. In any case, Akiba likely held a messianic-nationalistic view.

Hananina ben Gamaliel, Gamaliel’s eldest son, was a good scholar and allowed to dispute with the more senior Akiba and Rabbi Yose the Galilean. His disputation and the recording of his minority view, both at a time when his father’s generation was still active, suggest unusual prominence at a young age. He also likely stood in for his father at an official event, further suggesting prominence. He likely married and was severely ill for a time. Like his father, he disappears and is never mentioned in connection with Bar-Kokhba. Habas argues that because Gamaliel’s son had undue position, their whole family possessed prominence. Gamaliel himself somehow had power because of his family. He was in turn grooming Hananina, but both died in the

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37 Somewhere between 80-117.
38 Collins, Seers, Sybils, and Sages, 4.
39 Habas, “Rabban Gamaliel of Yavneh and His Sons.”
40 Ibid., 27.
41 Ibid., 34.
42 Ibid., appendix.
43 As suggested in j. Ta’anit 4.8. It is unclear whether bar Kokhba thought himself the messiah.
44 Grabbe, Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period, 124.
early second century, causing a power vacuum that was never really filled at Yavneh. 45

Third Generation

This pattern is repeated in Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel years later. A much younger son of Gamaliel, he was still a student during the Bar Khokba revolt and rose to prominence in following decades at the new center in Usha, Galilee. He also was given preference and position that his age would not suggest appropriate, even years after his father’s death. His entire career was in Usha, after Yavneh had waned as a center of power. There he interacted with Shimon ben Johai and Rabbi Meir, both of whom were likely ordained by Akiba.46

After 70: Yavneh Activity

Academy or Council?

The classic myth suggests that Yavneh functioned like a council, rather like the Christian councils of later centuries—a short, decisive period of firm decision. Collins suggests that Yavneh was more an academy than council. He cites Sundberg’s estimation that it was a loose series of disputation and decisions by scholars over a longer period.47 Habas, like others, simply assumes that Yavneh was never a formal council, but functioned like a college.48

D. E. Aune sees the council model as a product of Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz in 1871, who referred to it as a “synode.” Graetz in turn may have taken a cue from Spinoza’s 1670 theory that some Pharisaical “synode” probably fixed the tripartite canon (at some unspecified date).49 Also, many of the Mishnah passages following the record of Gamaliel’s deposition

45 Habas, “Rabban Gamaliel of Yavneh and His Sons.” This is essentially the thesis of Habas’ whole article.
46 Ibid., 29.
47 Collins, Seers, Sybils, and Sages.
48 Habas, “Rabban Gamaliel of Yavneh and His Sons.”
begin with the phrase “on that day.” The interpretation of this phrase varies, but it at least suggests another possible source for the idea of a single, massive, council-like period of action.50

Given that Gamaliel seemed to travel in an official capacity and that other towns also appear to have “Sanhedrin” councils, it is possible that Yavneh had both an on-going academy with long-term students and periodic councils of visiting leaders from other areas. During the uprisings of 117, meetings are held but “always of partial attendance, sporadic, in various places and with different sages attending in small groups usually said to be held ‘in danger.’”51

In short, Yavneh was likely an academic center which attracted and supported leaders in the chaos that followed the fall of Jerusalem. It was in contact with other areas, but there is little compelling evidence of a synod or council in which significant, final decisions were made in a short time.

Pharisees and Sectarianism

The traditional perspective of Yavneh supposes that the Pharisees were primary actors, who ousted all others. How strong was Pharisaism at Yavneh and in the formation of Rabbinic Judaism?

Many Groups

One explicit statement in the Mishnah52 states there were many groups at Yavneh, suggesting some continuity with the pluralism of the Qumran period and some synthesis in its development.53

In his influential 1982 article, Cohen argues that the basic innovation at Yavneh was a conscious decision to be completely non-sectarian within Judaism. Rather than one group conquering the others, those at Yavneh agreed there would be one broad “orthodox” Judaism, one tent big enough for all disagreements. The only unallowable doctrine was a sectarian self-identity.

50 Collins, Seers, Sybils, and Sages, 4.
51 Habas, “Rabban Gamaliel of Yavneh and His Sons,” 34.
52 M. Avot 2.8.
53 Grabbe, Judaic Religion in the Second Temple, 123.
Inclusiveness was their greatest achievement. All the groups decided to live together; they agreed to differ without strife. Intolerance was no longer directed at other sects but at sectarianism itself.\(^{54}\)

Cohen further argues that while there were strong ties between pre-70 Pharisaism and the post-70 rabbis, it is not an exclusive link. What is notable is the lack of distinctions and labels at Yavneh—the names for the sects disappear; the rabbis do not call themselves Pharisees or descendents of Pharisees.\(^{55}\) Cohen’s thesis is a radical one, almost the exact opposite of pre-70 sectarianism. He offers a possible explanation of the lack of labels himself, saying that one reason the name “Pharisee” in particular was not used is that it means “separatist” and may have been an epithet.

Thus there seems to be some plurality of groups, with some acknowledgement of the Pharisees in a key role. But the question remains whether one group ousted others over time, the others left on their own, or they, as Cohen suggests, all agreed to live together in a radical new fashion, or some other synthesis took place between the groups.

**Temple**

With the temple destroyed, the self-definition of many of the sects had lost their cultic center. Supporting his inclusive theory, Cohen suggests the destruction of the temple “warned the Jews of the dangers of internal divisiveness.”\(^{56}\) With the focal point removed, individual leaders were free to emerge and the sects free to redefine themselves. Also, the point of the Vespasian legend, with its Roman complicity in the creation of the Yavneh institution, is to promote continuity and de-emphasize the crisis and Roman conflict.\(^{57}\) Those at Yavneh simply decided to abandon their temple fervor.

Other scholars are not nearly as quick to see the influence of the temple disappear with its destruction. Although the temple

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\(^{55}\) Ibid., 52.

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 48.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 45.
was destroyed, there was hope for rebuilding. Building a Third Temple roughly seventy years after the Second, just as the Second was built 70 years after the loss of the First, may have been one of the driving factors behind the 135 revolt. Only after the Bar Kokhba revolt, when all hope of a new temple was finally extinguished, did rabbinic Judaism, embodied in the detailed reinterpretation of purity and impurity in social terms, really develop.58

Furthermore, it must be said the Pharisees had a philosophical advantage with the temple gone. Neusner points out in several places that their theology was ready to cope with the absence of a central temple. Even before 70, they sought to practice temple purity in the home. They were well placed to continue and develop that emphasis after the temple was destroyed.59

It may be then, rather than a radical rejection of sectarianism, the scholars of Yavneh continued to wrestle with the value of the temple. The temple was gone, but probably not forgotten, nor forsaken as Cohen suggests. Over time, the theology of the Pharisees naturally positioned them to offer an alternate vision of Jewish life without the temple. Only after 135 did this advantage flourish.

**Eschatology**

While the temple and the apocalyptic Qumran community were both destroyed around 70 CE, eschatological fervor, like hope for a new temple, continued throughout the Yavnean period.

The Apocalypse of Ezra, Apocalypse of Baruch, and Apocalypse of Abraham, as well as the Christian book of Revelation, all date to around 100 CE. From these books Grabbe suggests contemporary Judaism continued to have a keen interest in the end of Roman rule and in a messianic vindication of Judaism well past 70 CE.60 The *Sibylline Oracles* is also anti-Roman

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60 Grabbe details the themes as including a preoccupation with Roman rule and its imminent end, the rise of a messianic figure, messianic woes, the fate of...
and has an imminent expectation of judgment. VanderKam states, “the very existence of these books shows that the apocalyptic mentality which may well have played a role in fanning enthusiasm for the [bar Kokhba] revolt did not perish with the flames of 70 CE.”

Moytner distinguishes at Yavneh what he calls quietist and activist eschatologies. Rather than seeking the restoration of the temple, some called for events to be left in God’s hands rather than provoked by a holy war. Based on an attributed saying, Moytner suggests that Yohanan ben Zakkai believed that messianic movements should be resisted and that the disaster was a step forward in the plan of God. “Eschatological fervour and a desire to rebuild the temple are connected with each other, and both are countered with the sober judgment that the destruction of the temple was actually a good thing.”

Yet within Yavneh, as noted earlier, significant figures appear to have shared a messianic-nationalistic view. The influential Rabbi Akiba is supposed to have not only died in the revolt, but even named the leader, Simon Bar Kosiba, “the son of the star” (Bar Kokhba), which would have been understood as a messianic reference to Numbers 24:17.

After Yanveh and the revolt of 135 CE, it is difficult to find apocalyptic and other Jewish works with a strong apocalyptic-messianic worldview. The Mishnah of later decades seems a sharp contrast to such a view. As Motyer states, “from all we can tell, apocalyptic expectations ceased in their old form, having disappointed once and for all.”

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individuals after death, periodization of history, new heavens and new earth (with a messianic age), and significant roles for good and evil angelic beings.

63 *Abot. R. Nat B31*; quoted in Neusner’s *Yohannan*, 134.
64 As does the author of 2 Baruch 52:6-7.
65 Motyer, *Your Father the Devil?*.
66 VanderKam, *An Introduction to Early Judaism*, 49.
68 Ibid., 126.
Thus, eschatological fervor certainly continued through the Yavnean period, both within wider Judaism and at Yavneh itself. While anti-apocalyptic Pharisees could have been influential or even the majority at Yavneh, the presence of others who were eschatologically inclined continues to demonstrate the plurality of Yavneh. Yet not only did the Pharisees have a theology of the temple more compatible with the times, they may have also had a quietist eschatology, which became prominent after the Bar Kokhba disaster. This would seem to suggest that the Pharisees gained prominence over time rather naturally, as events came to support their perspective.

**Heresy and Exclusion**

As recently as 1988, Manns was assuming the key break between Christianity and Judaism happened at Yavneh, arguing that the break was a mutual repudiation, rather than an expulsion of Christians.69

But Cohen argues that no group was repudiated, nearly by his definition of Yavneh being an inclusive community. Yavneh, in his view, actively eschewed the idea of heresy. Rabbis were not put out for errant doctrine, but for rejecting the majority. Even the powerful Gamaliel was deposed when he tried to impose his will on the group.70 Doctrinal differences might be silenced, but not excommunicated. For Cohen, tolerance was the key ethic at Yavneh.71

Yet even in Cohen’s view, a certain level of discernment and exclusion was present. Boyarin argues that while Cohen is correct that the end of the temple brought an end to a particular kind of sectarianism, Yavneh must have seen the beginnings of a new kind of division. By the time rabbinic Judaism had formed in the late second century, there was clearly a category of those outside true Israel. Sectarianism had not disappeared, but rather one group began to achieve hegemony, and portrayed itself as the end

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70 Ibid., 59.
product of Judaism.\textsuperscript{72} At Yavneh this was not a full-fledged heresiology, but basic ideas that were emphasized in later centuries. Liturgical practices, such as the rabbinic “blessing of the heretics (\textit{minim}),” probably began with unnoted, spontaneous inclusion in liturgy, moving to formal inclusion and justification later. In the latter part of the first century, the notion of heresy had not yet entered (pre)-rabbinic Judaism, and “the term min — only attested, after all, in late second-century sources — is in fact a later development in Jewish religious discourse.”\textsuperscript{73} Yavneh began with an open pluralism, but some form of hegemony did develop over the following century.

As Moytner summarizes, there is a general consensus that there was exclusion at Yavneh, but it was passive, rather than active:

There is now a healthy consensus that (a) the Yavnean sages did indeed introduce a curse on the minim [heretics] towards the end of the first century, but (b) we cannot be sure who the intended minim actually were, nor (c) what the precise wording was, and (d) since the curse worked by self-exclusion rather than by expulsion (so that it would only bar from the synagogue those who recognized themselves as ‘minim’), it must have functioned more as an exhortation to Jews generally than as a specific means of social exclusion.\textsuperscript{74}

In short, Yavneh may have begun as a rather inclusive community, but the growing rudimentary heresiology at Yavneh seems more evidence of an emerging hegemony rather than Cohen’s idealized pluralism. Yet while the rudiments are there, the exclusion process was not as definitive or active as the myth suggests, even if the seeds of division produced fruit in later decades.

**How strong was Yavneh in wider Judaism?**

Regardless of internal structure, the question of Yavneh’s overall influence at the time remains an open question. Neusner claims that source analysis of the Mishnah shows that there is

\textsuperscript{72} Boyarin, “Justin Martyr Invents Judaism,” 7.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Motyer, \textit{Your Father the Devil?}, 93.
little interest in civil law, suggesting that the Yavnean scholars were not in control of society.\textsuperscript{75} Habas' theory of family prominence also suggests a certain social chaos. That family ties could propel Gamaliel's sons to prominence, both before and after 135 with only modest achievement, suggests a vacuum of order and desperation for leadership.\textsuperscript{76}

Collins suggests that Yavneh, while significant, was not a singular center of power. While Yavneh had some bearing on later developments, no single body had an "official" capacity for wider Judaism at that chaotic time.\textsuperscript{77} Other areas appear to be at least as pluralistic in vision as Yavneh. Speaking of Judaism at the time generally, Motyer states,

> But at least it is clear that many varying viewpoints were held, from the ethical universalism of the \textit{Testament of Abraham} which does not even mention covenant or Torah, to the intense nationalism of the fifth book of the \textit{Sibylline Oracles} – both quite possibly written contemporaneously in Egypt.\textsuperscript{78}

As noted earlier, if Yavneh was largely quietist in eschatology, other centers must have been active to produce the apocalyptic works. While acknowledging the Pharisees were ultimately "the sole significant force to emerge from the catastrophe of 70," Neusner and Leany maintain they were not necessarily the key players during the Yavnean period. "The very fact of the war of 132-5 suggests that others, not Pharisees, held predominance in the life of the Jewish people."\textsuperscript{79}

Agreeing with Grabbe,\textsuperscript{80} Habas acknowledges that rabbinic Judaism eventually became dominant over the other strands of post-70 religion, but this "took much longer than was once

\textsuperscript{75} Jacob Neusner, \textit{Judaism, the Evidence of the Mishnah} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
\textsuperscript{76} Habas, "Rabban Gamaliel of Yavneh and His Sons."
\textsuperscript{77} Collins, \textit{Seers, Sibyls, and Sages}.
\textsuperscript{78} Motyer, \textit{Your Father the Devil?}, 76.
\textsuperscript{80} Grabbe, \textit{Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period}, 123.
thought, and the rabbis probably did not achieve a leading position until well into the third century or later." 81

Thus, rather than a singular council of Pharisees, our picture of Yavneh is one of an academic center that took on some prominence after the fall of Jerusalem and continued to function for over sixty years, but was not considered at the time the definitive center of Judaism. Pluralistic in nature, some Pharisaic dominance does seem to be evident and likely increasing over time. The temple was gone, but eschatological issues continued through the entire period, punctuated by continued upheaval and defeat. The Pharisees were well-placed in theology and eschatology to extend their influence, particularly after 135. Although pluralistic, there was a developing concept of what was doctrinally acceptable and what was not, though at Yavneh, this rejection was largely passive. It does not seem likely that the Pharisees were actively ousting others. Yet these trends were well-suited to the times and helped propel leaders into new centers of power, including Usha and the Mishnah.

Canonization

Besides the emergence of rabbinic Judaism in the late second century, the other major development of the period is the fixing of the Hebrew Bible to what became the Masoretic Text. As suggested earlier, earlier scholarship suggested this was one of the major tasks of the Yavnean Council. If the council was mythical, what was the role of Yavneh and how did the text come to be fixed?

Scripture as center

Interestingly, recent scholarship suggests the deliberative process at Yavneh, while possibly influenced heavily by Pharisees, was rather quite synthetic, giving Pharisaism a distinctly scribal focus.

Grabbe admits that “Pharisees were probably the core making up the religious reconstruction at Yavneh after 70,” but they contrast with the pre-70 Pharisaic houses of Hillel and Shammai.

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81 Habas, “Rabban Gamaliel of Yavneh and His Sons,” 125.
who were “concerned mainly with basic laws relating to agricultural matters, purity, and the Sabbath and festivals.” Johannen is supposed to have been a Pharisee, but Grabbe thinks he looks more like a scribal figure, whose emphasis on scripture differs from the pre-70 concern for religious law and legal disputes; textual-centeredness is new to Yavnean Pharisaism. Likewise, most of the discussion at Yavneh does not seem rooted in cultic experience but in the biblical text alone. “That is, the interest is in creating a new, idealized cult according to the sect’s principles, not in extending or developing the old Second Temple practices.” In other words, before 70, the Pharisees were a table-fellowship group, with largely legal concerns. The key factor toward the development of rabbinic Judaism was the injection of “the concept of Torah-centeredness and the religious efficacy of study.” Moyer, with Neusner, also sees the Yavneans adopting scribal guidance and individual obedience to Torah as the key to restoration. Further, after Yavneh, the Christian patristic fathers, as Cohen points out, do not associate the Rabbis with Pharisees, but rather with Scribes.

In short, there is some evidence that the Pharisees, in their pluralistic and academic setting, acquired a new Scriptural focus, which fits their quietist eschatology, which provided the synthetic material for Rabbinic Judaism to form later.

**Categories of books**

Given this scribal interest and the later prominence of a single canon, it seems likely to expect some process of canonization at Yavneh. But Grabbe generally rejects Yavneh as a center of canonization activity. Not only was Yavneh not a synod, he argues, there is no serious discussion of canonization nor any suggestion that canonization was on the agenda. Indeed, when a

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83 Ibid., 123.
84 Ibid., 122.
85 Ibid., 124.
86 Moyer, *Your Father the Devil?*, 92.
87 Cohen, “Yavneh Revisited,” 60.
book is discussed at Yavneh, (e.g., Songs) its canonical status is simply affirmed. Yet the need to affirm particular books might itself suggest there was some controversy over canonical status at Yavneh. A saying attributed to Akiba proclaimed that “one who reads ‘outside books’ would have no share in the life to come,” highlighting a sense of both exclusion and canon. On the day when Eleazar ben Azariah was installed in Gamaliel’s place, Songs and Ecclesiastes were declared holy books. Yet these were not final decisions. The record only shows a dispute took place, one that was not settled on that day or for decades after. Well after 135, Rabbi Meir in Usha declared those same books not holy. Meir also disputed with R. Judah on whether the Torah, Prophets, and the Writings can be bound together, suggesting that both the total list of acceptable books and the sets of subcategories were still challenged late in the second century CE.

Nevertheless, eventually some books were indeed rejected and the canon fixed. The Talmud labels some books as the books of the heretics, presumably all the writings which were not ultimately canonical, including the apocryphal, sectarian, and Christian writings.

Notably, some books now known as apocryphal and pseudepigraphal were at Qumran, but were not all necessarily considered authoritative for the Qumran community. Whether they were authoritative for wider Judaism is unclear. We can be certain only that they were rejected or dropped out of use in the second century CE.

The criteria for rejecting those books have traditionally been seen, as Cohen characterizes, as those written in Greek or in apocalyptic style. Those written in Greek could have been rejected

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88 Grabbe, Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period, 155.
89 m. Sanhedrin 10:1.
90 Collins, Seers, Sybils, and Sages, 4.
91 Evans, “The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Canon of Scripture,” 73.
92 VanderKam and Flint, The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls, 78-80. VanderKam and Flint use a variety of criteria to suggest that Jubilees and 1 Enoch were certainly authoritative for the Qumran community, but Letter of Jeremiah (Baruch), Sirach and Tobit are uncertain.
93 Cohen, “Yavneh Revisited.”
not so much for language choice as for recent origin. Writing in the 90s CE, Josephus states that such recent works are not “deemed worthy of equal credit with the earlier records, because of the failure of the exact succession of prophets.”94 And, as Collins points out,

there is no clear evidence that books were excluded because of their apocalyptic content. R. Akiba, who pronounced the most severe ban on the “outside books” is credited with an ascent to Paradise (Hag 14b) and with endorsing Bar Kokhba as messiah (j. Ta'anit 4.8), and so he at least can not have been too negatively disposed toward apocalyptic speculation.95

It seems then, that given the final result of canonization, a vague sense of doctrinal exclusion, and a growing focus on scripture, some active discussions around individual books and subcategories of the canon were indeed in process, though they were not settled at Yavneh. The rejection of the other Scriptures cannot entirely be explained as benign neglect, that they simply fell out of use. However, the criteria for selecting books seems even less clear. In short, the trends suggest early canonical work was indeed in process at Yavneh. Later developments in rabbinc Judaism were likely influenced by the early work here.

Text-types

An even more perplexing problem is that of the text-types. Were these text variations equally authoritative in Second Temple period? Why was the proto-Masoretic text ultimately selected against the others?

Ackroyd,96 Sanders,97 and Ulrich98 hold that all the variations of texts were equally authoritative pre-70. Not only were multiple

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95 Collins, Seers, Sibyls, and Sages, 20.
literary editions in wide circulation during the Qumran period, none had more value than another. For Second Temple period Jews, authority was in general message rather than precise words or word order, and “the specific textual form was not a consideration.”

Ulrich further argues the text-types that eventually settled out in the Masoretic text were entirely accidental. Since particular text-types had no particular authority, we should not think of the MT as being a particular unit, with any criteria of coherence against the other types. It is rather a random collection of text-types which scholars have labeled proto-Masoretic.

Others do not accept Ulrich’s theory of an accidental tradition. Crawford suggests that since some types did not last, they were probably limited to local authority, suggesting some form of natural selection that caused the rabbis to choose one over the other. Waltke argues that simply dismissing the status as accidental and equal is unsatisfactory for both the historian and the theologian, that there had to have been some process involved. Furthermore, if it is successfully argued that some of these traditions were developed with theological polemics in mind (e.g., the Samaritan Pentateuch) that would deny by definition equal status for all traditions for all groups.

Ulrich’s position on the authority of text types could be seen as a polemic against the current status of the MT. He has argued the non-masoretic text traditions have been unjustifiably disregarded as unreliable in past scholarship in favor of the more familiar MT. Positing the text traditions as equal and the MT as accidental drives his point of Second Temple pluralism perhaps too far. Historical accident does not address the question of why a single

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100 Ulrich, “The Bible in the Making,” 65.
101 Ibid., 66.
102 Crawford, “The Fluid Bible.”
103 Waltke, “How We Got the Hebrew Bible,” 43.
text was developed at all, much less why the MT was assembled in favor of the others.

In any case, a text-type was indeed chosen by design or accident, around the time of Yavneh. “All of the second-century A.D. biblical manuscripts from the caves south of Qumran are proto-masoretic texts; by this period other text types seem to have fallen out of circulation” in Palestinian Judaism.\textsuperscript{104}

Likewise, speaking of the vorlage to Greek translations, Ulrich states,

> the evidence suggests that there were no variant Hebrew manuscripts generating further Greek variants due specifically to correction toward Hebrew readings at variance with the MT after approximately the beginning of the second century C.E. The Hebrew scrolls found at Murabba’at, dated prior to 135 C.E., conform very closely to the MT and indicate that the rabbinic Bible was already standardized both in general contents and in consonantal text by the second Jewish revolt.\textsuperscript{105}

Unfortunately, the direct evidence for Yavneh’s role in the fixing of the text type seems nonexistent, much less its criteria. Given the growing trends noted, it does seem a likely candidate for such work, but it is largely an argument from silence. If Ulrich is correct that the text was indeed fixed by 135, there does not seem to be enough direct evidence from Yavneh to say definitively that it happened there. In fact, the continued squabbles at Usha seem to challenge his claim that the general contents were permanently fixed by 135 CE.

**Summary**

We have seen, then, the Second Temple period before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE was characterized by sectarian and Scriptural pluriformity. The Dead Sea Scrolls and other sources show that Palestinian Judaism contained multiple sects, many of which defined themselves in terms of the Jerusalem temple and an imminent eschatology in which they would be vindicated against oppressors.

\textsuperscript{104} Crawford, “The Fluid Bible,” 51.

\textsuperscript{105} Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Origins of the Bible*, 212.
The Scriptures of this period are also pluriform in both the overall list of books and in subcategories. While the books of the Torah are fixed, those of the Prophets, Writings, or other categories are still forming. Yet even those fixed books have variations in their texts, to the point that they have been characterized as having multiple literary traditions, traditions with unclear parity of authority.

After 70, Yavneh was became an academic center which attracted and supported leaders in the chaos that followed the fall of Jerusalem. It was in contact with other areas, but there is little compelling evidence of a council in which significant, final decisions were made in a short time. Pluralistic in nature, some Pharisaic dominance does seem to be evident, likely increasing over time and synthesizing with Scribal perspectives and a Scriptural focus. Yavneh functioned for over sixty years, punctuated by continued upheaval and defeat, but was not considered at the time as the definitive center of Judaism. Yet the Pharisees were ready in theology and eschatology to extend their influence. Their perspective was well-suited for existence without the temple, as was their quietist eschatology. Although pluralistic, there was a developing concept of what was doctrinally acceptable and what was not, though at Yavneh, this rejection was largely passive. Yet these trends were well-suited to survive and develop after the revolt of 135, propelling leaders into power and developing rabbinic Judaism.

