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## OLD TESTAMENT ARCHAEOLOGY: *Its Promises and Pitfalls*<sup>1</sup>

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Etymologically, “archaeology” involves the “study of old things.” The dictionary definition is “the scientific study of material remains (as fossil relics, artifacts, monuments) of past human life and activities.”<sup>2</sup> The adjectives “biblical” or “Old Testament” limit the field of endeavor to a search for antiquities in the world of the Bible that enlightens it and the times and circumstances of which it speaks. The intent of this article is to explore briefly the history, methods, objectives, and conclusions of Old Testament archaeology with special attention to how its findings may legitimately or illegitimately be used to clarify, support, correct, or otherwise address the biblical text.<sup>3</sup> No field of investigation has been more proclaimed by Bible believers as decisive proof of the Bible’s historical and scientific truth claims and, at the same time, by skeptics who at best disavow biblical archaeology as an academic discipline and at worst direct its findings against the biblical record in an attempt to raise questions as to both its historical and its theological credibility.

### THE BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY “MOVEMENT”: A BRIEF HISTORY<sup>4</sup>

Since biblical times, pilgrims and travelers of all kinds have visited the lands of the Bible in order to achieve an awareness of the world in which

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<sup>1</sup> The author read an earlier draft of this article at the southeastern apologetics conference of the Conservative Theological Society (now Society of Dispensational Theology) on 22 April 2006 at Grace Community Church, Rincon, GA.

<sup>2</sup> *Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1976) 46.

<sup>3</sup> See also Eugene H. Merrill, “Archaeology and Biblical History,” in *Giving the Sense: Understanding and Using Old Testament Historical Texts*, eds. David M. Howard Jr. and Michael A. Grisanti (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003) 74-96.

<sup>4</sup> For a brief history of Palestinian archaeology, see John D. Currid, *Doing Archaeology in the Land of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999) 23-36.

biblical events occurred. Christians in particular have yearned to “walk today where Jesus walked” and thus in some mystical sense come to know Him better.<sup>5</sup> With only rare exceptions, these journeys were not undertaken to examine closely the life and times of the ancients who lived in the biblical world. However, a few explorers eventually came to pursue more serious investigation of the places and times of the Bible in hopes of making linkages between them and their own world and thus contribute to a better understanding of the sacred text.<sup>6</sup> This kind of research was fueled in medieval times by the journeys of European Crusaders whose primary mission, as they saw it, was to deliver the holy places from the clutches of Moslem infidels but who secondarily resurrected the remains of ancient sites of Christian interest. The mission of the Crusaders was more serendipitous than scholarly but at least it piqued the interest of intellectuals in the whole matter of exploring the past.

The discovery and deciphering of the Rosetta Stone in Egypt in 1798 (and later) unlocked the mysteries of Egyptian hieroglyphics, and by the 1830s, the cuneiform languages of Mesopotamia were becoming available to the general public thanks to the arduous and painstaking efforts of British and French scholars. Soon the literatures of these lands were being published, opening a window into the ancient Near Eastern world of which Israel was a part. In some cases, Israel itself was referenced in these texts and in ways that complemented or supplemented the Old Testament accounts, and in any case shed considerable light on them.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster, UK: Aris & Phillips, 2002). A famous example from the late fourth century was Egeria (or Aetheria), a woman who in her *Itinerarium Egeriae* detailed her travels throughout the Holy Land, visiting as remote a site as Mount Nebo from whence Moses viewed the land of Canaan (See *ibid.*, 110-123). See also Robert D. Ibach Jr., “Two Roads Lead to Esbus,” eds. David Merling and Lawrence T. Geraty, *Hesban after 25 Years* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1994) 65-79.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, Eusebius (the great early church historian) in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century and Edward Robinson in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See, respectively, Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Onomasticon: Palestine in the Fourth Century A. D.* (Jerusalem: Carta, 2003) and Edward Robinson, *Biblical Researches in Palestine*, 3 vols. (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1856).

<sup>7</sup> The most important of these are published in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition with supplement

Meanwhile, Palestine, then under Ottoman Turkish control, experienced preliminary attempts at systematic archaeology<sup>8</sup> employing methods that were not scientifically sound until the work of W. M. Petrie at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> A few decades later, W. F. Albright and his students—notably G. Ernest Wright—launched what might properly be called the “biblical archaeology movement,” largely under American and now Israeli archaeologists. In recent years it has become fashionable in critical circles to disavow the adjective “biblical” in favor of “Palestinian,” “Eastern Mediterranean,” or some such label in order to preclude the allegation that archaeology’s task is to defend the historical accuracy of the Bible (a charge most embarrassing to the skeptical mindset).<sup>10</sup>

### THE NATURE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

Archaeological artifacts may be assigned to two basic categories: literary (or inscriptional) and non-literary. Literary objects are, of course, written documents ranging anywhere from single letters to isolated words to texts of considerable length. These obviously are of greater value than other finds because (1) they can provide clues as to the time of their composition provided they are subject to sound palaeographical method; (2) they may reveal information about persons, places, and events whether related or unrelated to biblical counterparts; and, (3) they can erase gaps in the development of languages and dialects including biblical Hebrew and Aramaic. Many of the most important discoveries in Israel and surrounding areas are inscriptions that can be brought to bear directly on the Old Testament thus adding to or illuminating its message (a number of which will be examined later in this article).

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(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds., *The Context of Scripture*, 3 vols (Leiden: Brill, 1997-2002).

<sup>8</sup> Charles Wilson, *The Recovery of Jerusalem: A Narrative of Exploration and Discovery in the City and the Holy Land* (New York: D. Appleton, 1871); Charles Warren, *The Survey of Western Palestine. Jerusalem* (London: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1884).

<sup>9</sup> W. M. Petrie, *Seventy Years in Archaeology* (New York: H. Holt, 1932).

<sup>10</sup> For example, William Dever, “Syro-Palestinian and Biblical Archaeology,” in *The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters*, eds. Douglas A. Knight and Gene M. Tucker (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 31-74.

Non-literary artifacts consist of such varied features and objects as walls, cisterns, public and private buildings, roads, tools, weapons, furniture, household items, textiles, and *objets d'art*. The most important artifact by far from a cultural and historical standpoint is pottery whether in whole vessels or mere shards.<sup>11</sup> It is ubiquitous and trans-historical, covering the range from crude examples of Neolithic times to highly sophisticated and aesthetically pleasing works of art at the end of the Old Testament period. It consists of indigenous production in addition to exotic imports from the Aegean, Cyprus, Anatolia, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and even more distant places. Enough examples abound from all these sources that they can be plotted along lines of increasing development of manufacture, form, style, and utility. In other words, a ceramic typology can be constructed that permits experts in the field to arrange the objects in chronological sequence in addition to geographic provenance. Indeed, there is general consensus that well-represented pieces can be dated within a decade or two of their creation, especially in later periods.

Consequently, it is important to recognize that artifacts—even inscriptions—are essentially mute, unable to interpret themselves. They must be understood against the background in which they originated and in terms of a context of many other data including the Bible itself. A piece of pottery—no less than a biblical text—must be “exegeted” by a rigid methodology if it is to have a message that is informative and credible. The reader is therefore directed to the matter of the interpretation of archaeological remains.

#### THE INTERPRETATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

No fragment of information—literary or otherwise—is self-interpreting; it always calls for outside help to give it meaning. “Outside help” does not mean the “reader” of the object either, for a reader will interpret what is read according to his or her own biases and background. Rather, the outside help consists of contexts within which information is found and the connections among pieces of data that all together constitute the whole. To state it in terms of texts—especially biblical texts—a fundamental rule of hermeneutics is that the obscure must be understood in the light of the clear and that parts must be interpreted with a view to

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<sup>11</sup> For the most authoritative study, see Ruth Amiran, *Ancient Pottery of the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Masada Press, 1969).

their interrelationship.<sup>12</sup> This is true also of silent “witnesses”: mute objects like walls and pots that stand exposed before the eye of the excavator but that have no intrinsic meaning in and of themselves. Even inscriptions that stand alone have an ambiguous message until they are placed alongside others with which they share common language, genre, times, and circumstances. This is why archaeologists are so insistent on the idea that artifacts, if they are to yield the best information, must be located *in situ*, that is, in the precise spot in which they were found in the ruins.<sup>13</sup> This establishes the context of their last use or at least their last appearance before they were covered by the debris of the ages. Sadly, the museums of the world, and especially private collections, are filled with relics of the past that may be beautiful to see and admire but that have little to contribute to an understanding of the historical culture that produced them.

#### THE INTEGRATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL DATA

Attention must now be directed to the synthesis of text and trowel, of poetics and pottery. What is the relationship between the silent or, at best, non-contextual witnesses of archaeological discovery on the one hand and the message of the Bible on the other? Can they be mutually informative and if so, how? What principles and practices of sound method must be brought to bear in order to ensure credible and sensible outcomes? The answer lies largely in the attitude one has to these respective sides of the equation.

The investigator who believes firmly that the Bible is the fully inspired Word of God, inerrant in all it has to say about matters of faith and history, will obviously begin with that premise and will grant the biblical text priority as a standard against which all other witnesses must be measured. The secularist, on the other hand, is likely to view the Bible with great skepticism with respect to its “non-religious” value for, it is argued, the Bible was not written to be a work of history but merely a collection of ancient myths, sagas, and legends with little or no basis in

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<sup>12</sup> Moisés Silva, “Who Needs Hermeneutics Anyway?” in Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Moisés Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 20-22.

