



The Evangelical Review  
*of Theology and Politics*

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# The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

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# The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

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Edited by  
Calvin L. Smith  
Stephen M. Vantassel

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The *Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics* subscribes to the historic decisions of the early church councils. We hold dearly to the deity of Christ, the virgin conception, salvation through Jesus Christ, and the Trinity. We also believe in the unity of Scripture and consider the Bible as the final authority on all issues of faith and practice. This high view of Scripture requires submissions to be underpinned by a thoughtful biblical and theological analysis. The Editors also welcome non-Evangelical contributors to submit critiques of Evangelical political and social thought, providing they are suitably respectful of our values and beliefs, and that submissions are of interest and relevance to the aims and readership of the journal. Articles appearing in the journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editors.

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## Articles

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## Introduction

Calvin L. Smith

### *About*

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics is an online journal. All articles and reviews are published online as PDF files, and are downloadable by subscribers.

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What you have here are the articles, review articles, and reviews from 2014 collected together in a single edition for subscribers to print-off, or consult in electronic mode on Kindle or an e-Book reader.

In addition all past volumes of The Evangelical Review of Society and Politics are available for subscribers from the website: [www.theevangelicalreview.com](http://www.theevangelicalreview.com)

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics is a peer-reviewed, online, subscription journal exploring God’s revelation to humanity in the form of Jesus Christ. Scholarly submissions that are suitably respectful of the Evangelical Christian tradition are welcomed and invited from across the disciplinary spectrum: Evangelical theology, biblical studies, biblical theology, politics, society, economics, missiology, homiletics, discipleship, preaching, conversion, salvation, atonement, redemption, the Church et al.

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*The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics* subscribes to the historic decisions of the early church councils. We hold dearly to the deity of Christ, the virgin conception, salvation through Jesus Christ, and the Trinity. We also believe in the unity of Scripture and consider the Bible as the final authority on all issues of faith and practice. This high view of Scripture requires submissions to be underpinned by a thoughtful biblical and theological analysis. The Editors also welcome non-Evangelical contributors to submit critiques of Evangelical political and social thought, providing they are suitably respectful of our values

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Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics  
**Articles**







# Dorothy L. Sayers as a Cautious Transformationalist

Andrew J. Spencer

KEYWORDS:

| Dorothy L. Sayers | Political Theology | Christ and Culture |  
| H. Richard Niebuhr | Vocation | Transformationalist |

ABSTRACT:

Dorothy L. Sayers is most famous for her detective fiction, particularly the mystery novels involving Lord Peter Wimsey. Her greatest gift to history, however, is the application of a faithful concept of vocation to her art. Based on a speech delivered to the Archbishop of York's conference in Malvern, 1941, it appears Sayers had something like a transformationalist view according to Niebuhr's model. She saw withdrawing from the culture and becoming one with the culture as a pair of matched dangers. The first effectively privatizes Christianity and the second denatures it. Accordingly, Sayers believed the Church must do the impossible: without becoming identified with cultural institutions, it must redeem those institutions. The church must influence morality, but not get tied to the moralistic aspects of cultural institutions. This essay presents the case that Sayers was a cautious transformationalist. She believed that Christianity could permeate and redeem every form of art and every institution to improve it and make it more consistent with God's creational design. In a period of growing cultural marginalization, Sayers' example presents a way for Christians to point people toward a robust understanding of human flourishing.

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## INTRODUCTION

Depending on the circle in which she is being discussed, Dorothy L. Sayers may be known as a mystery writer, an advocate for classical education, a playwright, a lay theologian, or a translator of Dante. She is all these things and more. She is, intellectually speaking, fitting company for G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and T. S. Eliot. No less significant than these famous men of the early twentieth century, Sayers deserves a place at the table in the contemporary Christian discussion of cultural engagement.<sup>1</sup>

The multi-faceted Sayers is, to use Andy Crouch's term, a culture maker.<sup>2</sup> Her stories, plays, essays, and translations are excellent by any standard. Through all these media, she strives to be true to the form of the art, because she believes that the act of skillful creation is a good in itself. Sayers advocates for this approach to work in her famous essay, "Why Work?"<sup>3</sup> and no less clearly in her detective novel, *Gaudy Night*.<sup>4</sup> She sees faithfulness to God as being exemplified by faithfulness to her craft. In this respect, there is resonance between her understanding of cultural engagement and Crouch's. However, Sayers encourages a deeper engagement in political and economic activities than Crouch, which leads to something like a transformationalist approach to the relationship between Christianity and culture.

This essay argues that Sayers is a cautious transformationalist. That is, she demonstrates many of the characteristics of H. Richard Niebuhr's

1 For example, Bruce Riley Ashford, *Every Square Inch: An Introduction to Cultural Engagement for Christians* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), 55–58.

2 Crouch himself uses Sayers' volume, *The Mind of the Maker, in support of his vision. Andy Crouch, Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 274.

3 Dorothy L. Sayers, "Why Work?," in *Letters to a Diminished Church: Passionate Arguments for the Relevance of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2004), 125–46.

4 See for example, the clear discussion of the importance of the quality of one's work and consistency with the artistic form. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Gaudy Night* (New York, N.Y.: HarperPaperbacks, 1995), 370–72.

typology, Christ Transforming Culture, but with due caution to prevent tipping from transformation to theonomy. She actively resists conflation of the church with the institutions of the world while seeking to influence culture through Christian truth. Whether in her fiction, her plays, or her essays, Sayers provides a helpful example of how to remain oriented to doctrinal orthodoxy and influence culture from a Christian worldview through excellence in a craft.

### CAUTIOUS TRANSFORMATIONALIST

Though some object to the use of H. Richard Niebuhr's categories, they remain helpful as typological categories.<sup>5</sup> Adapting the categories of *Christ and Culture*, Dorothy L. Sayers is a cautious transformationalist: she seeks to redeem the good things in culture and use them for the glory of God.<sup>6</sup> However, she is cautious about the approach the church should take to influence culture for fear Christianity will become unduly associated with the institutions of culture. Therefore, Sayers follows the path of the transformationalist but with concern for the potential to conflate the state and the church and bring about a synthesis that would misrepresent the truth of Christianity.

Living in a nation that still recognizes the Church of England as the official religion of state, it could have been easy for Sayers to see a purification and elevation of that ecclesial body as the solution to the decline of Christian sentiment. Sayers does not support that option. Instead, she argues the church should be a transformative force in the world, but one that is disinterested in politics. In other words, the church should seek to fulfill the gospel without risking entanglement in governance because the quest for power can undermine the mission of the church.<sup>7</sup>

5 For example, Carson discards Niebuhr's categories as useless, though he offers scant replacement. D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 1–65.

6 Niebuhr outlines the transformationalist perspective in H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, Expanded ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 190–229.

7 Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Church's Responsibility," in *Malvern, 1941: The Life of the Church and the Order of Society: Being the Proceedings of the Archbishop of York's*

Based on these observations, it seems warranted to qualify Niebuhr's categories somewhat and carve out a new variety of cultural engagement for those that see the power of the gospel to transform all things and yet feel the need to object to the burning of Servetus more strenuously than did Calvin. Sayers' preference for distance between the coercive power of the government and the transformational work of the church may have been influenced as much by the conflation of the state and church in Nazi Germany as by her understanding of the government of Geneva; there is little evidence to work from.<sup>8</sup> However, her appreciation for the applicability of Christianity to all of life is firmly driven by the unity she sees in the world, which is inspired by her classical education.

## CLASSICAL LOGIC

In homeschool circles, Sayers is known for her essay, "The Lost Tools of Learning," which has contributed to the resurgence of classical education.<sup>9</sup> Her appeal reflects a call to educate children as she was educated: with great books, an emphasis on the grasp of languages, and significant effort toward clear thinking. Her father, an Anglican clergyman, taught her Latin at a young age. She learned several romantic languages from her governesses.<sup>10</sup> As a result, Sayers read promiscuously of books that matter and that shaped her thought.

The wide net of Sayers' reading leads her to make some connections in different ways than many children that grow up in church. For example, Sayers tells of her initial encounter with Cyrus the Persian. She met the ancient monarch in the pages of a children's magazine and categorized him with the Greeks and Romans. "So for a long time he remained," writes Sayers. "And then, one day, I realized, with a shock as of sacrilege, that on

*Conference* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1941), 71–72.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>9</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning," *National Review*, January 19, 1979, 90–99.

<sup>10</sup> Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers*, 14–26.

that famous expedition he had marched clean out of our Herodotus and slap into the Bible."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the story of Esther and Ahasuerus crossed from biblical data to classical history in Sayers' mind.<sup>12</sup>

As Sayers describes it, "I think it was chiefly Cyrus and Ahasuerus who prodded me into the belated conviction that history was all of a piece and that the Bible was part of it."<sup>13</sup> The connection is like a light bulb turning on. The Bible is no mere fairy tale to Sayers; it is true. Christianity is a real, historical religion for her. This makes all the difference as she seeks to find her place in the world as a Christian. Everything inside and outside the Bible has the same standard of logic applied to it. No special pleading is allowed on the basis of faith or obstinate skepticism.<sup>14</sup> The key for Sayers is to think and think clearly; her concern for education is to see that children are taught that skill.

Sayers' essay, "The Lost Tools of Learning," stands on par with Lewis' essay, "Men Without Chests," in its prophetic value as they both question modern subjectivist pedagogy.<sup>15</sup> In a series of interrogatives in her introduction to the essay, Sayers asks, "Has it ever struck you as odd, or unfortunate, that today when the proportion of literacy throughout Western Europe is higher than it has ever been, people should have become susceptible to the influence of advertisement and mass propaganda to an extent hitherto unheard-of and unimagined?"<sup>16</sup> This is, of course, Sayers' own opinion. It is confirmed through her experience working for an advertising agency as a copywriter.<sup>17</sup> Thus Sayers' call to return to a

11 Sayers, "A Vote of Thanks to Cyrus," in *Letters to a Diminished Church: Passionate Arguments for the Relevance of Christian Doctrine*, 193–94.

12 *Ibid.*, 194–95.

13 *Ibid.*, 195.

14 The rejection of special pleading to differentiate biblical and extra-biblical history is largely the point of her essay *Thanks to Cyrus*. *Ibid.*, 193–202.

15 C. S. Lewis, "Men without Chests," in *The Abolition of Man* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 1–26.

16 Sayers, "The Lost Tools of Learning," 90.

17 Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers*, 111. Her experience working in an ad agency formed the backdrop of one of her early Lord Peter novels, *Murder Must Advertise*. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Whose Body? / Clouds of Witness / Murder Must Advertise / Gaudy Night* (New York: Avenel Books, 1982), 261–458.

classical education is humanitarian as well as practical.

The humanitarian element of her syllabus for classical learning is drawn from the view that people are generally better off when they can think clearly. Clear thinking saves people from getting ripped off by conmen. The danger, according to Sayers, is in having “a population that is literate, in the sense that everybody is able to read and write; but, owing to the emphasis placed on scientific training at the expense of the humanities, very few of our people have been taught to understand and handle language as an instrument of power.”<sup>18</sup> She then describes the world in picturesque terms as having children bumbling about in a scientific laboratory pulling levers and pushing buttons. Yet in the same essay she recommends the delight in knowledge and the understanding of how to use words to explore the unity in the world.<sup>19</sup> The study of language as a part of a child’s education is critical to helping them piece together comprehension of the universe as it is.

For Sayers, the fragments of knowledge and culture are interesting in themselves, but the reassembled whole is enthralling. The creation is good and deserves looking into and looking after, which can be done through the study of history, science, and language. Along with these subjects theology is an essential element in her ideal education, “because theology is the mistress-science, without which the whole educational structure will necessarily lack its final synthesis.”<sup>20</sup> She encourages parents to orient children to the “story of God and Man in Outline—i.e., the Old and New Testaments presented as parts of a single narrative of Creation, Rebellion, and Redemption.”<sup>21</sup> The content of Scripture provides the ethics necessary for later evaluation of history, limitation of science, and the deep discussion of dogma, which is a good and exciting thing in itself.<sup>22</sup>

18 Sayers, “Creative Mind,” in *Letters to a Diminished Church: Passionate Arguments for the Relevance of Christian Doctrine*, 46.

19 *Ibid.*, 45–48.

20 Sayers, “The Lost Tools of Learning,” 95.

21 *Ibid.* That Sayers is a mystery writer who appreciates biblical theology only deepens the love of many Christians for her writing.

22 *Ibid.*, 98.

The unity of the world in Sayers' mind is exactly what places her in the category of a transformationalist. There are no compartments in Sayers' world. The gospel makes sense of the whole universe and its light should be shone on every area of life. For Sayers, the doctrines of the church are enlivening and exciting. The truthfulness of Christianity illuminates all things and coordinates all things. Therefore, she sees that all things could and should be done in a way that brings glory to God. This includes the brilliant logic and grammatical prose of her detective fiction.

### EXCELLENCE IN FICTION

As one of the first female graduates from Oxford with a Master of Arts, it may seem somewhat surprising to find the first fruits of this great mind in the fiction stacks. However, her stories of Lord Peter Wimsey provide an entry point into later efforts and pay the bills for a time as she, a single mother, finances the upbringing of her son. There is some evidence to suggest that she feels some consternation at writing popular detective novels to earn money when she is capable of more academically oriented writing. This can be seen in her semi-autobiographical character, Harriet Vane.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the dangers of reading an author's life into her work, there is little question there is a clear link between Vane and Sayers.<sup>24</sup> Harriet is a writer of detective novels. She is an MA from Oxford in one of the earliest women's classes. In *Strong Poison*, Harriet has an illicit lover who claimed to be opposed to marriage and with whom she fell out, much like Sayers.<sup>25</sup> Harriet and Sayers value work done well for its own sake. This is significant inasmuch as Harriet Vane is confronted by her Senior

23 See, for example, the discussion between Harriet and the dons about her work. Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, 31.

24 Ralph E. Hone, *Dorothy L. Sayers: A Literary Biography* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1979), 63.

25 There is no doubt that Harriet's relationship with Phillip Boyes is autobiographical. Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers*, 113–14.

Common Room for writing detective fiction. On the one hand, the oddity is that she writes murder mysteries after having been on trial for murder. However, there is an intellectual snobbery among the dons, which causes them to sneer gently at Harriet's novels, however excellently written.<sup>26</sup> There is tension throughout *Gaudy Night* about Harriet's calling as novelist. But this tension helps make it the best of her novels, because in it, the characters are most real.

If there is a legitimate criticism of Sayers' fiction, it is that the early Wimsey stories are less literary than her other works.<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that the stories are bad. Sayers presents excellent detective stories that challenge the reader with careful reveals and delightful red herrings. The syntax is superb, but the characters are not fully human. The interactions between Wimsey and his valet, Bunter, are sometimes humorous and always helpful to the story.<sup>28</sup> But Wimsey is something of a plastic character. He is an exceedingly intelligent aristocrat with near limitless financial resources. He and Bunter are conveniently experts at nearly everything they encounter. The stories are fun, but they lack some of the virtues of high literature because her main character does not appear to be real—Wimsey is too much of a superhuman.<sup>29</sup>

That begins to change when Harriet Vane is introduced as the defendant in *Strong Poison*. Her former lover is poisoned by arsenic shortly after a vigorous quarrel. Harriet is, rather serendipitously, writing a novel about arsenical poisoning. In doing research for the book, she uses false names to purchase arsenic at various chemists in London. The case against her

26 Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, 39–42.

27 For example: Dorothy L. Sayers, "The Bibulous Business of a Matter of Taste," in *Lord Peter* (New York: Avon, 1972), 154–72.

28 As when Wimsey notes that he is surprised and disappointed that Bunter knows nothing of campanology. Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Nine Tailors* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1962), 15.

29 Hannay provides evidence of the exaggerated heroics of Wimsey from an unpublished address. Margaret P. Hannay, "Harriet's Influence on the Characterization of Lord Peter Wimsey," in *As Her Whimsey Took Her: Critical Essays on the Work of Dorothy L. Sayers*, ed. Margaret P. Hannay (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1979), 37. See especially note 4.

seems insurmountable even after Lord Peter steps in to investigate. It is a very good detective story, but *Strong Poison* becomes a good novel because it is the first account in which the main characters are authentically human.<sup>30</sup> Peter falls for Harriet and proposes to her in a prison interview room. The love story is set in motion, but the concern for jealousy over past lovers, fear for Harriet's life, and the social pressure of a nobleman marrying a notorious woman accused of murder stifle the relationship. Lord Peter loses none of his witty demeanor and razor sharp logic, but he gains humanity by being emotionally real for the first time.<sup>31</sup> The novels that chronicle the Vane-Wimsey romance are the most excellent because they are the most authentic and Peter is seen to mature as a person.

Lord Peter's maturation presents a problem, however. In creating her Sherlock, Sayers imbues him with characteristics that seems to reflect her own state of rebellion against Christian morals and the church. Lord Peter knows Christian doctrine but is unrepentant of a history of immorality, including affairs with a Viennese opera singer<sup>32</sup> and a woman named Barbara with whom he is so enamored that he took a course in logic.<sup>33</sup> More than his sexual exploits, which are set to paper while Sayers is engaged in an affair,<sup>34</sup> the reader see a dismissive attitude toward Christianity in Lord Peter's rejection of the Gospels. On one occasion Wimsey comments, "As the old pagan said of the Gospels, after all, it was a long time ago, and we'll hope it wasn't true."<sup>35</sup> As a result, Sayers cannot bring Wimsey into the kingdom without destroying the authenticity of his character. At the

30 Margaret Hannay discusses the impact of Harriet Vane on Wimsey in detail, noting that the love story was concocted, in part, by Sayers to marry Lord Peter off and be done with him. *Ibid.*, 40.

31 It may be the experience of writing *Strong Poison* that Harriet and Peter debate in Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, 331–33. Cf. Hannay, "Harriet's Influence on the Characterization of Lord Peter Wimsey," in *As Her Whimsey Took Her: Critical Essays on the Work of Dorothy L. Sayers*, 40–41.

32 Sayers, *Gaudy Night*, 183.

33 Dorothy L. Sayers, *Strong Poison* (New York, N.Y.: HarperPaperbacks, 1995), 128. It is possible that the relationship with Barbara was platonic.

34 See Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers*, 107.

35 In *Clouds of Witness*, Chapter 2: Sayers, *Whose Body? / Clouds of Witness / Murder Must Advertise / Gaudy Night*, 133.

same time, she is herself returning to the faith of her youth, which seems to influence her work. Her friend and biographer, Barbara Reynolds, notes that Sayers returns to confession and communion after the birth of her illegitimate son.<sup>36</sup> There is about a six-year gap between the birth of John Anthony and the submission of *Strong Poison*, where Wimsey seems to begin his turn, so plenty of room for debate remains.

Whatever questions remain about Sayers' psychology and conversion at the time, even her early detective novels recognize the objective order of the world.<sup>37</sup> Lord Peter displays a passion for finding the truth, so that even when his brother's life is on the line, exposing the reality of the situation is more important than any value gained from ambiguity in evidence. In a somewhat heated exchange, Lord Peter defends himself against his brother's solicitor:

“Damn it all, we want to get at the truth!”

“Do you?” said Sir Impey drily, “I don't. I don't care twopence about the truth. I want a case. It doesn't matter to me who killed Cathcart, provided I can prove it wasn't Denver. It's really enough if I can throw reasonable doubt on its being Denver. . . .”

“I've always said,” growled Peter, “that the professional advocate was the most immoral fellow on the face of the earth, and now I know for certain.”<sup>38</sup>

A more rigorous concern for truth than is displayed by Sir Impey Biggs can be seen in the sympathetically portrayed Chief Inspector Parker. For example, the policeman is glad to see his case against Harriet Vane overturned in *Strong Poison* and cooperates with Lord Peter to do so, even though it will make him look silly for having been mistaken.<sup>39</sup> Truth and integrity are significant concepts within Sayers' worldview. This leads her to a transformationalist stance because when one recognizes that there is

36 Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers*, 141.

37 E.g., Dorothy Sayers, L., *Whose Body?* (New York: HarperPaperBack, 1995), 123.

38 Sayers, *Whose Body? Whose Body? / Clouds of Witness / Murder Must Advertise / Gaudy Night*, 200.

39 Sayers, *Strong Poison*, 57.

truth, it is merely the next logical step to believe that all things should conform to that truth.

Apart from the worldview that undergirds Sayers' detective fiction, her writing ability enables her to be effective as a cautious transformationalist because she hones the skills necessary to communicate clearly and imaginatively to a wide audience. Laura Simmon notes, "Writing detective fiction requires the ability to visualize a complete story and break it down into its constituent parts, composing it so that all relevant clues—and usually some irrelevant ones—are included and can point readers toward the solution."<sup>40</sup> She goes on, "More than simply telling a story, though, a detective novelist is crafting an argument of sorts. Sayers is not presenting a random jumble of information; each clue has to help readers understand the conclusion. In her theological writing, Sayers is similarly persuasive."<sup>41</sup> Sayers' detective stories are excellent because of the same outlook that makes her a faithful Christian: a thirst for the truthfulness in everything in life. Her fiction reflects a Christian ethos because it is true to the art form and reality, not because the main characters express exemplary faith.

In fact, her most famous character, Lord Peter, never does convert. However, his attitude toward Christianity seems to soften through the series. Peter's relationship to the church may reflect a parallel to Sayers' own attitude.<sup>42</sup> Based on her biographies, there is an ebb in Sayers' spiritual tide during the early Wimsey days, which causes the flow at later points toward a more pronounced Christianity to be noticeable. Sayers' renewed interest in theology seems to push her away from the frivolity of Lord Peter's detective stories and toward more explicitly theological works. As one scholar notes, "Even Lord Peter . . . in his later days showed increasing sensitivity to moral and religious issues, but it was

40 Laura K. Simmons, *Creed without Chaos: Exploring Theology in the Writings of Dorothy L. Sayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 49.

41 *Ibid.*, 50.

42 Catherine Kenney, *The Remarkable Case of Dorothy L. Sayers* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990), 181–90.

not in keeping with his eighteenth-century gentility to become a Christian convert. . . . Dorothy L. Sayers needed a new means to present the case for Christianity. She found it in the drama.<sup>43</sup> So it is that Sayers shifts from being primarily a novelist to a dramatist with an invitation to write for the Canterbury Festival in 1937.

## DOCTRINAL DRAMA

Distinct from the youth skit that mars the contemporary worship service with poorly delivered lines, too frequent informal heresies, and blatant moralism, Sayers' theatrical contributions are quality in doctrine and form. In response to an invitation, Sayers writes a play celebrating vocation and service through the arts for the Canterbury Festival. In this drama, Sayers works to transform the culture by presenting a robust doctrine of vocation from a Christological perspective.

Her first play, *The Zeal of Thy House*, is an outworking of the doctrine of vocation that she begins to display in *Gaudy Night*. The play, according to Brabazon, interests Sayers more "as a job than as a work of devotion."<sup>44</sup> In other words, she sees it primarily as an artistic opportunity rather than as an act of religious service to the Church of England. The play represents the story of William of Sens, a French architect who is commissioned to rebuild a cathedral destroyed by fire. His work is done well, but he is prideful about it and impious. The moral of the story, as it were, is that the quality of the work defines the quality of the worker.<sup>45</sup> It is a sin for a Christian to do a thing badly and for that bad thing to be accepted as good merely because of the doctrinal leanings of the worker.

Two things are revealed as Sayers shifts from writing novels to

43 Nancy Marie Patterson Tischler, *Dorothy L. Sayers, a Pilgrim Soul* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 102.

44 Brabazon, *Dorothy L. Sayers*, 160.

45 *Ibid.*, 162.

writing plays. First, she demonstrates the depth of her appreciation of the necessity of integrity in work. This is put on display because of the basic theme of the play she writes. It matches what she has already revealed.<sup>46</sup> Second, Sayers' actual attitude toward Christianity is finally made plain. As indicated in the discussion above, the main character of her novels is somewhat skeptical of Christianity. However, the distance between the characters and the storyteller leaves it open to doubt what Sayers' own attitude is when writing those stories. In contrast, her plays written for a religious audience to be performed in a religious venue leave little doubt as to Sayers' own Christian faith. This leads to her being drawn into open religious conversations in her day.

Sayers does what she can to distance herself from her own theology by writing about confessional doctrine and not personal experience. According to Brabazon,

Unfortunately the way in which she re-stated the Christian doctrines was so vigorous, so pugnacious, so stimulating – in short so personal and so unlike the normal clerical version – that there was no chance of her being able to get away with insisting that she was merely repeating what the Church was always saying. Orthodox theology it might be, but it bore little relationship to what the man or woman in the pew heard, week after week, from the man in the pulpit.<sup>47</sup>

At this stage in her career, however, Sayers is reluctant to openly theologize on a regular basis. As she explains in a letter of refusal to an offer of a commission to write a book on Christianity, "I feel that lay persons such as myself can interfere in these matters much more successfully if they do not do it too often. To rise up once and lay about one is startling and effective. But when one makes a practice of it, the thing becomes official, and the public only say 'Oh poor old Dorothy Sayers has gone religious',

46 Indeed, Sayers was surprised when critics failed to see the connection in the theme of her play to that in *Gaudy Night*. *Ibid.*, 161.

47 *Ibid.*, 166.

and pay no further attention.”<sup>48</sup> Likely Sayers has a point, which more artists who are Christian could consider for today, though her point is much more difficult to heed given the prevalence of media—social and otherwise.

In any case, Sayers continues to work as a playwright. She writes a play depicting the honeymoon of Lord Peter and Harriet, *Busman’s Honeymoon*, which is also presented as a novel.<sup>49</sup> She returns to making religious plays, producing a radio nativity play for the BBC, *He That Should Come*. Eventually, she writes a cycle of twelve plays on the life of Christ as radio dramas for the BBC. In the plays, which are published as *The Man Born to Be King*, she seeks to bring the greatest story ever told to life with a fitting dramatic flourish.<sup>50</sup>

With these plays, Sayers crosses from merely being an artist creating works that are popular and excellent to becoming a public theologian. She writes and speaks openly about her Christianity, bringing her sharp intellect and talent to bear on the deep religious questions of the day. This she does with excellence and integrity, viewing the work of the theologian as inherently good and necessary for the transformation of the culture.

## TRANSFORMATIVE THEOLOGY

Sayers’ initial foray into public theology is the result of many questions raised when *The Zeal of Thy House* is produced. She writes the essay, “The Dogma is the Drama,” to explain that the content of *Zeal* is not novel invention, but imaginative presentation. She argues, “The action of the play involves a dramatic presentation of a few fundamental Christian dogmas—in particular, the application to human affairs of the doctrine of the Incarnation.”<sup>51</sup> Her basic position is that the doctrines of the

48 Letter to Messrs Longmans dated May 13 1938, cited in *ibid.*, 168–69.

49 Dorothy L. Sayers, *Busman’s Honeymoon* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

50 Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1943).

51 Sayers, “The Dogma is the Drama,” in *Letters to a Diminished Church: Passionate Arguments for the Relevance of Christian Doctrine*, 16.

church are some of the most interesting truths, and that they are typically misrepresented.

To make her point, she offers a tongue-in-cheek modern theological catechism:

Q.: WHAT IS MEANT BY THE ATONEMENT?

A.: God wanted to damn everybody, but his vindictive sadism was sated by the crucifixion of his own Son, who was quite innocent, and therefore, a particularly attractive victim. He now only damns people who don't follow Christ or who never heard of him.

...

Q.: WHAT IS FAITH?

A.: Resolutely shutting your eyes to scientific fact.

Q.: WHAT IS THE HUMAN INTELLECT?

A.: A barrier to faith.

...

Q.: WILT THOU BE BAPTIZED IN THIS FAITH?

A.: No fear!<sup>52</sup>

Sayers thus imaginatively presents various fallacious doctrinal positions that people in her day attributed to Christianity. Her approach is somewhat confrontational, since there are responses in her catechism that many readers would likely find to resonate with their own theological understanding. And that is exactly the point. Sayers uses somewhat shocking language to confront her audience with their error; making readers uncomfortable is a necessary part of the task of apologist. According to Brabazon, "The work of Christ and His Church was, after all, to bring good out of evil. Christians were right and pagans were wrong; and what harm was there in a little short-lived suffering, a little destruction, if it gave her the chance to prove it?"<sup>53</sup> Sayers' theological work is one of bringing the transformative power of truth, accurately

52 *Ibid.*, 18–19.

53 Brabazon, *Dorothy L. Sayers*, 179.

and imaginatively expressed, to bear on all of life. The willingness to be confrontational and go where logic leads sometimes puts Sayers on the front lines of the doctrinal disputes of her day.

Sayers herself is no stranger to doctrinal debate. Her concern for logical precision extended to her understanding of gender roles. During an early attempt to ordain women in the Church of England, C. S. Lewis asks her to write in opposition to it. Her response is to say that she believes the priest should be male on the basis of tradition and a preference for the theatrical propriety of a male standing in the place of Christ in administering the Eucharist.<sup>54</sup> She also argues it is better to hold to traditional gender roles in the church to avoid further alienating the Church of England from the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. However, as she writes to Lewis, she does not see any strong logical or theological reason to resist the ordination of women.<sup>55</sup> Her perspective on this issue leads to some identifying her as a sort of proto-feminist.<sup>56</sup>

However, in the early days of feminism, Sayers rejects that label. Despite that open rejection, some feminists still try to reclaim her, since she rides a motorcycle, has a career, and denies there is an ontological difference between men and women. According to Sayers, women should have access to the same sorts of jobs as men, as long as they are qualified.<sup>57</sup> Still, she vigorously resists the feminists because she sees their attempt to place the female over the male as an overcorrection.<sup>58</sup> Sayers views women as ontologically equal to men and sees only physical strength and individual gifting as differentiating qualifications for differing vocations. It is her razor-sharp mind, honed by an education in classics, that allows her to argue so tightly. While recognizing the authority of Scripture, Sayers is willing to go wherever the logic takes her because she views

54 Simmons, *Creed without Chaos*, 15–17.

55 Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers*, 358–59.

56 Mary McDermott Shideler, “Introduction,” in *Are Women Human? Astute and Witty Essays on the Role of Women in Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 3–8.

57 Dorothy L. Sayers, “Are Women Human?,” in *Are Women Human? Astute and Witty Essays on the Role of Women in Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 33–34.

58 *Ibid.*, 21–22.

God and his creation as ultimately logical.

