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"Faith Alone In Christ Alone"

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Editor
Robert N. Wilkin
Production
Michael Makidon
Cathy Beach

Manuscripts, periodical and book reviews, and other communications should be addressed to Michael Makidon, GES, P.O. Box 155018, Irving TX 75015-5018.

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A FREE GRACE PERSPECTIVE ON BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

BOB WILKIN
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, Texas

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently there have been a number of journal articles written evaluating modern Bible translations in light of theological concerns, their handling of the Old and New Testaments, and in terms of their use of English style.[1]

Since I have often been asked what translation or translations I recommend and why, I thought writing an article might prove to be of interest. In this article I evaluate five major translations in terms of how they handle passages of special interest to the Grace message.

Bible translations are so massive as to make evaluating the entire translation impossible. A reasonable approach is to select a manageable number of verses that deal with our theological concern, the Free Grace perspective, and compare how each translates the verses. Before we do that, I will make some general comments about the translations which I evaluate, the NIV, NASB, NET (*The NET Bible*), KJV, and NKJV.

II. GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE FIVE TRANSLATIONS REVIEWED

Of the five, the NIV and NET are the freest in terms of their translation style. They are not really paraphrases of the text as are *The Living*

[1] See, for example, Michael A. Lyons and William A. Tooman, "Three Recent Bible Translations: An Old Testament Perspective," *JETS* (September 2003): 497-520; Peter H. Davids, "Three Recent Bible Translations: A New Testament Perspective," *JETS* (September 2003): 521-32; Daniel E. Ritchie, "Three Recent Bible Translations: A Literary and Stylistic Perspective," *JETS* (September 2003): 533-45.

Bible and *The Message*. However, at times they do a fair amount of paraphrasing. They both use a thought for thought translation style, which is called *dynamic equivalence*.

In their book, *The NIV Reconsidered*, Hodges and Radmacher suggest that dynamic equivalence is sometimes necessary and that it isn't objectionable in itself.[2] "When all is said and done," they write, "it is the issue of accuracy that matters above everything else."[3] The authors then proceed to give many examples of where the NIV is inaccurate.

In the back of the NET the translators state the principles they used in translation. There they say that this translation is somewhere between formal equivalence ("word for word") and dynamic equivalence. The NET translators indicate some of the techniques they used including, breaking up "long, complicated sentences in the original languages…into shorter sentences more acceptable in contemporary English;" "Nouns have been used for pronouns where the English pronoun would be obscure or ambiguous to a modern reader;" "In places where passive constructions create ambiguity, obscurity, or awkwardness in contemporary English, either the agent has been specified from context or the construction has been changed to active voice in the English translation, with an explanatory note."[4] Additionally, the NET replaces gender exclusive language (men, mankind,[5] brethren, etc.) with gender inclusive language (mortals, as in Ps 9:20, human race, as in Job 12:10, brothers and sisters, as in Gal 1:11, etc.) whenever the Greek or Hebrew generically uses the masculine gender.

While the text itself reads somewhat like the NIV, the NET's 57,875 footnotes clearly set it apart from any other translation.

Peter Davids comments that the many footnotes make the NET "a Bible with a limited audience. It will take a serious Bible reader to want to wade through the information presented, whether presented in the text

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[2] Earl Radmacher and Zane C. Hodges, *The NIV Reconsidered: A Fresh Look at a Popular Translation* (Dallas, TX: Redención Viva, 1990), 26-28. See also pp. 29-30.

[3] Ibid., 28.

[4] NET, 2347-48.

[5] It should be noted, however, that the NET does use the word *mankind* frequently. It is used in places where other translations read *men*. Thus it is hard to see why in places like Job 12:10 where most translations have *mankind* the NET puts *human race*. Perhaps this is because this translation has not been done by committee and some translators found even *mankind* to be too gender inclusive.

itself in the various typefaces and frequent footnote numbers or in the footnotes."[6]

However, Davids suggests that the well trained reader will find fault with many of the notes and will not be attracted to this version: "The person [attracted to the NET] will be a reader who is not put off by Greek characters or references to the manuscript tradition, yet finds the level of explanation in the footnotes useful. The level of explanation will not be enough to interest scholars and many of the more-educated pastors, but it could satisfy many less-educated pastors and relatively sophisticated lay people."[7]

Davids concludes, "Thus the NET is a translation for a niche market, that group of readers with a serous interest in Bible study and some exposure to Greek (in the NT), but which does not have the education to use the Greek text itself."[8]

The NASB is the most *wooden* by far, in that it advances as much as possible a word-for-word translation even when it makes for awkward English. This is called *formal equivalence*.

Many people really like this, for the reader knows that he is getting a word-for-word translation. However, others feel the translator should seek to make the English as smooth as—or smoother than (see the comments earlier by the NET translators regarding ambiguity in the original language)—the Hebrew or Greek which it translates, which means at times supplying words, changing word order, changing passive voice into active, and the like.

The KJV and the NKJV are the most *flowing*. Some find them easier to memorize and feel they have a certain cadence to them not found in the others.

Concerning the NT and its underlying Greek text, three of these translations (NIV, NASB, and NET) follow what it is called *the Critical Text*. The other two follow *the Majority Text*. A brief word is in order about these for those readers who are unfamiliar with these terms.

There are a little over 5000 manuscripts of the NT. For any given book, there are between 100 and 1000 manuscripts. *The Critical Text* is a collation of Greek manuscripts that assumes the correct reading, the original reading, is typically the one which is found in the majority of 3

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[6] Davids, "Three Recent Bible Translations," 532.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.

early manuscripts (Aleph, A, and B) which it regards as relatively pure and untainted by scribes. If 2 of these 3 agree, the NASB, NIV, and NET usually call that the correct reading.[9]

The Majority Text essentially suggests that the correct reading is the one which is found in the majority *of all existing manuscripts*, not simply the majority of 3 manuscripts. It does not assume that if two or even all three of these early manuscripts agree that that is necessarily the correct reading.

For example, the NIV, NASB, and NET believe that Mark 16:9-20 is not really part of the Bible since it is not found in two of their most favored manuscripts (Aleph and B). However, since over 900 manuscripts contain these verses, the KJV and the NKJV both believe these verses are original. Interestingly, even though the NIV, NASB, and NET do not normally print words or sentences they feel are not original, here (and in John 7:53–8:11) they print the entire section. The only way you would know they think this isn't part of the Bible is if you notice the brackets before and after the passage and then read their footnote.

Personally I believe in *the Majority Text* position. Thus I believe that John 6:47 includes "in Me" ("he who believes *in Me* has everlasting life") and 1 John 4:19 includes "Him" ("we love *Him* because He first loved us"). Many such examples could be given. While the differences are relatively minor, they are differences nonetheless. So in deciding which version to use, realize you will be looking not only at different translation choices, but the inclusion or exclusion of certain words based on the underlying Greek (or Hebrew) text they use.

Finally, I feel I should briefly comment on the difference between the KJV and the NKJV. Some feel that the KJV of today is the 1611 King James Version. It is not. There were five major revisions, or NKJVs, between 1611 and 1769. Each edition changed the wording of the KJV. The first five revisions were called the Cambridge Revision of 1629, the Cambridge Revision of 1638, the Planned Revision of 1653-

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[9] For example, the NET has the following comment in a note on the text of Rom 8:1, "The earliest and best witnesses of the Alexandrian and Western texts have no additional words for v 1 (Aleph* B D* F G 1506 1739 1881 et pauci [and a few others]," p. 2127, fn. 9. Aleph and B are from the Alexandrian area and are called by the NET translators "[two of the] earliest and best witnesses."

1657, the Cambridge Revision of 1762, and the Oxford Revision of 1769.[10]

What we now call the New King James Version is really the 6th revision of the KJV. My good friend, the late Dr. Art Farstad, was the general editor of the revision and he personally explained to me how they took great pains to merely update the language common in 1769 to that of the latter part of the twentieth century.

With this as a brief background, let's compare how each translation handles the selected key passages.

III. Five Bible Translations in Focus

A. Can Faith Save Him? James 2:14

Note how our five translations handle this verse, and pay special attention to the different ways they translate the last part of this verse, the question dealing with the connection between faith and salvation/deliverance.

> **KJV** "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can *faith* save him?"
>
> **NKJV** "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can *faith* save him?"
>
> **NASB** "What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but has no works? Can *that faith* save him?"
>
> **NIV** "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can *such faith* save him?"
>
> **NET** "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Can *this kind of faith* save him?"

The NIV, NASB, and NET qualify faith the second time it appears in the verse: "*such* faith," "*that* faith," or "*this kind of* faith," respectively. The KJV and NKJV do not supply the qualifiers.

The Greek merely refers to "the faith" (*hē pistis*). The definite article is also used with *pistis* in the nominative case in vv 16, 17, 20, and 22. Yet in none of these other places do the NIV, NASB, or NET translate the expression as *that faith*, *such faith*, or *this kind of faith*. The translators are making an interpretive decision for the readers here. The

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[10] Arthur L. Farstad, *The New King James Version: In the Great Tradition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 24-26.

KJV and NKJV more accurately represent the Greek, with no pejorative description of the faith in question.

In addition, the NIV and NET also seem to be interpreting for the reader when they translate *ean legē tis* (literally "if someone says") as "if a man *claims*" or "if someone claims." Yet this destroys the verbal tie here with v 12. There the same verb, *legō*, is used and clearly it refers to speaking, not claiming, there. Note even the NIV and NET translations of v 12: "*Speak* and act as those who are going to [or will] be judged by the [or a] law that gives freedom."

The issue in James 1:21–2:26 is that we are to be doers and not speakers. We find the same thing in 1 John 3:16-18. The issue in v 12 is saying versus doing, not claiming versus doing. Claiming has a pejorative tone. Why wasn't v 12 translated that way then: "Claim and act as those who are going to be judged…"? The reason is obvious. That isn't the point in v 12. The NASB is on target as are the KJV and NKJV on this point.

The Free Grace person using the NIV or NET is doubly handicapped on this verse. The NASB user is also handicapped, but not quite as much. The KJV and NKJV are friendly to the Free Grace position in this verse.

This passage serves to illustrate how translators sometimes find it difficult to set aside their theological convictions when translating. If the goal were simply to convey what the original language says as clearly as possible in English, then they would not resort to this sort of interpretive rendering of the text.

B. Anyone Named Brother: 1 Corinthians 5:11

The key question here is how the various translations handle the Greek words *tis adelphos onomazomenos*. I have italicized the portion of the translations below that handle those words.

> **KJV** "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, *if any man that is called a brother* be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater…"
>
> **NKJV** "But now I have written to you not to keep company *with anyone named a brother*, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater…"
>
> **NASB** "But actually, I wrote to you not to associate *with any so-called brother* if he should be an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater…"

NIV "But now I am writing to you that you must not associate *with anyone who calls himself a brother* but is sexually immoral or greedy, or an idolater…"

NET "But now I am writing to you not to associate *with anyone who calls himself a Christian* who is sexually immoral, or greedy, or an idolater…"

In this passage Paul is telling the believers in the church of Corinth that they are to judge those who are inside, not those outside, the church (vv 10, 12). If one takes the view that those inside the church are believers, then Paul is telling the believers in Corinth to separate from immoral or covetous or idolatrous *believers in the church.* If, however, one believes that those inside the church include both believers and unbelievers [or false professors], then Paul is telling the believers in Corinth to separate from immoral or covetous or idolatrous *unbelievers in the church.*

If the job of the translator is to translate and not interpret, the translator should seek to make his translation of this passage as vague as the original. In this case the first two translations, the KJV and NKJV, fill the bill. A Greek participle, *onomazomenos*, has a literal meaning of "anyone bearing the name." The NKJV gets it just right and the KJV is close. The other three, the NASB, NIV, and NET, all interpret this phrase for the reader rather than translate it.

There is nothing in the Greek that suggests the phrase "so-called brother." Indeed, the context strongly suggests that this is a genuine believer (compare vv 10 and 12). There is also nothing in the text about what the person *calls himself.* The Greek verb *to call* is not found in this verse. Nor is the word *himself.*

The last three translations reflect an interpretive bias which springs from Reformed theology. If there is no such thing as a believer who is immoral or covetous or an idolater, then Paul isn't warning about believers here. But note well that even if I was convinced this passage was warning about false professors, I still would translate it "anyone who bears the name brother" or "anyone named brother."

C. Let Him Be Accursed: Galatians 1:8d (and 1:9d)

KJV "…let him be accursed."
NKJV "…let him be accursed."
NASB "…let him be accursed."
NIV "…let him be eternally condemned!"
NET "…let him be condemned to hell!"

Three translations have "let him be accursed." This is a literal rendering of the Greek (*anathema estō*). It is ambiguous and could refer to a curse in this life, or in the life to come, or both.

The last two translations, the NIV and NET, are not really translations at all. They are interpretations. The word *condemned* is not found here. Nor are the words *eternally* or *hell*.

The translators have allowed their theology to color their translation. Evidently they believe that there is no such thing as a regenerate person who at some later point actually promotes a false gospel. I would say that there is a lot of evidence in Paul's writings and even in Galatians (see 2:14!) that some genuine believers fall doctrinally and actually preach false theology and even a false gospel.

Additionally, practically speaking, how would a believer in one of the cities in Galatia let someone be eternally condemned or let them be condemned to hell? Would this mean that they weren't to witness to them? Or would it mean the opposite—that they were to treat them as someone who is hell bound and thus witness to them?

If we leave the translation as vague as the original, then the practical application is simple: treat these people as those who are cursed. Do not support their ministry financially, prayerfully, or with your time and talents. People who are proclaiming a false gospel, which in Galatians is any gospel other than justification by faith alone (Gal 2:15-16), whether they are Christians who have fallen or unbelievers who never knew the truth, are ones we are not to aid in any way.

D. There Is Therefore Now No Condemnation: Romans 8:1

This example deals not so much with differences in how the verse was translated, but in which words were translated. Two of these versions contain an additional phrase at the end of the verse that potentially totally changes the way it is to be understood.

> **KJV** "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, <u>*who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*</u>."
>
> **NKJV** "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, <u>*who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit*</u>."
>
> **NASB** "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."
>
> **NIV** "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

> **NET** "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

The reason the KJV and NKJV have a longer reading is because the majority of manuscripts of this verse contain the longer reading.

The NET has a footnote here that is instructive as to why it excluded the longer reading:

> The earliest and best witnesses of the Alexandrian and Western texts have no additional words for v 1…Later scribes… added the words…"who do not walk according to the flesh," while even later ones…added…"but [who do walk] according to the Spirit." Both the external and internal evidence are completely compelling for the shortest reading. The scribes were obviously motivated to add such qualifications (interpolated from v 4), for otherwise Paul's gospel was characterized by too much grace. The KJV follows the longest reading found in Byz.[11]

I've always found these types of arguments to be extremely subjective. Might it be that those who adopt the *shorter* reading have misread the text? After all, if the same idea is found in v 4, why is it so antithetical to the context to have it in v 1 as well?

The key word in this verse is the one translated *condemnation* in all five translations. It is the Greek word *katakrima*. According to Moulton and Milligan it means "penal servitude,"[12] that is, slavery to sin. Might not Paul's point in v 1 be that those who walk according to the Spirit do not experience slavery to sin? After all, this verse is part of Paul's *sanctification section* in Romans. The verses which follow clearly deal with sanctification and not justification. Paul spent much of chapter 6 showing that believers are no longer slaves to sin and challenging them to no longer live in their experience as slaves to sin. In chapter 7 he shows that a legalistic mindset will not free the believer from sin's bondage, but will increase it.

The very last verse in Romans 7, the one immediately preceding this one, alludes to slavery to sin! It says, "I thank God—through Jesus Christ

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[11] NET, 2127, fn. 9.

[12] James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1930, Reprint 1974), 327-28.

our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself *serve* the law of God, *but with the flesh [I serve] the law of sin*" (emphasis added). Does it not make sense that the next verse would build on this idea of serving God or serving sin based on whether we live according to the Spirit or the flesh?

Then in chapter 8 Paul shows how it is the Spirit of God that enables us to live in our experience as we are in our position: as those free from slavery to sin.

Regardless of how you understand Rom 8:1, it is vital that you are looking at what Paul actually wrote. Readers of English translations should realize that the issue is not merely how the translators handled the Hebrew and Greek text, but also *which text* they translated.

E. ABRAHAM'S JUSTIFICATION: GENESIS 15:6

We will now look at one famous OT passage dealing with grace issues to see how these translations handle it.

> **KJV** "And he believed in the LORD; and he *counted it to him for righteousness*."
>
> **NKJV** "And he believed in the LORD, and He *accounted it to him for righteousness*."
>
> **NASB** "Then he believed in the LORD; and He *reckoned it to him as righteousness*."
>
> **NIV** "Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness."
>
> **NET** "Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD considered his response of faith worthy of a reward."

Here we find four translations in near agreement. The KJV has "counted…for righteousness." The NIV has "credited…as righteousness." The NKJV has "accounted…for righteousness." The NASB has "reckoned…as righteousness."

But why is the NET translation so radically different? The word *righteousness,* found in all four of the other translations, is missing here. Instead we have the word *reward*. Where the others speak of belief as being *counted* or *accounted* or *credited*, the NET has *considered worthy*.

Since this text is quoted twice in the NT by Paul, each time with the Greek representing the idea of being accounted righteous, it seems especially odd to put forth a translation that essentially makes Paul's use of this text illegitimate (see Rom 4:3 and Gal 3:6).

The NET does have four separate notes explaining how it arrived at this translation. The first explains that "believed" refers to "'consider[ing] something reliable or dependable.' Abram regarded the God who made this promise as reliable and fully capable of making it a reality."[13] This is outstanding.

The second note explains why they changed the third singular pronoun *he* to the LORD. There is certainly no problem with this, though it is really an unnecessary change.[14]

The third note says, "*Heb* 'and he reckoned it to him'…In this case one might translate 'and he reckoned it to him—[namely] righteousness.'"[15] That is fine. Why then doesn't the text put it that way?

The fourth note starts, "Or 'as righteousness.'" Then an extremely odd reference is made:

> The verb translated "considered" (*Heb* "reckoned") also appears with *ṣᵉḏāqāh* ("righteousness") in Ps 106:31. Alluding to the events recorded in Numbers 25, the psalmist notes that Phinehas's actions were "credited to him as righteousness for endless generations to come." Reference is made to the unconditional, eternal covenant with which God rewarded Phinehas's loyalty (Num 25:12-13). So *ṣᵉḏāqāh* seems to carry by metonymy the meaning "loyal, rewardable behavior" here, a nuance that fits nicely in Genesis 15, where God responds to Abram's faith by formally ratifying his promise to give Abram and his descendants the land.[16]

For a translator to jump from a famous text in Genesis that is often cited in the NT to an obscure text in Psalms that is never cited in the NT is an odd thing to do.

Frankly, I am delighted to find someone in print who takes my view of Ps 106:31. I was convinced it was referring to rewards, but up to this point I really didn't have a good way of explaining it. Now I do. So in this sense this note in the NET is helpful. But it would have been better if this note and translation had occurred in Ps 106:31 only.

While there are some common words in the two contexts, the differences far outweigh any similarities. Besides, Paul translates and explains

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[13] NET, 57, fn. 19.
[14] Ibid., fn. 20.
[15] Ibid., fn. 21.
[16] Ibid., fn. 22.

Gen 15:6 for us and his translation and explanation don't match up with "Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord considered his response of faith worthy of reward."

The translation suggested in the four notes in the NET is fine. But the one actually printed in the text changes *the* key OT text on justification into a text on rewards.

IV. CONCLUSION

We are blessed to have scores of different Bible translations in our language. I have merely picked five of the most popular ones to evaluate today.

While there are differences between these translations, and while I have a preference for the NKJV, I am convinced that a Christian can grow and mature using any of these texts.

Having said that, it is vital for believers to know that you can't rely on every nuance of every word in every translation. Sometimes translators interpret for the reader as we have seen in the cited examples. The NKJV is not perfect. I would prefer a translation that better reflects the Majority Text. But the NKJV does the best job of that. And it does less interpreting and paraphrasing too.

Whatever version you use, I hope you use it! That is the key. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4).

POSTMODERNISM: THE DEATH OF GOD AND THE RISE OF THE COMMUNITY

MICHAEL D. MAKIDON
Director of Publications
Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, Texas

I. INTRODUCTION

It was the summer of Ninety-Nine. Sitting on the back porch of a good friend's house, I listened as she poured out her heart to me. She had been dating a guy for several years, but was distraught over the fact that he was an atheist. She was a non-believer whom I had witnessed to several times—a Roman Catholic, nominal at best.

Her words still remain clear in my mind, "I don't care what he believes. I just want him to believe in something—in God. I don't care what religion he is—Buddhist, Muslim, Christian—I don't care. I just don't want my kids to grow up not believing in something." I thought to myself, "Well, this one is pretty simple." So, I explained to her, "Actually, he is a believer. He *believes* that there isn't a God. Just as Buddhists don't believe that Jesus is '*the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life, the *only* way to the Father,' neither do atheists. So, if Christ's claim is correct that He is the *only* way, there is no difference between an atheist and a Buddhist. Both are wrong." And so I sat back and waited for the *truth* I had just imparted to her to be processed, realized, and believed.

And sure enough, for the first time, she knew exactly what I had said. There was no doubt in her mind. With a horrified look, she turned and asked, "Are you saying that your religion is the best religion? I think that's arrogant. I guess that's fine for you, but not me."

That day two paradigms collided—Christianity and postmodernism. So, what happened? And how in the world did we get here?

II. THE LINE OF DESPAIR

Francis Schaeffer in his book *The God Who Is There* proposed what is called the "line of despair." He suggests that cultural paradigms shift

in an orderly manner. They begin with philosophy, continue with art and music, saturate the culture, and then gradually seep into theology.[1] It is a repetitious cycle. A philosopher comes up with a new spin on reality, an artist then puts his interpretation down on canvas, the culture soaks it up like a dry sponge in water, and then culture infects the church. This cycle repeats itself over and over again.

I wish that we were on the verge of a cultural shift—that we were at a crossroads and if we turned the wheel hard enough we could circumvent what lies before us as a Church. However, this shift is upon us. It has been going on for centuries—since the beginning of the second millennium. This repetitive cycle where one period's philosophy becomes the next period's theology, was not born out of the modern period, but more rightly the medieval period.

Let us look at this *line of despair*, which begins with philosophy and ends with theology.

III. The Death of God in Philosophy

A. René Descartes

From the late 15th century to the mid-16th century, the belief system of the medieval world collapsed. Instead of sailing off the edge of the world, Christopher Columbus (1451–1506) expanded the known geography of the medieval period, Copernicus (1472–1543) decentered the earth from the middle of the solar system, and Martin Luther (1483–1546) tore the pope from the center of the world and exposed the church's history of deception. In other words, Columbus, Copernicus, and Luther literally pulled the rug out from under the medieval world. Everything that had been accepted by faith for over a millennium[2] was now under serious scrutiny.

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[1] Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There: Speaking Historic Christianity into the Twentieth Century,* 30th Anniversary Ed. (Chicago: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 28.

[2] While Anselm (1033–1109) is best known as the archbishop of Canterbury, his greatest impact was on the formation of scholasticism—an era when the development of theology transferred from the monasteries to the universities. Anselm's desire was to apply reason to questions of faith. The medieval period could be summed up by his phrase, "I believe in order that I may understand." In other words, he wasn't trying to prove something that he didn't believe. He was

And along came René Descartes (1596–1650), who has been called the father of modern philosophy. He ushered in what is known as the Enlightenment period.