<sup>13</sup> For method in general, see Currid, *Doing Archaeology*, 49-56.

actual fact. To him, the fruits of archaeological research must have pride of place. Should the Bible happen to correlate with evidence from that source, so be it. Should it not, it must be deemed unreliable and rejected entirely as any kind of reliable testimony.

This said, should an apparent contradiction between the Bible and extra-biblical data automatically mean the latter must be given little weight or ignored altogether? Or might it not be possible that biblical texts once thought to be perfectly understood must, in the light of new evidence, be reconsidered and if not radically reinterpreted at least nuanced in a slightly different direction? And if that is fair, is it not also incumbent on interpreters of archaeological remains to adjust their thinking about their conclusions one way or the other in light of the plain meaning of biblical texts? This article will now address some of the shortcomings of both sides of the issue.

### MISUSE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA: SOME TEST CASES

In this and the following section only a few of the more important and famous examples can be cited. In some instances the misuse is by critics who overstate the case for Israel's dependence on surrounding cultures for the most significant aspects of their faith or who misinterpret the data in a manner that goes against the Bible's own testimony. In other cases, conservatives eager to defend the Bible against such attack have made use of archaeological findings in uncritical ways that have resulted in mishandling the data and bringing reproach upon the whole apologetic enterprise. This and the following section will list examples of finds either in the order in which they appear in the Old Testament or in chronological sequence.

#### *Enuma Elish: The Sumero-Babylonian Creation Epic*

Among the treasures unearthed in the famous library of King Ashurbanipal of Assyria was a collection of cuneiform tablets narrating, among other things, an account of creation.<sup>14</sup> The original written form of the epic is dated to at least the latter part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, a full thousand years before Moses and the Genesis account of creation. Critical scholars soon argued that the similarities between the cuneiform

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<sup>14</sup> Benjamin R. Foster, "Epic of Creation," *Context of Scripture*, 1:390-402.

and biblical versions (which have been greatly overstated) “proved” that the Genesis rendition was borrowed from the Babylonian, especially since they had already denied the Genesis account to Moses, placing it instead in the period of the Babylonian exile where the Jews were most likely to have learned of ancient Mesopotamian traditions.<sup>15</sup> While there are superficial points of contact between the two versions, more careful study has made quite clear that the differences far outweigh the similarities. The remaining resemblances can well be explained by postulating that the Mesopotamian account is a garbled, highly mythologized memory of the original creation story preserved faithfully in the Bible. This would explain other creation legends known throughout the world that have at least some common motifs.

### *The Sargon Legend*

The founder of the Akkadian Empire in the 24<sup>th</sup> century BC, Sargon is said to have been born to a priestess mother who placed him in a basket when he was an infant in order to trust him to the beneficence of the gods.<sup>16</sup> He was rescued by a common laborer who also reared him, and thanks to the goodness of Ishtar, he eventually became the cupbearer to King Ur-Zababa of Kish. Comparison to Moses comes immediately to mind but again the differences are far more apparent than the similarities. The characters surrounding the two persons are vastly different as are their eventual outcomes. Those who try to suggest that the story of Moses is an offshoot of the Sargon legend overlook the very common ancient Near Eastern practice of exposing unwanted children to the elements.

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<sup>15</sup> Heidel referred to this tendency among early critics while disavowing it himself. See Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) 132-39.

<sup>16</sup> Brian Lewis, *The Sargon Legend* (Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1980).

***The Nuzi Archives***<sup>17</sup>

The city-state of Nuzu, located in what is now east central Iraq, was home to a thriving Hurrian population in the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 BC). Excavators found there hundreds of clay tablets discussing all manner of legal and social customs that appear at first glance to have Old Testament parallels. For example, they permit childless couples to have children by a surrogate mother or to adopt a son to inherit their estate and take care of them in their old age. They also show that the blessing of a dying patriarch was irrevocable. The connections with Abraham (Gen 16:1-6; 15:3; cf. 24:1) and Isaac (Gen 27:33) seem most evident. However, the Nuzi materials describe customs of non-Semites who lived 600 years or so after the biblical patriarchs. Conservatives who latch onto them in order to prove the historicity of patriarchal traditions have no basis for doing so. However, Hammurabi's law (ca. 1750 BC) and tablets from Alalakh (ca. 1650) reflect some of the same customs, thereby providing some support for the Bible's testimony.

***Nelson Glueck's Surface Surveys***

Support for the late date of the exodus (ca. 1250 BC) appeared at one time to be strengthened by the Trans-Jordan travels of the famous American archaeologist Nelson Glueck.<sup>18</sup> He examined pottery found everywhere on the surface of the ground but none from the Late Bronze Age (1500-1200 BC). He concluded there could have been no population of Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, and others encountered by Israel at that time so the exodus must have been later. However, recent excavations in the region have yielded evidence of important cities and towns throughout the Late Bronze period, notably at Tell Hesban, Tell Jalul, and Tell Umairi. The arguments advanced by Glueck can no longer be sustained.

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<sup>17</sup> Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 219-20 (cf. Ernest R. Lacheman, ed., *Studies on the Civilization and Culture of Nuzi and the Hurrians*, 14 vols. [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981]).

<sup>18</sup> Nelson Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (Cambridge, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1970).

***Kuntillet ‘Ajrud***

Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, which is located deep in the Negev, has yielded ruins of a high place where, according to an inscription found there, Yahweh and his consort Asherah were worshiped.<sup>19</sup> Liberal scholars have seized upon this evidence to make the point that at the period in view (7<sup>th</sup> century BC) Israel was a polytheistic community with pure Yahwism not yet having come to a position of exclusivity. Such a conclusion far outruns the full evidence, however, for all that can be known so far is that a religious syncretism was practiced at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud, a fact the Bible itself admits was true elsewhere as well (cf. 2 Kgs 17:7-23). This by no means proves that a perverted Yahwism was Israel’s official or normative religion any more than doctrinal deviations in any period of the history of the church can be recognized as orthodox expressions of the faith.

LEGITIMATE APPROPRIATION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA:  
SOME TEST CASES  
WITH REGARD TO ANTIQUITY OF THE ALPHABET

The question as to whether or not Moses could have had access to an alphabetic script and therefore could have written the Pentateuch in its present form appears now to be answered with a resounding affirmative. In earlier times the invention of an alphabet was attributed to the Phoenicians who flourished at 1200-1000 BC or so, some centuries later than the traditional date of Moses.<sup>20</sup> In the 1930s, a graffiti Semitic alphabet was discovered at Serabit el-Khadem in the Sinai desert, dated by Albright to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, thus roughly contemporary to Moses.<sup>21</sup> Even more recently a similar alphabet was found carved on the face of a

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<sup>19</sup> J. A. Emerton, “New Light on Israelite Religion: The Implications of the Inscriptions from Kuntillet ‘Ajrud,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 94 (1982): 2-20. For response, see Chang-Ho C. Jo, “Is Kuntillet ‘Ajrud a Cultic Center? A Psychological and Archaeological Reassessment,” *Near Eastern Archaeological Society Bulletin*, New Series 39-40 (1995): 17-18.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Naveh, *Origins of the Alphabets* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Publishing House, 1994) 14.

<sup>21</sup> W. F. Albright, “The Early Alphabetic Inscriptions from Sinai and Their Decipherment,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 110 (1948): 6-22.

cliff at Wadi el-Hol in deep South Egypt.<sup>22</sup> This one, from ca. 1900 BC, antedates Moses by 450 years. The conclusion is that Moses as a Semite not only had no need to write the Pentateuch in some cumbersome script such as hieroglyphics or cuneiform but also had at hand a Semitic alphabet already long in use before his time.

### ***Hittite Treaty Texts***

The discovery in the 1920s of treaty texts at Boghazkeui (the site of the ancient Hittite capital city Hattushash) has shed a great deal of light on both the date of Deuteronomy and its form and purpose.<sup>23</sup> These writings—known as “suzerain-vassal” treaty texts—were records of agreements between the great Hittite kings and subject rulers in which the Hittites offered protection and sustenance to their vassals in turn for the payment of taxes and tribute in addition to unfeigned loyalty. In content they consist of parts that are remarkably similar to the structure of Deuteronomy and that address the same kinds of concerns. Since these texts date to the Late Bronze Age (the period of Moses and the Pentateuch), there can be little doubt that Moses consciously adopted them as models in order to communicate the covenant nature of Deuteronomy to his people in an idiom familiar to them and that they could easily grasp. The only other similar documents originated in 7<sup>th</sup> century Assyria, the time usually assigned to the composition of Deuteronomy by source-critical scholars. However, these later examples lack many of the features of both the Hittite and biblical models and thus fail to make a case for a late, non-Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy.<sup>24</sup>

### ***The Merneptah (or Merenptah) Stele***

Advocates of a 1250 date of the exodus under Pharaoh Rameses II find themselves in great difficulty thanks to the Merneptah Stele, a monument composed by the pharaoh of that name who immediately

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<sup>22</sup> *The New York Times* (14 November 1999): 1, 10.