Sayers' ability to speak theologically to the masses is a strength that gives her work enduring value. According to Simmons, "One of Sayers's great contributions as a lay theologian was that she knew both jargons thoroughly. Few other professional writers had the same degree of theological acumen, the ability to interpret, clarify, and embody theology for people."<sup>59</sup> Just as Sayers later translates Dante in the vernacular, so she translates the formal theology of her day into ideas that have legs. She does for theology what many of the clergy were incapable of doing. In a personal letter, Sayers comments on the inability of theologians to write well, saying, "Some of them are so clumsy and obscure that one can hardly shake the good ideas out of the mist of enveloping verbiage."<sup>60</sup> Getting dogma into the public sphere is essential to Sayers. In an essay, the point of which is that society may either have a Christian creed or social chaos, Sayers argues for a greater role of doctrine in the church: "It is not true at all that dogma is hopelessly irrelevant to the life and thought of the average man. What is true is that ministers of the Christian religion often assert that it is, present it for consideration as though it were, and, in fact, by their faulty exposition make it so."<sup>61</sup>

When she makes this statement, Sayers is not arguing for replacing theology with creative writing, but for doing theology creatively. In other words, doctrine is the most exciting thing about Christianity; it does not need spectacular additions. Such a stark claim might cause a fog machine to fail if made in certain contemporary circles, but there are really few more theologically rich and intriguing concepts that are intimately relevant to the Christian life than, for example, the doctrine of the incarnation. However, as Sayers goes on to argue, "The trouble is that, in nine cases out of ten, [the average Christian] has never been offered the

59 Simmons, *Creed without Chaos*, 59.

60 Sayers to Mrs. Robert Darby, May 31, 1948, in Barbara Reynolds, ed. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, UK: Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 1999), 376.

61 Sayers, "Creed or Chaos?," in *The Whimsical Christian: Reflections on God and Man by the Creator of Lord Peter Wimsey*, 38.

dogma. What he has been offered is a set of technical theological terms that nobody has taken the trouble to translate into language relevant to ordinary life.”<sup>62</sup> This is the breach in the wall that Sayers so admirably fills.

Sayers enacts a cautious transformationalism by engaging the culture through contemporary means without compromising content. As she argues of her plays, the dogma is the drama. As she demonstrates in her essays, doctrine is really quite interesting, not stodgy and boring. The most significant failure of the modern theologian is to make the most interesting subject in the world boring. Much academic theology stifles the imagination, rather than enlivening the Christian mind to meet God. Sayers helps to reinvigorate the Christian imagination to begin to overcome this failure.

## CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION

In an essay on a Christian aesthetic, Sayers first dismisses the idea that there has been a recognizable Christian aesthetic in history. She goes on to propose the development of a Christian aesthetic that values creation. According to Sayers,

The true work of art, then, is something new; it is not primarily the copy or representation of anything. It may involve representation, but that is not what makes it a work of art. It is not manufactured to specification, as an engineer works to a plan—though it may involve compliance with the accepted rules for dramatic presentation and may also contain verbal “effects” that can be mechanically accounted for. We all know very well, when we compare it with so-called works of art that are turned out to pattern, that in this connection neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. Something has been created.<sup>63</sup>

62 *Ibid.*, 39.

63 Sayers, “Toward a Christian Esthetic,” in *The Whimsical Christian: Reflections on God and Man by the Creator of Lord Peter Wimsey*, 83.

This is artistically significant in that such an attitude would exterminate all kitsch culture from the camp of Christianity. It is also theologically significant in that it speaks very specifically to the doctrine of humanity. In other words, part of what defines humanity is the ability to create analogously to God's ability to create. This is a significant emphasis in one of Sayers' most well-known theological texts, *The Mind of the Maker*.

Sayers begins *The Mind of the Maker* by establishing her worldview, which stands in the continuum of the great tradition of Christian theology. As such, there is a universal moral law, which is knowable through human experience.<sup>64</sup> It is essential to establish such an understanding at the outset of this treatise on work and the value of creation because it emphasizes the difference between cultural approval of something and its timeless goodness. Cultural approval results from conformity to certain moral codes derived from society, while timeless goodness results from conformity to universal moral laws written into creation by God.<sup>65</sup> This helps to inform Sayers' ethic and enhance her portrait as a cautious transformationalist.

God is the creator—or former—and primary transformer of the world. As Sayers notes, "The mind of the maker is generally revealed, and in a manner incarnate, in all its creation."<sup>66</sup> Thus to engage in creative work in the world is to emulate God and function as the image of God. The product of that creative work should correspond to the universal moral law, and, as much as necessary, to the customary codes of the artist's society. That is, to be excellent, work must reflect both artistic truth and universal truth. The impetus toward both truths is the way that the Christian can transform the world with the knowledge of God.

Caution is evident in Sayers' conception of truthful artistry. Avoidance of cheap moralism is an absolute. The loving creator wants his creation to develop in its own shape. As Sayers notes, "The more genuinely creative

64 Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 9.

65 *Ibid.*, 9–13.

66 *Ibid.*, 87.

[the artist] is, the more he will want his work to develop in accordance with its own nature, and to stand independent of himself.”<sup>67</sup> Good art resists simplistic moralism. Transformation of the culture through art must not cheapen the art by merely copying cultural forms and inserting a Christian morality. Instead, the Christian artist should demonstrate excellence in the cultural forms and consistency with the universal moral law. Thus, transformation occurs when universal truth is artfully represented, and caution is evident because the Christian artist does not co-opt the cultural form, deforming it in an attempt to redeem it. When the church becomes too closely identified with any particular cultural form, whether artistic or political, the church can start to lose its focus.

## CHRISTIANS AND POLITICAL INFLUENCE

Sayers comments on the engagement of the church with the state in a 1941 address to the Archbishop of York’s Conference on “The Life of the Church and the Order of Society.” In this essay, Sayers outlines two significantly different ways that the church can exist in culture. The first is to be a “self-contained community, practicing its peculiar loyalty, and offering neither particular approval of, nor opposition to, those departments of human activity which are vaguely summed up in the words ‘civilization’ and ‘the state.’ As Christians they are not concerned with them.”<sup>68</sup> Opposed to that perspective is “a body of opinion which sees civilization, as a German National-Socialist sees it, namely as a ‘world within the Church’—organized in every detail and inspired in every activity, by devotion to a single purpose which at once indwells and transcends it.”<sup>69</sup> Nothing at all can be excluded from the purview

67 Ibid., 130.

68 Sayers, “The Church’s Responsibility,” in *Malvern, 1941: The Life of the Church and the Order of Society: Being the Proceedings of the Archbishop of York’s Conference*, 60.

69 Ibid., 67. It should be clearly noted that in 1941 comparisons to Nazis were strong, but since the Holocaust was unknown, they were not nearly so strong as they are today.

of the church under the second description. Sayers debunks the first option because it is inconsistent with Scripture and fails to account for the doctrine of the incarnation fully. She debunks the second option because it denatures the church and causes the church to lose sight of its mission. As she argues, "In claiming to control the state, [the church] has become involved in maintaining the state machinery."<sup>70</sup>

In Niebuhr's terms, Sayers has thus outlined and rejected both the categories of Christ and Culture in Paradox and Christ Transforms Culture. She is neither a Lutheran nor Calvinist. Given her Anglo-Catholic leanings, one might expect her to land near to Saint Thomas with an understanding of Christ Above Culture. She does not, however. There are similarities in the view, but her assertion that the Christian should do work excellently in a way that teaches the doctrines of the church separates her from this view. Instead, she sees the Christian as called to cautiously transform the world by doing things excellently in light of the unified truth of the moral order of the universe.

According to Sayers, the church, both as an institution and its individual parts, must avoid being associated with the administration of the law. Instead, like Christ, Christians should "proclaim a kingdom in which the judgment of the Law [has] no need to operate. The Gospel escapes, as it were, between the meshes of the Law, exactly as He Himself escaped between the horns of every dilemma by which the lawyers attempted to enclose him."<sup>71</sup> Christians, then, are to transform culture—ever cautious to avoid entrapment in its failings—by pointing toward the redemptive power of the gospel in life and in art.

Sayers believes transforming society to reflect Christian values is possible. However, such a transformation is dependent upon the intellectual integrity of the church. She writes, "If we really want a Christian society, we must teach Christianity, and . . . it is absolutely impossible to teach

70 *Ibid.*, 69.

71 *Ibid.*

Christianity without teaching Christian dogma.”<sup>72</sup> There is a place in Sayers’ vision of society for a significant role of Christians teaching Western thought patterns and, perhaps most importantly, teaching the great truths of the church.<sup>73</sup>

Sayers calls for a significant revision of the Constantinian project by placing limitations on the church’s political engagement, writing, “The Kingdom of Heaven is not of this world; and the attempt to yoke it to any form of secular constitution is treason.”<sup>74</sup> Such entanglement is dangerous to the very nature of the church. Sayers notes, “The Church can only order the affairs of the world when, and so long as, she is not involved in or identified with them.”<sup>75</sup> This paradox is explained more clearly by Sayers’ call for Christians to participate in the world without attempting to gain power. In the realm of politics, such an approach requires disinterested participation.

In a distinction that reflects the precision of her reasoning, the prefix attached to “interest” marks the essence of Sayers’ view on the relationship between the church and the surrounding culture. When everyone engaged in culture has an interest, the common people will all feel there is no one they can trust. As Sayers describes her time, “All had an axe to grind, and the expressed principles of all were only a screen of expediency put up to cover a march of exploitation.”<sup>76</sup> She also notes, “In certain devastated areas of our cities, the only people who could get things done, bursting through red tape and indolence, were a number of parish priests and clergy.”<sup>77</sup> This is because these men attempt to change the culture in a disinterested fashion, with no hope of gaining political capital. Yet they seek to change the systems around them because they are Christians.

72 Sayers, “Creed or Chaos?,” in *The Whimsical Christian: Reflections on God and Man by the Creator of Lord Peter Wimsey*, 36.

73 E.g., Sayers, “The Lost Tools of Learning,” 90–99.

74 Sayers, “The Church’s Responsibility,” in *Malvern, 1941: The Life of the Church and the Order of Society : Being the Proceedings of the Archbishop of York’s Conference*, 70.

75 *Ibid.*, 77.

76 *Ibid.*, 73.

77 *Ibid.*

This is the embodiment of disinterest, not uninterest. This is Sayers' charge to Christians as they interact with the culture both as the church and as individuals. It is, as she describes it, impossible, but it is the task at hand.<sup>78</sup> She is a cautious transformationalist because she has real hope for improving the culture through Christian truth, but well recognizes the danger of the church becoming identified with cultural institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Dorothy L. Sayers is a uniquely gifted and creative person of the sort that normally only comes around every few generations. Her success in various vocations, including as author, playwright, and public theologian make her an inherently interesting person. More than merely an interesting figure from history, Sayers is an example of cultural engagement for modern Christians.

She is uncompromising in her artistic standards, unwavering in her doctrinal fidelity, and unflinching in her commitment to pursue sound logic wherever it leads. Sayers recognizes the signs of the times, diagnoses the disease, and searches history for a possible solution rather than attempting to find an answer from within herself. The beauty of Sayers' work is not that she provides all the answers. She does not, because the issues of her day are different than those of the contemporary age. Instead, Sayers points toward a cautious engagement with culture that speaks the language of culture, models excellence in its artistic forms, but transforms contemporary media with the timeless truths found only in Christianity. Contemporary Christians would do well to model her conscientious engagement with the world as cautious transformationalists.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

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# Conceptions of Capitalism in Biblical Theology

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KEYWORDS:

| Capitalism | Socialism | Private |  
| Ownership | Compatibility | Markets |

ABSTRACT:

Both capitalism and socialism are incompatible with biblical theology, according to theologian, Craig Blomberg.<sup>1</sup> He believes that a biblical theology of economics favours neither system. Making a judgment on these matters depends on what is meant by capitalism and socialism, and what is compared with biblical understanding. Definitions of these systems are reviewed, and reasons evaluated for reaching a nihilistic conclusion concerning the admissibility of capitalism and socialism. The conclusion is that biblical theology is compatible with a reformed Christian-based capitalism, in which Christians would practice their biblical guides more stringently than at present.

## INTRODUCTION

Only the capitalist side of the equation is scrutinized. Most of the reforms Blomberg advocates can be included inside capitalism. Further, the revisions to capitalism could also encompass most of what is termed

<sup>1</sup> Craig Blomberg, "Neither Capitalism nor Socialism: A Biblical Theology of Economics," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 15 (2012), 207-225.

socialism today, although not applying to widespread state ownership of the means of production (the classical model of socialism). Socialism does not receive a great deal of emphasis here for, despite name claiming of socialism by some countries, it is doubtful whether it exists anywhere today. Finally, the paper argues that if both capitalism and socialism are rejected, it is unclear what is to replace them.

## DEFINITIONS OF CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM

Capitalism is defined from *The Oxford Dictionary of Economics* as “the economic system based on private property and private enterprise... all, or a major proportion, of economic activity is undertaken by private profit-seeking individuals or organizations, and land and other material means of production are largely privately owned.”<sup>2</sup> This definition can be supplemented. Paul Williams in *The Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* defines capitalism as entailing “the private ownership of the means of producing wealth and the exchange of goods and services, land, labor, and capital via markets.”<sup>3</sup> The market-based nature of capitalism is highlighted in this definition, an element missing from the *Oxford* definition. Robert Benne in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* emphasizes the role of the price mechanism in competitive markets, a feature omitted from the *Oxford’s* specification. For Benne, the price mechanism “provides the dominant mode of making economic decisions,” with “nongovernmental ownership of the means of production; economic freedom to enter and exit the market.” A further feature that could be incorporated in definitions of capitalism is the role of state regulation and welfare availability. Bottomore<sup>4</sup> describes these features as welfare capitalism. *The Penguin*

2 John Black, Nigar Hashimzade, and Gareth Myles (eds.), *A Dictionary of Economics* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52.

3 Paul Williams, “Capitalism,” in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (eds. Joel Green, Jacqueline Lapsley, Rebekah Miles, and Allen Verhey; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 115.

4 Tom Bottomore, “Capitalism,” in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought* (eds. William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore; Oxford: Blackwell, 1993),

*Dictionary of Sociology* defines capitalism similarly to the *Oxford* above, but includes the feature that economic activity is intended to make profit.<sup>5</sup> No definition of profit is offered, and it is possible to think of some economic activity within capitalism not profit making, however defined, such as not-for-profit companies, like trusts, charities, foundations, and cooperatives. It is profitable to employees of these non-profits who may also obtain the benefits of the halo effect that they are working for the greater good.

These definitions of capitalism can be summarized:

1. Private ownership of the means of production.
2. Market exchange is the means to access goods and services.
3. Prices are the arbiters in market exchange.
4. Participants in the market can freely enter and exit it.
5. The state oversees all these processes.

Some of these features have to be qualified because exceptions exist to their operation. For example, all means of production are not privately owned, some are state-owned. Access to some goods and services can be via direct distribution from the state, and from not-for-profit companies.

Abercrombie *et al.* define socialism<sup>6</sup> as involving common ownership of the means of production, with economic activities planned by the state and a minimal role for the market in the allocation of resources. The importance of private property was expected to decline under socialism. *The Oxford Dictionary of Economics* saw socialism with society's resources employed "in the interest of all its citizens, rather than allowing private owners of land and capital to use them as they see fit."<sup>7</sup> Gauging the "interest of all its citizens" has long generated contentious

61-62.

5 Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, Bryan Turner, "Capitalism," in *The Penguin*

6 *The Penguin Dictionary*, 362.

7 *A Dictionary*, 418.

debate about socialism. That socialism is marked by “common control or ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange”<sup>8</sup> is a common theme in definitions of socialism. The collapse of communism has presented even more disagreement about how socialism might be instituted.<sup>9</sup> Given that operational examples of socialism are few and far between, *The Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* contains no definition of socialism, but does of capitalism.

In summary, no unanimity exists in definitions of capitalism and socialism. So open-ended are some of the definitions above that the notion of capitalism could accommodate to a definition of socialism. That “economic activity is undertaken by private profit-seeking individuals” (capitalism) could be consistent with the economy’s resources being used “in the interest of all its citizens” (socialism).

## REASONS WHY BIBLICAL THEOLOGY CONTRADICTS CAPITALISM AND SOCIALISM

One reason is that capitalism and socialism “were not the economic systems of the biblical worlds.”<sup>10</sup> However, given the definitions of capitalism above, the economic system of Jesus’ world can be construed as conforming to at least some features of capitalism. It was based on private property and private enterprise. Market exchange was the means to access goods and services, free (non-slave) participants in the market could freely enter and leave it, prices were the arbiters in market exchange, and the state oversaw some of these processes. As the *Oxford Dictionary* put it above, a major proportion of economic activity was “undertaken by private profit-seeking individuals or organizations, and land and other material means of production [was] largely privately owned.” Economic structures in Jesus’ Palestine approached those of the definition of

8   Duncan Forrester, “Socialism,” in *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. John Macquarrie and James Childress (London: SCM, 1986), 595.

9   Tom Bottomore, “Socialism,” in *The Blackwell Dictionary*, 619.

10  Blomberg, “Neither Capitalism,” 208.

capitalism above,<sup>11</sup> even though the term had not been invented. This is not a popularly held view that sometimes believes Jesus' Palestine to have been pre-capitalist<sup>12</sup>.

One objection to the affinity of economic characteristics in Jesus' Palestine to capitalism is the notion that economic activity at that time was of a zero-sum nature characterized by limited goods. The idea that economic activity in pre-industrial Jesus' time was of this nature does not take away from its capitalistic characteristics. As Malina has employed the notion of limited good and zero-sum game,<sup>13</sup> it means that as the rich became richer, it was assumed that less wealth would be available for everybody else because wealth increments were not generated or distributed uniformly; they accrued disproportionately to the rich. Malina does not have a great deal of evidence for this occurring in Jesus' Palestine. He cites a number of unexplained biblical references, and a series of rhetorical questions about them. The conjecture remains hypothetical. An alternative reading is by Longenecker<sup>14</sup> who marshalled data showing that wealth generation, thereby enlarging the pool of goods, was occurring in Paul's time. Even if Malina's assertion were true, its occurrence still accords with the definition of capitalism above. What it does not accord with is an additional feature that might be listed for capitalism, its ability to generate wealth. But even if this is true of capitalism, the rich can still get richer and the poor lag further behind. They all enjoy some increase in wealth, the pool of goods increases, everybody's living standards rise, although in different degrees, but the rich gain greater wealth increments than the poor.

All this may not be vastly dissimilar from how the process of capitalism operates in the less developed world today. Blomberg accepts the limited

11 K. Hanson and Douglas Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 95-100, 104-105, 111-116.

12 *Ibid.*, 116.

13 Bruce Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2001), 89-90, 97-100, 231-234.

14 Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

goods view, suggesting that most people in Jesus' time "were convinced that there was a finite and fairly fixed amount of wealth in the world to which they would ever have access in their part of the world so that if a member of their society became noticeably richer, they would naturally assume that it was at someone else's expense."<sup>15</sup> This is how the process of exploitation has always been defined. In all likelihood, most poor tenant peasant farmers in less developed countries today think like this. Their landlords gain a disproportionate share of any wealth increment created, unavoidably at the peasants' expense. Since the peasants represent the majority of world population, one could say this is the prevailing mindset of most people in the world, not unlike the situation prevailing in Jesus' time. Just as in today's less developed countries, "the tiny number of extremely wealthy persons in each of the various biblical societies from the united monarchy onward derived much of their wealth through purchasing or foreclosing on the property and possessions of the poor, especially when the indebted could not repay their loans."<sup>16</sup> This situation may resemble how the rich accumulate part of their wealth in much of the contemporary less developed world where rich landlords own most farming land.

It is possible also that the limited goods notion typifies the mindsets of poor people in advanced capitalist countries today. They cannot afford everything they need, or perceive they need, to function adequately in the society in which they live. To them, goods are in limited supply. The poor look at the lifestyles of the rich and see them engaging in consumption totally beyond their comprehension. If the poor compare their own condition with the rich, they may well think that the rich have obtained their riches by exploiting the rest of society. Exploitation is not a term commonly applied to capitalism outside Marxist analysis, but non-Marxist definitions suggest its contemporary relevance. Wertheimer explains that exploitation occurs when one person/group takes unfair advantage

15 "Neither Capitalism," 208.

16 "Neither Capitalism," 209.

over another.<sup>17</sup> For *The Blackwell Dictionary of Modern Social Thought*, exploitation occurs when “one group or individual is structurally in a position enabling them to take advantage of others.”<sup>18</sup> Finally, *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* construes exploitation as to take advantage of other people.<sup>19</sup> Obviously, subjective judgment is needed to establish when “to take advantage of” occurs, and when it is unfair. To what extent exploitation, so typical of economic relations in Jesus’ time, occurs in contemporary capitalist society is a matter for debate.

Another argument Blomberg proposes against the existence of capitalist features in Jesus’ Palestine concerns taxes. Taxes paid to the Temple treasury and to Rome have been estimated at 30-50 percent of people’s incomes. Blomberg interprets this as reflecting “the beginnings of socialism”.<sup>20</sup> But he had not posed taxation rates as a criterion bearing on socialism. In Blomberg’s definition of socialism, there is no mention of taxation. It can just as well be said that 30-50 percent income tax rates characterize many capitalist economies today. In this case, the tax rate factor does not tell against capitalist features either now or in the past.

Inferences that might be drawn from Blomberg’s assertion that “capitalism and socialism were not the economic systems of the biblical worlds” depend on what the Bible is regarded to be. If the implications from biblical exposition relate only to the historical periods during which the Bible was constructed—not involving capitalism or socialism — its message is time and culture bound. Many Christians would not regard this to be the case. To them, normative teaching from the Bible is intended to apply trans-temporally and –culturally, despite the difficulties of doing this. Numerous Protestant (and Catholic) theologians have pointed out that the Bible reveals normative guidelines or principles applicable to all

17 Alan Wertheimer, *Exploitation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 10.

18 Susan Himmelweit, “Exploitation,” in *The Blackwell Dictionary of Modern Social Thought* 2nd ed., ed. William Outhwaite (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 227.

19 A. Shaikh, “Exploitation,” in *The New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* vol. 2, 2nd ed., eds. Steven Durlauf and Lawrence Blume (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 249-251.

20 “Neither Capitalism,” 209.

societies.<sup>21</sup> The question confronting Christians is to what extent these norms are achieved and achievable in present societies.

Thus, when Jesus advocates assisting the poor, this is meant to be practice in all times and places. The normative principle that should characterize all economies is that the poor are to be helped to a lifestyle not vastly inferior to some norm prevailing in the society in question. The biblical ethical principle intended to apply universally is rectification of the lot of the poor. A complementary biblically derived norm might be that all able-bodied people who so wish should be provided with paid work sufficient to support themselves and their families. Christians can discuss among themselves how these objectives might be pursued in contemporary society.

A second reason why biblical theology might contradict capitalism and socialism is that scriptural texts “supporting one or the other system, are relatively evenly distributed between the two.”<sup>22</sup> Biblical texts supporting capitalism can be found, such as “private property is enshrined as a fundamental good,” specifically applying to Israel as it enters the Promised Land. Concomitantly, theft of possessions was prohibited, thereby implying their private ownership.<sup>23</sup> Just as rich people exist in capitalism, so they did in the Bible. God-fearing rich people are acceptable to God, such as Abraham, Isaac, Job, David, Solomon, and Esther. At the same time, all these examples were from pre- or post-Mosaic Law times, rather than during the Mosaic Law period, brief as that was. Examples

21 John Goldingay, *Models for Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); Marcelo Sorondo, “For a Catholic Vision of the Economy,” *Journal of Markets and Morality* 6 (2003): 7-31; Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004); I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004); Scott Duvall and Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); Walter Kaiser, Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*. Rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007); Henry Virkler and Karelyne Ayayo, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); *Pontifical Biblical Commission, The Bible and Morality* (Rome: The Vatican, 2008).

22 “Neither Capitalism,” 209.

23 “Neither Capitalism,” 209.

post Israel's entry into the Promised Land are few, such as Boaz, David and Solomon, or Zaccheus and Joseph of Arimethea in Jesus' time. Except for the last, these were called by God to manage their wealth differently. Paul in 1Tim 6:17 explains how the rich are to behave, not praising their existence.

The righteous rich were few in number after Mosaic Law times. They were required to "give a substantial portion of their assets away, especially to help the poor." This is because "God is very concerned that everyone has the opportunity to acquire some property."<sup>24</sup> More than just "some" property is in question. Families needed enough to be able to function adequately in the society in which they lived. In the Mosaic Law, property was to be redistributed regularly to its original configuration (the Jubilee)<sup>25</sup>. Every forty-nine years, land holdings were to be reassigned to those families as allocated on Israel's entry into the Promised Land. This was necessary to maintain the private property basis of the economy. This property was the capital with which each family worked to maintain economic independence and sustained their function as a coherent unit. The economy would work well only if each family had sufficient capital to enable them to maintain its economic independence. In the Mosaic Law, more than "some" property was restored to each family — all of it was, except in cities. Each family was intended to maintain the assets it originally had, designed to maintain its economic independence.

The conservative evangelical economist, Griffiths draws the following inference from these requirements to present-day capitalism (that he supports vigorously). Contrary to Marx's analysis, if the Mosaic Law "had been applied it would have been impossible for 'labour' to be in conflict with 'capital'." But the laws were not practiced throughout history so that capital became owned "by a few, but the majority were without access to that capital, other than being hired on the labour market.

24 "Neither Capitalism," 209.

25 Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Leicester UK: IVP, 2004; William Domeris, *Touching the Heart of God*, London: T&T Clark, 2007; David Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009.

This was precisely the situation which the property laws of the Pentateuch were designed to prevent.”<sup>26</sup>

Subject to the constraint that all families have sufficient access to capital to ensure their economic independence, as Griffiths suggests, the Mosaic Law requirements could operate consistently with capitalism. This does not occur under present day capitalism. For instance, a measure of asset poverty for the US in 2001 shows that 27% of people did not have assets that could tide them over three months.<sup>27</sup> The matter, therefore, is whether a capitalism could be envisaged consistent with the reasonably even distribution of means of production envisaged by the Mosaic Law. Means relating to the sphere of production by which greater evenness in the distribution of capital could be pursued are canvassed later.

Another feature of contemporary capitalism Blomberg suggests is contrary to biblical views is payment of interest on borrowed money. The Mosaic Law specified that interest was “never to be charged on a loan extended to a fellow Israelite.”<sup>28</sup> Who are the modern day equivalents to “fellow Israelites “ is mooted below. But, first it is worth noting that interest was not listed by Blomberg as a feature of capitalism or socialism. Therefore, deciding whether interest should be payable today does not require resolution to favor either system. But should interest be charged, and would capitalism be able to function without it?

In pre-monarchical Israel, Blomberg points out that loans were “used to help the poor gain at least basic sustenance levels of existence.” However, maintaining the reasonably equal distribution of land (capital) would probably be a more effective way of supporting the poor. In a capitalist economy aspiring to the Law’s orientation, interest could be avoided, despite it usually being viewed as necessary to encourage economic development. Blomberg believes that “capitalism would have barely moved beyond its most rudimentary stages without the liberal

26 Brian Griffiths, *The Creation of Wealth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984), 57.

27 Edward Wolff, *Poverty and Income Distribution* 2d. ed. (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 120.

28 “Neither Capitalism,” 210.

extension of loans repayable with interest.”<sup>29</sup>

To what extent is this claim valid? Consider how a process of economic development might have worked if the Mosaic Law principles had been followed. Surpluses beyond need could be paid into a common fund (a bank). Those wanting to engage in innovative practices (consistent with God’s direction) would use this fund to facilitate their new enterprise. If they wanted additional funds for their enterprise, they would go back to the bank that would lend it to them (all things being equal). No interest would be charged on this loan. The bank would become part owner of, and investor in, the enterprise. As and if the enterprise flourished, the entrepreneurial family would pay back their loan to the bank. At the same time as this process occurred, the other principles of the Law would ensure that the entrepreneurial family did not become excessively rich compared to the norm of the society.

This practice is not vastly dissimilar from ways in which a number of modern organizations inside capitalism provide capital to fund entrepreneurial activity. These include JAK Banks, some micro-finance agencies, like Kiva, and some Islamic banks, that do not charge interest on their loans. The JAK Cooperative Bank (Sweden) does not aim to make a profit, but balances its deposits and loans without the payment of interest, meeting its costs through members’ fees and a loan repayment fee. On this basis, loans are cheaper than through conventional banks. Local Enterprise Banks, part of JAK, are in process of being established for specific loan purposes, such as an ecologically friendly slaughterhouse. JAK has grown rapidly since its establishment in Sweden in 1965, currently having 38, 000 members, with regular JAK schools, and 350 volunteers spreading the word.<sup>30</sup>

Israelites could charge loans to foreigners (Dt 23:20). Blomberg

29 “Neither Capitalism,” 210.

30 Margrit Kennedy with Declan Kennedy, *Interest and Inflation Free Money* Rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers, 1995). Other models for contemporary interest-free lending are in Paul Mills, “Finance,” in *Jubilee Manifesto*, eds. Michael Schluter and John Ashcroft (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 204-206.

accepts this provision as applying today, especially on commercial loans, both in general, and to foreigners.<sup>31</sup> But in the New Covenant, as foreigners became part of the body of Christ, we might infer from the Mosaic Law that Christians are the new fellow Israelites. If this is the case, interest would not be charged on loans between Christians. However, Jesus goes further in Lk 6:35 in condemning interest outright. Perhaps an objective for Christians, therefore, would be to persuade people in general to omit interest in loans, or to make interest rates very low. In this situation, Blomberg's complaint concerning international loans would not have less weight. He laments "the enormous stranglehold that massive indebtedness on loans *with interest* has on the poorest countries of the world."<sup>32</sup> The criterion of interest on loans from the developed to the less developed world is probably not the major motivation in international lending. International governmental and non-governmental agencies could make loans on the basis of participating in the profits and losses of the projects to which their loans were directed.

What now of socialism? Blomberg interprets some of the Mosaic Law provisions discussed above as supporting socialism. These include the allotment of land texts, and restriction of production texts (Sabbath, sabbatical year, Jubilee). However, these texts are consistent with a capitalist system based on "private property and private enterprise" with "a major proportion of economic activity undertaken by private profit-seeking individuals or organizations, and land and other material means of production largely privately owned." This structure was what the Mosaic Law aimed at, subject to the qualifications of land allotment and restriction of production. The relevant Mosaic Law texts do not necessarily contradict capitalism. Blomberg observes that in the Mosaic Law, "the laws of the market were not to be the be-all and end-all of human existence."<sup>33</sup> Again, this does not have to suggest socialist tendencies, for

31 "Neither Capitalism," 210. This position is challenged by Bruce Ballard, "On the Sin of Usury: A Biblical Economic Ethic," *Christian Scholar's Review* 24 (1994), 210-228.

32 "Neither Capitalism," 210; original emphasis.

33 "Neither Capitalism," 210.

there are many capitalist economies where “the laws of the market” are restricted. These include the United States where controls exist on wages, working conditions, prices, standards for goods, land development, and environmental effects of business. Christians do not universally agree on the nature of these controls, but their existence does not constitute socialism as defined here.