The activity of Yavneh seems to include some level of the canonization process, though the evidence for definitive Yavnean action is quite light. Circumstantially, Yavneh was well-positioned to engage in such activity. They did have a growing focus on scripture, a growing sense of doctrinal exclusion, and some active discussions around individual books and subcategories of the canon. Given that the canon was fixed within a few years, one might theorize early canonical work was indeed in process at Yavneh, though the issues raised were not settled at there. The criteria for selecting text-types, ultimately settling on what became the Masoretic Text, remain obscure.
Richard Baxter’s Directory for Mission:  
Puritan Mission Theory  
in Motive and Method  

Brian A. DeVries  

The Puritans are typically not remembered for their missionary activity. In 1906 Gustav Warneck lamented the lack of missionary action in the first several centuries of Protestants. “We miss in the Reformers not only missionary action,” he writes, “but even the idea of missions, in the sense in which we understand them to-day.” He admits that the Protestants were hindered by their lack of immediate interaction with the heathen nations and by their struggle for existence against papal and worldly power. Yet their “fundamental theological views hindered them from giving their activity, and even their thoughts, a missionary direction.”¹ Warneck has been recognized as the father of missiology. His classic history of Protestant missions has since shaped the historical perception of Protestant and Puritan missions.

Many scholars have since challenged Warneck’s views.² David Bosch, a respected missiologist from South Africa, has given excellent treatment to this question:

several scholars have argued that a judgment such as Warneck’s implies summoning the Reformers before the tribunal of the modern missionary movement and finding them guilty for not having subscribed to a definition of mission which did not even exist in their own time… To argue that the Reformers had no missionary vision... is to misunderstand the basic thrust of their theology and ministry.”³ The Reformers, and the Puritans in...

particular, had missionary content in both their theology and ministry. Sidney Rooy has confirmed that representative Puritans helped to advance missionary thought and make way for the great missionary enterprises that followed.4

One such representative Puritan who was instrumental in the development of Protestant missiology is Richard Baxter.5 This great Puritan leader is known for many achievements and contributions. His prolific writing has generated much discussion, both in his day and to the present.6 In his forty-year-

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plus writing career, Baxter authored at least 168 books on a broad range of subjects, the best-known being *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest* (1650), *The Reformed Pastor* (1656), and *A Call to the Unconverted* (1657). Additionally, his evangelistic passion is evident to all who have read him:

This is our case, brethren. The work of God must needs be done! Souls must not perish, while you mind your worldly business or worldly pleasure, and take your ease, or quarrel with your brethren! … Take it how you will, you must be told of it; and if that will not serve, you must be told of it yet more plainly; and, if that will not serve, if you be rejected as well as reprehended, you may thank yourselves. I speak all this to none but the guilty.

His fiery zeal for the salvation of souls, among other things, is what his followers have come to greatly appreciate in this passionate Puritan. But the foundation of this evangelistic passion in his missionary theology is seldom sought. Consequently, Baxter’s contribution to missionary thought is a forgotten aspect of history.

Little attention has been given to the missionary aspects of his writing. Certainly, much interest has been shown for his classic work *The Reformed Pastor*. Many will correctly point to Baxter’s writing and ministry in Kidderminster as an example of his missionary spirit. But this work forms only part of his

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10 For example: Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Evangelism: A Biblical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1999); Timothy Beougher and James I.
missionary contribution; many other examples of his mission theory are found throughout his writings. For example, his sermon *How to Do Good to Many* (1682)\(^{11}\) is a missionary publication similar in content to William Carey’s famous tract and written more than one hundred years prior.\(^{12}\) If the Puritans helped to advance missionary thought by their theology and practice, and if Baxter is representative of this Puritan missionary spirit, then his missionary motives will shine through in all of his life and work. This article will seek to correct the existing oversight of Baxter’s contribution by identifying missionary material in his life and works. The purpose is two-fold: First, it will uncover the forgotten mission theory in Baxter’s ministry and works. Second, it will add support to the mounting evidence of a Puritan missionary spirit.

As noted above, extensive research has been directed toward the study of Baxter’s works. Most attention, however, has been given to his devotional and practical writings. The greater part of these writings were collected in 1707 and reprinted in four large volumes titled *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*.\(^{13}\) Carl Trueman has recently observed that popular and scholarly attention has been focused almost exclusively on these devotional and practical works, with the exception of Baxter’s autobiography.\(^{14}\) His two major theological works, *Catholick Theologie* (1675)\(^{15}\) and *Methodus Theologiae* (1681),\(^{16}\) have never been

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reprinted. At 677 and 889 folio pages respectively, these works are a substantial portion of Baxter’s literature; a vitally important portion considering that these works systematically present Baxter’s own doctrine and alleged ecumenical thought.17 Trueman argues that this “does Baxter an injustice, divorcing his practical writings from his life and works as a whole and divorcing his thought from its wider context.”18 The result is that his piety and ecumenical endeavors are overemphasized and even misrepresented in the popular understanding of this great man, while the focus is shifted from his significant contribution in other areas. Trueman attempts to correct this oversight and examines Baxter’s contribution in the area of church unity. Similarly, this article will focus on the overlooked area of his missiological contribution.

How should mission theory and Baxter’s missiological contribution be understood? As already considered, the issue of definition is at the heart of the larger debate. To be fair to Baxter, it is necessary to use seventeenth-century definitions for this discussion. Nevertheless, Baxter did not use the words mission, missionary, evangelism, or evangelistic since these English terms had only just begun to be used in the seventeenth century.19 Yet, as will soon be proven, he often wrote about the concepts represented by these words. Additionally, Baxter writes about catechizing, doing good, works of charity, winning souls, profession of true religion, furthering the gospel, and an assortment of similar terms. So it is advantageous to give a preliminary definition to mission that can later be adjusted by Baxter’s own material. For the sake of this article, let mission be defined most broadly as the whole scope of God’s intention in the world (missio Dei), and more narrowly as the God-given missionary task of the people of God.

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17 For an excellent overview of the heads of Baxter’s theology, see Fisher, “The Theology of Richard Baxter.” No mention is made in this article of Baxter’s missiological contribution.
19 Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v. “mission” and “missionary.” The terms “evangelism” and “evangelistic” were not used in reference to mission activity until the nineteenth century.
Additionally, let *mission theory* be defined as the set of “principles which are held to be essential to the successful practice of mission.”

Baxter’s literature, consistent with seventeenth-century definitions, is primarily focused on the more narrow understanding of mission. It is expected, therefore, that the missionary aspects of Baxter’s life and ministry would include any activity that involves the missionary task of the people of God. Using Baxter’s words, this would include all activities that seek “the Conversion of sinners, and the enlargement of the Church of Christ.”

In order to prove that Baxter had a mission theory, it is necessary to demonstrate that he at least had an implicit set of principles for the successful practice of his understanding of mission.

Did Baxter have a framework for the missionary aspects of his theology? It is clear from the schematic diagrams in both *Catholick Theologie* and *Methodus Theologiae*, that Baxter, like most Puritans, was fond of carefully defined theology. Additionally, his *Christian Directory* demonstrates his penchant for fine distinctions. For instance, the subject of doing good works as servants of Christ – the tenth of seventeen grand directions for walking with God in a life of faith and holiness, which is the third of ten chapters in his first of four main parts of the book – is divided into four main categories of doctrine, directions, cases of conscience, and rules. Each of these are divided again into thirteen, twenty-seven, eight, and fourteen sub-distinctions, respectively.

Are similar distinctions to be found in his missiological teaching? This raises two questions apropos to this study: (1) Did Baxter have an explicit or implicit mission theory that governed his mission activity? (2) Are there, in his thought

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and works, further distinctions within the ethical domain of practice, such as the motives, methods, manners, and goals of mission activity? To answer these seminal questions, the missionary aspects of his life and works will be systematized by common themes in order to demonstrate Baxter’s mission theory.26

I. Development of Mission Theory

Baxter does not explicitly write about a mission theory or present a complete framework for his thought on mission. A question to be answered in this article is whether a mission theory is implicit in his contribution. To that end, effort will be made to systematize common themes in the missionary aspects of his ministry and works. Care must be taken not to force his instruction into a foreign structure or to interpret him with twenty-first century definitions. Therefore, every attempt will be made to use his own style and to divide the subject as he might.

For this task, it is first necessary to recognize a fundamental distinction in Baxter’s typical-Puritan thought. In the advertisement (i.e. introduction) to his Christian Directory, he states that this book will focus on “the second and practical part of theology” and that a future work, later called Methodus Theologiae, would focus on the primary and theoretical part of theology.27 Accordingly, Baxter understands practical theology to deal mainly with ethical duties and theoretical theology to deal with the doctrines that define and order these duties. It must be noted that Baxter’s understanding is consistent with the thought of his day and that his use of the word theory is largely consistent with the contemporary definition of the word theology. That Baxter did not have an explicit theology of missions, as defined by the contemporary definition, is confirmed by its absence in Catholick

26 This article is a condensed version of a 100-page M.Div thesis with the same title. The full version first reviews selected works in which Baxter deals directly with mission issues. These works include: Baxter’s Evangelistic Ministry (1641-1661); The Saints’ Everlasting Rest (1650); Gildas Salvianus: The Reformed Pastor (1656); A Call to the Unconverted (1658); Correspondence with John Eliot (1656-1682); A Christian Directory (1673); “What Light Must Shine in Our Works” (1674); and How to Do Good to Many (1682).

Theologie and Methodus Theologiae, the two main systems of his theoretical thought. This is expected since the concept of mission theology as a category was only developed later.

The distinction between theory and practice is not as clearly defined in Baxter’s other works, such as The Reformed Pastor and How to Do Good to Many, which are structured as sermons. His mission instruction in these works often overlaps both categories. In the typical-Puritan sermon style he first explains the doctrine and then develops exhortations from it. Yet a survey of Baxter’s literature will show that the missionary aspects of his life and ministry usually focus on the duty and activity of the people of God. Baxter is usually most concerned about motivating his readers to activities that seek “the Conversion of sinners, and the enlargement of the Church of Christ.” Mission, therefore, as an activity and ethical duty, is for Baxter part of practical theology that is – like all practice – directly related to the theoretical domain.

Missionary aspects of Baxter’s contribution can be systematized, however, even though it is likely that Baxter did not have a conscious system of missions. As seen in the previous section, his method is usually first to explain the supporting doctrine (theory) before exhorting his readers to a particular missionary activity (practice). Additionally, he consistently gives broad coverage to various dimensions of mission activity, and he always makes many distinctions within this instruction. For that reason, it can be argued that Baxter does present an implicit set of principles for the successful practice of his understanding of mission. Furthermore, these principles can be grouped into the proposed framework that follows. If these principles, distinctions, and systemization of instruction correctly reflect his thinking, then Baxter did have an implicit mission theory.

To systematize the missionary aspects of Baxter’s contribution in this article, it is necessary to divide this subject as he might. The following mission theory chart of grand divisions offers a likely alternative:

\[ \text{Mission Theory Chart of Grand Divisions} \]

\[ \text{Grand Divisions} \]

\[ \text{1. Missionary Activities} \]
\[ \text{2. Missionary Doctrine} \]
\[ \text{3. Missionary Exhortations} \]
\[ \text{4. Missionary Distinctions} \]
\[ \text{5. Missionary Systemization} \]

\[ \text{Illustration of Missionary Aspects} \]

\[ \text{Please note that the full version of this article systematically deals with each of the five methods of mission. Cf. n. 26 above.} \]

\[ \text{PW:4, How To Do Good, 949.} \]

\[ \text{29 Please note that the full version of this article systematically deals with each of the five methods of mission. Cf. n. 26 above.} \]
These divisions are practical in the sense of being comprehensive categories of the ethical activity of mission. Since Baxter probably did not consciously have a comprehensive theoretical theology for mission, theoretical categories should not be defined for the whole. These grand divisions of practical theology encompass the system of Baxter’s missionary aspects.

I. The duty of mission involves the missionary task of the people of God. Again in Baxter’s words, this includes all activities that seek “the Conversion of sinners, and the enlargement of the Church of Christ.”

J. I. Packer and Sidney H. Rooy both give excellent treatment to Baxter’s grand theme of the redemption and restoration of humanity. Packer’s treatment alternates between theory and practice; he locates Baxter’s duty of mission in preaching to the ruined race and in the religion of the redeemed. Rooy’s treatment argues that Baxter developed the idea of mission in line with Richard Sibbes and John Eliot; he highlights Baxter’s views on the role of the church in mission and on the redemption of the world.

II. The objects of mission are all those who are affected by the performance of this activity. Baxter frequently refers to these people as “souls,” thereby accenting the eternal value of each individual. There are many catalogs and classifications of his

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30 PW:4, How To Do Good, 949.
31 Packer, “Redemption & Restoration.”
32 Rooy, Theology of Missions.
audience scattered throughout his literature. The audience is only limited by the ability of the agent:

It is God’s prerogative to do good to all; man’s ability will not reach it. But our all is, as many as we can do good to. 1. To men of all sorts, high and low, rich and poor, old and young, kindred, neighbours, strangers, friends, enemies, good and bad; none excepted that are within our power. 2. Not to a few only but to as many persons of all sorts as we can.

Baxter would likely divide “all men” into two classes: the unconverted and the converted. The classes of the unconverted could be divided by location as those in Christian lands (sinners, atheists, members of other religions, etc.) and those in darkness (Heathens, Mahometans, Indians, Tartarians, Turks, other infidels). In The Reformed Pastor, the class of the converted are divided by their condition into the young and weaker, those who labor under special distempers, the decliners, those who are fallen under some great temptation, the disconsolate, and the strong.

III. The method of mission is the most significant area of Baxter’s contribution. Packer is certainly correct in calling Baxter “a Christian strategist of a high order.” Baxter has numerous references to mission methodology and innumerous instructions, exhortations, directions, and suggestions on how it should be done. He usually tailors his methodology to match the performer of the duty. Common classifications include: individuals, ministers, merchants, and magistrates. At times, Baxter addresses specific groups that are more related to function or opportunity such as the rich, schoolteachers, and even landlords. His mission methodology can also be classified by tasks. These include catechizing, personal instruction, evangelistic preaching, propagating the gospel, promoting public good, and the profession of religion. For the most precision, let this classification by task serve as the structure of what follows.

34 PW:4, How To Do Good, 936.
35 Reliquiae Baxterianae, 131.
36 PW:4, Reformed Pastor, 382-83.
Baxter’s mission methodology of these five tasks deserves special attention. Few, however, have focused on this aspect of his contribution, and most of the attention has been given only to the first of these tasks. Baxter’s catechizing and pastoral instruction, as found in The Reformed Pastor, is the focus of much popular literature. Yet there has been some noteworthy scholarship in this area. Packer (1954), in his recently republished doctoral dissertation, has given attention to Baxter’s evangelistic preaching and to specific aspects of his exhortation to promote the public good.\(^{39}\) Rooy (1956) gives detailed attention to much of Baxter’s instruction in the area of gospel propagation.\(^{40}\) More recently, N. H. Keeble (1984) advanced scholarship’s understanding of Baxter’s preaching ministry. He noted the apparent trend of the emphasis in Baxter’s sermons: a focus shift from evangelistic, to instructional, to motivational over the span of his life.\(^{41}\) Timothy K. Beougher (1992) has made a significant contribution to the study of Baxter’s pastoral catechizing, evangelistic preaching, and instruction on the profession of religion.\(^{42}\) Each of these task classifications deserves special attention. This brief article, however, will be limited to the tasks of propagating the gospel and promoting public good since they are least known in the secondary literature and are the most significant (along with his well known catechizing and instruction) for Baxter’s contribution to mission.

IV. The manner of missions for Baxter varies with the task and audience. At least three attitudes, however, apply to the whole and describe Baxter’s style of mission instruction. First, mission duty must be performed with expectant trust in God. “Though I know that we have a knotty generation to deal with and that it is past the power of any of us all to change a carnal heart without the effectual grace of the Holy Ghost,” writes Baxter, “yet it is so usual with God to work by means, and to bless the right endeavours of his servants, that I cannot fear, but great things will be done, and a wonderful blow will be given to the kingdom of

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\(^{40}\) Rooy, Theology of Missions, 92-140.
\(^{41}\) Keeble, “Baxter’s Preaching Ministry,” 539-59.
\(^{42}\) Beougher, “Baxter and Puritan Evangelism,” 82-94.
darkness by our undertaken work, if it do not miscarry through the fault of the ministers themselves.”

Second, mission duty must be performed with diligence and urgency. The task is great and there is no time to waste. He writes,

We are seeking to uphold the world, to save it from the curse of God, to perfect the creation, to attain the ends of Christ’s death, to save ourselves and others from damnation, to overcome the devil, and demolish his kingdom, and set up the kingdom of Christ, and attain and help others to the kingdom of glory… O see then that this work be done with all your might.

So too,

I confess, I am frequently forced to neglect that which should tend to the further increase of knowledge in the godly, because of the lamentable necessity of the unconverted. Who is able to talk of controversies, or nice unnecessary points, how excellent soever, while he seeth a company of ignorant, carnal, miserable sinners before his face, that must be changed or damned?

This last quote also reveals the third manner of missions: the unity of the Church. The spirit of concord (i.e. agreement) is a chief issue for Baxter: “O how many millions of souls are kept by them in ignorance and ungodliness, and deluded by faction as if it were true religion!”

C. Propagating the Gospel

In Reliquiae Baxterianae, Baxter declares that there is “no Employment in the World so desirable in my Eyes as to labour for the winning of such miserable souls: which maketh me greatly honour Mr. John Eliot, the apostle of the Indians in New England, and whoever else have laboured in such work.” In other places, he writes that it is “one of the best works in the world, for fit

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43 PW:4, Reformed Pastor, 454-55.
44 PW:4, Reformed Pastor, 392.
45 PW:4, Reformed Pastor, 381.
46 Reliquiae Baxterianae, 132.
47 Reliquiae Baxterianae, 131.
persons to go on a design to convert the poor infidels and heathens where they go. Therefore the preachers of the gospel should not be backward to take any opportunity, as chaplains to ambassadors, or to factories, &c. to put themselves in such a way.” Elsewhere he writes, “I take it to be the greatest duty encumbent on Christian Princes and people uppon [sic] earth to endeavour the conversion of all these lands. If they can procure the consent of their kings, it’s best: But if they cannot they should their best without it.” And as “the most eminent work of charity, is the promoting of the conversion of the heathen and infidel parts of the world,” Baxter was thus certainly not opposed to mission work!

Baxter describes this work as “the Conversion of sinners, and the enlargement of the Church of Christ.” This area of duty has much in common with ministers’ responsibilities of preaching the gospel and with all Christians’ responsibility of promoting the public good. Few of Baxter’s works are devoted directly to this subject. Yet various references and injunctions to the work are scattered throughout his writings. The most important include: the sermon How to do Good to Many; scattered instructions in the A Christian Directory; and Baxter’s Self-Analysis in Reliquiae Baxterianae. Rooy gives excellent treatment to various aspects of foreign mission in Baxter’s literature and on the related topic of the redemption of the world. He summarizes Baxter’s contribution, compiling his thoughts on the need in England and abroad, the hindrances to mission, and some motives for involvement. Rooy’s work greatly assists in formulating the following four divisions of Baxter’s instruction on propagation of the gospel: (1) explicit motives; (2) several methods; (3) main hindrances; and (4) a few specific directions.

1. A survey of Baxter’s literature will reveal explicit motives for propagating the gospel. First, as the above quotes prove, it is one of the best works in the world. Second, Baxter believed that

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49 Rooy, Theology of Missions, 126.
50 PW:1, Christian Directory, 886.
51 PW:4, How To Do Good, 949.
ministers should be motivated to the conversion and baptism of infidels by Christ’s express commission in Matthew 28:19-20. In his Christian Directory, Baxter challenges contrary opinions and gives proof that this commission “was not peculiar to the apostles or their age”:

1. Because [it is…] the first great business of the gospel and ministry in the world.
2. Because others as well as the apostles did it in that age, and ever since.
3. Because the promise is annexed… ‘I am with you always to the end of the world.’
4. Because it was a small part of the world comparatively that heard the gospel in the apostles’ days. And the far greatest part of the world is without it at this day, when yet God our Saviour would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
5. Even where the gospel hath long continued, for the most part there are many still that are in infidelity. And so great a work is not left without an appointment suitable for its performance: and if an office was necessary for it in the first age, it is not credible that it is left to private men’s charity ever since.
6. Especially considering that private men are to be supposed insufficient; (1) Because they are not educated purposefully for it; but usually for something else. (2) Because that they have other callings to take them up. (3) Because they have no special obligation. And that which is no man’s peculiar work, is usually left undone by all. 53

Third, Baxter was motivated by the spiritual need of the non-Christian world and of unconverted souls: “the misery of the unconverted is so great, that it calleth loudest to us for compassion.”54 In his Self-Analysis at the midpoint of his career, he records a growing concern:

My soul is much more afflicted with the thoughts of the miserable world, and more drawn out in desire of their conversation than heretofore. I was wont to look but little further than England in my prayers, as not considering the state of the rest of the world. Or if I prayed for the conversion of the Jews, that was almost all. But now, as I better understand the case of the world and the method of the Lord’s Prayer, so there is nothing in the world that lieth so heavy upon my heart as the thought of the miserable nations of the earth. It is the most astonishing part of all God’s providence to me, that he so far forsaketh almost all the world, and

54 PW:4, Reformed Pastor, 381.
confineth his special favour to so few; that so small a part of the world hath the profession of Christianity in comparison of heathens, Mathometans and other infidels; and that among professed Christians there are so few that are saved from gross delusions and have but any competent knowledge; and that among those there are so few that are seriously religious and truly set their hearts on heaven. I cannot be affected so much with the calamities of my own relations of the land of my nativity as with the case of the heathen, Mahometan, and ignorant nations of the earth. No part of my prayers are so deeply serious as that for the conversion of the infidel and ungodly world, that God’s name may be sanctified and his kingdom come, and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.\footnote{55 Reliquiae Baxterianae, 131.}

This quote also reveals a fourth motive. In several places, Baxter links mission work with the Lord’s Prayer. In agreement with the Lord’s Prayer, Christians must “pray most earnestly for the world’s conversion.”\footnote{56 Rooy, Theology of Missions, 127.} One who glorifies God with his or her life,

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beholdeth all the earth, and is desirous to know how it goeth with the cause and servants of the Lord, and how the gospel gets ground upon the unbelieving nations; and such are affected with the state of the church a thousand miles off, almost as if it were at hand, as being member of the whole body of Christ, and not of a sect… They pray for the ‘hallowing of God’s name,’ and the ‘coming of his kingdom,’ and the ‘doing of his will throughout the earth, as it is in heaven,’ before they come to their own necessities, at least in order of esteem and desire… They pray that the gospel may have free course and be glorified abroad, as it is with them.\footnote{57 PW:1, Christian Directory, 153; cf. Reliquiae Baxterianae, 131.}
\end{quote}

Other motives for the propagation of the gospel include the love of God, the example of Christ, and the ultimate glory of God.\footnote{58 Cf. PW:1, Christian Directory, 153 and 886; PW:4, How To Do Good, 945; Reliquiae Baxterianae, 131. Also see van den Berg, Constrained by Jesus’ Love, 26-29.}

2. Baxter suggests several methods for the propagation of the gospel. He understands the conversion and baptism of infidels to be the work of the ministerial office. He writes, “That it is part of the minister’s office work to teach, convert, and baptize men, to bring them out of the world into the church, is undeniable.”\footnote{59 PW:1, Christian Directory, 639-40.}
Though not a special designation, Baxter also makes room for the missionary office. Regarding the ordination of ministers he writes, “A man may be made a minister in general, yea, and sent to exercise it in converting infidels, and baptizing them, before ever he is the pastor of any particular church.” He distinguishes between fixed and unfixed ministers. Fixed ministers have “a special charge of each particular church; and that they may know their own flocks” while unfixed ministers “employ themselves in converting infidels, and in an itinerant service of the churches.”

Further explanation of the unfixed ministry is found in Ms. Treatises V, #165. Rooy affirms that Baxter gives a number of arguments to prove the continuance of this form of ministry. For instance, “before his ascension Christ instituted ‘unfixed Ambulatory Minister’ as a ‘standing necessity’ in the church.” Baxter writes that unfixed ministers are necessary where “1. Churches are to be newly gathered from among Infidells; 2. or Rude Materiallls be newly ordered & Ministers fixed in them by ordination; 3. or corrupted Infected, declining Churches to be restored.”

Related to the Protestant method is Baxter’s assessment of the method employed by the Roman Catholic propagation of the gospel. Though moderately critical of their motivation and method Baxter is congratulatory of their stamina and success. He writes,

It's true that the Jesuites & Fryars have made their chiefe attempts on princes: But: 1. That is not because they thought it unlawfull to preach to the people against their wills: but because prudence directed them to it as the way of most generall successse if it could be attained: 2. And against the will of princes they converted many thousands in Japan, China, &c. And though a bloodye p[er]secution extirpated Christianity in Japan, yet multitudes by martyrdom are gone to heaven: (woe to those Dutchmen that caused it if that be true that is written of them). And it better beseemeth Christians to encourage martyrs & preachers, than p[er]secuting tyrants.