<sup>23</sup> Viktor Korošec, *Hethitische Staatsverträge* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche, 1931). The connection of these texts to the Old Testament was made especially by G. E. Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 17 (1954): 50-76.

<sup>24</sup> K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 289-304.

succeeded Rameses.<sup>25</sup> In it he boasts of having launched a campaign against Canaan and having defeated its inhabitants including especially Israel. Indeed, this is the earliest time Israel is mentioned outside the Bible. The problem is that since Moses led Israel from Egypt following the death of the king from whom he fled (i.e. Rameses), the exodus would have had to occur under Merneptah. However, Merneptah claims to have attacked Israel in Canaan in his fifth year leaving only five years between the escape from Egypt until Israel was safely ensconced in Canaan. The forty years of wilderness wandering obviously have had to be concluded. The Merneptah Stele thus appears to seal the fate of a late exodus.

### ***The Tell Dan Inscription***

It has become fashionable in recent years for critics to adopt minimalist views that question the historicity of Old Testament events earlier than the exile. Even such famous characters as David and his royal descendants have by and large been relegated to the realm of legend and fancy. More than thirty years ago, Israeli archaeologists commenced a massive dig at Tell Dan, the site of the infamous shrine erected by the apostate king of Israel, Jeroboam. After uncovering the ruins of a cult center including a high place with a huge stepped altar, they came across an inscription carved into a rock that had been used secondarily as part of the protective walls of the city.<sup>26</sup> The inscription, dating from the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century and written in Aramaic, describes battles waged by an Aramean king against Israel and Judah, which he calls *bytdwd*, “house of David.” This reference to David by name, along with what may be now regarded as a second reference (see following), places David’s existence on solid, indisputable historical grounds. Despite feeble responses on the part of skeptics who explain the name David in a host of ways so as to relegate it as unimportant,<sup>27</sup> archaeology has provided great opposition to the minimalist school.

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<sup>25</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, “The (Israel) Stela of Merneptah,” *Context of Scripture*, 2:40-41.

<sup>26</sup> Avraham Biran and Joseph Naveh, “An Aramaic Stele Fragment from Tel Dan,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 43 (1993): 81-82; and, “The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 45 (1995): 1-18.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Frederick H. Cryer, “Betdawd’ Miscellany: Dwd, Dwd’, or Dwdh?” *Scandinavian Journal of Theology* 9 (1995): 52-58; Philip R. Davies, “Bytdwd

### ***The Samaria Ivories***

The Bible, in a kind of epitaph of King Ahab (874-853 BC), speaks of the fact that “the rest of the events of Ahab’s reign, along with all his accomplishments, the ivory palace he built, and all the cities he built, are written about in the Historical Record of Israel’s kings” (1 Kgs 22:39). Though clearly the intent is not to suggest that the palace was of solid ivory, excavators of Samaria, capital of the Northern Kingdom, found hundreds of ivory fragments in and about the palace complex that testify to the accuracy of the Old Testament in even a relatively minor detail.

### ***The Mesha Inscription***

Also from the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century, this artifact, known otherwise as the “Moabite Stone,” recounts the hostile relationship between Mesha, king of Moab, and Joram of Israel, a contretemps described in some detail in the Old Testament as well (2 Kgs 3:1-27).<sup>28</sup> Though the accounts do not fully agree in either detail or in overall perspective they do complement each other and give modern readers an opportunity to read of a biblical event through the eyes of another witness to it. Therefore, just as the author of Kings attributed Israel’s success to Yahweh (3:10, 13, 18), so the Moabite version ascribed to Moab’s god Chemosh the ability to succeed and prosper. The greatest value in such a discovery is not necessarily a proof of the reality of the biblical event described but the revelation of the larger ideological and theological world in which God’s people lived.

### ***The Siloam Inscription***

Summarizing King Hezekiah’s great achievements, 2 Kings 20:20 states “he made the pool and the tunnel and brought water into the city [of Jerusalem].” The situation that demanded this was the invasion of Judah

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and *Swkt Dwyd: A Comparison*,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 64 (1994): 23-24; and, Niels Peter Lemche and Thomas L. Thompson, “Did Biran Kill David? The Bible in the Light of Archaeology,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 64 (1994): 3-22.

<sup>28</sup> John A. Dearman, *Studies in the Mesha Inscription and Moab* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

by King Sennacherib of Assyria in 701 BC. The pool in mind is the Pool of Siloam and the water supply from outside the city originated in the Gihon Spring. It had long been speculated that the tunnel at the pool was the very one to which the biblical text alluded, but only when a boy bathing in the pool found an inscription on the tunnel wall in 1880 was it put beyond doubt that this was, indeed, Hezekiah's tunnel. Besides this proof—important in itself—is evidence of a degree of engineering that still astounds modern builders. The inscription ends with these words: “On the day of the piercing through the stonecutters struck through each to meet his fellow, axe against axe. Then ran the water from the spring to the pool for twelve hundred cubits.”<sup>29</sup> The archaeological contribution here is both confirmatory and illuminative; it offers proof of a biblical notation and supplies insight into ancient technology.

### ***The Lachish Letters***

In the days of Jeremiah, the Babylonians began their conquest of the West, including Judah. In addition to the information supplied in the writings of the prophet, a number of letters written on ostraca (clay sherds) have come to light from Tell ed-Duweir (ancient Lachish). These were found beginning in 1935, and though quite fragmentary, provide still another witness to the tragic days just preceding Jerusalem's capture and utter destruction. Jeremiah rather dispassionately refers to Nebuchadnezzar's campaign against Jerusalem at about 588 BC and says, “the king of Babylon's army was attacking Jerusalem and all of Judah's remaining cities—against Lachish and Azekah, for only they were left among Judah's fortified cities” (Jer 34:7). Lachish 5 sounds a much more plaintive note: “It will be known that we are watching the (fire)-signals of Lachish according to the code which my lord gave us, for we cannot see Azekah.”<sup>30</sup> These words from an eyewitness add a great deal to Jeremiah's uncharacteristically laconic reportage of these tragic events.

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<sup>29</sup> N. H. Snaith, “The Siloam Inscription,” *Documents from Old Testament Times*, ed. D. Winton Thomas (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1958) 210.

<sup>30</sup> Dennis Pardee, “Lachish Ostraca,” *Context of Scripture*, 3:80 (cf. James M. Lindenberger, *Ancient Aramaic and Hebrew Letters* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003], 124-32).

*The Dead Sea Scrolls*<sup>31</sup>

The Dead Sea Scrolls, though perhaps of greater value on the whole to New Testament rather than Old Testament studies, have made a powerful impact upon understanding the Old Testament text. Prior to the discovery of these remarkable documents in 1947 there was no objective way the Masoretic Text could be validated in terms of its adherence to the ancient manuscripts of Old Testament times. Until then the Hebrew Bible was based on the so-called Ben-Asher family of manuscripts that dated no earlier than approximately AD 930. These were in turn dependent on a presumed tradition of manuscripts from pre-Christian times but none of these survived for various reasons. Therefore, text critics had to rely largely on ancient versions such as the Greek Septuagint, the Syriac Peshitta, the Aramaic Targums, and the Latin Vetus Testamentum and Vulgate if they were to attempt to recover the Hebrew texts of thousand years earlier.

Of the four hundred or more compositions represented at Qumran, all but one of the Old Testament books are so far attested, the book of Esther being the exception. The biblical texts vary in both the extent of their preservation and their adherence to the Masoretic Text. Some are clearly more in agreement with other Hebrew text traditions, including a number that appear to be based on the same Hebrew *Vorlage* as the Septuagint. On the whole, however, the so-called Proto-Masoretic Text was favored and is most abundantly represented. In some cases—notably 1QIsa<sup>a</sup>--sheet after sheet of the Dead Sea text is virtually identical to the Masoretic Text of a millennium later. Overall, the Dead Sea Scrolls have validated the accuracy and primacy of the Masoretic Text and therefore give confidence in the faithful preservation of God's Word through the ages.

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<sup>31</sup> The literature on the Scrolls is so vast that not even a representative sample can be listed here. For the Scrolls' contribution to the matter especially in view here—textual criticism—see Frank Moore Cross Jr. *The Ancient Library of Qumran* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961); Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 101-17; and, Peter W. Flint, ed., *The Bible at Qumran: Text, Shape, and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

## CONCLUSION

Archaeology in the abstract is neither friend nor foe of the Bible and the Christian faith. It is a silent witness to the past that has no independent authority and that cannot interpret itself. Therefore, it is useful only as it becomes a tool in the hands and minds of human interpreters. How it is used depends, of course, on the disposition of the user. Those who wish to bring it to the service of the written Word of God can find it to be an invaluable aid in understanding, defending, and proclaiming that Word. On the other hand, those who bring the Word to the service of archaeology will use and abuse the Word as they see fit to make it conform to the “assured results” of modern criticism and infidelity.