"I think, therefore I am," he announced. This statement was meant to serve as the foundation for knowledge. He believed that self-knowledge was the basis for all knowledge. Human reason began to take the place of God's revelation. In the Enlightenment, the measure of truth became "what I think" instead of "what God reveals." Thus, Descartes pushed God from the center and left man in His place.

Descartes' philosophy led him to say, "I will suppose then, that everything I see is spurious. I will believe that my memory tells me lies, and that none of the things that it reports ever happened. I have no senses. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are chimeras. So what remains true? Perhaps just the one fact that *nothing is certain*."[3] Descartes began questioning everything.

B. JOHN LOCKE

If Descartes pushed God from the center, John Locke (1632–1704) pushed Him out onto the cliff. He expanded upon Descartes' view of reality by stating, "No man's knowledge here can go beyond his experience." In Locke's work, the *Second Treatise of Civil Government* (1690), he initiated the celebration of the individual. Human beings were seen as unencumbered and autonomous. No longer was the church the source of knowledge. The source of knowledge had shifted to finite beings.

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trying to better understand that which he already believed, which many would say was a noble endeavor. Yet, unbeknownst to him, he opened the door to rationalism.

Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274) wrote, "Belief *cannot* refer to something that one sees…and what can be proved likewise does not pertain to belief." *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard,* Book 3, distinction 3, quaestio 2, articulus 1 (3d.24,2,I). In other words, the natural can be known by reason, but the supernatural can only be grasped by faith. And understanding leads to faith. Aquinas came up with "five ways" or arguments that God exists. All of them begin with the world as it is known through the senses, and then show how such a world requires a God. Aquinas believed that sense perception was the beginning of knowledge. He unwittingly opened the door to rationalism and empiricism.

[3] René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," in *Epistemology: The Big Questions* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 8, italics added.

C. IMMANUEL KANT

The epistemological avalanche that Descartes initiated waned momentarily with Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). He believed that all knowledge was constructed by the human senses and reason, but that theology was not dealing with the constructs of the human faculty of knowing, that is, with appearances, as were mathematics and physics. Thus, Kant was hoping that by limiting knowledge to the senses that there was still room for faith.

D. GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL

Hegel (1770–1831) began a renewed movement of celebrating the individual. He believed that "The rational is the real and the real is the rational." Truth was not apart from man, but within the mind. This began to open wide the door to postmodern relativism.

E. SØREN KIERKEGAARD

While little attention was paid to Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) in his own century, theologians in the 20th century such as Karl Barth were highly influenced by him. In the Enlightenment period, Christianity was believing a set of doctrines. Kierkegaard challenged this idea. He sought to show that faith was a matter of "inwardness" and "subjectivity" not objectivity.

He wrote,

> If one who lives in the midst of Christendom goes up to the house of God, the house of the true God, with the true conception of God in his knowledge, and prays, but prays in a false spirit; and one who lives in an idolatrous community prays with the entire passion of the infinite, although his eyes rest upon the image of an idol: where is there most truth? The one prays in truth to God though he worships an idol; the other prays falsely to the true God, and hence worships in fact an idol.[4]

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[4] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments,* trans. David F. Swenson (Copenhagen 1846: Reprinted by Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 179-80.

Kierkegaard elevated passion above truth. This is most likely because he defines truth as: "An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual."[5]

Explaining Kierkegaard's view of truth, Millard Erickson writes, "The objective approach involves what he calls an 'approximation process,' [or appropriation-process] whereby one continually gathers more data and comes closer to a correct description of the object. So with respect, for example, to historical matters, one can only have relative certainty."[6] The door to relativism swung open even wider.

F. William James

Postmodern relativism arrived on the scene with men like William James (1842–1910) who said, "Objective evidence and certitude are doubtless very fine ideals to play with, but where on this moonlit and dream-visited planet are they found?"[7] If nothing can be certain, how can someone tell another that he is right or wrong? This question would soon be thrust to the forefront of philosophical discussion.

G. Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche (1844–1900) instituted the "death of God" movement, which he knew would lead to the death of fixed meaning and objective truth.[8] Yet, he believed that these were necessary evils. In a poem entitled "The Madman" he wrote,

> "Whither is God" he cried. "I shall tell you. We *have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers…Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in

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[5] Ibid., 182.

[6] Millard Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise & Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 82.

[7] William James, "The Will to Believe," in *Essays on Faith and Morals* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947), 45.

[8] For an excellent article on Nietzsche's contribution to society see Rodrigo de Sousa, "Rethinking an Evangelical Response to Postmodernism: A Critique and Proposal," *Presbyterion* (Fall 2003): 94-102. Yet, while his discussion of Nietzsche's death of God concept is helpful, he unfortunately falls into the postmodern trap of perspectivism himself.

> all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night coming on all the while?"[9]

What Nietzsche's philosophy led to is what most call *postmodernism* but is more rightly called *perspectivism* or *relativism*. He said, "Insofar as the word 'knowledge' has any meaning, the world is knowable: but it is *interpretive* otherwise, it has no meaning behind it, but countless meanings—'Perspectivism.'"[10] Now that God had died, the only one left to replace Him as the author of truth was man.

For Nietzsche the idea of an objective moral absolute is but an illusion constructed in the mind. Moral truth is relative because God is dead. The true force that drives our good and evil actions is an amoral force called *the will to power*. He foretold of a new age of humanity, personified by the superman, who having lived through nihilism (belief that everything is meaningless and chaotic), would emerge richer and stronger. Yet, David Wells explains, "It [the Enlightenment] had made extravagant promises about life, liberty and happiness, but in the modern world it had become increasingly difficult to see where those promises were being realized."[11]

In the Enlightenment period the autonomous self was the center of philosophical thought, which culminated in Friedrich Nietzsche's superman. And two ascended to power in the 20th century: Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin. After seeing the atrocities they committed, philosophers and others began to realize that they had taken this to the extreme. Jimmy Long writes, "People began to realize the necessity for a community that can hold individuals accountable, to avoid the rise of future Hitlers and Stalins."[12] God was replaced by the autonomous individual only to be ultimately replaced by the community. An atheistic amoral democracy was born—the society of the 20th century.

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[9] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Gay Science," in *The Portable Nietzsche,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 95.

[10] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power,* trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 1967), §481, 267.

[11] David Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993), 286.

[12] Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 67.

H. WILLARD VAN ORMAN QUINE

Further questioning certainty, Quine (1908–2000) and his student Joseph Ullian cooperatively wrote,

> …knowledge is in some ways like a good golf score: each is substantially the fruit of something else, and there are no magic shortcuts to either one. To improve your golf score you work at perfecting the various strokes; for knowledge you work at garnering and sifting evidence and sharpening your reasoning skills. Your immediate concern must be with the *comprehensiveness and coherence of your belief body*. Knowledge is no more thus guaranteed than is the lowered golf score, but there is no better way. Perhaps philosophers have done us a disservice by focusing so much on knowledge and so little on belief.[13]

At first glance this sounds reasonable. But, after closer analysis, it actually further opens the door for relativism.

There are two major views of truth: 1) The correspondence view[14] which states that a proposition is said to be true only if it corresponds with reality; and 2) The coherence view which states that truth is like a web. The more consistent it is, the better it coheres together. What Quine is suggesting here is that we must be concerned with the coherence of our belief body. Thus, a Muslim's belief body, as long as it consistently holds together is said to cohere and thus be true.

I. MICHAEL NOVAK

The young 20th century Catholic philosopher Michael Novak, in his work *Belief and Unbelief,* wished to define belief in a world where God was dead. He sought to set standards by which one might understand various belief systems within their respective communities:

> No man believes, or disbelieves, in isolation; he believes in the context of a certain historical community. Moreover, belief

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[13] W.V Quine and J.S. Ullian, *The Web of Belief,* 2nd ed. (New York: Random House, 1978), 14, italics added.

[14] Roderick Chisholm (1916–1999) wrote, "'*Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus'*: a true belief or assertion is one that 'corresponds with the facts,'" *Theory of Knowledge* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1966), 104.

> and unbelief draw their concrete meaning from the life of a particular community.[15]

This raises several questions: 1) How does a community come to a consensus?; and 2) How does it decide what beliefs are acceptable?

J. MICHEL FOUCAULT

The Frenchman Michel Foucault (1926–1984) sought to clarify the sphere of truth when he wrote:

> Truth isn't outside of power, or lacking in power, contrary to a myth…truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true.[16]

Nietzsche's "will to power" was thus resurrected. Since God is dead, the power brokers in society control what truth is acceptable. Thus, truth is relative to who holds the power.

K. CONCLUSION

Almost four hundred years ago, Descartes removed God from the center of the world's understanding of truth and pushed Him to the side. After three hundred years all that was left was the autonomous self—Nietzsche's superman, which culminated in horrible atrocities by monsters such as Hitler and Stalin. Because the Enlightenment could not fulfill its promise of unending progress, all that was certain was lost. When the dust settled, God was dead and the community was left in charge. And truth was relative to who held the power in the community.

IV. THE LOSS OF FIXED MEANING IN ART

Just as we see this shift towards relative truth in philosophy, it is evident in art as well.

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[15] Michael Novak, *Belief and Unbelief: A Philosophy of Self-Knowledge* (New York: The New American Library, 1967), 33.

[16] Michael Foucault, "Truth and Power," in *The Foucault Reader,* ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 72-73.

A. The Romantic Period

The Romantic Period (1790–1850) characterized those who wanted to revolt against the established social and religious order. Romanticism exalted individualism, subjectiveness, irrationalism, imagination, emotions, and nature. Emotion was greater than reason and the senses were greater than the intellect.

The "Chalk Cliffs of Rügen" (1818) painted by Friedrich sums up this period. Three people stand at the cliffs. While two look for objective scientific discoveries by searching the ground, one peers off into the vastness of nature—where the sea and the sky become one. "Why limit yourself to what you can reason in nature?" the painting asks. Instead, nature should give us an emotional response through our senses (eyes).

B. Impressionism

Next we move to Impressionism (late 19th century, France). Monet's "Water Lilies," "The Starry Night," and "Jardin De Monet" embody this period. These paintings give an immediate emotional impression. Impressionistic painters did not try to recreate a particular scene as it would be seen by the eyes. They began to explore the feeling of the scene—impression on canvas. Objectivity began to fade. This period bridged the gap between Romanticism and abstract art where objectivity was lost.

C. Abstract Art

After the period of Impressionism, art began to eliminate rational visual association. Kandinsky's "Im Blau" ("In Blue," 1925) perfectly represents this period. Various shapes and colors seek to float around in a seemingly unrelated abyss. Art no longer had to represent something rational or objective. Art began to lose objectivity and in turn elevate the *perspective* of the artist and the viewer.

D. Surrealism

This brings us to Surrealism (1924–1940). This period represented a reaction against what was seen as the destruction wrought by rationalism which culminated in the horrors of World War I. Surrealism sought to reunite the conscious and unconscious realms of experience in the hopes that the rational world would be joined by the world of dreams and fantasy. What was left was known as surreality.

René Magritte in "The Son of Man," a picture of an androgynous person in a suit with an apple covering his or her assumed face, captures the essence of this period. Magritte toys with what is called *object permanence*, a form of conditioning that infants experience. All have

been taught that behind the apple lies a face. Magritte seeks to question how easily we unconsciously "fill in" what the apple covers. Furthermore, she seeks to question the blind faith we place in our "rational" assumptions.

There was no longer a fixed meaning in abstract and surrealistic art. Instead of real, art was surreal and instead of factual, it became abstract. Fixed meaning in art shifted into perspectivism, which questioned the *individual's* ability to make sense of reality.

V. The Rise of the Community in Culture

Just as Nietzsche predicted, "the death of God" has led to the death of fixed meaning and objective truth. The relativism which began in philosophy and continued in art, has found its way into culture.

The cry of our post-Enlightenment culture is that what's "true for you might not be for me." The supermen that Nietzsche was hoping for collapsed in the 20th century and have been resurrected as nihilism (the belief that everything is chaotic and meaningless), relativism (a loss of fixed meaning and objective truth), and finally the community.

A. Television

The 20th century was a time in history like no other. Reality was placed in a little box called the television—a box that encourages us to sit back and relax. Don't worry about thinking; it will think for you. We are now able to disengage our minds and become surrealists where reality and fantasy become one. For this reason, the television is the best known channel between art and culture. Instead of art infecting culture over a period of decades, the television has allowed a direct line into the mind since all our defense mechanisms have been effectively shut down.

There is no better illustration of our post-Enlightenment culture than the recent, wildly successful Seinfeld show. A self-professed "show about nothing," where comedian Jerry Seinfeld plays a comedian named Jerry Seinfeld. The line between fiction and truth is obliterated.

In this narcissistic show, morality is altered at every whim, and urban thirty-something-singles float through a chaotic meaningless life (nihilism).

Jerry and Elaine are trying to get as much out of life as they can. George navigates his pathetic existence with whatever is expedient, claiming that his whole life is based on lies. Kramer's life, though extremely chaotic, is eternally static.

While modernity promised progress, postmodernity desires just the opposite. One of the show's writers has confessed that there is only one rule in the composition of the show: the characters must never learn from their experiences; they must forever be what they intrinsically and eternally are.[17]

A two-part episode entitled "The Trip" illustrates perfectly the deep seeded nihilism and relativism of Seinfeld. Kramer moves to California in order to "find himself." He is apprehended for being the "smog killer" after the woman he was dating turns up dead with a piece of paper on her person bearing Kramer's name. Things were not looking too good for Kramer. Yet, he was finally released when the police learned that the "smog killer" had struck again.

As Kramer exits the jail, Jerry and George dance gleefully chanting "the smog killer struck again" as the parents of the newest victim pass behind them. Objective morality cannot be found. Jerry and George later question Kramer as to whether he will now return to New York. After all, his girlfriend was murdered and he had been put in jail. Kramer's *perspective* was that everything was going fine, "Yeah, well I wasn't looking for a long term relationship." All is relative.

TV is an unconscious infector of our American community's belief system.

B. The University

Fixed meaning and objective truth have disappeared from the university as well. Charles Colson writes,

> College campuses are caught in a face-off between modern Enlightenment rationalism and postmodern relativism. The Enlightenment philosophers wanted all the *benefits* of Christianity without *belief* in God. By human rationality alone they hoped to discover universal truth and universal morality.[18]

For the most part, God is dead on college campuses in the United States. The question that must be asked is: "What has been left in His place as the standard for truth?"

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[17] See Thomas S. Hibbs, *Shows About Nothing: Nihilism in Popular Culture: From the Exorcist to Seinfeld* (Dallas: Spence Publishing Co., 1999), 144-72.

[18] Charles Colson, "Postmodern Power Grab," in *Christianity Today* (June 1994): 80.

A former Harvard and Duke University Professor, Dr. Stanley Fish, wrote a book in the early eighties entitled *Is There a Text in This Class?* "In 1970 I was asking the question 'Is the reader or the text the source of meaning?' and the entities presupposed by the question *were* the text and the reader whose independence and stability were assumed."[19] In other words, he soon learned that the text and the reader are not static.

One question would forever reorient this discussion. One day a student inquired, "Is there a text in this class?" to which he replied "Yes, it's the *Norton Anthology of Literature*." The student then rejoined, "No I meant do we believe in poems and things, or is it just us?" Because of this misunderstanding, Fish began to ponder how individuals could agree on the interpretation of a given statement. Concerning this quest for meaning, Millard Erickson queries,

> How, then can there be any agreement on the meaning of statements, or even any meaningful discussion of them? This has seemed to present a significant problem for postmodernists. The concept of community is believed to solve this problem, and one of the most vigorous advocates of this idea is Stanley Fish.[20]

Fish believes that his concept of the community solves the problem of disagreements between individuals. In order to clarify his position, he writes,

> Indeed, it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties. In other words these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around.[21]

Thus, it is the community that decides what ideas are written down. Yet, this seems to apply to interpretation as well.

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[19] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 1.

[20] Millard J. Erickson, *The Postmodern World: Discerning the Times and the Spirit of Our Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 51.

[21] Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 14.

He gives the example of two professors arguing over the meaning of a literary text using the same word to prove their case. Fish notes,

> What we have here then are two critics with opposing interpretations, each of whom claims the same word as internal and confirming evidence. Clearly they cannot both be right, but just as clearly there is no basis for deciding between them. One cannot appeal to the text, because the text has become an extension of the interpretive disagreement that divides them; and, in fact, the text as it is variously characterized is a *consequence* of the interpretation for which it is supposedly evidence.[22]

He seeks to clear up this by offering:

> This, however, is an impasse only if one assumes that the activity of interpretation is itself unconstrained; but in fact the shape of that activity is determined by the literary institution which at any one time will authorize only a finite number of interpretive strategies. Thus, while there is no core of agreement in the text, there is a core agreement (although one subject to change) concerning the ways of *producing* the text. Nowhere is this set of acceptable ways written down, but it is a part of everyone's knowledge of what it means to operate within the literary institution as it is now constituted.[23]

Limits do exist in Fish's paradigm however. One of his students illustrated this by saying that she could enter into any class at Johns Hopkins University and win approval for

> running one of a number of well-defined interpretive routines: she could view the assigned text as an instance of the tension between nature and culture; she could look in the text for evidence of large mythological oppositions; she could argue that the true subject of the text was its own composition…She could not, however, at least at Johns Hopkins University today, argue that the text was a prophetic message inspired by the ghost of her Aunt Tilly.[24]

For Fish, "no one is or could be capable of making the necessary determination (the determination of which preferred truths are the

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[22] Ibid., 340.
[23] Ibid., 343-44.
[24] Ibid., 343.

genuinely transcendent ones) because everyone is so enmeshed in time and circumstance that only circumstantial and timely (i.e., historically bounded) truths will be experienced as perspicuous."[25] Therefore, in Fish's mind, the community is necessary in order to determine what truths are acceptable within that particular community. As we shall see, this same thinking prevails among religious scholars as well.

C. Conclusion

Nietzsche's death of God has led to the death of objective certainty in philosophy, art, our culture, and in our universities. Because the autonomous individual could not be trusted, something had to take its place. That something was the community. It is now the task of communities to set the standards of truth.

VI. The Culture's Influence on the Church

When most people think of postmodern philosophy they assume that the postmoderns are all "out there" and that we remain safe within the confines of our seminaries and churches.

Philosophy has never succeeded in walking directly through the front door of the church, marching up to the pulpit, and preaching to the congregation. It has always worked slowly from the outside in. The period we find ourselves in, the post-Enlightenment period, is no different. Instead of a canvas on the wall, the medium of postmodernism is the TV, internet, and university.

Postmodernity has replaced modernity's autonomous self and objective truth with the community and relativism. This is reflected in institutions that were once evangelical such as Harvard and Duke.

Stanley Hauerwas, a professor of Theological Ethics at Duke's Divinity School wrote,

> I certainly believe that God uses the Scripture to help keep the Church faithful, but I do not believe, in the Church's current circumstance, that each person in the Church thereby is given the right to interpret the Scripture.[26]

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[25] Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7-8.

[26] Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 16.

A reaction against the individual has begun. In his work *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* he proceeds even further:

> *Most North American Christians assume that they have a right, if not an obligation, to read the Bible. I challenge that assumption. No task is more important than for the Church to take the Bible out of the hands of individual Christians in North America.* Let us no longer give the Bible to all children when they enter the third grade or whenever their assumed rise to Christian maturity is marked, such as eighth-grade commencements. Let us rather tell them and their parents that they are possessed by habits far too corrupt for them to be encouraged to read the Bible on their own.[27]

Hauerwas believes that there is *no task* greater than taking the Bible out of the hands of individuals in North America. The Bible was torn out of the hands of Roman Catholicism and now we are trotting back down the road to Rome in order to give it back. Should we apologize at the doors saying, "I'm sorry that our forefathers absurdly believed that we could actually interpret Scripture for ourselves—Please tell us what we should believe"?

To many this sounds ridiculous and to some extent it is. Nonetheless, slowly but surely that is exactly what is happening.

A clear shift in exegesis has occurred even in the last twenty years in evangelical seminaries. While they once taught students to go to Scripture to find the meaning of a given text, they are now teaching that students must first evaluate the views of commentators that have come before them—some of whom do not believe the words they are commenting on are even inspired. Exegesis is slowly shifting from the individual to the community.

The former president of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) noted in a 2002 paper presented in Dallas, Texas:

> If the ETS were to seek a "doctrinal" base beyond Scripture and the Trinity, here [the creeds] would be where to look for it. This is a far better option in my view than trying to rewrite such creeds from scratch today, for it would affirm the unity of our community with those that went before us, an act that

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[27] Ibid., 15, italics added.

> ultimately affirms the work of the Spirit in the community throughout her history.[28]

He clearly believes that the Holy Spirit guides the community (the Body of Christ) through history—a corporate rather than individual focus.

This paper was later included in a book. The author gives an example of a debate where two sides argue their views from Scripture and both believe they are correct. His remarks are uncannily similar to those Fish discussed earlier:

> Note also how individualized this doctrine of the Spirit risks being: I have read it right, but you, also a member of the believing community, have read the text wrong. It is here that the corporateness of the Spirit's work needs to be applied to this discussion. Healthy dialogue need not be seen as a bad thing for evangelicals, provided we all agree that the text is the key arbiter in our discussion…Provided they also have a historical sense of where the core of the faith lies (i.e., Scripture) evangelicals should welcome these denominations into dialogue.[29]

In regards to the Openness debate, he wrote, "Only solid, dialogical community will save us from our individual tendencies to be drawn in where we do not belong."[30] Sadly, society has replaced the individual with the community and the church is following its lead. Some might question whether God (the Holy Spirit) will be fully replaced by the community in this arena as well.

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[28] Darrell Bock, "Prolegomena on Controversy in Evangelicalism and a Purpose-Driven Theology: How Should We Approach Discussion and Debate in the ETS and Evangelicalism?—An Appeal for Meta-Narrative, 'Critical Realism' and a 'Biblical Foundationalist' Approach" (ETS 2002 Regional Meeting, Dallas, TX): 8, fn. 14.

[29] Darrell Bock, *Purpose-Directed Theology: Getting Our Priorities Right in Evangelical Controversies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 32.

[30] Ibid., 34. May we remember Peter Abelard's words: "Doubtless the fathers might err, even Peter, the prince of the apostles, fell into error: what wonder that the saints do not always show themselves inspired? The fathers did not themselves believe that they, or their companions, were always right. Augustine found himself mistaken in some cases and did not hesitate to retract his errors. He warns his admirers not to look upon his letters as they would upon the Scripture, but to accept only those things which, upon examination, they find to be true," *Readings in European History,* ed. James Harvey Robinson (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1904–1906), I:450.

VII. CONCLUSION

Nietzsche's pronouncement of the death of God movement sent shockwaves through history. The individual was elevated above God only to be replaced by the community. God was dead, the individual could not be trusted, and so the community was left in charge.

The church will be faced with great challenges in the twenty-first century. How will we answer them? Will we give in to the death of objective truth or will we proclaim that God is indeed alive, that He is *the* author of truth, and that His revelation is absolute?

May the words of Adolph Hitler in a speech dated November 6, 1933 soberly remind us that our job is to take care of the next generation:

> When an opponent declares, "I will not come over to your side," I calmly say, "Your child belongs to us already…What are you? You will pass on. Your descendants, however, now stand in the new camp. In a short time they will know nothing else but this new community."[31]

The community is new and it demands the power to determine what truth is acceptable. May we not be oblivious of our surroundings as a recent bumper sticker jokes, "Where are we going? And why are we in this handbasket?" But instead, we should be mindful of the past and hopeful of the future. May we not give in to relativism disguised as the community view of truth.