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61 PW:1, Christian Directory, 556
62 Rooy, Theology of Missions, 99.
63 Rooy, Theology of Missions, 100.
64 Rooy, Theology of Missions, 127.
His assessment of the Protestant effort is equally critical:

The Jesuites and Fryars shewed us in Congo, Japan, China and other Countries that much might be done with care and diligence. Tho the Papal interest was a corrupt end, and all the means that they used was not justifiable, when I read of their hazards, unwearied labours, and success, I am none of those that would deprive them of their deserved honour, but rather wish that we that have better ends and principles might do better than they, and not come so far behind them as we do.65

In addition to the unfixed ministry of ministers, Baxter exhorts rulers and all men to establish new churches “where the skillful preaching of the gospel is now wanting.”66 This applies to England and to other places. For, “the planting of a learned, able, holy, concordant ministry in a particular kingdom, and settling the primitive discipline thereby,” is a work for rulers, and in their absence, a work for private men.67 He also encourages training and support for those involved in the work: “The most eminent work of charity, is the promoting of the conversion of the heathen and infidel parts of the world: to this princes and men of power and wealth might contribute much if they were willing.”68

3. There are many hindrances to the work. Lack of concord in the church (as noted above) is a very common lament for Baxter: “O how many millions of souls are kept by them in ignorance and ungodliness, and deluded by faction as if it were true religion! How is the conversion of infidels hindered by them, and Christ and religion heinously dishonoured!”69 Baxter states that contentions between the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches, between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and between the Lutherans and Calvinists “have woefully hindered the kingdom of Christ. Except the case of the infidel world, nothing is so sad and grievous to my thoughts as the case of the divided churches.”70

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65 PW:4, How To Do Good, 949.
69 Reliquiae Baxterianae, 132.
70 Reliquiae Baxterianae, 132.
There was also opposition to the propagation of the gospel. In addition to legal restrictions, many condemned the work and brought various charges against it. This opposition is best seen as reflected in Baxter’s defense of gospel propagation:

Now the adversaries of this practice: 1. Condemne the work of the propagators of Christianity as is said in the three first ages, & many afterwards in Persia, India, Tartarie, Bulgaria, Germany, Swedan, Denmarke, &c. 2. They condemne our king who by a Corporation encourageth the preaching of the Gospell to the Indians in New England. 3. They condemne Mr. Eliots & his helpers that have long preacht to them… 4. They condemne all that write books to convert Infidels & heathens & Mohametanes: as Mr. Eliots that translated the Bible: Mr. Boile & Dr. Pococke that translated into Arabike Grotius de Verit Rel. Christ. & sent it into Persia, &c. 5. They condemne the best worke that even the Jesuites did in the world: Though by the corrupt End of subjecting Kingdomes to the Pope, & by much corruption in managing their worke they disgrace & hinder it, yet I take it to be my duty greatly to honour them, for what they have done in Congo, Japan, China & other countries, if Maffaeus & many others are to be believed: Yea I thinke them much more laudable that did those great things though in a culpable manner, than those Protestants that ever had opportunity, & have done nothing themselves, but find fault with them that did it. We have had preachers & chaplaines, at Aleppa Surat, & many other such places: But I never heard of any great matters attempted or done by any English Protestants, save excellent Mr. Eliots & his helpers in New England.71

Baxter is also sensible of the difficulties caused by the division of languages and the tyranny “which keepeth the Gospel from most of the nations of the world… Could we but go among Tartarians, Turks and heathens and speak their language, I should be but little troubled for the silencing of eighteen hundred ministers at once in England.”72 His description of these and other hindrances to the propagation of the gospel shows his insight on the situation and suggests that he gave much more than passing thought to such work.

4. Though not exhaustive, Baxter gives a few specific directions to the work in his sermon *How to do Good to Many.*

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72 *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, 131.
These directions describe both the character of the work and his manner in promoting it. They are as follows:

I. Is it not possible to send some able zealous Chaplains to those Factories which are in the Countries of Infidels and Heathens? [Chaplains who] thirst for the Conversion of sinners, and the enlargement of the Church of Christ, and would labour skillfully and diligently therein? Is it not possible to get some short Christian books, which are fitted for that use, to be translated in such languages that Infidels can read, and to distribute them among them? If it be not possible also to send thither Religious Conscionable Factors, who would further the work, the case of London is very sad.

II. Is it not possible, at least to help the poor ignorant Armenians, Greeks, Moscovites, and other Christians, who have no Printing among them, nor much Preaching or knowledge; and for want of Printing have very few Bibles, even for their Churches or Ministers? Could nothing be done to get some Bibles, Catechisms, and practical books printed in their own tongues and given among them? …

III. Might not something be done in other Plantations as well as in New-England, towards the Conversion of the Natives there? Might not some skilful zealous Preachers be sent thither, who would both promote serious piety among those of the English that have too little of it, and might invite the Americans to learn the Gospel, and teach our Planters how to behave themselves Christianly towards them, to win them to Christ?

IV. Is it not possible to do more than hath been done, to Convert the Blacks that are our own slaves or servants to the Christian faith? Hath not Mr. Goodwin justly reprehended and lamented the neglect, yea and resistance [sic] of this work in Barbados? And the like elsewhere? 1. Might not better Teachers be sent thither for that use? 2. Is it not an odious crime of Christians to hinder the Conversion of these Infidels, lest they lose their service by it, and to prefer their gain before mens Souls? … Why should those men be called Christians, or have any Christian reputation, or privileges themselves, who think both Christianity and Souls to be no more worth, than to be thus basely sold for the gain of mens servilest labours? And what, tho the poor Infidels desire not their own Conversion; Their need is the greater, and not the less.73

D. Promoting Public Good

Thus Baxter enjoins his readers to doing good works: “Your lives must be laid out in doing God service, and doing all the good you can, in works of piety, justice, and charity, with prudence, fidelity, industry, zeal, and delight.”74 His doctrine of good

73 PW:4, How To Do Good, 949.
74 PW:1, Christian Directory, 110.
works, a necessary part of the Christian life,\textsuperscript{75} is broader than the subcategory of ethical duties related to the promoting of the public good; yet it is on this doctrine that Baxter often builds his practical theology for the support of mission and for works of charity. He writes, “To do Good to all men is all mens duty, to which every Christian especially must apply himself. All men should do it: True Christians can do it, through Grace, and must do it, and will do it.” Christ’s Spirit “makes them in there [sic] several measures the Salt of the Earth, and the Lights of the World.”\textsuperscript{76} Promoting the Public Good, therefore, is an important division in Baxter’s mission theory.

There are at least four main sources for Baxter’s instruction on doing good. His sermon, \textit{How to do Good to Many}, is focused directly on this topic. The others are found in two chapters of \textit{A Christian Directory} within the section entitled “How to work as servants of Christ our Lord,” Grand Direction X.\textsuperscript{77} The first chapter is “Cases and directions for loving our neighbours as ourselves.”\textsuperscript{78} The second is “Cases and directions about works of charity.”\textsuperscript{79} Besides these chapters, other sources from within \textit{A Christian Directory} include “Glorifying God in our lives”\textsuperscript{80} and “Directions for the rich.”\textsuperscript{81} Both Packer and Rooy address this aspect of Baxter’s contribution. Packer systematizes Baxter’s catalogue of good works in a manner similar to the method section below.\textsuperscript{82} His approach is commendable though partial. Rooy gives a brief summary of the subject by reviewing several related works. He gives relatively little attention to Baxter’s sermon \textit{How to do Good to Many}.\textsuperscript{83}

Baxter defines good works as “all actions internal and external that are morally good.” They are “not only formally good, as acts

\textsuperscript{76} PW:4, \textit{How To Do Good}, 936.
\textsuperscript{81} PW:1, \textit{Christian Directory}, 517 ff.
\textsuperscript{82} Packer, “Redemption & Restoration,” 312-15.
\textsuperscript{83} Rooy, \textit{Theology of Missions}, 108-11.
of obedience in general, but also materially good.” Promoting the public good would apply primarily to those actions that are external. His instruction on promoting public good can be divided as follows: (1) the doctrine; (2) the motives; (3) the methods; and (4) the manner.

1. The doctrine of promoting good is grounded in the being and character of God. Good is an attribute of God’s being and God is the fountain of goodness. As He is the fountain, His will is the measuring rule and the end of all derived good. Therefore, “the prime notion of the Creatures goodness is its Conformity to the Will of God.” Since God “is the universal Father and Benefactor to the world,” the doing of good makes a person most like to Him. For his sermon How to do Good to Many, Baxter derives his doctrine of promoting good from Galatians 6:10, “Where 1. Doing Good is the substance of the duty: 2. Men are the objects: 3. To all men is the extent: 4. Especially to them of the Household of Faith, is the direction for precedence: 5. And while we have opportunity is the season, including a Motive to make haste.” Additionally, he often quotes Titus 2:14 and Ephesians 2:10.

For Baxter, there are at least four aspects to this doctrine. First, doing good is the obligation of the servants of Christ. Thus,

The obligation to good works, that is, to works of piety, justice, and charity, is essentially to us as servants of the Lord. We are practical atheists, if we do not works of piety to God: we are rebels against God, and enemies to ourselves, and unmeet for human society, if we do not the works which are good for ourselves, and for others, if we have ability and opportunity. This is our fruit which God expecteth; and if we bear it not, he will hew us down, and cast us into the fire.

Second, doing good is a necessary part of the Christian life. God imprints His image on His works, “and the impress of his

84 PW:1, Christian Directory, 111.
85 PW:4, How To Do Good, 937.
86 PW:1, Christian Directory, 885; cf. PW:4, How To Do Good, 945.
87 PW:4, How To Do Good, 936.
88 For instance, see: PW:1, Christian Directory, 886 and PW:4, How To Do Good, 936.
89 PW:1, Christian Directory, 111; cf. PW:4, How To Do Good, 936.
Love and *Goodness* is the chief part of his Image on his Saints: This is their very *Holiness*: For this is the chief part of their likeness to God, and dedication to him."90 Third, doing good is important in the glorifying of God. “If you will glorify God in your lives,” writes Baxter, “you must be above a selfish, private, narrow mind, and must be chiefly intent upon the public good, and the spreading of the gospel through the world.”91 He continues,

A selfish, private, narrow soul brings little honor to the cause of God,” but “a larger soul beholdeth all the earth, and is desirous to know how it goeth with the cause and servants of the Lord, and how the gospel gets ground upon the unbelieving nations; and such are affected with the state of the church a thousand miles off, almost as if it were at hand, as being member of the whole body of Christ, and not of a sect.92

Fourth, doing good is required in the spiritual struggle against the Devil. In the conclusion of *How to do Good to Many*, Baxter writes, “The great opposition that is made against doing good by the Devil and his whole Army through all the world, and their lamentable success, doth call aloud to all true Christians to overdo them.”93

2. The motives for promoting good, like the doctrine, are usually directly grounded in the truth of God’s being and character wherein man’s ethical duty is a reflection of and response to God and his gifts. “I greatly rejoice in the Grace of God which I daily see in many such of my familiar acquaintance: who study to do good to all, and to live in Love and Peace, and Holiness,” writes Baxter, “by example and by self-denial and constant Charity, using Christ Talents to their Masters ends, for the temporal and eternal good of many. But alas! too many live as if it were enough to do no harm, and say as the slothful Servant, here is thy Talent which I hid.”94 With earnest admonition and keen considerations, Baxter seeks to make his readers “zealous of doing all the good they can.”95 Baxter argues for such zeal using

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94 PW:4, *How To Do Good*, 945.
95 PW:4, *How To Do Good*, 945.
the following rationale: (1) Doing good makes a person most like God. (2) Christ came to do the greatest good as the Savior of the world; “to learn of Christ, and imitate his example is to be his true disciples.”96 (3) Doing good is “the end of all the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit. Grace is given us to use.”97 (4) “It is God’s great mercy to mankind, that he will use us all in doing good to one another… He could have done good to all men by himself alone, without you, or any other, if he would,” writes Baxter, “but he will honour his servants to be the messengers of his bounty. You best please him when you readily receive his gifts yourselves, and most fully communicate them to other. To do good, is to receive good; and yet he will reward such for doing and receiving.”98 (5) Christ has promised to reward good deeds; since all Christians are members of the same body, “in doing good to others we do good to ourselves.”99

3. Baxter’s methods for promoting public good are numerous. As Packer writes, “They constitute together an impressive program of Christian philanthropy, and reveal Baxter as a Christian strategist of high order.”100 It is interesting to note the similarity among his several lists of methods.

(a) Promoting personal religion. In general, everyone

is to relieve the most needy which are next at hand. To know what poor families are in greatest want, and to help them as we are able; and to provoke the rich to do that which we cannot do ourselves, and to beg for others; and still to make use of bodily relief, to further the good of their souls, by seconding all with spiritual advice and help.101

Baxter suggests that the poor children and families of faithful ministers who were ejected in 1662 should also be relieved.102 In particular, Christians should promote practical knowledge of the great truths that are necessary to salvation. Baxter proposed that

97 PW:4, How To Do Good, 946.
100 Packer, “Redemption & Restoration,” 312.
102 PW:1, Christian Directory, 887.
this be done by setting up “free-schools in populous and ignorant places, especially in Wales” so that Children may learn to read the Scriptures, the catechism, and the principles of religion.” To this end, “a poor honest man, or a good woman, will teach Children thus much for a small stipend, better than they are taught it in most Grammar Schools.” He also proposed that the poor, once they can read, be given Bibles, catechisms, and plain godly books “which are most fitted to their use.” He proposed that a fund be created, the interest of which could be used yearly to provide the books for several parishes; a plan that when successful could be used in other countries. He writes, “If men that in life, or at death, give a stated revenue for good works, would settle the one half on a Catechizing English School, and the other half on some suitable good books, it may prove a very great means of publick reformation.”

(b) Maintaining the ministry includes several injunctions: (1) Restore “christian churches to their primitive purity and unity.” (2) “Procure a skillful, faithful ministry in the church.” Baxter suggests sending “some of the choicest wits, among the poorer sort in the country schools” to the university to study for the ministry. Only those who have the necessary qualifications for the ministry should be trained. It is “a work of great importance, for religious gentlemen to buy as many advowsons or presentations as they can” in order to promote competent ministers. (3) Maintain true order and Christian discipline in the church. (4) Promote the love and concord of all who deserve to be called Christian.

(c) Promoting new ministries includes: (1) Promoting and training missionaries: “The most eminent work of charity, is the promoting of the conversion of the heathen and infidel parts of

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the world: to this princes and men of power and wealth might contribute much if they were willing.” He continues, “They might procure the choicest scholars, to go over with their ambassadors and learn the languages... or they might erect a college for the training up of students purposely for that work.” 112 It is “one of the best works in the world, for fit persons to go on a design to convert the poor infidels and heathens where they go.” 113 (2) Government supported missions: “I take it to be the greatest duty encumbent [sic] on Christian Princes and people upon earth to endeavour the conversion of all these lands.” 114 (3) Planting of churches cross-culturally: “The planting of a learned, able, holy, concordant ministry in a particular kingdom, and settling the primitive discipline thereby,” is a work for rulers, and in their absence, a work for private men. 115 (4) Planting churches locally: “to procure and maintain a worthy minister in any of the most ignorant parishes in these kingdoms... where the skillful preaching of the gospel is now wanting; or to maintain an assistant in populous parishes, where one is not able to do the work; or by other just means to promote this service.” 116 Several of these methods are similar to the methods of propagating the gospel as detailed above.

(d) Promoting the social welfare. To promote the common good in general, Baxter exhorts his readers to avoid sedition and unlawful wars, procure wise and faithful rules, and oppose public sin and temptations. 117 He also makes specific suggestions: Poor men’s children apprentices should be set up with honest, religious masters, “where they may at once get the blessing to their souls of a godly education, and to their bodies, of an honest way of maintenance.” 118 Young promising tradesmen could be lent money and offered good advice in setting up their new business. Baxter’s ingenious wisdom is revealed in his advice for landlords.

114 Rooy, Theology of Missions, 126.
117 PW:4, How To Do Good, 943-45.
118 PW:1, Christian Directory, 887.
They should “improve their interest with their tenants, to further at once their bodily comfort and salvation, to hire them by some abatement at their rent days, to learn catechisms, and give the pastor an account of their proficience. Whether the law will enable them to bind them to any such thing in their leases, I cannot tell.”

4. The manner of promoting public good deals with how good must be performed and with what attitude. In the most basic sense, good must be done willingly in service to God. He writes,

Understand how much you are beheld to God, (and not he to you,) in that he will employ you in doing any good: and how it is the way of your own receiving; and know the excellency of your work and end, that you may do it all with love and pleasure... God loveth a cheerful servant, that loveth his Master and his work... It is the main policy of the devil to make our duty seem grievous, unprofitable, undesirable, and wearesome to us.

Christians must be intent on the public good for God’s glory and not selfishly seek their own good. Nor should they look for rewards from others but expect their reward from God alone in the life to come.

In several places, Baxter gives detailed rules on the priority of doing good. Most significant to mission is his frequent instruction that good must be done to both the souls and the bodies of people. The souls of men must be preferred before their bodies, “Yet sometimes mercy to the body is in that season to be preferred.” Baxter’s instruction in How To Do Good to Many is most complete:

Do as much good as you are able to mens bodies in order to the greater good of Souls. If nature be not supported, men are not capable of other good... Ministers that are able, and willing to be liberal, find by great experience, that kindness and bounty to mens bodies openeth their Ear to Counsel, and

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120 PW:1, Christian Directory, 115.
123 For instance: Reliquiae Baxterianae, 89; PW:1, Christian Directory, 424 and 519.
124 PW:1, Christian Directory, 113; cf. PW:4, How To Do Good, 937
maketh them willing to hear instruction... All men are sensible of pain or pleasure, good or evil to the flesh, before they are sensible what’s necessary for their Souls. You must therefore speak on that side which they can hear, and work upon the feeling part if you will do good.125

Charity often removes distractions and temptations to evil: “Do your best to save the poor from such Temptations, as you would yourselves be saved from them... And when you give to the poor that are ignorant and ungodly, give them after it some Counsel for their Souls, or some good book which is suited to their Case.”126 Other rules for prioritizing good include the duties of the first table of the law before the second, “yet the greater duties of the second table must be preferred before the lesser duties of the first.”127 The good of many is to be preferred over the good of few.128 Likewise, a durable or everlasting good should be preferred over a short transitory good. He writes, “As to build an alms-house is a greater work than to give an alms, and to erect a school than to teach a scholar; so to promote the settlement of the gospel and a faithful ministry is the greatest of all, as tending to the good of many, even to their everlasting good.”129

II. Expansion of Missionary Thought

It follows from these considerations that Baxter does have an implicit mission theory that governed his mission thought and activity. Additionally, there are further distinctions within the ethical domain of practice, such as the method, manner, and motives of mission activity. Furthermore, there is conclusive evidence in his literature of a missionary spirit. Therefore, the question should no longer be whether such missionary thought and spirit existed in the seventeenth century; rather the vital questions are: (1) how broadly and effectively was this missionary spirit employed, and (2) what aid does Baxter’s instruction give in the development and maintenance of a contemporary methodology.

125 PW:4, How To Do Good, 940.
126 PW:4, How To Do Good, 940.
A. Tracing the Trajectory of Baxter’s Thought

Baxter’s contribution to mission is the product of many factors as well as a major influence of what followed. As Rooy has argued in his dissertation, Baxter must be considered as part of the Puritan tradition and its theology of mission.\(^\text{130}\) It is difficult to trace every cause and effect of Baxter’s contribution, yet a number of significant influences can be suggested.

What influenced Baxter’s missionary thought? In addition to his Puritan family life as a child, which was perhaps one of the greatest influences in his life,\(^\text{131}\) Baxter himself records many diverse sources for his ideas. Bishop Usher was a motivating factor for the writing of A Christian Directory and other similar works, including A Call to the Unconverted.\(^\text{132}\) Baxter’s education was influenced by a study of the schoolmen;\(^\text{133}\) he also records that he was greatly influenced by the reading of good books, for “most of the good that God hath done for me, for knowledge or conscience, hath been by sound and pious books.”\(^\text{134}\) Besides his correspondence with Eliot, the writings of Peter Maffaeus and the Jesuit’s epistles appear to also have impacted his missionary thought.\(^\text{135}\) Other convincing possibilities that should be tested in future research include: the impact of Richard Sibbes on his spiritual life and thinking;\(^\text{136}\) his knowledge of the developing missionary thought on the continent, particularly by Gisbertus Voetius (1588-1676), a very influential contemporary;\(^\text{137}\) and the impact of mission thought from the tradition of German Pietism.\(^\text{138}\)

\(^{130}\) Rooy, Theology of Missions.
\(^{131}\) Reliquiae Baxterianae, 4.
\(^{132}\) PW:2, Call to Unconverted, 501.
\(^{133}\) Reliquiae Baxterianae, 9.
\(^{134}\) PW:4, How To Do Good, 940; cf. PW:1, Christian Directory, 887.
\(^{135}\) PW:4, How To Do Good, 949.
\(^{136}\) Reliquiae Baxterianae, 7. Sibbes’ Bruised Reed influenced Baxter’s young life.
Certainly, Baxter’s friendship with John Eliot also had a large impression on his life and thought. Baxter writes of Eliot, “There was no man on Earth, whom I Honour’d above him.”\textsuperscript{139} Baxter and Eliot shared many commonalities in their life and ministries. Both were part of the Puritan tradition in their theology and practice. Both had hearts of love for lost souls and passionate zeal that drove them to accomplish almost the impossible. Both were strong advocates for unity in the church and mission – this, in addition to their mutual missionary zeal, is the common theme of all their mutual communication. Their writings have similar exhortations and even similar expressions; striking similarity is found in their mutual motto: \textit{let us be up and doing}. In his \textit{Indian Grammar}, Eliot writes, “We must not sit still, and look for miracles: \textit{Up, and be doing, and the Lord will be with thee. Prayer and Pains, through faith in Christ Jesus, will do anything.”\textsuperscript{140} In \textit{The Reformed Pastor}, Baxter writes, “Seeing, then, the work is cast upon us, and it is we that must do it, or else it must be undone, let us be up and doing with all our might.”\textsuperscript{141}

Surely, Baxter and Eliot mutually influenced each other’s missionary thought.\textsuperscript{142} Moreover, since their deaths, many others have been influenced by Baxter’s contribution. Samuel M. Jackson writes, “he cultivated every subject he handled; and, if he had lived in the primitive time, he had been one of the Fathers of the Church.”\textsuperscript{143} How did Baxter’s missionary thought influence others? His specific influence on missions is more difficult to trace. Yet it can be documented that many have been influenced by his writings, particularly by \textit{The Reformed Pastor}. Certainly his coworkers in Kidderminster and the surrounding country of Worcestershire were greatly influenced by his writings and

\textsuperscript{139} Keeble and Nuttall, \textit{Correspondence}, #1252, 2.324.

\textsuperscript{140} John Eliot, \textit{The Indian Grammar Begun; or, an Essay to bring the Indian Language into Rules} (Cambridge: M. Johnson, 1669), 65.

\textsuperscript{141} PW:4, \textit{Reformed Pastor}, 360.

\textsuperscript{142} Consider that Eliot begun his mission work before Baxter began his writing. Yet, Eliot is known to have read much of what Baxter published. Remarkably, they both died less than two years apart, dying with the same gracious expectation and similar parting words.

activity. It is also significant that his *Call to the Unconverted* was one of the first books after the Bible that Eliot translated, and that this “missionary tract” was a best-seller of the century.

Baxter’s influence continued through the eighteenth century. Packer records John Wesley’s remarks about *The Reformed Pastor* at a Methodist Conference: “Every traveling preacher must instruct them from house to house... Can we find a better method of doing this than Mr. Baxter’s? If not, let us adopt it without delay.” Many others, including Philip Doddridge, William Grimshaw, Charles Wesley, John Angell James, and Charles Spurgeon, have all made similar statements. In the preface of an 1829 edition of *The Reformed Pastor*, editor William Brown proposes that a copy of this book be given to every minister in the country “to simulate their zeal and activity... They are the chief instruments through whom good is to be effected in any country.” Then in the strategizing spirit of Baxter, he adds,

> To the different Missionary Societies, I trust I may be allowed to make a similar suggestion. To furnish every minister, or at least every Missionary Station, with a copy of the *Reformed Pastor*, would, I doubt not, be a powerful mean [sic] of promoting the grand object of Christian Missions. Sure I am of this, there is no work so much calculated to stimulate a missionary to holy zeal and activity in his evangelistic labours.145

The similarity of Baxter’s missionary instruction with mission activity today is noteworthy. His pastoral evangelism is comparable to the local evangelistic activity of pastors who minister to their church’s community. Baxter’s instruction on propagating the gospel is a precursor to the more developed fundamentals of international missiology. His direction for the promoting of public good is comparable, in essence, to contemporary humanitarian missions. His exhortation to the profession of religion, though perhaps quaint in language and

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method, is still apropos in the church today. Most readers are influenced, however, not so much by the content of what Baxter wrote, as by the spirit with which he wrote. Baxter communicates zeal and passion; he motivates his readers to evangelistic action. His greatest legacy is found not in his quotable statements or even in his sagacious directions. Rather, Baxter’s greatest legacy is found in his contagious zeal. His contribution to missions is the intangible but undeniable missionary spirit that he has passed on to those who follow.

B. Refuting the Accusation of Warneck

The consideration of Baxter’s contribution raises again the ongoing discussion of Warneck and Bosch, and the initial question of this article. Was Warneck correct when he suggested that the “fundamental theological views” of the Protestants “hindered them from giving their activity, and even their thoughts, a missionary direction”?\(^\text{146}\) If Warneck was also speaking categorically about the English Protestants of the seventeenth century, he was wrong. Baxter’s fundamental theological views did not hinder him from missionary thought or activity.

Yet Baxter himself notes the lack of Protestant missionary activity:

> Yea I thinke [the Jesuits] much more laudable that did those great things [i.e. missions in Congo, Japan, China & other countries] though in a culpable manner, than those Protestants that ever had opportunity, & have done nothing themselves, but find fault with them that did it. We have had preachers & chaplaines, at Aleppa Surat, & many other such places: But I never heard of any great matters attempted or done by any English Protestants, save excellent Mr. Eliots & his helpers in New England.\(^\text{147}\)

And again, in *How to Do Good to Many*, Baxter writes:

> The Jesuites and Fryars shewed us in Congo, Japan, China and other Countries that much might be done with care and diligence. Tho the Papal interest was a corrupt end, and all the means that they used was not justifiable, when I read of their hazards, unwearied labours, and success, I am none of those that would deprive them of their deserved honour, but

rather wish that we that have better ends and principles might do better than they, and not come so far behind them as we do.\textsuperscript{148}

Baxter’s fundamental theological views, which were generally consistent with most Protestants of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, did not hinder his missiological thought and activity, and yet, according to his own writing, the mission activity of the Protestants was far behind that of the Catholics. Baxter emphatically states, “I never heard of any great matters attempted or done by any English Protestants” except by Eliot.