**UNIFORMITARIANISM IN  
OLD TESTAMENT STUDIES:  
A Review of *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old  
Testament* by John H. Walton.  
Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006. 368 pp., paper, \$24.99.**

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*Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* is a difficult book to review, which is not because it is hard to read, but because it is a tangled web of orthodox/conservative assertions blended with uniformitarian concepts arising from evolution and critical scholarship (both of which typically regard the Bible as only a human document). The author has a theological background that this blending reflects. He has been professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College since leaving Moody Bible Institute, where he taught for twenty years. In coming to Wheaton College, he was returning to his academic roots, for the Wheaton Graduate School is where he earned his Master of Arts degree. His doctoral dissertation was from Hebrew Union College and concerned the Tower of Babel. Walton's academic background therefore has included involvement in fairly conservative venues such as Moody Bible Institute, in addition to less conservative ones (Wheaton College and Graduate School, and Hebrew Union College).

While at Moody Bible Institute, Walton wrote a paper about the Tower of Babel, which included the kinds of issues discussed in his doctoral dissertation.<sup>1</sup> This review illustrates the blend of conservative and uniformitarian features in his thinking. Walton maintained that the Tower of Babel was historical, saying that the "tower, as a ziggurat, embodied the concepts of pagan polytheism as it developed in the early stages of urbanization."<sup>2</sup> In contrast, he took issue with other elements of the Tower of Babel story that would appear to be firmly established. For instance, in Genesis 9:1-3, God had commanded post-Flood man to

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Walton, "The Mesopotamian Background of the Tower of Babel Account and Its Implications," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995): 155-75.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 155.

replenish the earth. Obedience to this command required dispersion; therefore, the gathering of all mankind at Babel in the beginning of Genesis 11 signifies that there was at least disobedience, if not rebellion, against God. Genesis 11:4 states there was a desire not to disperse, “lest we be scattered.” Furthermore, Nimrod is described as the instigator of the project at Babel (Gen 10:10). A simple inference is that Nimrod was leading a rebellion against God. *Linguistic confusion and the hardship it imposed would appear to be judgment, but God does not judge people for obeying Him.* In Genesis 11:7, the Trinity are quoted as saying, “Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.” This is not a neutral statement; it is a decree of judgment. If there were, however, no rebellion at Babel, why was there a need for judgment?

Walton acknowledged, “the builders of the [Tower] desired *not* to be scattered abroad,” but continued, “Although this statement has often been interpreted as an indication of disobedience on the part of the builders, such a view cannot be warranted.”<sup>3</sup> One of his reasons for rejecting this interpretation is that scattering “in nomadic and seminomadic societies . . . is counterproductive to cultural continuity.”<sup>4</sup> Walton’s implicit assumption that the society at Babel was “nomadic and seminomadic” is a *uniformitarian* one, overlooking the possibility that world climate and cultural conditions may not have been the same several millennia in the past as they are now. However, Africa and the Near East are well known to have experienced *non-uniform* changes in the last four thousand years. For example, the Sahara desert in North Africa did not exist at one time. “Around 2000 BC there began a long and eventually disastrous natural change. The climate gradually became much drier. The Sahara received less and less rain. Its rivers began to fail and, little by little, its farming peoples had to move away and find new homes. . . . By about 500 BC this complicated movement of peoples was already in the past, and the Sahara had become the dry and stony wasteland that we know today.”<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately Walton appears not to

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 166.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 167.

<sup>5</sup> Basil Davidson, *A Short History of West Africa to the Nineteenth Century* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1966) 12-13.

have integrated the non-uniformitarian implications of this significant climate change into his thinking.<sup>6</sup>

*Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* exhibits the same blend of conservative and uniformitarian thinking evident in Walton's earlier academic involvement. It is critical, however, to distinguish Walton's eclecticism from the denial of biblical historicity characteristic of theological liberals. The liberal position denies the historical existence of the Tower of Babel, for example.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, liberals assert "Genesis is essentially a folk literature,"<sup>8</sup> Genesis 1–11 are "imaginative stories,"<sup>9</sup> the Hebrew story of Babel "would be most unlikely to have had any reference to the origin of language,"<sup>10</sup> and, "it is apparent [that the author of Genesis 11] is not really interested in the origin of languages."<sup>11</sup> *These liberal positions are not Walton's positions.* Walton's outlook can be described as conservative with respect to biblical historicity in general, but susceptible to uniformitarianism with respect to origins and cultural history.

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<sup>6</sup> Walton, "Mesopotamian Background," 172. Walton's uniformitarian bias is ironic in light of the fact that he recognized the pronounced shift to a more arid climate in the Near East several millennia ago, quoting Hans Nissen to substantiate his point. "The results of studies of the ancient climate and of the changes in the amount of water in the Mesopotamian river system and in the Gulf . . . now present us with a clearer picture of the developments in southern Babylonia. The climatic changes documented for the middle of the fourth millennium seem, within a space of two to three hundred years, to have stemmed the floods [i.e. flooding decreased and aridity increased] that regularly covered large tracts of land and to have drained such large areas that in a relatively short period of time large parts of Babylonia, particularly throughout the south, became attractive for new permanent settlements" (*The Early History of the Ancient Near East, 9000-2000 BC* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988] 67). By contrast, a generation earlier it was maintained that the Near East had experienced no sweeping climate changes of this sort. See Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: A History of the Negev* (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1959) xii, 7, 16, 17, in which Glueck maintained that a rigid uniformitarianism held with respect to climate. Significantly, Glueck (1900-71) was connected with Hebrew Union College throughout his adult life, earning his first degree there in 1918, and serving as its president from 1948 to 1971. Since Walton's doctorate is from Hebrew Union College, it is likely that he read and was influenced by Glueck's views.

<sup>7</sup> John C. L. Gibson, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 207.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 209.

## WALTON'S ESPOUSAL OF BIBLICAL HISTORICITY

A conservative influence in Walton's college years was his "encounter" with *Archaeology and Bible History* by Joseph Free, a "former Wheaton professor."<sup>12</sup> Walton credited this book with setting the course of his academic future, for "It was in the very year that I read that book that I made the decision to pursue Old Testament studies as a vocational discipline." The author of this review can personally testify that this is one of the finest books on biblical archeology—perhaps the *very* best—he has ever read.<sup>13</sup> *Archeology and Bible History* first appeared in 1950 as Wheaton College was shifting from a conservative to a more accommodationist stance. Joseph Free himself was scholarly but on the first page of text warned, "Many books on archaeology and the Bible are written by liberals,"<sup>14</sup> and Free was determined not to reflect a liberal stance in denial of biblical historicity. Walton, in *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, reflects this view generally in accepting biblical events as historical. For example, according to Walton, Eden "is presented as a real place" (p. 125); Adam and Eve are our "genetic parents" (p. 209); and, Shinar is "rightly [connected] to the area called Sumer" (p. 120). Walton's equation of Shinar with Sumer is especially interesting, because in earlier years he had asserted that, "Whether Shinar = Sumer is now open to question. . . ."<sup>15</sup>

Walton also was careful generally to distinguish God's revelation in the Old Testament, and the religious practices of Israel, from the faith and practice of the surrounding contemporaneous Near Eastern cultures. For instance, he stated, "Commandment 4 is positive rather than negative because there is nothing like a Sabbath observance in the ancient Near East" (p. 159); "for divination to be acceptable in Israel, it had to be entirely binary," thus disallowing the reading of entrails or oil on water (p. 271); the Old Testament was written as a covenant, not as a typical Near Eastern "treatise" (p. 293); and, *Sheol* has "no known antecedent in other cultures or religions of the ancient world" (p. 320). He elevated the biblical record by concluding, "Nothing in the ancient Near East

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<sup>12</sup> Wheaton College, "Faculty Dr. Walton" [online] (accessed 1 July 2009) available from <http://www.wheaton.edu/Theology/Faculty/walton>.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History* (1950; reprint, Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1956).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* vii.

<sup>15</sup> Walton, "Mesopotamian Background," 155.

compares to the extent of revelation that Yahweh gives to his people” (p. 298).

### WALTON’S MISTAKEN BIBLICAL COSMOLOGY

Walton’s mention of the Sabbath and *Sheol* as concepts unique to Old Testament revelation suggests that by the time the Old Testament was penned, many beliefs and practices held early in the history of the world had been either forgotten or corrupted. The Sabbath, for example, predated the Mosaic law because it was a commemoration of the seven-day creation week (Gen 2:1-2; Exod 20:9-11). Unlike other time units, it has no basis in astronomy<sup>16</sup> and did not originate from lunar phases.<sup>17</sup> Since the creation was a universal event, at one time the Sabbath observance would have been universally recognized, but by Moses’ time, the Near East had abandoned the Sabbath. In summary, *there appears to have been a corruption or degradation in faith and practice between the earliest history and the penning of the Pentateuch*. However, Walton appears to be unaware of this fact, which is most apparent in his description of ancient Near Eastern cosmology. He began by asserting that the ancient Near East accepted a three tier cosmology consisting of a *flat earth* with the netherworld below and the celestial sphere—a *crystalline or metallic firmament*—above (p. 166). Uniformitarians have long assumed without warrant that this *three-story cosmology* was the universal cultural belief in antiquity. Paul Seely, in an old article for the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, claimed that the “Bible assumes that the universe consists of three stories.”<sup>18</sup> “[All] parties [considered] the earth to be a flat disk,” Walton now maintained (p. 172). This is an inaccurate and therefore primitive cosmology, of course, which harmonizes nicely with the uniformitarian premise that antiquity in general was primitive.

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<sup>16</sup> “The year, month and day all have clear astronomical bases. Our 7-day week, however, does not have an obvious link with any heavenly cycle” (Duncan Steele, *Marking Time* [New York: Wiley, 2000] 73).