Likewise, “give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread” (Prov 30:8) can be compatible with capitalism, as can “giving to a common treasury or fund to be redistributed to the poorest and neediest in their midst.”<sup>34</sup> However, it is arguable that this latter provision derived neither from the Mosaic Law nor from Jesus’ or Paul’s teachings, but from its one occurrence in Acts. Certainly, Mosaic Law capitalism was intended to ensure family economic independence, but not mainly through mere philanthropy, charity, benevolence, and generosity, insufficient in themselves. Economic independence was to be earned through remunerated employment.

The Mosaic Law instructed the well off to apply their surpluses to assist the poor. Blomberg puts it that “as long there are some who have too little to live even a minimally decent life, the surplus of the rich shows that they have too much and that they should redistribute it by giving it away to those who most need it.”<sup>35</sup> This statement does not go far enough in showing what the Mosaic Law taught. As it stands, the statement implies only a redistribution of assets. The Mosaic Law required work effort by the poor in return for the asset redistribution. The poor needed to work to achieve their self-sufficiency. It is not stretching its inference too far today to suggest that jobs should be provided for the poor, organized by the rich, something that could be practiced in a capitalist economy.

For the rich to use their surpluses in this manner would be a non-coercive exercise. No compulsory government action is involved. Although this might not depict how the rich do employ their surpluses

34 “Neither Capitalism,” 211.

35 “Neither Capitalism,” 211.

in capitalism, it does seem possible for the Christian rich to do so. They are people who have business acumen, given that over 74% of very rich people in the US own businesses.<sup>36</sup> Blomberg does not go down this track, instead observing that the lot of the poor improved in advanced “democracies with mixed economies,” excluding the US.<sup>37</sup> Probably, a mix of factors was instrumental here, such as the process of economic development and redistributive government taxation. However, these were features achieved in developed capitalist economies, not socialist ones. It is stretching the case too far to attribute improvement in the plight of the poor in these countries to “Christian and democratic socialism.”<sup>38</sup> Welfare capitalism was responsible for it, in which Christian influence has been instrumental.<sup>39</sup>

A third suggested reason why neither capitalism nor socialism accords with biblical theology is that “neither system necessarily helps the plight of the involuntarily poor, disabled, widow or orphan, or numerous other vulnerable and marginalized people.”<sup>40</sup> This objection does not have great sway. Blomberg had contended that “the plight of the poor was alleviated even more... in democracies with mixed economies,” compared with former Soviet bloc countries.<sup>41</sup> That is, these economies had taken action to alleviate the lot of the poor. These mixed economies include Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand who are said to have “implemented more socialist mechanisms than in the United States.”<sup>42</sup> Yet Europe etc. are capitalist countries by our definition. Recall this is a system “based on private property and private enterprise... all, or a major proportion, of economic activity is undertaken by private profit-seeking individuals or

36 Edward Wolff, “Recent Trends in Household Wealth in the United States: Rising Debt and the Middle-Class Squeeze,” *Working Paper No. 589, The Levy Economics Institute* (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, 2010), 18.

37 “Neither Capitalism,” 211.

38 “Neither Capitalism,” 211.

39 Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005).

40 “Neither Capitalism,” 212.

41 “Neither Capitalism,” 211.

42 “Neither Capitalism,” 211.

organizations, and land and other material means of production are largely privately owned “. None of the four regions cited as “mixed economies “ fall outside this definition.

“Socialist mechanisms” is not a term contained in Blomberg’s definition of capitalism or socialism, or in any of the other definitions cited above. Recall that Blomberg had defined socialism from *The Oxford Dictionary of Economics* as “the idea that the economy’s resources should be used in the interest of all its citizens, rather than allowing private owners of land and capital to use them as they see fit.”<sup>43</sup> He acknowledges that taxonomies of socialism exist, such as market socialism, planned socialism, and participatory socialism, but the mechanisms by which these variations might be attained are not discussed, nor do examples exist of economies run on this basis today. Some commentators think that where the term, “market socialism” was used in the past to describe the experience of Eastern European countries immediately before the collapse of communism, it was a misnomer. In Brus’ view, the experiences implied “the abandonment of the concept of socialism as a grand design.”<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Blomberg admits diversity in capitalist systems. But the blanket claim of “more socialist mechanisms” in the favored capitalist countries,<sup>45</sup> needs explication. For instance, how these mechanisms relate to the idea of using the economy’s resources “in the interest off all its citizens, rather than allowing private owners of land and capital to use them as they see fit” needs further explanation. Welfare and state-regulated capitalism may be the order of the day in advanced capitalist countries today, but it is debatable whether they have adopted “more socialist mechanisms.”

A fourth reason for rejecting capitalism and socialism is that “the actual track record of modern economies” does not support socialism or capitalism, “apart from the mitigating effects of Christian values.”<sup>46</sup>

43 “Neither Capitalism,” 207-208.

44 Włodzimierz Brus, “Market Socialism,” in *The Blackwell Dictionary*, 363.

45 “Neither Capitalism,” 211.

46 “Neither Capitalism,” 213.

“The mitigating effects of Christian values “ is not something explored by Blomberg. He observes a litany of “government-run ameliorations “ to “a pure market economy,” but does not show that they stem from “the mitigating effects of Christian values.” Perhaps Medicare and Medicaid were developed under the influence of Christian values, but Blomberg does not demonstrate the connection. This same hiatus applies to the numerous state-mediated measures he lists. Perhaps all the “government-run ameliorations “ could occur only in a capitalist society that had become sufficiently wealthy to be able to sustain them. That the “stunning economic growth” achieved in “East Asian countries “ depended on “even more regulations and interventionist measures from the state than their Western counterparts “ does not take away from the fact that these were and are capitalist economies, even though Christian influence might not be great. Capitalist economies in the West and elsewhere seem capable of spawning all manner of readjustments affecting the economy, including those aiming to help the poor. Whether they do pursue the latter effectively is something to which Christian values can be directed.

The issue of the “mitigating effects of Christian values” on capitalist economic development is still a matter of contention. Perhaps Blomberg is right, that in the West, Christian values did alleviate the worst excesses of capitalism. But they did not overthrow the capitalist system, nor did they seek to. On the other hand, Christian values might have pushed in the direction of encouraging beneficial change for the poor beyond that to which the capitalist system could accommodate voluntarily. Understanding these issues underlies how Christians today could respond to the capitalist system. If “capitalism simply promotes self-absorption and the illusory quest for self-sufficiency,”<sup>47</sup> the quest for Christians is to avoid such practices, and to promote an economy that devalues them.

A fifth reason for eschewing capitalism and socialism is that neither “adequately acknowledges the depth of human depravity and sin that the

47 “Neither Capitalism,” 214.

Scriptures teach us remains in all human beings, even redeemed ones.”<sup>48</sup> While this reason is valid, it does not tell against capitalism or socialism. Even with depravity, capitalism (and socialism when it existed) still manages to function. Capitalism as it is practiced, and socialism as it was practiced, do not depend for their functioning on the non-existence of human depravity. Both systems function with it, as does any human action. Yet, it is probably impossible to assess which system “takes more account of sin.”<sup>49</sup> A comparison on this score between capitalism and socialism has little meaning today, given that socialism as defined both by Blomberg and other sources does not exist. This is despite the label being attached to some economic arrangements that do exist within capitalism, such as “market socialism” in China, but this designation does not accord with the definitions of socialism canvassed above.

Any human system does not “adequately acknowledge(s) the depth of human depravity and sin.” The more the system is influenced by secular influences seeking to operate apart from God, the more it will be subject to sin and evil. However, it is up to Christians living and working within the system to assess how sinfulness might be mitigated, and to try and pursue this. That total depravity prevails is no warrant for Christians to remain unconcerned about the costs (and benefits) of any economic system, or to acquiesce to their sinful condition. Capitalism is a humanly constructed system, held together by God’s common grace enabling it to function as well as it does. Human depravity and sin infect all human action, but there is no biblical precedent for Christians to give in to it, sit back, and do nothing to try and improve the human condition. Also, it seems a reasonable scriptural deduction that actions by redeemed people have the potential to conform more to God’s preferences than those by the unredeemed. Nevertheless, redeemed people have to keep in touch with God as much as they can. This involves regular prayer, Bible study, and church participation that help counter the depravity to which humans are

48 “Neither Capitalism,” 214.

49 “Neither Capitalism,” 214.

subject.

Blomberg raises all manner of hypothetical matters that could affect capitalism and socialism on the matter of good and evil. For example, one advantage capitalism might have is that it may provide checks and balances against anybody becoming too powerful. Blomberg thinks this is applying decreasingly in a multinational and globalized world, so that “the top politicians of a country can now become subservient to the business and media moguls.”<sup>50</sup> The responsibility falls on Christians to ascertain if this is true, and also to determine how and whether biblical principles can be discerned to help counter the process.

According to Reformed theologian, Spykman, “total depravity means total misdirection, complete disorientation.” Yet, even in the midst of the total depravity of humankind, “God maintains the structures of his creation,” by the process of God’s common grace. But “only God’s grace can restrain total depravity” for “in a fallen world God maintains the structures of his creation by his preserving grace.”<sup>51</sup> However, as Grudem points out, the term, “total depravity” can be misleading; “it can give the impression that no good *in any sense* can be done by unbelievers,”<sup>52</sup> to which could be added “and believers.”

In summary, Blomberg claims that the “five key themes “ canvassed above from the entire sweep of the biblical material” do “not lead to a clear winner.”<sup>53</sup> However, the notion of a clear winner has little validity because socialism does not exist today. Instead, each of Blomberg’s themes contains a reasonable affinity with capitalism that is still beset with sinfulness. Consider, now, an earlier exposition by Blomberg of how biblical themes relate to capitalism.<sup>54</sup> The first aligns with capitalism, that “material possessions are inherently good “. However, not all

50 “Neither Capitalism,” 215.

51 Gordon Spykman, *Reformational Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 322, 320, 321.

52 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 497; original emphasis.

53 “Neither Capitalism,” 215.

54 Craig Blomberg, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches* (Leicester, UK: Apollos, 1999).

possessions are good, for sinful people produce goods that are evil. This leads into Blomberg's second theme, that possessions can "lead to temptations to pursue great evils." This can involve sinful possessions, but also an excess beyond need of possessions that intrinsically might not appear sinful. Where and how this arises is a matter of judgment, connecting to Blomberg's third theme, that the process of being redeemed involves a transformation in the area of stewardship. Most of Blomberg's examples for this stewardship theme concern the need to help the poor, but stewardship transformation applies to diverse areas, such as how to live without an excess of riches, how to care for the environment, how to organize business firms etc.

Blomberg's fourth theme is that "there are certain extremes of wealth and poverty which are in and of themselves intolerable."<sup>55</sup> This is called the principle of moderation, involving "reduction of disparity between 'haves' and 'have-nots'." "These extremes cannot be quantified," but contemporary capitalism does not measure up well on this theme. In many countries, disparity is wide and increasing. For the US, Wolff reported that the richest 20% of households owned 93% of nonhome wealth in 2007, up from 91.3% in 1983.<sup>56</sup> Modification to this degree of inequality would seem to be called for on the basis of Blomberg's fourth theme. Blomberg's fifth theme is that "the Bible's teaching about material possessions is inextricably intertwined with more 'spiritual' matters."<sup>57</sup> Since people in capitalist societies probably fail to appreciate their relationship with God, capitalism underestimates this requirement.

Contemporary capitalist systems only partially conform to a number of the biblical themes raised by Blomberg in his earlier investigation. None of the themes unambiguously support capitalism, but they suggest that Christians could modify capitalism toward biblically-based principles. Material possessions can be valued, but only while they do not have evil

55 *Neither Poverty*, 245.

56 Wolff, "Recent Trends," 44.

57 *Neither Poverty*, 246.

elements within them or are used for evil purposes. Present capitalism does not seem to encourage stewardship transformation. Extremes of wealth and poverty within countries seem to be a common feature of capitalism that does not acknowledge the inherent connection between material and spiritual matters. These may not seem sufficient reasons for abandoning capitalism, but for restructuring it. Redeemed individuals, not governments, are the solution to this renovation of capitalism.

Blomberg's final reason for rejecting capitalism and socialism is that "Biblical ethics... is first and foremost centered on God's people in community, known in this age as the church."<sup>58</sup> Presumably, this means that biblical ethics are only secondarily aimed at the world. This proposition, that biblical ethics is directed "first and foremost" to the church, would seem to be overly restrictive as to whom Jesus directed His teachings. Jesus aimed His teachings at the world, the crowd and multitude, as well as to His followers and disciples. Wherever Jesus performed healings, they were usually associated with teachings, and were directed to whoever was ill. There is no precedent in Jesus' teachings that they were intended only for the church. "The second- and third-century-ancient Mediterranean church" recognized this intention in endeavoring to help the poor in general.<sup>59</sup> Various contemporary theologians hold this view, even including the Catholic. For instance, the President of the Pontifical Academy of the Social Sciences, Marcelo Sorondo sought to "demonstrate that the Gospel and the social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church... contains those essential principles... which no economy, if it wants to be a good economy, can forget."<sup>60</sup> This is a statement directed to the world, for no economy is excluded from it if it aspires to be a good economy. Fortunately, Christian programs today to help the ill and poor, and engage in other social action, work on the basis of helping whoever they can. This is the operational criterion on which

58 "Neither Capitalism," 216.

59 "Neither Capitalism," 216.

60 Sorondo, "For a Catholic Vision," 7.

Christian welfare and aid agencies work. Christian-run hospitals, and programs to help the poor both in developed and less-developed countries function on this basis. Blomberg is “sympathetic to the argument that the church should care for the poor and needy of the entire land in which it finds itself,”<sup>61</sup> but does not extend this argument to other aspects of the economy for which normative biblical principles might be discerned.

Blomberg approvingly points to contemporary reforms in capitalism encouraged by “proponents of socialism,”<sup>62</sup> citing worker-owned cooperatives as examples. “Proponents of socialism” might well approve of these developments, but so do proponents of capitalism, such as the former Tory Prime Minister of Great Britain, David Cameron. Nor were worker cooperatives all instigated by “socialists.” Indeed, sometimes socialist-minded unions in the past have argued against worker cooperatives, seeing them as making workers “little capitalists.” Consider the highly-efficient Spanish Mondragon Cooperative Corporation (MCC), started in 1956, made up of 132 worker-owned cooperatives, straddling a range of industries from hi-tech to banking and retailing. This was started by a Catholic priest wanting to reform capitalism, not promote socialism as defined above and by Blomberg. As with the definition of capitalism Blomberg employs, the cooperatives operate on the basis of “private property and private enterprise.” Their members are private profit-seeking individuals, their organizations privately owned. It is incorrect to label these business forms as non-profit enterprises. They make profits to continue their operation. The difference from conventional joint stock company business forms in that the workers own the firm.<sup>63</sup> There is no flavor here of Blomberg’s definition of socialism, of the economy’s resources being used “in the interest of all its citizens, rather than allowing private owners of land and capital to use them as they see fit.”<sup>64</sup>

61 “Neither Capitalism,” 216.

62 “Neither Capitalism,” 216.

63 Gregory Dow, *Governing the Firm: Workers’ Control in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 57-66.

64 “Neither Capitalism,” 207-8.

While the Mondragon cooperative owners of the firms do work together under the umbrella of the MCC, there are still “private owners of land and capital “ using them “as they see fit,” subject to the qualification of the MCC’s guidance.

Blomberg recognizes that diversity in capitalist systems exists, but, once again, the source cited for this occurrence (Lane and Wood) gives little empirical detail how this diversity manifests among capitalist countries. The only real-world reference is to the emphasis on regionalization in Italy, although not to the firm types that occur within regions (such as a stress on cooperatives).<sup>65</sup> If biblical theology does not favor socialism, Christians can envisage and operationalize reforms to capitalism that do accord with this theology. Return to Blomberg’s example of worker cooperatives. The Catholic Church has long supported this form of firm organization, and its effects are most noticeable in Spain and Italy, two strongly Catholic-influenced countries.<sup>66</sup> Of course, secular socialists have also worked for the development of worker cooperatives in these and other countries. Consider the biblical justification for this. Assume that Jesus upheld the principles of the Mosaic Law as distinct from its details. Each family was provided with sufficient land (capital) in the Law to enable it to remain self-sufficient, as Griffiths above noted. From this conclusion the step can be taken to advocate workers having self-ownership and self-management over the capital they work with. Private ownership of property is retained, but those who make the capital available (shareholders), and those who do the work (workers) are one and the same. Further, cooperatives have more even wage configurations than do conventional companies, helping to mitigate extremes of income and wealth in the society at large. Since the Mosaic Law and Jesus advocated decreasing inter-family material inequality, this is another way in which worker cooperatives meet biblical theology.

65 “Neither Capitalism,” 208; Christel Lane and Geoffrey Wood, “Capitalist Diversity and Diversity within Capitalism,” *Economy and Society* 28 (2009), 531-51.

66 Clive Beed and Cara Beed, “Work Ownership Implications of Recent Papal Social Thought,” *Review of Social Economy* 60 (2002), 47-69.

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## CONCLUSION

Tweaking the capitalist system rather than overhauling it is Bloomberg's preference. Presumably, this means encouraging reform within capitalism. However, to do this in terms of "a biblical theology of economics" requires guidelines from the Bible to chart the way forward. One guideline for this path is to provide "access to the means of production for all who can work."<sup>67</sup> Churches and Christian organizations have a vital role to play in this objective, including making micro-finance available for business purposes to the poor. Bloomberg advocates this procedure, to encourage micro-finance for entrepreneurial effort within neighborhoods that can help mutually reinforce each other.<sup>68</sup> Calling this "a socialist" concept is somewhat exaggerated, for the idea has long been standard practice inside capitalist economies, especially in the less developed world. Even so, microfinance use currently does have problems. As Jo et al.<sup>69</sup> point out, microfinance interest rates are often excessive, and need biblical safeguards to avoid this.

Blloomberg favors a system that "lies somewhere between pure capitalism and pure socialism." If advanced economies are the models, it is doubtful that "pure capitalism" has ever existed in the last eighty years. All manner of government regulation puts the bridle on "pure capitalism," which is not to say that existing regulation is the best way of heading toward a more "balanced, responsible and compassionate system."<sup>70</sup> Reforms that can be instituted inside present capitalism, such as heightened private and government action to encourage self-employment, partnerships and worker cooperatives for the poor, are more useful in improving their lot than are welfare handouts.

These forms of business enterprise have greater evenness in

67 "Neither Capitalism," 217.

68 "Neither Capitalism," 217.

69 Haesue Jo, Hoje Jo, and Manish Pathak, "Microfinancing, Interest Rate, and Biblical Safeguards," *Review of Business Research* 11 (2011), 59-67.

70 "Neither Capitalism," 217.

remuneration levels than exist within joint stock companies. There are extremely unequal distributions of income and wealth in most capitalist countries today. Policies to encourage self-employment etc. run closer to the biblical mandate of reducing inequality — which does not mean pursuing equality. Fostering a “theology of enough”<sup>71</sup> is more likely to be attained where enormous differences in levels of wealth and income do not exist within the population. Aspiration to possessions would be more comparable between different sections of the population, and, overall, dampened as purchase of luxury items slackened. If everybody had enough, there may be less ambition to strive for more and more.

71 “Neither Capitalism,” 217.



# Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky: Bible, Pneumatology and the Supernatural, Spiritism and Epilepsy– Evil and the Body Politic

**P.H. Brazier**

**KEYWORDS:**

| Angels and Demons | Christlikeness | Epilepsy | Good and Evil |  
| Politics | The Holy Spirit | Sin and Possession | Supernatural |

**ABSTRACT:**

To what extent is the Russian writer Dostoevsky's beliefs and faith conditioned, formed, by his youthful involvement in Spiritism and revolutionary politics, also by his epilepsy. How does this influence his triune understanding, specifically the pneumatological action of God in relation to sin and evil? Is evil for Dostoevsky primarily a case of bad politics, corrupted self-serving actions conflated into the public arena, through government and legislation? As theologian, prophet, and novelist, we can understand this development of Dostoevsky's beliefs from the impetuous naive socialism of his misspent youth through to his deep mature faith, grounded in the Bible: for example, the profound impact the mock execution had leading to Dostoevsky's imprisonment/exile for revolutionary sedition in a forced labour camp in Siberia, which triggered his return to faith through his discovery of the Russian New Testament, which he studied on a daily basis for the remainder of his life (is his mature faith more biblical than Russian Orthodoxy?). In conclusion we may ask, rhetorically, was Dostoevsky fearful of the Holy Spirit and the supernatural because of this youthful involvement in revolutionary politics (nineteenth century Russian anarchistic socialism and proto-Marxism) and his socialite flirtation with demonically driven Spiritism: both of which he repented of in his mature years and works.

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## INTRODUCTION

“For we wrestle not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the high places.”

EPHESIANS 6:12

Fêted in his later years as a prophet (пророк, *prorok*) the nineteenth century Russian writer and theologian Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky became a believing Christian in his middle years after a tumultuous youth spent flirting with spiritism/séances, anarchic atheism, franco inspired revolutionary politics, then surviving a mock execution at the hands of the Russian state for sedition, followed by imprisoned in a Siberian labour camp, and finally exile. The aim of this paper is to critically analyse key related elements in his writings which will explain his position on the Holy Spirit, and on the supernatural, including the role his epilepsy played in the formation and nature of his beliefs, his understanding and acknowledgement of pneumatology, and his flirtation with spiritism and séances as a young man.

Issuing from his challenge to the body politic,<sup>1</sup> the mock execution and imprisonment/exile led to his rediscovery of the Russian New Testament, which is the foundation of the biblical world of his novels. Importantly this will cause us to consider the role Dostoevsky’s epilepsy had in the formulation of his beliefs; that is, in informing and shaping – perhaps subliminally – how different his beliefs were in subtle ways from those of the average academically impartial, seemingly disinterested and neutral, theologian whose brain was not epileptic. Was the epilepsy responsible, so to speak, for certain nuanced details in his thought and

1 The body politic: defined as a group of persons politically organized under a single governmental authority, a people considered as a collective unit. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

in generating in him, to a degree, the conditions within his mind that gave him a more dynamic and truer understanding of the eschatological reality that humanity occupies, and the judgment that we all will face? More pertinently, did the condition of his brain allow the triune God to impart to him, to generate in his mind (in addition to the brutality of his imprisonment), a sounder eschatological understanding than many cossetted Western academics display? This inevitably raises questions about Dostoevsky's understanding of the supernatural, his acknowledgement of the pneumatological (as well as his flirtation with spiritism/spiritualism prior to his Siberian exile).

### TRIUNE CONSIDERATIONS

Central to Dostoevsky's beliefs – post-Siberia – is the centrality of Jesus Christ, the God-man. Using the Gospel of John as evidence of Christ's divinity, he struggled to conceive of God outside of Christ: the immanent was all-important to him. At times Dostoevsky so believed in Jesus Christ as God that he lost any understanding or concept of God's transcendence, as in the Father in heaven.<sup>2</sup> Dostoevsky therefore accepted the transcendence of God axiomatically whilst grounding the knowability of God in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Any encounter with the Holy Spirit would then be perturbing, puzzling, and certainly not conforming to the cognitive and epistemological expectations of humanity as demonstrated by the immanent: Sacred Scripture (his term: Священное Писание; *Svyashchennoye Pisanije*) was the measure and test of any perception/encounter. In addition, the second person of the Trinity was often perceivable for Dostoevsky through ordinary people, and distinctly through suffering.

But where was the Holy Spirit? Dostoevsky's novels, his belief system, is centred, in many ways, on deliverance from evil. This raises the question, what concept of evil is Dostoevsky working with? Evil is clearly

2 Alexander Boyce Gibson, *The Religion of Dostoevsky*, (London: SCM, 1973), 166.

manifold and present and active in his novels. But is it real, and what do we mean by real? For Dostoevsky evil is a spiritual force manifest in the corporeal, but it is not Manichean: it is not parallel or equal to God's goodness, it is goodness turned away from God, it is corrupted good, in many varying degrees, descending deeper and deeper, taking the human ever further from God's goodness, ultimately destroying the human. Evil, like demons, is not an abstract idea, even though such evil is clearly expressed psychologically in Dostoevsky's most depraved characters. Evil for Dostoevsky is real, but it is a transcendent actuality, the flip side of a coin: good and evil are states each and every human can rise to, or descend into. Dostoevsky's novels are full of evil motifs, but does such evil have a supernatural component, actual demonic powers exerting influence? It is clear from the Biblical witness generally, the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth specifically, that demons are very real, however, what of Dostoevsky's novels? There do appear to be real demons operating behind people, pulling their strings, so to speak, but Dostoevsky is ambiguous, and he falls safely on the line that evil may simply be bad politics, bad human actions within a hermetically sealed, closed-off world. So is evil solely psychological? Whether this transcendent actuality is 'real' or not, many of his characters are a reflection of actual people he knew of and observed: these characters are possessed by evil and go on to possess and destroy others (unless at the final moment in their lives, they turn to Christ and are saved!). Evil, as Dostoevsky saw it, is sometimes a noun, sometimes subjective verbs or adjectival criticism, though it is important to remember that Dostoevsky does sometimes regard good and evil as simply relative and comparative, subjective, seeking to avoid (as with demons) the question of the ontological nature of this transcendent actuality.

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## THE POLITICAL DOSTOEVSKY: THE FRANCO- RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONARY

### *i. Execution, Imprisonment & Exile*

In 1847, as a 26-year-old, at the St. Petersburg Military Academy, Dostoevsky fell in with a secret revolutionary proto-socialist group under the aegis of the editor and writer Vissarion Grigorievich Belinsky; Dostoevsky then became part of the Petrashevsky circle (named after its founder Mikhail Butashevich-Petrashevsky, who was a self-confessed atheist, humanist, anti-Czar, proto-socialist). The group took inspiration from, and was centred on the writings of, two leading figures in the French revolution: Jean-Baptiste Joseph Fourier and Auguste Comte. In 1849 the members of the Petrashevsky Circle (Dostoevsky was seen as the leader) were arrested: convicted of sedition, then were sentenced to death by firing squad. William J. Leatherbarrow notes:

Nicholas I was persuaded to commute the death sentences to imprisonment with hard labour, but he was determined to teach the conspirators an unforgettable lesson: they were kept in ignorance of the judgment of the court until the day of execution. Early in the morning of 22nd December, Dostoevsky and his fellow prisoners were transported to Semyonovsky Square, a regimental parade ground, where they were confronted with solemn priests, a black-draped scaffold, empty coffins, a line of armed soldiers and other signs that they were to be subjected to immediate execution. The original sentences were read and the first three prisoners, including Petrashevsky, were led to the stake. At the last moment, as the order to fire was about to be given, a messenger galloped into the square with news of the Tsar's 'gracious' clemency. One of the prisoners lost his mind, and Dostoevsky himself was to be radically altered by this grim charade, which he later described in striking detail in his novel *The Idiot*.<sup>3</sup>

3 W.J. Leatherbarrow, 'Introduction,' in Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (trans., Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky; London: Everyman's Library, 1993), p. xii.

This experience had a profound effect on Dostoevsky: it was the experience of being born again, of resurrection. This theme of resurrection was to dominate his mature novels and he was to project this near-death experience onto his characters on more than one occasion.<sup>4</sup> Dostoevsky, along with his co-conspirators, was shackled and imprisoned, and exiled in Siberia for ten years (1849–59). The significance of the trial, mock execution, and the imprisonment/exile are of profound importance to anyone who wishes to understand Dostoevsky’s theological beliefs.

### *ii. Dostoevsky and The New Testament*

The New Testament is of crucial importance in Dostoevsky’s rediscovery of his Christian faith and as the source and basis for the beliefs underlying his novels. On route to Siberia – marching the entire route – an elderly woman thrust a copy of the Russian New Testament into his hands:<sup>5</sup> this helped him to reaffirm his commitment to Christian principles, as embodied in the traditions and spirituality of the Russian Orthodox Church (though he was always wary of ecclesial power and authority). He kept this New Testament<sup>6</sup> until his death, reading John’s Gospel on a daily basis, annotating it and writing his theological thoughts in the margins.<sup>7</sup> From the evidence of the annotations, the following books were of most importance to him: The Gospel According to John, The Epistles

4 See, for example, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (Constance Garnett trans. 1913; Melbourne: Heinemann, 1961).

5 See Ronald Hingley, ‘Introduction,’ in Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, *Memoirs from the House of the Dead* (Oxford Word Classics; Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp. vii–xviii. Details are also recounted in this text, Dostoevsky’s auto-biographical reminiscences of his imprisonment.

6 F. Derek Chisholm, ‘Dostoevsky as Political Prophet: Demons as Prophecy of Lenin, Stalin and the Foundations of Russian Communism.’ Online: [www.fyodordostoevsky.com/essays/d-chisholm.html](http://www.fyodordostoevsky.com/essays/d-chisholm.html). See, GBL, fond 93/I, K. 5b./1. Evangelie. Gospoda nashego Iisusa Khrista Novyj Zavet. Pervym izdaniem. Sanktpeterburg. V tipografii Rossijskogo Biblejskogo Obshchestva 1823. See also: Geir Kjetsaa, *Dostoevsky and his New Testament* (Oslo: Solum Forlag A.S., 1984), pp. 6 and 80

7 Irina Kirillova, ‘Dostoevsky’s Markings in the Gospel according to St. John,’ in *Dostoevsky and the Christian Tradition*, edited by George Pattison and Diane Oenning Thompson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 41–50.

of John, then The Revelation to John.<sup>8</sup> Twenty-one of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are marked – however, The Gospel of Mark is annotated only in two places, Luke in seven; by contrast there are fifty-eight annotations in The Gospel of John. The teachings of Christ and the passion are heavily marked and annotated. The short First Epistle of John is heavily marked and annotated in six places; The Revelation to John sixteen places.<sup>9</sup> By contrast The Sermon on the Mount, respected and used by Dostoevsky's contemporary, Tolstoy, is largely ignored. (This may be due, in part, to Dostoevsky's fear of any abstract ideological system resulting from his experiences with the Petrashevsky circle and studying at the feet of Belinsky.) Even after his return from Siberia he regularly consulted, annotated, and wrestled with what were key passages, marking in ink, pencil (even finger-nail indentations whilst in prison, when no writing implement was available); the practice of wrestling with Священное писание ('Sacred Scripture') continued even until the day before his death.<sup>10</sup>

The Gospel of St. John has particular significance for Dostoevsky because, more than any of the other New Testament books, it enables him to affirm his faith in the divine Son of God through the affirmation of Christ's Sonship made manifest in the 'theology of love' that is so central to both The Gospel of St. John and the First Epistle of John. Dostoevsky's profession of faith had to overcome not so much the claims of nineteenth-century Natural Science as the tragic, insoluble contradiction between belief in an omnipotent and merciful God and the cruel, bleak reality of innocent suffering. The luminous revelation of love in the person of Christ enables Dostoevsky to believe that it is possible to resolve the terrible antinomy of innocent suffering and divine mercy through faith in Christ, the God-Man, who is both innocent victim and Redeemer.<sup>11</sup>

8 Ibid., p. 43.

9 Ibid., p. 48.

10 Anna Grigoryevna Dostoevsky, *Dostoevsky Reminiscences* (trans., by Beatrice Stillman. London: Wildwood House, 1975), p. 375.