How must Warneck’s unfair charges and Baxter’s honest admissions be understood in light of the ongoing discussion? Let me make several suggestions based on the foregoing study of Baxter’s missionary contribution. To the extent that Baxter is typical of all Puritans, these suggestions can be applied to the whole. First, Baxter’s mission theology (and all Puritan theology by extension) appears to be missionary according to seventeenth-century definitions. This has been shown in part by Bosch, Rooy, and others.\textsuperscript{149} Furthermore, the above study confirms that a missionary spirit permeated Baxter’s fundamental theological views. Yet several questions remain: Is Baxter’s instruction missionary according to the developed twenty-first century definition of mission? And more importantly, is it missionary according to earlier definitions, particularly those of the Apostle Paul and the early church? Issues related to these questions have generated separate trajectories of discussion.\textsuperscript{150}

Second, Baxter’s ministry in practice appears to missionary according to seventeenth century definitions. Warneck and others found sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestants to be lacking in missions when they judged them by nineteenth century definitions of mission. Yet, when comparing Baxter’s instruction and activity to seventeenth century definitions, he is truly a

\textsuperscript{148} PW:4, How To Do Good, 949.
\textsuperscript{149} Bosch, Transforming Mission, 258-60; Rooy, Theology of Missions; cf. n. 2 and 3 above.
mission strategist *par excellence*. Furthermore, though it is unfair to judge him by twenty-first century definitions, I would add that the essence of Baxter’s mission instruction is still apropos today. *The Reformed Pastor* still motivates many Christian leaders to missionary activity. Baxter’s other evangelistic writings, though somewhat antiquated in method and application, would do the same if applied to contemporary cultures and needs. Much more work can be done in this area.

C. Maintaining a Contemporary Methodology

Baxter’s instruction, therefore, is still relevant today. As such, much can be learned from him as the twenty-first century church seeks to maintain a mission methodology that reaches the immediate culture and needs. Regarding Baxter’s pastoral evangelism, Packer writes:

> The evangelism Baxter envisions is catechetical and heavily didactic, and that emphasis reflects the deep doctrinal ignorance which at that time characterized the lay people of semi-rural Worcestershire, apart from some exceptional folk in his own congregation. Nowadays, things are different: the churches of the West are minority enclaves within secular communities; evangelism focuses on those who do not yet come to church; and knowledgeable laymen share in it, as they should. In bringing Baxter’s approach to bear on today’s situation we must not lose sight of these differences. But the things that Baxter writes about – the need for pastors seriously to watch over themselves, and seriously to discover and minister to the spiritual needs of each member of their flock, taking pains to ensure first and foremost that these members are all thoroughly converted and truly regenerate – still apply; and this is where evangelism of the Puritan type finds its initial focus, in this or any age.151

We must not lose sight of the differences between Baxter and contemporary cultures. Consequently, Baxter’s (and the Puritans’) instructions cannot be directly applied to contemporary situations and ministries without modifying the exact methodology and application.

Yet Baxter, consistent with the entire history of orthodox Christians, sought to ground his theology and practice on scriptural truth. Therefore, the essence of his missionary

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151 Packer, “Puritan Evangelism,” 308.
instruction still has great value today. Baxter’s directory of mission should be similar to contemporary mission theory in several ways. It is derived from the same source of biblical doctrine and duty. It is performed in much the same manner and is propelled by many of the same motives. It employs some of the same methods and is applied with similar directions. The foundation of all mission theory is found in the absolute truth of Scripture; but the application of all mission theory is shaped by the constantly changing culture and conditions, and therefore can never be the same.

Baxter’s directory of mission will be dissimilar to a contemporary mission theory in two ways: Baxter’s theology of missions has already been developed and expanded by successive centuries of Protestants, while the urgent duty of missions that he courageously delineated is now, if anything, much more urgent and undeniable. We must, therefore, improve upon Baxter’s directory of mission by avoiding his pitfalls and expanding his contribution. We must revive his sense of mission duty in the church. We must restate his missionary manners and motives in contemporary language. We must reinvent his methodology and directions for missions in contemporary approaches that account for cultural change.

So there is work to be done. A reformed and reforming mission methodology must continue to be developed. Let Baxter’s contribution, and the contribution of two millennia of mission activity, aid in shaping our directory of mission. Let his zeal and passion also aid in motivating our continuing mission activity. “Seeing, then, the work is cast upon us, and it is we that must do it, or else it must be undone, let us be up and doing with all our might.”

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152 PW:4, Reformed Pastor, 360.
William Hasker’s Emergentism:  
A Novice Account  

David J. Zehnder  

Thesis  
Hasker’s emergentism addresses the mind-body problem extremely well but suffers from a lack of positive evidence. For the theological doctrine of the afterlife, emergentism has a disadvantage to dualism because the soul’s existence is grounded in a mortal body.  

The Mind-Body Quandary  
From western philosophy’s very dawn, the question the soul’s existence and exact function has been a live issue, so perplexing that scholars are perhaps more confounded by it now than ever before. The traditional view, dominant in much of philosophy’s history, defined the body and soul as two distinct substances: a dualism. The ever influential Descartes was a major proponent who posited the soul as a human’s rational capacity and the body as its material/animal component. With various nuances, the dualist approach lives on in thinkers such as Richard Swinburne, John Eccles, and modern Thomists; it is the classical anthropology, and for many theologians, inherent to belief in an intermediate state for disembodied souls.¹  

Lately, however, dualism has come under attack, receiving fire from ethicists, Bible scholars, historical theologians, and what is my central concern: philosophy of science.² From the perspective of methods, dualism predictably faced the challenge of materialism. Physical sciences are naturally inductive, explaining phenomena from the ground up. This method itself is innocuous, but as it came to form a prominent worldview, viz. materialism, dualism lost much of its persuasive ground in the academy.  

Traditional dualists attributed powers to the soul that scientific observation questioned. For instance, if one’s personality is determined by his soul, how can we explain cases such as Phineas Gage, whose morals and aspirations were altered after severe brain damage? Philosophers now debate whether epiphenomenalism is true, if one day all human brain activity could be explained on physical grounds.

Whatever ground materialism has gained, its victory is not decisive because of philosophers such as William Hasker, who is willing to debate the mind-body or body-soul problem on common grounds of logic and empirical evidence to demonstrate that physical science can never furnish all explanations for anthropology. But Hasker’s work is not simply a critique; rather his true objective is to produce a model of the soul that explains it in relation to the body, avoids criticisms lodged against Cartesian dualism, and also explains human consciousness and freedom where eliminative materialism fails. Dualism grapples to explain how a soul-substance, added completely from outside a body, can relate meaningfully with a body. And materialistic monism vaporizes human values and moral responsibility into physical causation. The key, contends Hasker, is to find some medium by grounding the mind in the brain’s biological functioning without reducing it to neuron-supervenience. The result is Hasker’s emergentism, where the brain generates its mind as a field. This essay is devoted to explaining not only emergentism but also what elements in philosophy and neuroscience are crucial to Hasker’s present formulation of it. These elements are the unity of consciousness argument in Kant, some scenarios from epileptic neurosurgery, and a brief discussion of emergentism as a metaphysic. Via these topics I shall demonstrate that Hasker’s emergentism addresses the mind-body problem extremely well.

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4 See esp. William Hasker, The Emergent Self (Ithaca: Cornell, 1999), 58-75. Also note that for this essay’s sake I assume Hasker’s notion that “mind” and “soul” are synonyms.

but suffers from a lack of positive evidence. For the theological doctrine of the afterlife, emergentism has a disadvantage to dualism because the soul’s existence is grounded in a mortal body. A critique following my general discussion will expound these complications and circumscribe a few challenges Hasker must surmount if emergentism is to remain tenable. The outset of his project is an argument for unified consciousness, which shows the need to acknowledge a human mind over its physical brain.

**Unity of Consciousness**

From his earliest writings on philosophy of the mind, Hasker has worked to resuscitate the unity of consciousness argument against functionalism, expressly as formulated by Immanuel Kant. Kant dubbed it a paralogism, seeming to deem it inadequate as a device for precise reason, but he was actually more confident about its cogency. Hasker uses the argument both to criticize materialist formulations of consciousness and to demonstrate that unified consciousness is explicable only through a simple mind/soul. Because the argument lacks clarity in all of its mediums, I shall summarize its basic claim with my own example.

Let us suppose that I am taking a walk on a brisk winter day. At a given moment I am aware of a number of phenomena that my senses perceive. Such could include the feeling of cold wind, my visual field of the sidewalk ahead, perhaps the smell of smoke from a nearby chimney, and even Haydn’s symphony 92 “Oxford” playing through my headphones. All of this sensual input forms a unity in my cognizance. **Unity** is an abstract term that Hasker could better explain, but he means both that these elements are experienced simultaneously and from the same geographical location. The mind perceives all of them together in each moment.

To understand the brain’s apprehension of this sensory data, Hasker grants the materialist her analogy of the computer, which

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8 Inspired by Hasker, “Concerning the Unity of Consciousness,” 533-5.
stores and processes data from interconnected units in its hard drive. From our example, one set of units might hold sight input, another touch, another smell, and another sound. But the question arises about where the subject of consciousness is located. If we allow C to stand for the collection of all the brain units contributing to my unified experience, then C contains all the information in my subject of consciousness. However, C is not a single thing but a composite of interconnected brain units that cannot themselves be conscious. The materialist will argue that the brain itself is the center of consciousness, but she cannot explain how all of C’s parts assimilate to form the unity I experience. No one brain-unit contains all of C, and since experience indicates consciousness as a unity of all my senses, claiming that units are conscious independently is unlikely as there is only one subject of consciousness.

The substance dualist obviously claims that our thoughts are a faculty of the mind presiding over the brain; a mind subsuming C into a single awareness. A collection of interconnected brain units can explain the storage of memory data but not their presence together in a unified human now. In Kant’s words, “It is…possible only in a single substance, which, not being an aggregate of many, is absolutely simple.” From Descartes through Leibniz to Kant, philosophers have recognized the need to explain consciousness by way of a soul, and only recently has this argument been neglected. Hasker’s appropriation of it, while not a decisive victory over materialism, provides a persuasive argument for dualism in the contemporary context of debate. It not only challenges the materialist account of consciousness, but rightly accentuates consciousness’s inherent unity in a simple (component-less) substance. Thus, Hasker shows that belief in the mind over the brain is plausible and that human cognition is an essential unity. But how closely are the mind and brain related? Hasker’s emergentism is designed to answer this inquiry in part as it is informed by neurology.

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The Doctor and the Mind

A great influence of Hasker is the work of neurologist Dr. Wilder Penfield, who demonstrated not only the soul’s empirical plausibility but minimally how it might be related to the brain. Penfield’s work was directed primarily to treating epilepsy, a condition where neurons fire randomly about the brain, disrupting its normal functioning and causing seizures. Epilepsy is treated by direct surgery on the brain by severing dysfunctional gray-matter, and strangely, this surgery requires only local anesthetic to the scalp of a fully conscious patient. This set of conditions provided an intriguing disposition for Penfield to stimulate areas of people’s brains with an electric probe and receive immediate feedback from them about how they were affected.

Penfield found that he could preclude a patient’s ability to speak by stimulating a certain area, but the patient could still think the words he wanted to say. Penfield could also make patients’ limbs move in a reflex-like action, but the patients would continually deny responsibility for the movements, attributing them rather to Penfield himself. That is, Penfield found that he could influence many motor functions of his patients’ but not their will or reason. The will and rational capacities seemed ecstatic to whatever “meddling” he did in the brain itself.

Perhaps the most striking finding, however, is when Penfield probed an area of the brain’s temporal lobe he called the “interpretive cortex.” Here he caused patients to re-experience events in their pasts, or music melodies encoded in their memories. The patients experienced two simultaneous streams of consciousness: one present and intelligent to Penfield and another from a past memory. They maintained the unified consciousness as discussed above, which is why a patient could discuss his alternate stream of consciousness to Penfield. Incredulous, he

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attempted to trick his patients to insure they were not inventing this alternate stream of their own caprice, but the results were consistent. He concluded that the patient’s consciousness stood aloof in a way to pass critical judgment on all stimulations of the brain.

Hasker is cautious not to conclude too much from these experiments alone—science is far from determining the brain’s vast complexities. But Penfield has shown that if a mind exists, it stands in a unity above brain activity yet is activated by certain stimulation within the brain matter itself. A sharp mind-body dichotomy such as Descartes’s position cannot easily explain the connections Penfield made; thus Hasker resolves to seek a dualism whose trajectory is more integrative between the mind-body union.

One more example from neuroscience furnishes an important influence into the making of Hasker’s emergentism. Again, because of its unique operating conditions, epilepsy patients are the object, this time in the studies of Dr. Roger Sperry. Some types of epilepsy are most devastating when spontaneous neuron firing begins on one side of the brain and strikes the other side through the corpus callosum, the one channel connecting both hemispheres of the brain. Sperry found that by simply severing the corpus callosum, aberrant neuron firings could be contained to one hemisphere, exacting significantly less damage on the brain as a whole. This procedure is called commissurotomy.

Sperry found that his “split-brain” patients could live quite normally most of the time, but they also had occasions of what I might call “ontological ambivalence.” In one comical case a patient found himself pulling his pants down with one hand and up with the other, seemingly representing two minds about the matter. Another patient, during an altercation with his wife, grabbed her and shook her with his left hand while his right hand reacted by assailing the left in defense of his wife—another demonstration of split-brain ambivalence. In all of Sperry’s experiments, the patients had essentially normal brain

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functioning, but they had times where one side of the mind would know or will differently than the other, especially in cases that demanded them to act quickly, allowing insufficient time for the halved brain to reach consensus.

Given that a mind is a simple unity able to apprehend multiple streams of input, we would expect it to assimilate impulses from both sides of the brain regardless of the corpus callosum, but such is not the result. Even on the mildest interpretation of commissurotomy, Hasker forecasts “serious problems for dualism.”18 The problems arise because the classically understood soul, although intimate with the body, is still independent from the body in its origin. Because it does not flow from the brain, the mind’s bifurcation in commissurotomy patients is enigmatic beyond a satisfying explanation.19 Hasker acknowledges this problem for classical dualism while remaining confident that dualism can survive the critique if it is modified appropriately. Traditional dualism faces the mystery about how an independent spiritual substance can relate with the physical brain, usually placing mental causation in a downward relationship from the soul to the body. This downward causation is necessary to dualism, thus Hasker is reluctant to do away with it. The genius of his emergent dualism is to place the brain phenomenologically prior to the mind such that upward causation (brain to mind) conjures the necessary platform for downward causation. In commissurotomy, this move could explain why a drastic change from below (the severed corpus callosum) could predicate changes above in the mind.

The above examples from philosophy and neurology demonstrate the need for a unified center of consciousness in anthropology but also that this center is subject to the brain as a physical entity. After all, thinking hard burns calories otherwise stored. Hasker’s solution is to base the mind on the brain: his emergentism. Before discussing this theory properly it would be useful to outline the metaphysic of emergence.

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Emergent Properties

To understand emergent properties, an abstract definition from C. D. Broad is helpful as Hasker ill-defines the backdrop of his theory. Given any physical thing, “the characteristic behaviour of the whole could not, even in theory, be deduced from the most complete knowledge of the behaviour or its components, taken separately or in other combinations, and of their proportions and arrangements in this whole.”20 The central idea is that whole entities embody faculties or properties that are inexplicable from their amalgamated parts alone. For example, complete knowledge of a shark’s biochemical composition and the arrangement of all its molecules interacting together still cannot account for the shark as a living fish, terrorizing dolphins in the sea. Thus, life itself is an emergent feature by this line of thinking.

If his fullest outworking of emergentism, Hasker adapts a similar form of this theory from John Searle and divides it into various levels of emergent potential.21 An emergent 0 feature is the whole of a thing according to its composite structure and is therefore emergent only in a logical sense but not according to Broad’s definition. More importantly, features such as matter’s solidity, liquidity, and maybe even rudimentary biological life (i.e. floral life) fill the category of emergent 1a. These elements cannot be deduced simply from microstructure, and thus they fit Broad’s definition of an emergent feature. But Hasker is more concerned with features two levels higher than 0 and 1a, those whose actuality is more speculative and less determinable by physical observation. The emergent 1b feature is the first which is not only irreducible to physical components, but affects the physical constituents grounding it in such a way that they are altered by its presence.22 In Hasker’s words, “the processes of life would indeed be explained by causal interactions among the elements, but the laws that govern these interactions are different because of the influence of the new property that emerges in consequence of the higher-level

21 Hasker, The Emergent Self, 171-76.
organization.” Apart from 1a, this feature is the first that exerts a downward causal influence on its material basis simply by its presence. The cognitive capacity of some mammals might illustrate this feature appropriately. And finally, the emergent 2 feature has causal control over its material basis apart even from its direct presence within that material. The only discernable candidate for this feature would be libertarian human freedom, a theory, it is noteworthy to mention, that Hasker fiercely commits to. A possible example is the student who may freely choose between reading Plato’s Republic for philosophy or watching sitcoms. Reading will enhance her brain power; watching television will only let her brain languish—her free decision determines the outcome.

These four features are actually levels of existence and consciousness found in varying degrees in all living organisms. The first two, so far as science can now determine, can be taken for granted as true emergent features. The third (1b) feature is less certain than its precedents, but generally acceptable unless proven false. Emergentism stands or falls on the plausibility of this feature. And the last, the existence of libertarian freedom, although there are good arguments for it outside the emergent system, is the most contested. Nevertheless, Hasker’s emergentism is not defeated even if the emergent 2 concept ultimately fails. The exposition of this backdrop clarifies what Hasker is trying to accomplish in his theory of humans and animal souls, the appropriate topic to follow.

The Mind and Its Origin

The above arguments from philosophy and neuroscience delineate what a mind-body theory must encompass to thrive on secular grounds of debate. So far as Hasker discusses the philosophical mind-body problem, he does not adduce theological evidence. But he is very concerned about the possibility of the

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afterlife and the intermediate state. Thus his emergentism works to form both a plausible mind-body theory within empirical grounds, and within theology, to postulate a soul that can exist apart from the body.

As a philosophical system, Hasker espouses the emergent metaphysic that matter, when arranged in significant complexity, can form irreducible wholes. More concretely, the theory “views mental processes and activities as the natural result of certain complex patterns of functioning of human and animal nervous systems.”27 His use of the words “natural result” is peculiar yet inherent to his thought. Hasker is contending that the brain’s functioning naturally generates the mind above itself; its natural substance actually produces a “field of consciousness” which then influences the brain.28 Rather than following laws of causation verified in scientific theory, the field follows its own “emergent laws,” or those represented by 1b and 2 definitions. This field is natural only in that it is produced by physical material but is itself a unity and a separate substance, leaving Hasker in the dualist camp. The major divergence from classical dualism is that the soul is not added but generated.

As a crude analogy, I propose the mind’s springing from the brain like an oak producing leaves. The oak surely begins to grow from the ground with all of its initial energy coming from nutrients in the soul where it is planted. Once the oak sprouts leaves, however, its leaves enable photosynthesis by which the tree harnesses the sun’s energy, carrying it down through the whole tree. I use this illustration to demonstrate how causality can start from below and grow to include causality from above.

26 I am spending much more time on the secular problem just as Hasker does. Emergentism is formally a philosophical project after which Hasker hopes to find theological approval.
Hasker’s token analogy is the magnetic field, which is very similar to how he imagines the soul’s field.\textsuperscript{30}

A magnet is simply a piece of metal formed by iron molecules, which, when arranged properly, produce a magnetic field. The field is invisible but demonstrably real by its affects on the physical world around it, and it extends indefinitely into space beyond the magnet, becoming continually weaker with distance from the metal. Thus does Hasker propose the soul-field. This analogy is simply an example from science and does not provide true evidence that there is a generated soul, but it does illustrate what a soul could be like.\textsuperscript{31} The soul and the magnetic field both have causal powers; both are invisible. If the magnet is affected, perhaps bisected, so the field would be divided with it. Such could apply to the above commissurotomy patients, whose minds incurred splitting with the brain’s corpus callosum. And the field is a simple substance just as consciousness is: a truth substantiated both in the unity of consciousness argument and Penfield’s neurology.\textsuperscript{32} Helpful as the magnet analogy is, Hasker still has to account for the soul as emergent 1b at least, and because a magnetic field has only one simple kind of causation its illustrative powers finally break down. Emergentism’s application is much wider theory than any single analogy can maintain.

This emergent field of consciousness, he proposes, is present not only as a human mind, but also in animals. Its potency is dependent solely upon the complexity of the brain and its functioning powers. That explains why mammals would have emergent 1b features but not emergent 2 (although it is consistent with emergentism that if an animal could evolve greater brain complexity, it would also begin to acquire free will), also why a human infant has no free will but grows to acquire it in time. Because living things generate consciousness, there is no question about the mind’s origin—parents pass down its material potential,


\textsuperscript{31}Hasker, \textit{The Emergent Self}, 190-91

\textsuperscript{32}For some of these faculties see Hasker’s, “The Souls of Beast and Men,” 275-76.
a kind of traducianism. Even in the phenomenon of biological regeneration, where an animal (e.g. a starfish) is cut apart and both parts grow into their own complete organism, emergentism serves as a plausible explanation. If the animal starts with one soul and organism and then becomes two souls and organisms, a natural conclusion is that its living material generates a new soul. Thus, emergentism requires no special account of creationism at the birth of each creature because potential for the soul resides inherent in all organic matter.

I hope to have made Hasker’s project clear. By making the brain the wellspring of the mind, he attempts to explain how a simple-substance mind is still altered significantly by alterations to its physical brain, yet retains emergent 1b features and is not wholly subject to the brain’s activity as in epiphenomenalism. The same general scheme works with animals in their ability to pass down and generate souls. By positing the soul as a truly separate substance, Hasker remains a true dualist, and like many dualists he wants to affirm belief in the afterlife. He believes that the soul can exist apart from the body and retain personal identity — a better alternative to the extinction-re-creation view which he finds logically inadequate.

The Continuity of the Mind

The initial problem for emergent dualism is obvious in the magnet analogy. If the magnet deteriorates, the field it projects ceases. Also with the mind, if the brain and body die, the soul field would naturally disintegrate. In classical dualism the soul’s existence never depends on the body, making continued existence quite consistent to that view, but emergentism’s advantage in explaining mind-brain integration comes at the price of questionable immortality.

Hasker answers this problem first by noting that a field’s contingent existence on matter is not a logical necessity but a physical limitation; there is nothing illogical about a magnetic

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34 Hasker, “Resurrection and Mind-Body Identity,” 324. The extinction-re-creation view is death ends personal existence entirely and individual must be recreated entirely in the resurrection.
field existing without a magnet.\footnote{See Hasker, *Metaphysics*, 75.} An example not in Hasker might be if I were to run a treadmill in a room. The heat emanating from my body is a kind of field that would raise the room’s temperature and would stay raised even if I were to depart. Hasker’s favorite example is the black hole. Under certain conditions a star’s own gravity causes it to collapse on itself and produce a field of pure density. The star’s matter disappears while the black hole continues to exist in no need of its original material producer.\footnote{Hasker, *The Emergent Self*, 232.} Even in the physical sciences a field’s continued existence has an analogue.

Ultimately continued existence is a theological topic where, in all views, God’s sustaining power is invoked to keep a soul from annihilation. Hasker avers this truth, but he realizes that a non-dualist anthropology cannot account for the intermediate state. Thus his project for personal identity is designed especially to be compatible with God’s governance of souls into the intermediate state, which he takes to be an inescapable biblical truth.\footnote{Hasker, *The Emergent Self*, 207. Here Hasker admits his indebtedness to Cooper’s *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting* for its proof of a disembodied afterlife in the Bible.} If Hasker were unconcerned with continued existence he would not argue so vigorously for it. Because he does maintain a true, albeit modified dualism, the afterlife should provide no devastating problems for emergentism in the context of theology.

With the mind-body complications in place, emergent metaphysics defined, Hasker’s emergent solution exposited, and the hope for the afterlife addressed, my central description is complete. I shall now offer an appraisal to determine emergentism’s tenability and what its future might require.

\textbf{Assessment}

It should now be obvious that postulating the soul’s origin in organic matter is simultaneously the source of this theory’s greatest strength and greatest mystery, felicitously explaining the co-dependency between the brain and mind while lacking positive proof of how exactly this process goes. Hasker addresses
the enigma of the soul’s origin but has little to argue directly for its favor. 38 Along with nonreductive materialism, emergentism must allow the potential for consciousness to be purely within matter. But Hasker parts company with all forms of materialism because they cannot explain the unity of consciousness. And so his theory of a field of consciousness (viz. a unity produced by matter) is essentially a peg carved to fit the hole of the problem. Hasker’s defense of the project is simply that it fits the data well and cannot currently be refuted, but for many that is not significant reason to espouse emergentism.39 How can a brain generate a soul? Is Hasker asking us to believe in metaphysical magic?