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[31] Adolph Hitler quoted in William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), 249.

TULIP: A FREE GRACE PERSPECTIVE PART 3: LIMITED ATONEMENT

ANTHONY B. BADGER
Associate Professor of Bible and Theology
Grace Evangelical School of Theology
Lancaster, Pennsylvania

I. INTRODUCTION

If asked whether one is a Calvinist or Arminian, a very common response is, "I'm a *four-point* Calvinist." This indicates that the person generally follows Calvinistic, Reformation doctrine, but believes that Jesus died for everyone, not just for those chosen by God and designated as "the elect." A "four-point Calvinist" rules out the teaching known as Particular Redemption or Limited Atonement.

This article considers the doctrine of Limited Atonement and is the third in a series which seeks to correctly understand God's endeavor to save man from sin. In the previous articles we have considered the doctrines of Total Depravity and Unconditional Election as taught and understood by both Calvinistic and Arminian stances on theology.

Before evaluating the views of Calvinists and Arminians, who stand at odds theologically, we will first consider the actual presentations of both.

II. THE REFORMED VIEW OF LIMITED ATONEMENT[1]

Enns explains Limited Atonement by saying,

> This view, also referred to as particular atonement or particular redemption, states that "God *purposed* by the atonement to save only the elect and that consequently all the elect, and they alone, are saved." Christ's death saves all it *intended* to save. Connection is again made with the preceding doctrine of unconditional election. If God has elected certain ones to

[1] For extensive argumentation of the Limited Atonement view, see John Owen, "The Atonement," *Introduction to Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 141-70.

> salvation from eternity past, then it logically follows that He will also provide for the redemption of *precisely those* whom he has chosen.[2]

Note that the doctrine limits or restricts the number of people for whom Christ died.

Elwell explains that, "the choices boil down to two: either the death of Jesus was intended to *secure* salvation for a limited number or the death of Jesus was intended to *provide* salvation for everyone" and that the "first view is sometimes called 'limited atonement' because God limited the effect of Christ's death to a specific number of elect persons, or 'particular redemption' because redemption was for a particular group of people."[3] It seems that Grudem implies "guilt by association" for anyone who is not of this Reformed persuasion by saying that:

> One of the differences between Reformed theologians and other Catholic and Protestant theologians has been the question of the extent of the atonement. The question may be put this way: when Christ died on the cross, did he pay for the sins of the entire human race or only for the sins of those who he knew would ultimately be saved?[4]

Steele and Thomas under an article entitled "The Five Points of Arminianism Contrasted with the Five Points of Calvinism" refer to the doctrine of "Particular Redemption or Limited Atonement":

> Christ's redeeming work was *intended* to save the elect only and *actually secured* salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of *certain specified sinners*. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption *secured* everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him.

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[2] Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1989), 483, quoting R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 62, italics added.

[3] W. A. Elwell, "Atonement, Extent of the" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 98, italics added.

[4] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 594.

> The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, thereby guaranteeing their salvation.[5]

Steele and Thomas explain the logic of the system saying, "election itself saved no one; it only marked out particular sinners for salvation. Those *chosen* by the Father and given to the Son had to be *redeemed* if they were to be saved."[6] That is, if the Father chose some and then gave those chosen ones to Christ, it follows that Jesus died with the sole intention of saving only those so chosen. Palmer is specific when he says, "Since the objects of the Father's love are particular, definite, and limited, so are the objects of Christ's death."[7] Enns reflects that, "if Christ actually made an atonement for sin then the objects of that atonement must be a particular group. Otherwise the atonement's effect is weakened because not everyone is saved for whom Christ made atonement."[8]

Note that the presentation of the Reformed Calvinistic position is that, according to Buswell, "the atonement is particular in *design and intention*…Within the decrees of God, the atonement was intended to accomplish precisely what is does accomplish. It accomplishes the salvation of the elect of God."[9] Key terms used in expressing the Reformed position regarding the effects of Christ's death are God's *design*, *intention*, *accomplishment,* and the *securing* of the elect's salvation.

The Calvinist position in regard to the extent of the atonement may be summarized as follows:

1) God *selected* individuals to ultimately be saved from sin and its consequences.

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[5] David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *Romans: An Interpretive Outline* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1963), 145, italics added.

[6] Ibid., 166.

[7] Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 44.

[8] Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 327.

[9] James Oliver Buswell, Jr., *Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 2:142-43. Buswell goes beyond the normal Calvinistic assertions, here, and adds that it also "furnishes the ethical and logical ground for common grace…and it renders the lost ethically and logically inexcusable."

2) God *made a pact* within the Godhead whereby the Father gave certain ones to Christ.[10]
3) God's *intention* was for Jesus to die only for those He chose and gave to His Son.
4) Jesus came to earth, not with the intention of saving all individuals in the world, but intending *to redeem only the elect*. In His death He endured the penalty of sin in a substitutionary way only and exclusively in place of certain specified or elect sinners.
5) Jesus' death *actually secured* the eternal salvation of only the elect and had no eternal significance for the non-elect. His redemptive work secured everything necessary for the salvation of the elect, including faith which unites them to Him.
6) Redemption was *designed* to bring to pass God's purpose of election.
7) While faith is a gift, the gospel can be offered to all universally. Faith is infallibly applied or given by the Spirit to each and every person for whom Christ died, thus guaranteeing their salvation.

III. The Arminian View of Unlimited Atonement

Elwell says the doctrine is called General Redemption or Unlimited Atonement "because God did not limit Christ's redemptive death to the elect, but allowed it to be for mankind in general."[11] He says,

> The death of Christ was designed to include all mankind, whether or not all believe. To those who savingly believe it is redemptively applied, and to those who do not believe it

[10] Steele and Thomas site John 6:35-40 as a supporting passage "which represent[s] the Lord Jesus Christ, in all that He did and suffered for His people, as fulfilling the terms of a gracious compact or arrangement which He had entered into with His Heavenly Father before the foundation of the world." They assert that, "Jesus was sent into the world by the Father to save the people which the Father had given to Him," *Romans,* 171.

[11] Elwell, "Atonement," 98.

> provides the benefits of common grace and removal of any excuse for being lost.[12]

Enns states that, "The doctrine of unlimited atonement, as understood by evangelicals, means that Christ died for every person but His death is effective only in those who believe the gospel."[13]

Steele and Thomas explain the Arminian position of "Universal Redemption or General Atonement:"

> Christ's redeeming work made it *possible* for everyone to be saved but did not actually *secure* the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for *every* man, only those who believe in Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it.[14]

Further, Article 2 of the Five Arminian Articles of A.D. 1610 states that Christ died for all men:

> That, agreeably thereto, Jesus Christ, The Saviour of the world, died for *all men and for every man*, so that he has *obtained for them all*, by his death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer, according to the word of the Gospel of John iii.16: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And in the First Epistle of John ii.2: "and that he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the *whole world.*"[15]

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[12] Ibid., 99. It's noted that the addition of common grace and man's responsibility (generally considered Arminian in nature) is what Buswell added from his rather Calvinistic perspective in a former note.

[13] Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology,* 327.

[14] Steele & Thomas, *Romans,* 145, italics added.

[15] Article 2 in "*ARTICULI ARMINAINI SIVE REMONSTRANTIA*. The Five Arminian Articles. A.D. 1610." From Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1966), 546, italics added.

Steele and Thomas assert from their perspective:

> The Arminians also place a limitation on the atoning work of Christ, but one of a much different nature. They hold that Christ's saving work was designed to make possible the salvation of all men on the condition that they believe, but that Christ's death *in itself* did not actually secure or guarantee salvation for anyone.[16]

Finney supports the Arminian view reasoning, "If the atonement is not intended for all mankind, it is impossible for us not to regard God as insincere, in making them the offer of salvation through the atonement."[17] Also, "That the atonement is sufficient for all men, and, in that sense, general, as opposed to particular, is also evident from the fact, that the invitations and promises of the gospel are addressed to all men, and all are freely offered salvation through Christ."[18]

God's intention for Christ's atoning death as seen from the Arminian perspective may be summarized:

1) Christ's death was a substitutionary, redemptive act for *all mankind*, for the world, for all men, and for each and every man.
2) Christ's substitutionary death *did not secure* anyone's eternal deliverance or take away any individual's sin *per se*, but rather made it *possible* for everyone to receive God's pardon on the condition that they believe in Christ.
3) The death of Christ is *provisional* for every man, i.e., it is the historical event which provides a way or means for God to

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[16] Steele and Thomas, *Romans,* 167, italics in original. They refer to Loraine Boettner (*The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1932], 135) who says, "The Calvinist limits the extent of it [the atonement] in that he says it does not apply to all persons (although…he believes that it is efficacious for the salvation of the large portion of the human race); while the Arminian limits the power of it, for he says that in itself it does not actually save anybody. The Calvinist limits it qualitatively, but not quantitatively."

[17] Charles Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1994), 223.

[18] Ibid., 225.

pardon anyone and everyone, but only becomes *effective* for the individual when man chooses to accept its benefits.

4) Redemption was *not designed only to bring to pass God's purpose of election*, but also to demonstrate God's love and service for all mankind.[19] As such, redemption also provides a basis for judgment in light of the fact that some reject Christ.
5) God cannot, therefore, be rightly accused of being unjust in His judgment of sinful men who have not believed in Christ so as to receive forgiveness and eternal life.
6) The offer of eternal life *can be offered to all* on the basis of Jesus' death as a substitution for every man and as a provision that can be attained by personal faith in Him.

Having seen the teachings of both Calvinism and Arminianism in regard to the intent and effects of the death of Christ, we will now proceed to an evaluation of the views.

IV. A Response to the Calvinistic Arguments that Christ Died Only for the Elect[20]

Elwell summarizes eight arguments for the Reformed view of Limited Atonement. An evaluation of each will now be considered with refutations from both logic and from the Arminian point of view. There may be variations and/or refinements that could be made to these assertions, but Elwell seems to present the positions fairly.

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[19] C. Gordon Olson, under a section called "Christ's ministry to the 'non-elect'" illustrates that Jesus spent time with those whom we would consider non-elect, i.e., the rich young ruler in the synoptic gospels. He also reasons, from Genesis 4, that God spent time with Cain. "If Christ didn't die for Cain, and if he had been reprobated in eternity past, why did God bother to deal with him at all? God certainly knew his status. Again we see how the issue ties in with 'unconditional election.'" *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism: An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation* (Cedar Knolls, NJ: Global Gospel Publishers, 2002), 148.

[20] See Steele and Thomas, *Romans,* 166-75. They offer an extensive argumentation on this subject.

A. Scripture Restricts Who Benefits from Christ's Death

1. The Calvinist Argument Stated

Elwell presents the first argument for Limited Atonement or Particular Redemption:

> First, in the Bible there is a qualification as to who will benefit by the death of Christ, thus limiting its effect. John 10:11, 15 says Christ died for "his sheep"; Acts 20:28 "his church"; Rom. 8:32-35 "the elect"; and Matt. 1:21 "his people."[21]

2. The Argument Negated

In answer to this it can be said that just because Christ died for a select group (His sheep, His church, the elect, or His people), this need not restrict the purpose or intention of His death to *only* those groups. If He indeed died for every single person in the world, this would necessarily include anyone and everyone within a smaller select group (the elect) who had been, who were then, or who would later become believers.

Several years ago I decided to buy a motorcycle. As soon as I began riding it in traffic I realized that when passing motorcyclists coming from the other direction it was customary to wave with the left hand in a friendly gesture of camaraderie. Not doing so gives the distinct impression that you're snubbing the other rider.

Occasionally I will pass a large group of oncoming cyclists and raise my hand in a friendly gesture. Usually some of the oncoming group will wave and some just look straight ahead with no response whatsoever. Now, the question: When I raise my hand, was it my intention to wave only to those who would wave back, or was I being friendly to everyone? Clearly I was waving to *all* of them and I *intended* to do so, but only some responded. Similarly, when Jesus died in a single act, there is certainly no reason to negate the possibility that He intended to die for everyone. Included in that universal group for whom Jesus died would be those who respond by God's grace, i.e., the elect (the church, His people, His sheep). But if God intended for Jesus to die only for the elect to the exclusion of all non-elect, why would God so inspire the words of Scripture which use such all-inclusive terms (i.e., the world, every man, etc.)? While this reasoning may not necessarily settle the argument, it does show that what is stated in a non-restrictive, general, or all-inclusive way

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[21] Elwell, "Atonement," 98.

(Christ's death for the whole world of mankind) doesn't rule out the action also being done for a smaller, restrictive group (i.e., the elect) within that general audience. And if reference is made to the action being done for the smaller group, such doesn't mean that it wasn't also done for others. Nowhere does Scripture say that Christ died *just* for the elect, *only* for the sheep, *exclusively* for Israel, etc. Geisler notes that "there is a logical fallacy in arguing that (1) because Christ died for believers (2) He did not also die for unbelievers."[22] Saying that Christ died for the elect in some passages doesn't rule out or restrict the other Scriptures which assert that His death was for the world.

Simply put: The use of restrictive terms does not exclude the universal aspects of Christ's death. We may conclude that there is no logical or scriptural reason to believe Christ died only for the elect.

B. Man Cannot Frustrate God's Efficacious Designs

1. The Calvinist Argument Stated

Elwell presents a second argument for Limited Atonement:

> God's designs are always efficacious and can never be frustrated by man. Had God intended all men to be saved by the death of Christ, then all would be saved. It is clear that not everyone is saved because the Bible clearly teaches that those who reject Christ are lost. Therefore, it stands to reason that Christ could not have died for everyone, because not everyone is saved. To argue that Christ died for everyone is in effect to argue that God's saving will is not being done or that everyone will be saved, both of which propositions are clearly false.[23]

2. The Argument Negated

The problem is that no one but Universalists say that God intends to save all men. The truth is that God does *not* intend to save all men. Indeed, *if* God intended to save all men by Christ's death alone (i.e., apart from personal faith), all men would indeed be saved. We might correctly say that God's intent in the bloody, penal, substitutionary death of Christ was to make a *provision* for the salvation of all men.

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[22] Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2001), 77.

[23] Elwell, "Atonement," 98.

Now, for purposes of discussion, let's ask: *what if* God's design and intention for Christ's death was *not* to save all men, but indeed to *provide* a sufficient sacrifice that would *accommodate* the salvation of any man upon the fulfillment of a single condition for receiving the gift of eternal life, i.e., faith in His Son? Would not this understanding rather frustrate the Calvinistic argument rather than the plan or intention of God? There is, therefore, no scriptural *need* to suggest that God's plan is frustrated if Christ didn't die solely for the elect. Calvinists simply misunderstand and/or misrepresent His plan for the sake of asserting their theological system.

C. God Would Be Unfair in Sending Unbelievers to Hell

1. The Calvinist Argument Stated

Elwell presents a third argument for Limited Atonement:

> If Christ died for everyone, God would be unfair in sending people to hell for their own sins. No law court allows payment to be exacted twice for the same crime, and God will not do that either. So God could not have allowed Christ to die for everyone unless he planned for everyone to be saved, which clearly he did not, because some are lost. Christ paid for the sins of the elect; the lost pay for their own sins.[24]

2. The Argument Negated

The overriding assumption that Christ's death actually *secures* the salvation of those for whom Christ died (the elect) still permeates Reformed thinking. But if Jesus' death is viewed in a *provisional* way there is no basis for the present argument.[25] The provisional benefits of

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Editor's Note: Dr. Badger answers this objection by postulating that the death of Jesus is merely *provisional*. While that is certainly an orthodox way of dealing with this issue, I feel it is biblically sound to say that the death of Christ actually removed the sin barrier, making all men savable. Being savable and having eternal life, however, are two different issues, as Dr. Badger points out as well. A careful study of Rev 20:11-15 shows that while unbelievers will be judged according to their deeds (that which is written in the *books*, plural) at the Great White Throne Judgment, their deeds will not be the basis of their being cast into the lake of fire. People will be cast into the lake of fire because their names are not found in the book of life. Of course, one must believe to get into that book. Jesus' death actually paid for the sins of those who will spend eternity

Christ's death are not extended for or given to those who do not believe in Christ. This is so because eternal life is a gracious *offer* to be *received* by faith, not a *compulsion* that is *forced* by irresistible power. If all humanity is composed of guilty sinners deserving the punishment of hell, Christ died for all such humanity, and some humans fail to appropriate by faith the benefits provided by Christ's death, how may it be said that God is unfair? Did not God provide the completely satisfactory remedy and offer deliverance by grace alone through faith alone in Christ and His finished work alone? That Christ died for every single man does not validly argue against the fairness of God. Rather, the universal extent and intention to *provide a way* of deliverance *validates* His justice and the wrathful judgment of those who refuse or neglect His gracious offer. The *primary* reason for such a death sentence is that men are sinners, are guilty, and deserve condemnation. The *secondary* reason for it is that they have not appropriated the remedy of the cross by personal faith. Elwell considers the Arminian point of view:

> God is not unfair in condemning those who reject the offer of salvation. His is not exacting judgment twice. Because the nonbeliever refuses to accept the death of Christ as his own, the benefits of Christ's death are not applied to him. He is lost, not because Christ did not die for him, but because he refuses God's offer of forgiveness.[26]

Men stand justly condemned because of sin and guilt if they are not believers (John 3:16, 18, 36). Men will *never* stand condemned because Christ did not die for them, because He did. Therefore, it is not legitimate to say that God is unfair in sending unbelievers to hell. On the contrary, it would seem *completely* unjust for God to send some men to hell because no provision was made for their salvation.

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in the lake of fire. This fits, by the way, Peter's comment concerning unbelieving false teachers (see 2 Pet 2:17) who were guilty of "denying the Lord *who bought them*" (2 Pet 2:1).

[26] Elwell, "Atonement," 98.

D. UNLIMITED ATONEMENT LEADS TO UNIVERSALISM

1. The Calvinist Argument Stated

Elwell presents a fourth argument for Limited Atonement:

> To say that Christ died for everyone logically leads to universalism. It is true that not all of those who believe in general redemption believe in universalism; but there is no valid reason that they do not. If they were consistent they would, because they are arguing that Christ paid for everyone's sins, thus saving them.[27]

Warfield argues that Arminianism leads to Universalism. He reasons that if indeed it is God alone who works salvation apart from man's intervention or addition, and if indeed "all that God does looking to the salvation of men he does to and for all men alike (which is the subject of the universalistic contention); why, then, all men without exception must be saved."[28]

2. The Argument Negated

Essential to the scheme of Limited Atonement is the "given" that Christ's death secures the salvation for everyone for whom Christ died. The answer to this objection is rather simple. The Unlimited Atonement position does *not* assert that when Christ paid the price for everyone's sins universally that this saves them or that it secures their salvation. It does not say, as Warfield has stated, "all that God does looking to the salvation of men he does to and for all men alike." Once again, the Calvinist simply miscomprehends the fact that God's remedy for human sin, death, and eternal judgment is both *provisional* as well as *applicational*. If Jesus' death is *universally provisional* and the application of its benefits is conditionally limited to those who believe, as is suggested here, there is no reason to think or assert that Christ's death saves anyone *of and by itself*, i.e., without personal faith in Him. No reason, that is, except that the Reformed system of theology demands it. Calvinism is driven to exclude (for all practical purposes) the conditional aspect of faith in order to set forth the argument for Particular Redemption.

In summary, the Arminian and Biblicist would answer that "the several arguments that reduce to a charge of universalism are special

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, Rev ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 70.

pleading."[29] The charge that the teaching of General Redemption leads to Universalism is just another "straw man" argument and can be set forth like this: (1) Christ paid for everyone's sins, (2) paying for everyone's sins saves them, so (3) everyone will be saved. In this case the second premise is wrong. Paying for everyone's sins doesn't save them. It simply *provides the way* for them to be saved and is the historical event upon which man can rest his eternal destiny by *believing* in the finished work of Christ. Regeneration of any man is not accomplished until it is appropriated by personal faith. So, the doctrine of Unlimited Atonement does *not* logically lead to Universalism unless the premises are misstated.

E. Christ Died to Save, not to Make Salvation Possible

1. The Calvinist Argument Stated

Elwell presents a fifth argument for Limited Atonement:

> Christ died not just to make salvation possible, but actually to save. To argue that Christ died only to provide the possibility of salvation is to leave open the question of whether *anyone* is saved. If God's designs are only of possibilities, not actualities, then no one is secure and everything is open to doubt. But the Bible clearly teaches that the death of Jesus actually secures salvation for his people, thus making it a certainty and limiting atonement (Matt. 18:11; Rom 5:10; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13; Eph. 1:7).[30]

Steele and Thomas follow this line of thinking:

> The Scriptures describe the end intended and accomplished by Christ's work as the full salvation (actual reconciliation, justification, and sanctification) of His people…The Scriptures state that Christ came, not to enable men to save themselves, but to *save* sinners.[31]

2. The Argument Negated

The assertion that "Christ came to save, not to make salvation possible" seems rather pithy, at least on the surface. It could be easily

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[29] Elwell, "Atonement," 99.

[30] Ibid., 98.

[31] Steele and Thomas, *Romans,* 168 (citing as support, Matt 1:21; Luke 19:10; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 1:3-4; 1 Tim 1:15; Titus 2:14; and 1 Pet 3:18), italics in original.

accepted if not carefully analyzed. First, we need to realize the deficiency which underlies the reasoning. The argument that if "Christ died only to provide the *possibility* of salvation [this would] leave open the question of whether *anyone* is saved" is, as pointed out above, to exclude the subsequent working of the Holy Spirit in regenerating a believing sinner. The question of whether *anyone* is saved should not be seen within the parameters of the extent of God's intention regarding Christ's death, but ought to be relegated to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.[32]

Looking at the texts cited in Elwell's description will determine whether the assertion is supported by Scripture. In Matt 18:11 Jesus says, "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost."[33] In context, this verse is an introduction to the parable of the one lost sheep and the Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine secure sheep in search of it. Clearly they are all sheep, not goats. And clearly they were His sheep. Here, the use of the word "save" indicates a restoration of the straying sheep back into the realm of safety, into the flock. The context deals with restoring and protecting one of "these little ones" which are already His (cf. Matt 18:10, 14). To use this verse as support for the idea that Christ's death accomplishes and secures eternal salvation is to ignore the context and to force-read theological concepts into the context which are not there.

Paul says in Rom 5:10 "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." The fact that Christ died for us while we (believers) were yet sinners (Rom 5:8), we (believers) are justified by His blood (5:9a), we (believers) will be saved from His wrath (5:9b), we (believers) were reconciled to God by Christ's death, and will be saved through His life (5:10) does not exclude (indeed, does not even address) all the rest for whom Christ might have died. It only serves to demonstrate that the benefits of His historic death are applied to believers who can presently rejoice in that "we have now *received* the reconciliation" (5:11, italics added).

Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." When seen in the surrounding context, the verse indicates that, in light of

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[32] Such will be the subject of the next article in this series, i.e., the doctrine of Irresistible Grace.

[33] There is a textual question as to whether Matt 18:11 was in the original autograph, but see Luke 19:10 for a similar statement.

the fact that God has reconciled the world to Himself by Christ's death (5:19a) and that He has given believers the ministry of reconciliation (i.e., taking the gospel to the world of unbelievers, 5:19b-20), we ought to live lives characterized by justice (righteousness). This is affirmed in the verses immediately following (i.e., 6:1-3) and then by Paul's example of suffering faithfully for Christ's sake (6:4-10). We may conclude that in Christ's becoming sin on our behalf His intention was that we might be forgiven and then that we might have opportunity to live for and serve Him. Such intention does not at all negate the broader intention of God to reconcile the world to Himself through Christ's death. If He did not reconcile the whole world to Himself, how might believers be expected to go forth in a ministry of reconciliation to unbelievers?