11 Kjetsaa, p. 50 (Op cit 5).

This antinomy between divine mercy and apparently innocent suffering presented by the dialectical contradiction between the idea of an omnipotent and merciful God and the reality of suffering and death here on earth is reconciled only in the Lordship of the Son of God. This is the central dialectic in Dostoevsky's beliefs and in the theology presented in his novels. All other examples of Dostoevsky's dialectics flow from this resolution of the contradictions of faith and life in the God-man – hence 'living life' (живая жизнь : *zhivaia zhizn'*).<sup>12</sup>

## EPILEPSY ... AND RELIGION

### *i. Epilepsy ... and Religion*

The medical condition of epilepsy (seizures caused by abnormal brain activity) holds a unique place in relation to mind and soul, the supernatural and eternity, God and salvation. A history of mild childhood epileptic events culminated in a major seizure when Dostoevsky was an eighteen-year-old cadet at the military academy. The idea that these seizures were caused by the stressful impact of his father's death – a common argument by critics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (including Sigmund Freud) – is now considered wide-of-the-mark by neurologists.<sup>13</sup> His father's death – three years after his mother had died – could have exacerbated an already latent tendency towards seizures in the brain, but a sudden onset of epilepsy is most often caused by a head-brain injury. Anecdotes and speculation as to the cause of epilepsy in historical figures

12 See: P.H. Brazier, *Dostoevsky: A Theological Engagement* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, Wipf & Stock, 2016), pp. 44-45. See also, P.H. Brazier, *Barth and Dostoevsky* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Theological Monographs, 2007), pp.83-84.

13 See, Theodor Reik, 'The Study on Dostoyevsky,' in *From Thirty Years with Freud* (New York: Farrar and Rhinehart, 1940), 158–76. Freud's analysis (that Dostoevsky's epilepsy was not caused by a physical flaw in the brain, but was a pseudo-epilepsy, the symptoms being brought on by stress and guilt, also hysteria) is now considered speculative and inaccurate. See also, Nathan Rosen, 'Freud on Dostoevsky's Epilepsy: A Revaluation,' *Dostoevsky Studies* 9 (1988) pp. 107–25.

are considered unreliable: there is simply not enough actual evidence to determine the cause. However, Dostoevsky was certainly an epileptic; he suffered from seizures, and wrote about seizures, and they profoundly affected him.

Contrary to the view of most scholars that Dostoevsky's epilepsy was an unfortunate illness that occasionally troubled him, a consideration of epilepsy and the profound effect the condition has on the mind of an epileptic is crucial in understanding the eschatological theology that can be read from his writings, indeed that undergirds his *corpus*. Epilepsy is crucial to understanding Dostoevsky and the dialectical foundation of his theological views.

Seizures may be caused by an injury to the brain, or sustained chemical abuse. A diagnosis may issue from the culmination of very mild seizures during childhood – moments of frozen expression, absent mindedness, losing all sense of continuity and place just for a second – which often indicate an underlying latent epileptic condition before the onset of actual and noticeable seizure events. Seizures may be focal or generalized. Focal seizures are caused by a small area of scar tissue in the brain; generalized seizures offer no focal point. In Dostoevsky's case, there came a point in his teens where he collapsed with a major seizure. As he progressed through his adult years the seizures became more severe. This is a predictable prognosis, development. Seizures cause minute damage in the brain, and therefore leave scarring. Such scarring then triggers further seizures of increasing intensity, because at its most basic epilepsy is simply a minute electrical malfunction in the brain's wiring, in the synaptic pathways that provide the conditions for thought. (From a reductionist perspective these electro-chemical events are taken as the sole manifestation of 'thought,' but the functioning synaptic pathways do not so much *constitute* our thoughts, as provide a *vehicle* for our thoughts.) As the scarring increases, the number and intensity of the seizures increases.

How recurrent seizures affect the precise nature of theological beliefs in one such as Dostoevsky is an open question yet to be

examined. Epilepsy may under certain circumstances be considered to be eschatological because epilepsy can foster dualistic, binary thinking, and as such has an inclination towards an eschatological way of seeing the world; in addition, there is a sense in many epileptics of the need for urgency in decision making, in dealing with a crisis, a sense that everything is coming to a head, that judgment is coming (these thoughts often precede a seizure of varying intensity). This may be considered a particular interpretation of eschatology when most people do not concern themselves with the crisis of life and the risk of eternal judgment. Epilepsy can lift people out of a worldly complacency. Dostoevsky's beliefs are profoundly eschatological and, to a degree, dualistic: light and dark, heaven and hell, good and bad, ecstatic and nihilistic, either-or: in a word, *dialectic*. Dualism, issuing from the epilepsy, accounts – in part – for this dialectic. Epilepsy is not an inconvenient illness that occasionally disables the individual. An epileptic brain operates differently from a so-called 'normal' brain. Epileptically conditioned beliefs significantly alter the superficial religious background (characterized by a relatively trite theological anthropology). Why? Epileptics are often forced into the position of outsiders. Dostoevsky demonstrates this in his novels: for example, Prince Myshkin (*The Idiot*) is often politely ignored, shunned, subtly omitted from social interaction for risk he may have a fit or damage something precious! People around him fear a seizure, not just because they do not know how to cope with it, but it un-nerves them – they fear losing their own mind, not being in control, and they fear the risk of death (SUDEP: sudden unexplained death from epilepsy). Outsiders, like lepers in the biblical world of Jesus, or the blind, the lame, the disabled, who are ostracized from the Jerusalem temple cult and religion, either love Jesus, or loath him: the Gospel sees such matters in terms of light and dark, either-or, angels or demons, heaven or hell. Such is the case with epileptics, even if the condition is relatively well controlled. It may be speculated that this is why the marginalized, the afflicted, the suffering outcasts, saw Jesus and responded strongly, either one way or the other.

In 1862 Dostoevsky visited clinics in Western Europe to try to find either a cure, or ways of stabilizing his epilepsy. There was no cure.

### *ii. Epilepsy ... And Christlikeness*

Dostoevsky aligns the position of the suffering outsider with Christlikeness. This is starkly presented in *The Idiot* (1869): Myshkin, the Christlike figure, fails in his efforts to save Nastasya Filippovna because he is human and not divine. As Eduard Thurneysen notes, 'The Idiot, Prince Myshkin, an epileptic, returns to Russia from a nerve clinic in Switzerland without being cured.'<sup>14</sup> At the end of the novel Myshkin ends up returning to the clinic after suffering his destruction at the hands of murderers, libertines, and the proud cultured classes in St. Petersburg. The only way to look at these events is eschatological: the world still remains the same, but there has been a change in people, this is movement, either the movement *towards* salvation or, for some, a movement *away* from salvation into damnation. The ancient Greeks, and the Romans to a certain extent, understood this in a way that many Christians today fail to: what we do in the here-and-now echoes through eternity. Dostoevsky's faith was characterized by an existential eschatological crisis, which was conditioned by his epilepsy (in addition to the mock execution). Dostoevsky's suffering was to a degree (but certainly not always) a form of Christlikeness that separated him from the polite social etiquette of the St. Petersburg religious classes. His wife, Anna Dostoevsky, noted a state that almost led to a seizure, which defines this outsidership:

On the way to Geneva we stopped overnight in Basel, with the object of viewing a painting in the museum there which someone had told Fyodor Mikhailovich about. This painting, by Hans Holbein, depicts Jesus Christ after his inhuman agony, after his body has been taken down from the Cross and begun to decay. His swollen face is covered with bloody wounds, and it is terrible to behold. The painting had a crushing impact on Fyodor

14 Eduard Thurneysen, *Dostojewski* (München: Kaiser, 1921), pp. 25–26.

Mikhailovich. He stood before it as if stunned. And I did not have the strength to look at it – it was too painful for me, particularly in my sickly condition – and I went into other rooms. When I came back after fifteen or twenty minutes, I found him still riveted to the same spot in front of the painting. His agitated face had a kind of dread in it, something I had noticed more than once during the first moments of an epileptic seizure. Quietly I took my husband by the arm, led him into another room and sat him down on a bench, expecting the attack from one minute to the next. Luckily this did not happen. He calmed down little by little and left the museum, but insisted on returning once again to view this painting which had struck him so powerfully.<sup>15</sup>

Dostoevsky understood the height of the intensity of beauty and joy in an aura in the minutes before an epileptic seizure possesses, and how these may be moments of true knowledge of God and of humanity's existence, only to be followed by the destructive nihilism of the seizure. For Eduard Thurneysen this is 'to push the paradox to the limit ... wherein God is seen.'<sup>16</sup> This can be seen in the depths of negation and nihilism, illness and suffering that allow the epileptic to gain deep knowledge out of the moment of near death. Thurneysen, continues, 'Humanity can be true to the real meaning of this life only in those great negations of all human standpoints and possibilities.'<sup>17</sup> These negations are like a premonition of the *eschaton* because they generate the crisis of judgment (the model for this was the crucifixion). In *The Idiot*, the unworldly Myshkin, the epileptic, unnervingly speaks the truth and never partakes in the games of status, power, and sexual politics that other people do, but he eventually returns to the asylum as the result of *status epilepticus* (continuous epileptic seizures over several hours with the resulting brain damage that in most instances causes death) having effectively been destroyed by the people he was trying to help, to save. Myshkin is only understood

15 Anna Grigoryevna Dostoevsky, *Dostoevsky Reminiscences*, p. 134.

16 Thurneysen, *Dostojewski*, p. 24.

17 *Ibid.*, p. 48.

truly for what he is – as an example of Christlikeness – by the outcasts in society, the outsiders: in Myshkin's case, by a harlot (Nastasya) and a murderer (Rogozhin). The Swiss theologian Karl Barth noted of Myshkin's character in *The Idiot*, 'Why can we work up no indignation against Dostoevsky's daring to make Christ pass as an idiot in society and the real understanding of him begin with the murderer and the harlot?'<sup>18</sup> Jeannette Stirling notes that this psychotic murderer (Rogozhin) and this victim of child abuse, turned into a sex slave (Nastasya), 'are also fragmented characters, their emotional fragility manifesting from time to time as "convulsive" and "hysterical" behaviours.'<sup>19</sup> Perhaps it is that those outside of what we take to be the church are sometimes in receipt of a deeper, greater, and more profound (and therefore *truer*?) understanding of the human and its relationship to God, than clerics and religious. The ranks of clergy and religious professionals may perceive something of this knowledge, but their witness is hampered and compromised by their religious status (Matt 7:21-23).

Dostoevsky describes the effect of seizures on the human through characters, he describes how the condition of epilepsy marks the epileptic as different to the rest of humanity, how the condition sets the individual apart. Some of Dostoevsky's accounts are first-hand, drawing on his own recollections of the seconds and minutes leading up to a seizure (often for him an *ecstatic aura*), and the state of confusion afterwards (i.e., *post ictal confusion*). No epileptic has a sound reasoned memory of the actual seizure, it would be like a camera trying to take a picture of itself, or a computer trying to analyse itself when it is switched-off! Many of his descriptions are from his wife's observations, and those of various doctors. These descriptions are then projected onto characters in his novels: Kirillov (Бесы, *The Demons*, 1872); Smerdyakov (Братья Карамазовы, *The Brothers Karamazov*, 1880); Nellie in (Униженные и

18 Karl Barth, 'Der Christ in der Gesellschaft,' in *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* (München: Kaiser, 1924), pp. 33–69 (quote, p. 61).

19 Jeannette Stirling, *Representing Epilepsy: Myth and Matter* (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 97.

оскорблённые, *The Insulted and Injured*); Prince Myshkin (Идиот, *The Idiot*, 1869).

In *The Idiot*, Dostoevsky portrays Myshkin in the half-hour or so leading up to a seizure, wandering; this preamble is not so much confused or aimless, but without consistent purpose. Myshkin is focusing on small irrelevancies, obsessive details, in what to some may seem an autistic manner.<sup>20</sup> The lack of focus and the wandering continue and he begins to question reality. Myshkin then realizes that he may be drifting into a seizure. What Dostoevsky attempts to describe is the *aura* prior to a seizure (*prodromal* or *pre-seizure*), the dark nihilistic destruction that follows on he cannot describe, he will only know of the sheer destruction in his mind after the seizure is over: as the *post ictal* confusion begins to dissipate. During the last twenty years of his life Dostoevsky kept a record of the number of seizures he experienced in his notebooks. This is a total of 120 (which is actually a relatively low number: an average of one every two months). Jeannette Stirling, in *Representing Epilepsy: Myth and Matter*, considers Dostoevsky's condition:

One of Dostoevsky's friends wrote that the author often spoke of his *prodromal*, or *pre-seizure*, phase as a period of ecstasy. He claimed to have experienced:

... a contentedness which is unthinkable under normal conditions, and unimaginable for those who have not experienced it. At such times I am in perfect harmony with myself and the entire universe. Perception is so clear and so agreeable that one would give ten years of his life, and perhaps all of it, for a few seconds of such bliss.<sup>21</sup>

Many of these aspects of cerebral paroxysm, as well as the darker and more difficult sensory changes, are written into the characterizations in Dostoevsky's fictional works. In *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin's pre-seizure states sometimes elevate him to a 'lofty

20 See, Dostoevsky, *The Idiot* (Garnett trans.), Pt. 2, Chp. 5, p. 139–41.

21 Stirling, *Representing Epilepsy*, pp. 95 & 127. Stirling notes, the quote is attributed to Strakhov, cited in Henri Gastaut, 'Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky's (1821–1881),' *Epilepsia*, 19 (1978), p. 188.

calm' where 'his mind and heart were flooded with extraordinary light';<sup>22</sup> however his seizures also plummet him to the lowest mode of existence.<sup>23</sup>

Dostoevsky therefore focuses on the *pre-seizure aura*, often termed ecstatic epilepsy, and the nihilism of the post seizure, or *post ictal* period of recovery, where the brain slowly 'reboots' and recovers, where perception and understanding needs to gradually re-ground in reality.

An interesting point he projects into his epileptic characters is the primordial scream immediately prior to a seizure:

Myshkin's seizures, like those of Yelena in *The Humiliated and Insulted*, are preceded by a 'frightful, unimaginable scream':

In that scream everything human seems obliterated and it is impossible, or very difficult, for an observer to realize and admit that it is the man himself screaming. *It seems indeed as though it were someone else screaming from within the man.* That is how many people at least have described their impression. The sight of a man in an epileptic fit fills many people with positive and unbearable horror, in which there is a certain element of the uncanny.<sup>24</sup> (My emphasis.)

In an indexical turn, Dostoevsky describes Myshkin as having 'that strange look from which some people can recognize at the first glance a victim of epilepsy.'<sup>25</sup>

Dostoevsky, quoted here by Stirling, appears to be invoking something beyond the rational, beyond the immediate reductionist diagnosis of epilepsy; so what is going on here?

22 Stirling is here quoting from Dostoevsky's, *The Idiot* (Garnett trans.), p. 219.

23 Stirling, *Representing Epilepsy*, p. 95.

24 Op cit, pp. 22, 228–9). Note, descriptions of Yelena's seizure can be found in Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, *Humiliated and Insulted* (trans. Ignat Avsey; Richmond, UK: Alma Classics, 2012), p. 191f.

25 Stirling, *Representing Epilepsy*, p. 95.

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## EPILEPSY AND CAUSE

### *i. Epilepsy ... and Nihilistic Determinism?*

The standard reductionist (i.e., modern/scientific) approach to epilepsy – reflecting the closed-off world of Kantian philosophy – conceives of epilepsy as a brain disease, a malfunction in part of the grey matter/flesh inside of our skulls that is manifested by the synaptic pathways between our brain cells. Any spiritual dimension is simply where the sensation in a person’s mind leading up to a seizure may, under certain circumstances, and according to the individual’s background, be given a ‘religious’ gloss: thus is the nihilistic deterministic world view about epilepsy from the so-called experts. Feelings of warmth, light, contentment, pleasure, heightened awareness, and so forth – these are considered by psychologists and neurologists to be ‘religious’ (though without an accompanying definition and explanation of what being religious actually is). Thus, epileptic seizures, where there is consciousness of the pre-seizure or actual seizure in the epileptic,<sup>26</sup> are often considered spiritual, but this is a no more than a comment upon the individual’s interpretation of the event. The psychologists and neurologists themselves do not make sense of the event in terms of such categories, unless theology is defined as yet another brain activity, subjective and contained within a closed-off Kantian universe. They may indeed deny the reality of any spiritual – or supernatural – dimension to the world that transcends the psyche of human beings.<sup>27</sup>

26 A simple partial seizure involves a degree of conventional consciousness by the epileptic; a complex partial seizure involves no conventional consciousness, but altered consciousness, as the individual will still walk, try to talk, bump into things, but have no more understanding of the world and its dangers around her/him that a ten-month old child just beginning to walk (a state of complex partial seizure can sometimes be similar to advanced dementia). The depth of a complex partial seizure may lead into a full-blown seizure with total loss of consciousness and the risk of brain death.

27 See Coles, Alasdair. ‘Temporal lobe epilepsy and Dostoyevsky seizures: Neuropathology and Spirituality.’ Published online, [Royal College of Psychology, 2013](#):

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## *ii. Epilepsy ... and a Biblical World View?*

Things are different with the Bible; the Bible being the repository of God's revelation and the truth about the reality we occupy and live out our lives in. The biblical world is invisibly peopled by angels and demons: spirits that underpin and influence the actions and beliefs of people. To the biblical authors, these spiritual beings were not to be considered abstract ideas; angels and demons were not to be seen as psychological projections, they were to be seen as real – as *real* as people are; invisible, perceived by their sway, their influence on humanity, but nonetheless an *actuality*.

What did Dostoevsky believe? He accepted and valued the Bible (more pertinently, the New Testament, he was somewhat ambiguous about the Old Testament) and it is clear that many of his characters are defined by what appears to be angelic goodness or demonic evil, but also that they have the freedom to move between the states of good and evil. Did Dostoevsky realize or acknowledge that we cannot dismiss the influences of good or bad spirits on the human mind? If he did, did he learn this from his epilepsy? Or did he avoid the question? The concept that we may be influenced in our thinking, in our beliefs and actions, by angels and demons is not, to Dostoevsky, an abstract idea; it is a concept underpinned by his respect for the Bible, specifically the New Testament. The protagonists in Dostoevsky's novels are heroes or anti-heroes, the behaviour of many of these characters is 'demonic,' 'hellish,' as in *The Demons* (1872), and in the character of Raskolnikov (Преступление и наказание, *Prestupleniye i nakazaniye: Crime and Punishment*, 1866). But we must be clear that Dostoevsky does not assert actual real spiritual demons behind the evil behaviour of humans. Dostoevsky is very coy about the biblically asserted spiritual realm, a point we will consider in relation to his flirtation with, and then rejection of spiritism/spiritualism.

### *iii. Evil ... and the Demonic?*

The apparent dualism between good and evil, angelic and demonic, between a closed-off reality, and a world porous to the eternal, this paradoxical duality may define the human condition, but it does not define God and God's economy with creation. It is of paramount importance to note that in traditional Christian theology the devil is not a parallel 'god,' equal to God, uncreated, co-existing from eternity. Rather, the devil, the arch-leader of demonic evil forces, is a creature: Lucifer was good, in some ways the highest creation, the brightest of angels, but he rebelled, set himself up as a 'god,' and attempted to parallel God. Lucifer could not coexist in heaven, in eternity, and fell. He was expelled. This rebellion and its consequences are mirrored in Dostoevsky's anti-heroes, the depraved and *fallen* characters who move ever deeper into a 'hell' of *their own making*, eventually losing all traces of a God-given humanity. Madness and suicide await them; unless at the last moment they turn and repent. This is a recurring theme in Dostoevsky's mature period novels. However, it is important to note that according to conventional interpretation Dostoevsky appears to use the biblical notion of devils, demons, and hell, as a motif and theme, he sees this reality from the Bible played out in the *Fall* of human characters. That, however, is not at all the same as seeing actual evil spirits at work as part of the world of the novel.

Epilepsy may help to generate this 'either-or' dualism in Dostoevsky's understanding of the human condition, but Scripture bears witness to a deeper understanding of the relationship between seizures and the world of angels and demons: an epileptic seizure (or for that matter cramp in the leg!) may be the result of an electro-chemical reaction in the muscle, determined by our activities, and all that has led up to the person we are at a given moment in time; or, the cramp, the seizure, may have been triggered by the influence of a spiritual being: invisible, but outside of our control (but like Satan in the Book of Job, not beyond God's purview!).

This is a world that characterizes and underpins Dostoevsky's novels, but he was not necessarily asserting that the evil anti-heroes in his books were manipulated by actual, real, demons. Is this a weakness in his work, and in his own life's belief system? Did Dostoevsky create psychological barriers to the concept – and dangers – of the supernatural. We are on safer ground with Dostoevsky's teleology if we assert that demons – real or psychological – whisper into the conscious mind of an individual, suggesting, inviting them to indulge in beliefs and acts that will in time ensure their *Fall* and condemnation into an eternal hell. But what are the worst demonically inspired beliefs and acts? – for Dostoevsky this is the political. Bad politics is the ultimate evil: consider Lucifer's *Fall* and humanity's depraved addiction to original sin, imposed on others through the body politic!

## POSSESSION AND POSSESSORS: THE POLITICAL

### *i. Political Possessors*

In *The Demons* (Бесы, Besy, often translated as *The Devils*, or wrongly translated as *The Possessed*, where, *The Possessors* would be a more accurate translation) Dostoevsky explicitly invokes this world of demonic influence whereby ideas are the main weapons that are used in the downfall into evil of seemingly altruistic and idealistic people. The novel draws on actual events, the assassination of opponents of revolutionaries in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other places. Rowan Williams comments,

Fyodor Dostoevsky was already a major figure in the Russian cultural scene when he published *The Devils*, the third of the four great novels of his maturity. By this time, he had returned to Christian faith and practice, and saw himself as called to defend this faith in his writing. But this did not mean that he wrote improving stories on religious subjects. His way of defending Christianity

was to try and show how it could cope with the most horrific and extreme of human situations. He never gives easy answers, but expects his readers to face the worst the world can offer so that the scale of God's grace becomes even more astonishing.<sup>28</sup>

Williams notes how the two key figures in a proto-socialist (arm-chair) revolutionary group are presented as demonically-driven: 'Verkhovensky is a brilliant manipulator ... Stavrogin is intelligent, wildly independent, mysterious and charismatic, a "messianic" figure.' Based on an actual incident, the murder of one member of the group binds all the others together.

Here, Williams understands how it is through wilful decisions, many tiny, little decisions, and the influence of those we live with, decisions that allow us to accept the courting of demons or angels – which will ensure our progress towards the eschatological judgment that none of us can escape, but also how that judgment permeates back into time as the individual becomes ever more evil, or good:

These two diabolical characters don't come from nowhere. Their parents also figure in the book. Pyotr's father is a vain and silly old man, who loves to think of himself as a daring revolutionary writer; Nikolai's mother is an equally silly woman, caught up in a whole complex of self-deceit... . The message is clear: the demonic evil of the two younger men comes from this sterile, fantasy-ridden atmosphere, full of large talk about change and progress, but with absolutely no spiritual or moral substance. One generation's flabby fashions become destructive horrors in the next generation. You can see why Dostoevsky's novel was so unpopular with progressives in Russia at the time.<sup>29</sup>

Williams asks the pertinent question, 'Can there be redemption for people like these, people whose emptiness invites the devil in?'<sup>30</sup> Dostoevsky

28 Rowan Williams, 'The Archbishop on Dostoevsky's "Devils": <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2003/the-archbishop-on-dostoevskys-devils>., para 1.

29 Ibid., para 5.

30 Ibid., para 6.

explores this possibility, the openness of redemption, towards the end of the book, but both characters walk away from the public confession and utter repentance that is required for salvation. Both are too demonically possessed to move to God. *The Demons* was profoundly influenced by Dostoevsky's reading of The Book of Revelation. It is an explicitly political and eschatological text. Revolutionary forces were highly active in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century (only coming to power with the revolution in 1917). However, already in Dostoevsky's day, competing ideologies fought each other for power and control. Dostoevsky is highly critical of these radical proto-communist idealists, who presented their beliefs and ideas – their politics – as quasi-religious; indeed Dostoevsky saw the very foundation and ground of these ideologically motivated beliefs to be inherently evil.

Dostoevsky knew and understood the progressive politics of late nineteenth century Europe. In *Crime and Punishment* he has the anti-hero Raskolnikov, murder an old pawn broker simply for no justifiable reason other than he does not like her, he sees her as an obstacle to his development, and categorizes her as a louse. Dostoevsky was something of a prophet in the crime/trespass of Raskolnikov. In November 1869, three years after the book was published, a young student at the Petrovsky Agricultural Academy in Moscow was murdered by a revolutionary group headed by Sergei Nechaev<sup>31</sup> for the supposedly humanitarian aims of radical ideology, or what Dostoevsky would have described as rational egoism: just like the character of Raskolnikov – killing for anarchic reasons.

## *ii. Evil as Politics*

The imperial Russian establishment is presented by Dostoevsky as inept, toothless, and in many ways complicit through its failure to refute the

31 Sergei Nechaev (1847–82), a Russian revolutionary nihilist who advocated the single-minded pursuit of revolution by any means necessary, including violence: the end justified the means

arguments of the revolutionaries, but this imperial body politic is not necessarily evil. F. Derek Chisholm, assessing Dostoevsky's understanding and use of the 'demonic' and eschatological, but also assessing the Russian and Soviet history that follows on after Dostoevsky's death and into the twentieth century, comments:

The novel *Demons* accurately applies New Testament texts from Luke's Gospel and Revelation on the demonic to Russian political extremism and the foundations of Russian communism. Second, that the formation of Russian communism by Lenin and Stalin provides an insightful case study of the demonic in politics... . Dostoevsky's copy of the New Testament indicates that he believed the Book of Revelation was an eschatologically prophetic book that was being fulfilled within late nineteenth-century Russia.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, Chisholm notes how,

Verkhovensky is modelled after the beast that rose out of the earth in Chapter 13 of the book of Revelation. Snakes rise out of the earth and have an association with Satan and the perpetration of evil that goes way back. Stavrogin is modelled after the beast from the sea described in Revelation 13:11–18. Stavrogin is described as being a 'beast of prey' that has 'ungovernable wildness' and 'superhuman strength.' In the book of Revelation the beast that rose out of the earth prepares the way for the beast that rose out of the sea. In the novel Verkhovensky prepares the way as Stavrogin's subservient follower.<sup>33</sup>

The conclusion that we can infer from these allusions to revelation in *The Demons* is that politics is more often than not demonically controlled: is this the conclusion Dostoevsky draws? Politics is a compromise; politics issues from the spirit of this world:<sup>34</sup>

32 Dostoevsky explicitly uses Revelation, chps. 10 and 13. Op cit, Chisholm.

33 Op cit, Chisholm, 'Dostoevsky as Political Prophet...' para. 16, quoting Kjetsaa, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: A Writer's Life*, pp. 253–56.

34 Perhaps only the Torah as a political system of government and law – given by God to the chosen people, the ancient Hebrews, the Jews – is the only valid political system, though this then raises questions about its implementation and the integrity of the body politic.

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (John 17:14-16)

Indeed, are all politicians, to a greater or lesser degree, demonically inspired and sometimes even demonically controlled? Or is this going too far? Or are some of them possessed by evil of this world, and then become – in a true translation of Бесы, *possessors*)? Dostoevsky offers no comforting nuances here, no grey, confused middle ground: politics rules and governs our lives and politics is either-or: politicians are for God or against God, angelic or demonic: but they, the politicians, the rulers, the movers and shakers, those who set trends and generate the political ideology that rules people (as Raskolnikov vainly believes of himself in *Crime and Punishment*) are the real *possessors* of the ordinary people, playing them like puppets. The *possessed* (demonically) then *possess* others and draw them into their hellish condemnation. But we err if we believe we can lump all demonic influence on politicians alone, leaving all other human activities free from demonic manipulation. Perhaps the reason Dostoevsky focused so much on the politics of revolutionaries, and its demonic foundation, was in a way to repudiate the flirtation he had with political radicals during his misspent youth: the Franco-inspired revolutionaries that he came to be the self-styled leader of. William J. Leatherbarrow notes,

[t]his pattern of biblical motifs, imagery and allegory drawn from the apocalyptic revelations of St. John occupy a particularly significant place, and reveal much about the nature of Dostoevsky's Christian vision. This apocalyptic colouring emerged suddenly in Dostoevsky's works of the 1860s, and appears to be linked to his increasing awareness of the nature of Western European society.<sup>35</sup>

35 Leatherbarrow, 'Apocalyptic Imagery in *The Idiot* and *The Devils*,' *Dostoevsky Studies* 3, 1982, 44. Accessed online Nov. 28, 2013, [www.utoronto.ca/tsq/DS/03/043.shtml](http://www.utoronto.ca/tsq/DS/03/043.shtml).

We cannot deny that the apocalyptic in Dostoevsky's work from the time of the writing of *Crime and Punishment* is in all probability also linked to the worsening of his epilepsy. Therefore, Dostoevsky understood how the real risk in serious assaults by demons lay not in, say, an inept demon needling him by triggering an epileptic seizure, but in the way such evil spirits, whether understood as actual spiritual beings or as personifications of the lower aspects of our fallen natures, whispered ideas into the minds of people, gradually bringing about their downfall, their *possession*, and their *servitude* to this personified evil (to the possessors).

This raises the question for his readers: to whom do you belong? To Satan, the prince of evil; or to God, the Lord? Or do you subsist in the delusion that you belong only to yourself, that no one or no one thing lays claim to you?