In hope of vindicating the soul-field hypothesis I placed the side of my head against my wife’s head and tried to read what number she was thinking of. I guessed 8; she was thinking 4. Perhaps this trivial experiment was fanciful foolishness, but if the human brain literally projects a field of consciousness, it seems reasonable that other brains would have some access to those fields. Certainly magnetic, electrical, and gravitational fields interact thus. But to my knowledge there is no trustworthy documentation of telepathy, and even if there were, it still would be only a small piece of evidence for emergent minds.

Furthermore, Frank Dilley comments that if the mind is an energy system, it should have observable mental energy that is unaccounted for in the brain’s energy, but this evidence does not exist.40 This question pushes Hasker on the question: What exactly is the soul made of? He is clear that it is a separate substance from the mind and that it has a causal correlation with mind. He neither uses “energy system” language of Dilley nor the theological term “spiritual” substance. If the emergent mind is a spiritual substance, which it looks like in his account of the afterlife, then there is no reason we should expect to detect physical energy from it. But if it is really a physical energy field,

Dilley is correct to doubt the field’s existence. If nothing else, Hasker needs to clarify the substance’s essence to foster coherence between his philosophy and his theology.

From a theological perspective, I see no great advantage of emergentism over a holistic form of dualism. My knowledge of the monism-dualism debate is extremely limited, but it seems reasonable to believe that God could create a soul so intimate with the body that both are dependent on each other such that influences on the brain ineluctably affect the mind. Because the soul is created as a spiritual substance apart from the body, its continued existence is more believable than the emergent account that has God reaching down at the last minute to rescue every soul from its dying body. It is an inconsistency within Hasker’s emergentism that he works so hard to hypothesize a soul produced apart from deity and then turns to divine intervention as a tag to his project concerning the afterlife. Perhaps it is a natural consequence of arguing on two fronts.

Corcoran states that keeping a magnetic field in existence without the magnet itself is something God is incapable of, thereby making emergentism incompatible with a disembodied afterlife. But Hasker rightly argues that the field’s continued existence is only a physical impossibility and not a logical one. If God can make a bush burn and not be consumed, he can likely keep a soul-field in existence. Corcoran is correct only in sensing that emergentism is at a conceptual disadvantage to classical dualism in regard to explaining the afterlife.

Conclusion

As stated in my thesis, emergentism is able to handle the philosophical mind-body problem extremely well. By placing the mind posterior to the brain, Hasker can explain why the mind is influenced with the brain (esp. in commissurotomy and other modern neuroscience) without dismissing the unity of consciousness. This view easily explains the transmission of a soul from one being to its offspring, and also how biologically

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42 Hasker, Metaphysics, 75-76.
43 See also Dilley, “Review: The Emergent Self,” 128.
regenerated animals can receive a soul. The major question is how exactly this field is generated. Hasker lacks positive evidence to demonstrate that the emergent metaphysic is really plausible. In contending for substance dualism, he can explain the afterlife, but only by requiring God’s timely action to sustain otherwise mortal soul-fields. Traditional dualisms clearly explain the afterlife more suitably. Because “every viable view in the metaphysical neighborhood of persons comes with a cost and raises its own set of puzzles,”44 we must suspend complete judgment on philosophical emergentism as a tenable solution until further evidence is available. It nonetheless provides a fascinating proposal to the problem of mind-body correlation.

A Critique of Alvin Plantinga’s EAAN:
Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism

Jeffrey A. Snapper

Most non-Christian biology departments today tout a two-pronged worldview. First, evolution is an empirical fact. Second, once you realize that you’ve arisen not from God’s benevolence, but from protoplasmic slime, you really should give up belief in God or anything like Him. Therefore naturalism is the right ontology to hold once you get a handle on evolution.

“Not quite,” says Alvin Plantinga in his evolutionary argument against naturalism (EAAN). This argument claims that naturalism is the exact wrong ontology to hold once you get a handle on evolution. It argues this claim by critically examining what naturalistic evolution has to say about how our beliefs came to us by natural selection. Its conclusion is that folks who claim both evolution and naturalism to be true have very little reason to trust their cognitive faculties.

Thesis

While the EAAN does seem to argue persuasively that materialistic naturalists are irrational, and withstands the criticisms of Jerry Fodor (among others not treated here), it nonetheless requires some shoring up on other fronts. First, Plantinga’s own theory of internal rationality invalidates his exempting of Paul the prehistoric hominid from the “principles of humanity.” This in turn makes P(R/N&E&C) high. Second, although P(R/N&E&C) is high, naturalists are nevertheless constrained to be epiphenomenalists. However, finally, a modified version of semantic epiphenomenalism (C*), where the propositional content of belief is causally connected with behavior, combined with a high P(R/N&E&C), could nonetheless constitute a defeater for the EAAN.
The Initial Argument\textsuperscript{1}

Before we begin it is well to mention that the unstated assumption running through the EAAN is that most, if not all naturalists, are also materialists (believing the human being is exclusively material). Given that, the EAAN states: the probability that the naturalist’s cognitive faculties are reliable given the truth of naturalism and evolution is either low or inscrutable. “Reliable” here describes a cognitive faculty whose vast majority of deliverances are true, meaning the major bulk of what it it produces can be trusted.

In symbolic terms, the EAAN states that, the probability (P) that our cognitive faculties is reliable (R), conditional upon (/) naturalism (N) (no God or anything like Him) and evolution (E), is either low or inscrutable. In other words, P\(P(R|N\&E)\) is either low or inscrutable. To put this into words: the low or inscrutable probability that S’s (the naturalist’s-evolutionist’s) cognitive faculties are reliable is due to S’s belief that those faculties evolved via a naturalistic natural selection.

Natural selection describes the process by which those individuals who exhibit adaptive behavior will tend to produce more offspring than those exhibiting less adaptive behavior. Hence natural selection, according to orthodox biology, is a description of the process by which adaptively advantageous genes become more common, and adaptively disadvantageous genes, since their carriers will tend to have fewer progeny, become less common. Hence, a population evolves.

So, S believes that this is how human beings and their cognitive faculties came to evolve from protoplasmic slime. The key here is that S believes his cognitive faculties evolved according to a process (natural selection) which selected individuals, and hence also their faculties (because natural selection makes no distinction between an individual and its parts) based on one criteria only: adaptive behavior.

“That’s great,” you say. “So S believes his cognitive faculties evolved according to adaptive behavior. So what?” It is Plantinga’s claim that there is no positive correlation between true beliefs and adaptive behavior. If he is right then natural selection would select the behaviorally adaptive individuals regardless of whether or not their beliefs were true. And this lack of a preference to select for true beliefs continues, according to evolution, to today.

Plantinga argues this claim by presenting four jointly exhaustive and mutually exclusive possibilities which define the relationship between belief and behavior in general. If these possibilities can conclusively demonstrate that there is at best a low positive correlation between true beliefs and adaptive behavior, then S will be forced to admit that his belief that his cognitive faculties are reliable is, even if it was warranted and basic, now defeated. This is so because in the first case if false beliefs result in more adaptive behavior than true beliefs then natural selection would select for false and against true beliefs. In the second case if beliefs simpliciter are maladaptive then believing creatures simpliciter would be selected against. In the third and fourth cases, if the content of belief in general is irrelevant to behavior then no selection preference could occur for true over false beliefs.

That said, the first of these four possible relationships between beliefs and behavior is a causal and adaptive connection. For example, Cal the prehistoric hominid has a true belief that the bonfire he is sitting next to is hot enough to hurt him. This belief about the hotness of the fire causes him to refrain from jumping into it thereby preventing him from incurring bodily harm. According to this relationship between belief and behavior the P(R/N&E&C1), where C1 denotes the causal connection between belief and behavior, might be rather high since in this scenario natural selection would clearly favor a true belief instead of a false belief (for instance, that it is safe to jump into the fire).

“But wait,” says Plantinga. If we are going to admit that beliefs have a causal connection with behavior then in order to be consistent we must admit that desires also enjoy such a connection. If this is the case, then certainly different
combinations of beliefs, some of which are false, combined with desires, would just as likely to lead to adaptive action as true beliefs. Take another look at Cal. Again he is sitting by the bonfire. This time he holds the false belief that the bonfire is a friendly god who wants Cal to sit on his lap. The night is rather chilly and sitting in the fire does sound good to Cal. However, he also remembers what his buddy Ari the hominid told him, “Whenever those pesky sit-on-the-friendly-fire-god’s-lap beliefs come into your head, it really means that the fire god wants you to roast a goat over him, not sit on his lap. This is what the fire god is really trying to tell you, you’re just getting it wrong.” So, in the belief that Ari is an expert on the fire god, and in an effort to satisfy his desire to fully please the fire god, Cal roasts a goat over the fire instead of sitting in it. This is a case of false beliefs combined with desires which lead to adaptive behavior.

While this in my own example, Plantinga provides a number of other scenarios illustrating further that false belief-desire combination scenarios are just as, or more adaptive than, true belief scenarios. His hominid’s name is Paul:

- Paul very much likes the idea of being eaten, but when he sees a tiger, always runs off looking for a better prospect, because he thinks it unlikely that the tiger he sees will eat him. This will get his body parts in the right place so far as survival is concerned, without involving much by way of true belief.... Or perhaps he thinks the tiger is a large, friendly, cuddly pussy cat and wants to pet it; but he also believes that the best way to pet it is to run away from it.... Or perhaps he thinks the tiger is a regularly occurring illusion, and, hoping to keep his weight down, has formed the resolution to run a mile at top speed whenever presented with such an illusion; or perhaps he thinks he is about to take part in a sixteen-hundred-meter race, wants to win, and believes the appearance of the tiger is the starting signal; or perhaps.... Clearly there are any number of belief-cum-desire systems that equally fit a given bit of behavior.²

Thus we can see that, due to desire’s parallel causal connection to behavior, true beliefs lead to no more adaptive behavior than false beliefs thereby making true beliefs invisible to natural selection, in turn making P(R/N&E&C) low.

² WPF, 225-26.
However, there is a caveat here. The naturalist might still object that a few anecdotal examples of false belief-desire combinations exhibiting equally adaptive behavior as true beliefs in Plantinga’s particular examples do not really constitute a very strong argument that in general and as a rule false beliefs are just as adaptive as true ones. Seeing this, Plantinga wisely and humbly concedes that under this possibility $P(R/N&E&C)$ could indeed be moderately high.

The second possible relationship is a causal and maladaptive connection, where beliefs do cause behavior, but only maladaptive behavior. If this is the case then natural selection selects for those individuals who believe the least. This would lead us to think that we have very few, if any beliefs. Since this relationship results in all of us believing in very little if anything at all, this position leaves $P(R/N&E&C)_{2}$ low.

The third possibility is a complete disconnection between belief and behavior, termed epiphenomenalism simpliciter. Epiphenomenalism is the “theory of body-mind relation which holds that consciousness—and hence also belief—is a mere epiphenomenon, or a by product of a basic process which exerts no influence on the subsequent development of the process, in relation to the neural processes which underlie it.”

Consequently our beliefs do not enter the causal chain of being leading to behavior, at any point. Since our beliefs are epiphenomenal to our brain states, it is really the brain states that lead to behavior, sending neural impulses to muscles and organs. The beliefs themselves have a one to one correspondence with brain states, and are phenomenologically true in that sense, but have no physical connection with reality.

So, under epiphenomenalism the truth content of brain states is invisible to natural selection since it does not alter behavior which is what natural selection selects for. Hence under epiphenomenalism a given belief’s truthfulness or falseness floats right by to the next generation unseen, totally unselected. Moreover, if this applies to a single belief it also applies to every belief since all are equally epiphenomenal. Thus $P(R/N&E&C)_{2}$,

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where \(-C_1\) refers to a total causal disconnection between belief and behavior, will necessarily be low under epiphenomenalism simpliciter.

The final possibility is termed semantic epiphenomenalism. On this position the rates of firing, number of neurons, synaptic connections, and other neurological details all compose the physical contours of a belief which consequently trigger neurons that flex muscles, etc., thereby providing a causal connection between belief and behavior. These neurological details are described as the syntactic portion of a belief. While syntax composes its physical characteristics, a belief is nonetheless more than the sum total of its physical parts. A belief also contains content. This content is in the form of a proposition which can be either true or false. This propositional content is described as the semantic portion of a belief.

The issue then, is which portions of a belief are causally connected with behavior, and which are not. The reason: a causal connection between a given belief and a given bit of behavior which excluded the content of that belief would be a contentless connection. The belief might be connected and causing the behavior yet the belief’s content would not be causing the behavior. Hence the propositional truth or falsity of that belief’s content would be irrelevant to that behavior because merely the belief minus its content had entered the causal chain of being.

So which portion of a belief enters the causal chain of being under semantic epiphenomenalism? Only syntax enters the chain. Semantics, and therefore content, is excluded. Under this position then, it is clear that there is no behavioral difference between epiphenomenalism simpliciter and semantic epiphenomenalism. This is because one cannot tell by analyzing neurons whether a belief a true, but only by comparing the truth of a belief’s propositional content with its claim about a state of affairs. Therefore semantic epiphenomenalism’s syntactic causal connection with behavior is irrelevant, inefficacious, because the truth content is located in the semantics of the belief. On this position \(P(R/N&E&-C_2)\) will therefore also be low.

Finally, on the basis of Plantinga’s probability calculus, utilizing Baye’s Theorem, and given the caveat under relationship
number one, $P(R/N&E)$ could be either moderately high at best or low. However, Plantinga cleans up that final caveat under the causal and adaptive possibility with the remark that,

> it is extremely hard, given materialism, to envisage a way in which the content of a belief could get causally involved in behavior. If a belief just is a neural structure of some kind - a structure that somehow possesses content - then it is exceedingly hard to see how content can get involved in the causal chain leading to behavior.

He has three assertions here. First, since he is arguing against naturalism, he is implicitly asserting that all naturalists are materialists. Second, he asserts that it is “extremely hard” to see how a materialist could not hold epiphenomenalism. Third, it is “exceedingly hard” to see, on the epiphenomenalist’s view, how a belief’s content could causally connect with behavior. Therefore $P(R/N&E)$ is low⁴, or if one dislikes Plantinga’s numbers, at best inscrutable.⁵

This argument constitutes a defeater for S’s belief that S’s cognitive faculties are reliable. Moreover, if the reliability of S’s cognitive faculties has a defeater, then so also does every belief originating from his faculties, since they are unreliable. Thus materialistic naturalism and evolution, themselves believed on the basis of these unreliable cognitive faculties, are defeated. In fact, all of the naturalist-evolutionist’s beliefs are defeated. Moreover any argument brought about by the evolutionist-naturalist against the EAAN is necessarily undercut because it has arisen from

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⁴ Based on $P(R/N&E) = [P(R/N&E&C) \times P(C/N&E)] + [P(R/N&E&-C) \times P(-C/N &E)]$. In this equation Plantinga has combined both types of epiphenomenalism into $-C$ on the grounds that both equally ignore the content of belief. He also ignored the relationship of causal but maladaptive connection ($C_2$) on the grounds that it is very unlikely. Next he assigns to $P(-C/N &E)$ a value of .7. This represents the high probability of epiphenomenalism (either semantic or simpliciter) conditional upon naturalism and evolution where $P(C_1/N&E)$ is correspondingly assigned a value of .3 as these are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive and hence need to add up to 1. $P(R/N&E&-C)$ is next estimated to be .2 where $P(R/N&E)$ could then at most be .45. Cf. ND7, 10.

⁵ As I will argue later to say that something is either “extremely” or “exceedingly hard” or even both together at the same time still does not constitute an argument.
unreliable cognitive faculties. Hence for the naturalist-evolutionist the EAAN is a universal undefeatable defeater.

Moreover, a thoughtful naturalist must necessarily hold to evolution since it is the best scientifically supported explanation of human origins consistent with naturalism. Therefore while the EAAN technically defeats naturalism by examining its conjunction with evolution, it also reveals more subtly that naturalism alone is self-defeating due to its necessary reliance on evolution. Hence, he who is aware of the EAAN is also irrational in accepting naturalism simpliciter.

This perturbs naturalists. No one likes being called irrational, especially people who think they are smarter than everyone else. Despite the unreliability of their cognitive faculties, or maybe due to it (since their beliefs are all false anyway) naturalists have sought defeaters for Plantinga’s EAAN for over a decade. The first and only of these to be reviewed here is Jerry Fodor.

Fodor

Fodor is opaque. He chooses his own terms which do not coincide with Plantinga’s in such a way that you have to sort of guess at what he is saying. Moreover, he never touches upon the key issue of epiphenomenalism. It rather looms over his argument like a dark raincloud. If the case can be made that naturalists are constrained to be epiphenomenalists, then it is neither the truthfulness nor the falseness of a belief that is at issue for naturalists, but rather the content simpliciter and the ability of that content to cause behavior that is at stake. Nevertheless it is important to see what Fodor does say, even if it rather misses the point.

His argument is that Darwinism (evolution via natural selection) does not “threaten” Scientism (the goal of which is the discovery of objective empirical truths). By this statement I take him to mean that science’s claims to know truthfully certain empirical facts about our the universe is not undercut by the admission that our cognitive faculties have arisen by way of natural selection as explained by Darwinism.

What I think he is doing is transforming the reliability of one’s cognitive faculties in Plantinga’s argument into the scientific
application of those faculties in his argument in order to appeal to our common sense. In other words, I think the choice of terminology itself is rhetorical. It is easier for me, a rather scientifically minded theist, to agree with Plantinga that the naturalist’s cognitive faculties are unreliable in the abstract sense of unreliable, than it is for me to agree that the naturalist’s faculties are unreliable when he asserts something we all agree on, such as, “the stars are very far away.”

However, this rhetoric works only if you don’t fully understand the EAAN. That is, the rational responsibility to distrust the naturalist’s cognitive faculties apply only to the naturalist, not to the theist. This is because, due to the conjunction of natural selection, epiphenomenalism and naturalism within the EAAN, S (the naturalist-evolutionist) is forced to doubt the reliability of his cognitive faculties. This doubt includes all the scientific conclusions he comes up with because they have arisen from unreliable faculties. However, the theist knows better. She knows that S’s cognitive faculties were in fact given to the unwitting naturalist by God. Therefore she can trust his scientific conclusions, even though rationality does not permit S to trust those same conclusions himself.³

Following this initially shifty rhetorical approach to the argument, Fodor stumbles through Churchhill and Plantinga’s precursors. He utilizes the accusation of a distributive fallacy to discount Churchhill’s assertion that the truth content of beliefs take a back seat to adaptive behavior. From there he bumbles over Plantinga’s argument that false beliefs are equally as

³ What this clarifies is the meta-structure of the EAAN and its dependance on the necessary growth of one’s epistemology from one’s ontology. The EAAN assumes the naturalist ontology and then grows from there to a demonstrably unreliable naturalist epistemology. Thus so long as one’s source ontology is naturalism one’s epistemic ground is rather shaky. What the theist knows, however, is that the naturalist ontology is really a farce. There’s no such thing as naturalism; not really anyway. Its just something some people mistakenly believe to be true about reality. Therefore the theist can see that in fact the naturalist is actually not standing on shaky epistemic ground, but rather on very solid ground, and it is for this reason that the theist is constrained to continue taking the naturalist’s arguments seriously, even though the naturalist cannot trust them himself.
adaptive as true beliefs from a natural selection perspective. His main claim in this latter portion is that in order for the EAAN to hold water not only must false beliefs happen to be as behaviorally adaptive as true beliefs, but they must also be so because they exhibit some characteristic P which natural selection can select for. The reason P must exist, thinks Fodor,

is simply that, according to the present story evolution selected us because of something about lots of our false beliefs that reliably lead to our behavioral success. So the present story couldn’t be true unless there was something about lots of our false beliefs that reliably lead to our behavioral success. 6

What I take him to mean here is that according to the EAAN, (present story) the false beliefs of our selected ancestors had a characteristic P which reliably led to behavioral success. To use one of Fodor’s favorite words: Poppycock! The EAAN makes no such claim. Instead it claims that if beliefs are admitted into the causal chain leading to behavior, then so also must we admit desires. Further, it is the conjunction of false beliefs with desires, and not some characteristic of the true beliefs themselves, which reveals that false beliefs result in just as adaptive behavior as true beliefs. Fodor’s mistake here is in thinking that the false belief simpliciter must exhibit P. In contrast Plantinga shows us that a false belief-desire combination can effect the Fodorian desire for a P, yet P is not exhibited in the belief itself. Therefore Fodor is wrong.

Following his initial explanation Fodor summarizes his argument in three steps. His first step shows (so he claims) that P simpliciter exists, but false beliefs of the sort which the EAAN employs (which are equally as adaptive as true beliefs) do not actually have P. Therefore these false beliefs, while just as adaptive as true beliefs, are only as adaptive as true beliefs by accident, as a fluke, by mistake, and not because of any property they exhibit. Thus the EAAN fails to meet Fodor’s required criteria because it relies on the proposition that the false beliefs which are as adaptive as true beliefs do have P (at least this is what Fodor thinks the EAAN relies on).

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Next he asserts that if he was selected in the past due to his false beliefs having P, then lots of his past behavioral successes must have been predicated on false beliefs tout court. While that may be the case, nonetheless there is a big pile of inductive evidence Fodor has for thinking that in fact most of his present behavioral successes are predicated on true beliefs. He cites the behavioral success of brushing his teeth and all the accompanying true beliefs leading to it as evidence.

Finally he comes full circle. If those false beliefs which are equally as adaptive as true beliefs do not have P (step 1), and if, although his past behavioral successes may have been predicated on false beliefs, his present ones haven’t (2), then all the EAAN can claim is that behavioral success, while it used to be predicated on mostly false beliefs, no longer is (3). If this is true then the argument from the invisibility of the truth content of belief to the unreliability of the naturalist’s cognitive faculties is defeated because according to step 1) false beliefs, since they do not have P, are not as adaptive as true beliefs, and according to step 2) even if they were as adaptive as true beliefs the argument’s premises and conclusion all begin and end in our evolutionary history, never reaching the present.

Plantinga’s response to Fodor is short and sour. Fodor incorrectly equates scientism with naturalism. Scientism merely asserts that science can discover objective empirical truths about physical states of affairs whereas naturalism asserts there is no God nor anything like Him. The first is compatible with theism and the EAAN; the second is not. Plantinga’s intial response is very similar to mine. Even if everything Fodor says is completely correct, he is still wrong! Whether or not false beliefs are more or less adaptive than true beliefs is irrelevant if you’re a naturalist because a naturalist is pretty much constrained to hold an epiphenomenal view of beliefs in which P(R/N&E) will be, at

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7 Plantinga assigns a value of .7 to P(-C/N &E) in ND?, 10. This does not strictly constrain the naturalist, but it suggests strongly that they probably have to hold it.
Plantinga’s most generous, .36, a value still sufficient to defeat R for the naturalist.

Further, says Plantinga, Fodor is not only unclear but also incorrect to assert that, “It can’t be plausible that we were selected for the behavioral success of our false beliefs unless it is independently plausible...that a lot of our behavioral successes have in fact been actions out of false beliefs.”

Plantinga replies that in fact it need not be independently plausible in the sense that you need more than one defeater for R, so this cannot be what Fodor means. One defeater for a given argument is sufficient. Further, neither inductive evidence of true beliefs causing adaptive behavior, nor the commonsense view that true beliefs are more adaptive than false beliefs are in any sense of the word defeaters for Plantinga’s argument that false beliefs are at least as adaptive as true beliefs. So not only does Fodor manage to leave the EAAN unscathed, he also totally misses the irrelevant target he originally aims at, that true beliefs are more adaptive than false ones. Having presented the EAAN and Fodor’s fumbly argument we’ll move to some of my own concerns.

Internal Rationality Makes P(R/N&E&C) High

My goal in this section is to show that, under the first possible relationship between belief and behavior, Paul the hominid’s exemption from human status on the basis of internal irrationality makes P(R/N&E&C) high. To ensure clarity a brief review of Plantinga’s theory of internal rationality is in order. Internal rationality “…can [be] initially characterize[d] as a matter of proper function of all belief producing processes ‘downstream from experience.’” More specifically, an internally rational human needs to meet five requirements to remain such under Plantinga’s theory of knowledge. First, he is to form and hold only those beliefs that are appropriate to his phenomenal imagery

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8 Based on P(R/N&E)=P(R/N&E&C) x P(C/N&E) + P(R/N&E&C) x P(-C/N&E) where Plantinga assigned values of .2 and .8 to P(R/N&E&C) and P(-C/N&E) respectively. ND?, 253.
and doxastic experiences. Second, he is to hold only coherent beliefs, necessarily excluding self-contradicting beliefs. Third, he is to draw correct inferences from his beliefs. Fourth, he is to make correct decisions based on his beliefs. Finally, he is to hold an attitude of general epistemic responsibility wherein he prefers true instead of false beliefs and inquires further into matters when it is appropriate.¹¹

Return to the first relationship: belief is both causally efficacious and adaptive. Plantinga explains that the intuitive position regarding true beliefs and behavior here is that true beliefs are more adaptive than false beliefs. He refutes this idea with numerous false belief-desire counterexamples that nonetheless lead to adaptive behavior. These counterexamples illustrate that since false belief-desire combinations can be equally adaptive as true beliefs it is not very cogent to argue that natural selection cares much about the truthfulness of belief-only its adaptive value. Further, “…most or all of [Paul’s] beliefs could be false but nonetheless adaptive or fitness enhancing”¹² because it is easy to imagine systematically false beliefs that would still yield adaptive behavior.