Galatians 1:4 speaks of Christ "who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father," but, again, just because there are intentions and ramifications of deliverance from sin and from the present evil age for believers does not argue against the more general and universal understanding of His death. Nothing is proven by the use of this verse. Consequently, that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Gal 3:13) doesn't limit God's intention other than to say that only those who have responded in faith (us) have received its provisional benefits, i.e., that Christ suffered the curse in the place of believers. This does not demonstrate that He didn't do the same for unbelievers, as well.

Ephesians 1:7 says, "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." Again, the simple answer is that using this Scripture fails to exclude everyone from the intention of His redemptive effort. It speaks only of the benefit obtained by those who believe.

So, the argument that Christ's death actually secures the salvation for whom He intended to die is unfounded in Scripture regardless of the misinterpreted proof texts which are offered as support. The conditional aspect of belief in Christ and the subsequent application of His death-benefits by the Spirit are overlooked and/or ignored along with what should be an obvious fact that salvation (regeneration, eternal life) is not "secured" until the condition of personal faith is met. Why is it necessary to assert that Christ's death secures salvation when indeed salvation is not even present until one believes in Him? It is at the time of faith that we look for assurance, not before!

F. Both Repentance and Faith Are Secured

1. The Calvinist Argument Stated

Elwell presents a sixth argument for Limited Atonement:

> Because there are no conditions to be met in order to be saved (i.e., salvation is by grace and not by works, even an act of faith), both repentance and faith are secured for those for whom Christ died. If the design of the atonement were for everyone, then all would receive repentance and faith, but this is clearly false. Therefore, Christ's death could have been intended only for those who will repent and believe, namely, the elect.[34]

The essence of this argument is similar to the argument that the teaching of Universal Redemption leads to Universalism, discussed earlier, and similar answers would apply. It also assumes there are no active human conditions to be met and then equates faith with an act. We must note well that even faith is ruled out as a condition for regeneration in the Calvinistic system. This makes it necessary, in the structural support of that system, to assert the idea that God must *first regenerate* the sinner and *then give* faith and repentance to him, like some commodity.

2. The Argument Negated

Where the argument goes wrong is in the equation of faith with an action or a work. Faith is not a work, but a passive response. Belief is the result of being convinced (notice the passive nature of the words here) that something is true. No one *does* anything when he believes. When one is convinced that the gospel is true and that God is able to perform His promises, he has faith.[35] When we speak of "saving faith" we mean that the Spirit of God has acted in such a gracious way as to produce the conviction that the gospel message is true and that God is able to perform the promises He makes within the body of that message. In regard to repentance, it is indeed an act, and, as Hodges points out, "No text in the New Testament (not even Acts 11:18) makes *any direct connection*

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[34] Elwell, "Atonement," 98-99.

[35] See Rom 4:18-21 for an illustration and definition of faith. Abraham was "fully assured that what He had promised, He was able also to perform."

between repentance and *eternal* life. No text does that. Not so much as one!"[36]

There should, at this point, be no need to stress that no human act (such as repentance) is worthy or meritorious enough to gain one an acceptable position before God. To suggest that, "both repentance and faith are *secured* for those for whom Christ died" is to simply assert a tenet of the Calvinistic system. But an assertion is not a demonstration of truth. To say that all would necessarily receive repentance and faith if Christ's death were intended for everyone is, first, to assume that repentance is a gift of God, and not an active personal *decision* to conform one's lifestyle to God's character and to turn from sin.[37] Second, it fails to recognize that faith is the human enlightenment to the truth of the gospel message (not a commodity given by God) and, as such, is not an act. With the proper understanding of faith and repentance, there is no need to consider them to be gifts. If they were gifts, no one would be held responsible for belief or rejection of the gospel, nor for success or failure in proper living.

G. "WORLD" DOES NOT MEAN EVERYONE IN THE WORLD

1. The Calvinist Argument Stated

Elwell presents a seventh argument for Limited Atonement:

> The passages that speak of Christ's death for "the world" have been misunderstood. The word "world" really means the world of the elect, the world of believers, the church, or all nations.[38]

Steele and Thomas admit that:

> Some passages speak of Christ's dying for "all" men and of His death as saving the "world," yet others speak of His death as being definite in design and of His dying for particular people and securing salvation for them…There are two classes of

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[36] Zane C. Hodges, *Harmony with God: A Fresh Look at Repentance* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 2001), 10. This work is an excellent recent clarification on the doctrine of repentance. See also Hodges' previous work *Absolutely Free!: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* (Dallas and Grand Rapids: Redención Viva and Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 143-63, italics in original.

[37] An active decision is not a condition for salvation, indeed it couldn't be, because man isn't saved by his actions. See Rom 4:2-6; 11:6.

[38] Elwell, "Atonement," 99.

> texts that speak of Christ's saving work in *general terms*: (a) Those containing the word "world"—e.g., John 1:9, 29; 3:16, 17; 4:42; II Corinthians 5:19; I John 2:1, 2; 4:14 and (b) Those containing the word "all"—e.g., Romans 5:18; II Corinthians 5:14, 15; I Timothy 2:4-6; Hebrews 2:9; II Peter 3:9.[39]

In explanation of these universal or general terms involved in these passages, Steel and Thomas argue:

> One reason for the use of these expressions was to correct the false notion that salvation was for the Jew alone. Such phrases as "the world," "all men," "all nations," and "every creature" were used by the New Testament writers to emphatically correct this mistake. These expressions are intended to show that Christ died for all men without distinction (i.e., He died for Jews and Gentiles alike) but they are not intended to indicate that Christ died for all men without exception (i.e., He did not die for the purpose of saving each and every lost sinner).[40]

2. The Argument Negated

This seems to be a rather contrived explanation. Steele and Thomas offer no biblical support that "world" or "all" were intended to be used this way. In fact, the writers were able to express the idea of Jew/Gentile inclusion into God's plan and did so clearly when they wanted to do so (cf. Gal 3:28).

In relation to the intention of the Father and Christ in His death, there are numerous passages that suggest that what He did on the cross was for all men. "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29; cf. John 3:16). John 3:17 clarifies the term "world" by equating the "world" with the one He came into, with the one He did not (at His first advent) come to judge, and with the one which He came to save. The "world" is clearly the entire world of lost men which He could judge if He were so inclined. Jesus, in John 12:47, says that He didn't come to judge this world, but to save it. Elwell adds an Arminian answer to this Calvinist assertion by saying:

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[39] Steele and Thomas, *Romans,* 174.
[40] Ibid.

> The Bible teaches that Christ died for "sinners" (I Tim. 1:15; Rom 5:6-8). The word "sinner" nowhere means "church" or "the elect," but simply all of lost mankind.[41]

The world, i.e., the normal understanding of that term, indicates all mankind. Norman Geisler clarifies the problem by quoting John Owen's *retranslation* of John 3:16 as follows: "God so loved his elect throughout the world, that he gave his Son with the intention, that by him believers might be saved." Geisler comments that this interpretation, "needs no response, simply a sober reminder that God repeatedly exhorts us not to add to or subtract from His words (Deut. 4:2; Prov 30:6; Rev 22:18-19)."[42]

Additionally, there are three grand soteriological themes that indicate the universality of the atonement: First, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also *for the whole world"* (1 John 2:2). John could have said, "for the world" or "for those who would believe," but he said "the *whole* world." A normal reading will lead us to the plain understanding of the all-inclusiveness of Christ's death. Chafer states,

> The meaning of [propitiation] is inexpressibly sweet. It refers to a divinely provided place of meeting…The mercy-seat of the Old Testament is spoken of in Heb. 9:5 as a place of propitiation. There, covering the broken law, was the blood-sprinkled mercy-seat, and there was the Shekinah light which spoke of the presence of God.[43]

To trifle with the clear meaning of this verse for the sake of a theological system seems unthinkable. It also serves to change the "sweetness" of God's grace into bitterness.

Second, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor 5:19). Can it legitimately be asserted that "the world" means less than all humanity? Paul could have easily said "the elect" or "those who believe," but the inspired text simply says "the world." Chafer notes,

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[41] Elwell, "Atonement," 99.

[42] Geisler, *Chosen But Free,* 202, quoting John Owens, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 214.

[43] Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Salvation: A Clear Doctrinal Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1917), 38.

> The world is thus thoroughly changed in its relation to God by the death of His Son. God Himself is not said to be changed; He has thoroughly changed the world in its relation to Himself by the death of Christ. God Himself has undertaken the needed mediation between His own righteous Person and the sinful world.[44]

The sinful world is certainly in view here, and so, the passage says that God does not impute (place to their account) their *trespasses*. God has transferred (imputed) them to the Savior on the cross. Is there a better description of what took place in Jesus' provision of reconciliation than to say that in His death He made peace with God for mankind and, thus, made the world savable?

Third, it was the OT sacrificial system that required blood alone for atonement. "When I see the blood I will pass over you" (Exod 12:13). "Blood makes atonement for the soul" (Lev 17:11). So, Jesus would say, "For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt 26:28).[45] In contrast to His blood being shed for many, 1 Tim 2:6 says that Christ "gave Himself a ransom for all" and the immediate context (1 Tim 2:1-6) qualifies the term "all." It refers not to all the elect, but to "all men" (2:1) and "all who are in authority" (2:2), and indicates that God desires "all men to be saved" (2:4).[46] If "all men" in this verse refers only to all the elect, this would be a tautology, a truism, and would need not be said, because God would know that all the elect would indeed be saved. What would be the point of saying it? The phrase makes sense only if the whole world is meant. Surely this contextual use of "all" here argues against such a restrictive use as "all the elect"!

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[44] Ibid., 35.

[45] Remember, we have just shown that the restrictive use of "many" doesn't necessitate a restriction to only some to the exclusion of others.

[46] Geisler astutely says, "Even if 'all' can and does mean less than literally all men in some passages, it still leaves open the question of what 'all' means in this passage. And there is ample evidence that Paul has reference to the entire human race in 1 Timothy 2:4-6," *Chosen But Free*, 211.

H. "ALL" DOES NOT MEAN EVERYONE.

1. The Calvinist Argument Stated

Elwell presents an eighth argument for Limited Atonement:

> Finally, the passages that say Christ died for all men have also been misunderstood. The word "all" means "all classes" of men, not everyone.[47]

Palmer, for instance, gives the following explanation of the Calvinist view in answer to the Arminian objection that "all" and "world" are universal, general, or all inclusive (as per John 1:29; 4:42; 2 Cor 5:14-15; 1 Tim 2:6; 1 John 2:2).

2. The Argument Negated

The answer to this objection is that often the Bible uses the words *world* or *all* in a restricted, limited sense. They must always be interpreted in their context and in light of the rest of Scripture. We must do this in any normal reading. For example, if a newspaper should report that a ship was sunk, but all were rescued, it is obvious that it means that all that were on the ship were rescued, and not all that are in the world.[48]

The problem is that Palmer has not demonstrated, by giving any biblical context regarding the passages in question, that "all" or "world" *should* be used in such a restrictive way. He has only given an illustration of how we *might* speak.

V. AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE VARIOUS VIEWS OF LIMITED ATONEMENT

Certainly the Calvinist and Arminian doctrines of Jesus' atonement are contradictory. Enns sets forth the problem with Calvinism:

> Many Calvinists emphasize that although the atonement is particular, Christ died only for the elect, yet the offer of the gospel is for everyone. How both of these facts can be true is paradoxical—a mystery that cannot be explained; it is one of many "irreconcilable" opposites of Scripture. God's thoughts and ways are not man's thoughts and ways. He has always been faithful and true. Therefore we must trust Him where our

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[47] Elwell, "Atonement," 99.

[48] Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 52, italics in original.

> philosophical efforts to harmonize His mysteries are utterly confounded.[49]

So what is the answer? Where is the correct understanding of the scriptural teaching in the matter? Having given the basic tenets on the subject of the divine intent for Christ's death by both Calvinism and Arminianism above, one may conclude, on the basis of a normal reading of Scripture, that Jesus' death was a sufficient provision for all men. His intent was to be the Savior of the world of sinful men and His death on the cross was sufficient to redeem or pay a sufficient (read, "supreme") price as payment for human sin and to reconcile (make savable) the world to Himself. Only when bound by a theological system which demands adherence to unfounded tenets such as the teaching of total inability to believe in Christ for eternal life (called by Calvinists "total depravity") and the teaching of *unconditional election* (based on the idea that God's past choice of certain sinners is done apart from His eternal nature, omniscience, and infallible knowledge) is one bound to follow the idea that Christ died only for a select few to the exclusion of others.

Additionally, whereas the Scripture may indeed restrict who will *benefit* from Christ's death, it does not equate Christ's death with the application of those benefits by the Holy Spirit and, thus, does not teach that Christ's death secures salvation for anyone. There is no contradiction in the assertion that Christ's death was sufficient to bear the sins of the world and, yet, be efficient in a saving way, only for those who believe in Him for eternal life. Simply, that Scripture uses restrictive language at places in discussing benefits to the church, Israel, the sheep, the elect, etc., doesn't rule against the other teaching that His death is offered for the broader spectrum of the entire world of mankind. What He provisionally did for everyone (the large, all inclusive group), He also did for everyone who would believe (the smaller, selective, restricted group). The *application* of the universal provision of Christ's death by the ministry of the Holy Spirit during the course of anyone's individual life need not be equated with the cross itself. Christ's death for all provides the way of salvation, but the Holy Spirit is the One who actually applies Christ's work and, thus, secures salvation for each person who believes the gospel. Douty succinctly states, "It is strongly asserted by Limited Atonement men that *the cross saves*, as though we do not as thoroughly believe the same. Indeed, the cross saves, and in the same sense in which

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[49] Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*, 483.

a remedy cures."[50] There need be no contradiction at all as long as there is no imposing theological system demanding it.

Further, since no passage in the Bible teaches that God's intent for Christ's death was *only* for the elect, there is no ground for asserting that God's purpose is frustrated. The theological system that speculates and imposes such fabricated intention upon us is frustrated.

God is not unfair in sending someone to hell if Christ died for that person as a member of humanity and if that person does not appropriate God's forgiveness by means of faith. Since Jesus' death does not secure one's salvation (for such is not taught in the Bible) and since faith in Christ is the necessary condition to secure (and to be assured of) one's salvation, the charge that double jeopardy is involved is simply a rhetorical argument without biblical foundation. If the substitutionary sacrifice was not appropriated, then the pardon (and Christ's death, the basis for the pardon) is ineffective. Grace that is rejected is not effectual.

That Unlimited Atonement leads to Universalism is a "straw-man" argument because, again, the avenue for salvation is faith. The object of faith is the finished work of Christ (the Atonement). If there is no faith in Christ, God's provision is to no avail. Universalism is not at all a logical outcome of the Unlimited Atonement position. Christ died to make salvation *possible*, but not to the exclusion of the necessity of personal faith in Him. When faith is present, the human appropriation and the Spirit's application of His provisional death is what effectually saves.

Since repentance is an act, a decision to get right with God, it is ineffectual in obtaining the gift of eternal life. Since faith is a human response to the gospel message and an assurance that it is true, faith is not some commodity given by God. Faith is within the sinner by the Spirit as He effectively convicts and convinces the sinner who hears the gospel. Faith is not secured by Christ's death. No Scripture teaches such a thing.

To say that universalistic terms like "world" and "all" used by Scripture writers mean a restricted group is an imposition of the Calvinistic theological system onto the text of Scripture. It seems correct, based on the normal reading of Scripture, to throw off the teaching of Limited Atonement (as well as the Calvinistic system which teaches it) in favor of a normal hermeneutic.

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[50] Norman F. Douty, *The Death of Christ: A Treatise which Considers the Question: "Did Christ Die Only for the Elect?"* (Irving, TX: Williams & Watrous Publishing Co., 1978), 54, italics in original.

We may conclude that God's intent in the death of Christ was a provisional payment and a substitution for God's wrath on the world of sinful men. It was meant to provide the way (cf. John 14:6) for eternal life through His death in place of every man conditioned solely upon personal belief in Christ. When the truth is so simple, why convolute it with a complicated system?

GRACE IN THE ARTS:

HERMAN MELVILLE: AN AUTHOR IN THE ANGST OF AMBIGUITY

JAMES A. TOWNSEND
Elgin, Illinois

I. INTRODUCTION

If one were to poll high school and college literature teachers for a Top Ten list among novels in the English-speaking world, hardly any such list would be complete without Herman Melville's classic *Moby-Dick*, which initially was pretty much a failure in terms of sales ratings.

Lawrance Thompson of Princeton University authored a book entitled *Melville's Quarrel with God*. Melville's quarrel eventuated in *Moby-Dick.* Hardly one in ten thousand modern readers would ever think to call *Moby-Dick* a "wicked book," yet Melville himself called it that. If we take his assessment at face value, then we see Melville's quest to find the meaning of the universe as analogous to Captain Ahab's quest to find the great white whale.

Right after Melville penned *Moby-Dick*, he wrote another novel entitled *Pierre: or the Ambiguities*. Certainly angst and ambiguity are rife in *Moby-Dick*, as demonstrated by the wide variety of interpretations later literary analysts have foisted upon the symbolism of Melville's masterwork. Also, Melville's friend, Nathaniel Hawthorne, indicated in a famous quote that Melville was tortured by the ambiguity of not knowing where he stood regarding the question of belief in God.

Why did Melville have a running argument (as Lawrance Thompson indicated) with God? The empirical data of Melville's own life reveals that he had a whale of a time in confronting the ominous, overwhelming, unwinnable battle against circumstances, the universe, and/or God. In Herman's youth his father went bankrupt, insane, and then died. Also the boy Melville was unsuccessful at a miscellany of jobs. Later, one of Melville's sons committed suicide and the younger one died of TB (as did Herman's brother) and Melville himself struggled against a siege of works, illnesses, and injuries. And his magnum opus (*Moby-Dick*) was a financial flop. Everywhere Melville turned the universe's woodwork

seemed to have splinters. Life seemed but a litany of lamentations. What was this massive, mysterious, seemingly malignant force Melville had to contend with? If the all-predestinating God of his Calvinistic youth was the animus behind all these adversities, then Melville had a bone to pick with this defiant deity. Like Captain Ahab in his monomaniacal scavenger hunt for the white whale, Melville was drawn to, yet defied by, this anything-but-cooperative, ever-thwarting deity. His questions and his quest produced one of the world's greatest novels, yet his empirical search after God only left him in ambiguity and angst.

II. LITERARY LAURELS

Herman Melville assuredly teeters near the top in ranking among American writers, even if *Moby-Dick* had been the only novel he ever wrote. Darrel Abel announced that Melville's "is the most crucial achievement in American literature…at the most critical and decisive time in our history."[1] *Moby-Dick* was published in 1851, the kickoff date of America's Civil War. Also Nathaniel Hawthorne published *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850 and *The House of Seven Gables* in 1851. Additionally Henry David Thoreau issued *Walden* in 1854, and Walt Whitman published *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, causing Edwin Miller to label this productive period "the greatest decade in American literary history."[2] And of those five titles just cited, Melville's is certainly the greatest.

Melville's importance quickly went under a cloud cover toward the end of his life. Nevertheless, since 1963 "there have been more scholarly studies of Melville [done] than any other American author."[3] This factor alone is demonstrative of Melville's merit in the literary firmament.

III. A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Herman Melville's mother was the "only daughter of 'the richest man in Albany,' the respected…General Peter Gansevoort, hero...during the American Revolution."[4] It is obvious that his mother's name, Maria Gansevoort, is reproduced in the first three letters of the name Mary and

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[1] Darrel Abel, *American Literature,* Vol. 2 (Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1963), 366.

[2] Edwin H. Miller, *Melville,* Vol. 1 (New York: Geroge Braziller, Inc., 1975), 23.

[3] Tyrus Hillway, *Herman Melville* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979), 9.

[4] Ibid., 29.

the first letter of the last name of Mary Glendinning in Melville's book *Pierre*. The character Mary Glendinning (whom scholars agree is unquestionably a partial portrait of Melville's mother) is haughty and controlling of her son.

Melville's father, Allan, seems to have been somewhat like Charles Dickens' Mr. Micawber when it came to financial reliability—forever borrowing. In 1830 he went bankrupt, in the aftermath he went insane, and in 1832 he died. This left Melville's mother a widow with eight children to raise. She must've felt like a lone sailor steering her ship against overwhelming odds, as if she were up against a great white whale.

Within the historical omnibus of Melville's ancestry were a number of Presbyterian ministers. His mother had grown up within the context of Dutch Reformed Calvinism. His father's father was educated at Princeton University to become a Calvinist minister, but he balked at rigorous Calvinism there and settled for Unitarianism instead. It is obvious from the profusion of biblical quotation and allusion in his writings that the young Melville was steeped in the early study of Scripture. In fact, Nathalia Wright claims: "On average, every seventh page of [Melville's] prose has some biblical allusion."[5] More explicitly, *Moby-Dick* has 250 biblical references and *Billy Budd* about 100."[6]

Repeatedly in his younger years Melville encountered a universe that seemed to bristle toward him with porcupine quills. His father had failed financially, psychologically, and then physically when Herman was a pre-teen. This debt and death must've been a devastating blow to the struggling family. Undoubtedly it was aggravated by the elevated economic expectations derived from his mother's heritage. Five years later (in 1837) Herman's brother's business also failed. Melville must have felt like he was always up against something vastly greater than his capability could handle, and no matter how determined a person might be, an overwhelming world would win out. Within his psyche was already being formed an unremitting opponent, which would eventuate in the form of a great white whale.

Herman tried his hand at being a bank clerk, sales person, farmhand, and school teacher without any significant success from 1832 to 1837. He never attended college.

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[5] Nathalia Wright, *Melville's Use of the Bible* (New York: Octagon, 1969), 30.

[6] Ibid.

Then finally the ominous ocean came calling him. His matriculation as a sea hand would constitute, as he pithily put it, "my Yale College and my Harvard."[7] First he was a cabin boy on the St. Lawrence in 1839 and was shocked by the sailors' morals. In 1841 he sailed for the South Seas aboard the whaler called the Acushnet, where he eventually jumped ship with Richard Tobias Greene and lived for a month among cannibals. In 1842 he escaped on board an Australian trading ship where the crew mutinied, so he abandoned ship in Tahiti. Next, he boarded another whaler for Hawaii, enlisting as a sailor in Honolulu on the frigate United States in 1842, which eventually brought him back to Boston in 1844. Naturally all these adventures became grist for the mill of one who had ink circulating in his blood stream.

In the mid-1840s Melville launched a new career, using his writing pen as a steersman's helm. Melville (amazingly) "published ten works of fiction in eleven years," including one world-class novel.[8] His first five works all took the form of "fictionalized autobiography."[9] Melville's eight major novels were *Typee* (1846), *Omoo* (1847), *Mardi* (1849), *Redburn* (1849), *White-Jacket* (1850), *Moby-Dick* (1851), *Pierre* (1852), and *Israel Potter* (1855).

In 1847 Melville got married, and in 1850 he met his much-admired authorial friend Nathaniel Hawthorne. However, life (or God) kept thwarting his happiness, for 1) Hawthorne moved away (which seemed to Melville like desertion); 2) in 1853 a fire destroyed his book plates; and 3) in 1867 his son Malcolm committed suicide at age 18. Also 4) in 1867 his wife and her minister sought to declare Melville insane; as well as 5) he underwent an assortment of injuries and illnesses inflicted upon him. Finally, 6) in 1886 his son Stanwix died of tuberculosis at age 35.