#### EVIL AS A TANGIBLE TRANSCENDENT ACTUALITY

We cannot avoid the question, in relation to Dostoevsky's works, what do we mean if we refer to evil as *real*? In defining evil as real, is this an attempt to acknowledge that evil exists and is more than just an opinion about human behaviour that offends? Is evil more than just a subjective judgement made by people to distance themselves from something they don't approve of? If evil is a turning away from God, is such evil supernatural, issuing from *actual* demonic powers (beings created good by God, but who have turned from God and embraced evil?) exerting influence in the here-and-now? Is evil multitudinous acts of sin that has lost the perception and capacity to repent? – in this instance is evil sheer wilfulness? Are the demonic motifs in Dostoevsky's writings an adjectival judgment, used to interpret and criticize political powers, or do they represent an interference, and at times perhaps even a possession, of the human by *actual* evil? Dostoevsky *does not* go down the latter path, of actual, tangible, real, and concrete evil, though for some readers his use of the demonic is ambivalent, it seems to call for acknowledgement

of evil as a *transcendent actuality*. The allusion can be seen as Pauline in the sense that the New Testament speaks of principalities and powers and many biblical scholars debate whether these principalities and powers (Eph 6:12) are spiritual or political, as the original Greek text appears, for some, to be indecisive. Or are Paul's (and Dostoevsky's) spiritual powers 'real' but operative through earthly powers. The Pauline texts show this well, and so does the Book of Revelation; however, are these powers to be understood as individual demonic beings or something akin to actual evil spiritual forces, a transcendent actuality, or are they simply psychological – a mental manifestation in a closed-off universe? And what biblical background can we read between the lines of Dostoevsky's works? Dostoevsky is ambiguous, though he considers evil to be bad politics (wrong before Almighty God, the Lord), bad human actions (where humans wilfully exercise power and authority). For Dostoevsky evil issues from bad ideas, and as such is worse than brawling fisticuffs, or sexual sins: pride and arrogance issue from corrupt beliefs, bad principles, twisted and convoluted dogma, that lead to the turning away from God: the body politic forms a Pagan rebellion against *El Shaddai*, *Yahweh's* will for the people (this rebellion was seen by Dostoevsky in his mature years as the rise and development of socialist anarchy and proto-Marxism, in Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century, in addition to the Franco inspired commune-collectivization of his youth, grounded in the French revolution). But Dostoevsky does not appear to posit real demons operating behind people, pulling their strings, so to speak? Is the evil we can read from his novels analogous to a *tangible transcendent actuality*, which appears to exist without of the human, even though this was in all probability not Dostoevsky's intention.

### GOOD AND EVIL ... AND EPILEPSY?

Epilepsy defines frailty. Dostoevsky understood this from observing

people in the world, but also from his own epilepsy. It lays open our vulnerability. If the mind can be subject to forces from outside of what we take to be perceivable reality then not only bad forces but also good forces could act upon the mind, and in turn upon the brain. And good forces, good spirits, could trigger an epileptic seizure in one who is prone to such attacks in the same way that more tangible triggers may cause an attack. If the brain, or part of the brain, has a weakness then something, even with good intention, may act as a trigger. Consider the account of Saul on the road to Damascus: a Spirit-enabled encounter with the risen and ascended Christ had a dramatic and cataclysmic effect on him (Acts 9:1-18). His symptoms are like a partial epileptic seizure (phasing between *simple* and *complex*, between consciousness and altered consciousness) both in the attack on the road and in the details given at the point of his healing at the hands of Ananias: ‘He laid his hands on Saul and said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’ And immediately *something like scales fell from his eyes*, and his sight was restored’ (Acts 9:18a; my emphasis). Saul’s temporary blindness may have been an extended period of post seizure activity in his brain (*post ictal confusion*, or *ocular/retinal migraine*?<sup>36</sup>). The phrase, *something like scales fell from his eyes*, indicates the possibility of a seizure in the rear of the cerebral cortex, which processes information from the eyes before sending it to the temporal lobes at the front of the brain for interpretation,

36 Ocular/retinal migraine is a neurological eye condition that causes brief attacks of blindness or visual problems like flashing lights in the eyes, or like seeing through frosted glass, often having the appearance of ‘scales’ (as used in the Apostle Paul’s case: *λεπίδες*, *scales, flakes*, from *λεπίς*, or *λεπρά*, *scaliness*: hence leprosy). In most cases an ocular/retinal migraine is harmless, though it can severely restrict vision, and can vary from minutes, to – in rare instances – days. An ocular/retinal migraine is a distinct condition from a headache-type migraine, though what is happening is not in the eye(s) but in the rear of the cerebral cortex (the back of the brain). Search Google images using *retinal migraine* and/or *ocular migraine* keywords for simulations. Hilary, my wife, had a continuous ocular migraine in the lower corner of her right eye – continuously for approximately 5 years – then it just cleared. See also, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qVF1cF9lyk8>, and, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8P\\_ZTJqv8g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G8P_ZTJqv8g)

recognition, and so forth. This reality of spiritual influence is more open, more noticeable, in epileptics. This eschatological reality is to be seen as a characteristic of Dostoevsky novels, and it is a reality that epilepsy bears witness to, an understanding that epilepsy may generate with Dostoevsky's writings. It is a question of to whom we belong: personified evil, or to God? Who are we exposed to? What influences us? Proximity and commitment to Christ, the incarnation of God, should alleviate such a danger: God protects *His* own. Genuine commitment to Christ will provide a pneumatological firewall against the wiles of the devil; but this spiritual protection is not available to those whose faith is false and disingenuous (Matt 7:21-23).

This spiritual protection can be seen in many of the characters of Dostoevsky's novels, for example, Father Zossima in *The Brothers Karamazov*, or Sonya's younger sister in *Crime and Punishment*, the innocent and charismatically holy child, Polenka. Grace will surround and protect holy individuals from the guiles and charms, of the devil, the ever present invitation to *Fall*, to recapitulate on original sin, and from the subversive influence of demons. This is not favouritism; the potential is there for all humanity, and to all of Dostoevsky's characters. It comes down to a question of faith and proximity. Christians may have epileptic seizures (a physical breakdown in the wiring – the synaptic pathways – in the brain) and still be insulated by God's Holy Spirit from the demonic world. It comes down to the relationship between the individual and God – which brings us back to the characters in Dostoevsky's novels: the promise of spiritual protection.<sup>37</sup>

What is important is that two of the main epileptic characters in Dostoevsky's work – Myshkin and Smerdyakov – are in some way diametric: Myshkin, the innocent fool, who fails through his humanity

37 In Mark's Gospel, the boy who manifests epileptic seizures is in his right-mind, and morally sound before God after the seizures. An interesting question is, did this boy continue to have mild momentary seizures, or auras, after the exorcism at Jesus's hands; was there a residual epileptic condition no longer aggravated by demons, no longer life threatening?

to be truly Christ-like; Smerdyakov, the scheming murderer who flirts with evil till it possesses and destroys him. Both suffer from seizures, which may or may not be thought to result from ‘demonic’ interference (though Dostoevsky does exclude the actual demonic from causing them, though he is uncertain as to how *real* such evil is), therefore it is not the seizures *per se* that are of concern, but the ethical teleology: what impact on the moral character did the seizures have, and how did the person develop and progress after the seizure? What do we say of demons and epilepsy? – that what is most dangerous is, the impact of demons on the minds of Myshkin and Smerdyakov’s (and Dostoevsky). The aim of such demons – if we follow the biblical paradigm – is to ensure the downfall of an individual by whispering ideas into the person’s mind.<sup>38</sup> Demons may, or may not, have triggered epileptic seizures in Dostoevsky’s brain, but they did not necessarily cause him to *Fall*; where demons had been successful was in whispering revolutionary *ideas* into the mind of the young Dostoevsky, encouraging him down the path of bad politics. These demonically-driven ideas nearly led to Dostoevsky’s execution, at a point where he had not repented of his youthful (political) mistakes. In his later life he was much more morally sound before God: despite being plagued, racked, and broken by the seizures: he held to his right mind and a right judgement before God.

## DOSTOEVSKY AND SPIRITUALITY/SPIRITUALISM?

But why when Dostoevsky asserted so fiercely a tradition/orthodox/evangelical Gospel, emphasising the utter absolute necessity of the Christ to answer the depravity of the human, was he so reluctant to speak of the supernatural and invoke the power and authority of the Holy Spirit? The

38 Demons did not need to trigger seizures in Judas, Pilate, or Herod, to ensure their fall, only whisper ideas into their minds.

answer lies again in his misspent youth(!).

Spiritism,<sup>39</sup> a form of Spiritualism, was something of a fashionable preoccupation amongst the wealthy and leisured classes in St. Petersburg, particularly in the 1840s and 1850s. Thomas Berry notes,

From the reign of Catherine the Great to the Revolution of 1917, Russian society and literature were affected by the relationship between Western spiritualism with its séances and mediums and an ancient folk tradition with its superstitions and fancifulness. The common Russian belief in spirits, combined with the Western occult science, brought charlatans into the highest court circles throughout the last hundred and fifty years of the Romanov's rule.<sup>40</sup>

These were people who considered themselves Christian but dabbled with séances and mediums, the occult and psychic phenomena, in particular, what they considered to be communication with the dead, all framed by religious interests and practices that denied fundamental Christian doctrine. Considered an innocent playtime, many were drawn into a much darker world than they expected, becoming infatuated with these gatherings. As a young army officer Dostoevsky was involved in such séances, flirting with the pronouncements of mediums, and so forth. As such Dostoevsky's seduction by Spiritists is interlinked with the military society he moved in, then with the fashionable bourgeois world of his early novellas where he is a sceptic but plays with Spiritist ideas as an innocent pastime, and then – ironically – with his politicization through revolutionary Franco-ideologies: 'Dostoevsky was aware of the literary tastes of the period and his own writing reflected his effort to appeal to the public's taste for the esoteric.'<sup>41</sup> In *The Landlady* (1847), Dostoevsky flirts with the idea that the heroine is possessed by the devil, but narrates that this is psychological imbalance; the early Dostoevsky weaves some ideas

39 See, Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Allan Kardec and the Development of a Research Program in Psychic Experiences. Cited on Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritism>, accessed Jan. 16, 2016.

40 Thomas Berry, 'Dostoevsky and Spiritualism,' *Dostoevsky Studies* 2 (1981) pp. 43–51 (quote, p. 43).

41 Ibid.

from Russian folklore into his short stories and novellas, for example, a violinist possessed by evil powers when he plays the instrument (*Netochka Nezvanova* 1848).

Post-Siberia Dostoevsky embraced Orthodox Christianity, grounded for him in the New Testament, and rejected Spiritism; his understanding of the supernatural is related to this rejection of Spiritism/Spiritualism; this rejection then effects, to a degree, his reading of the New Testament. It also shaped his theology generally, his eschatology specifically, creating apparent anomalies and flaws, contradictions in his otherwise biblical/traditional/orthodox theological framework. Fundamental to this question is whether the ‘other,’ the supernatural, exists, and is acknowledged; that is, a spiritual dimension: good and bad, holy and evil, angelic and demonic. Does such a reality exist in a way not reducible to the physical world we occupy? A Naturalistic position considers the material world to be all there is. Spiritualism, specifically Spiritism as a form of transdimensionality, was rejected by Dostoevsky post-Siberia, at a time when it was even more highly fashionable amongst the leisured classes in St. Petersburg. Dostoevsky is critical of spiritualism/spiritism as a system of belief or religious practice based on supposed communication with the spirits of the dead, especially through mediums in séances. But does this rejection also involve a denial of the reality of the supernatural as attested to in the Bible?

Implying, in philosophical terms, the doctrine that the spirit exists distinct from matter, or that spirit is the only reality (OED), Spiritism can be considered to be, for many, Gnostic and heretical, raising serious questions about the incarnation, and the value of the corporeal. Aware of the ‘tremendous popular regard for the occult science’<sup>42</sup> Dostoevsky does weave into his major novels some examples, but walks a fine line between belief and scepticism, for example, ‘the dual nature of Russian spiritualism from the folkloric devils in many of his works to the sophisticated devilish

42 Ibid.

phantom of Ivan's dream in *The Brothers Karamazov*.<sup>43</sup>

If in his major novels he tries to steer a path between belief and scepticism with regard to the influence the supernatural might exert on us in the here-and-now, he ends up with an hermetic world where any sense of the supernatural is to be considered psychological. However, in his personal life he toyed with the idea of a spiritual reality that can exert influence on us.

Although sceptical of demons and spiritism, Dostoevsky was aware of what we may term the action, the enigmatic presence, of the Holy Spirit in his life, of unusual, nigh impossible, coincidences.

In his personal life, Dostoevsky gave evidence of his curiosity about psychic phenomena. Doctor Janovskij, who treated the author, reported that Dostoevsky believed in premonitions and related the following incident. During the second year of their acquaintance, the doctor lived in Pavlovsk, returning to St. Petersburg three times a week for his medical practice. One day a strange urge convinced him of the necessity of returning to the city for an unscheduled visit. In a remote area he accidentally ran into Dostoevsky who had no money to pay a petty debt demanded of him by some military clerk. When the writer saw the doctor, he shouted, 'See! See who will save me!' Later Dostoevsky called the incident remarkable and every time he would remember it, he would say, 'Well, after that, how could one not believe in premonitions!'<sup>44</sup>

Saved from punishment under the law for this debt by this unexpected, unpredictable, encounter, Dostoevsky saw this as a form of divine intervention, though he fails to identify and acknowledge the pneumatological nature of the encounter, grounded in the triune God, he also fails to see the moral paradox: was God aiding and abetting his avoiding repaying a debt? Premonitions, for Dostoevsky, equal the enigmatic presence of the Holy Spirit, though he fails to distinguish, or

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., p. 44.

test, the spirits.<sup>45</sup>

Although there are sometimes references to devils/demons/evil imps in his novels (as distinct from *the* devil as a dark personified evil force),<sup>46</sup> he states explicitly that he does not believe in such devils/demons/evil imps: ‘My whole trouble is that I, too, cannot believe in devils/demons; this is really a pity, since I have conceived a very clear and most remarkable theory of Spiritism, but one exclusively based upon the existence of devils: without them, my whole theory comes to naught of its own accord.’<sup>47</sup>

If we check through Dostoevsky’s New Testament, examining the annotations, there are no marks against any passages in the Synoptic Gospels describing demons, demonic encounters, demonic possession, exorcisms, or the supernatural generally. He clearly selects the parts of the New Testament he feels comfortable with. There are likewise no annotations or markings against the episodes of exorcising of humans possessed by demons where the possession appears to be responsible for epileptic seizures.<sup>48</sup> Dostoevsky nowhere questions the cause of his epilepsy, or considers the possibility of supernatural interference as a trigger for seizures (whether good or evil – we noted earlier the possibility of pneumatological interference triggering a type of epileptic seizure as part of Saul/Paul’s Damascus Road encounter/experience).

It is pertinent to note that there are no exorcisms in John. There is the devil, but Satan’s influence is mediated through the darkness of the world. The devil is also mediated through the darkness in and of an

45 1 John 4:1f. See also, Rom 8:16, Acts 10:30–32, 1 Thes 5:21–22.

46 For example, in *Crime and Punishment* (Pt. 4, Chp. 1), the conversations between Svidrigailov and Raskolnikov about ghosts, and hauntings, often generated by a guilty conscience.

47 Dostoevsky’s theory was that the apparent revelations and encounters that appeared to happen in séances were demons/evil spirits toying with susceptible people, but he denies the existence of such spiritual phenomena and thus he concludes that what is happening can be explained psychologically. See, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer* (trans/annotated, Boris Brasol. 2 vols; New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1949). See, Vol. 1, Chp. 3, §.2, ‘Spiritism. Something about Devils. Extraordinary Craftiness of the Devils, if only these are Devils,’ pp. 190–96, quote, p. 191.

48 For example, Mark 9.

individual like Judas Iscariot; indeed, this is the self-destructive darkness that starts initially with ideas, maybe one seemingly innocent idea that progresses through a manifold till the darkness engulfs the individual, condemning him/her. Such darkness ensures the demonic behaviour, and the intolerance and persecution, the destruction and chaos, which Dostoevsky saw at its worst in bad politics. Dostoevsky wrote, in 1876, in his mocking criticism of Spiritism (and associated demons), of the dangers of a theological debate:

Naturally, I have been jesting and laughing from the first word to the last; yet this is what I wish to express in conclusion: if one were to regard spiritism as something carrying within itself a new creed (and virtually all spiritists, even the sanest among them, are a bit inclined toward such a view) ... [then] for this reason, may God speedily bring success to a free investigation by both sides; this alone will help to eradicate, as quickly as possible, the spreading stench, and this might enrich science with a new discovery. But to shout at each other, to defame and expel each other from society on account of spiritism – this, to my way of thinking, means nothing but consolidating and propagating the idea of spiritism in its worst sense. This is the beginning of intolerance and persecution. And this is precisely what the devils are after!<sup>49</sup>

So evil/the devil is, under certain qualified conditions, *real*, but demons may be psychological creations of our imagination, though still result from the action of this dark personal force. Did Dostoevsky, in effect, retain the closed-off world of a Kantian philosophy from his youth, a concept of the world that denied the supernatural and was *de rigueur* amongst the proto-communist revolutionaries and anarchists he scorned, post-Siberia? And it is perhaps important to note that we do not dictate the conditions under which the Holy Spirit acts on us and in us (if we try to, we end up inventing impish demons and spirits, the idea of which is generated by real personified evil). Rhetorically, we may ask, did Dostoevsky, post-Siberia, have, in effect, a phobia about demons and

49 Dostoevsky, *The Diary of a Writer*. See, Vol. 1, p. 196.

the supernatural, which coloured his understanding and acceptance of the real spiritual world of heaven and hell, the triune God and salvation/damnation? Was this how he dealt with the sins of his youth – specifically, his flirtation with spiritism which he had been involved in at the same time as his politicization into Franco-Russian revolutionary ideas and praxis? Dostoevsky noted, ‘I don’t believe in spiritualism, but besides that, I don’t want to believe.’<sup>50</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Critics working from within an essentially Enlightenment perspective or from what may be termed a modernist and/or liberal position will claim, with some justification, that there are no real angels and demons affecting the characters in Dostoevsky’s novels, that Dostoevsky presents good and evil as psychological projections, relativistic modes of behaviour. The opposite idea is that the world of angels and demons is no mere (Feuerbachian) psychological projection, but an accurate perception of the reality *fallen* humanity has willed itself into. Is Ivan’s dream encounter with the devil simply a hallucination, or is it a genuine meeting between a human and a powerful spirit, a trans-corporeal being, who can influence the thoughts and actions of individuals?<sup>51</sup> Was Dostoevsky being intentionally ambiguous by presenting this encounter as a dream? To try to claim one or the other – psychological projection, or real angels and demons – is to go beyond what Dostoevsky wrote. We can assert the truth of the biblical world – though critics would dismiss such a biblical mindset as belonging to primitive peoples who knew no better.

However, we might ask, where do ideas come from? Where does the existence of utterly depraved and evil thoughts and consequent actions come from? Dostoevsky does not have angels and demons appearing (like cherubs and imps in a Renaissance painting!) and enacting events of their

50 Ibid., pp. 139–40.

51 Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Bk XI, Chp 9, ‘The Devil. Ivan Fyodorovich’s Nightmare’, pp. 634–49.

own volition; no, Dostoevsky presents people who are being torn first one way then the other between evil and goodness. But if we do not accept the reality attested to in the Bible then where does the distinction come from. Do good and evil exist in a way that transcends humanity? – good and evil as nouns, not as subjective verbs? Do ethics then come down to psychological relativism or do they reflect a God-given reality, and a God-given natural law? Clearly Dostoevsky does believe that good and evil *are not* simply subjective and relative. However, believing that goodness is grounded in God and is not subjective does not require literal angels and demons as spirit persons to account for goodness and evil: or does it?

As an epileptic Dostoevsky's mind was driven into an understanding of the dichotomy between angels and demons (whether they were 'literal beings' or psychological projections). Seemingly healthy people – who do not suffer from epilepsy – are often blind to this reality (whether the reality is literal or psychological, or some other explanation, the impact is still the same); they are also blind to the notion of demonic suggestion and interference (again whether literal or psychological). Eschatology is framed by angels and demons, whatever their ontological status, for they may generate in many ways the path the individual human travels: whether to heaven or to hell. This eschatology then becomes a theological axiom that underpins Dostoevsky's works: in his post-Siberian writings he was warning people of the two paths and the dangers of taking the wrong one: whether psychological or 'real' the experience of an eternity 'in' hell will be very, very real to the condemned.

Startlingly original, stripped of all religious pretence (for Dostoevsky some prostitutes and criminals *might* just have a better understanding of salvation than many of the wealthy and cultured classes), Dostoevsky as a prophet warned not only of the eschatological reality that ruled individual lives, but also – prophetically – of the corporate politicized humanistic delusions of the twentieth century; he may have been a lone prophet crying out in the wilderness, but his theology is biblical, Evangelical while it resonates with that of the Russian Orthodox tradition and becomes more and

more pertinent as the decades roll on and humanity becomes increasingly possessed by wilful self-destruction.

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Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics  
**Review Article**







Review Article  
Race and the Political in 21st Century  
Evangelical America

Amos Yong

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Andrew T. Draper, *A Theology of Race and Place: Liberation and Reconciliation in the Works of Jennings and Carter* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2016).

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Josef Sorett, *Spirit in the Dark: A Religious History of Racial Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (The Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2017).

## INTRODUCTION

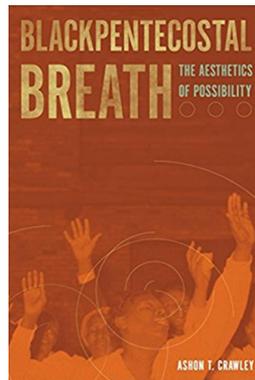
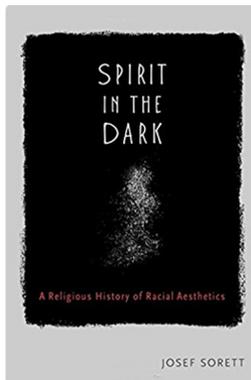
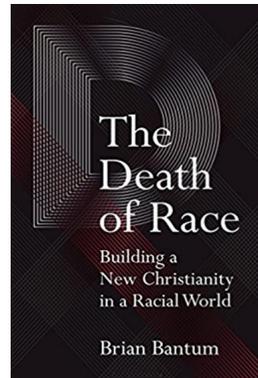
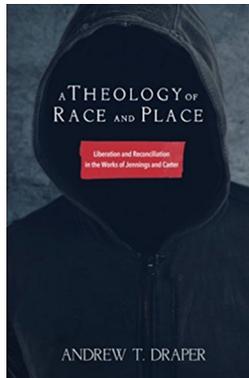
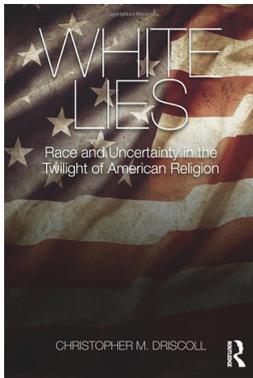
A few years ago, I published an article that, while hinting in its title the American<sup>1</sup> evangelical movement had entered into a post-racist era, yet urged that much work across racial lines remained to be done.<sup>2</sup> Little did I realize how much I had understated the problem until I woke up on 9 November 2016 (in Ghana, where I was lecturing at the time) to the realization that Donald J. Trump had become the president elect of the USA. Amidst many and complex reasons for his ascendancy, that four out of five white evangelicals who voted did so for the Republican candidate indicates that the so-called Christian segment of America remains segregated not just on Sunday mornings but also at the polls, not to mention in real life. Elsewhere I have attempted to make further sense of this racial divide in the North American evangelical church from my Asian American Pentecostal location.<sup>3</sup> In this essay, however, I want to focus more directly on the black-white chasm in the evangelical world, analyzing its fractures and attempting to discern a way forward.

To accomplish our task, we will engage with five interlocutors, authors of books published in the last year (as of the time of writing). At one level, the volumes to be discussed cannot be easily shoehorned into any common category – for instance, three, but not all five are revised PhD dissertations (Sorett’s being an extensively further developed argument and Bantum’s being a second book) – and their convergence in what follows might be seen as unjustifiable and arbitrary. At another level, however, read together, an informative narrative can be discerned. Even

1 *America* in this essay refers to the United States of America, not generally to any North American conglomerate that would include Canada when technically considered and sometimes – even oftentimes – also incorporate Mexico.

2 Yong, “Race and Racialization in a Post-Racist Evangelicalism: A View from Asian America,” in Anthony B. Bradley, ed., *Aliens in the Promised Land: Why Minority Leadership Is Overlooked in White Christian Churches and Institutions* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2013), 45-58 and 216-20.

3 Yong, “American Political Theology in a Post-al Age: A Perpetual Foreigner and Pentecostal Stance,” in Miguel A. De La Torre, ed., *Faith and Resistance in the Age of Trump* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2017), 107-14.



if the trajectory of this account might be variously delineated, my own assessment is designed to both 1) comprehend better the binary character of black-white racism and racialization in the USA and 2) chart some theologically hopeful and promising, even if politically charged and contested, ways into a more viable future. I will proceed hence to provide brief analytical expositions of each of the five texts in the order that I believe will best accomplish the twofold objective set for our discussion and return in the concluding and final section to evaluate what if any progress has been achieved in the aspired directions.

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DRISCOLL<sup>4</sup> —  
RECKONING (AMERICAN) RELIGION

We begin with this visiting professor in the Lehigh University department of religion because I have found nothing else as prescient about the rise of the present White House administration, even if the main argument was developed and defended as a Rice University PhD thesis in 2014, long before the primary run up to the election. For our purposes, I would urge that potential readers not be distracted by the thread signaled in the book's main title: focusing on that portion of *White Lies* potentially spirals into a kind of psychoanalytical assessment of whiteness in twentieth century America and risks losing the forest for the trees. Grappling with the *how* of white existential anxiety playing out – through the “lies” (or idolatrous god-complexes) that whites propagate against the radical contingencies and uncertainties of history (see subtitle) that threaten their privileged way of life, so argues Driscoll, is less important than understanding *that* certain responses such as lynchings before and white police brutality more recently, among many other documented aggressions (the book opens with discussion of George Zimmerman's July 2013 acquittal of shooting African American Trayvon Martin in February 2012), are defense mechanisms against the sunsetting, or “twilight” (Driscoll's term) of Americanism on the one hand and the intensifying forces of globalization and the looming multicultural order on the other.

What Driscoll desires finally is a willingness on the part of white America, of which he is a member, to acknowledge their own contingency and therefore to be opened up to the possibility of a greater solidarity with black Americans and other peoples of color, the groups whose contributions – or exploitedness, to put it more truthfully – have historically propped up white privilege. His overarching argument can

4 Christopher M. Driscoll, *White Lies: Race and Uncertainty in the Twilight of American Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

be clearly grasped in an extended passage that deserves to be reproduced here:

Recognizing that what once was a “white” America is on the decline does not equate to saying that things are better for those most victimized by white America. It simply means that whiteness and white America are witnessing the arthritic fingers, acrid feet, fettered face and hands, the shallow breaths of a civilization facing twilight, but without a historic or hermeneutic precedent for accepting this social decay. For instance, the gutting of the public school system; the shrinking of the middle-class; the loss of privacy; militarization of local and state police agencies. Adequate education, economic stability, privacy, relative safety, though never fully afforded (if at all) to African Americans, are on the decline for whites, as well. Casting white American social life as in decay – that is, American religion in twilight – and the current social arrangement as an expression of the realization of the nothingness it has feared, might lead to greater willingness (among white Americans) to finally address the conditions making such an arrangement possible.<sup>5</sup>

Although much might be contested in the above paragraph when abstracted from the full argument in *White Lies*, the short of it is that rather than continue to promulgate a civil religiosity that underwrites a racialized socio-political history and seeks to fortify or at least not give away completely the privileges attained by white supremacy, white people in the USA need to come to grips with their own mortality in order to be in a better position to forge common cause with others for the greater good.

Even if approached sympathetically, Driscoll’s suggestions for how to move ahead, reliant as they are on urging epistemic conversion on the part of his fellow white Americans, might seem unrealistically abstract and overly cognitive and intellectualized. The philosophical, psychological, cultural, and religious studies argumentation here will certainly be foreign to white evangelicals. I am struck, however, by the following aspects of *White Lies*: first, it has named some, even many, of the important elements

5 Driscoll, *White Lies*, 224-25.

sustaining the white evangelical vote in the 2016 elections; second, it provides an explicitly religious analysis of whiteness, thus adding depth to an interdisciplinary conversation;<sup>6</sup> and last but not least, even if Driscoll’s own non-religious and a-theological commitments (to the degree these are manifest across the pages of his book)<sup>7</sup> undercut the credibility or plausibility of his constructive proposals for at least white evangelicals if not most white Christians in this country, they provide historical resources from religious studies perspectives for Christian theologians devoted to engaging matters at this intersection. White voices, even if not confessionally Christian, are crucial to advances in this conversation.

### DRAPER<sup>8</sup> — RECONCILING PLACE

If Driscoll’s is a more secular orientation, Andrew Draper is an evangelical theologian (at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana, his alma mater) and pastor (founder of Urban Light Community Church in Muncie, Indiana) who is eminently qualified to engage his white compatriots on race and the political in the present milieu. The “liberation” and “reconciliation” sought for (in the subtitle of Draper’s book) underscores the painful realization of deep alienation that exists in the evangelical and broader ecclesial world on Sunday morning. One potential resolution is the forging of what *A Theology of Race and Place* names as an *ecclesiology of joining*, a reconstitution of the American body of Jesus Christ as inclusive of those across the color spectrum, knitted together by practices of Christian fellowship including

6 E.g., George Yancy, ed., *Christology and Whiteness: What Would Jesus Do?* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012).

7 Perhaps consistent with the intellectual development of Driscoll’s *doktorvater* at Rice, Anthony Pinn, who in the year Driscoll defended his thesis, published *Writing God’s Obituary: How a Good Methodist Became a Better Atheist* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2014); see also Anthony B. Pinn, *The End of God-Talk: An African American Humanist Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

8 Andrew T. Draper, *A Theology of Race and Place: Liberation and Reconciliation in the Works of Jennings and Carter* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2016).

particularly that of eating together. Draper suggests that such performative joining requires not just a theology of hospitality accenting the role of hosts – in which case whites or blacks might continue to fight over who is in charge – but that of mutual guest-ing, a mode of joining constituted by mutual vulnerability, but more precisely that in which whites have to recognize their imperial domination of the American ecclesial and political space.