The key in this section is Plantinga’s foresight into the objection to his examples stemming from Richard Grandy and David Lewis. They assert that certain “principles of humanity”¹³ are required in any decent theory of content in order to exclude unreasonable belief-desire combinations.¹⁴ The objection would be that the false belief-desire combinations Plantinga invented are in fact fantastical, unrealistic, and could never be believed by any actual human being, but only by an invented one. Thus they should not be admitted into Paul’s noetic structure as viable patterns of cognition, and consequently Paul’s ridiculous beliefs should not be admitted into the argument. Not being admitted into the argument would of course allow P(R/N&E&C) to remain high. However, having forseen this, Plantinga replies that Paul is

¹² ND?, 8.
¹⁴ WPF, 226.
not a human, and that hence, these nifty principles of humanity do not apply to him, therefore \( P(R/N&E&C) \) is low.

There is a problem here. Plantinga justifies exempting Paul’s beliefs from the principles of humanity based on his non-human status. But what exactly is it that makes Plantinga a human and Paul a non-human? Size of cerebral cortex? Jaw protrusion and other skeletal features? Tool usage? No, these can’t be it. We still classify those individuals as “human” who have lobotomies, look rather ape-like, and are mechanically challenged.

Maybe what Plantinga really means here is that there is a certain amount of genetic divergence between himself and Paul which disqualifies Paul from enjoying human status. The question begging to be answered then is, just how genetically dissimilar is Paul from humans? Further, what amount of divergence is necessary for disqualification? In other words, how far down into evolutionary history must we travel in order to find an ancestor whom we might rightly classify as “human” and hence for whom these ridiculous examples of false belief-desire scenarios exhibiting adaptive behavior would be invalidated? What criteria would be used to draw such a line?

However, perhaps it is a mistake to think that what Plantinga means by not human is a certain degree of genetic divergency from us humans. After all he certainly sees why genetic divergency is problematic. Perhaps instead he means simply that Paul’s cognitive faculties do not function on a par with human faculties regarding belief formation. This would make sense then of why Plantinga thinks these handy principles of humanity ought not be applied to Paul, since he’s rather too dull to measure up to them. Plantinga’s assertion that

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\text{We can’t assume that their [prehistoric hominids] beliefs, for given circumstances, would be similar to what we take it we would believe in those circumstances. We must ask what sorts of belief-desires are possible for these creatures given only that they have evolved according to the principles of contemporary evolutionary theory…}^{15}
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\(^{15}\text{WPF, 226-27.}\)
reveals that it is \textbf{the sorts of belief-desires one is capable of having} which defines a being as human or not. Further, it is also safe to infer here from his use of “possible” that being “human” means being able to have certain types of belief-desires that are not able to be had by the likes of Paul. This inference is safe because of the clear contrast between what we current day humans “would” believe and what Paul \textit{could} believe under “given circumstances.”

So far we have established that to be human is to have a noetic structure capable of forming certain belief-desires that the non-human is incapable of forming. Well, what kinds of belief-desires can a human hold that a non-human cannot? Better yet let’s simplify this to beliefs alone. So the question becomes, “What kinds of beliefs can a human hold which a non-human cannot?” Plantinga does not answer this question. He does not come right out and explain what it is that distinguishes human from non-human beliefs. Thus I propose that our best means of getting at what Plantinga is saying here is to look at his hominid who Plantinga tells us is not capable of forming the same sorts of beliefs a human might form in “given circumstances.” That is, we need to go on the inductive evidence of his false belief-desire scenarios in order to discover Plantinga’s criteria for distinguishing a human from a non-human.

Keeping in mind Plantinga’s theory of rationality, we must ask whether or not Paul’s beliefs are internally rational. First, Paul believes the tiger is unlikely to eat him. This seems neither very appropriate to the phenomenal imagery of a “hungry tiger,”\footnote{ND?, 8 (emphasis mine).} nor to be a correct inference from the imagery to the tiger’s behavior. Thus, this belief would disqualify Paul from enjoying internal rationality on two counts. If we look at his other beliefs the same is true there as well. He believes the tiger is a pussy cat (inappropriate to the phenomenal imagery); he believes that the best way to pet a pussy cat is to run away from it (incoherent); and so on for the others. The point here is that the type of beliefs Paul’s noetic structure seems capable of forming in these scenarios are not internally rational ones.
So what are we left with? First, every one of Paul’s beliefs violates at least one of the requirements of internal rationality. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that internal rationality does not apply to Paul since he never once demonstrates it. Second, the principles of humanity do not apply to Paul because Plantinga made clear that Paul is not capable of holding humanesque beliefs. Third, the principles of humanity do apply to us today because we do hold the types of beliefs humans hold, being humans and all. Plantinga also implicitly agrees to this by contrasting us humans to whom the principles apply with the hominid to whom they do not apply. Once all this is said and done two possibilities arise. Internal rationality and the principles of humanity just happen to look a whole lot alike, but are actually different, or they are in fact referring to the same thing. I think the latter.

Therefore, internal rationality is what is required by the principles of humanity, and Paul is exempt from those principles because he cannot be expected to exhibit internally rational beliefs. Or, to put a finer point on it, Plantinga exempts Paul from the principles of humanity because the hominid noetic structure has not yet evolved to the point of being human, to the point where it should be expected to prefer true to false beliefs, to the point of fulfilling the requirements of internal rationality. If so, then this means that Paul is exempt from the principles of humanity because he’s incapable of being internally rational due to his ridiculous belief-desire combinations. Nonetheless we are under those principles because we are internally rational.

The problem: the entire purpose of the scenarios is to argue that selection cannot distinguish between true and false beliefs. However, the implication of the principles of humanity being another name for internal rationality, and applying to us but not to Paul is that selection here certainly has selected for less ridiculous belief-desire combinations. That is, Paul, our ancestor, is incapable, or (even if much is conceded to Plantinga’s scenarios) at very least less capable of holding internally rational beliefs, whereas we are entirely capable of holding internally rational beliefs, and this

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17 That is, I am purposely avoiding a deductive definition of what a “human” belief is, all the while trying to get at it with the scenarios.
evolution in capabilities is due to natural selection. Thus natural selection has a clear preference for internally rational cognitive functioning and against internally irrational cognitive functioning.

The next question becomes: “Is there a strong positive correlation between internal rationality and true beliefs?” The answer is simply and clearly yes. By his own criteria Plantinga states that “finally, if she is internally rational, she will do what proper function requires with respect to such things as preferring to believe what is true, looking for further evidence when that is appropriate, and in general being epistemically responsible.” Therefore, these internally rational beliefs will tend to contain true, as opposed to false, beliefs.

This does not look good for Paul’s employment in the argument that false beliefs are just as adaptive as true beliefs. To summarize: I have inferred from his above remark that Plantinga thinks that the principles of humanity apply to contemporary humans because we are internally rational but not to Paul because he is not internally rational according to Plantinga’s theory of internal rationality. I have then inferred one more step that since Paul is our ancestor and presumably came to us by way of evolution via natural selection that in order for us to exhibit internal rationality while Paul does not, natural selection must have selected for those creatures exhibiting greater internal rationality. I have not supplied a reason why natural selection would prefer internally rational creatures to internally irrational ones. I don’t need to. I only need to show that it must do so in order for the principles of humanity to apply to us but not to Paul.

Finally, based still again on Plantinga’s theory of internal rationality, I have argued that those creatures which exhibit greater internal rationality will also necessarily prefer to believe what is true rather than what is false. Therefore, natural selection, in selecting for those creatures who exhibit greater internal rationality, cannot help but also be selecting for those creatures which prefer true beliefs instead of false ones. Consequently $P(R/N&E&C)$ becomes high.

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18 WCB, 112.
Now, the rebuttal to all of this would be that in fact while theists may be internally rational, naturalists are not, and that this has been the argument all along. That is, Paul is exempt from the principles of humanity due to his internal irrationality/ non-human status, yet so are current-day naturalists due to the EAAN.

The problem with this rebuttal is Plantinga’s use of the term “human.” Plantinga needs to change this terminology in order for the rebuttal to work. In exempting Paul from “human” status Plantinga has also forced naturalists into that same exemption, thereby making naturalists non-human. This is a rather controversial claim. I imagine that quite a few naturalists think of themselves as rather human. It is even more problematic due to the fact that Plantinga merely alludes to the meaning of “human,” but does not directly exegete it. Thus I conclude that the currently constructed rebuttal is fundamentally flawed due to its sloppy characterization of naturalists as non-human. Hence, facing the EAAN as it now stands, \( P(R/N&E&C) \) remains high.

Nonetheless, there is a stronger version of this rebuttal to my defeater of the hominid. A better road would be to exempt Paul from the principles of humanity on the basis of being internally irrational, rather than on the basis of not being “human.” This is where the change in Plantinga’s terminology should occur. Such a change would ensure the admission of Paul’s crazy beliefs into the argument while at the same time avoiding calling naturalists non-human. This would get the rebuttal to work without endangering its credibility. Hence under this modified rebuttal \( P(R/N&E&C) \) would again become low.

The Necessity of Epiphenomenalism for Naturalists

Now, the proper response to all these shenanigans is that while true beliefs may in fact be preferred by natural selection to false ones, nonetheless this seems irrelevant for the naturalist because she probably needs to hold an epiphenomenalistic attitude toward beliefs anyhow. If N does necessarily include a total causal disconnection between belief and behavior then \( P(R/N&E) \) would remain low or inscrutable. If not then my above section, if I am correct and minus my modified rebuttal, constitutes a wholesale defeater for the EAAN.
Thankfully this is not the case. When Plantinga remarked that “if a belief is a just a neural structure of some kind…that somehow possesses content – then it is exceedingly hard to see how that content can get involved in the causal chain leading to behavior,”\textsuperscript{19} he simply stated that it is hard to see how a naturalist could not also be an epiphenomenalist. However, this is not an argument. There is nothing here that argues the case that a naturalist must be an epiphenomenalist. Consequently this is where his argument seems weakest. That being the case a search for the necessity of epiphenomenalism for naturalists is worth the effort.

I think his above remark hints at that necessity. Here is why. In order for naturalists to be naturalists, they must believe in naturalism. In order to do that, they must believe at least two more things: that beliefs at least phenomenologically exist and that beliefs possess content. The naturalist’s belief in beliefs simpliciter and in their possession of content is the crux of the matter. The content of a belief is necessarily in the form of a proposition expressed in language.

While the naturalist must believe that beliefs do possess content, the location of that content cannot be the brain, since we don’t find content there. Have we ever found propositions in the brain? Nope. Furthermore our neural structure does not exhibit the appropriate ontology for a storehouse of beliefs.\textsuperscript{20} This being the case, we can see that the naturalist is in a tight spot. In order to remain a naturalist he needs to believe: 1) in beliefs, 2) in belief’s content 3) that beliefs have no non-natural manifestation. From this spot the optimal position is epiphenomenalism because it allows the naturalist to believe in beliefs and their content via a real, albeit solely phenomenological, manifestation.

If the naturalist gives up his epiphenomenalism then his belief in beliefs, if it exists at all, is very thin. That is, those beliefs will be without content since their only manifestation, phenomenal or otherwise, will be in the brain, which, as

\textsuperscript{19} ND?, 10.
\textsuperscript{20} I am following Plantinga here in his lecture “Against Materialism,” 9/27/2002 although I will argue against this in the following section.

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Plantinga argues,\textsuperscript{21} cannot support a medium of content. This would leave the naturalist at best believing in contentless beliefs, in which case he cease being a naturalist. Further, even if the naturalist rebuts with the, “I don’t believe that beliefs possess any content whatsoever.” It is easy to see that such a statement actually assumes its own contradiction, that the belief that beliefs have no content whatsoever does have some content. Thus internal rationality requires that the reflective naturalist hold epiphenomenalism as well.

**The EAAN Defeater from Modified Semantic Epiphenomenalism**

The assumption in arguing that naturalists must be epiphenomenalists is that the propositional content of belief cannot be found anywhere in our neuronal structures. However, might it not be possible that the theistic neurobiologists, with enough technology and training and time and money, eventually discern such a vast and complex array of patterns that they constituted not only the syntax by also the semantics of beliefs? In other words right now all they have are rudimentary data about the syntax of beliefs. What if neurobiology gathered enough data and performed enough analysis that syntax could be deciphered into translatable semantic patterns? What if it became able to discern, “I believe the car is blue” from “I believe the car is chartruse” by analyzing neurons alone? Might this constitute a defeater for EAAN?

Immediately Plantinga would respond that the number 7 just cannot weigh seven pounds because “its not the right sort of thing,” or “an elephant is not a proposition.”\textsuperscript{22} The brain, says Plantinga, has the wrong sort of ontology to be “about” something. A quivering mass of gray matter simply cannot have propositional content, and to assert that it could is the same as asserting that a snowdrift could be a question. These are nice analogies, and that is an interesting assertion. They are not arguments. Until Plantinga supplies us with good reason to see strong similarities between the number 7 and the brain, and weighing ten pounds and being “about” something, we should

\textsuperscript{21} Plantinga, “Against Materialism.”

\textsuperscript{22} Plantinga, “Against Materialism.”
withhold judgment on whether the brain has the right or wrong ontology to have propositional content. 23

In the absence of an argument I could just assume that the brain does indeed exhibit a suitable ontology to support propositional content. However, due to the presence of Plantinga’s assertion alone I feel obliged to argue my case fully. If the brain does not exhibit the correct ontology then what does from the theist’s perspective? I imagine the answer would have something to do with the mind or spirit or soul, but in any case some portion of the human being that was non-material.

If that’s the case, then the theist’s position seems no stronger to me than the materialist’s. Plantinga says loudly that the brain cannot support propositional content, and the materialist says loudly that humans have no non-material parts. Neither the mind’s nor the brain’s ontologies are yet sufficiently understood wherein one could make a strong case that either’s ontology was more supportive of propositional content than the other’s. This being the case we cannot discard out of hand the semantic epiphenomenalist’s argument than syntax may actually be encoded semantics.

How about an analogy: The year is 3003 and Michigan is at civil war. The Holland guerilla fighters have an especially valuable brain-in-a-vat which they must send to allies in Lansing. This brain-in-a-vat is the brain of a martian who crash landed in Holland State Park just last week. The Holland guerilla fighters luckily found a decoder ring so they could communicate with the friendly and useful martian. However, the Grand Rapids Militia, their enemies, intercept the brain.

The Militia has extremely advanced scanning imagery at its disposal. It is so advanced that it can pinpoint every neuronal event and its relationship to every other neuronal event perfectly! Sadly, however, because it is a martian brain the Grand Rapids Militia cannot make semantic heads or tails of its data, even though every last bit of the syntactical information is clearly understood.

23 Plantinga, “Against Materialism.”
Luckily, the Militia has just recruited its newest code breaker, John Nash the XII. He does crack the code and what they could only previously make syntactical claims about becomes semantically significant, full of propositional content. Would it not be unwarranted, the modified semantic epiphenomenalist might claim, to assert that simply because we have not yet broken a rather extremely complex code that therefore there is no code at all to be broken? Is it not a bit presumptuous to assert that just because we have not yet discerned a code therefore the semantics of belief do not lie there? The inability of 10th c. physicists to imagine an ontology of things that would support our current electron theory is not evidence that electrons and protons did not exist in the 10th c. Is that not a rather unwarranted jump to make?

Further, this is an argument from silence. We don’t see content or hear content or feel content, so there must not be any. Well, that might be the case, but it might just as well be the case that our inability to sense the content is due to technological deficiency and ontological misdiagnosis rather than a semantic vacuum in the brain. And, given this reality, the semantic epiphenomenalist, it seems to me, would be equally warranted in believing that the propositional content of beliefs do lie in the neurons and their interrelationships.

Further, is the theist’s position really any stronger? After all, where do we place the location of the content of beliefs? In our “minds,” correct? This is our immaterial consciousness, somehow related to our soul. So which position enjoys more warrant? Since this is the heart of the EAAN it seems as though it cannot be brought to bear against the naturalist-materialist in this instance in order to discredit the proper functioning of his cognitive faculties. Could it not be argued that either position enjoys relatively equal warrant?

In conclusion, even apart from the warrant issue, this position would allow a naturalist to remain a modified (in the sense of understanding semantics as deciphered syntax) semantic epiphenomenalist with no good reason to doubt his cognitive faculties. The syntax of a belief, on normal semantic epiphenomenalism, would enjoy a direct causal and efficacious connection with behavior. By modifying the syntax simpliciter
concept into a syntactical-semantical hybrid concept via accurate ontological admissions and enhanced neurological analyses the content of a belief can also be seen to enjoy a causal connection with behavior. In fact, it is instead a small human imagination and a limited imaging technology that has incorrectly divided a unified ontology due to an invalid distinction.

Therefore, modified semantic epiphenomenalism (C*) in conjunction with a sound argument that true beliefs lead to more adaptive behavior than false ones would constitute a defeater of the EAAN. Given Plantinga’s concession that P(R/N&E&C) “is at best moderately high,” as well as my above section showing that it probably is high, this argument could constitute a defeater for the EAAN. In sum, if I’m correct, P(R/N&E&C*) is high and the EAAN has a defeater.

In conclusion I am grateful both to Alvin Plantinga for the evolutionary argument against naturalism, and to Calvin Van Reken for the generous hours of instruction on these topics, most prominently epiphenomenalism. Throughout my undergraduate stint in a secular biology department I felt the itch that all was not well with its philosophical underpinnings. The EAAN has scratched that itch and started a few others. For that I am thankful. In addition, I may have multiple blind spots and numerous logical fallacies hiding in the bushes, but I have done my utmost to present the strongest case I could. These arguments really do seem correct to me. I look forward to their correction.

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24 ND?, 9.
Still Coherent:
An Affirmation of Christ’s Full Humanity without Jeopardizing His ‘Necessary’ Impeccability

Simon Sang-Kyun Ko

“God cannot be tempted by evil.” (James 1:13)

“He had to be made like His brethren in all things … we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15)

“Our Lord Jesus Christ is … consubstantial with the Father as to his Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us in manhood, like us in all things except sin.” (Chalcedonian Decree)

“If God is not truly and altogether in Christ, what sense can there be in talking about the reconciliation of the world with God in Him?” (Karl Barth)

Marilyn McCord Adams, in her 1999 Aquinas Lecture entitled, What Sort of Human Nature? Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology, presents a rather intriguing picture of Christological development in the Latin West. According to her study, while working under the general rubric of the Chalcedonian Definition, major medieval scholars freely speculated about the things left unspecified by the Definition. For instance, Bonaventure maintained that Christ’s virgin birth enhanced human nature because it realized the fourth and the last possibility to become human: (4) from female alone – while the

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other options being: (1) from no parents, (2) from a male alone, and (3) from both sexes!2

Along these speculative lines, Peter Lombard contemplated that because Christ came to save humanity, it was *fitting* for Him to assume a quality from each of its four major dispensations: (A) immunity from sin (prior to the fall), (B) punishment and suffering incurred by sin (prior to Christ’s atoning sacrifice and after the fall), (C) fullness of grace (since the time of Christ’s atoning work); and (D) the inability to sin – or ‘*non posse peccare*’ (to be had by us after the *coming* consummation).3 Now, given this particular analysis, the suspicion that Christ could in no way be both fully human and necessarily impeccable disappears. That is, if the locus of Christ’s salvific identification with us truly lay in simply appropriating from all of the relevant stages, the fact that *non posse peccare* (a 4th stage quality) does not mirror our current and “*pre*-fourth” stage should not trouble anyone.

However, towards the end of her lecture, Adams helpfully directs our attention to Luther and his disapproval of such speculative theorizing.4 Luther used Scripture – rather than speculative medievalism – as his starting point, and the outcome was a renewed appreciation for Christ’s role as the *penal* substitute.5 This observation demanded that Christ be much more like us in our *pre*-glorified, *pre*-fourth stage than Luther’s medieval predecessors once presumed.6 This, in turn, entailed that Christ be (at least, in some sense) vulnerable to sin as the rest of humanity has been since its beginning!

Such soteriological concern seems to propel Charles Hodge’s theology when he remarks:

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3 In *Sentences* III, d.16, c.2; cited in *What Sort*, 18.
4 Ibid., 97-99.
5 Ibid.
6 Although this seems to fly in the face of the soteriological approach to Christology (i.e. the approach that determines the identity of Jesus on the basis of his *saving significance* for humanity) that Wolfhart Pannenberg speaks against in *Jesus – God and Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 38-49, Luther seems to be entirely warranted here to postulate a certain requisite connection between Christ’s identity and its salvific significance.
The sinlessness of our Lord, however, does not amount to absolute impeccability. It was not non potest peccare. If He was a true man, He must have been capable of sinning. ... Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of his person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then his temptation was unreal and without effect, and He cannot sympathize with his people.7

This observation (or objection!) takes us right to the heart of this paper. Given Luther and Hodge’s soteriological concern that Christ must identify with us more substantially in our pre-glorified state (i.e., with its essential freedom to choose between the good and evil), how could we believe that the Incarnate Christ was in every sense necessarily impeccable?

In relatively recent literature, Christian philosophers have attempted to defend the coherence of the two-natures view espoused in the Chalcedonian orthodoxy. For example, Thomas Morris states in The Logic of God Incarnate that it is his expressed goal to rebut arguments that are designed to show the Chalcedonian decree false or incoherent.8 Morris goes about this task by making pertinent distinctions between kind and individual natures (understood as sets of essential properties), common and essential properties, and mere and full humanity. These distinctions allow Morris to conclude that Christ could be fully human as long as the human qualities that He lacks are only the ‘common’ ones (e.g. ‘temporary sinfulness’). What matters for Morris is that Christ really possesses all of the essential properties to be human. Moreover, with this analysis, although it may be impossible for Christ to have more than one individual-nature, He could belong to more than one species by possessing plural kind-natures. Christ could be fully God and fully human if (a) Christ possesses all of the essential human properties and (b) none of these properties conflict with His essential divine properties.

This may be all fine and dandy so far. However, the real question is whether Morris’ distinctions can dissolve the tension between (a) Christ’s inability to sin and (b) His full humanity. For

8 Thomas Morris, The Logic of God Incarnate, 16.
instance, is not the ability to choose wrong (for at least some period in one’s history) an essential property to being human?9 Morris may deny it and affirm that Christ could be fully human while lacking that property. However, as viable as this suggestion may be in and of itself, it still leaves Christ somewhat removed from the rest of us. For example, how would such a Savior fully sympathize with His people as the Bible declares?10

This difficulty seems to exist just as strongly for Morris’ rivaling kenoticists. To resolve other seemingly irreconcilable properties for Christ, the kenoticists typically employ what could be described as the ‘‘divine’’-unless-kenotically-incarnate’ strategy. For example, instead of maintaining that ‘omniscience simpliciter’ is God’s essential property, they endorse ‘omniscient-unless-kenotically-incarnate’ as the right one. They do this in order to ensure that Christ comes out divine even when he lacks omniscience. The problem is that this otherwise brilliant strategy falls short when it comes to our question. For instance, ‘impeccable-unless-kenotically-incarnate’ would entail that in His kenotic state God could lack impeccability and still be God. This, however, does not seem like a right picture of God, and the construal of kenosis that allows His perfect goodness to be injured should be avoided.

Despite such seemingly insurmountable difficulties, the task of this paper is to defend the thesis that God’s necessary impeccability, if plausibly construed, permits Christ to be fully human and fully divine while tempted as we are in the full libertarian sense. This task will be carried out by critically evaluating two distinct proposals advanced by Thomas Morris and Thomas Flint, followed by my improved alternative.11

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9 This of course assumes that there could be no mere epistemic temptability as Morris would argue.
10 This point was made explicitly by Eleonore Stump in her review of The Logic of God Incarnate in Faith and Philosophy 6 (Ap 1989): 220.
11 The motive for considering the views propounded by these two philosophers is primarily illustrative. In what follows, the notion of freedom and God’s impeccability will also be closely scrutinized.
Thomas V. Morris’ Compatibilist Proposal

In his book, *The Logic of God Incarnate*, Thomas Morris makes the following suggestion in regards to Christ’s temptation and His necessary impeccability:

How can it be the case that Jesus was necessarily good and yet was tempted to sin? We have said that it seems to be a conceptual truth that, in some sense, temptation requires the possibility of sinning. On reflection, we can see that it is the epistemic possibility of sinning rather than a broadly logical, or metaphysical, or even physical possibility that is conceptually linked to temptation; Jones can be tempted at t to go and lie to his department chairman, although, unknown to him, his chairman died an hour earlier, making it impossible for Jones or anyone else to go and lie to him at t or thereafter (147).

He then elucidates further that Jesus could be epistemically tempted to sin in His earthly range of consciousness if “the full accessible belief-set of his earthly mind did not rule out the possibility of his sinning (148).” In other words, Morris espouses that Christ could be genuinely tempted as long as his human mind is unaware of His overall necessary goodness.

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12 In his article, “Divine Necessity and Divine Goodness” in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 313-47, Keith Yandall states that what is about to be presented as Morris’ view does not necessarily amount to compatibilism, although compatibilism entails Morris’ view. Yandall advances this distinction by contending that the lack of alternative possibilities in a given situation could still allow room for libertarian freedom as long as such “determination” plays no (direct) causal role in the person’s choice (327). Although I am sympathetic to Yandall’s point, I believe I am completely warranted to call Morris’ forthcoming proposal ‘compatibilist’ in so far as Morris’ explanation for such a lack of causality or determination exclusively consists of the choice’s correspondence with the agent’s desire (*The Logic*, 152). This is characteristically a compatibilist’s way of talking about one’s free status. For a quick glance on this issue, see Richard Double, *Beginning Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 199-232 and Tomis Kapitan, “Free Will Problem,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 280-82. Moreover, Frankfurt’s counter-example that Morris employs to defend his strategy was originally devised to defend the compatibilist account of freedom. See Wes Morriston, “What is so good about moral freedom?,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 200 (2000): 344-58.
Morris’ account seems to be ridden with serious problems. Provided that Morris is not a kenoticist, his suggestion concerning Christ’s “epistemic weakness” requires that He possess two minds, one pristinely divine and the other not. However, such a two-mind construal seems to entail two persons with two different minds, and this looks awfully close to the ancient heresy of Nestorianism. Morris tries to avoid such a charge by explaining that the two minds are welded together into one person in an “asymmetrical accessing relationship (159).” The idea is that only the divine mind of Christ has an unlimited access to His human mind and that such an asymmetrical access for Christ the sought-after personal unity.