<sup>17</sup> “Those who believe that our seven-day week has derived from the lunar cycle seem to forget that the latter is not really a twenty-eight day cycle” (Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week* [New York: Free Press, 1985] 9).

<sup>18</sup> Paul Seely, “The Three-Storied Universe,” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 21 (March 1968): 18.

The modern belief that the ancients thought the earth was flat (viz. the *flat-earth myth*) has fallen on hard times, however. “It was conventional wisdom among both early- and late medieval thinkers that the world was round.”<sup>19</sup> So why is the flat-earth myth the “number one most common historical illusion”? According to historian Jeffrey Burton Russell, “No one before the 1830s believed that medieval people thought that the earth was flat. . . . The reason for promoting both the specific lie about the sphericity of the earth and the general lie that religion and science are in natural and eternal conflict in Western society, is to defend Darwinism. . . . The flat-earth lie was ammunition against the creationists. The argument was simple and powerful, if not elegant: ‘Look how stupid these Christians are. They are always getting in the way of science and progress. These people who deny evolution today are exactly the same sort of people as those idiots who for at least a thousand years denied that the earth was round. How stupid can you get?’”<sup>20</sup> Of course these statements are about the fallacy of thinking that people in *medieval* times believed the earth is flat. However, Russell made these remarks at an American Scientific Affiliation conference. The Affiliation has not only embraced Russell’s claims that medieval people knew the earth is round, but Gleason Archer wrote for the American Scientific Affiliation and characterized Paul Seely (mentioned previously) as presenting “a distorted caricature of the Old Testament view of the universe.”<sup>21</sup> Archer specifically challenged Seely’s concept of a metallic firmament, but *he also dismissed the claim that the rest of the three-story cosmology is biblical*, saying, “So much for the ‘middle story’ and the ‘bottom story’—to use Seely’s quaint (but quite unbiblical) terminology.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Inventing the Flat Earth: Columbus and Modern Historians* (New York: Praeger, 1991) ix. See also Lesley B. Cormack, “Myth 3: That Medieval Christians Taught That the Earth Was Flat,” in *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009) 178-86.

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, “The Myth of the Flat Earth” [online] (American Scientific Affiliation Conference, Westmont College, 4 August 1997, accessed 4 July 2009) available from <http://www.veritas-ucsb.org/library/russell/FlatEarth.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Gleason L. Archer, “The Metallic Sky: A Tragedy of Modern Pseudo-Scholarship,” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 31 (December 1979): 220 [online] (American Scientific Affiliation, accessed 4 July 2009) available from <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1979/JASA12-79Archer.html>.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the three-story cosmology cannot have been the universal belief in the earliest history, for mankind had experienced a sudden dispersion from the Tower of Babel over the entire earth, which would have been mapped as round, not flat. *Therefore the three-story cosmology in the ancient Near East of Moses' time must have been a degraded, corrupted belief.* However, Walton claimed that the ancient Near East “conceived of the earth as supported on pillars” and that the “language of the Old Testament reflects this view, and no texts in the Bible seek to correct or refute it” (p. 167). A few pages later, he repeated, “Yahweh did not reveal an alternative cosmic geography in the Old Testament” (p. 175). *Note that Walton did not say that the Bible actually teaches a three-story cosmology.* Walton appeared not to be informed of the developments discussed in the previous paragraph. He maintained that ancient Near Eastern “diagrams and texts” consistently present a three-story cosmology (p. 171), but he would do better to acknowledge that these are only the *known* sources, and that other ancient sources confounding this view may come to attention.

There is an even more unfortunate aspect of Walton’s insistence that the Bible implicitly accepts the three-story cosmology. Modern misconceptions about ancient views of the earth and cosmology have a history of being exploited to challenge biblical inerrancy and the legitimacy of Christianity. The medieval flat-earth myth was designed for this purpose, as noted previously. *However, the three-story cosmology has also been used to question biblical inerrancy.* According to this method of reasoning, since the Bible teaches—or at least accepts—the three-story cosmology, and since modern science knows this is false, Paul Seely concluded that one must not “insist that the Bible be inerrant every time it touches on science. . . .”<sup>23</sup> This is not a light matter. Referring to Seely’s article, Harold Lindsell concluded, “The American Scientific Affiliation [has] people who do not believe that the Bible is free from error in the whole and in the part.” The “infection” of unbelief therefore “has spread into parachurch organizations that were created for the purpose of maintaining a full belief in biblical infallibility.”<sup>24</sup> Misled by his uniformitarian premise, *Walton has*

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<sup>23</sup> Seely, “Three-Storied Universe,” 18.

<sup>24</sup> Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976)

*unwittingly promoted as biblical a version of cosmology that has no biblical warrant and has been an enemy of biblical faith.*

#### WALTON AS A RECIPIENT OF A CARTESIAN/UNIFORMITARIANISM HERITAGE

*Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* implicitly assumes a uniformitarian view of earth history and culture. In the Bible, however, especially in Genesis 1—11, history is *not* uniformitarian, for the global Flood and other events such as the confounding of languages at Babel were not repeatable. They were *non-uniformitarian* events. A related assumption, also implicit, is (in the words of Carl Henry) “Christian theology unreservedly champions reason as an instrument for organizing data and drawing inferences from it, and as a logical discriminating faculty competent to test religious claims.”<sup>25</sup> The Bible certainly presents its claims as rational, in passages such as Isaiah 1:18 (“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord . . .”), but the Bible’s allowance for *reason* never signifies a displacement of *revelation*. Even a valid emphasis on human reason, as in the statement by Carl Henry, must be constrained by revelation, because the human mind *does* tend to belittle and even displace *biblical* revelation, preferring lies rather than truth (Prov 14:12; 16:25; Jer 17:9). This displacement happened most famously in Western culture with the French mathematician and philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650).

In 1637, Descartes published *A Discourse on Method*.<sup>26</sup> Descartes attempted to set forth principles that would allow man to discover truth by his own investigation unaided by revelation. His first principle was the famous phrase, “Je pense, donc je suis”—“I think, therefore I am,”<sup>27</sup> often rendered in Latin as *Cogito ergo sum*, from his *Principia Philosophiae* (*Principles of Philosophy*) of 1644.<sup>28</sup> Descartes concluded that truth could be discovered by *deduction*, a process of reaching specific conclusions starting with general premises. However, the

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<sup>25</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, TX: Word, 1976) 1:226.

<sup>26</sup> Rene Descartes, *A Discourse on Method*, trans. John Veitch (originally published 1637; English translation, London: Dent, 1912; reprint, 1977).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>28</sup> Rene Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy*, trans. John Veitch (originally published 1644; English translation, London: Dent, 1912; reprint, 1977) 168.

conclusions acquired via deduction can be no better than the premises. A false premise can lead to false conclusions. It is because of this fatal flaw in Descartes' logic that *his methodology opened the door for the potential ascendancy of false origins concepts in all the sciences*. This potential was not realized in most sciences until the 1700s, and did not bear fruit with the public dominance of evolution until the 1800s.

Regardless of Descartes' personal religious beliefs (he claimed to be a devout Roman Catholic and others accused him of being a closet Deist or atheist) contemporary philosopher-mathematician Blaise Pascal summarized the effect of Descartes' philosophy: "I cannot forgive Descartes. In all his philosophy he did his best to dispense with God. But he could not avoid making Him set the world in motion with a flip of His thumb. After that he had no more use for God."<sup>29</sup> Pascal's assessment is an accurate description of the thinking not only of Deism, but also of modern theistic evolution and the day-age theory *in which God is constrained virtually always to act within the constraints of natural law*. As will be evident, this is the view of "creation" which Walton espoused. Therefore, did Descartes' method introduce evolution eventually into all the sciences.<sup>30</sup> In the Christian community, this body of thought supposes that God began the universe somehow, but *since then has been constrained to permit natural law to allow the cosmos to evolve*, as set forth in Big Bang theory and various other evolutionary models.

In the English-speaking world, Descartes' method was most famously insinuated into the church by William Paley.<sup>31</sup> The origin of

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<sup>29</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* 77, trans. W. F. Trotter (New York: Random House, 1941; reprint, Roslyn, NY: Black's Readers Service, 1978) 29 [online] (Internet Archive, accessed 1 July 2009) available from <http://www.archive.org/details/penseestheprovin013046mbp>.

<sup>30</sup> It is true that Descartes established his method to disengage scholarly study from medieval superstition; however, it is also true that Descartes established a precedent of exploiting reason to craft evolutionary models of cosmic origins (*Principles of Philosophy*, Plate X). The cosmos, he said, is made of a fluid divided into sections, each a whirling vortex, somewhat like a hurricane except immensely larger and much less substantial. The solar system is supposed to have evolved from such a vortex. Descartes has the distinction of having developed the first significant evolutionary cosmology in the West since antiquity. His cosmology anticipated—by more than 150 years—the nebular hypothesis for solar system evolution which the atheist Simon de Laplace would advocate in 1796.