Concomitant with such a performative praxis is a theological conversion willing to confess modern theology, including and perhaps especially its evangelical accounts, is a fundamentally white enterprise. Draper comes to this realization a bit circuitously, albeit unavoidably in his book, given his interlocutors: J. Kameron Carter and Willie Jennings.<sup>9</sup> Whereas Draper's case unfolds through the analysis of how the former (Carter) seeks to reorient the black theological tradition (which liberative message nevertheless presumes the black-white binary) and to contest the proposals of the Radical Orthodoxy program (in which retrieval of the main lines of the Christian theological tradition are overwhelmingly European), and how the latter (Jennings) exposes the supersessionist character of the colonial imagination (in its marginalization of indigenous cultures) as well as attempts to temper the colonialist dispositions of contemporary anti-Constantinian theological initiatives, the point both make – and the point that then undergirds Draper's own critical analysis – is this: that modern Christian theology, even in its feeding of postmodern theological streams, is undeniably white in its theological, anthropological, and political assumptions. Such has never been explicitly named because there has never been a need to do so (just as fish have no need of naming the water in which they swim). The way

9 In particular, Carter, *Race: A Theological Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), and Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010). In 2014, when both Carter and Jennings were still at Duke University (Jennings is now at Yale), I commissioned, as co-editor of *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, a set of articles responding to the Carter-Jennings "Duke School" (as I called it) salvo across the theological academy; see the lead essay by Erica Ramirez, "Race and Global Renewal: Mulattic Tongues and Hybridic Imaginations to the Ends of the Earth," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 36:3 (2014): 379-85.

forward must intentionally work toward what Draper calls, with help from Carter’s poly-glossolalist Pentecost and Jennings’s “christology of joining,”<sup>10</sup> a miscegenist theological and ecclesiological vision, including ecclesial practices that unfold in specific places and spaces around meal tables in ways that don’t privilege white presuppositions and priorities.

In effect, the pill Draper provides will be a hard one to swallow if the 2016 elections are any barometer, precisely because white evangelicals are voting according to their fears (at least that is one way of reading Driscoll) rather than from an informed theological point of view. Yet any chance of evangelical metanoia on this front is better calculated if routed through *A Theology of Race and Place* and its author’s impeccable credentials than through other options currently on offer.<sup>11</sup> This is because both Draper’s ecclesiology of joining is submitted first and foremost as scripturally grounded and then presented in terms of evangelical praxis, opening up thereby its missional character, and because his methodology reflects such joining in action: the capacity to listen to the voices of the non-white other and internalize their claims in more than deconstructive ways. Evangelicals, white and otherwise, who embark on such joining practices will be transformed, and in the process, perhaps reconstitute the people of God and the body of Christ on the one side and realign American politics on the other.

### BANTUM<sup>12</sup> – REDEEMING RACE

Brian Bantum appears in part of Draper’s ecclesiology of joining due to the former’s first book: *Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race*

10 See Draper, 89-92 and 214, for discussion and references (to Carter and Jennings).

11 Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), anticipates Draper’s arguments, but her location within the more progressive and mainline Protestant establishment means that her appeal will not find much traction in the white evangelical world.

12 Brian Bantum, *The Death of Race: Building a New Christianity in a Racial World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016).

and *Christian Hybridity*.<sup>13</sup> Bantum's hybridic theology resonates with Jennings's christology and theology of joining – and hence also intersects with Drapers' construal – not least because *Redeeming Mulatto* was written in part under Jennings' supervision at Duke University. The son of a white woman and her black husband, Bantum's efforts then were devoted to comprehending the hybrid character of human and Christian identity in light of the fusion of human and divine in the Christ event. The redemption of racialized humanity, then, involved nothing less than being en-spirited, by the divine breath, into the risen life of the incarnated Son of God.

Now, after a few years earning promotion from assistant to associate professorship at Seattle Pacific University, an institution of higher education in the Wesleyan wing of the American evangelical movement, and in light of a two-decade long cross-cultural marriage with a Korean American woman, Bantum has deepened his analysis and extended his prognosis with *The Death of Race*. The death called for is not the so-called colorblind Christianity that might be prevalent in majority white churches and communities; instead, "To say that race must die is to say that we must refuse the lie that we can exist freely while others struggle to be seen as human.... To say that race must dies is to refuse the lie that my life with God can be whole while other people's futures are foreclosed."<sup>14</sup> In parallel with Driscoll's *White Lies*, Bantum here speaks to his evangelical community, making appeals to his comrades on their terms, evidenced along three interrelated registers: the personal, the scriptural, and the theological. What I mean is that Bantum's invitation to herald and enter into the "death of race" proceeds testimonially (according to his own journey of discovering his embodied blackness partly in and through immersion into the Korean American world and its evangelical subculture), biblically (each of the chapters engages extensively with various passages from the canon of scripture), and according to the main lines of the generally received

13 Brian Bantum, *Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2010); see Draper, *A Theology of Race and Place*, 283-91, for discussion of *Redeeming Mulatto*.

14 Bantum, *The Death of Race*, 153.

salvation history narrative (the movement from chapter to chapter proceeds from creation through fall to redemption in and through the person and work of Christ). The point is that Bantum’s is a kerygmatic proclamation, calling the evangelical church in particular, not to mention the American ecclesia in general, to concentrate on their constitution in and through colored bodies. Hence the particular lives of “red and yellow, black and white” (to use this colloquialism) are intertwined in the church. “If I am to overcome the death of race, I need to see . . . myself truthfully,”<sup>15</sup> that is in the specificity of his history and that of his peoples’, then for the church to overcome its racism, it needs also to account for its members and their various stories – testimonies – truthfully.

Such ecclesial truthfulness, *The Death of Race* suggests, can potentially reconstitute the racially divided polis, even the cosmopolis that is the USA. Bantum is not proposing a political theology, but his “new Christianity” is an ecclesiological vision, not unlike Draper’s, that has political implications, not to say consequences. There is no getting away from race, certainly not from the ethnic and racial dimensions of our biologies, but the call is to confront and negate the sin of racism that stains our personal identities, that estranges us from one another in our churches, and that mars the body politic whether in local communities or at the state or national levels of engagement. Is a kind of Christian re-racialization possible, one that lives into and out of the healing story of Jesus the messiah whose life and death promised to erase the enmity between Jew and Greek to begin with?

### SORETT<sup>16</sup> – RETRIEVING HISTORY

If Draper’s ecclesiology of joining and Bantum’s death of race both invite if not demand consideration of the specificities and particularities

15 Bantum, *The Death of Race*, 139.

16 Josef Sorett, *Spirit in the Dark: A Religious History of Racial Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

of other lives and bodies, how might white Americans, and even Asian Americans like me,<sup>17</sup> attune ourselves to the witness borne by the black church and the black citizens of this nation? While there are any number of even recent accounts of the black church and its theological and other fortunes,<sup>18</sup> I turn here instead to the work of the religious historian and African American studies scholar Josef Sorett in smaller part because he builds a bridge to the next (and final) book to be reviewed but in larger part because his focus on the African American literary tradition from the 1920s through the 1960s provides a window into black religious responses to white domination, especially from across the Afro-Protestant tradition. Currently an associate professor of religion and African-American Studies at Columbia University, and director of its Center on African-American Religion, Sexual Politics and Social Justice, this author's *Spirit in the Dark* captures the religious dimensions of black protest literature, urging that rather than being marginal to such efforts, spiritual and even theological impulses have consistently, even if not without contestation, invigorated the black literary endeavor.

Sorett's point is that, despite the pressures exerted toward the secularization of the African American literary tradition, especially given the dependence of black upward social mobility on assimilation to white cultural fashions and norms, there is a fundamental religious dimension that can nevertheless be detected across the half century of analysis. For instance, the Negro Renaissance and the Black Arts movements through the 1940s were antedated and suffused by and with the ancestral spirits of slave, Caribbean, and Afro-diaspora religiosity (think for example of Nora Neale Hurston); the efforts to universalize the black experience at mid-century could not escape the aesthetics of

17 For more on Asian American racialization into whiteness, its problems and possible venues of mutual liberation, see Yong, "Asian American Historicity: The Problem and Promise of Evangelical Theology," *SNACS Journal [Society of Asian North American Christian Studies Journal]* 4 (2012-2013): 29-48.

18 Including but not limited to Walter Earl Fluker, *The Ground Has Shifted: The Future of the Black Church in Post-Racial America* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

the Afro-Protestant tradition (e.g., James Baldwin and Richard Wright); and the transnational and political ferment of the 1960s was empowered as much by the prophetism of the black church – male and female – as it was by the emergence of nationalist Islam and other African-derived traditions (think Alice Walker and Ralph Ellison among others). In these and other ways, Sorett documents the interwovenness of religion and race in African American aesthetics, not only in its musicality but especially in its literary production. *Spirit in the Dark*, taken from Aretha Franklin’s so-named record in 1970, reflects on black spirituality outside the church, just as Franklin herself “crossed-over” from the sacred to the secular realm without ever really leaving the former behind.

In effect, Sorett documents across five decades of African American literature the cries for liberation that have rung out since the Middle Passage. To be sure, some will counter-argue that the emergence of the black middle class since the Civil Rights movement suggests that racist impediments have been overcome. Yet if Bantum is correct, then, the story of black lives told by Sorett continue to be written across black bodies, alive and dead!<sup>19</sup> More problematic is that we are currently oblivious to black-white segregation since such is no longer legally mandated and we presume things are how they are because we – whites, blacks, and everyone in between – have chosen to affiliate ourselves in such a color-coordinated (or more accurately: color-segregated!) way. *Spirit in the Dark* is an open invitation, to whites who might not fear such introduction, to examine the religious depth of black voices, lives, and experiences, as mediated through slices of its literary traditions. Written (or printed) between the lines of these pages are the spirits of black histories – ancestral, international, African diaspora, even Catholic spirits – that have animated and continue to animate black lives and their witnesses.

19 That is why African American theology cannot yet be fully whitened, or domesticated according to the white evangelical frame; see, e.g., Amos Yong and Lewis Brogdon, “The Decline of African American Theology? A Critical Response to Thabiti Anyabwile,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 4:2 (2010): 129-44.

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CRAWLEY<sup>20</sup> –  
REVITALIZING BREATH

If Sorett's exploration of black literature unfolds how the quest for black literary aesthetic could not free itself from the spirituality and religiosity of the black church, then Ashon Crawley confronts the politics of respectability head on, propounding instead against the theological-and-political establishment an *atheological-and-apolitical* black consciousness along a sonic register. Opposing here the intellectualized abstractions of European and colonial categorical discursivity that has perpetuated distinctions – of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc. – privileging white lives, Crawley presses deep into the soundscape of blackpentecostal religiosity, one he enters from the pentecostal site of his Church of God in Christ background but that he insists is irreducible to its modern pentecostal manifestations and expressions, in order to formulate an enfleshed mode of thinking and doing otherwise than that sanctioned by the white academy. Crawley agrees here with Jennings and Carter (and by extension Draper) that “to think theologically, to think philosophically, is to think racially,”<sup>21</sup> but his response is to think blackpentecostally on its own terms rather than as beholden to the categorical rationality of the intellectual status quo.

So in contrast to Bantum's more scriptural and theological approach, Crawley's is an enfleshed inquiry privileging the breathing, shouting, noise-producing, and tongue-speaking (the four main chapters of his book) expressions of blackpentecostal life. Blackpentecostal preaching, praying, and dancing are ritual subversions of Jim Crow lynching; the shouting, whooping, and gesticulations of the Great Awakenings and the Azusa Street revival involve the amplification (later on through the Hammand B3 organ, for instance, discussed in *Blackpentecostal Breath's*

20 Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (The Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2017).

21 Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 12; Jennings is cited in Crawley's text (albeit in relationship to another point), but Carter is not, unless I missed it.

epilogue) rather than reduction of sound that is characteristic of allegedly cultured white religiosity; the testifying, crying, and tarrying – including the moaning and groaning – at the blackpentecostal service and altar are a refusal of the embarrassment demanded by white respectability; and the intensification of blackpentecostal *glossolalia* (presumed heavenly languages) are a rejection of the normativity of *xenolalia* (presumably actual languages the speaker attains without learning) and the presumptiveness of assimilation to white linguistic conventions, insisting instead on sectarian resistance to the status quo. For the blackpentecostal, “being spirit filled breaks down the distinction, the categorical coherence of human and machine....”<sup>22</sup> But blackpentecostal breathing not only explodes the human-machine contrast, but also the categorical structuring of other binaries: materiality and spirituality, rationality and irrationality, and (white) humanity and (black) inhumanity. It is possible to think otherwise, but only if one is willing to set aside the intellective performativity of white cognition and rationalization and descend down the windpipe, into the enfleshed gut, of black life and religiosity.

Those who are familiar with my earlier work on black Pentecostalism and on pentecostal aurality and sonicity will no doubt surely recognize that this review essay culminates with *Blackpentecostal Breath* least because it is the most recently published of the books under review (although that is convenient) but because Crawley seeks to forge an alternative theological-philosophical platform from out of the breathing and living of colored lives historically marginalized on the underside of the European enlightenment and its colonial extensions.<sup>23</sup> The aesthetics

22 Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath*, 255.

23 I discuss the sonic dimension of pentecostal spirituality in my, “Proclamation and the Third Article: Toward a Pneumatology of Preaching,” in Myk Habets, ed., *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 367-94, and engage with black pentecostal spirituality and theology in, “Justice Deprived, Justice Demanded: Afropentecostalism and the Task of World Pentecostal Theology Today,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15:1 (2006): 127-47; for more on the latter, see also Estrelida Alexander and Amos Yong, eds., *Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

of possibility breathed out across these pages are exhaled from out of the experiential site of this (former?) choir director, musician, and preacher, not to mention preacher's kid, who refuses to compartmentalize these activities on the outside of the theological-and-philosophical sphere, and insists instead on excavating their theological-and-philosophical implications and applications even if such interventions might mean the end of theology and philosophy as we know it. In the end, black American Eric Garner's "I can't breathe!" – caught on video in July of 2014 as Garner expired under the excesses of white police violence – introduces themes of a book long before in the making (the Duke dissertation version was defended in 2013), but now catapulting onto center stage the potency of what it means to think through breaths of resistance and of noise in a racialized world.

## CONCLUSIONS AND TRANSITIONS

Ending with Crawley hints that the answer to the "race question" in the twenty-first century involves a turn to Pentecostalism, perhaps even more precisely to black Pentecostalism. That might be seen instead as a perpetuation of the problem, if such were understood according to the terms of the 2016 elections with which this essay began. Revisiting the horizons of our thinking from Driscoll through to Crawley, however, invites another set of questions and consideration: is whiteness redeemable and if so what role do blacks play?

If whiteness names the systems and structures of Euro-American exploitation of people of color for the advancement of western civilization, then such must be judged as contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ who comes for all flesh, Jew and Greek, with every shade in between. But if whiteness names the historicity of complicity that we all find ourselves

caught in – white or black, yellow or brown<sup>24</sup> – then the redemption of whiteness can only happen with the redemption of all: the establishment of righteousness, the reparation of injustices, the repentance from collusion (across color lines), and the establishment of shalom and just reconciliation. This means neither that *only* “black lives matter,” nor that “all lives matter” in any unqualified sense at this moment in our history. It does mean that those committed to the historicity of Jesus’ incarnation and the Spirit’s pentecostal outpouring on all flesh ought to be committed to discerning the specificities of concrete times and the particularities of living spaces within which human breathing and enfleshment unfolds, and to attend to the violence destroying human creatures at those sites.

My own Asian American pentecostal perspectives thus prioritizes discernment at least along the following three lines, here enumerated in existential rather than logical order. First, to the degree that people of color remain those most vulnerable to the violence of the present global system and its structures, including those instantiated here in America, to that same degree we ought to foreground and work to repair the brokenness of a world that alienates and destroys human life; for this task, in the American landscape, hearkening to black voices – theological (Bantum), literary (Sorett), or transdisciplinary (Crawley) – is essential in order to listen to the extant challenges and discern possible opportunities to chart for futures otherwise not named. Second, the 2016 election indicates that white-black relations are being further polarized by pain and anguish perceived if not also felt on both sides rather than being reconciled, and that the evangelical church is not in much of a position at all to facilitate dialogical solidarity; toward this end, we need all the help we can get, not only theoretically (e.g., the Driscolls of this world) but more importantly performatively, so that we can think further and more productively about

24 White Europeans are certainly not uniquely ethnocentric so that any honest discussion of race will inevitably have to deal with how people across the global cultural landscape are all guilty of racism variously, and thus need to be engaged with these issues; for further discussion, see Love Sechrest, Amos Yong, and Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, eds., *Race, Theology, and Mission* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018).

what it means to be hosts and guests of each other first, before we even try to develop grand schemes of re-racialization. Last but not least, as an Asian American, I have to ask myself how our peculiar site involves its own racialized dynamics, how these play out vis-à-vis others across the race spectrum, and what these mean in relationship to the good news of the coming reign of God; for such a task, my colleagues and I have to be triply conversant: with the angst of whites, with the pain of blacks, and with our own confusion as stereotypical “model minorities” and “perpetual foreigners,” each with its own specific seductions and traps.<sup>25</sup> In the end, we each need the other since we cannot work toward a more just world on our own.<sup>26</sup> If the problem seems too great so as to immobilize any one of us, perhaps this ought to be taken as an indicator that the divine breath which gives life to human creatures is calling out to us through the voices of others, and if so, then may those who have ears be able to respond appropriately.<sup>27</sup>

25 And here I have not factored in the Latino/a perspective and reality, into which I have married (my wife is a fifth generation Mexican American); I must return to this interface at another time.

26 See also here the concluding chapter of my book, *The Future of Evangelical Theology: Soundings from the Asian American Diaspora* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), where I urge how evangelical theology needs not only Asian American voices but those of other peoples of color in a globalizing world.

27 Thanks to my graduate assistant, Hoon Jung, for proofreading this essay; any errors of fact or interpretation remain my own.



Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics  
**Reviews**





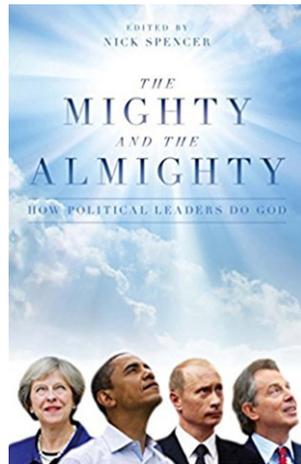
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## Book Reviews

Nick Spencer.  
*The Mighty and the Almighty:  
How Political Leaders Do God*  
London: Biteback Publishing,  
2017.

Reviewed by, Anthony A.J. Williams.  
University of Liverpool

The issue of political leaders and their personal religious faith has already been raised in the UK's 2017 General Election. Most notably, Liberal Democrat leader Tim Farron has found himself embroiled in controversy over his views, as an evangelical Christian, on same-sex relationships and abortion; Farron eventually conceded he did not believe the former to be a sin, while it was initially left to party colleagues to confirm that he is in fact "pro-choice".<sup>1</sup> Prime



1 J. Stone, 'Lib Dems deny Tim Farron is anti-abortion after comments from 2007 interview surface', *Independent*, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/tim-farron-abortion-lib-dems-pro-choice-anti-life-christian-gay->

**Minister and Conservative leader Theresa May has escaped much of the questioning directed at Farron, but has still been open about her faith: in a recent interview with LBC she spoke of the importance of Christianity in helping her in hard times and in teaching her the “importance of public service”<sup>2</sup> It is this issue on which Nick Spencer and other contributors to *The Mighty and the Almighty: How Political Leaders Do God* seek to shed some much-needed light.**

Nick Spencer is the Director of Research at religion and society think-tank Theos; as well as editing the volume he provides the introduction and conclusion, along with six of the book's 24 chapters. Each of the other contributors are current or former Theos researchers, including Ben Ryan – who contributes three chapters – as well as Paul Bickley, Maddy Fry and Simon Perfect – each of whom contribute two. The only exception appears to be Andrew Connell, who also contributes two chapters.

Each chapter explores the relationship between Christian belief and engagement with politics in the life of an individual political leader. These include such well-known figures as Margaret Thatcher, Nelson Mandela, Tony Blair and Barack Obama, as well as those with which the reader may be less familiar: Viktor Orbán of Hungary, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, and Fernando Lugo of Paraguay, to name just three. Background information is provided about each individual, with more information given for those lesser-known individuals; this, including both biographical details and historical context, serves as a helpful aid which encourages the reader to engage with the full range of case-studies presented

The volume is brought up to date with chapters on Theresa May and Donald Trump, both written by Spencer. Despite the lack of detailed statements about her faith – or, indeed, her private life in general – the chapter

rights-sex-lgbt-a7739916.html, accessed 22nd May 2017.

2 A. Williams, 'Theresa May shares how faith helped with childlessness', *Premier*, <https://www.premier.org.uk/News/UK/Theresa-May-shares-how-faith-helped-with-childlessness>, accessed 22nd May 2017.

on May is insightful and informative. This is in stark contrast to the chapter on Trump, which adds little to our understanding of the President's religious commitment, insofar as any such commitment actually exists: Spencer recounts again the evidence of "Trump's patchy and idiosyncratic knowledge of the Bible, his marital and sexual history and his disavowal of the need for repentance".<sup>3</sup> In the book's conclusion Spencer describes the tendency for observers to dismiss political leaders' religious profession as only ever an act of hypocrisy as "boneheaded", yet names Trump as the one example from the book in which such a charge could "certainly" be sustained.<sup>4</sup> One gets the impression that this is a chapter Spencer did not wish to include.

Trump though is the only exception to the rule that each of the figures covered in this volume are treated seriously by Spencer and other contributors. The assumption afforded to individuals as diverse as Mary McAleese, Vladimir Putin and Nicolas Sarkozy is that their religious profession is genuine – even if it is at times employed as a political tactic – and has something noteworthy to teach us. With any volume of this type, however, consistency may be an issue, and not all of the chapters offer the same level of analysis. Bickley's chapter on Mandela, for example, takes a more biographical approach, as opposed to the more analytical style employed by Connell in his chapter on Kevin Rudd, Spencer in his chapters on Thatcher and May, or, indeed, Bickley himself in his chapter on Gordon Brown.

This lack of consistency may result from the lack of a methodological framework underpinning the research, which might have been provided by the work of David Domke and Kevin Coe on religion and the American Presidency.<sup>5</sup> Domke and Coe are referenced in *The Mighty and the Almighty*, but only to provide specific historical examples; perhaps this was a missed opportunity to apply their framework to a non-American context. While this

3 N. Spencer, 'Donald Trump', in N. Spencer, ed., *The Mighty and the Almighty: How Political Leaders Do God* (London: Biteback, 2017), p.326.

4 N. Spencer, 'Conclusion', in N. Spencer, ed., *The Mighty and the Almighty: How Political Leaders Do God* (London: Biteback, 2017), p.339.

5 D. Domke and K. Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp.18-9.

lack of an methodological basis does stand as a criticism, however, it must be conceded that the imposition of such on a volume of different case studies contributed by different researchers, aimed at non-academics as much as academics, may have rendered a highly readable work clunky and inaccessible.

The main conclusion to the volume relates to a question which Spencer posits based on the highly-varied accounts of political leaders “doing God”: that is, given the diversity of political views expressed, does Christianity really make any difference in their political lives? Spencer’s answer is two-fold. Firstly, drawing on his previous work, he explains that while the Bible does not offer an exact political blueprint, it does proclaim two, sometimes contradictory, political themes – freedom and order – and “that these twin impulses towards freedom and order describe much of the theo-political variation we have seen in this collection”.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, while Christian faith initially shapes the political beliefs of an individual, at some point those political beliefs are solidified and the process is reversed: the individual begins to draw from their faith only that which succours their political beliefs. This is an intriguing and credible suggestion, which perhaps offers a basis for further research.

Spencer and the other contributors have certainly put together a well-researched, informative and insightful volume. *The Mighty and the Almighty* is also a timely publication, given the growing relevance of religion to politics both international and domestic. The book is accessible enough for non-academics – and it certainly deserves as wide a readership as possible – yet given the varied array of individuals under scrutiny and the relative lack of research into religion and politics outside a US context there will certainly be something of relevance here for any academic reader.

6 Spencer, ‘Conclusion’, p.341.

John Corvino, Ryan T. Anderson, and  
Sherif Girgis.  
*Debating Religious Liberty  
and Discrimination.*  
New York: Oxford University Press,  
2017. vii + 343 pgs.

Reviewed by Dan Brockway,  
Adjunct Instructor of Theology  
Fuller Theological Seminary,  
Pasadena, CA.

With *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) the U.S. Supreme Court established same-sex marriage as the law of the land in all fifty states. The ruling also shifted the debate around marriage equality into a dispute pitting the religious freedom of socially conservative business owners and county clerks against the equal rights of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) minorities. After an introduction outlining the historical development of religious liberty in the United States, this book presents two essays from the opposing sides of this divide. Philosopher and LGBT rights advocate John Corvino articulates the anti-discrimination view, while Ryan T. Anderson of the Heritage Foundation and Sherif Girgis argue for religious liberty. The two essays are followed by rebuttals from the opposing side.

The core claim of Corvino's essay is that religious liberty has morphed into religious discrimination. He argues that religious exemptions to generally applicable laws constitute an unfair privileging of religion—one that is not typically extended to non-religious conscience claims and all too often promotes the exclusion of vulnerable minorities. Engaging with prominent recent court cases, Corvino draws convincing parallels between SOGI and racial discrimination, proposing a path forward that would fashion anti-discrimination laws to exclude custom services provided by private businesses (while requiring those businesses to provide non-



custom services to everyone). This is a promising suggestion, albeit one that is overshadowed by the author's disregard for religious exemptions in general. In a section exploring whether religious exemptions to law are ever justified, Corvino excludes all but the most extreme, life-or-death instances of conscientious objection. Unfortunately, this high standard intended to make Christian photographers work same-sex weddings would also force Muslim women to remove their head coverings in driver license photos and Sikh military officers to shave their beards. Such low regard for religious accommodation is exacerbated by the author's occasional jabs at religion (equating burkas with the subjugation of women on page 67 and making light of belief in transubstantiation on page 86, to cite two examples). These unfortunate detours from an otherwise charitable discussion only serve to distance the very people of faith Corvino aims to persuade. Interestingly, the section on religious exemptions is not mentioned at all in the essay's concluding summary—a passive acknowledgement, perhaps, of the overreach.

On the religious liberty side of the debate, Anderson and Girgis warn of a progressive Puritanism that would force religious objectors into conformity with socially liberal policies. The authors defend freedom of conscience as the backbone of a free society and advocate for a pragmatic pluralism that promotes win-win scenarios, honoring the rights of individuals to opt out of dealings that violate their convictions without doing harm to SOGI minorities. Their defense of religious freedom is strong, albeit overly abstract. The argument excels when the ethical framework articulated by the authors is applied to concrete examples (e.g., financial penalties imposed on businesses that have taken traditional moral stances and parallels between objections to participating in same-sex wedding ceremonies and other legal conscience accommodations, like those allowing doctors to refuse to perform abortions). The weak point of the essay is the attempt to differentiate SOGI discrimination from other forms, like racism and sexism. While the authors do a convincing job distinguishing religious objections from the systemic injustices

of the Jim Crow South, their argument is hampered by an inadequate acknowledgement of discrimination's impact on SOGI minorities and the naïve assumption that the free market will sort everything out. Certainly, if given enough time, economic realities might have brought American slavery to an end—that hardly negates the movement for abolition. Anderson and Girgis close by presenting religious objectors as the true victims, a brave resistance marginalized by liberal authoritarians. It is an unconvincing end to an otherwise persuasive essay.

As is so often the case with point-counterpoint texts, one comes away yearning for a third option. What of a perspective that defends religious liberty *and* SOGI equality? Few clues as to what such an argument might look like are found here. The authors do share much in common, agreeing that religious exemptions should extend to secular conscience claims and calling for legal protection for SOGI minorities against employment discrimination and other forms of institutional marginalization. However, the real value of this text lies in the tone of its authors' disagreements. The back and forth exchange reveals a civility, thoughtfulness, and willingness to grapple with the opposing perspective that is so often lacking in our society today. For this reason alone, the book deserves to be read widely. Readers searching for a theological treatment of the topic should look elsewhere, as the text is not a work of theology. However, for those craving an in depth exploration of the legal and philosophical underpinnings of this divide, *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination* will not disappoint.

Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin-Schramm, eds.  
*Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril.*  
Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016  
pb, xxi, 306, \$28, £30.

Reviewed by Joshua Beckett.  
Ph.D. Candidate in Christian Ethics,  
Fuller Theological Seminary.



On the cusp of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a major catalyst of the Protestant Reformation – Martin Luther’s nailing his 95 theses on the Wittenberg church door – another multifaceted crisis with global implications requires urgent action. Humanity’s comprehensive degradation of God’s creation has undermined and problematized “our ability as stewards, and our conviction that we are neighbor-lovers” (McKibben x, from the Foreword). In response to interlocking ecological threats, and in alignment with the Lutheran World Federation’s tripartite theme for this season of remembrance (“Salvation: Not for sale. Human beings: Not for sale. Creation: Not for sale.”), Lisa E. Dahill and James B. Martin-Schramm have brought together 16 leading Lutheran scholars from the disciplines of biblical studies, systematic and pastoral theology, history, and ethics. In *Eco-Reformation: Grace and Hope for a Planet in Peril*, they seek “to pull forth resources from the Lutheran tradition in particular that constructively advance the vision of a socially and ecologically flourishing earth” (xiii).

They have, for the most part, succeeded. *Eco-Reformation* incorporates several creative, sophisticated essays that significantly realize its editors’ aims. A few of the contributions are particularly strong, including Cynthia D.

Moe-Lobeda's analysis of the structural dimensions of sin and concomitant discussion of the global interrelatedness of ecological destruction and social injustice. H. Paul Santmire calls for a profound recognition of the integrity of nature, since "*God hears the phenomenologically discernible destructivity of nature as the groaning of nature [and] the phenomenologically discernible creativity of nature as nature's praise*" (83, emphasis original). Aana Marie Vigen interweaves Advent and Lenten liturgies with an exposition of the importance of bodily health, against which climate change poses many demonstrable hazards. And Terra S. Rowe, in conversation with the Finnish interpretation of Luther, proposes understanding "free gift" as inherently involving interdependent relationship, in contrast to later capitalist misunderstandings of the concept: "Luther's own sense that Christ both *gives* and *is* the gift in reciprocity and interdependence may function today as a corrective to a pervasive and ecologically perilous articulation of grace as a gift free of exchange" (268, emphasis original).

Overall, there is much to commend about this ambitious project. The authors make creative use of Lutheran concepts (justification by faith alone, theology of the cross, creation as God's mask, consubstantiation) and figures (Martin Luther himself, of course; but also twentieth-century Lutherans Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Joseph Sittler). Additionally, they converse with scientists, activists, ministers, and scholars from other traditions, while incorporating insights from Scripture, geological and biological research, and practical suggestions for faith-based ecological fidelity. Perhaps the most salient achievement of *Eco-Reformation* – all the more remarkable given how many authors are involved – is the relative unity of its tone: soberly entranced with creation's God-given grandeur, painfully cognizant of humanity's failures to care for it properly, and critically hopeful about the possibilities of bearing fruit in keeping with repentance. These essays are consistently passionate, frequently compelling, and occasionally inspiring.