However, as Morris himself acknowledges, this suggestion by itself does not solve the personal unity problem (159). After all, does not a similar relationship hold between God and any human mind? Why should we assume then that Jesus’ human range of consciousness is uniquely that of the Incarnate God? Morris’ reply is that Christ’s set of causal and cognitive powers operating in His earthly mind, unlike ours, just are the second Person’s (161). Consider, for example, a situation where we are really immersed in our dream as players while also semiconscious that it is only a dream. In a like case, both “the reality self” and “the dream self” can be argued to belong to one and the same person! Both “selves” experience the world with the same “I” or self-consciousness.

However, if it is indeed this sort of qualitatively similar ‘token-reflexive’ awareness that ensures the unity between the “two minds,” it seems quite doubtful that it can help Morris’ cause. In Morris’ scheme of things, Christ’s divine mind is

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15 Such concern could be tied with John Hick’s objection in The Metaphor of God Incarnate (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 57, where he objects, “this distinguishing circumstance [i.e. Jesus’ earthly mind having the same cognitive and causal powers as God the Son] amounts to there being a single will.”
aware of His necessary impeccability while His earthly mind is not. This discrepancy, however, seems too huge to obtain any personal oneness. This being the case, his view is still infested with Nestorianism.

More to the point, it is either the case that there is an intricate connection between Christ’s (a) will and the (b) contents of His mind or there is not. If there is such a connection and his (a) moral impeccability is directly proportional to His (b) “epistemology,” then Christ’s (a) moral/ontological impeccability does impinge on His (b) “epistemic temptability,” and vice versa. On the other hand, if there is no such connection, Christ’s (b) ignorance should have no affect on His (a) temptability. Therefore, in any way we look at it, Morris’ strategy seems to fail. Even when there is a supposed connection, Christ’s ignorance does not allow Him to be tempted while having His essential impeccability totally unaffected.

To make it even clearer, at the heart of Morris’ problem is his espousal of the compatibilist view of freedom. Morris accepts the proposition (a) ‘Christ can be tempted’ (or ‘He is responsible for His actions’) while embracing (b) ‘it is impossible for Christ to sin.’ To maintain their compatibility, Morris adopts a Frankfurtian16 counterexample17 originally devised to rebut the Principle of Alternate Possibilities [PAP] – which says, ‘A person is morally responsible for what she has done only if she could have done otherwise.’

The counterexample goes like this: Ms. Black wants Jack to murder Mary. Unbeknownst to Jack, Black has implanted electrodes in Jack’s brain to monitor it. If Jack were to show any sign of hesitation when Black wants him to kill Mary, Black is ready to intervene and causally determine Jack to kill Mary. As it happens, however, Jack decides on his own to murder Mary so that Black never has to intervene. Although seemingly tenuous, what is significant about this thought experiment is that in a similar situation, a person like Jack should still be held responsible for his or her act, albeit he had no choice but to kill her.

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Bringing this scenario back into Christ’s situation, we can envisage how Christ too could have been morally responsible for His virtuous acts even when He lacks genuine alternatives. As long as He did not know of His necessary impeccability, could He not desire the right choices and be responsible for them? Is that not what our thought experiment leads us to think? Not quite yet! Going back to the counterexample, why do we feel that Jack was responsible for his atrocious act? Is it not because it was up to him whether he was (1) forced or (2) not forced to murder Mary? That is, was it not because Jack was in some sense able to force Black’s hand even though he could not have done but actualize Mary’s death?

However, how could this be the case with Christ? It appears that if Christ truly was necessarily sinless, then His impeccable hand could never acquire the opportunity to “further” ensure a good choice. This is because the very need for such activation would entail corruption, and this is not possible for a necessarily impeccable Christ. Hence, the analogy between a Frankfurtian agent and Christ breaks down. In regards to this apparent gap separating Christ’s mode of “choice” from ours, Keith Yandall comments: “So long as we allow an agent the actual and exercisable capacity to try to act wrongly, or to choose wrongly, or to try to choose wrongly, it remains plausible to think of the agent as responsible; remove this actual and exercisable capacity and the plausibility goes as well.”

It is important to note, therefore, that in the end, human responsibility requires some measure of “up-to-us-ness.” And this “up-to-us-ness” seems incompatible with the compatibilist’s notion of causal determination that rules out alternatives in every conceivable way. If Christ was so rigidly “fixed” that He could in no way make alternative choices in regards to good and evil (unlike the Frankfurtian agent could), He could not be free for, responsible for, and tempted against His good actions regardless of how that “choice” may have been truly pleasing to His

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18 Yandall, 332.
19 For a difficult, yet rather definitive case made against the compatibilist notion of free will, see Peter Van Inwagen, An Essay on Free Will (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).
subjectivity. Therefore, if we wish to find out how Christ could truly identify with us in His will without impairing His divine impeccability, we must move on to Thomas Flint’s Molinist proposal.

**Thomas P. Flint’s Molinist Proposal**

In the abstract of his article, “A Death He Freely Accepted: Molinist Reflections on the Incarnation,” Thomas Flint states the following:

Traditional Christians face a puzzle concerning the freedom and perfection of Christ. Jesus the man, it seems, must have possessed significant freedom for him to serve as a moral example for us and for his death to have been truly meritorious. Yet Jesus the Son of God must be incapable of sinning if he is truly divine. So if Jesus is both human and divine, one of these two attributes – significant freedom or moral perfection – apparently needs to be surrendered. In this essay, it is argued that if (and perhaps only if) a Molinist approach to divine providence is embraced, one can plausibly affirm both the freedom of the man and the impeccability of the Son.21

What Flint says here just about summarizes what has been observed so far in this paper: significant freedom is crucial for being human and an account of how this quality can be connected with Christ’s moral perfection still needs to be formulated. With this correct framework, Flint nevertheless proceeds with a rather questionable strategy. He singles out ‘Christ’s Human Nature’ (‘CHN,’ for short) and refers to it as though it is a personal agent. For instance, Flint asserts that CHN was born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, embraced death on the cross, etc! This personal attribution is problematic because Flint explains elsewhere that “CHN refers to the particular body-soul composite that was and is supernaturally united to the second person of the Trinity’ that ‘is not a person at all (6).” What is going on here?

Upon some reflection, it becomes clearer that Flint talks the way he does because he endorses the dyothelite position sanctioned by the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-81). The Sixth

21 Ibid., 3. Hereafter, page references to this article will be made parenthetically in the body of the text.
Council at Constantinople approved of the two-will position without contravening the earlier councils’ conclusion that Christ is just one person. As such, when Flint asserts that CHN is not a person, this should not be understood as in fact denying that CHN is a person in the way we typically understand the term. After all, Flint says that we human individuals just are body-soul composites and that individual human natures are just those things (5). By transference of identity, he is inferring that human natures just are individual persons and that CHN is no less than such an individual. The same thought is reflected when he says:

The counterfactuals of creaturely freedom that God knows via middle knowledge make reference not to human persons, but to individual human natures. In most cases, of course, this amounts to a distinction without a difference: most of us humans just are individual human natures (12).

In the light of these passages, we can safely conclude that in Flint’s mind, Christ’s “nature” or CHN just is a human individual in the way we normally understand the term.22 However, once this explication is given, it is not at all clear how Flint could steer clear of adoptionism.

Moreover, with this picture of two persons with two distinct “souls” or minds, criticisms directed to the two-minds aspect of Morris’ theory apply to Flint’s view just as well. On the one hand, if there is a qualitative difference between the two minds, then the two minds cannot have the same experience – including temptation. Moreover, whatever divine “temptation” may look like (granting that it is even possible), as long as the qualitative difference between the two minds is significant, God would still be that much more distant. On the other hand, if there is no such a qualitative difference, how could they be deemed two different minds? Thus, in any way we look at it, the two-minds view seems to be in trouble.

To elucidate this further, as already mentioned, one important reason that Flint wants individual persons to be conceived as mere natures (and Christ to have one of them as CHN) is because he has a certain view of creaturely freedom. As a Molinist, he maintains that God can perceive all feasible contrary-to-fact choices and free persons (i.e. “natures”) before he decides to actualize them. So, when Flint talks about Christ’s “feasible-partner,” CHN, it might feel more fitting to talk about it as a (feasible) “nature!”

With this sort of framework, Flint says something like this:24 There is no possible world25 in which Christ’s assumed human nature sins while it is assumed by Him. Therefore, necessarily, if CHN is assumed, then CHN does not sin. Accordingly, CHN in itself is able to sin. For instance, there are possible worlds where CHN is not assumed by Christ and it sins. To put it another way, CHN has the counterfactual power to so act so that, had he so acted, CHN would never have been assumed by Christ. Provided that CHN is assumed, however, it follows that God must have arranged His created order in such a way that, though CHN could have sinned in other circumstances, he would not do it “there.” In other words, it is clearly impossible that God ordains a world where both CHN is assumed and he sins at the same time.

This is possible, however, only if God can have the so-called ‘middle knowledge’ of how CHN would freely choose in certain “freedom-retaining” circumstances – including union with Christ. Given this middle knowledge, God could decide to assume CHN by being certain that CHN would never sin in such and such circumstances. Unlike Morris’ proposal, such a Molinist version preserves libertarian freedom for a human person, including that of CHN! Moreover, with God’s middle knowledge, it can maintain at the same time that CHN would never sin. This is for

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24 Ibid., 8-9.
25 Here, Flint assumes some acquaintance with the possible worlds language. For a good treatise on this issue, see Alvin Plantinga, The Nature of Necessity, Clarendon Library of Logic and Philosophy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974).
sure a very attractive picture. It certainly seems to catch two birds with one stone. Such a Molinist proposal, however, is not without some challenges. Let us consider them now.

First, in what sense can we say that an agent in the Molinist picture possesses true (libertarian) freedom? You may recall that the abovementioned Frankfurtian counterexample showed how some alternatives are indispensable for retaining genuine freedom and responsibility. Jack was free and culpable because, though he could not but kill Mary, it was up to him whether he was forced to do so. Hence, it seemed that if he took the better option of being forced, Jack would not have been responsible for the evil conduct. So, the reasoning goes that doing something on one’s own and having alternate possibilities are intricately and inseparably connected. It appears that as libertarians (i.e. as “anti-even-soft-determinists”), one must uphold the PAP [Principle of Alternative Possibilities] at all costs.

However, how would the Molinist proposal fare in terms of this PAP? That is, what if we supposed that Black had access to middle knowledge? What if Black knew that Jack’s counterfactuals of creaturely freedom were such that he would freely murder Mary in certain conditions? All that Black would have to do is to know these special circumstances and place Jack accordingly. This, however, would not only guarantee that Jack would actually kill Mary, but also that he would do this completely on his own with no further interruption! That is, in this scenario, Black would no longer have to remain in a close proximity as the “back-up.” Jack would be in some sense left all by himself to do the only possible act available for him: killing Mary unforced. Now, can Jack be regarded as free and culpable? If so, does this mean that Jack has some alternatives that we are unaware of? Or does this signify that alternatives are not as important to freedom as we first assumed?

I think that the response can go either way, depending on how we approach it. Some might want to argue that Jack is not free in this scenario. They might point to the fact that God’s middle

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knowledge is fixed not only independently of God, but also independently of Jack. They may reason that if Jack was given existence because of these “pre-determinative” conditions, then he could not possibly act contrary to such “existence-forming-conditions.” They would argue that Jack is then stuck to them involuntarily.

Yet others might arrive at the opposite conclusion by arguing that Jack’s choice, as rising from within, is not (exhaustively) determined by conditions external to him, and that this fact should entail his possession of freedom. They may even point out that what is truly sacred to the notion of libertarian or incompatibilist freedom is that his or her act is not (sufficiently) caused by anything external to the self.

Others may yet further elaborate that such agents should be considered to possess the counterfactual power over these so-called “certainties.” Alvin Plantinga maintains, for instance, that the counterfactuals of creaturely freedom are not even accidental necessities. This is because counterfactuals of freedom rely on the concept of agent causation based on the libertarian view of

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27 According to Flint, this is why it is called the ‘middle’ knowledge: Molina reasoned that God has (1) Natural knowledge – having to do with necessities or possibilities, which are therefore independent of God’s will, (2) Free knowledge – derived from God’s creative choice concerning metaphysical contingencies and is therefore dependent upon His will, and (3) Middle knowledge – that involves creaturely freedom that is, although contingent, not up to God. In the case of middle knowledge, then, although God has a choice as to which particular one is actualized, he has no control over their intrinsic qualities and these can be therefore deemed as independently fixed from God. See Thomas Flint, “Two Accounts of Providence,” Divine and Human Action: Essays in Metaphysics of Theism, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 156-58.

28 Morriston thinks that this is the gist of Robert Adam’s explanatory priority objection. See Morriston, “Explanatory,” 29. For information on Adam’s “other” objections, see Thomas P. Flint, Divine Providence: The Molinist Account (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 159-76.

29 I found this suggestion from Morriston. See Morriston, 30-33.

30 Accidentally necessary truths refer to those propositions that were once contingent but are no longer so because they are beyond anybody’s ability to now change them; propositions concerning the past could qualify as such. See Alvin Plantinga, “On Ockham’s Way Out,” in The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader, ed. James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 282.
(spontaneous) freedom. That is, although God may be reckoned as having caused certain states of affairs by “certifying” those feasibilities, given the libertarian definition of freedom, such actualization does not have to entail strong (or sufficient) causation! This is because such spontaneous freedom is by definition never fully determined by external causes. It can be seen as self-generating and if God is said to only actualize its preexisting feasibility, then its spontaneity does not have to be seen as having been squelched by God.

However, how can there be such a thing as spontaneous, self-generating freedom? Can it be anything but mere randomness? To put it another way, can there be a choice apart from a preexisting nature? Perhaps not! However, as much as a choice may be in accordance with some pattern or nature and flows out from it, perhaps a good way to think about it is in terms of having

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31 For instance, the position of the agent causation holds that agents can be first-causes or unmoved movers. Any sense of significant autonomy or self-causation seems to require a similar view. I am inclined to think that freewill is ultimately a primitive notion whose meaning cannot be further analyzed. It seems then that the perplexity stems from inappropriately trying to analyze something that cannot be further analyzed. As a way of example, wondering about freewill, one may question whether it is nature or decision that comes first. It is certainly difficult to conceive a meaningful choice happening just out of the blue, and as compatibilists often mention, that would be similar to endorsing mere randomness as the essence of freedom. The choice therefore should flow out of an individual’s “nature.” However, I think that freewill is such a thing that, while flowing out in accordance with certain nature, is unconfined by it! In other words, if we are to keep using the same causal language, we should perhaps think of freewill as something that has the power to change or influence its own nature, the very nature from which it flows. The outcome of such imagery is that freewill is a rather fluid and unique thing that should not be talked about in terms of rigid, one-way causality. Notice that what I am saying here about such libertarian freedom is different from how the soft-determinists would typically talk about freedom. Although they too affirm that one is free when her choice is made in accordance with her nature and desires, the compatibilists deny that such a nature can be self-made. This is the point where the libertarians seem to find the compatibilist view difficult to swallow; it ultimately seems irreconcilable with responsibility.

32 Notice that, by the term “feasibility,” these states of affairs are not seen to be entirely left to God.

33 For such distinctions in causality, see Alvin Plantinga, The Nature of Necessity, 184.
the power to change or influence itself. As such, it would be a much more fluid and dynamic thing—far from something akin to one-way causality typically associated with the determinist view of freedom (including that of compatibilists). The compatibilists deny that one’s nature needs to be similarly self-made, and it is this point that seems irreconcilable with having responsibility.

Going back to the main issue, a “libertarian” Molinist would therefore maintain that because freedom is such a definite thing (albeit fluid), God could simply put His mind around it. And in the framework of certain temporal theories, this does not amount to too much more than the belief that God can know the future without predetermining it; God might just enjoy greater noetic strength. Therefore, in light of the scriptural data (i.e. of both God’s perfect sovereignty and human responsibility) and the preceding reflection on its prospect, Molinism seems to be a good

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34 Among many objections launched against the Molinist view of divine providence are various kinds of “grounding” objections, some of which were discussed earlier in this paper. Roughly put, these objections concern with how the truth of contrary-to-fact (i.e. counterfactuals) could be grounded or ascertained. However, as William Craig puts, it does not seem all that clear why truths need further truth-makers than just the states of affairs “disquoted” by such propositions. One apt example to consider in this regards is the laws of nature that can “come into” effect. In the middle of the summer in Grand Rapids, the temperature may never cool down below 0 degrees. However, this does not stop us from holding that there is a matter of truth about how this counterfactuals of nature would work. We believe that it will be true that if it were to get that cold, then the water would freeze. Although counterfactuals of creaturely freedom is a bit (or even significantly) different from these counterfactuals of nature, I think that there being a definite way about me in different circumstances do not necessarily conflict with the fact that I am the final determiner of such “definite-fluidity.” For more study on the disquotation principle, see William Lane Craig, “Middle Knowledge, Truth-Makers, and the ‘Grounding objection,’” Faith and Philosophy 18 (2001): 348. The counterfactuals-of-nature examples were taken from Alvin Plantinga’s The Nature of Necessity, 178.

candidate for solving the problem concerning Christ’s temptability in His perfectly impeccability.36

Thus far, we have seen that for freedom to be genuine, it has to be a libertarian type. Furthermore, it has been shown that libertarian freedom has primarily to do with self-determination, the ability to make one’s own choices, making choices that are “up-to-us.” Is the PAP then crucial for this “up-to-us-ness?” It seems that PAP is either crucial or not so crucial depending on how we approach it. Not having alternatives from the “finished” perspective (i.e. one that already includes how Jack would self-determine the act in a feasible world) does not excuse Jack from killing Mary. On the other hand, from the “unfinished” point of view (i.e. one that does not include how he would self-determine), eliminating all the alternatives seems to utterly eliminate freedom!

This is a rather intriguing conclusion. Given its coherence and plausibility, therefore, a version of Molinism should be employed to solve the puzzle concerning Christ’s temptability. This version of divine sovereignty is better than Morris’ compatibilism because it does not rule out all (e.g. counterfactual) alternatives for Christ. For a detailed view of how this tumultuous problem can be worked out, let us turn to the next and final section.

An Alternative Suggestion

First, let us visit another reason for which Thomas Flint devises the “creature,” CHN.37

Does the fact that CHN is able to sin allow us to say that the Son, though impeccable, is able in some qualified [i.e. metaphorical] way to sin? If it does, then clearly our first objection [that the redistribution principle would not work] is answered. If it does not, then we seem to have little choice but to say that many properties traditionally ascribed to the Son – properties such as “being human” or “freely accepting death on a cross” – are strictly speaking properties only of CHN; claims

36 It has been alleged that the view of middle knowledge takes away from God’s sovereign grace. We do not have the space to deal with them here. However, I believe that they can be answered. See Thomas P. Flint, Divine Providence: The Molinist Account (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 109-20.
37 Flint, “A Death Freely Accepted,” 11-12.
ascribing such properties to the Son would have to be viewed as literally false, thought we might well remain tolerant of their use in liturgical and other contexts where a pedantic concern for philosophical precision is out of place. But however we think the traditional Christian should end up answering our question, the Molinist’s endeavor to defend both CHN’s freedom and the Son’s essential moral perfection will remain as a seemingly viable solution to our puzzle.

Flint appears to need CHN because even with the Molinist’s guarantee of impeccability, he does not want to attribute to the second Person any ability to sin (e.g. in any sense of that word, ‘ability’). Now, despite desiring this detrimental division between the “humanity” and the “divinity” of Christ, Flint seems rather optimistic about his project. His optimism, however, depends largely on what he means by ‘our puzzle.’ If, in starting with his ultimately two-persons38 framework, his goal is to make sure that CHN posed no threat to the overall “combo’s” sinlessness in the world, the answer is a clear “Yes!” Perhaps that may be all that Flint wishes.

However, how far would that take him? In other words, as mentioned a number of times already, what would be its soteriological import? In similar light, what kind of “an” overall person would that be? With what sort of ultimate moral constitution? Simple unity? Or some combination of necessary impeccability and conditional impeccability? For example, what kind of a death would such a person experience? Partial personal death, where CHN experiences its sting39 while the Incarnate Son does not?

These issues, I think, should ultimately lead us to embrace a version of kenotic theory. First of all, personal unity seems indispensable for Christ’s perfect union with us as it is spoken of in the Scripture. To recall Barth’s principle, God should be entirely in Christ (especially in His temptations). Morris and Flint’s two-minded view, however, prevents that from ever happening because it always pushes the divine one step removed

38 This may sound too derogatory.
39 Notice that in Christian theology death does not necessarily entail annihilation.
from the human. To account for this problem rising from the
diverged mind/will, the kenotic version thus appears to be the
way to go. It allows Christ to possess one mind and one will and
this in turn allows Christ to fully identify with us in His entire
person.40

However, even from the kenotic perspective, the question
remains as to how human freedom and God’s freedom can coexist
in one person. That is, how can one person be fully divine and
fully human in respect to moral caliber? I believe there is a way to
make sense of this. To proceed, I propose that we give up on
what is typically understood as the Anselmian notion of God’s
necessary goodness!41

The statement ‘God is necessarily good’ means that He is
unable to do something evil. This idea, however, can be
understood in two different ways. To see their differences,
consider the difference between the de dicto and de re senses.
According to this distinction, the statement, ‘God is necessarily
sinless,’ can be differentiated as:

Necessarily, if A is God, then A is sinless. (de dicto)

God (i.e. A) is necessarily sinless. (de re)

‘1’ amounts to saying that no individual can enjoy the divine
status while failing to exemplify sinlessness. ‘2,’ on the other
hand, propounds that the individual, say, Yahweh, cannot choose
to sin and exist. ‘2’ would then entail that there is not even one
possible world in which the individual, Yahweh, can deviate from
His goodness and live.

This latter view is often under attack because it gives the
impression that there is something that God is somehow unable to

40 More thorough discussion on the coherence of kenosis in other aspects of
Christ, see Ronald Feenstra, “Reconsidering Kenotic Christology,” Trinity,
Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays. ed. Ronald
Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame

41 Ironically, I took my inspiration from Thomas Morris’s article,
“Properties, Modalities, and God,” Anselmian Explorations (Notre Dame:
University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 76-97.
do. However, we now know that the essence of libertarian freedom does not require that one can always do the opposite. So, we can concur with John Calvin when he says, “Not from violent impulsion but from his boundless goodness comes God’s inability to do evil.” In this respect, necessary goodness and omnipotence may be compatible. So, let us grant that this de re account is in and of itself adequate to capture the Christian understanding of God. However, there is one problem with this view. The Bible informs us that this God became human.

To account for this revelation, we should thus consider another way of thinking about God’s goodness. What about employing God’s goodness in the de dicto sense? By this reading, the decision to sin is at least a conceptual possibility for Jesus as an individual. Just as importantly, the de dicto reading guarantees that the Incarnate Son never actually falls for evil due to its preserved ‘strong stability for God.’ The idea is that, given God’s essential omnipotence, omniscience, and purely goodness at some time, He never falls from His perfect goodness. That is, provided that God has perfect knowledge, power, and goodness at sometime, He can and would ensure that He never falters.

Now, we can apply this observation to the kenotic situation in the following way: with (a) the de dicto sense of necessary goodness and (b) God’s essential property as omnicompetent-unless-kenotically-incarnate, there is a conceptual possibility where any Person of God could fall as an individual. At the same time, given this individual’s total set of properties as a divine

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45 For example, see Morris, Anselmian Explorations, 92-97.

46 Of course, this allows for the possibility that He has always been less than perfectly good; but this argument is not meant to serve as an apologetic proof that God is really purely good. It only tries to show that given His pure goodness at sometime – as we in fact believe as Christians, it is the case that God would never falter.
being, his perfect and permanent goodness is guaranteed with any temporary goodness. In other words, there could be no possible world where that Individual falls short of perfect goodness while existing as a deity, as we believe that God in fact does.

In the case of Christ, this allows Him to be like us while necessarily impeccable! Before the kenosis, the second Person, even on His own, can ensure that His kenotic self never actually falters while being tempted as a human being with the use of Molinist predetermination! With this determining power, Christ can empty Himself so that He could experience the full weight of temptation as any human person would (e.g. Adam before the fall) while ensuring at the same time that He never falls in this weaker state! That is, to the extent that such a Molinist freedom is weaker than God’s completely unaffected freedom (i.e. unaffected by any determining force), it can be deemed kenotic and human. However, to the extent that there is no possibility for the Incarnate Christ to fall with such a Molinist predestination, this sort of kenotic weakness could legitimately qualify as a divine property.” What a delightful picture of incarnation! It fully preserves His humanity and divinity.

In this paper, we embarked on a journey to find out whether God’s necessary impeccability, if plausibly construed, permits Christ to be fully human and fully divine while being tempted as we are (with the Molinist freedom). As Thomas Morris once remarked, the project was not to demonstrate that the two-nature doctrine is true, but only to show that its full-blown version can be coherent. With the help of libertarian freedom, Molinism, kenosis, and an adjusted notion of God’s necessary impeccability, a viable solution to our puzzle has truly been found.