<sup>31</sup> Rolland McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled: The Failed Strategy of Modern Evangelicalism* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2004) 198.

evil, for example, cannot be explained by observation of the physical world via Cartesian logic. Paley, therefore, in his *Natural Theology* (1802) attempted to explain *evil* having originated as *good*, saying, “Of the origin of evil no universal solution has been discovered.”<sup>32</sup> This is a true statement as to the beginning of evil in Satan’s heart, but it is not true regarding the entrance of evil into the world, because Genesis 3:1-19 presents the history of the Fall. Genesis 3 also mentions some of the physical effects of the curse on the ground (difficulties in child bearing, “thorns and thistles,” and arduous toil involving “sweat”). Starting after the Flood, God permitted predation (Gen 9:1-3), and Romans 8:20-22 describes the effect of the curse as being universal. Paley’s *Natural Theology*, however, avoided discussion of these biblical passages in the context of the Fall and its aftereffects. Instead, Paley sought to explain as inherently *good* things that are obviously “bad” (see Table 1 which lists some of these items). Paley’s view was that God had created these bad things in their bad (though *not evil*) state, but according to Paley, it would be mistaken to call them “bad.” This is different from saying that God brings good from evil. To Paley, *these bad things were not evil*.

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**Table 1. EVIL ORIGINATING AS “GOOD”: PALEY VERSUS THE BIBLE**

<b>Topic (pages in Paley, 1802)</b>	<b>Biblical Origin</b>
Venomous animals (348-50, 357)	Genesis 9:1-3; Romans 8:20-22
Predation (348-54, 357)	Genesis 9:1-3; Romans 8:20-22
Death of animals (355-56)	Genesis 9:1-3; Romans 5:12, 8:20-22
Uninhabitable, desolate places (388)	Genesis 3:18
Chronic pain (367)	Genesis 3:16; Romans 8:20-22
Disease (368-70)	Romans 8:20-22
Arduous labor and toil (371-72)	Genesis 3:19
Civil strife (372)	Genesis 3:17-19; James 4:1-17
Human evil (376)	Genesis 3:6-8
Uncertainty, instability in life (380-81)	Genesis 3:17-18
Scarcity and want (382)	Genesis 3:18-19
Poverty (382)	Genesis 3:18-19
Suffering, sorrow (390-91)	Genesis 3:16-19; Romans 8:20-22

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<sup>32</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology: or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (Philadelphia: John Morgan, 1802, reprint, Houston: St. Thomas Press, 1972) 364.

*The Cartesian version of reality, in addition to Paley's, is rigidly uniformitarian.* Non-uniformitarian events such as the Fall cannot be incorporated into such a history. One of the most famous results of this distortion involved Charles Darwin (1809-82), who read Paley in his college years at Cambridge.<sup>33</sup> Rather than viewing the Creator as responsible for making obviously *bad* things and calling them *good*, evolutionists such as Darwin chose to believe that there is no Creator. *Therefore an exaggerated insistence on uniformitarianism can become a challenge to Christian faith.*

At Wheaton College, a significant exponent of the Cartesian/uniformitarian view of history was Gordon H. Clark (1902-85), a professor of philosophy there from 1936 to 1943. Clark did not discount revelation as thoroughly as Descartes, but relegated it to a place below “science.” With Clark, “The foundational presupposition is drawn from the Bible, but it is immediately subjected to rational investigation and analysis to determine its veracity.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, one must consult human “authorities” to see if the revealed claim is *reasonable*. Clark rendered John 1:1 as, “In the beginning was logic, and logic was with God and logic was God.”<sup>35</sup> Carl Henry ranked Clark as “one of the profoundest evangelical Protestant philosophers of our time.” His academic career spanned six decades during which he authored over forty books, one of which was a history of philosophy, *Thales to Dewey*, which has been called “the best one-volume history of philosophy in English.”<sup>36</sup> Given Clark’s voluminous output and long career, part of it at Wheaton, it is unlikely that Walton escaped his influence.

### WALTON’S MISTAKEN VIEWS REGARDING ORIGINS

One symptom of a Cartesian/uniformitarian view is an exaggerated reliance on human authority as against revelation. In biblical studies, a

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<sup>33</sup> Aileen Fyfe, “The Reception of William Paley’s Natural Theology in the University of Cambridge,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 30 (September 1997): 321.

<sup>34</sup> McCune, *Promise Unfulfilled*, 198.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon H. Clark, “The Wheaton Lectures,” in *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark*, ed. Ronald H. Nash (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1968) 67.

<sup>36</sup> John W. Robbins, “An Introduction to Gordon H. Clark,” *The Trinity Review* (July/August 1993): 1.

symptom of this exaggerated reliance is an over-emphasis on the *cultural origins* of Scripture. Early in *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, Walton maintained, “since the Bible and other ancient documents use language to communicate, they are bound to a culture” (p. 20). Near the end of this book, he made the even stronger claim that “knowledge of the ancient Near East is *essential* for understanding the biblical text” (p. 325, emphasis added). All would agree that Near Eastern studies can *enrich* one’s Bible reading, but Walton’s claim elevated Near Eastern studies to a *necessity*. One wonders how multiplied generations of uneducated believers could have comprehended the Word of God if this were really true. Even more, the Bible establishes itself at the outset as a document of *universal* scope, which, although penned within certain cultural contexts, transcends all of them. It begins with Genesis 1 making sweeping statements of purpose which apply to all the heavenly bodies in the cosmos (Gene 1:14-18), not to only the earth or a single people on the earth.<sup>37</sup> Walton also overlooked the fact that *language comes from God*, Who used language to *speak* the cosmos into existence,<sup>38</sup> and Who is certainly capable of transcending cultural barriers as He communicates through His Word. According to Walton, however, if the message of the Bible is culturally bound, so is the reader. “[I]mposition of our own cognitive environment on the texts of ancient Israel, which is all too common in confessional circles,” prevents one from accepting the biblical interpretations arising from “critical scholarship” (p. 334), he said. In *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, the “critical scholarship” which Walton had most in mind relates to cosmic origins.

Origins discussions are often where the contest between reason and revelation is most evident. It is significant that the first text page of *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* confronts the reader with the fact that questions of comparative Near Eastern studies are fundamentally a conflict between evolution and revelation. Walton opened by observing, “What the Scopes trial was to the discussion of evolution,” Friedrich Delitzsch’s ‘Babel und Bibel’ lectures were in 1902

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<sup>37</sup> Jonathan F. Henry, “Ye Shall Be as Gods: The Modern Search for Extraterrestrial Life,” in *When Christians Roamed the Earth: Is the Bible-Believing Church Headed for Extinction?*, Ken Ham et al. (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2001) 182.

<sup>38</sup> The phrase “And God said” occurs nine times in the creation account of Genesis 1.

(p. 15), with Delitzsch claiming that the Old Testament had been borrowed, or *evolved*, from Mesopotamian literature. Despite Walton's awareness of this point, he later *displaced* what the Bible says about origins with the (evolutionary) concepts of Near Eastern critical studies.

He began by claiming that in the ancient Near East, "something exists when it has a function, not when it takes up space" (p. 167). Later he clarified what this is supposed to mean: "in the ancient world something came into existence when it was separated out as a distinct entity" (p. 180; see also pp. 97, 183, 184, 198). He added, "The precosmic condition was not lacking in that which was material, it was lacking in order and differentiation" (p. 185). Therefore, the ancient Near East believed in a *process* of "creation" from pre-existing material, actually a kind of *evolutionary* process. This similarity with modern evolution is no surprise since modern evolutionary theory has its roots in antiquity.<sup>39</sup>

So far so good. As with the three-story cosmology, *this ancient Near Eastern version of "creation" must be seen as a degraded, corrupted version of the knowledge man had once possessed*. Sufficiently close in time to creation, it is certain that mankind had remembered the actual creation of the universe rather than a corrupted evolutionary version. However, Walton's uniformitarian bias prevents him from apprehending this point. Instead, he claimed, "also for the Israelites function, not substance, was the focus of creation" (p. 180). *Walton's uniformitarian premise misleads him to impose on the Bible the corrupted view of creation held by the cultures surrounding Israel*.

Ironically, *Walton recognized that this is not what the Bible teaches*. He asserted, "One can argue that the Hebrew verb *bara* ("create") carries the same functional meaning as for other ancient Near Eastern verbs for "create," *though it has not generally been recognized* (p. 183, emphasis added). In other words, Walton realized that what he has stated is not much more than his own personal view. Nevertheless, he continued, "Indeed, the text never uses *bara* in a context in which materials are mentioned . . . we cannot afford to be distracted by our cultural ideas" (p. 183). However, since Genesis 1:1 uses *bara* to speak regarding the earth's creation, and since the earth is certainly material, how could Walton dismiss the material context for *bara* as a "throw-away "cultural idea"? The answer becomes clearer as Walton continued.

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<sup>39</sup> Henry, "Ye Shall Be as Gods," 166.

To Walton, creation “is the process of operating within the parameters of . . . control attributes” (p. 193), which is the same claim that modern theistic evolution makes in saying that God was constrained to follow *natural law* when He “created.”<sup>40</sup> *Therefore, “creation” is really an evolutionary process.* Since to Walton, creation was a process, *bara* cannot signify a fiat creation.