From 1866 onward until official retirement Melville served as a paid customs inspector in New York City for nineteen years. As in the case of Thomas Hardy, the literary critics and a misunderstanding reading public drove Herman Melville from his writing desk into relative obscurity during what still might have been highly productive years for one of the world's great novelists.

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[7] Abel, *American Literature,* Vol. 2, 371.

[8] Elizabeth Hardwick, *Herman Melville* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2000), 7.

[9] Hyatt H. Waggoner, "MELVILLE, Herman," in *Encyclopedia of American Biography,* ed. John A. Garraty (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974), 751.

IV. MELVILLE'S MAJOR BOOKS

All five of Melville's parade of early novels (from 1846-1850) were semi-autobiographical sea-stories. His first, *Typee* (1846), was sensationalist stuff, announcing himself as one who'd lived among cannibals! This novel reflected upon Melville's second stint as a seaman (in 1842).

Despite the fact that Melville declared *Typee* to contain "the unvarnished truth," Melville's stint in the Marquesas Islands was actually four weeks rather than the novel's fictionalized four months.[10] Also, despite the reality that the narrator settled temporarily among cannibals, he represents the scene as a paradise island.

One of the early tipoffs to Melville's opposition to orthodoxy is seen in his anti-missionary animus. The following statement by Melville is not in itself condemnatory, yet throughout the novel runs an undertone and numerous barbs are launched about the bad side-effects of Christian missions. Melville opined:

> Better will it be for [the islanders] for ever to remain the happy and innocent heathens and barbarians that they now are, than, like the wretched inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands, to enjoy the mere name of Christians without experiencing any of the vital operations of true religion, whilst at the same time, they are made the victims of the worst vices and evils of civilized life.[11]

It is undeniable, of course, that the in bringing of before-unknown diseases is not a benefice, yet Melville seems to lump missions in together with, say, the drunkeness-inducing liquors of so-called "civilized" Westerners. Furthermore, "better" being "happy and innocent heathens and barbarians" is not necessarily the polar opposite to mere *nominal* Christianity. Also any Christian critic would wish to ask someone who only spent four weeks among cannibals (and escaped with his head!), are "heathens" actually and biblically "happy and innocent"?

Melville did grudgingly acknowledge (in the novel's next chapter): "against the cause of missions in the abstract no Christian can possibly be opposed; it is in truth a just and holy cause."[12] Yet he raised the alarm against its abuses. And, beside Melville's glowing account of these

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[10] Abel, *American Literature,* Vol. 2, 372.

[11] Herman Melville, *Typee, Omoo, Mardi* (New York: The Library of America, 1982), 215.

[12] Ibid., 233.

uncivilized islanders, "Melville saw 'white civilized man' as 'the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth,'" so with tongue-in-cheek he suggested that "four or five Marquesan islanders sent to the United States as missionaries might be quite as useful as an equal number of Americans dispatched to the islands in a similar capacity."[13]

Tyrus Hillway stated that *Omoo*, Melville's second novel, "must have been during his lifetime the most widely read of all his books."[14] *Omoo* took up where *Typee* left off. Tahiti, to which the narrator had escaped in *Omoo*, "seems a fairy world, all fresh...from the hand of the Creator" like "the Garden of Eden" and "nominally many of these people are now Christians."[15] Though Melville viewed the Tahitians as constitutionally indisposed to the Christian gospel, he did acknowledge that "the greatest achievement" of Western Christian missions proved to be that "they have translated the entire Bible into the language of the island."[16]

Melville properly excoriated the missionaries he saw on the ground of racism. He observed that "the two races are kept as far apart as possible from associating; the avowed reason being to preserve the young whites from moral contamination."[17] The telltale adjective "avowed" in the preceding sentence informs us that Melville strongly suspected a more covert reason. In the next paragraph he added, "They went even further at the Sandwich Islands, where a few years ago a playground for the children of the missionaries was enclosed with a fence many feet high, the more effectually to exclude the wicked little Hawaiians."[18]

In a gut-wrenching exposé Melville tugs at the readers' heart-strings as he relates the following incident:

> Distracted with their sufferings, [the islanders] brought forth their sick before the missionaries, when they were preaching, and cried out, "Lies, lies! You tell us of salvation, and behold, we are dying. We want no other salvation than to live in this world. Where are there any saved through your speech?

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[13] Edward Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1952), 61.

[14] Hillway, *Herman Melville,* 71.

[15] Melville, *Typee, Omoo, Mardi,* 391, 393-94.

[16] Ibid, 511.

[17] Ibid., 514.

[18] Ibid.

> Pomaree is dead; and we are all dying with your cursed diseases. When will you give over?"[19]

It is, of course, hard to argue with such an emotionally laden scenario. Yet, despite Melville's stacking the deck emotionally, the question must still be raised: is there an eternity and (if so) how will one be prepared to face it?

Mardi was Melville's third South Seas-oriented book. *Mardi* is conspicuously more allegorical than Melville's two previous novels. Darrell Abel asserted: "*Mardi* is an allegory of the quest of the human mind for the meaning of life—for beauty, happiness, truth, virtue."[20] The characters are allegorical embodiments. Babbalanja stands for philosophy, Yoomy for poetry, and Mardi for the human soul. Taji and the girl Yillah visit the utopia of Serenia "where all things are regulated with the teachings of Alma (Christ)."[21] Tyrus Hillway summarized the novel's heart:

> All the searchers in the party, excepting Taji, finally give up the pursuit and find safe harbor at Serenia, the island of Christian love (or primitive Christianity), whose inhabitants have set aside their desire to know the secrets of God and are satisfied to live together peacefully under the Golden Rule.[22]

Yet Melville never really relinquished the quest himself.

Melville's fourth novel was *Redburn*. Darrel Abel offered the condensed summary: "*Redburn* is a boy's first voyage as a sailor; its theme is initiation into evil."[23] Melville's lead character mirrored its author in *Redburn* when he wrote: "Cold, bitter cold as December…seemed the world to me; there is no misanthrope like a boy disappointed; and such was I, with the warm soul of me flogged out by adversity."[24]

There is undoubtedly symbolical significance in the fact that the neophyte sailor begins his voyage on Sunday, reading a ponderous passage from the Bible, and "it was a mystery that no one could explain, not even a parson…"[25] This novel's opening parallels the opening of

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[19] Ibid., 518.

[20] Abel, *American Literature,* Vol. 2, 380.

[21] Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel,* 66.

[22] Hillway, *Herman Melville,* 80.

[23] Abel, *American Literature,* Vol. 2, 387.

[24] Hardwick, *Herman Melville,* 20-21.

[25] Herman Melville, *Redburn* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 94-95.

Moby-Dick—with a younger sailor setting sail with the Bible reverberating in his mind's ears and enshrouded in mystery.

White-Jacket was Melville's fifth novel of ponderous length—all five of them written in a span of five years (1846-1850). Darrel Abel indicated that *White-Jacket* "is perhaps more documentary than any other book of Melville's…"[26]

The story of *White-Jacket* became the preface or corridor to the white whale. Also in 1850 Melville met his greatest of friends, Nathaniel Hawthorne. Melville was lyrical in his praise of Hawthorne. In reviewing Hawthorne's work, Melville referred to the "great power of blackness [or depth] in him."[27] While speaking of the ocean-depth of "blackness" in Hawthorne in 1850, Melville was writing of the whiteness of the unfathomable whale (to be published in 1851).

Bruce Lockerbie called *Moby-Dick* "a very great Christian novel."[28] However, Melville was not a Christian according to literary expert Harold Bloom, so *Moby-Dick* really can't be labeled a "Christian novel," though it may be of compelling interest to many Christians.[29] "When W. Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) was asked to select the ten greatest novels ever written, he chose...[only] one American [novel, which was] *Moby-Dick*."[30] Edward Wagenknecht paid *Moby-Dick* the ultimate compliment when he claimed that "the book is great enough to create its own category..."[31] George Steiner declared: "Nowhere, in language, did the nineteenth century come nearer the great mirror of tragedy than in *Moby-Dick* and *The Brothers Karamazov*."[32]

An ongoing jousting match has been waged by critics over the symbolic meaning in *Moby-Dick*. Wagenknecht alleged: "The book has been interpreted as a parable of man's struggle against nature, against evil, against 'the accidental malice of the universe,' and even against God."[33]

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[26] Abel, *American Literature,* Vol. 2, 391.

[27] Ibid., 397.

[28] Bruce Lockerbie, "The Greatest Sermon in Literature," *Christianity Today* (November 8, 1963), 9ff.

[29] Harold Bloom, *How To Read and Why* (New York: Scribner, 2000), 237.

[30] David L. Larsen, *The Company of the Creative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1999), 382.

[31] Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel,* 68.

[32] George Steiner, *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959), 136.

[33] Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel,* 66.

Tyrus Hillway proposed that both *Mardi* and *Moby-Dick* handle "essentially the same philosophical problem: the search for a true explanation of man's relationship to God in the universe."[34] Harold Bloom dogmatized: "the white whale is not God, nor even God's surrogate…you cannot deny the God of this world…any triumph over your innermost self."[35]

Despite Bloom's disclaimer, Melville forever thrashed about (like the agnostic Thomas Hardy) against God or whatever-was-out-there defying his smooth sailing on life's seas. Melville was raised within the confines of belief in an all-sovereign, all-encompassingly decreeing Calvinistic God, yet his life was regularly pocked with tragedy—the family bankruptcy, his father's insanity and death, his mother's financial pinchedness, his own two sons' early and untimely deaths, etc. There always seemed to be someone or something ominously and oppressively opposed to Melville's welfare. So, if God was all-controlling and this world was forever menacing, would it not make sense to take on this defiant, ever-squelching power?

Ishmael and Captain Ahab seem to be the Jekyll and Hyde aspects of Melville—one person objectively observing and surviving and the other one defying what is ominous and overwhelming. Tyrus Hillway announced: "Ahab is—as Melville once...described...Hawthorne—'a man who...declares himself a sovereign nature (in himself) amid the powers of heaven, hell and earth.'"[36] After he finished writing *Moby-Dick* Melville admitted to Hawthorne: "I have written a wicked book and feel spotless as a lamb."[37] By today's trashy standards of sexual promiscuity, stale profanity, and savage brutality, few readers would have thought *Moby-Dick* "a wicked book." Nevertheless, through the aperture of the allegorical Ahab, Melville has—as it were—attacked what is more massive and mysterious and (to him) malignant than himself. Who can survive such an onslaught?

Certainly much of the character-naming within the novel is biblically borrowed. Ishmael is the outcast, onlooker, and survivor (as in Scripture). Ahab is obviously borrowed from the name of Israel's famous villainous king. Elijah is the prophet who warns of Ahab.

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[34] Hillway, *Herman Melville,* 83.
[35] Harold Bloom, *Ahab* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991), 5.
[36] Hillway, *Herman Melville,* 89.
[37] Ibid., 92.

Father Mapple's opening sermon on Jonah has been called "the greatest sermon in fiction."[38] The novel is pimentoed with biblical allusions such as "the angel Gabriel," "the blackness of darkness and the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing," "thou young Hittite," "the Anak of the tribe," "Belshazzar's awful writing," "Rachel weeping for her children," etc. Melville's mind was marinated in the characters and content of Scripture.

If Melville aggravated conservative readers with his "wicked book" of *Moby-Dick*, he further alienated them with still more abrasive topics in his seventh novel, *Pierre*. *Pierre* delves into "such controversial matters as incest, suicide, the Oedipal theme, and the love triangle."[39] Pierre, engaged to Lucy Tartan, is the son of the haughty Mary Glendenning (modeled after Melville's mother, Maria Gansevoort). He is shocked to learn that he has a half-sister (by his father and a French mistress) named Isabel. Pierre relinquishes Lucy and pretends to marry Isabel so his mother disowns him. Pierre murders his cousin. Lucy dies out of shock. He is sexually attracted to his half-sister. They end up ingesting poison and dying. Naturally Melville got a public backlash from this shocker. (One marvels that such a harum-scarum classic with a risque theme has not been transmitted into a modern movie!)

Novel number eight, *Israel Potter*, is "the least regarded of Melville's books…"[40] Just as Redburn's voyage launched on Sunday and Ishmael's voyage (in *Moby-Dick*) got underway on Christmas Day, so Israel Potter made his getaway while his family was at church on Sunday. (In other words, in three of his novels it was as if Melville was playing hooky from Christianity, launching into a wider world.) The book features the historical John Paul Jones, and Israel's adventures finally wind him up back in America on the Fourth of July.

Darrel Abel noted that after Melville's "*Piazza Tales* in 1856, he published only one more fictional work before he lapsed into silent obscurity of almost forty years…"[41]

Melville could never quite exorcise Christianity and his quest for meaning from his system, for in 1856 he made a trip to the Holy Land. The long-range authorial outcome of that trip was his 18,000-plus line

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[38] Lockerbie, "The Greatest Sermon in Fiction," 9ff.

[39] Waggoner, "MELVILLE, Herman," in *Encyclopedia of American Biography,* 750.

[40] Abel, *American Literature,* 423.

[41] Ibid., 427.

poem, *Clarel*. The term *Clarel* is undoubtedly from the Latin root for "clear," but if this work was to "clear" things up finally for Melville, it fell short of the mark. Clarel, a theological student, "is, like his author, a person of religious disposition who lacks religious faith..."[42] *Clarel* involves a group of Holy Landers, such as Derwent (a liberal Anglican clergyman), Ungar (a Roman Catholic), Margoth (representing science), Nehemiah (a fanatical Bible conservative who's looking for Christ's imminent return and passing out tracts), Vine (partially modeled upon Hawthorne who is a source of invigoration), etc. The editor of one edition of *Clarel* commented: "Although questions of belief continue throughout the poem,…the inner movement defined by Clarel's experience is away from theology towards a kind of pragmatic humanism, or speculative psychology."[43] The same editor concluded: "The loss of faith is the basic assumed fact of the poem, and its largest problem is how to endure the overwhelming sense of a shattered vision."[44]

Melville's *Billy Budd* was Melville's shorter finale. It is heavily sculpted by a Christ-theme. Billy Budd is the innocent figure, loved by his father-figure (Captain Vere, with a name carrying the Latinate form of "truth" or "verity"). Billy is not spared death by this just father figure who blesses the captain with his very last words. As Tyrus Hillway said, "Within the act of [Billy Budd's] sacrifice, a symbol of expiation for all the sins of mankind, burns the spark of hope for eventual moral regeneration."[45] Hence, even here it seems as if the Christ-figure or best-loved character (Billy) got a raw deal, even as Melville forever seemed to have life down on him. Billy "looked like one impaled" and his expression was "as a crucifixion to behold," the narrator of *Billy Budd* informs us.[46]

When Billy Budd utters his climactic line ("God bless Captain Vere") before death, it is almost as if Melville is reversing Christ's "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Instead, the seemingly innocent human (Billy) is blessing (or forgiving) the unbending God-figure (Captain Vere). For Melville it's as if the too-staunch God needed forgiving (rather than sinning humanity needing forgiveness).

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[42] Ibid., 439.

[43] Herman Melville, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage in the Holy Land,* ed. Walter E. Bezanson (New York: Hendricks House, Inc., 1960), lxix.

[44] Ibid., cix.

[45] Hillway, *Herman Melville,* 141.

[46] Herman Melville, *Complete Shorter Fiction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 449-50.

Melville also wrote a significant amount of poetry, and "in the last poem of *John Marr*…Melville offered his mature conclusion about man's fate," namely, that "the universe is an order of necessity inscrutable to man."[47] This conclusion is a seamless garment with the outraged younger Melville who'd been bombarded by "the slings of outrageous fortune" (as Shakespeare had it).

V. MELVILLE'S THEOLOGY

In seeking to encapsulate Melville's overall theological framework, certain distinctions must be clarified at the outset (which Melville does not necessarily clarify in his novels). In the Melville corpus there are at least three types of theological affirmations and allusions: 1) those enunciated through his characters and narrators which are merely accurate summations of what individuals of one given persuasion would believe; 2) similar statements by characters which are a mask for Melville's own views; and 3) outside-his-novels theological reflections (such as in his letters) by Melville (which, naturally, are most authentically Melvillian in terms of personalized belief). Therefore, much of the theological material marshaled below from his novels will fall into the first of the three categories named above rather than betray Melville's own private convictions.

A. THE BIBLE

Nathalia Wright's *Melville's Use of the Bible* is the classic locus for researchers on this subject. The Bible's plots, people, and passages were intricately interwoven into the fabric of Melville's thought-texture. While Melville may have felt like Jacob wrestling with the angel of his Calvinistic upbringing, he owed to that circulation of Bible background in his bloodstream an immense debt in terms of his own future literary output.

In Melville's massive poem *Clarel* the Anglican character Derwent urges:

> "The Scriptures–drama, precept fine;
> Verse and philosophy divine,

[47] Abel, *American Literature,* 444.

> All best. Believe again, O son,
> God's revelation, Holy Writ…"[48]

Here (in the quote) is a kind of inbuilt question: will one accept "the Scriptures" as the "best" amalgam of literature's literary genres, or as "God's revelation" and "Holy Writ"?

That Melville did not elevate Scripture to a status summited above other inspiring writings is seen in a letter in 1849 written to a literary friend, Evert Duyckinck: "Dolt and ass that I am, I have lived more than 29 years, and until a few days ago [I] never made close acquaintance with the divine William [that is, Shakespeare]. Ah, he's full of sermons-on-the-mount, and gentle…almost as Jesus. I take such men to be inspired…"[49] Such a statement seems to put Scripture and Shakespeare on the same level, if both are to be called "inspired." (Evangelicals would distinguish between "inspired" and "inspiring" literature, for some of Scripture is *uninspiring* though it is all *inspired*.) Melville also wrote to Hawthorne in 1851: "Knowing you persuades me more than the Bible of our immortality."[50] Such a comment inadvertently shows that Melville placed human experience above biblical revelation. Once a person moves away from the rock of biblical revelation, one is left to an up-for-grabs philosophy of life.

B. GOD

All in all, Melville seemed to be a theist, although there is considerable ambiguity about his stance. Tyrus Hillway said: "To Melville [an] atheistic image [of the world] looked like a cadaver…Melville's intellectual state may be described as a tentatively optimistic skepticism."[51] In another place Hillway states: "…in his flight from religious faith, [Melville] went as far as tentative agnosticism."[52]

In November of 1856 Melville met Henry Arthur Bright (1830–1884) at Hawthorne's, and "being an ardent Unitarian [Bright] took [Melville] to the Unitarian Church [at] Horsford…"[53] After Melville wrote in 1891 about Billy Budd dying, he died in the same year.

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[48] Melville, *Clarel,* 369.

[49] *The Letters of Herman Melville,* eds. Merrell R. Davis and William H. Gilman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1960), 77.

[50] Ibid., 143.

[51] Hillway, *Herman Melville,* 144.

[52] Ibid., 129.

[53] *The Letters of Herman Melville,* 186.

Reverend Theodore Williams of All Souls [Unitarian] Church was the officiating minister.

In yet another more figurative mood, Melville wrote admiringly to and of Hawthorne:

> I felt pantheistic then—your heart beat in my ribs and mine in yours, and both in God's.
>
> …I feel that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the [Last] Supper, and that we are the pieces. Hence this infinite fraternity of feeling.[54]

Melville's eulogistic and emotional surge toward Hawthorne (in the first sentence quoted above) is reminiscent of what theologians call interpenetration. (Interpenetration refers to God the Son's intimate language of "I in You" and "You in Me" with reference to God the Father.)

Whether Melville can be pinned down to being labeled a theist, pantheist, agnostic or whatever with reference to God, the literary analysts are in little doubt that Melville engaged in a lifelong conflict with reference to the idea of God itself. (In fact, Melville epitomizes the age-old question: if God is all-good and all-powerful, why do I experience so much evil?) Lawrance Thompson of Princeton University held that Melville "was obsessed with one theme: God is to blame for creating an unjust world."[55] Thompson accused Melville of being "an inverted transcendentalist" who "needed a scapegoat," so "he spent his life…sneering at God, accusing God…blaming God…"[56]

Despite Melville's ongoing God-conflict, he seemed to speak positively on a number of occasions about God in the role of Creator and tended to be negative about Darwinianism. David Larsen claimed that Melville "was thoroughly disgusted with the radical ideas trumpeted by Charles Darwin (1809–1882), Karl Marx (1818–1874), Ernst Renan (1823–1892), and David Strauss (1808–1874)," all of whom were his contemporaries.[57]

In *White-Jacket* Melville wrote picturesquely,

> We mortals are all on board a fast-sailing, never-sinking world-frigate, of which God was the shipwright, and she is but

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[54] Ibid., 142.

[55] Lawrance Thompson, *Readings on Herman Melville* (San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, 1997), 55.

[56] Ibid., 53, 56.

[57] Larsen, *The Company of the Creative,* 383.

> one craft in a Milky-Way fleet, of which God is the Lord High Admiral [and while] our last destination remains a secret to ourselves…yet our final haven was predestinated 'ere we slipped from the stocks at Creation.[58]

In the same novel Melville speaks of one human in "this image of his Creator."[59] If Melville were a Unitarian theist, he could still hold to the doctrine of a Creator. Laurie Robertson-Lorant indicated that during Melville's later years "he joined All Soul's Unitarian Church, which had become notorious when its pastor, Horatio Alger, was dismissed for molesting young boys."[60] Other quotations from Melville appear to endorse belief in a Creator.

In *Redburn* the Melvillian narrator remarked that though some sailors run riot, "we feel and we know that God is the true Father of all, and that none of his children are without his care."[61] In *Mardi* he says: "All things form but one whole; the universe a Judea, and God Jehovah its head."[62]

Some of God's attributes are highlighted in the various novels. In *Moby-Dick* in reference to humanity's "august dignity," the narrator indicates that it "radiates without end from God; Himself. The great God absolute!...His omnipresence, our divine equality!"[63] Also in *Moby-Dick* Melville alludes to "the unearthly conceit that *Moby-Dick* was ubiquitous [or omnipresent as to space]" and "not only ubiquitous, but immortal (for immortality is but ubiquity in time)…"[64]

However, despite having spoken earlier of God's care for all people, the narrator of *Moby-Dick* also announces: "Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright," and the whiteness of the whale is the "symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's deity."[65]

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[58] Hillway, *Herman Melville,* 77.

[59] Herman Melville, *Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby-Dick* (New York: The Library of America, 1983), 496.

[60] Laurie Robertson-Lorant, *Melville: A Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1996), 510.

[61] Melville, *Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby-Dick,* 154.

[62] Melville, *Typee, Omoo, Mardi,* 673.

[63] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or the Whale* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1996), 121-22.

[64] Ibid., 192-93.

[65] Ibid., 206-207.

Subsumed under the doctrinal category of theology proper is the biblical doctrine of predestination. Because Melville grew up within a Calvinistic church, naturally he comments upon this teaching. No doubt Melville autobiographically relates his own early experience when (through the mouth of Ishmael) he speaks of being "born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church."[66]

In *Mardi* Babbalanja sounds something like a South Seas philosophy professor when he asserts:

> Confound not [what is] distinct. Fatalism presumes express and irrevocable edicts of heaven concerning particular events. Whereas, Necessity holds that all events are naturally linked, and inevitably follow each other, without providential interposition, though by the eternal letting of Providence.[67]

Indeed, Babbalanja sounds like a South Seas John Calvin in saying that

> in times past the future was foreknown of Oro; hence, in times past the future must have been foreordained. But in all things Oro is immutable. Wherefore our own future is foreknown and foreordained.[68]

In his ultra-long poem *Clarel* he wrote:

> The master ever spurned at fate,
> Calvin's or Zeno's. Always still
> Man-like he stood by man's free will
> And power to effect each thing he would,
> Did reason but pronounce it good.[69]

Three vital observations emerge through this poetic spokesperson: 1) Calvinism seems to be categorized as one form of fatalism; 2) to be authentically human seems to be in possession of "free will;" and 3) "free will" needs to operate within the framework of "reason" if what humans do is to turn out "good."