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47 See Morris, Logic of God Incarnate, 16.
Being Under Authority:
Three Essential Questions of the Christian Life
(Luke 7:1-10)

William H. Jensen

In the summer of 1980 a certain adorable, blond American girl went on vacation to Denmark with her family. Although I know her now as a beautiful and intelligent 26 year-old woman, back then she was just two and a half years old, and like all kids on a family vacation she often found herself bored and tired.

The fatigue became particularly bad when her parents took a tour of the palace in Copenhagen, the capital city. All that walking made her tired. Her feet became very sore. She just wanted to sit down!

Rounding a corner she found herself in a palace hallway: great, more walking…. Looking one direction, she saw a room full of bright lights and smiling people. Looking the other direction she saw two nice looking chairs, both empty. She was sick and tired of all the people and the strange language they spoke. She really needed a break, so she headed for the chairs.

Ducking under the red velvet rope and climbing up into the chair, she plopped herself down into the throne of a 17th century Danish Queen; a throne no one had sat in for 400 years….

She was tired, needed to sit down, and there was a chair. Who really cares who sat in it 400 years ago? Chairs are made for sitting right? And so she sat.

There are some objects in the world which look normal, but which carry very special authority and elicit special treatment. Thrones of kings and queens, the tattered notebooks covered in the Michelangelo’s scrawl, old, broken pottery filled with scrolls found in caves near the Dead Sea. They might look like nothing to the untrained eye. Perhaps they would even be thrown away as dusty trash in a frenzy of spring cleaning. We can experience it all around us. We find a favorite title at a used bookstore for a few dollars. We unload our clutter to happy consumers in a summer time garage sale, or we discover that old, dusty clock is worth six
grand on the Antiques Road Show one afternoon. Or maybe it’s the loss of a friend or family member that shows us how much we have taken them for granted? Perhaps a crisis in our life teaches us what really matters in life?

I think many of us treat God in this way. He’s just another family heirloom we keep around, but in reality we treat him just like everything else— if we even notice him at all. In our daily lives he’s forgotten. Well, forgotten until we have a problem we’d like him to solve. Then we petition and pray, promising him whatever we think he might want. We think that since we are such good church people, kids in Christian schools, member of the board of elders, or regular bible study attendees, that God must listen especially to us. We subject God to our human economy, and treat him as we would another human being. Though a clock worth six grand might tell time just as well as a $10 Casio, and a 400 year old throne can feel just as comfortable for a tired two and a half year old, as we will see in this morning’s lesson, sometimes ordinary looking objects can deserve extraordinary respect.

The Setting

According to the Gospel of Luke, our text begins after Jesus had just finished speaking to the people who assembled from all over Judea. Throughout the region he performed many miracles and word of him had spread throughout the countryside. After picking out his twelve disciples he preached what is called the Sermon on the Plain. Now in our text, Luke turns from the teachings of Christ to examples from his ministry which illustrate the words he had just spoken.

The Narrative

Our text for today picks up when Jesus finishes preaching to all those listening to him. We read in verse 1 that he then entered Capernaum, which had become his new home base after his rejection in Nazareth. He had become well known in the region. People came from far and near to hear him speak and to see him perform miracles. It was not uncommon in those days for messiahs to arise and find a following. Stories of miracle workers
brought people with the same hopes as many who now came to Jesus. So Jesus likely attracted some attention as entered the old, dusty city followed by his disciples and a large, noisy crowd.

Stationed in the city was a garrison of Roman soldiers. They were in charge of keeping the peace, police work, and also regulating trade. One of the many duties they performed was staying on top of any local messiahs who might come along, as many of them sought to incite the people against Rome. Thus the news of Jesus and his great following with the people spread to the ears of the centurion in charge of the soldiers. It was his duty to guard the discipline of the unit as well as the order of the community.

Though it was unlikely that the centurion was a Roman, he certainly was not a Jew. He likely was from one of the countries the Romans conquered. He would have been a strong and disciplined Gentile. We learn from the text that he supported the Jewish people and the elders are eager to help him.

A good relation with the Jews was a mutually beneficial arrangement for both sides. It offered the Jews freedom from any conflicts with the authorities and it allowed for a stable and well ordered community for the Romans.

To the Jews he was still a dirty Gentile, but, as far as Gentiles go, he’s okay.

Upon hearing of the arrival of Jesus in the city, the centurion calls for the Jewish elders. He tells them his dear servant is sick and asks them to go to the healer for him. Like all centurions in the Roman army he is forbidden to marry while in service. Over time he has grown close to the servants in his household, they are like a family to him.

The elders are eager to grant his request. They walk out into the city to meet Jesus and the crowds following him. They tell Jesus of the sick servant and they argue in verse 4 that “the man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue.” They plead earnestly for Jesus to come. Perhaps they feel a debt to the centurion that they cannot repay. He has done great things for them and they need something to offer him in return. He has so nicely scratched their back, now it’s
their turn to scratch his and they hope that Jesus will do it for them.

Using only 5 words in verse 6, Luke tells us that Jesus went with them. Why does he go? I suppose the easy answer is, because he knew what would happen. This may be true, but to the crowds surrounding him, it would seem that the elders’ arguments are persuasive. It looks like he agrees that the centurion deserves a favor. I mean, yeah, he’s a Gentile, but compared to most, he’s alright. But Jesus sees beyond the elder’s worldly perspective. He sees beyond the money given for the temple and the debt the Jews owed the Gentile soldier. He sees beyond good deeds and public opinion. Jesus sees another envoy coming from the centurion.

*The Second Envoy*

As Jesus, the elders, and the crowds approach the centurion’s home, verse 6 tells us a second group approaches — some of the centurion’s friends. There is much speculation as to why a second party needed to be sent. Did the centurion have a change of heart after the elders left? Did he become nervous when he saw Jesus approaching? Or, the answer I prefer, did the first group get the message wrong?

The second message brings the very words of the centurion to the ears of Jesus. He says in verse 6, “Lord, don’t trouble yourself.”

What trouble? Jesus was practically there already! The concern of the centurion was not the trouble Jesus had in walking to his home, but the trouble of visiting a Gentile. Clearly the centurion was familiar with Jewish customs and sensitive to the culture. He knew that having Jesus over would bring him into contact with the uncleanness of a Gentile home as well as potential contact with a dead body. Both of which would require purification. He says, “Lord, don’t trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.”

What a contrast! He sounds nothing like the elders. They were all about who deserved what, and he speaks with such
humility. He knows that Jesus owes him nothing. He does not accept that this-for-that economy of the community leaders. He understands that Jesus represents something that is beyond the limits of the world. He knows that he cannot impose upon Jesus just because of his rank and reputation. Jesus speaks with authority and that is something the centurion is well acquainted with.

He was a soldier, a centurion in command of a garrison. As a centurion, he spoke with the authority of Rome. He submitted to his commanders and because of this, his words carried power. In verse 8 we read that his very words could command the men. He says, “I tell the one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” This is the case because he was a member of a chain of command and at the top of the chain was Caesar. That is where he got his power.

He saw Jesus and he saw a man with authority and power; yet authority and power from a greater source than Caesar. He knew that if Jesus just spoke the word, it would be done. In verse 7 he shows his faith in Jesus’ words when he says, “But say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

I doubt the centurion has a developed idea of the identity of Jesus. He doesn’t likely know Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, God incarnate here on earth. But even without this, he knew the power in Jesus and he believed it could heal.

In Luke 3:4 we read of John the Baptist preaching in the desert. He declares he has come to prepare the way of the Lord. He spoke of the one to come who was more powerful that he. Perhaps this centurion was one of the soldiers who had come to hear John? Perhaps he had heard of his teachings? But now, the Lord had come and all the power and authority of God was in this man, Jesus.

*The Amazed Response (v. 9-10)*

Jesus meets the centurion’s friends just around the corner from the house. They relate these words to him and then we read one of the few emotional responses of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, verse 9, “When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him.” Jesus
was amazed! Let’s stop for a moment and think about that. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Lord, the Word of God come down to earth was amazed. He was there at the creation of the world. In Colossians 1:16-17 we read that: “In him all things were created… all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

The one for whom and through whom the entire universe was made himself stood in the city of Capernaum amazed. The Word of God paused and was amazed after hearing the words of a Roman centurion.

But what amazed him?

I don’t want to suggest that Jesus was surprised by what the centurion said, or that Jesus had never thought that he would hear such words. I don’t think that he was at a loss for words or confused as to what to do next. Rather, Jesus was amazed or very impressed, or he even took a moment to admire the insight that this Gentile soldier had about who he is.

He is so amazed that he turns to the crowd following him, the Jewish elders, his disciples, and likely many who had heard him preach on the plain, and says, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” What harsh words! He hears a message from a Roman soldier, pauses, turns, and pronounces such a condemnation on the Jews. They had followed him and listened to him. They had come to him for healing and teaching. Now he raises a Gentile up above them all as a model of faith!

It’s not as though Jesus had found no following amongst the Jews. They listened to his words and believed him. But the centurion saw something that even his disciples missed. Consider how a bit further in Luke we read of the time Jesus and his disciples were in a boat on the lake. When a storm set in they all panicked yet Jesus slept peacefully. When they frantically woke him, frustrated and scared, he calmed the storm. We read their reaction in 8:25, “In fear and amazement they asked one another, ‘Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.’”

The centurion saw what the disciples missed. He saw the authority of Jesus. He saw that Jesus was sent by God and that he
had the power to heal. Stories of healing were not uncommon back then. But stories of healing at a distance were very rare. The centurion shows us that he understands the authority Jesus has over sickness and death. He knows that even from a distance Jesus can heal by just speaking the words. And he does.

When the messengers return to the home, they find the servant in good health.

Application

What can we learn from this account from the ministry of Jesus? Well, there are three essential questions I want to draw from it this morning: Who are we? Who is Jesus? And who are we in Jesus?

Who are we?

Jesus did not simply have two brief meetings in the city of Capernaum. He did not just encounter two groups from a centurion who changed his mind. Jesus was brought face-to-face with two competing pictures of the human life. Now we must come face-to-face with them as well. Do we measure our lives by the standards of the Jewish elders or the standards of the centurion? Do we look at who and what we are in this world, who we know, and the good that we have done, and then determine that we have the right to make requests of God? Perhaps even that God owes us something for all that we have done for him and his people? We work hard, don’t lie, cheat or steal, attend church, perhaps volunteer our time, tithe our money. Maybe it could even be said of us that “he loves our nation and she has built our church, they deserve to have you ...” and you just fill in the blank with whatever request you have for God.

Or do we measure our lives by the standard the centurion used? Instead of looking at who he was in the world, he looked at who God is and saw himself in comparison to Jesus Christ. He saw his unworthiness and responded with humility. His sense of unworthiness did not prevent him from making a request, but it caused him to make it in an appropriate manner. How do we make requests to God? Do we come to him with a sense of
entitlement? Do we expect God to see the world from our
perspective and respond accordingly? Or do we come to him
humbly and pray, ‘Thy will be done’?

**Who is Jesus?**

To see ourselves appropriately we must see ourselves in
relation to Jesus Christ. But how do we see Christ? The elders
saw him as another teacher and healer. They saw him as another
human being who was subject to the same limits and rules that
applied to all of them. They saw him according to human terms.

To see Christ correctly is to see him as one under authority.
But how is he under authority? Jesus is under authority because
he submits to the will of the Father. This does not mean he is less
than the Father, only that he prays, as in Luke 22:42, “not my will,
but yours be done.” Jesus came to earth to do the will of the
Father and this means that he has authority over all creation. He
has the authority of God. Jesus is also under authority because, as
God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, he has all authority
in heaven and earth to perform the will of God. The centurion
sees this in him and therefore knows that with just a word Jesus
can heal the dying servant.

We confess that we know these things about Jesus Christ. But
do we live them out? Do we believe that Jesus, though not
physically present with us, has the power to rescue us from our
lives of sin and death? In Jesus we have seen God’s salvation and
through him we have been brought into it, but do we believe in
his authority in and for our lives?

**Who are we in Christ?**

When we see Jesus as one under authority, we see his words
as the words of God, we see his power and we put our trust in
him. This means that we too are under authority.

We are under authority because we have submitted ourselves
to the will of God. We recognize the authority of Jesus in all areas
of our lives and that means that we must bring them all under his
control. How often do we question and doubt him? Earnest
questions and the daily struggles of faith are a natural part of the
Christian life. But do we go beyond this honest wrestling and move into outright criticism of God? Do we sometimes believe that we know better than he does?

We are also under authority because we now are God’s representatives to the world. We live under the authority of God. As we leave this place we must submit our lives to the authority of Jesus Christ. This is because it is only through this trusting him and living as his representatives that we can be truly shaped into images of Him.

Conclusion

It is one thing for a very tired and sore two and a half year old to treat a queen’s throne as an ordinary chair. It is quite another for us to treat Jesus Christ as just another person and take his person and power for granted. We cannot bargain with God. We do not obey him and try to do good deeds in the world so that he might do good for us. We do those things because of what he has already done. We are not even worthy to come to him, yet he, in his great love comes to us.
Review Essay:


Glenn A. Evans

In this book, Grant H. Palmer (a fourth-generation Mormon, Brigham Young University graduate—M.A. American History) provides a helpful summary of the enormous amount of research that has been done over the last 25 years concerning the origins of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church — the Mormons). The word “Insider” in the title reflects his thirty-four years of experience as an Institute Director for the Church Educational System (CES). However, throughout the eight chapters Palmer challenges the many traditional claims that inspire members of the LDS Church. He is now retired, and serving as the high priest group instructor in his LDS ward in Sandy, Utah.

In apparent anticipation of faithful Mormons being reluctant to accept his critical evaluation of many long-standing Mormon beliefs, he early-on gives his reason for writing the book, “Lest there be any questions, let me say that my intent is to increase faith, not to diminish it. Still, faith needs to be built on truth — what is, in fact, true and believable. After that comes the great leap” (ix).

Palmer prefaces his book by giving two reasons why he feels compelled to publish a book that describes concerns he pondered mostly in private during his service career in the CES. First, he wants to introduce LDS Church members to issues that are central to the topic of Mormon origins by surveying what has been termed the New Mormon History. Second, he wants LDS Church members to understand that historians and religion teachers like him are actually salvaging the earliest, authentic versions of the LDS Church stories from being rewritten by well-meaning censors who have abridged and polished them for institutional purposes.
Palmer’s candid discussion of the foundations of the LDS Church begins with the Book of Mormon.

In chapter one, Palmer discusses Joseph Smith’s ability to translate ancient documents. He highlights a large body of evidence that strongly implies Joseph Smith never translated any ancient document, and he believes the Book of Mormon represents a “nineteenth-century encounter with God” rather than an ancient epic.

After focusing on the authorship of the Book of Mormon in chapter two, Palmer concludes with his thoughts of how Joseph Smith produced the Book of Mormon. He outlines a timeline for the making of the Book of Mormon that is much longer than what most Mormons generally acknowledge.

The following is a plausible scenario for how the Book of Mormon came to be. After Joseph’s marriage to Emma Hale in January 1827, he promised his father-in-law that he would give up treasure hunting. Influenced by the revival fervor and by his mother’s piety, his mind began to fill with impressions that blended his familiarity with Indian lore and his conviction of biblical promises. Perhaps the outline of a book began to form sometime before Martin Harris became his scribe in April 1828. He had already experimented with seer stones, and perhaps he thought that through greater faith and concentration, God would open to his mind a vision of the secrets of the artifacts being discovered in upstate New York. The dictation proceeded, and after Martin lost the first 116 pages of transcription in mid-1828, this may have been fortuitous. An apprenticeship had been served, and the vision that was unfolding in Joseph’s mind may have become clearer. The dictation probably progressed haltingly at first, perhaps as a kind of stream-of-consciousness narrative. Before Oliver Cowdery became his new scribe in April 1829, the prophet had had nine months to ponder the details of the plots and subplots and to flesh out the timeline. Given his familiarity with the Bible and with American antiquities, it would have become progressively easier for him to put form to the vision. He dictated the final manuscript in about ninety days. Over the next eight months, before the book was published in March 1830, he had the opportunity to make textual refinements. “He thus had
three years to develop, write, and refine the book — six years from the
time he told his family about the project” (66-67, emphasis mine).

Although his scenario is coherent and will likely be embraced
by some of his intended Mormon readers, it lacks the biblical
support orthodox Christians would require in order to take the
“great leap” needed to believe the Book of Mormon represents
even a “nineteenth-century encounter with God.” Joseph Smith’s
folk magic (occult) background and teachings are irreconcilable
with the teachings of Jesus and his disciples and give Christians
warrant for rejecting the Book of Mormon as being sourced in the
God of the Bible.

Palmer continues focusing on the authorship of the Book of
Mormon in chapter three by challenging the claim that it is an
authentic ancient history. He gives five examples that exemplify
the Bible’s influence on the Book of Mormon as observed by
Krister Stendahl, (at the time dean of the Harvard Divinity
School):

The biblical material behind the Book of Mormon strikes me as being in the
form of the KJV [King James Version Bible].... I have applied standard
methods of historical critics, redaction criticism, and genre criticism. From
such perspectives it seems very clear that the Book of Mormon belongs to
and shows many of the typical sign of the Targums [interpretations or
paraphrasings] and the pseudepigraphic recasting of biblical material. The
targumic tendencies are those of clarifying and actualizing translation,
usually by expansion and more specific application to the need and situation
of the community. The pseudepigraphic, both apocalyptic and didactic, tend
to fill out the gaps in our knowledge about sacred events, truths, and
predictions ... It is obvious to me that the Book of Mormon stands within
both of these tradition if considered as a phenomenon of religious texts.1

Most of chapter four concerns the subjective nature of specific
Protestant denominations (Palmer mistakenly refers to them as
evangelicals. Unlike today, Protestant denominations during the
1820’s were not called “evangelicals”) in western New York
during the 1820s and its influence upon Joseph Smith’s writing of

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1 Krister Stendahl, “The Sermon on the Mount and Third Nephi,” in
Reflections on Mormonism, Judaeo-Christian Parallels, ed. Truman G. Madsen
(Provo: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1978), 149, 152;
Cited by An Insider’s View of Mormon Origins, 69.
the Book of Mormon. Contrary to the accepted Mormon position, Palmer personally doubts the reliability of interpreting religious feeling as an affirmation of spiritual truth, and basing subsequent religious commitments on these feelings.

Palmer writes, “Despite the [LDS] church’s claim to exclusive receipt of the Holy Ghost as a gift, a 1985 Gallop Poll reveals that over 40 percent of adults in America claim the same variety of spiritual feelings and experiences enjoyed by the Latter-day Saints” (132-33). In the next paragraph he writes, “The evangelical position of identifying and verifying truth by emotional feelings, which the Book of Mormon advocates, is therefore not always dependable” (133). Palmer implies the subjective experience of these Protestant denominations during the 1820s is also normative for contemporary evangelicalism. Using broad-brush strokes, Palmer depicts contemporary evangelicalism as embracing such a subjective fancy, thereby, being a religious faith which determines truth apart from any reason, Scripture, tradition, etc. (i.e., fideism). Actually, however, the position held by the vast majority of evangelicals employs various objective epistemological methods in identifying and verifying biblical truth, which is quite contrary to what Palmer asserts. It is the Mormon position, particularly the epistemological method advocated for determining the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, which is overtly subjective to emotional feeling. The challenge of Moroni 10:4-5 evidences this subjective illusion foundational to Mormonism.

As an evangelical Christian, I would like to offer at least one biblical interpretation concerning how to discern the work of the Holy Spirit. As a possible help in understanding how the Holy Spirit works, Palmer quotes Moroni 7:13, “Wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.” He interprets this verse to mean “the Holy Spirit will witness to that which brings a person to Christ (John 14:6).” He asserts that when a person “experiences the Spirit” it is actually a “God-felt urging to repent and come unto Christ,” yet it does not prove the “truthfulness of the doctrines heard, taught, or read” (133). Palmer does not offer any suggestion on how one who feels they have “experiences the Spirit” is to discern if the “Spirit” is truly the Holy Spirit. First
John 4:1 warns, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” The apostle John tells us how to both know “the Spirit of God” (1 John 4:2) and how to discern between “the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6).

First, many false teachers have denied that Jesus Christ was fully human. During the late first century the apostle John refuted these false teachers by writing, “Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God” (v. 2). It is important to know what this verse does not say. It does not say, “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.” Therefore, the converse of v. 2 is not necessarily true, that is, a spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not necessarily the Spirit of God, however, the Spirit of God always confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh.

Second, the “Spirit of God” is most certainly the “Spirit of truth.” Those who know God by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ recognize the “Spirit of truth” by knowing it always confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh and by listening to those from God who speak in the Bible (v. 6). “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 2:15). Ever since Eve doubted the Word of God in Genesis 3:1-4 the spirit of error has led others to doubt and not listen. People who are not of God refuse to listen to the biblical teaching by those who are of God and these people are of the spirit of error (v. 6).

Christianity is unique because vast amounts of historically verifiable, objective evidence corroborate the “truthfulness of the doctrines heard, taught, or read” by those who know God by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.

Chapters 5 and 6 consist primarily of popular beliefs about the supernatural held by people who were contemporary to Joseph Smith and informed his experiences and interpretation of the world and how these beliefs became part of the early narratives about his life.

The focus of chapter 5 compares the life experiences of Joseph Smith with a short story entitled “The Golden Pot” by E. T. A.
Hoffmann. Palmer draws some interesting parallels that draw from that story’s use of gold, money, and especially esoteric knowledge. He briefly summarizes the story:

It is divided into twelve chronological episodes which Hoffmann calls vigils. The main character, Anselmus, is a young theology student who hopes his professor, Conrector Paulmann, has some work for him. Anselmus’s life is humdrum and evokes neither sorrow nor joy. He feels that he possesses little influence in the world.

Anselmus begins to have daydreams in which Professor Paulmann becomes a mystical, ancient archivist named Archivarius Lindhorst from the lost civilization of Atlantis. The professor’s house and library are transformed into the repository of valuable old records, manuscripts, and treasures from this ancient civilization. When the transformed archivist gives Anselmus work, it is to copy and translate the records of Lindhorst’s ancestors. However, Anselmus, must first meet certain qualifications to prove his worthiness. After passing these tests, Anselmus receives the Atlantean records on the fall equinox (22 September) and begins to translate them. Throughout the story, the student indulges in daydreams until he can no longer distinguish between his imaginary world and real life. By the story’s end, he has permanently withdrawn to the imaginary world (137-38).

Chapter 6 examines both published and unpublished statements and experiences of the witnesses to the golden plates that reveal a stark contrast between today’s rationalist perspective and their nineteenth-century magical mindset. The witnesses shared the common belief in the “second sight” which included the ability to see spirits and their dwelling places within local hills and elsewhere. Palmer’s work helps readers understand these men more fully and weigh the value of their testimony.

Chapter 7 examines how several of the earliest historically verifiable accounts of the LDS priesthood restoration differ from the story told today. The earliest reference to the priesthood appeared in the 1833 Book of Commandments (the earliest version of and precursor to, the Doctrine and Covenants).2

The 8th and final chapter consists of Joseph Smith’s four First Vision accounts recorded during 1832, 1835, 1838 and 1842. The foundational importance of the First Vision for the LDS Church cannot be over emphasized. Current LDS President Gordon B.

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Hinckley declares, “Our whole strength rests on the validity of that vision. It either occurred or it did not. If it did not, then this work is a fraud.”

This book makes an important contribution to the study of the Mormon origins. I think many readers will be grateful to Palmer, for he has collected in one book much factual material that previously would have required one to research numerous sources. If you desire a candid examination of the foundations of the LDS Church, then this book should be on your required reading list.

Palmer concludes his book with this thought:

As Latter-day Saints, our religious faith should be based and evaluated by how our spiritual and moral lives are centered in Jesus Christ, rather than in Joseph Smith’s largely rewritten, materialistic, idealized, and controversial accounts of the church’s founding. I hope that this study contributes in some way toward that end.

However, this conclusion is puzzling. For Palmer has largely undermined the key historical claims of Joseph Smith that are the basis of the idea that the LDS Church and its message are “restored” Christianity. In that case, why should the church Joseph Smith founded be the source for establishing a relationship with Jesus Christ?

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3 Salt Lake Tribune (7 Oct 2002).
Editorial

Under a renewed mandate from the Student Body, communicated through the bylaws of the Constitution of the Student Senate, this volume of Stromata is offered for the edification of the community of Calvin Theological Seminary. May it be found adequate to this task.

Stromata has a long and checkered history of publication, in a variety of formats and dispensations. There has been very little in the way of continuity. The evolution of Stromata into its current manifestation must be understood in relation to the development of its younger sister publication, Kerux. Where Kerux meets the ongoing and everyday needs of the community, Stromata is intended to serve as a forum for the high standard of academic scholarship among the students of CTS. Only in tandem are the pluriform needs of the seminary community able to be met.

Thanks are due first to those who submitted pieces for consideration, regardless of the outcome of the decision regarding publication. This journal is to serve as “a vehicle for scholarly expression,” and without the active participation and interest of the Student Body, there would simply be nothing to produce.

In addition, special recognition is merited by Review Editor Jeffrey A. Snapper, whose efforts have truly been a blessing and a much-needed help. Leslie Yarhouse graciously donated her time and talents in providing us with the excellent cover.

With the advent and passing of my first and only term of editorship of Stromata, I have taken this as an opportunity to give a special gift back to the community that has provided me with so much over the last four years. I hope that the result of our combined efforts inspire the continuation and future fruitfulness of Stromata.

—Jordan J. Ballor
Grand Rapids, Mich.
May, 2004