The particular process of “creation” which Walton believes to have happened is a kind of framework hypothesis in which the days of Genesis 1 are presented in symbolic parallelism. There was a presentation of functions on days 1-3, Walton said, then a presentation of functionaries on days 4-6 (p. 198). He further claimed, “Israel shared with the ancient world the idea that events are revelation” (p. 232). This is the same view of Genesis 1, which Bernard Ramm preferred, in which “creation was *revealed* in six days, not performed in six days.”<sup>41</sup> *Therefore, to Walton the days of creation must be symbolic or metaphorical rather than actual.*

Having taken the position that Genesis 1 is symbolism, not history, Walton buttressed this conclusion with the assertion that in the ancient Near East, “narrative does not concern itself primarily with the event—it is much more interested in the outcome” (p. 228). To the extent that this is true, one can conclude, as with ancient Near Eastern cosmology and “creation” stories, a degree of degradation in the recording of history had occurred since the beginning. *However, Walton adopted the “non-historical” nature of ancient Near Eastern narrative to signify that documents appearing to be historical are not really so.* He applied this conclusion to the Old Testament, quoting E. A. Speiser for saying, “The Bible is not so much a chronicle of events worth recording . . . as an interpretation of significant happenings” (p. 226). *Therefore, although Genesis 1 appears to be history, it is not really so.* Of course, this conclusion is consistent with Walton’s assertion that the days in Genesis 1 are not historical. The possibility that historical accounts in the Old Testament could pose challenges to modern (uniformitarian,

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<sup>40</sup> Later, Walton said, “creation involves not only the decreeing of destinies, but the actual initiation of control attributes” (“Mesopotamian Background,” 199). Therefore, he recognized that God is responsible for natural law rather than being subject to it, but he did not reconcile this more accurate statement with his earlier claim.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 222. Ramm did not specify to whom this revelation occurred, such as to Moses on Mount Sinai.

evolutionary) science is dismissed with the comment that concern with documentation “reflects the cultural values of our contemporary Western cognitive environment” (p. 224). *Walton here reached a conclusion that contradicts his own assertions of the historicity of Eden and Adam and Eve.*

However, the claim that the Old Testament, particularly Genesis 1, is unconcerned with history is not defensible, and has been challenged in the journal of the accommodationist American Scientific Affiliation. “Walton [attempted to] demonstrate that the author of Genesis 1 and 2 intends to convey a creation narrative much in the same vein as other creation myths of the ancient near east. If this hypothesis is correct, it seems to follow that Genesis 1 and 2 should not be taken ‘literally,’ meaning that it should not be taken as having much, if any, actual historical content. But is this paradigm consistent with how the Bible interprets itself?”<sup>42</sup> The Apostle Peter claimed (2 Pet 1:16), in recounting “the empirical foundation for the Christian faith,” that “We did not follow cleverly invented stories.”<sup>43</sup> One cannot say therefore that documentation of New Testament events was meticulous, but not in the Old Testament, because *Peter linked the truth of the New Testament to the accuracy of documentation in the Old Testament, and in 2 Peter chapter 3, ultimately to the Genesis creation account.* Addressing non-historical views of Genesis creation such as Walton’s, the American Scientific Affiliation article concluded, “Christian faith is not merely a religion of personal, subjective experience. . . . It is grounded primarily in particular historical facts. . . . But it is hard to imagine how a Christian would be able to mount any sort of rigorous apologetic for the accuracy of the Bible if it does not contain accurate descriptions of the created order, especially when the Bible itself seems to so closely link history with theology (see 1 Cor. 15:14, 17).”<sup>44</sup>

*Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament* includes a number of interesting and helpful points not discussed already, such as

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<sup>42</sup> Krista Kay Bontrager, “The History of the Universe in a Nutshell: Reflections on 2 Peter 3,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 57 (December 2005): 318.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 320.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 320, 323. These assertions are especially significant considering that the author adopted the accommodationist positions that that the Noahic flood was restricted to “the Mesopotamian region” and that the Big Bang was the beginning of the universe (*Ibid.* 322).

mention of the total eclipse visible over Assyria in 763 BC which has “critical importance for both relative and absolute chronology” (p. 67). Walton contrasted God’s revelation to Israel with the “high levels of insecurity and anxiety [which] plagued the system” of revelation in pagan divination rituals (p. 137). He presented a heart-rending Assyrian prayer entitled *A Prayer to Every God*: Although I am constantly looking for help, no one takes me by the hand; When I weep, they do not come to my side. I utter laments, but no one hears me; I am troubled; I am overwhelmed; I cannot see.” Regarding the prayer, he concluded, “This is the plight of those who live in a world without revelation” (p. 145). Reflecting on this prayer is a corrective to the romanticizing of non-Christian traditions now so fashionable in the West. However, the author’s uniformitarian/accommodationist view of origins, and his uniformitarian view of terrestrial and cultural history, are severe difficulties. Harold Lindsell observed, “Almost inevitably, graduates of an institution reflect the viewpoints of their teachers. More than that, they usually go beyond their teachers, and carry their aberrant viewpoints to the farthest extreme.”<sup>45</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Despite the positive aspects of *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, Walton’s biblically and scientifically unwarranted uniformitarianism opens a dangerous potential in the minds of impressionable students for the unfortunate outcome that Lindsell described. Though sold as a college or seminary text, this potential makes it unsuitable for use as a primary text. Its good points make it a suitable supplementary text or a resource for the general reader. Walton is not alone among Christians in espousing an unwarranted uniformitarianism. Gordon H. Clark and William Paley were genuine believers, as was possibly Rene Descartes. They sought to do well through their scholarship. That their conclusions could be exploited to challenge Christian faith is a testimony to human depravity, *but it is also a testimony to the care that Christian scholars must exercise to avoid espousing concepts which could be so used.*

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<sup>45</sup> Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible*, 197.





## THE ERROR OF DIVINE AND MYSTICAL ATTRIBUTIONS WITH REGARD TO THE BLOOD OF CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

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Perspectives in regards to understanding the biblical teaching concerning the blood of Christ have been varied. Reverence for the preciousness of the blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:19) has no doubt been an influential factor among Christians whose theology is generally conservative, who have sought to defend the notion of divine attributions in regards to the blood of Christ. Among generally conservative theologies, one may often encounter statements that the blood of Christ is so precious that it is actually preserved in heaven. There is, however, some extreme teachings concerning the blood of Christ by those whose theology is generally less conservative, and even frequently heretical. These mystical attributions in regards to the blood of Christ have resulted in unbiblical (even pagan) notions regarding the extent of the power of Christ's shed blood. An example of such attributions would include the teaching that a Christian may simply speak the "blood of Christ" to protect one's home, self, and even family. The intent of this article is to assist the church in understanding the blood of Christ based upon the authority of Scripture. To accomplish this intent, two issues will be addressed: (1) the error of attributing the divine to the blood of Christ; and, (2) the error of attributing the mystical to the blood of Christ. Throughout this article, the author intends to demonstrate how Scripture defines the blood of Christ and its salvific accomplishments.

The importance of understanding the blood of Christ is evident throughout Scripture. For instance, the writer to the Hebrews instructed believers that all Christians "have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus" (Heb 10:19). Based upon reconciliation with Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> The author is happy to acknowledge the valuable assistance rendered to him by Dr. James White, director of Alpha and Omega Ministries (Phoenix, AZ), and Dr. Ric Walston, president of Columbia Evangelical Seminary (Buckley, WA), in their reading and helpful commenting on a preliminary draft of this article.

Christ as God and Savior, the Christian can enter into the very presence of the Creator of the universe through the shed blood of God's own Son. Christ "always lives to make intercession" (7:25) for those trusting in Him alone for redemption. Therefore, those who are being sanctified<sup>2</sup> through the blood of Jesus have immediate access into the presence of God because Christ appears "in the presence of God for us" (9:12-14, 24).

The basis of approaching God is unambiguous. However, questions have been posed as to whether Christ completed the work of redemption upon the cross of Calvary or did He apply His literal blood upon the mercy seat in heaven in order to complete His sacrificial death as atonement for sin? In other words, did Christ enter heaven through His own blood or with His own blood (cf. 9:12)?<sup>3</sup> There are two arguments contending that Christ took His literal, physical blood into heaven. The first argument contends that the blood of Christ is imperishable. The second argument is a logical conclusion of the first point arguing that Christ took His literal blood into heaven. Regarding the second argument, some would argue that the blood of Christ is actually preserved in heaven at this very moment because it is imperishable blood. Heretical groups argue this point to a "damnable" extreme in saying that the blood of Christ is used as a perpetual offering in heaven (cf. 2 Pet 2:1). The purpose of this article is to answer the first argument regarding the imperishability (divinity) of Christ's blood, and then to interact and respond with heretical views concerning mystical attributions to the blood of Christ.

### THEORY OF THE DIVINE BLOOD

Any response to the theory that Christ's blood is imperishable because it is divine must consider the biology of His blood. According to 1 Peter

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<sup>2</sup> A distinction is to be drawn in terms of position wherein believers are sanctified (John 3:36; Eph 1:3; 2:3-6; Rom 4:25; 8:9-14; 1 Cor 1:2) and await ultimate sanctification, which is the glorification of the body (Rom 8:29-39; 1 Cor 15:50-58; Phil 1:6; 3:20-21). However, in terms of daily experience believers are responsible to be sanctified (Eph 3:14-19; 5:3-8, 33; 6:4, 18; Phil 2:12-13; 4:6, 7; 2 Pet 2:16). Therefore, depending on the context, it can be said that believers are already saved, are being saved, and will be saved.