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[66] Ibid., 55.
[67] Melville, *Typee, Omoo, Mardi,* 1081.
[68] Ibid., 1082-83.
[69] Melville, *Clarel,* 120.

In the same poem we read:

> …in old Gnostic page blurred,
> Jehovah was construed to be
> Author of evil, yea, its god;
> and Christ divine his contrary:
> A god was held against a god,
> But Christ revered alone…[70]

In other words, in ancient Gnosticism Jehovah was pitted against Christ, and Jehovah was regarded as the "Author of evil," making God the predestinator and creator of every evil.

In the quest after the white whale, Captain Ahab dogmatizes to Starbuck: "This whole act's immutably decreed."[71] In the next chapter *Moby-Dick* is said to have a "predestinating head."[72] In a line in one of Melville's poems he speaks of "code corroborating Calvin's creed."[73] Thus, in both poetry and novel it is apparent that the later Melville can never quite escape the tormenting whale of Calvinism fostered in and foisted upon the earlier Melville's upbringing.

C. HUMANITY

Any serious religious philosophy has to come to terms with both the excellence and evil within humanity. Wagenknecht speaks of Hawthorne and Melville's concurrence on "the inborn dignity of humanity."[74] The same literary critic remarked: "Like Hawthorne, [Melville] found Emersonian optimism unconvincing and felt the psychological truth of the doctrine of original sin even while he rejected it as dogma."[75]

In *Moby-Dick* Melville penned:

> Men may seem detestable…but man, in the ideal, is so noble and so sparkling, such a grand and glowing creature…That immaculate manliness we feel within ourselves…that it remains intact though all the outer character seems gone…

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[70] Ibid., 291.
[71] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 591.
[72] Ibid., 602.
[73] *Collected Poems of Herman Melville,* ed. Howard P. Vincent (Chicago: Packard & Co., 1947), 57.
[74] Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel,* 64.
[75] Ibid., 75.

> This august dignity…radiates without end from God; Himself![76]

The initial feel the reader gets of South Sea islanders (from Melville's perspective) is that of Edenic paradise and untainted islanders like Rousseau's "noble savages"—though in the end he acknowledges that they are cannibals! Yet Melville presented *Typee* as "a Paradise of innocent, unfallen Barbarians…"[77]

Kerry McSweeney stated that in Melville's article on "Hawthorne and His Mosses" Herman Melville explained that his dark power "derives its force from its appeal to that Calvinistic sense of innate depravity and original sin, from whose visitation, in some sense or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free."[78] A considerable admission!

In *Pierre* the troubled reader "refers to his Bible, and there he reads most explicitly, that this world is unconditionally depraved and accursed; and that at all hazards [people] must come out of it."[79] Of course, Melville would have acknowledged that the expression "unconditionally depraved" is extra-biblical theological language. Also, we'd have to define what is meant by "come out of [the world]." Irrespective of these quibbles on our part, Melville shows that he is familiar with biblico-theological rootage.

Even though Melville did not accept the theological reality of original sin, he owned (through his travelers in *Mardi*) "that evil is after all a part of the human condition everywhere."[80] In fact, in *Redburn* the narrator appears to acknowledge that "the true calling of the reverend clergy…[is] to bring…sinners to repentance," thereby granting the reality of the hard datum of sin.[81] When Melville closed out his characterization of the infamously stubborn, unbendable, incorrigible Bartleby, he wrote, "Ah, Bartelby. Ah, Humanity."[82]

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[76] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 121-22.

[77] Abel, *American Literature,* 374.

[78] Kerry McSweeney, *Moby Dick: Ishmael's Mighty Book* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 8.

[79] Herman Melville, *Pierre, or the Ambiguities* (New York: Hendricks House, 1949), 244.

[80] Abel, *American Literature,* 383.

[81] Melville, *Redburn,* 194.

[82] Melville, *Complete Shorter Fiction,* 51.

D. THE DEVIL AND DEMONISM

In *Moby-Dick* Melville formed a lineup of "ponderous profound beings, such as Plato, Pyrrho, the Devil, Jupiter, Dante, and so on…"[83] Stubb tells a shipmate that Captain Ahab's "the devil…The reason why you don't see his tail is because…he carries it coiled away in his pocket."[84] A piece of sailor's superstition.

In *Pierre* Mrs. Glendenning tells the clergyman that it's not for him to condemn her "son, though he were Lucifer, simmering in Hell!"[85] In *Israel Potter* John Paul Jones "hung like Apollyon…over the fated abyss of the hatchway."[86]

In *Moby-Dick* Captain Ahab announces in soliloquy: "I'm demoniac. I am madness maddened!"[87] Also in *Moby-Dick* Melville referred to "fallen angels."[88] Additionally, alluding to Revelation 12, Melville compared the doomed Captain Ahab (in the last chapter of the book) to "Satan [who] would not sink to hell till [he] had dragged a living part of heaven along [too]…"[89] Alluding to James 2, Melville said (in *Billy Budd*) that "the scriptural devils…'believe and tremble'..."[90] Once again Melville has shown himself to be steeped in the literature and language of Scripture on this subject.

E. CHRIST

One of Melville's characters in his poem *Clarel* calls Christ "the human God Who dwelt among us…Shared all of man except the sin and mirth."[91] In the same poem Melville sounded orthodox when he wrote of the angel Gabriel who bore news: "To Mary, kneeling her before, Announcing a God, the mother she…"[92]

Melville appeared to confirm Christ's sinlessness when (in *Pierre*) someone asserts that Christ "did remain throughout [life] entirely without folly or sin."[93] Indeed, Melville seemed to attest to Christ's deity when

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[83] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 396.
[84] Ibid., 345.
[85] Melville, *Pierre,* 235.
[86] Melville, *Israel Potter,* 569.
[87] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 177.
[88] Ibid., 483.
[89] Ibid., 604.
[90] Melville, *Complete Shorter Fiction,* 435.
[91] Melville, *Clarel,* 12.
[92] Ibid., 388.
[93] Melville, *Pierre,* 249.

(in *White-Jacket*) he noted that "Burnet and the best theologians demonstrate, that [Jesus'] nature was not merely human—was not that of a mere man of the world."[94] In his first major novel Melville referred to "the divine and gentle Jesus."[95]

In *Pierre* Isabel wrote of "the world, for which the dear Saviour died."[96] The last chapter in *Moby-Dick* is partially entitled "Third Day."[97] The title alludes to the last time Moby Dick arose from the depths to conquer his foe, Captain Ahab. Ahab had urged his sailors to drive their nails into the whale. As a parody on Christ's cry of dereliction ("Why hast thou forsaken me?"), Ahab pleaded: "My God, stand by me now!"[98] Yet Ahab was finally left, as it were, pinioned to his cross, the conquering whale.

Melville alluded to the traditional ascension of Christ when, on his trip to the Holy Land, he penned: "Found it…hard to realize…on Mount Olivet that from there Christ rose [in His ascension]."[99]

Despite Melville's extensive references to Christ and His sinlessness, we must remember that Melville adopted a position in the Unitarian Church, so (like Dickens) he regarded Jesus principally as a sinless human being, saying, "The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows."[100] Tyrus Hillway summarized: "Melville's concept of Christ…in *Clarel* seems to be this: he was a being who brought mankind the gift of an ideal and of hope that the ideal might be achieved. He blessed mankind with the dream of eventual perfection."[101] This view of Christ is rather on the order of traditional liberalism.

F. SALVATION

F. O. Matthiessen wrote that Melville

> had been responsive…to [the] alteration from belief in the salvation of man through the mercy and grace of a sovereign God

[94] Melville, *Redburn, White-Jacket, Moby-Dick,* 692.
[95] Melville, *Typee, Omoo, Mardi,* 238.
[96] Melville, *Pierre,* 74.
[97] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 592.
[98] Ibid., 602.
[99] Melville, *Clarel,* xv.
[100] Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel*, 76.
[101] Hillway, *Herman Melville,* 130.

> to belief in the potential divinity of every man. That alteration centered around the Crucifixion.[102]

In *Moby-Dick* Ishmael says that "Christian kindness…has proved but hollow courtesy" so he tries his pagan friend who is said to have "redeemed" Ishmael's dismal situation.[103]

In *Omoo* Melville spoke of the London Missionary Society's attempts with the South Sea islanders "as the most promising subjects for conversion."[104] When the natives began dying of the Westerners' diseases, they cried out, "We want no other salvation than to live in this world."[105]

Queequeg (in *Moby-Dick*) is informed by Captain Peleg that "he must show that he is converted." Then Peleg adds: "Son of darkness,…art thou in communion with my Christian church?"[106] In order to get Queequeg aboard ship, Ishmael tells Peleg that Queequeg is a member of the First Congregational Church (with the result that Peleg believes him not to have been baptized correctly). In response to Peleg's asking if Ishmael is joshing, Ishmael says that it's "the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole worshipping world [to which] we all belong…"[107] Later in *Moby-Dick* the black galley cook is told that swearing is "no way to convert sinners."[108]

In *Pierre* Melville referred to standard Protestantism's position on salvation by grace when he mentioned "that most true doctrine of the utter nothingness of good works…"[109] Yet in a later chapter of the same novel Melville states that for "the grand condition of acceptance to God, Christianity calls upon men to renounce this world…"[110] Melville mobilized this notion in order to rebuke the West for its materialism; and he failed to take into account the condition cited in Acts 16:31 or in a multitude of other NT texts.

Robertson-Levant observed that Herman Melville's sister, Augusta, was a true believer who taught Sunday school and sought to win her

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[102] F. C. Mattiessen quoted by Harold Bloom, *Ahab,* 70.
[103] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 54.
[104] Melville, *Typee, Omoo, Mardi,* 500-501.
[105] Ibid., 518.
[106] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 93.
[107] Ibid., 94.
[108] Ibid., 314.
[109] Melville, *Pierre,* 160.
[110] Ibid., 243.

brother over. Nevertheless, despite Melville's vast familiarity with the Bible, "his quest *for religious certainty* had floundered in the Holy Land."[111]

Essentially when it came to salvation-related issues, Melville had reduced Christianity to a matter of morality—(like Tolstoy) mooring his ship's anchor in the Sermon on the Mount and the Golden Rule. In *Pierre* the narrator tells about a priest administering the sacramental bread when he was stuck with severe doubts (just as *Pierre* then was). Yet "the imperishable monument of his Holy Catholic Church, the imperishable record of his Holy Bible, the imperishable intuition of the innate truth of Christianity—these were the indestructible anchors which still held the priest"—in contrast with *Pierre*. "With *Pierre* it was a question whether certain vital acts of his were right or wrong."[112] In other words, faith's foundation for Melville lay not in doctrine, but in morality.

Melville (also in *Pierre*) spoke of "that greatest real miracle of all religions, the Sermon on the Mount."[113] In *White-Jacket* Melville referred to Christ's enjoining us to "turn the other cheek" before declaring: "that passage [in Matthew] embodies the soul and substance of the Christian faith; without it Christianity were like any other [religious] faith."[114]

In *Mardi* the islanders "have set aside [like Melville] their desire to know the secrets of God and are satisfied to live together perfectly under the Golden Rule."[115] Similarly in *Moby-Dick* Ishmael meets the pagan Queequeg (who worships his wooden statue) and asks: "What is worship—to do the will of God?—to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me [in other words, the Golden Rule]—that is the will of God."[116] Consequently, Ishmael decides that he must turn idolater so as to do what Queequeg would want him to do. *Melville, then, reduced soteriology basically to a matter of ethics.* Melville settled for a very tarnished Golden Rule.

G. CHURCH

In his writings Melville mentioned Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Anglicans, and Catholics. He grew up among the Dutch Reformed and

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[111] Robertson-Levant, *Melville: A Biography,* 399, italics added.
[112] Melville, *Pierre,* 240.
[113] Ibid., 243.
[114] Melville, *White-Jacket,* 687.
[115] Hillway, *Herman Melville,* 80.
[116] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 55.

later landed among Unitarians. In *Moby-Dick* Melville includes a sort of parody on Christian communion when Captain Ahab passes around grog to the sailors while he grasps their lances "at their crossed center."[117] Melville alluded to Communion when he wrote Hawthorne "that the Godhead is broken up like the bread at the [Last] Supper…"[118]

Melville was obviously familiar with arguments over various modes of baptism, when he referred to the Congregational Church's view in connection with Queequeg and Peleg's comment that the native hadn't been "baptized right."[119]

Melville's liberalized leanings inclined him more to "the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole worshipping world; we all belong to that [group]…"[120] Melville's universalism will be dealt with in more detail in the next section.

H. Last Things

Captains Bildad and Peleg (whose names are both found in the Bible) were enlisting recruits for Captain Ahab's voyage (in *Moby-Dick*). Bildad placed in Queequeg's hands a tract entitled "The Latter Day Coming [of Christ] or No Time to Lose." Bildad asked Captain Peleg if, when their last ship had been caught in a typhoon, they would think "of Death and the Judgment then?"[121]

In Melville's poem *Clarel* Nehemiah represents the ardent, evangelistic conservative. Nehemiah announced:

> "Yea, friend in Christ, in morning skies
> Return he will over [Mount] Olivet:
> And we shall greet him."[122]

Nehemiah had specifically returned to the Holy Land to be on hand for Christ's imminent return.

Editor Walter Bezanson called Nehemiah "a millenarian."[123] With tongue-in-cheek the narrator of *White-Jacket* spoke of "those maxims which, in hope of bringing about a Millennium, we [in the Church]

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[117] Abel, *American Literature,* 405.
[118] Hardwick, *Melville,* 56.
[119] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 94.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid., 96-97.
[122] Melville, *Clarel,* 37.
[123] Ibid., iiv.

busily teach to the heathen, [yet] we Christians ourselves disregard."[124] This statement sounds like the rhetoric of postmillennialism.

The warning is sounded in *Moby-Dick* that to take on the Sperm Whale could be the entry to "a quick eternity."[125] On Ahab's ship the second mate Stubb engages the black sea cook in an interchange when the cook says that "some blessed angel will come and fetch him." In sailorly metaphors Stubb replies, "So, then, you expect to go up into our main-top, do you…when you are dead?" Then in more unmetaphorical language Stubb asks the cook about his "get[ting] into heaven."[126]

Melville was assuredly versed in the language of the Book of Revelation. In *Moby-Dick* he spoke of "the Vision of St. John, [in which] white robes are given to the redeemed, and the four-and-twenty elders stand clothed in white before the great white throne, and the Holy One that sitteth there [is] white like wool…"[127] The Shaker prophet whom the crew comes across had been "announcing the speedy opening of the seventh vial" found in the Book of Revelation.[128]

Toward the end of *Moby-Dick* the captain of the misnamed ship, the Delight, prepares to lower a corpse into the ocean, beginning with the words, "May the resurrection and the life"—until he is interrupted by Captain Ahab's brusqueness.[129] The final resurrection is also referred to in *White-Jacket* ("must rise at the Last Day").[130]

In *White-Jacket* the incidental comment is made that "all good Christians believe that any minute the last day may come, and the terrible combustion of the entire planet earth."[131] The statement combines a clear-cut doctrine of imminence with a borrowing of material from 2 Peter 3. Scraps of blubber aboard Captain Ahab's ship were thrown into a furnace which, the narrator said, "smells like the left wing of the day of judgment; it is an argument for the pit."[132]

There are numerous references to hell (or its synonyms) in Melville's novels. Melville was familiar with the Greek-derived term "tophet,"

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[124] Melville, *White-Jacket,* 691.
[125] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 191.
[126] Ibid., 316-17.
[127] Ibid., 200.
[128] Ibid., 333.
[129] Ibid., 568.
[130] Melville, *White-Jacket,* 456.
[131] Ibid., 482.
[132] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 447.

using it both in *Moby-Dick*[133] and in *Israel Potter*.[134] Melville drew upon the account of Lazarus, Dives, and "the fiery pit" from Luke 16.[135] In Father Mapple's renowned sermon on Jonah, Melville referred to "dreadful punishment" as "just."[136] The Quaker Captain Bildad warned Captain Peleg of ending up in "the fiery pit."[137] Captain Ahab spoke of being carried "to Hell's flames."[138] Later Ahab argues logically that if he could sense pain without his fleshly (missing) leg, then "why mayst not thou, carpenter, feel the fiery pains of Hell for ever, and without [having] a body?"[139] Indeed, Melville's notions of the afterlife become apparent through the mouthpiece of Ishmael who states (to Queequeg): "hell is an idea first born on an undigested apple dumpling; and then perpetuated through the hereditary dyspepsias nurtured by Ramadans [that is, fasts such as Queequeg had just endured]."[140] Rather than seeing hell as some objective biblical reality, then, Melville viewed it as an invention of discomfortable human experience ("dyspepsias") extrapolated outwardly.

A more orthodox view of hell appears in the mouth of a character in *Pierre* who acknowledges that "in the grave there is no help, no prayer thither may go, no forgiveness thence may come, so that…for that useless penitent his doom is eternal…; with him it is Hell-day…"[141]

Despite Melville's awareness of an orthodox doctrine of hell, however, on a number of occasions he spoke as a universalist (undercutting any substantive rationale for Christian missions).

In *Moby-Dick* the character Queequeg brings to the forefront Melville's universalistic propensities. Through Ishmael's voice he wrote:

> "We good Presbyterian Christians should be charitable in these things, and not fancy ourselves so vastly superior to… pagans…because of their half-crazy conceits [about worshipping wooden images, etc.]," so [says Melville,] "he seemed to

[133] Ibid., 9.
[134] Melville, *Israel Potter,* 589.
[135] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 10.
[136] Ibid., 49.
[137] Ibid., 83.
[138] Ibid., 465.
[139] Ibid., 499.
[140] Ibid., 92.
[141] Melville, *Pierre,* 336.

> be content, and there [we should] let him rest. All our arguing with him would not avail; let him be, I say…"[142]

Therefore, earlier in *Moby-Dick* Ishmael concluded: "I must…unite with [the idolater] in his [worship]."[143] Later Melville opined: "I have no objection to any person's religion…so long as that person does not kill or insult any other person…"[144] Similarly Melville wrote in *Redburn*: "Though the Christian era had not then begun, Socrates died the death of the Christian; and though [David] Hume was not a Christian in theory, yet he, too, died the death of the Christian—humble, composed, without bravado…"[145] Melville made it sound as if a subjective tranquility at the time of death-passage was the same as being a Christian.

His universalism appeared in the same novel when he penned: "We talk of the Turks, and abhor the cannibals; but may not some of them go to heaven before some of us?"[146] A Christian would desire to ask Melville, "Given this position, why only 'some of them'?" and "On what basis do any people 'go to heaven'?"

Melville's equalizing effect is evidenced in *Mardi* when he declared:

> In heaven, at last, our…father Adam will greet all alike, and sociality forever prevail. Christian shall join hands between Gentile and Jew; grim Dante forget his Infernos, and shake hands with fat Rabelais; and monk Luther…talk over old times with Pope Leo.[147]

To make such a reductionist statement is to flatten all doctrinal distinctions (involving exact positional opposites) into nothingness. One wonders (in light of such universalist declarations) how Melville could speak disparagingly (in *Moby-Dick*) of "solemn churches that preach unconditional inoffensiveness by all to all?"[148]

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[142] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 87.
[143] Ibid., 55.
[144] Ibid., 91.
[145] Melville, *Redburn,* 317.
[146] Ibid., 317.
[147] Melville, *Mardi,* 673.
[148] Melville, *Moby-Dick,* 380.

VI. CONCLUSION

Harold Bloom's conclusion that the mature Melville is not a Christian seems well-founded. Indeed, Melville seemed to flounder amid ambiguity. As Melville depicted a doctrine of God in his novels, no especially novel quirks seem to emerge in the area of theology proper. Through his characters he mouthed rather orthodox understandings of creation, angels, the devil, and demons. Though Melville represented evil as globally pervasive, he dispensed with any Christian doctrine of original sin. Although there are references to Christ-as-divine sprinkled amid the pages of his novels, Melville's later Unitarianism evidently prevailed in his treatment of the Savior's personhood. While numerous references to the traditional tenets of orthodox Christian eschatology crop up in the speech balloons of his characters, Melville's liberalism tended to nudge him in the direction of universalism.

With reference to the subject of salvation Melville seemed slanted away from a serious Christian concept of sin and salvation. He praised a Tolstoyanesque treatment of the Sermon on the Mount and therefore operated with an anti-missions animus. Yet Melville couldn't evade what Darrel Abel called "the sharkish facts of life."[149]

Like Captain Ahab in *Moby-Dick*, Melville felt tortured by the need to pin down this haunting, massive God-idea, but it proved to him so uncontrollable. Wherever he searched, it seemed to elude him. Like Ishmael in the same book, Melville quested the world-over (in places such as the cannibal islands of the South Seas or later as a pilgrim to the Holy Land) seeking to settle his struggle. His liberalism never landed him at the dock of Emersonian optimism, yet neither did he firmly rest on the Gibraltar rock of biblical revelation.

Nathaniel Hawthorne said of his friend Melville: "He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief…"[150] Therefore the famed writer who grew up within the dogmatism of Calvinism wallowed amid the waves of ambiguity and angst.

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[149] Abel, *American Literature,* 440.

[150] Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel,* 75.

BOOK REVIEWS

BY THE MEMBERS OF THE GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

Amazing Grace in John Newton: Slave-Ship Captain, Hymnwriter, and Abolitionist. By William E. Phipps. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001. 270 pp. Cloth. $35.00.

If you like the song *Amazing Grace*, then you'll probably like this book about its author.

Much confusion surrounds John Newton. His life is often idealized. Phipps points out that a major biography by Kathleen Norris notes that he came to faith in Christ while captaining a slave ship. Then he immediately turned the ship back to Africa and released the slaves and renounced the slave trade once and for all (p. 206). That never happened. Not only did he not stop the slave trade abruptly due to some religious conversion, it is far from clear when (or if) Newton came to faith.

Phipps points out that Philip Yancey in his book *What's So Amazing about Grace?* mistakenly suggests that Newton wrote *Amazing Grace* while in an African harbor waiting for a shipment of slaves (p. 281 in Yancey, cited by Phipps on p. 206). The truth is, Newton composed *Amazing Grace* while a pastor in Olney, "long after his years as a ship captain" (p. 206; see also pp. 125-31, 146-58).

Many point to March 21, 1748 as the date of Newton's "conversion." That was when Newton nearly drowned in a storm. Newton felt that God saved him from certain death that day. From then on, he began daily devotions and cleaned up his language. But he remained a slave trader. And by his own testimony he did not yet believe the gospel: "I seemed humbled and thankful. But I was still blind to the gospel" (p. 207).

Newton was a Calvinist with significant reservations: "I am what they call a Calvinist, yet there are flights, niceties, and hard sayings to be found among some of that system, which I do not choose to imitate" (p. 104). He admitted, "What is by some called high Calvinism, I dread. I feel much more union of spirit with some Arminians, than I could with some Calvinists" (p. 105).

One of Newton's reservations with Calvinism may have been the doctrine of eternal security. Phipps comments, "The 'once saved, always

saved' doctrine of high Calvinism troubled Newton because it minimized human responsibility. Unlike those who believed that once 'elected' there would be 'perseverance of the saints' evermore, Newton acknowledged with the Methodists that there are 'backsliders,' those who had professed their faith but were no longer expressing it in word or deed" (p. 105). Does Phipps mean that Newton believed in eternal security but not guaranteed perseverance? While Phipps starts by talking about eternal security, the rest of his statement concerns the possibility of failure to persevere.