At some points, however, this consonance in perspective risks devolving into repetitive insularity. Fully one-fourth of the essays make

reference to one of Luther's treatises on the Eucharist, which claims: "God is substantially present everywhere, in and through all creatures, in all their parts and places, so that the world is full of God" (Rhoads 9, *et passim*). Such frequency at least raises the specter of proof texting, especially given that over half of the remaining essays refrain from quoting Luther at all. Additionally, although some essays assert broader connections between the sacraments and the ecosystem, they insufficiently develop such links. At best, they may presuppose a more expansive theology of consubstantiation that was formulated elsewhere; yet when reading a sentence such as "Christ's presence in the Eucharist is a particular example, for the forgiveness of sins, of the general presence of God in all creation" (Simmons 201), one wonders whether some steps in the argument are missing. Either way, such overlap – both in general content and specific contours – gives the impression that *Eco-Reformation* is primarily an in-house Lutheran discussion, even as the authors genuinely desire to partner beyond their tradition for creation's healing.

A deeper concern is the book's pervasive fuzziness about the distinct role of Christ in creation. The incarnation is lauded as indicating "an immanent presence of God in *all things*" (Rhoads 10, emphasis original) and as "challeng[ing] the rampant dualism of our era" (Martin-Schramm 111). Yet it is unclear whether the Word made flesh is the same as the cosmic Christ that authors invoke along panentheistic lines, especially when one reads, "It's disorienting: Jesus is dissolved, all that's left is the wind" (Dahill 181). This lack of clarity in Christological method is indeed disorienting.

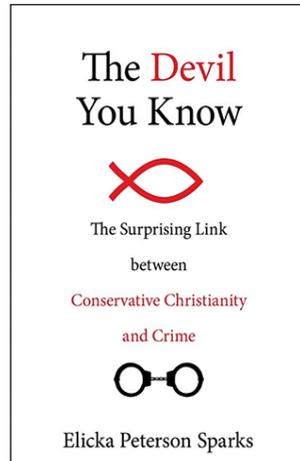
Even with these critiques in mind, *Eco-Reformation* is a constructive, hopeful contribution to ecological theology and ethics, as well as to Lutheran and Reformation studies. It should prove helpful to students and scholars, as well as laypersons who wish to become more informed on these themes in this crucial time. Although the book's greatest effectiveness will be reserved for Lutheran contexts, it has the potential to promote dialogue within and among other traditions as well. Half a millennium after Luther

– and this time with a friendly Pope – Dahill and Martin-Schramm, along with their team, deserve our gratitude for advancing the conversation about our need for ecological reformation.

Elicka Peterson Sparks.  
*The Devil You Know:  
The Surprising Link between  
Conservative Christianity  
and Crime.* Amherst, NY:  
Prometheus Books, 2016.

Reviewed by, Stephen M. Vantassel  
Tutor of Theology at King's  
Evangelical Divinity School

Most people, even the non-religious, believe that religion offers positive benefits to society. Just as the Santa Claus myth helps keep children in line, so religion helps reduce criminal behavior. Peterson Sparks, Associate Professor of Criminology at Appalachian State University, disputes that maxim that religion always reduces criminality. She suggests that the high rates of violence in the United States is due in part to the significant influence that “fundamentalist Christian ideology” has in and on American society (p. 14). Though her ire is directed against conservative, (i.e. biblical Christianity) in general, she is specifically concerned with a Christian sub-group she identifies as Christian Nationalists. Christian Nationalists, also known as dominionists and Christian Reconstruction, believe that America was founded as a Christian nation, the Bible is the inerrant word of God, Biblical jurisprudence should guide America's justice system, and America must be restored from its fall into liberalism by returning to Christian principles.



In short, Christian Nationalists march under the banners of faith, flag, and family. Peterson Sparks identifies several exemplars of the movement including some famous evangelicals, such as Charles Dobson's Focus on the Family, the late Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority, D. James Kennedy's Center for Reclaiming America Alliance Defense Fund, David Barton's WallBuilders, Rick Scarborough's Vision America, and Lou Sheldon's Traditional Values Coalition.

Peterson Sparks argues that Christian Nationalism spawns criminal behavior in several ways. First, Christian Nationalism's support for violence, specifically the principle of retribution and force to coerce behavior deemed evil, encourages harsh punishments causing America to have high incarceration rates which in turn spawns social consequences to the prisoner and likely the families of those prisoners, though I didn't see the latter point mentioned. Second, Christian Nationalism identifies groups and ideas as deserving of victimization. Third, Christian Nationalism's belief in the afterlife thwarts the natural fear of death and therefore empowers activists to sacrifice themselves for the eternal cause. When all three principles are combined in an adherent, you have an aggressive soldier working for God and not afraid to suffer or die for the cause.

I found the book difficult to read not because of her writing style but because it is never easy to read comments that scorn, frequently mischaracterize, and fail to appreciate the rationale for foundational Christian beliefs. But my reading was also challenged by her difficulty in staying focused on Christian Nationalism. She kept switching her comments from Christian Nationalism to conservative Christianity, to Fundamentalism, and to Evangelicalism. Granted these different groups share much in common but in theology, distinctions matter. Her inability to be sensitive of these distinctions was a significant flaw in her argument because it failed to properly define terms. She should have consulted with evangelical theologians to help her navigate between ideologies because

they hold important distinctions that have practical consequences. Peterson Sparks seemed to be aware of her weakness on this point for after listing tenets of the Christian Nationalist movement, she states that all of them are not essential to membership (pp. 55-6). Fair enough, but how many can be dropped? For if the theocratic elements of the list are removed, while upholding a Christian's right to be involved in politics, then her criticisms would apply to conservative Christianity, a much larger group of people. Is she ultimately claiming that believing Christians cannot push for their values in politics because doing so ultimately causes violence and crime? Given her comments that secular societies have less crime, I think the answer is, yes. Unless of course, the religion supports ideas she likes such as abortion on demand, state support of alternative sexuality and genders, and opposition to retributive justice, particularly the death penalty.

She also fails on definitions when she lists beliefs and behaviors Christian Nationalists are more likely to hold and practice (pp. 94-97). For example she says that Christian Nationalists are more likely to support "gay bashing" and show prejudice against many racial, national, ethnic, and linguistic minorities. But what exactly is meant by "gay bashing" and prejudice? Is calling homosexuality a sin an example of "gay bashing" and opposition to illegal immigration an example of prejudice against minorities? Failure to be more precise with her definition is a significant failing of this book.

Despite these and other weaknesses, I do think her concern over how certain self-professed Christians blend Christianity and nationalism is valid. While her idea does not achieve the status of being a theory because of its lack of sufficient evidence or precision, it is a working hypothesis, namely that conservative teaching when combined with politics can be a toxic mix. (See her list of six hypotheses on pages 101-103.) Scripture does warn about how power can allow our sinful desires to be manifest (e.g. David and Bathsheba). Power does not corrupt but it does allow the powerful to be less inhibited. I do think Christians must be careful

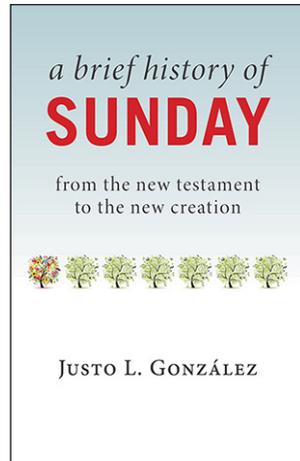
not to identify their faith with a particular cultural or national expression. For example, the right to bear arms is an American cultural expression, not a Christian one in that Christ didn't mandate his followers to bear arms. Sometimes, Christians forget these distinctions in our efforts to get out the vote for candidates that we believe will protect our values etc. Of course, the question is how should Christians work in a pluralistic society to create a just society that is tolerant of Christian belief and practice while protecting the ability of those to live as non-Christians?

I also think that Peterson Sparks' use of Scripture should cause us to redouble our efforts to refute bad biblical interpretation. I could easily point out the numerous and very egregious examples of her non-contextual reading of the Bible, but that would miss the point. For I suspect that her treatment of Scripture simply mirrors the misuse she encountered from "Christians" in her Bible Belt context. As is common amongst critics of Christianity, they are opposed to Christ's caricature because that is the only Christ they have encountered. We need to work hard to oppose erroneous thinking and behavior in the Church so that when people do criticize the faith, they reject the true faith not a polluted version.

In the final analysis, Peterson Sparks comments on Christianity and politics should be a warning for Christians to work harder to develop a theology of political engagement that is consistent with Christian teaching.

Justo L. González.  
*A Brief History of Sunday:  
 From the New Testament to the  
 New Creation*  
 Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B.  
 Eerdmans Press, 2017.  
 Pp. v-166 incl. Index. Paperback.  
 \$16.00 U.S..

Reviewed by, Jennifer L. Ackerman,  
 PhD student, Theology & Culture,  
 Fuller Theological Seminary



Martin Luther King, Jr. is oft quoted as bemoaning, “11am Sunday is the most segregated hour in America.” The civil rights implications of this statement may not have changed a great deal since the early 60s, but the assumption that a majority of Americans are going to church on Sunday certainly has. A more apt observation for today may be, “11am Sunday is the most secular hour in America.” Justo González hopes to combat this by offering the “gift of rediscovering the joy and the excitement of Sunday as early Christians viewed and celebrated it” (viii-ix). This gift is unwrapped through a rapid tour of liturgical history in four periods—“Before Constantine,” “From Constantine to the End of Antiquity,” “The Middle Ages,” and “The Reformation and Beyond”—paying particular attention to the evolution of the relationship between “Sabbath” and “The Lord’s Day.”

Although González claims he is uninterested in a “focus on the debates as to whether Christians should keep the seventh day of the week or the first” (128), a great deal of the book is dedicated to exploring the history of this very issue. Indeed, González is not arguing the merits of one over

the other, but merely charting the history that led to Sunday becoming the primary day for Christian worship.

In the Early Church, there was a great deal of overlap between Christian and Jewish worship, with both Jews and Gentiles participating in synagogue worship on the Sabbath (seventh day of the week), then later in the evening “breaking bread” as part of newly developing Christian rituals. This is where some distancing between Saturday and Sunday observance began, considering that the Jewish calendar counted days from sunset to sunset, unlike today’s practice of midnight to midnight. Thus, an early Christian may have been in the synagogue after sunrise on Saturday, then partake in a Christian observance of “The Lord’s Day” after sunset—today’s Saturday evening, but Sunday by the Jewish calendar.

That Saturday/Sunday divide increased as more and more Gentiles joined the church, and their work responsibilities did not allow for seventh day rest. While the Sabbath expectation was for rest from labor and devotion to prayer, the Lord’s Day expectation was for joy and celebration of the resurrection and new creation. In the time of Constantine, laws were established that released employment obligations on Sundays, which was considered the first day of the week by the Romans, and more and more elaborate Sunday worship rituals emerged.

In the Middle Ages, legislation further cemented Sunday as a day of rest from labor, and many began to consider Sunday the “Christian Sabbath.” However, a shift toward emphasis on the sacrifice of Christ in Communion led to more somber observances of “the divine drama,” while more secular spectacles celebrated Sunday as a day of leisure. “Thus Sunday was both the day of the great and overwhelming spectacle of the renewed sacrifice of Christ and the day of many other spectacles that often showed precisely why that sacrifice was necessary” (96).

Luther, and subsequent reformers, agreed that a “Sabbath” day was intended to be a day of “tranquility” allowing reflection on the gospel, and although there could be freedom as to what day that would be (save for Anabaptists, who considered Sunday a divine commandment),

a commonly set day allowed the community to gather for regular proclamation of the Word (103). By this point, that weekly observance had fully transferred from the Jewish Sabbath on the seventh day to the Lord's Day on the first day (which, interestingly, Roman Catholics saw as proof that even the new, *sola scriptura* Protestants were willing, in some cases, to allow authority of tradition to trump authority of Scripture).

Post-Reformation, legislation of Sunday rest continued for several centuries, though it became a more and more secular observance, as is remarkably clear in today's Post-Christendom world, where Sunday is a day of leisure for most in the West, but many "blue laws" and other legislation smacking of religious ideology has been repealed. This is precisely what González hopes to combat by returning to holy observance of Sunday as a day of resurrection and new creation. "And therefore Sunday, ever more neglected by society at large, will become ever more cherished by those who believe" (153).

While I heartily concur that the contemporary church is in need of renewal and would greatly benefit from reinvigorated, joyful celebration as resurrection people looking to the promised new creation, I fear González's hope for a specific return to Sunday is fruitless. Not only have secular forms of rest thoroughly, and I suspect irrevocably, encroached on Sundays, but our globalized, technological daily life has also forced us to reconsider the very notion of rest, tranquility, Sabbath. Rather than fixating on the Early Church's observance of Sunday in particular, today's church would be best served to consider *why* that shift was made—the growing Gentile church had different schedules, different customs, different day-to-day demands that had to be addressed differently than Jewish practices. They were no less earnest in their desire to carve out holy time and space, they were simply more innovative. Today's church must first return to this deeply engrained understanding and desire for Sabbath in all parts of our lives, and perhaps then we will see more clearly how this should be embodied in our corporate worship practices.

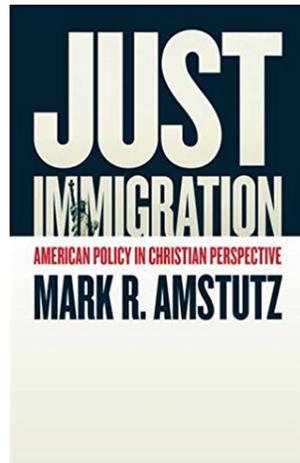
In all, González has offered a breezy romp through liturgical history,

drawing on a rich array of original sources, which makes *A Brief History of Sunday* a fine primer to those seeking an introduction to liturgical history. There is, however, a disappointing lack of any novel perspective or particular contextual insight from history seen through the eyes of this Cuban Methodist historian. Save for reference to the “Popular Salvadoran Mass” as an example of post-Vatican II embrace of the vernacular (146-147), there is nary a hint of González’s Latino context. But perhaps that is the point. Perhaps this primer was not written for Westerners seeking new insights from long-ignored majority world voices, but for majority world believers disconnected from these Western liturgical roots. As a trusted voice from within, González’s zeal for the Early Church’s embrace of Sunday may, in fact, be a novel and innovative call.

Mark R. Amstutz.  
*Just Immigration: American Policy  
in Christian Perspective*  
Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,  
2017.  
pb, pp. xvi, 224, \$21.25, £21.99.  
ISBN 978-0-8028-7484-9

Reviewed by, Esteban G. Miranda.  
Fuller Theological Seminary

As the founder of the Political Science department at Wheaton College, Mark R. Amstutz has become a significant voice in the dialogue on international affairs and political morality. A glance at his body of work testifies of his passion for educating the reader in ethical approaches to international relations and American foreign policy. He has authored books such as: *Evangelicals and American Foreign Policy* (2014), *The Healing of the Nations* (2015),



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and *International Ethics* (2013, 4th ed.)

In *Just Immigration: American Policy in Christian Perspective* the author is challenged by the recurring questions regarding the church's activism on behalf of a just immigration system. He asks, "Why do they believe the immigration system is unjust?" Amstutz also wonders "why do they [the churches] overwhelmingly support a more liberal policy, including amnesty for those who have entered the country unlawfully?" These questions guided the author through several years of bibliographic and field research seeking to understand how Christian perspectives help to structure the analysis of international migration. Amstutz' goal is to describe and assess the United States immigration system from a Christian perspective. Amstutz is concerned with the church's lack of knowledge of immigration policy and the reactionary stance taken because of this unawareness. Examining the contributions of Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Evangelical churches the author assesses how those contributions are applied to the "ongoing debate about immigration reform."

*Just Immigration* begins with a succinct introduction to the United States immigration system, its history, and effects. Christian ethics and immigration are introduced against the backdrop of cosmopolitanism and communitarianism. The first half of Amstutz work (Chapters 1 through 4) exhibits meticulous research, providing detailed analysis of US immigration policy and the challenges it faces. A system that faces the American people's differing perspective and understanding of immigration. Amstutz provides the reader with clear examples of the US immigration system's strength and weakness. He introduces it as a generous system, that gives priority to family ties and inclusiveness, while also paying close attention to those victim of violence and abuse in their own nations. Nevertheless, Amstutz sees a system unable to regulate its generosity and that loses control when prioritizing family ties; he also exposes a system with a poor ability to control and track those who overstay their visas as well as those who seek employment while in the

country illegally.

In the second half of *Just Immigration* (chapter 5 through 9) Amstutz deals with the different ways in which the Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestants, and Evangelical churches have addressed immigration. Throughout these chapters he examines and assesses the contributions and shortcomings of the various Christian groups. Amstutz is seriously critical of the Catholic church's approach to the current immigration crisis in the United States. By solely advocating for the immigrant, and pointing out a nation's responsibility to welcome them, he explains, the Catholic church simplifies a very complex issue and neglects its duty to moral education. Amstutz also sees Evangelical churches making the same mistake. While developing a strong biblical argument for a more liberal and flexible immigration policy, Evangelicals fail to address the moral dilemmas presented by the citizens' moral claims vis-à-vis immigrants'. Mainline Protestant churches, according to Amstutz seem to have understood the role of the church in the immigration debate better than the other major groups. Mainline Protestants have developed more careful and useful studies that focus directly on moral education, avoiding the usual arguments used to promote social justice. Unfortunately, because of their lack of influence in American society their efforts have gone almost unnoticed.

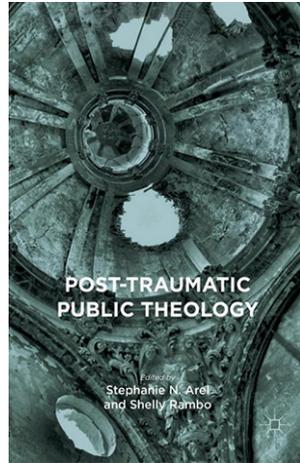
Amstutz methodically develops his argument, arriving at the conclusion proposed from the beginning, that the Christian church, although able and with the responsibility to participate in public policy development, must not forget its most important contribution will be that of moral education. Unfortunately, Amstutz does not provide the reader with enough scriptural depth to support such strong and thought-provoking claim. The biblical approach provided is dependent on each Christian tradition's understanding of Scripture. However, as he introduces his methodology the reader becomes aware the author is not interested in developing a "Theology of immigration," but rather in examining the biblical perspectives of the different Christian traditions. His discussion

on “Christian ethics, the Bible, and immigration” (chapter 5) suffers from a noticeable absence of Old and New Testament ethics scholars’ voices (Joel Green, Christopher Wright, John Goldingay, Cyril Rodd, Richard Burridge). Amstutz is able to remain focused on examining the different Christian traditions perspectives, without making any claims of his own, yet appealing to a few of the leading experts in the field of Old and New Testament ethics would have provided a more solid scriptural foundation for his argument.

*Just Immigration* serves as an eye-catching title for those interested in the subject. Nevertheless, Amstutz’ work is not just another book offering an answer to the current immigration crisis, nor is it an attempt to provide an exhaustive biblical reference on Christian ethics and immigration. Exquisitely researched but not tedious to read, *Just Immigration* serves as a “stop” sign in the debate; it educates the reader on immigration policy and Christian ethics and approaches, thus providing a much-needed clear perspective of what the Christian church has done and what, according to Amstutz, its most important contribution should be, that of moral education.

Stephanie N. Arel, and Shelly  
Rambo, eds.  
*Post-Traumatic Public Theology.*  
London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.  
pp: xiv, 312; £74.95/\$91.53 (hb)  
£58.99/ \$109 (eb); ISBN 978-3-319-  
40659-6 (hb) 978-3-319-40660-2 (eb)

Reviewed by, Matthew F. Jones.  
Theology and Culture, Fuller  
Theological Seminary



We live in an historical moment in which American political experience is frequently described as traumatic: not only are catastrophic disasters and terrorist attacks (such as 9/11 or the Charleston shooting) taking lives and damaging communities with gruesome regularity, but more quotidian experiences of racism and other forms of oppression are being shown to cause persistent negative psychological and physical effects. It is this kind of trauma, the “suffering that remains” and “overwhelm[s] human processes of adaptation” (Shelley Rambo 3, in the Introduction), that primarily concerns the contributors of *Post-Traumatic Public Theology*. With their wide-ranging essays, they hope to “unearth the resources within religious traditions to address the suffering of our times” (Rambo, 3), consider how trauma and theology might mutually address each other (Rambo, 18), and construct a “more responsive Christian theology” that better incorporates (in the fullest sense of the word) trauma and those who experience it into the life of faith (Rambo, 18).

While that goal (and the topic itself) might be too broad and complex for this one volume to adequately grasp, the book succeeds as a series of parallel case-studies in which trauma is applied as an interpretive

lens to various contexts, highlighting concealed truths and generating promising ways forward. A few of the essays do this particularly well, such as Willie James Jennings' short, searing opening chapter in which he deftly reveals how the wounded bodies of American veterans become the site of competing public narratives, and asks what kind of communal practices of penance might free both soldiers and the general population from damaging myths that prevent meaningful healing. Sharon V. Betcher uses the 2013 Boston bombing (which was the catalyst for this project) to consider how the initial moment of "disabling" trauma persists through disabled peoples' daily experiences of humiliation, and how the public humiliation of Jesus lends dignity and priority to their lives. Dan Hague taps into American racism and the collective trauma of black communities (which includes having to endure the recurring demand that they must provide more and more "evidence" of their trauma) to advance a central idea of the book: that theologians must expand their understanding of trauma beyond discrete incidents to include the violence of prolonged exposure to dehumanizing narratives. And finally, Deanna A. Thompson provides perhaps the most intriguing constructive work with her deeply personal account of finding solidarity in online communities of people fighting cancer, asking what role the "virtual body of Christ" plays in a society where people are increasingly finding solace for their *embodied* trauma in *virtual* spaces.

Whereas the above chapters utilize the broader definition of trauma to explore theological frontiers with a thematically coherent precision, not every entry in *Post-Traumatic Public Theology* is as effective, and the book occasionally has a patchwork, ad hoc feel that can plague multi-author volumes. Just as "violence" has become an increasingly vague term in public theological discourse, "trauma," as employed in this book, is at risk of becoming too bloated for incisive theological use. For instance, in Mark Wallace's urgent (and still worthwhile) chapter on ecological devastation, the sheer effort spent attempting "to re-imagine Earth as an animate being, a living soul, who feels joy and suffers sorrow and loss [and trauma] just

as we do,” (Wallace, 138) due to both being “bearer[s] of God’s presence,” (Wallace, 142) makes one feel like the label of “trauma” was being sought after for its rhetorical effect rather than critically examined and developed.

Although this potentially problematic dynamic haunts the book, it does not, ultimately, derail the goals of the project. Despite the occasional lapse into generic diffusion, the authors effectively demonstrate theology’s capacity to address trauma in its myriad, concrete forms. Additionally, the very existence of this book, its emergence from the traumatic aftermath of terrorism, embodies the complementary goal of challenging academics to consider how trauma addresses theology. It is in this mutual, dialectical space that a “more responsive Christian theology” might develop effective practices that acknowledge both discrete and systemic traumas, adapt to the various manifestations of those traumas over time, and function meaningfully and restoratively for each particular community and its diverse members.

Michelle A. Walsh, as she reflects on “material theopoetics” as a response to communal violence in the penultimate chapter, summarizes the promise of the project as whole when she says:

As we open possibilities for a public theology of aesthetics and power in relation to trauma and prophetic pastoral care, we [theologians and practitioners] widen our own capacity to encompass the broadest intercultural range of relational and material theopoetic testimony. We witness more fully to our shared humanity as *imago Dei*... [supporting the] transfiguration and ultimate transformation of the world with a greater love, peace, and justice. (Walsh, 241)

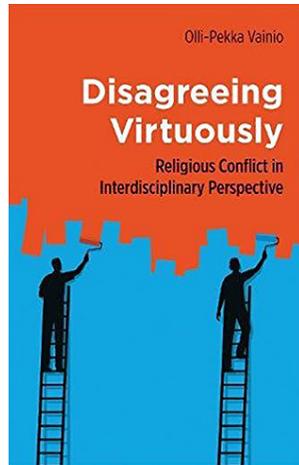
Although *Post-Traumatic Public Theology* is not (and does not claim to be) the definitive exploration of the intersection of trauma, religion, and public life, Arel, Rambo, and the contributors have provided a timely and generative work of constructive theology that merits wider critical engagement. That traumatic violence will continually shape our communities is a given; what remains to be seen is whether churches will be able to counter that violence with informed and transformative practices. Thankfully, there is now a new resource in this perennial struggle.

Olli-Pekka Vainio.  
*Disagreeing Virtuously: Religious  
Conflict in Interdisciplinary Perspective.*  
Foreword by Rob Barrett.  
Grand Rapids, MI, William B.  
Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017.  
pb, xxi, £24.99, \$30; ISBN: 207. ISBN:  
978-0-802-87504-4.

Reviewed by Judith C. P. Lin. PhD  
Candidate in Church History,  
Fuller Theological Seminary.

Olli-Pekka Vainio takes up one of the most pressing issues of our day—religious conflicts. Incorporating voices from the history of ideas, cognitive sciences, analytic philosophy of religion, and virtue theories, Vainio's work is accessible for anyone interested in the subject matter. As pointed out by Rob Barrett in the foreword, while Vainio's project primarily addresses Christian readers, his work is not narrowly Christian (x).

The book's central thesis is that it is not only possible, but desirable, to learn to disagree virtuously in religious conflicts. Vainio frames his argument first of all by exploring the views of selected theologians and philosophers on the pursuit of knowledge and (religious) disagreement, demonstrating that the conflicts that we face today are nothing new. Then, Vainio turns to contemporary psychology and philosophy to explicate why the inherent biases in human cognitive are but a natural result of human development. He then raises an obvious question: do biases render truth claims of particular religions untrustworthy? Drawing insights from scientific and epistemological perspectives on religious belief, Vainio challenges the thought that widespread religious disagreement would undermine the truth claims of particular religions. He also argues against granting doubt too prominent a place in religious faith or the formation of



belief. Instead, Vainio argues for a “dynamic view” of epistemic rationality as we approach religious disagreements, which allows us to hold fast our beliefs even when our convictions are “partially defeated” by opposing positions (136).

Does it mean that biases remain unchecked? By no means. In the final chapter—the heart of the book—Vainio ushers in the discussion of virtue. Without simplifying the matter, Vainio suggests the necessity of resorting to such virtues as open-mindedness, humility, courage, and tolerance, in times of disagreement. For Vainio, biases are to be curbed not by doubt, but by virtues. In contrast to the view that religion is at times a “conversation-stopper” (42-4), Vainio—without being utopian—regards religious conflicts as opportunities for Christian churches to exemplify to the world how it is possible to disagree virtuously in conflicts, without losing their identity (185-6).

In an age when conflicts abound, Vainio believes that it is critical to educate people to act more virtuously: “After all, what would be the option? To *not* teach people about virtues? We will fail in many ways in this endeavor, but this does not diminish our obligation to strive for ideal performance” (156). While his foundation is a Christian one, the “thickness” of his narrative—involving interlocutors from various disciplines—does justice to a subject that is as complex and arduous as *conflict*. Even though some pages may appear to be rather technical for readers unfamiliar with certain disciplines, Vainio presents arguments in such a lucid manner that his work is, in general terms, easy to follow and digest.

*Disagreeing Virtuously* is not merely a book for the academic circle or classroom settings. It is more than fitting to study the book in a religious setting, where communities of faith reflect what disagreeing virtuously entails in their specific context. And while his current study is set foremost in the Western context, Vainio’s text can be easily translated into non-Western contexts, insofar as all religions and cultures share similar virtue vocabulary (142).

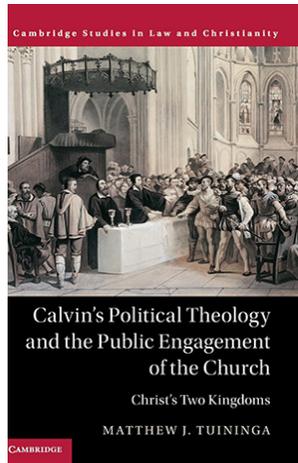
Rigorous as Vainio's research is, however, it seems that his focus is mainly on the individual's place in disagreements (and underlying contributing factors), as opposed to the role or dynamics of community. Granted, community is the sum total of individuals there within; *but it is also more*. In addition, the religious conflicts that arise in the public sphere nowadays, more often than not, involve ideology clashes between one (religious) institution (as opposed to individuals) and another. Thus, I wonder if Vainio could have expanded the final section of the book, in which he considers how communities, ideologies, and identities inform the discussion of religious disagreement, and how virtue functions in their interplay. I also wonder what Vainio's work would look like had he included voices from political science. A minor critique concerns writing style. As readers most likely will not be versed in all disciplines, spelling out acronyms for technical terms would help readers follow the narrative more easily.

These critiques aside, *Disagreeing Virtuously* is a constructive, timely, and hopeful contribution to our time and age. While conflicts have always been part of history, the intensity of conflicts looms large nowadays due to the concept of global village. If we are to see humans flourish to the highest possible degree, it is incumbent on concerned global citizens to learn how to disagree better. Vainio has pointed us to a feasible direction.

Matthew J. Tuininga.  
*Calvin's Political Theology and the  
Public Engagement of the Church:  
Christ's Two Kingdoms* (Cambridge  
Studies in Law and Christianity)  
Cambridge: Cambridge University  
Press, 2017. hb, xiv, 386, \$110.00.  
ISBN 978-1-1071-7143-5.

Reviewed by, Timothy R. Scheuers,  
Drs. Fuller Theological Seminary

In this publication of his Emory University doctoral dissertation, Matthew J. Tuininga, Assistant Professor of Moral Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary (Grand Rapids, MI), demonstrates the pervasive influence that John Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine had on his political theology. Through a judicious use of Calvin's own writings—including his principal doctrinal work, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and his biblical commentaries and polemical treatises—the author reveals that Calvin's two kingdoms theology enabled him to posit a sharp distinction between church (the earthly manifestation of Christ's spiritual kingdom) and political society (temporal and civil pursuits), yet without treating the ecclesiastical and political affairs of life as “two hermetically sealed realms” (2). Although temporal and authoritative boundaries distinguish church and civil society, the righteous principles of Christ's eternal kingdom place demands on every facet of believers' lives. Thus the overall thesis of Tuininga's book is that Calvin's two kingdoms theology, so often neglected or misunderstood by the church, can (and should) serve as a valuable guide for Christians who wish to participate biblically and effectively in the political life of modern pluralistic liberal democracies.



Tuininga initially sets out to engage Calvin's political theology critically and constructively by providing an intensive evaluation of the reformer's historical context and formal theology. Thus the book begins by situating Calvin against the backdrop of his late medieval and early Reformation political context. The author ably demonstrates that Calvin's struggle to establish principles for the spiritual government of the church, independent from Genevan civil control, sharply distinguished his two kingdoms doctrine from the prevailing political theologies of his day, some of which tended to blur the lines between ecclesiastical and magisterial control, and others of which pushed the distinction too far by inserting a harmful dualism into Christian life and exegesis.