Phipps suggests that Newton was not so concerned about a *point* of coming to faith in Christ, but about a *process* of becoming more and more godly. Phipps suggests that the line "the hour I first believed" was not meant by Newton, as we assume, to suggest that we know when we come to faith and at that time we are born again and eternally secure. Instead, Phipps says, "Newton intended the hymn to refer to a complex conversion that might begin early in life and continue to grow sporadically for the remainder of life…The hymn's opening stanza can be thought of as alluding to conversion stages" (p. 210).

One is not born again until he believes that Jesus guarantees eternal life to all who simply believe in Him (John 6:47; 11:25-27). Did Newton ever believe that? Possibly he did. Note this statement which is contrary to the conclusion of Phipps cited above (without giving any proof from Newton): "But now I began to understand the security of the covenant of grace, and to expect to be preserved, not by my own power and holiness, but by the mighty power and promise of God, through faith in an unchangeable Savior" (p. 66).

The book ends with an Afterword. While it begins well, it ends with Phipps preaching social activism. I found the closing pages of the Afterword to be a bit annoying. Fortunately, the preachy tone is not found elsewhere in the book.

This is an outstanding book. I highly recommend it.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors. By Joel R. Beeke. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999. 395 pp. Paper. $14.99.

For those that have it, assurance of eternal life is one of their most prized possessions. But, for those who don't, it becomes a quest. The history of this *Quest for Full Assurance* is the topic of Beeke's dissertation, which ultimately resulted in this book. In his introduction, he makes this line-in-the-sand purpose statement: "The following pages repudiate the sharp distinction many contemporary scholars make between Calvin and Calvinism" (p. 3).

Beeke's work begins with Luther. He explains that: "Luther had no patience for any view of assurance that returned the burden of salvation from God to man" (p. 20). While Luther's view of assurance was grounded on the promises of God, Beeke makes it clear that his successor, "Melanchthon indirectly led Lutheranism away from the doctrine of personal assurance" (p. 26). This is indeed where assurance was lost amongst the well known reformers. We are indebted to the Marrow Men for fighting for the belief that assurance is the essence of saving faith (See Makidon, "The Marrow Men," *JOTGES* [Autumn 2003]: 65-77).

Beeke shows Calvin's conflicting views on assurance. On the one hand he writes, "Calvin concluded that anyone who believes but lacks conviction that he is saved by God is not a true believer after all" (p. 40). Yet, on the other hand, Beeke writes, "According to Calvin, faith ought to be assuring, but no *perfect* assurance exists in this life" (p. 42). Calvin clearly believed that works "are the consequence, not the precondition of salvation" (pp. 71-72) and so Beeke shows how inconsistent Calvin was in his writings. It is unfortunate that this system's namesake is a man who, as many scholars have shown, waffled between several of Calvinism's own five points.

It is interesting to see the progression from Luther to Melanchthon and from Calvin to Beza. Beeke writes, "Calvin maintained a secondary status at best for assurance by works, but Beza nearly equalized the three grounds of assurance by using the practical syllogism more freely than Calvin. He wrote in *A briefe and pithie summe*, 'Good works be certain testimonies of our faith, and also do assure us of our eternal election'" (p. 79). One does not have to look much further than Beza to see where the Reformed doctrine shifted personal assurance from the Bible (God) to works (man)—a shift that would have outraged Luther.

Beeke then turns to William Perkins and notes that he "provided a major link in Reformed thought between Beza and the Westminster Confession" (p. 83). Later, he explains that "Gordon Keddie wrote: 'A cursory examination of the Westminster Confession must show the close approximation of its statement of the doctrine of assurance to that…of Perkins a half-century before'" (p. 111). Perkins believed that assurance was grounded in the Word of God but that "true gospel sorrow must thus flow from the inward conviction of having 'offended so merciful a God and loving Father' and must yield a wholehearted Godward change 'of the mind and the whole man in affection, life, and conversation'" (p. 96).

Beeke spends the next several chapters discussing the Puritans, John Owen, and the merging of English and Dutch thinking. While you should be sure not to miss these chapters, I won't give away the rest of the story. But then again, you know it already, at least as it stands in the twenty-first century. As Beeke reminds us: "we live in a day of minimal assurance. Sadly, the church, for the most part, is scarcely aware that it is crippled by a comparative absence of strong, full assurance" (p. 279).

While most would agree that the church is indeed crippled by their lack of assurance, the following statement clearly demonstrates the fundamental difference between Beeke's definition of "full assurance" and ours: "Scripture, the Reformers, and post-Reformers did not tire of saying that assurance is known by fruits of such as: close fellowship with God, involving childlike obedience; a thirsting after God and exercises that extol Him; a longing to glorify Him by carrying out the Great Commission" (p. 279). While this may be how the majority of the Reformers looked for assurance, this was certainly not the consensus.

Apart from several problems, Beeke's work is otherwise informative. May it remind us that we need to study the history of the grace movement lest we be led to believe that grace theology is a novel theology. We should not forget men such as Robert Sandeman and the Marrow Men who stood in the gap in times when assurance could not be found so that we could have assurance of eternal life. May we, like those that came before us, never stop proclaiming the Bible's message of assurance lest it die with our generation.

Michael D. Makidon
Director of Publications
Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

Christianity Is The Gospel of the Grace of God, Not the Gospel of the Kingdom. By Robert C. Brock. St. Petersburg, FL: Right Division, Inc, nd. 32 pp. Paper. $1.00.

The author staunchly defends justification by faith alone *for this age*. In his view, from the time of Moses until the regeneration of Cornelius and his family, justification was by faith plus works.

There are a number of Free Grace people who understand the expression *the gospel of the Kingdom* to be distinct from the gospel of Jesus Christ and the gospel of Paul. Brock, however, says that the gospel of Jesus Christ was this gospel of the Kingdom (p. 12). This comment by him startled me: "And when one studies the gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, this theme of faith plus works is repeated over and over again" (p. 16). A page later he gives this explanation, "God did require under the Dispensation of Law faith plus the works of the Law for salvation for the Millennial Kingdom of God" (p. 17).

He then immediately continues, "This principle of works continued up to the time of Cornelius in Acts 10…" (p. 17).

In the next paragraph he says, "James 2:14-26 is also in this same category…Putting it [James 2] with the Gospel of the Kingdom gives us the right meaning of what it says" (p. 17).

The beauty of this system is that we find the good news for this age in a very restricted area of Scripture. The entire OT is out. Acts is out until after Chapter 10. The four gospels are out. James is out. And, based on remarks made toward the end of the booklet, so are 1-2 Peter, Hebrews, 1-3 John, Revelation, and Jude. We find the gospel for this age only in Paul's writings: "Why Paul? Because he was *God's spokesman for this dispensation of grace…Real Christianity is Pauline Christianity*" (p. 31, emphasis his).

While we might be tempted to adopt a system that eliminated all soteriologically difficult texts outside of Paul's epistles, that leads, in my opinion, to great confusion. Then John's Gospel ceases to be the only evangelistic book in the Bible. Thus, John's Gospel is not for this age. And the message Jesus preached is no longer the saving message for today! Paul's gospel is not Jesus' gospel—at least not the gospel which Jesus Himself preached. According to this system the good news Paul says in Galatians 1 that he received directly from Jesus was *a new gospel* from Jesus.

While I am a Dispensationalist, I feel this form of Dispensationalism goes further than the biblical evidence warrants.

Biblically it is best to understand justification to have *always* been by faith alone (Gen 3:15; 15:6). Adam, Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Peter, James, John, and Saul of Tarsus were all born again by faith alone in the Messiah alone. The OT saints may not have known His name. But they knew that simply by faith in Him they had eternal life. Adam, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Paul all proclaimed justification by faith alone in Christ alone.

It is much simpler to understand the term *gospel* to mean *good news*. Thus "the gospel of the Kingdom" is the good news that the Kingdom was being offered to Israel. While the message of what one must do to have eternal life is included in the *gospel*, the term *gospel* is broader than that one message.

I found this booklet to be helpful for those wishing to learn about the view that relegates all justification truth for this age to the writings of Paul. However, while I appreciate its Free Grace position on justification today, I cannot endorse most of its conclusions.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

Help, I'm Hurting: Finding Meaning, Hope, Direction, and Happiness in the Words of Jesus. By Bill Oswalt. Nashville, TN: Archstone Press, 2002. 269 pp. Paper. $17.00.

Help, I'm Hurting, a how-to book on spiritual growth, is organized around what the author refers to as the beatitude model of discipleship. The first two chapters serve as the foundation by explaining the author's understanding of discipleship and the beatitudes. The author begins each of the following chapters with a beatitude that serves as a launching point for a homily exhorting the reader to think rightly about a loose mixture of theological and psychological topics. The final chapter concludes by exhorting the reader to think rightly about discipleship and rewards. Each chapter explains how right thinking about a particular topic contributes to the progressive sanctification of faithful believers.

As suggested by the title, this book does not limit itself to spiritual growth, but appeals to the psychotherapeutic desires of people—at times referring to the proposed beatitude model as a "discipleship-counseling" model (p. 32). It assumes that people who are developing the virtues found in the beatitudes and thinking right about the topics found in the homilies will be able to solve their relational problems and find emotional health in this life. This tact leads the author to sound, at times, like Jay Adams in his criticisms of the integration of theology and psychology, while, at other times, confounding psychological constructs with biblical concepts (e.g., he understands the old man of Rom 6:6 to be one's self-esteem prior to coming to faith in Christ).

Several aspects of this book will be found appealing by the readers of *JOTGES*. It includes a significant amount of Scripture. It calls the reader to faithful obedience to Christ. It includes numerous diagrams to illustrate what the author is saying. In addition, adherents to the GES perspective will appreciate his focus on grace conjoined with a call to daily obedience to Christ, his teaching on rewards, as well as his numerous references to Earl Radmacher, Joseph Dillow, and Charlie Bing.

However, the book is flawed by two significant weaknesses. First, it reads more like an early draft than a finished work. The connection between some of the beatitudes and the homilies that follow are likely firmer in the author's mind than they may appear to a discriminating reader. Conclusions, at times, rest upon the etymology of English words (i.e., conscious and psychology) as if the etymology of contemporary English words carry authority for a theological conclusion. In addition, the book is repeatedly marred by a lack of proofreading (e.g., misspelled words, inconsistent formatting of endnote numbers, inconsistent citations of sources, and inconsistent numbering of diagrams).

Second, the author has yielded to the temptation presented by our therapeutic culture to equate counseling and discipleship and thus offers the Bible as the solution for all psychological problems in this life (p. 56). This is potentially the source of a number of misunderstandings, not the least of which are the temptation to misread God's word to fulfill this assertion and the temptation to blame the sufferer for his suffering. It continues to puzzle this reviewer how Jesus' call to take up one's cross and march toward possible martyrdom can be so facilely reframed into a feel good approach to getting one's emotional needs met.

These weaknesses, as significant as they are, do not, however, completely overwhelm the potential benefits of the book. If the reader is

neither distracted by the poor editing nor the reframing of spiritual maturity as psychological/relational health, he or she will be encouraged that both Christ is preached and believers are called to follow Him.

Mike McGuire
Associate Professor of Psychology and Counseling
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, TX

Lordship Salvation and the Gospel of the Grace of God. By Joel Finck. Rapid City, SD: Grace Bible Church, 1998. 83 pp. Paper. No price.

The Free Grace movement is housed under a pretty big tent. Finck represents Free Grace believers, who are sometimes referred to as Ultra-Dispensationalists. (Finck actually calls himself a mid-Acts Dispensationalist.)

In a nutshell the author suggests that the gospel for today is found exclusively in Paul's epistles. He feels that Lordship Salvation more or less correctly understands the gospel by which OT people and people in the early stages of Acts were regenerated. The problem with Lordship Salvation is that they are caught up in the way of justification in another dispensation.

Thus verses in the four Gospels, Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, Jude, 1-3 John, and Revelation are all out of consideration for how one is born again in this age. Finck does a good job of explaining how he understands a representative number of texts.

Within Paul's epistles, Finck typically adopts the positions advocated by Zane Hodges, Jody Dillow, myself, and other Free Grace writers. I was pleasantly surprised to see that he adopts a new view of 1 Cor 15:2, one that I've held for some time but have not published yet. He suggests the salvation mentioned there is experiential salvation, that is, being spiritually healthy (pp. 36-37).

Those seeking in-depth exegesis will not find it in this book. Neither will they find any interaction with Lordship Salvation writers. However, those seeking a clear and easy to follow defense of the Free Grace position from an irenic Ultra-Dispensationalist will love this book.

One other thing I liked about this book is that the author doesn't duck the tough questions. He suggests, for example, that OT saints

weren't eternally secure until they died, and that they didn't actually get eternal life until they died, that is, if they died still in faith (pp. 73, 79).

Hopefully readers can overlook the fact that four times (by my count) he mistakenly uses the term *Armenians* when he means *Arminians* (pp. 70-71).

I will warn the reader, however, that it is disturbing to see a Free Grace person argue that what we must do to have eternal life is not found in the Gospel of John (pp. 17-18, 75-76). This book is not for the person who is new to the faith. Personally I feel if we abandon the primacy of the Gospel of John in anchoring our view of what one must do to have eternal life, then our movement is in trouble. I appreciate the fact that others like Finck disagree. And I'm glad they are in our camp. But I hope the majority position in our camp continues to be that John's Gospel is the place to start when determining your view of the saving message. And I also hope we continue to hold that justification has always been by grace through faith apart from works.

This is a fascinating book. I highly recommend it.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

Slaying the Giants in Your Life. By David Jeremiah. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2001. 217 pp. Cloth. $19.99.

Popular author, pastor, and radio preacher, David Jeremiah, has written what many consider to be his finest work to date. After reading this book in one sitting, this reviewer would have to agree. *Slaying the Giants in Your Life* delivers on its promise to equip the believer to win the battle and live victoriously. One of the unique strengths of this book is its concise structure and organization. Since the book is based on a recent sermon series it is replete with contemporary illustrations, alliterated expositions, and creative principles and applications. Few Christian living books are as easy to read and retain as this one.

In twelve chapters, Jeremiah marshals a strategy to overcome the battles that Christians face. In Chapter 1 he uses Deut 1:19-33 to explain how to fight fear by exercising faith. In Chapter 2 Jeremiah walks the reader through Nehemiah 4 as a lesson on destroying discouragement.

Jeremiah liberates the reader from loneliness by picking out segments of the church (e.g. the lonely single, spouse, survivor, senior citizen, sufferer, and servant of God) in Chapter 3. He then cites biblical examples of those who have learned to cope with loneliness (David, Jeremiah, and Paul). Chapter 4 explains how to win against worry. The principal text in this chapter is Matt 6:25-34. This may be Jeremiah's best exposition in the book.

In Chapter 5 we learn to guard against guilt through insightful expositions of Psalms 32 and 51. In Chapter 6 he urges Christians to tame temptation by relying on 1 Cor 10:13. The temptations that are focused on are idolatry, immorality, and greed. In Chapter 7 Jeremiah attacks anger by explaining from Ephesians 4 the difference between biblical anger and sinful anger.

Jeremiah helps the reader resist resentment in Chapter 8 by working through five simple steps: think it through, write it down, work it out, talk it over, and give it up. In Chapter 9 he disarms our doubts through the story of Thomas in John 20. In Chapter 10 Jeremiah advises the reader to postpone procrastination. This chapter is full of motivating quotes, illustrations, and insights from Acts 24. In Chapter 11, the reader is counseled to face failure head-on by meditating on 2 Cor 4:7-18. In the final chapter Jeremiah uses various Scriptures to teach the reader to journey beyond jealousy. His final applications are: renounce jealousy as sin, remember your rival in prayer, reaffirm God's goodness to you, and rekindle God's love in your heart.

JOTGES readers should note that at one point Jeremiah is inconsistent in his understanding of eternal security. In his exposition of Ps 52:11 ("Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me"), Jeremiah writes "Imagine it: *cast away from the presence of God*. This would be the description of a soul eternally lost—a soul castaway! David prays to avoid such a destiny. He pleads with God not to remove His Holy Spirit from him" (p. 83). The heading of the section from which the above quote is found is entitled "Renewing the Fellowship." Unfortunately, Jeremiah never comments on the proper temporal aspect, choosing instead to delve into eternal consequences.

Pastors and teachers who are looking for a helpful tool in developing a sermon series need look no further. Those looking for a gift to share with a "seeker" will find this book a welcomed resource. Jeremiah wisely targets felt needs that all people have and provides a hopeful remedy.

This is an excellent book written by a man who has demonstrated great credibility throughout his life and ministry.

Keith R. Krell
Senior Pastor
Emmanuel Baptist Church
Olympia, WA

The Gospel for Real Life. By Jerry Bridges. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002. 201 pp. Cloth. $19.00.

Bridges is the author of *The Pursuit of Holiness*, which has sold over one million copies. So when a best-selling author like this tackles the gospel, *JOTGES* readers are surely interested in what he has to say.

What we find in this book is fairly standard Reformed soteriology, but written in a very irenic style. Bridges says that regeneration precedes faith and that before we come to faith we are like Lazarus when he was in the grave, totally unable to even cry out for help (pp. 127-37). Concerning assurance, he points to the standard three means of assurance: the promises of God, the inner witness of the Spirit, and the works the Spirit does in and through us (pp. 149-59). Where he differs slightly is that when he speaks of times he goes through doubts, he says he focuses solely on the promise of Jesus in John 6:37 that He will never cast out those who come to Him.

He also tries to soften the idea of how we should respond to self-examination when we feel we fall short of the needed holiness to prove our regeneration. He says we should flee to the cross, not try harder (p. 158). Of course, since he says that all truly regenerate people are guaranteed to practice righteousness as a way of life (pp. 142, 156), and since those who are unregenerate can't flee to the cross since they are like a dead man in the grave, his advice seems to be a bit contrary to his theological grid.

His personal testimony of how he came to faith in Christ is instructive. He says, "I remember the night I trusted Christ as an eighteen-year-old. Outwardly I was a model teenager but not a Christian, even though I knew the gospel message. One night alone in my bed I asked Christ to be my Savior. Immediately I had peace in my soul, brought to me by the Holy Spirit" (p. 108; see also p. 154). When he says, "I knew the gospel message," does he mean that he *believed* the gospel before he became a

Christian? That seems to be his point. Of course, if true faith is more than believing the facts, then his statement makes sense.

Bridges makes a startling revelation: "I don't want to speculate on how much of the gospel a person must hear and understand in order to exercise faith, but as a minimum it will include the truth that 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3). At the same time it must be simple enough for a child to understand" (pp. 105-106). I find it remarkable that a person writing about the gospel indicates that he isn't going to even try and say precisely what a person must believe in order to exercise saving faith. Even within a Reformed system this is amazing since presumably a person can't exercise saving faith until he has been told the saving proposition. Note that Bridges isn't saying that if one believes that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," that he has exercised saving faith. He is simply saying that this much is surely a part (note "it will include the truth…") of what must be believed.

While this book is a bit thin on exegesis and detailed theological discussion, it is easy to read and candid in its approach. I recommend it.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For? By Rick Warren. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002. 334 pp. $19.99.

This is both a popular and powerful book. Its influence has spread rapidly throughout Christianity and the book and related materials are popping up in churches. Warren's purpose is to give Christians purpose—that is, direction in life. He wants us to live with eternity in mind, thus the title, *The Purpose-Driven Life.*

Warren argues simply and passionately for the Christian to embrace five purposes: 1) Worship – you were planned for God's pleasure; 2) Fellowship – you were formed to be part of God's family; 3) Discipleship – you were created to become like Christ; 4) Ministry – you were shaped for God's service; and 5) Mission – you were made to tell others about Christ (pp. 303, 310).

Those reading this journal will no doubt wonder how Warren views the gospel. While presenting a case for Christians to live life with purpose, he does not say a lot about the gospel. However Warren's presentation of the gospel is included. Here are some examples: "Real life begins by committing yourself completely to Jesus Christ. If you are not sure you have done this, all you need to do is *receive* and *believe*. The Bible promises, *'To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God'* (John 1:12, NIV). Will you accept God's offer?" (p. 58).

While the emphasis for Warren is believing in Jesus who died on the cross, he could clean up his presentation. It would have been better to make the offer of salvation contingent on faith rather than two items: believing and receiving. Yet, later the author states that there is *one* condition: "The invitation to be part of God's family is universal, but there is one condition: faith in Jesus. The Bible says, *'You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus'* (Gal. 3:26, NLT)" (p. 118).

The writer is generally clear in separating faith for salvation and works in the Christian life. His comment on Jas 2:24 is encouraging: "God's Word is clear that you can't earn your salvation. It comes only by grace, not your effort" (p. 72). Unfortunately, the writer repeatedly equates salvation with commitment, e.g., "You become a Christian by committing yourself to Christ" (p. 137).

Warren makes it clear that the believer is responsible to live a worthy life. Examples of his views on rewards are seen in the following quotes: "At the end of your life on earth you will be evaluated and rewarded according to how well you handled what God entrusted to you. That means *everything* you do, even simple daily chores, has eternal implications. If you treat everything as a *trust*, God promises three rewards in eternity. First, you will be given God's *affirmation*: He will say, 'Good Job! Well Done!' Next, you will receive a *promotion* and be given greater responsibility in eternity: 'I will put you in charge of many things.' Then you will be honored with a *celebration:* 'Come and share your Master's happiness'" (pp. 45-46). Also, "In heaven we are going to serve God forever. Right now, we can prepare for that eternal service by practicing on earth. Like athletes preparing for the Olympics, we keep training for that big day: *'They do it for a gold medal that tarnishes and fades. You're after one that's gold eternally'* (1 Cor. 9:25, The Message)" (p. 255).

Generally Warren is clear in describing salvation as what God does when a person has faith in His Son, in contrast to rewards which are a result of the believer's good works.

Even a great book could be a better book. No doubt some will see the following as shortcomings: 1) Though Warren argues for the future to motivate our lives here and now (a good thing), he never mentions the Millennium. The future Kingdom of Christ is not presented. This may be an attempt to appeal to a broad base of Christians, including those who hold to no Millennium; and 2) Rick Warren uses many Bible translations and paraphrases and most of the biblical quotes (of which there are nearly 1000) sound only vaguely familiar. Issue might be taken that many of the freer translations and paraphrases do not correctly reflect the meaning of the biblical text. Warren states that he does this to wake us up out of the doldrums of rereading the same text without fresh appreciation.

In the final analysis, the value of this work far outweighs its shortcomings. This book is motivating and highly practical. Warren gives specifics on what these ideals look like and how they can be practiced. The Christian is given concrete ways to translate Scripture into daily life experiences. Because Warren draws principles directly from the Bible, the believer who practices these principles will grow closer and closer to Christ-likeness. Therefore I highly recommend this book.

Mark Piland
Senior Pastor
Oak Hills Community Evangelical Church
Argyle, TX

An Urgent Call to a Serious Faith. By Dave Hunt. Bend, OR: The Berean Call, 2000. 272 pp. Paper. $11.00.

The title is provocative. What would such a book cover?

According to the back cover, the subject of the book is the gospel: "For years, Dave Hunt has spoken out against the watering down of the message of salvation…Dave explains the meaning and content of the gospel." But it covers more than that. The back cover description goes on: "*An Urgent Call to a Serious Faith* fosters deeper trust in and commitment to God by defining the biblical gospel—and what it saves us from, clarifying the call to discipleship, articulating the faith for which

we must 'earnestly contend,' explaining the necessity of taking up the cross, developing what the Bible says about the Trinity, the incarnation, and the church, [and] confronting the challenge of living in the last days."

After reading the book, I agree that what the back cover suggests is indeed covered. However, that is quite a broad subject for a book. This book is not well focused, and the result is that it is hard to see the point he is trying to make. Each of the points mentioned above would make a good book topic. And they aren't so much embodied in the phrase *an urgent call to a serious faith*. I'm not sure what title would pull that all in. But if a big part of the book is about the message of salvation, then that title is misleading, for it is faith, not *a serious faith*, which results in eternal life. And it is faith specifically *in Jesus*, not merely faith or *serious* faith.

There are many points in this book with which *JOTGES* readers will find themselves saying *amen*. He shows (e.g., p. 143) that the expression *eternal life* concerns both quantity (eternal) and quality (degrees of abundance). He argues for degrees of eternal rewards (pp. 87, 92). Prosperity and success gospels are labeled rightly as false (pp. 75, 97). He cites the Bible as the only source of absolute truth and certainty (p. 55ff.). Prayer, he says, is not essential to salvation (p. 53). Absolute certainty is what he indicates we need now (p. 10). Anyone who lacks certainty is foolish, Hunt argues, if he doesn't make a serious search for what lies beyond the grave and what he must do to have eternal life (pp. 10, 33). He also rejects ecumenism (pp. 39, 44).

However, there are things which will bother some *JOTGES* readers. There is, for example, says Hunt, no assurance for the uncommitted: "If you are not willing right now to live fully for Christ as Lord of your life, how can you say that you were really sincere when you supposedly committed yourself to Him at some time in the past?" (p. 223). Note that he speaks here of commitment, not faith.

As the preceding quote implies, also bothersome is his discussion of faith. For him faith seems to be more than believing a historical fact or promise. For Hunt faith includes some sort of commitment (pp. 85, 91, 100). On several occasions he slips in repentance as another or possibly co-condition for eternal life (pp. 41, 75).

Therefore, while there is helpful material in this book, it takes a certain amount of sifting to find it. This is more of a shotgun blast than it is a well-aimed rifle strike. Hunt throws a lot of material out there in the

hopes that the reader will find some of it helpful. Since this isn't my favorite book written by Hunt, whose works are generally excellent, I give it a mild recommendation.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches That Are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare. By Chuck Lawless. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002. 224 pp. Paper. $11.99.

Lawless eschews some of the more fanciful approaches to spiritual warfare and church growth today. His conclusion is that true spiritual warfare and church growth are accomplished by believers who are living holy lives as a result of being discipled in healthy churches (e.g., pp. 214-15). That is a biblical position which needs more attention today, to be sure.

This book doesn't exegete passages. Lawless mentions a lot of texts and even quotes quite a few. However, almost never does he explain what the text says. He assumes the reader agrees that the texts prove his points.

He believes that the local church exists to fulfill six Es: exalt God, evangelize the world, equip believers, edify others, encounter God in prayer, and encourage one another in fellowship. Those are the titles of Chapters 3-8 (see also *The Church Model* chart on p. 25). While those are all things believers are called upon to do, one wonders if those are indeed "the six purposes of the local congregation" (p. 18). There is no mention here or in the book of the Lord's Supper/communion. Baptism gets some attention (pp. 46-47, 49), but one could wonder whether sufficient attention is paid to this important discipleship issue related to the purpose of the local church.

The proclamation of God's Word during the church service is not emphasized in this book. Rather, as is common in many churches today, most of these Es seem to be fulfilled primarily in small groups (e.g., pp. 142-43).

JOTGES readers must search long and hard in this book for a clear statement about what one must do to have eternal life. While there is a

whole chapter on evangelism, and even a brief discussion of the message of evangelism, that which must be done to have eternal life is left vague. In the chapter on evangelism he implies that one is born again by deciding to follow God (p. 87) or Christ (p. 88). Yet on another occasion in that chapter he quotes Rom 5:1 which speaks of having been justified by faith (p. 94). But in another chapter he gives a model membership covenant a church might use. It starts with these words, "Having received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior…" (p. 117).

There is much useful information in this book. I recommend it with some reservations.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

Putting Amazing Back into Grace: Embracing the Heart of the Gospel. Second Edition. By Michael Horton. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991, 1994, 2002. 280 pp. Paper. $15.99.

In this second edition of his defense of Reformed theology, Horton does about as good of a job as one could do. Even though I disagree with Reformed theology on many points, I found myself time and time again agreeing with Horton, even on issues related to justification, faith, assurance, and many other points.

Yet he would occasionally make statements that deeply grieved me, more so than those made by other Lordship Salvation writers. The reason, I believe, is that he is so close to the truth. However, since he is chained to what he calls *the Reformed tradition* (e.g., pp. 15, 205, 207), he cannot avoid lapsing into statements that distort the saving message.

There is a difference between doctrine and dogma. Doctrine is truth derived from the study of Scripture, hopefully, our own personal study of Scripture! Dogma is an assertion derived from church councils and confessions.

Horton is promoting dogma, not doctrine. He tips his hand in this regard with references to *the Reformed tradition* and with his appendix, in which he devotes 17 pages to a list of Scriptures that purportedly prove his position (pp. 217-33). This is followed by a list of quotes from church fathers, later theologians, and creedal statements from church counsels

that run 26 pages (pp. 234-59). *Fifty percent more space* is given to the comments of men than those of God.

Horton seems to consider the doctrine of individual election to be the single most important soteriological doctrine (see, for example, pp. 73-90). "It is nice to know that you can gauge your life by God's decision for you [election] and not the other way around" (p. 173). Of course, the problem with this is how we know God has chosen us. Horton repeatedly skirts this issue, which is the Achilles heel of Reformed theology.

If election can only unfailingly be seen in perseverance to the end of one's life, then one cannot be sure he is elect until he dies. While Horton repeatedly indicates that only those who persevere to the end are truly saved (e.g., pp. 175-76, 252) and that those who fail to persevere prove they were never regenerated in the first place (e.g., p. 230), he stops short of admitting that certainty of one's eternal destiny is impossible prior to death. Indeed, he suggests the opposite: "While the biblical message of election is threatening to those who reject the gospel, it is a source of great hope *and certainty* to those who are trusting in Christ" (p. 87). Evidently as long as one continues trusting in Christ there is "certainty." But the moment one ceases trusting in Him, what he formerly thought was certainty proves to have been presumption.

Horton defends the idea that the church is the people of God and thus there is no future for national Israel (pp. 200-202). He says that regeneration precedes faith (p. 150), surprising to me, since in another book, *Christ the Lord*, he criticized MacArthur for saying essentially the same thing. Horton states that while justification is the *imputation* of righteousness, it unfailingly results in sanctification, which he says is the *impartation* of righteousness (p. 170). I'm sure Horton is usually more careful in how he words this. However, I fail to see the difference between what he is saying and what Rome has been saying for centuries.

I was also a bit shocked when in several places he indicated that discipleship is a condition of justification. For example, "Jesus made it plain throughout his ministry that one could not become his disciple (*and, therefore, could not receive eternal life*) unless that person was willing to 'take up his cross daily' and follow Jesus. The New Testament emphasizes denying yourself, dying to sin, and deferring to others" (p. 171, italics added). Note also this question: "Did you become a disciple of the apostles and of the Lord? *In other words, do you trust Christ alone for your salvation?* Then you are one of the elect" (p. 89, italics added).

I was also bothered by Horton saying that "we are responsible to persevere" (p. 230) and "it is our responsibility to persevere in faith and conviction—with great determination even in the midst of formidable obstacles" (p. 252). I cannot understand how this is so when in his theology, it is God who guarantees perseverance. Why would God make it *our responsibility* to do works that are *required* in order to get into the Kingdom? This is not adequately explained, nor can it be, in my opinion.

Let the reader beware that Horton is a very good apologist for his position. One who is well aware of Reformed rhetoric will find in this book great challenge. The need for the clear gospel is manifestly evident when you read a book like this. If this is the best that *the Reformed tradition* can do, then it is time to reject tradition and like the Bereans search the Scriptures.

I recommend this book to the well-grounded believer.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

Faith Victorious: Finding Strength and Hope from Hebrews 11. By Richard D. Phillips. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002. 234 pp. Paper. $12.99.

This book is based, according to the author, on a series of sermons he preached in the early morning service at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia in 2001 (p. x). Phillips is a graduate of Westminster Seminary and the book reflects a Reformed perspective on faith and assurance.

Each chapter is an exposition of a portion of Hebrews 11, with the final chapter covering 12:1-3. It isn't a commentary *per se* since the author is preaching rather than teaching.

Phillips suggests that true faith works. Thus James and Paul are not in opposition. "There is no contradiction between Paul and James. Paul states that we are justified by faith alone. James merely qualifies that by insisting that such faith inevitably does good works, or else it is not true faith" (p. 50). He then quotes Calvin as saying "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone." Phillips adds, "Faith is always accompanied by obedience."

In his discussion of Hebrews 10:35, Phillips implies that the men in question received eternal life because they persevered through persecution: "One of the brothers spat out to his tormentors, 'The King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, *because we have died for his laws*" (p. 182, emphasis added). While this might seem to be justification by works, Phillips would see it as justification by faith that works.

Not only in 10:35, but in all the many places in Hebrews 11 where eternal rewards are in view, Phillips sees justification salvation. This is unfortunate. The net effect is that the reader cannot be sure he has eternal life since he cannot be sure that he will persevere.

The tone of this book is quite irenic. I recommend this book to pastors who anticipate preaching through Hebrews.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

PERIODICAL REVIEWS

BY THE MEMBERS OF THE GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY

"The Hermeneutics of Noncessationism," Robert L. Thomas, *The Master's Seminary Journal* (Fall 2003): 287-310.

While this article is ostensibly dealing with the interpretive methods of those who believe the signs gifts continue today, it is quite helpful in dealing with modern hermeneutics practiced in most "traditions." His discussion of the ideas of community hermeneutics, preunderstandings, single versus multiple meanings, and reader-response hermeneutics are extremely helpful.

This article is well worth reading in order to better understand hermeneutics in general, the hermeneutics of noncessationism, and the theology of noncessationism. I highly recommend it.

Robert N. Wilkin
Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

"Rethinking an Evangelical Response to Postmodernism: A Critique and Proposal," Rodrigo de Sousa, *Presbyterion* (Fall 2003): 94-102.

When the terrorist attacks occurred in 2001, many hailed 9/11 as the death of postmodernity. This belief was born out of the fact that many believe that the twentieth century was in fact its genesis. For this reason, De Sousa wrote this article in order to "challenge, to some extent, these assumptions" for he believes "they reveal a failure to understand postmodernism and to provide a response that would enable the church to interact meaningfully with our culture" (p. 94). Thus, his thesis is that "in order to engage properly in the postmodern debate, we must recognize and reject the Nietzschean concept of genealogy and, at the same time, we must develop a clearer understanding of the hermeneutical nature of theology" (p. 95).

De Sousa does not believe that pluralism is at the heart of the debate. For "if philosophical pluralism were the real enemy, postmodernism could easily be dismissed" (p. 96). He believes that pluralism and relativism are major problems, but the heart of the issue is "the existence (or non-existence) of something upon which truth can stand, of an overarching metaphysical reality that goes beyond the boundaries of human perception and gives coherence and meaning to reality" (p. 97). De Sousa attributes this philosophy to Nietzsche's death of God movement. He writes, "Nietzsche saw that if God is dead, there is no ground for truth, for then we are left with no ultimate metaphysical reality, no basis for determining what is right or wrong…what we are left with is the responsibility of construing our own truth" (p. 99). Thus, "a proper evangelical response to the postmodern epistemology, therefore, should not have as its starting point the defense of the concept of objective truth, but rather the proclamation of the most foundational truth of God's existence and providence…" (p. 100).

Until this point in the article, the reviewer was in complete agreement; however, like many who write on postmodernism, it seems that De Sousa has bought into some of what he wrote against. He turns to John Frame's concept of *vagueness* developed in his book *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. He writes, "The knowledge of God comes to us especially through the Scriptures, but 'the bible itself is language,' and language is vague, marked by cultural limits and imprecision. Though this revelation is true, it is limited by the constraints of language itself" (p. 100). It is clear now why De Sousa does not believe the heart of the issue lies in our view of objective truth. Unfortunately, the postmodern perspectival view of truth and his own do not seem too different. Almost predicatively, he writes, "the recognition of theology as hermeneutics is liberating because it allows us to recognize that all our knowledge is perspectival and not as 'objective' as we once thought" (p. 101). How this is "liberating" eludes the reviewer. It seems more like a self-made cage. Once again the mantra of the postmodern theologian "Absolute knowledge of God, therefore, cannot be claimed by any cultural representation or epistemic process, and that includes the Western" (p. 101) finds its way into another article on how to reach the postmodern.

He concludes with: "…by understanding that all theology is nevertheless a matter of perspective can evangelicals construct a really effective theology" (p. 102). If theology is relegated to perspective, how effective can it be? How effective would the Book of Galatians have

been if Paul would not have said, "For I neither received it [the gospel] from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:12). We are not to preach our perspective but God's revelation. By saying that our Creator did not give us the ability to fully understand what He revealed, makes Him one of two things, impersonal or inept. He is neither.

Michael D. Makidon
Director of Publications
Grace Evangelical Society
Irving, TX

"Biblical Integrity in an Age of Theological Diversity," Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Evangelical Journal* 18 (2000): 19-28.

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., is the Coleman M. Mockler Distinguished Professor of OT and President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Kaiser has championed a single meaning hermeneutic for many years. Among his numerous works, a full defense of his hermeneutical approach is found in *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Baker, 1981). His passion and conviction is also evident in this brief but significant article. He begins by tracing the contributions of writers who assaulted the literary landscape by asserting that the reader and not the author of a text is the determiner of meaning. It is these debates, argues Kaiser, concerning hermeneutics that have given rise to the current crisis in biblical integrity. Kaiser applies his insights to three related aspects: 1) Exegesis; 2) Pulpit proclamation; and 3) Seminary and church life. The last part of the article deals with some effects of pluralism followed by a conclusion.

By making the "reader sovereign," Kaiser asserts, "[one] jeopardize[s] the divine authority of the text for God's people" (p. 21). This is particularly true regarding the NT authors' use of the OT. Kaiser bemoans the fact that many Evangelicals have adopted a *sensus plenior* (fuller meaning) approach to exegesis. It is argued that because Scripture is divinely inspired, God may have intended a meaning that isn't recognizable by the human author. Kaiser surveys the state of affairs that led to this approach yet asks some penetrating questions which seriously challenge this method.

Next, Kaiser focuses on the task of preaching. What is a pastor to do amidst diversity and pluralism? Many are claiming that if the NT authors found "rich meanings" in OT texts, we in the age of the Spirit are legitimately permitted to seek our own meanings also. Kaiser cautions, "Pastor, do not follow any of these methods" (p. 23). The temptation is all too enticing, for "if subjectivity is now allowed…then this is a whole lot better than the tedious work of teasing the meaning out of a text by working with the grammar, syntax, history, and theology of the Greek and Hebrew text" (p. 23). Ultimately, by abandoning author-intended meaning in both exegesis and proclamation, we forsake the very possibility of communication itself.

While turning his sights on the seminary and church, Kaiser follows Jeffrey Hadden's analysis that "belief, purpose, and leadership orientation" have come under severe crisis. This is more so apparent since the Enlightenment, given the desire to bring "God into line with modernity" (p. 24). This, notes Kaiser, quoting James Turner, was "because church leaders too often forgot the transcendence essential to any worthwhile God" (p. 24). All this was due to the fact that seminary (and church) tried to accommodate the prestige of academia.

Finally, Kaiser shows how given the crisis in hermeneutics which led to a reorientation of the very personnel who should have proclaimed, "Thus saith the Lord," now four factors emerge. First, Kaiser addresses the loss of church orientation due to secularization. The second, he states, follows naturally: the loss of mission and direction. Third, Kaiser argues, there is a loss of ecclesiastical commitment because of the supposedly superior stance of the "value free" perspective from which teaching is made. Finally, there is the loss of true academic freedom because of constant curriculum revision. The specializations have become narrower thus precluding a truly whole and comprehensive coverage of the Bible and theology (pp. 26-27).

In his concluding section, Kaiser shares how other traditions have suffered. Evangelicals must not feel immune to the tendencies of sliding down a slippery slope. To counter the trends, Kaiser suggests three safeguards. First, a return to a single, author-intended meaning hermeneutic, so as to win the battle over the NT use of the OT; second, the practical suggestion of protecting endowment funds; and third, to greater accountability between seminary and church.

This is a fine article, which should be read by all in seminary, from student to the highest administrator. No doubt Kaiser's hermeneutical

approach is sound as it stands, but an appreciation of the entire context of Scripture strengthens rather than undermines his emphasis. There is meaning in the text because God intended to communicate with mankind. Light is shone from both directions as one diligently studies the Bible. The OT is foundational for understanding much in the New. The NT also gives insight to the centrality of Christ in the totality of biblical revelation. The Bible should be read from left to right only to be re-read from right to left.

Doros Zachariades
Senior Pastor
Woodstock Baptist Church
Somerset, KY

"Preaching Christ from the Old Testament," Sidney Greidanus, *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 2004): 3-13.

Any pastor who has spent time preaching from the OT has experienced the difficulties and pitfalls of bringing Christ into the sermon. Some passages easily point to Christ, but many do not. Knowing that we are to "preach Christ" and the OT speaks of Christ, how are we to teach these passages while still being hermeneutically faithful to the text?

Sidney Greidanus proposes a likely solution in his article, "Preaching Christ from the Old Testament." Based on a book by the same title (Eerdmans, 1999), Greidanus writes that "preaching Christ" means more than just preaching the person and work of Christ, for "most texts cannot be linked legitimately to the person or work of Christ" (p. 7). A proper hermeneutical method of preaching Christ from the OT must also include the teachings of Christ. "This opens up a whole new range of links from the Old Testament to Christ in the New Testament" (p. 7).

With this in mind, Greidanus provides this definition for preaching Christ: "Preaching Christ from the Old Testament is to preach sermons that authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God's revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament" (p. 7).

There are seven legitimate ways of doing this. First is the way of redemptive-historical progression (p. 10). The narratives and characters of the OT are seen as part of the salvation history of God that leads ultimately to Jesus Christ. Second is the way of promise-fulfillment (p. 11).

Many of the promises in the OT are completely fulfilled only in Jesus Christ.

Third is the way of typology (p. 11). Over the centuries this has been the primary means of preaching Christ from the OT. While there have been many abuses of this method, under proper hermeneutical guidelines, it can be a fruitful and beneficial way to reveal Christ in the OT.

Fourth is the way of longitudinal themes (p. 12), which are ideas that can be traced all the way through the Bible. Every major OT theme leads to Christ. Fifth is the way of NT reference (p. 12). When the NT refers to an OT text, this can guide us in preaching Christ from that text. Finally is the way of contrast (p. 13). Sometimes the NT changes the teachings of the OT. Most often, these changes are a result of Christ's person, work, or teachings.

This article is well worth reading for any pastor who struggles with preaching Christ from the OT. Free Grace readers will also be pleased to note that he did get the gospel right: faith in Jesus is the only way to eternal life (p. 4).

My only complaint is that it was too brief, and didn't explain the seven ways in very much depth. For example, in the section about the way of typology, he approves of using OT events and characters as types of Christ if they are used as such in the NT. But he doesn't talk about how to deal with obvious OT types that are not mentioned in the NT (e.g. Noah's ark and Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac). But then, any pastor or reader who wants to know more can always buy the book.

Jeremy D. Myers
Senior Pastor
Fortine Community Church
Fortine, MT

"The Kingdom of God in the New Testament," James A. Brooks, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* (Spring 1998): 21-37.

James A. Brooks is Professor Emeritus of New Testament at Bethel Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is well known for his commentary on Mark's Gospel (NAC, Broadman Press). The purpose of this article is to trace the concept of the Kingdom in the entire NT. "Kingdom" is the theme for this issue of the journal.

"There is widespread agreement," notes Brooks, "that…the kingdom of God is primarily his rule in the lives of those who submit to his authority" (p. 21). As such Brooks suggests that "rule" or "reign" may be a better translation of the word "Kingdom" in many instances.

The article covers the intertestamental literature briefly then moves to the usage of the term "Kingdom" in the various parts of the NT documents. Here one finds a helpful analysis of the terms "Kingdom of God," "Kingdom of heaven," and "king." Yet here also, Brooks's commitments to literary dependence on the synoptic Gospels, Marcan priority, and the existence of Q, shine through. These latter convictions are not absolutely determinative of his exposition, yet they color his otherwise impressive analysis.

Rightly, Brooks notes that "the kingdom of God/Heaven was the most frequent and most important of Jesus' teaching" (p. 25). He moves through Mark, Matthew, Luke-Acts, John, the Pauline Epistles, Hebrews and the General Epistles, and finally Revelation surveying the contribution to the kingdom theme. Not surprisingly, most of the article is devoted to the synoptic Gospels. Brooks's treatment of material is judicious and even-handed. For example, in the debated text Mark 9:1, Brooks offers various possible interpretations without settling the issue, but suggests that a series of events may provide the fulfillment. He is right, I believe, in expressing the present and future aspects of the Kingdom by stating "…the kingdom is not only something which draws near in the ministry of Jesus but actually comes at a future time" (p. 26).

Despite some very correct observations in this article, there are also some serious errors. The first relates to Brooks's position on Israel. He believes that the parable of the wedding banquet "affirms that the kingdom will be taken away from the Jews and be given to the Gentile church" (p. 30). Also, in Luke 14:24, Brooks feels this is "the exclusion of the Jewish nation from the kingdom because of its rejection of Jesus" (p. 31). Along with this is Brooks's denial of a political dimension to the coming Kingdom.

The second problem is in relation to salvation. Brooks merges distinct teachings concerning kingdom inheritance and eternal life. For example, he asserts, "[t]here is also emphasis on inheriting the kingdom, i.e. receiving it as a gift" (p. 34). Yet when one notices the requirement for entering the Kingdom, according to Brooks, it is difficult to maintain this as a "gift." In discussing repentance as the ethical demand of the Kingdom, Brooks claims it "involves not just a change of mind…but a

change of life. It involves more than sorrow for sin; it involves forsaking sin" (p. 36). This is further elaborated upon by requiring the production of godly virtues taught by Jesus and the disciples. This is difficult to reconcile with receiving a gift. It sounds more like a trade with God for good behavior, and as such it is clearly a works salvation model. Brooks earlier said something akin to this where he posits, "any person who is excluded from the kingdom [is so] because he or she does not have good character and good deeds" (p. 30). At points he mentions "reward" and "rank in the kingdom" (p. 29) but unfortunately does not draw out the implications. This balance and distinction in the NT between salvation as a gift received by faith alone, and rewards, which are based primarily on works, is missed. The resulting confusion limits the usefulness of the exposition in some places.

Overall the article is helpful and is recommended because of the primary analysis of the theme/terminology, despite some serious shortcomings in the exposition. However, it should be used carefully (as Paul once cautioned: test everything; hold on to what is good), and only after one has fully digested Robert L. Saucy's chapter "The Kingdom" in *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* (Zondervan, 1993), 81-110, and Craig A. Blaising's chapter, "The Kingdom of God in the New Testament" in *Progressive Dispensationalism* (BridgePoint, 1993), 232-283, in that order.

Doros Zachariades
Senior Pastor
Woodstock Baptist Church
Somerset, KY