The remainder of the book attempts to establish the foundations of Calvin's two kingdoms theology, including its manifold implications for the relationship between the church as institution and the public, political life of Christians. A crucial point of emphasis in Tuininga's overall treatment of this subject is that Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine is grounded in his eschatological theology. The biblical fact that the eschatological *telos* of all creation is its spiritual transformation into Christ's eternal heavenly kingdom has, for Calvin, profound implications for how church and civil society should relate between "the already" and "not yet." Existing in this interim period, the church and state ought to remain distinct but nevertheless related. The church, as the embodiment of Christ's spiritual kingdom on earth, should never seek—by temporal means—to attain the complete renovation of all things in the affairs of this passing age. Civil magistrates alone are tasked by God to take coercive action to promote virtue and restrain vice in society. The church's appointed task, rather, is to preach the gospel, properly administer the sacraments, and exercise church discipline, which are God's normative means for creating faith and transforming sinners into members of the eternal kingdom of Christ. Christians should seek to promote the moral law of justice and piety in civil society, and may pursue public political office in order to stimulate the formation of just laws and polity in accord with the common

standards of natural law. But the church as institution is called to advocate individual and social change only by the means proper to the unique task and authority of the church itself, namely, by the official means of grace and the public witness of Christians to the gospel promise of cosmic restoration. In some contexts, civil magistrates might indirectly promote the cause of Christ's kingdom by defending the church's right to preach the gospel and by expunging heresy. In other contexts, Christians may be required to submit humbly to godless rulers while suffering as servants of Christ. In either situation, Calvin's two kingdoms theology served to distinguish properly the unique epochal placement of church and civil society within the broader scope of the eschatological goal of cosmic renewal.

Tuininga concludes his work by arguing that Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine both encourages and guides Christian participation in politically liberal societies. In particular, he proposes that Christians living in American secular society should strive to build greater moral consistency in societal laws themselves, on the basis of natural law as the common standard for civil government, "rather than seek to override moral pluralism with brute political force, so undermining the publicly recognized moral authority of the law itself" (364). In sum, Tuininga contends that it is Calvin's twofold emphasis on the church's unique task of preaching the word of the kingdom, and the Christian's task to freely serve Christ in temporal, secular society, "that makes his two kingdoms theology so useful for our understanding of the mission and public engagement of the church. It frees the church to proclaim a word to the world that is truly prophetic, even as it frees believers for the sort of political engagement that is truly faithful" (377).

In this well written and engaging study, Tuininga has given us a balanced, contextualized, and exegetically sensitive examination of the unique shape that Calvin's two kingdoms (or two governments) doctrine gave to his political theology. Moving deftly between Calvin's *Institutes* and biblical commentaries, the book offers helpful perspective

on how pervasively Calvin applied the two kingdoms distinction to his theological thought as a whole. As the author suggests, Calvin's two kingdoms theology—rightly understood—can help American Christians to keep their political and ecclesiastical activities in proper context: by distinguishing the unique tasks and authorities given to church and state; by prompting a robust public witness to Christ's heavenly kingdom in life's civil affairs; and by helping believers to resist the temptation to use politics as a means of transforming society into the eternal kingdom of God. Moreover, Tuininga's interpretation, specifically by criticizing overly rigid accounts of Calvin's two kingdoms doctrine that deny the extension of Christ's spiritual kingdom to matters of Christian civil action, and by recognizing the value of Abraham Kuyper's appeals to Calvin's theology in constructing his own distinction between the church as institute and the church as organism, should serve a mediating role amid the polemical heat that has so often characterized debate over Calvin's two kingdoms in the church and in the academy.

An unfortunate weakness of Tuininga's otherwise fine study is the evident lack of critical work in the original languages of his primary sources. Apart from a brief section in chapter 8, which examines part of a treatise of Calvin that remains untranslated into English, the author almost exclusively cites the English translations of Calvin's primary works (with little more than footnote references to their location in the *Calvini Opera*), giving no indication of his own translation or critical labor in the native language of the texts. He also pays scant attention to foreign language secondary sources on the Reformation and Calvin's theology, and neglects to consult some important primary sources that are particularly useful for constructing and illustrating the often complex implementation of Calvin's vision of church and state in Geneva, such as the *Registres du Consistoire de Genève au temps de Calvin* and the *Registres du Conseil de Genève à l'époque de Calvin*, sources that have garnered renewed scholarly interest in recent decades. Such lacunae represent a noteworthy breach of scholarly standards for a work of its kind. These issues aside, however,

Tuininga's contribution offers a cogent and thoughtful extension of the discussion on Calvin's political theology, and it should be required reading for anyone working in the field.

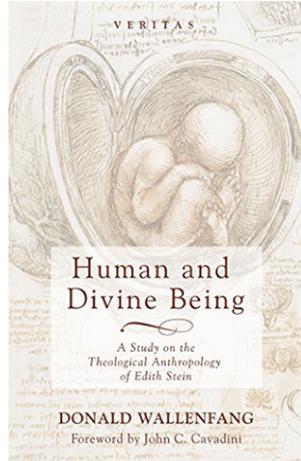
Donald Wallenfang.  
*Human and Divine Being:  
A Study on the Theological  
Anthropology of Edith Stein*  
Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books,  
2017.

Reviewed by, David Muthukumar S.  
Fuller Theological Seminary

Edith Stein (1891–1942) was a German-Jewish philosopher who joined the Carmelite Order after her conversion to the Roman Catholic faith in 1922.

She has written a number of books, out of which the *Potency and Act* (1931) and the *Finite and Eternal Being* (1937) stand as monumental works, in which she probes the wonder and mystery of human being in relation to the divine being. She suffered an untimely death under the Nazi regime at Auschwitz in 1942. She was later canonized as a martyr and saint by Pope John Paul II in 1998 as *Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross*.

In this book, Donald Wallenfang is presenting a holistic theological anthropology as he distills this theme from the works of Edith Stein. Through this attempt, Wallenfang is engaging the physical reductionist view of the contemporary postmodern worldview that leads to practical atheism, relegating the human person to a “random instance of atomic matter and energy.” He claims that Stein's framework would provide a



way to regain the sense of a holistic personhood that is rooted in right relationship with God.

As Wallenfang notes, Stein is combining the strength of phenomenology and metaphysics, especially the Husserlian phenomenology and Thomist metaphysics in her study of theological anthropology. He begins with Stein's understanding of the universal human vocation. For Stein, to be a human being is primarily to be an ethical being and human vocation is comprised of a call and a response. She avers, "To be authentically human is to be responsible for the other, to be responsible for all." By harnessing the vitality of the Aristotelian and Thomistic potency–act hermeneutic and the notion of perennial philosophy (that truths do not change), Stein observes that despite all phenomenal differences, every human individual is in an honest pursuit of truth. As the change from potentiality to actuality is caused by a prior actuality that acts on the latent potentiality, the inherent human potentiality is actualized by an anterior actuality which is the "pure actuality" (*actus purus*) that Aquinas calls God.

She further conceives the divine Logos as the "meaning-principle driving the entire evolutionary process of the cosmos" comprising the physical, biological, historical, and cultural realms, of which the Logos is also its goal. Stein is incorporating a cosmic evolutionary understanding into her theological reflections and relates it to the Trinitarian conception of creation. She calls the logic of the cross as the logic of the double negative as in the reality of poverty and self-divestment, Christ redeems the world. Stein calls this pattern of self-abnegation the "science of the Cross" (*Kreuzeswissenschaft*). Her theological anthropology is thoroughly Christocentric in that she presents Christ's self-emptying as the right model for deducing the human vocation and is also concurrently pneumatocentric as she argues that only in this process we attest to the life of the Spirit in us. As a seed dies in order to bring forth the hidden life of the sapling, also an individual ego must die in order to participate in radical solidarity with a communion of other selves. She emphasizes the "personal alterity" as the ground of possibility for being spiritual being. As

human beings, we become as “individuals only in relation to one another and authentic human personhood is realized in and through the opening to another.” Wallenfang thus presents Stein’s conception of the human vocation as Self’s essential relation to the Other by being enabled by its inherent relation to the Trinitarian God.

In her theological anthropology, Wallenfang notes that, Stein accounts for material and spiritual realms of an individual which she refers to as a “spiritual subject.” It is spiritual nature of a human being that defies being reduced into a mere material being by transcends the scope of mass/energy and its predictable and verifiable properties. Wallenfang thus juxtaposes Stein’s thought to the contemporary critical thought that denies the scope of spirit and also human soul.

By using the quadratic causality framework of Aristotelian-Thomistic conception, Stein points that soul can be understood only according to the metaphysics of formal and final causality while also affirming its relation to the physical body as articulated through material and efficient causality. She conceives the human person as a trichotomous interplay between body, soul, and spirit. Utilizing the potency–act rubric, Stein understands the material body (*Körper*) as that which is primarily in *potentia*, while the soul functions as the spiritual and actualizing principle of the body. Though accounting for a trichotomous composition of a human being, Stein emphasizes the unity of the human being by reiterating its intrinsic relation to the physical body. Stein identifies the soul as the form of the body. But the soul itself does not “have the power to actualize what is potential in it” and in turn depends on the “personal actuality of spirit, namely, God.”

As a critical phenomenologist, Stein identifies the human soul as “the innerness of consciousness” from which everything else is perceived. She finds the realm of consciousness and its intentional spiritual life as constitutive of the human soul’s voluntary activity. She further relates this identification of consciousness and soul to the aspect of redemption of the transient material being by the intransient spiritual nature. The spiritual

being of an individual works to redeem both matter and spirit, both body and soul. The inescapable entropy, that is the apparent destiny of material being toward degradation, disorder, and disintegration, is transformed and redeemed by the potentiality of the inner spiritual being. But, it is the human soul of Christ that is the actualizing medium through which the divine life is channelled to all other human souls. Because human beings exist at “the intersection of material being and spiritual being,” the incarnation of Christ absolutely incorporates “the ontological totality of the created order.” It is Jesus Christ who recapitulates and sums up the whole of creation in his incarnate Being. Here, Stein is alluding to a universalist understanding of the human creation. For her, the logic of resurrection coincides with the logic of the natural order in the form of paradoxical continuity of being. Therefore, to remove the human soul from the human is to remove personhood from the person, and the human soul can be comprehended only in reference to the incomprehensible God who chose to reveal divine incomprehensibility to us through that which is comprehensible.

Wallenfang remarks, as part of her Carmelite spirituality, Stein captures the importance of empathy through a forceful presentation. Stemmed from the German term *Einfühlung*, empathy is “the paradoxical lived experience of the self whose source material is the lived experience of the other.” As the experience of the self is constituted by the lived experiences of both self and other, empathy is that which defines that outward movement toward the other which is the essential trait of spiritual being. To participate in the affective life of another person involves a movement of self-divesting. The human vocation is thus constituted in the awareness of the unity of spiritual and material nature of a human being and its essentiality of movement toward the “Other” through empathy.

Wallenfang’s engages Edith Stein’s theological anthropology as a polemic against the prevalent material reductionism and is making a strong argument for the revival of understanding human personhood in its soul, body, spirit dimensions. Yet at times, Stein’s notion of spirit as

transcendental/immaterial and body as finite/material substance betrays strands of rigid “Cartesian dualism.” Though Wallenfang refutes this fact by pointing to Stein’s understanding of the unitary composition of body and soul, in the light of modern cognitive neurosciences and kinaesthetic-proprioceptive cognition, it seems Stein’s conception is over “spiritualized” at the expense of predominantly sensory existence of human beings. The influences of the Carmelite spirituality run thick in her account. Also, her reliance on the trichotomous view of human composition does not do justice to the biblical notion of using spirit and soul in an interchangeable fashion. Also, this effectively undermines the cognitive function of the soul or consciousness being totally divorced from the spirit. Stein’s conception of human being as *imago Dei* also relies on this trichotomous view. She considers the soul “in and by itself” to be regarded as an image of the triune God. She further elaborates this by equating the soul as the substantial image of God the Father. By way of analogy, through a Trinitarian understanding, Stein conceives the human soul as an image of God the Father, the body as the incarnated Son, and the spirit as the Spirit of life. But, as she prioritizes the spirit over the soul, she later argues that it is only the spirit that can sustain the spiritual nature of the soul, devoid of which the soul would be lost. To a modern ear, this would sound like a confusion of categories.

But then, this is definitely an anachronistic critique against Stein. By bridging between metaphysics and the natural sciences through the innovations of the phenomenological method, Edith Stein does present a comprehensive view of human personhood and vocation that places human beings in their right relationship with the Creator God.

Matthew Levering.  
*Engaging the Doctrine of Creation:  
Cosmos, Creatures, and the Wise  
and Good Creator*  
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker  
Academic, 2017.

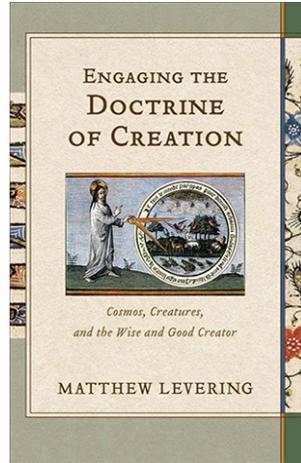
Reviewed by, Stephen Vantassel.  
King's Evangelical Divinity School

Levering holds the James N. and Mary D. Perry Jr. Chair of Theology at the University of Saint Mary of the Lake's Mundelein Seminary. *Engaging the*

*Doctrine of Creation* is yet another installment in Levering's efforts to defend traditional Catholic teaching within the field of systematic theology. While the book decidedly addresses the doctrine of creation as expected in a systematic text, Levering purposely avoids the difficult, perhaps impossible, task of covering all the issues entailed by the subject. For instance, he frankly admits that he ignored angelology and engaged divine providence in only an indirect manner. Likewise, he explained that he did not expend great attention to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.

Instead, Levering selected 7 key topics that he considers to be important either theologically or were especially timely. In this way his theological efforts are to be seen as trying to address contemporary problems or controversies rather than all the issues that were historically related to the subject. Thus, his text only addresses seven key topics, namely divine ideas, divine simplicity, creatures, image of God, human population growth, original sin, and atonement. Each topic is given its own chapter.

Chapters one and two discuss divine ideas and divine simplicity. Levering seeks to defend traditional views of God's freedom (i.e. that He



could create or not create without compunction) and God's immutability (i.e. that God's act of creation did not incur a change in Him). With contemporary theology still feeling the influences of process theology, Levering's thoughts here can be as disruptive, as they throw one back to an earlier view of God, as they are difficult to comprehend. Levering admits, at least in regards to divine simplicity, that his explanation fails to completely satisfy because our creaturely limitations prevent us from fully grasping the concept.

In chapters three through six, Levering looks to find ways to reduce the conflicts between Christian teaching and contemporary scientific claims about life and human origins. He directly considers questions by atheists such as, why did God make so many creatures just to have them go extinct?, Why does so much of our genetic material seem to be useless code? etc. Likewise he considers questions of how to harmonize biblical teaching (and Magisterial dogma) with scientific assertions. For instance, science asserts that humans did not evolve from a pair of humans. If this is true, how would this correlate with the Biblical claim of Adam and Eve? In addition, if there is no original human pair, how does this impact the notion of original sin? His approach is decidedly irenic without passively yielding all truth to contemporary science. Readers who reject a symbolic interpretation of the Genesis account will think that Levering holds "scientific claims" in too high a regard. Nevertheless, his discussion is thought provoking.

Levering's chapter on human population growth was of particular interest to me because of the environmental impacts associated with human population growth. Levering defended the Catholic teaching regarding procreation albeit weakly. I was disappointed that Levering accepted the doomsday claims of the environmental activists without much criticism. I think he could have made a good case to show that decline in human morality (e.g. divorce and other condemned evils) pose significant environmental threats yet are typically ignored by the environmental movement. For instance, divorce requires humans to double the amount

of land being consumed as instead of a husband and wife sharing a home, they now have two homes with all the accompanying products needed to run that home. Likewise, scripture is replete with statements about how environmental devastation comes as punishment for failing to follow God's commands. Is it any stretch to think that the environmental devastation of certain parts of the world is related more strongly with corruption than in population growth? Levering could have improved this chapter considerably by reading Calvin Beisner and others who provide a critique of the doomsday narrative of the "environmental movement."

In his final chapter, Atonement, Levering discusses Nicholas Wolterstorff's argument against the principle of reciprocity as a basis for the atonement. Levering convincingly shows that Wolterstorff neglected to consider the evidence Scripture provides supporting the principle of reciprocity as a proper aspect of justice. Levering concludes that the sacrifice of Christ, though not necessary, was appropriate to show how much God cared for us. I am not convinced that God could have overlooked the penalty of sin, but readers can evaluate Levering's thoughts for themselves.

As an Evangelical Christian, I found this text beneficial and challenging. It was refreshing to read Levering's cogent, nuanced, and respectful defense of historic Catholic teaching. Too many times, I have seen purportedly Catholic theologians do their best to attack and undermine Catholic teaching. It is almost as if these theologians were closet Protestants. Levering reminds us that faith seeking understanding is a better way to engage difficult topics. To be sure, I would have appreciated a more thorough and broader treatment of the doctrine of creation. But despite his decision to select only seven key elements, I think he chose well. In this regard, readers will find his work both enlightening, in that they will be exposed to overlooked areas of theology, and empowered to defend doctrines historically proclaimed by the faithful. Professors in upper level graduate theology courses should consider this book as a supplemental text.

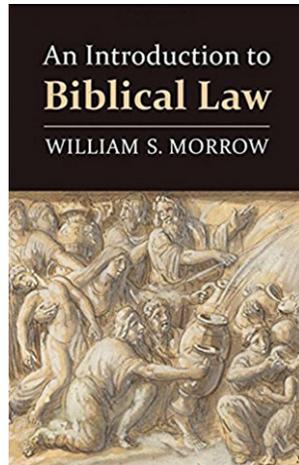
William S. Morrow,  
*An Introduction to Biblical Law*  
Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans,  
2017. Pbk, xvi, 270.  
ISBN: 978-0-8028-6865-7. \$24.00.

Reviewed by, Jason A. Riley.  
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Pasadena, CA

Some introductions are a mile wide and an inch deep, in contrast to monographs that are often an inch wide and a mile deep. Morrow admittedly seeks a middle ground. While covering the entire canon of biblical law, from Exodus to Deuteronomy, he focuses on specific topics within this corpus with chapters that are relatively brief (no chapter exceeds 13 pages), informative, well organized and researched, and enjoyable to read.

Morrow begins with the premise that Christians often neglect biblical legal material and, thereby, miss an important part of the Old Testament. While Morrow admits that this biblical material raises a number of hermeneutical issues, which he does not avoid addressing, he also maintains that biblical law represents an important and meaningful genre of biblical literature. According to him, “law represents a significant way in which ancient Israel did theology” (p. 5). Thus, Morrow seeks to introduce both theology students and lay readers to this important corpus of biblical literature.

Morrow’s approach is both critical and canonical. He places his canonical approach in the tradition of James Sanders. He makes four claims regarding his canonical reading: 1) Canon and community are interrelated. 2) Scripture contains a diversity of voices. 3) Scripture provides believing communities stability and adaptability. 4) Scripture



“enables communities to monotheize in a particular time and place” (p. 7). Morrow stresses the importance of the Pentateuch to both Jewish and Christian communities, and reminds readers that the biblical legal material was important for Israel’s self-definition.

The book is organized into five major parts. Part One, chapters 1-4, comprise the book’s introduction and foundational material. In chapters 2-4, Morrow addresses issues of terminology, Moses the mediator of law versus the Moses of history, and approaches to studying biblical law, respectively. In Part Two, Morrow introduces the Ten Commandments (ch. 5) followed by a detailed discussion of the second commandment (ch. 6). In Part Three, he discusses the Covenant Code in Exodus, including chapters addressing the goring ox (ch. 8) and slavery (ch. 9). In the longest section of the book, Part Four (chs. 10-17), Morrow looks at various aspects of the Priestly and Holiness codes in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Regarding the sacrificial instructions in Leviticus, Morrow does an excellent job providing a helpful synthesis of the biblical material, while also acknowledging that the biblical texts are not entirely clear on a number of matters. Finally, in Part Five (chs. 18-22), Morrow investigates various aspects of the book of Deuteronomy. Each chapter concludes with a brief discussion on developments of the legal material in focus in later Jewish and, primarily, Christian tradition. Additionally, each Part concludes with a select bibliography for further reading. Morrow concludes the book with a brief chapter expanding on the four claims he raised regarding a canonical reading.

Morrow strikes a reasonable balance between addressing critical issues of the biblical legal material and taking seriously the role of this material as Scripture. However, he does not attempt to provide facile explanations for either the critical issues or the moral difficulties this material presents. For example, in his chapter on slavery (ch. 9), Morrow admits that this material was used throughout history in support of slavery, and that the biblical writers and early Jewish and early Christian communities did not demand an end to slavery even though they were, in some cases, sympathetic

to the humanity of slaves (pp. 104-5). Morrow stops short prescribing strategies to deal with this and other difficulties (p. 8); nevertheless, he admits that contemporary communities may need to be adaptive in their appropriation of these texts, as did ancient Israelite communities (p. 256).

In general, Morrow is neither a maximalist nor a minimalist—he provides balanced and helpful discussions of origins, dating, and historical developments of the legal material while making reasonable conclusions regarding these issues. While he places any events related to the Exodus tradition in the Late Bronze Age or early Iron 1 period (p. 27), he concludes that the current form of the Decalogue derives from the late monarchal period (p. 55) and suggests that the exilic period is best time period in which to place the composition of the Covenant Code (p. 83-4). Morrow recognizes that the legal material in Exodus-Numbers underwent a complex history of composition and editing from the pre-exilic to the post-exilic period (pp. 111-3) and his canonical approach allows for a profitable reading of the biblical legal material in light of this complex history. Morrow acknowledges the importance of Deuteronomy in dating the other legal material in the Pentateuch and discusses three models for dating *Urdeuteronomium* (pp. 200-205). Although noting that Deuteronomy was expanded over a period of time, he places the origins of Deuteronomy after the fall of Israel in 720 and during the period(s) of religious reform in Judah (p. 205). Throughout the book, Morrow carefully stakes out reasonable positions regarding the various critical issues related to Old Testament legal texts, although some readers may not accept Morrow's conclusions on these issues. However, by taking an overall canonical approach throughout the book, Morrow provides a fine resource for introducing biblical legal material even for those who may not side with him on issues such as origins, dating, and development.

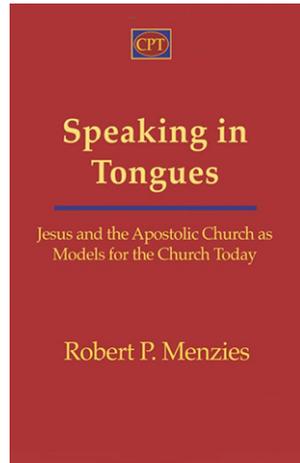
Biblical scholars will likely not find anything particularly new in this *Introduction*; although, the presentation of the material, the topics addressed, and helpful charts throughout the book make this a useful pedagogical text. I highly recommend this for undergraduate and

Seminary courses addressing the Pentateuch and biblical legal material. Students and laypersons will find this to be an enjoyable, informative, and challenging read, and will walk away with an understanding of the important issues regarding biblical legal material, as well as the depth and complexity of this corpus of biblical literature.

Robert P. Menzies.  
*Speaking in Tongues:  
Jesus and the Apostolic Church as  
Models for the Church Today*  
Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2016.  
ISBN: 978-1935931560. \$17.95 &  
£14.41.

Reviewed by, Mark Anderson. Kings  
Evangelical Divinity School.

Spirit baptism is the 'crown jewel' of Pentecostalism, and to the classical Pentecostal, is evidenced by speaking in other tongues. Robert P. Menzies is the Director of the Asian Centre for Pentecostal Theology and is concerned that Pentecostal pastors in his native USA tend to downplay the theology and practice of speaking in tongues. He cites three fears which pastors need to overcome if they want their churches to 'experience the joy of speaking in tongues, and in so doing recapture power of Pentecost and follow in the apostolic model' (p.5). These three fears are the reason for which the book was written and are 'the fear of disagreement', 'fear of embarrassment' and 'fear of excess'. He suggests that to alleviate and overcome such fears requires an understanding of the biblical mandate which will furnish Pentecostal leaders with the confidence



**that speaking in tongues is an experience which every believer can and should experience.**

Menzies seeks to do this in 168 pages carefully structured in four sections:

- Part One: Luke & Tongues,
- Part Two: Jesus & Tongues,
- Part Three: Paul & Tongues, and
- Conclusion: The value of tongues.

In Part One, Menzies presents the role of tongues in the church and the believer's life from Luke's perspective. He cites a faulty assumption which is that glossolalia was either non-existent or only given to a limited few. Coupled with this is the idea that the New Testament depicts 'speaking in tongues' as the supernatural ability to preach in a foreign language unknown to the speaker. Menzies corrects these assumptions by appealing to the occurrences of tongues in Acts and Corinth. He demonstrates how that in 1 Corinthians, the gift of tongues when exercised by the believer, is a spoken, unintelligible utterance inspired by the Spirit, and when given publicly requires interpretation. He examines Luke's gospel and Acts and posits that in Acts, speaking in tongues is a type of prophecy. He rightly asserts its association with prophetic utterances, and therefore the recipients of this phenomenon in Acts are 'part of the end-time prophetic band of which Joel prophesied.' In Joel's prophecy, Menzies notes Luke's subtle modifications to 'highlight important theological themes and truths' (p.22) which show that Luke anticipates such phenomena to characterize the ministry of the church in the last days and that tongues to have an ongoing role in the life of the church. However, Menzies may have inadvertently created confusion to the debate as to whether tongues are spoken to God or man when he refers to them as 'prophetic speech' and a 'manifestation of prophecy'.

He next addresses the role of tongues in the life of the individual and asks if Luke envisions speaking in tongues as being available to all

believers. In addition to examining Luke's frequent references to 'Spirit-inspired praise', Menzies notes a parallel between Jesus sending out the Seventy (Luke 10:1-16) and God putting His Spirit on the Seventy elders to assist Moses (Numbers 11:24-30). Given that Spirit-inspired praise and prophesying occur regularly in Luke's gospel, Menzies's attempt to use such as a means of suggesting that Luke envisaged every believer to speak in tongues is unconvincing.

In Part Two, Menzies explores what the New Testament says about Jesus' experience of and attitude towards tongues. A key Scripture is Luke 10:21: 'He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said...'. Menzies states that Luke connects the verb 'to rejoice' (Luke 1:47; 10:21; Acts 2:26) to the inspiration of the Spirit. He proposes that it is Jesus' tongue that 'rejoices'. There is, therefore, a connection with Luke's references to speaking in tongues. Such a connection might suggest that Luke and the early church may have understood this phrase from Psalm 16:9 as a reference to speaking in tongues and the possibility of Jesus practicing it (p.51).

In chapter four, Menzies seeks to strengthen his proposal that speaking in tongues marked Jesus' prayer life, by taking into consideration that the signs which Jesus spoke of in the 'long ending of Mark' except handling snakes and drinking poison have parallels elsewhere in Luke-Acts. He cites Job 20:16 as 'the interpretative key to Mark 16:18' (p.74) and suggests that it gave rise to the inspiration of Jesus' words, and so strengthens the case for 'the long ending of Mark' and for Jesus speaking in tongues.

In Part Three, Menzies considers Paul's teaching that all believers should experience tongues. He refers to other scholars such as Fee and Turner to provide a helpful background to the Corinthian context while specifically interacting with Carson and Turner in formulating a compelling case for every believer to speak in tongues. In tackling Paul's rhetorical question, 'Do all speak in tongues?' (1 Corinthians 12:30b), Menzies challenges Turner's apparent lack of faith in Paul's readers to note the distinction between the private and corporate expression of the gift of tongues. To bring closure to the argument, Menzies expounds on Paul's

wish that all would speak in tongues.

Having examined Luke and Paul's material about speaking in tongues, Menzies reconciles their respective emphases, beginning with their perspective of tongues as a 'sign'. He presents an excellent treatment of Paul's reference to Isaiah 28 and in doing so shows that Luke and Paul's perspectives are not so different after all. Chapter seven shows Paul's appreciation of the gift of tongues as a means of prayer, praise, and proclamation. In appealing to Romans 8:26, Menzies encourages by highlighting the Spirit's role to help us in our weaknesses, but again appears dogmatic in stating that the text is describing tongues as a means of intercessory prayer (p.139).

He concludes by drawing together various insights from Mark, Luke-Acts and Paul's letters as a means of theological reflections structured around six central observations.

This book succeeds in its primary objective in furnishing pastors with a biblical mandate to overcome fears and so recapture the power of Pentecost. It's not only relevant to leadership but also to the individual. His conclusions and applications at the end of each chapter are especially useful in this respect. The book's title dictates the flow of the book, and he presents the material in a coherent and readable manner. Menzies demonstrates good scholarship and interacts with the Greek- text and the Septuagint as well as with notable scholars such as Carson, Fee, and Turner. In comparison with other works, he has proposed two novel suggestions which are the possibility that Jesus spoke in tongues and that Job 20:16 inspired Jesus' words at the end of Mark's gospel. Although both suggestions are compelling, they aren't convincing. Menzies on a few occasions appears to be dogmatic in some assertions and suppositions which can't be scripturally substantiated. He does, however, offer pastoral counsel with sensitivity to those who are seeking the 'Pentecostal baptism' but as yet haven't spoken in tongues. Overall, the book has a valuable and challenging contribution in this specific area of pneumatology.

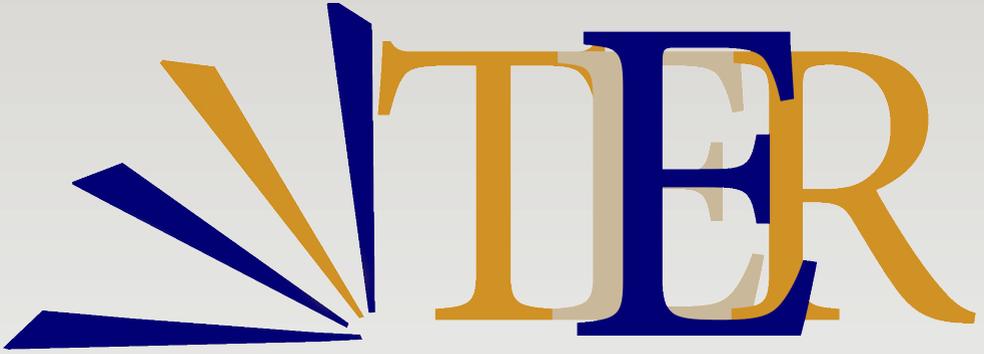












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