<sup>3</sup> The question here has been answered in a previously published article by the author: "Christ as the 'Mercy Seat': Understanding the Shed Blood of Christ," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 8 (April—June 2002): 42-55.

1:18-19, it is stated without equivocation that the blood of Christ is indeed precious: “knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with the precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.” The Greek word for “precious” (τίμιος) is distinctly Petrine, and is defined by the standard Greek lexicon to mean “of great worth or value.”<sup>4</sup> The blood of Christ is of highly esteemed value in contrast to the corruptible things. Peter stated that believers are not redeemed with that which is corruptible, but are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ. Unfortunately, deviation from Scripture often occurs in relation to the Petrine text. For instance, it is argued that Christ’s blood is incorruptible since it is contrasted with the corruptible things. However, Scripture does not state that the blood is incorruptible. It simply states that the blood is of immense value. One of the arguments employed in favor of the incorruptibility of Christ’s blood is that it was actually God blood. M. R. DeHaan was trained in the medical profession having received his doctorate from the University of Illinois Medical School. His love, however, for teaching Scripture resulted in study at Western Theological Seminary.<sup>5</sup> Although sincere, he wrote the medically themed book *The Chemistry of the Blood* contending, “The Holy Spirit contributed to the blood of Jesus. It is sinless blood. It is divine blood.”<sup>6</sup>

Typically, Acts 20:28, which refers to “the church of God which He purchased with His own blood,” is interpreted to mean that “His own blood” is the blood of God. However, since neither God the Father or God the Holy Spirit possess a body, it is certainly tentative whether such can be considered true? Although Leviticus 17:11 states, “the life of the flesh is in the blood,” neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit are men nor

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<sup>4</sup> William F. Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 818.

<sup>5</sup> It is not pleasant to critique the conclusions of DeHaan since he was a “capable theologian” in many respects, although errant in regards to his theory concerning the blood of Christ (see Ron J. Bigalke Jr. and Thomas D. Ice, “History of Dispensationalism,” in *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism*, ed. Ron J. Bigalke Jr. [Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005] xxviii).

<sup>6</sup> M. R. DeHaan, *The Chemistry of the Blood* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1943) 34.

inhabit a body of flesh and blood. Those who believe in God blood interpret the antecedent τοῦ to refer to θεοῦ. However, it is better to translate the antecedent of αἷματος as referring to Christ. In this context the passage is not referring to the “blood of God” for every New Testament reference to blood that is identified with a personality is referred to Christ. The passage is affirming that Jesus is God who shed His own blood for τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, the notion of divine blood is more akin to mysticism than sound biblical doctrine, which is adamant that the divine and human natures of Christ are individual and cannot be attributed to either nature. For instance, the divine qualities of Christ cannot be attributed to His human nature, nor can His human qualities be attributed to His divine nature.<sup>8</sup> The language the Apostle Paul employed in his charge to the Ephesian elders was entirely verbal. He desired to convey the cost of redemption being the cost of the Father sending His own Son to die and shed His blood on behalf of sinful humanity.

DeHaan referenced Acts 17:26 (“and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth. . . .”) to indicate that “all men are related by the blood of Adam, sinful and polluted blood, dead in trespasses and in sins.” Elaborating upon this assertion, he wrote:

All men have a “common” origin in Adam. All men are blood relatives of Adam, whether they be white or black, Jew or Gentile, pagan or cultured. Their blood carries the sentence of death because of Adam’s sin, and for this reason all men die a common death, with no exceptions. Remember that the life is in the blood, and so if man must die it is because there is death in the blood. Although we do not know the nature of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we do know that the eating of it caused “blood poisoning” and resulted in death. . . .<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1930) 3:353.

<sup>8</sup> Failure to recognize the distinction between the divine and human qualities even resulted in controversy during the Protestant Reformation since Martin Luther, for instance, believed in contrast to the Roman Catholic teaching of transubstantiation but nevertheless affirmed that the body and blood of Jesus was present “in, with, and under” the actual bread and wine of the Lord’s Super in more than one location (which, of course, is impossible physically).

<sup>9</sup> DeHaan, *Chemistry of the Blood*, 16.

The breath of God put something in man that made him ALIVE. That something was blood. It must have been. It could be nothing else: for we have already shown that the *life of the flesh is in the blood* and so when life was added by the breath of God, He imparted blood to that lump of clay in the shape of a man, and man became a living soul. Adam's body was of ground. His blood was the separate gift of God, for God is Life and the Author of all life.<sup>10</sup>

According to DeHaan's assertion, every human being has the tainted blood of Adam and on this basis is born sinful. Such reasoning is flawed since sin is not present in the blood of man (or for that matter even the flesh of man). Sin is the will of man to disobey and reject the holy and righteous commands of his Creator. Moreover, it is not understandable how one could regard the breath of life as the actual blood of man. For instance, would this imply that the vilest of men would be sinless upon decomposition of his body? DeHaan would reason that if one did not have a human father then the "blood-poisoning" would not be transmitted to the child. Of course, a child will not be born today without a human father (except, of course, the only-Begotten Son of God).

DeHaan argued that Christ's blood was divine since the blood in His body was not derived from a human father nor was it taken from Mary who would have received the "blood-poisoning" from her biological father. He wrote, "the blood which flows in an unborn babe's arteries and veins is not derived from the mother but is produced within the body of the foetus. Yet it is only after the sperm has entered the ovum and a foetus begins to develop that blood appears."<sup>11</sup> He further stated, "It is unnecessary that a single drop of blood be given to the developing embryo in the womb of the mother. . . . From the time of conception to the time of birth of the infant not ONE SINGLE DROP ever passes from mother to child."<sup>12</sup> On the contrary, the placenta is, indeed, attached to the wall of the uterus. The umbilical cord joins the placenta to the embryo at the abdomen. Through the nutrients and components from the mother's blood, the placenta supplies all that the embryo needs to develop. Nourishment and oxygen come from the mother's blood, which the placenta absorbs and carries to the embryo. In

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 31.

sequence, waste products from the fetal blood are passed across placental membranes into the maternal blood.<sup>13</sup>

DeHaan argued that Mary could have never supplied blood to Jesus since her blood would be tainted with sin. Therefore, when Scripture reads, “Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering you have no desired, but a body You have prepared for me;’” (Heb 10:5) this is interpreted to mean that the blood of Christ was the direct creation of God in Mary’s womb so that it is supernatural (divine) blood.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, according to DeHaan, Jesus’ blood did not possess any of the Adamic blood that was corrupt; therefore, Christ did not partake of the blood-poisoning of sin and was uncontaminated from the stain of sin. Whether such an assertion is true will require critical thinking regarding the nature of flesh and blood.

### ***Flesh and Blood***

The Holy Spirit created the body “prepared” for Christ (Heb 10:5) in the womb of Mary. Adam, “the first man,” was also the special, direct creation of God, which is one reason why Scripture states that Jesus is the “last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45, 47).<sup>15</sup> If one were to follow the logic of

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<sup>13</sup> Writing in regards to the function of the placenta, the *Textbook of Medical Physiology* states the following: “by the 16<sup>th</sup> day after fertilization, blood begins to flow. Simultaneously, *blood sinuses* supplied with blood from the mother develop around the trophoblastic cords. . . . Thus, the villi, carrying fetal blood, are surrounded by sinuses containing maternal blood . . . the fetus’ blood flows through two *umbilical arteries*, then to the capillaries of the villi, and thence back through the *umbilical vein* into the fetus. At the same time, the mother’s blood flows from the *uterine arteries* into large *maternal sinuses* surrounding the villi and then back into the *uterine veins* of the mother” (Arthur C. Guyton, *Textbook of Medical Physiology*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. [Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1986] 485-86; see also Arthur J. Vander, James H. Sherman, and Dorothy S. Luciano, *Human Physiology*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. [New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1985] 582-84). Additionally, this information was confirmed through personal conversations with Jeffrey W. Loux, D.O., Florida Medical Center, a board certified specialist and friend of the writer.

<sup>14</sup> DeHaan, *Chemistry of the Blood*, 39; H. A. Maxwell Whyte, *The Power of the Blood* (Springdale: Whitaker, 1973) 15-17.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947-48; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993) 5:50; Robert B. Strimple, “Was Adam an Historical Person? And What Difference Does It Make?” [online] (Westminster Seminary, 20 June 1989, accessed 3 July 2009) available from <http://wscal.edu/faculty/wscwritings/wasadamhistorical.php>.

the argument concerning “divine blood” then it would have to be maintained that since Adam and Jesus had bodies that were the special, direct creation of God then both possessed divine blood.<sup>16</sup> Adam did not have divine blood and neither did Jesus. Moreover, it is not as official Mormon doctrine states either that God the Father (Elohim) physically fathered Jesus’ body on Earth.<sup>17</sup> To state otherwise disregards the obvious. God is spirit and does not have a body so there is no sense in which He could propagate a physical body or blood through Mary in the same manner as a human father. Jesus is the one and only God-Man but to assert a “chemistry” of His blood that Scripture does not reveal specifically, and to make an argument for divine blood therefore is more consistent with the realm of mystic eisegesis than sound, biblical exegesis.

The Father, indeed, sent “His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3), but this does not mean that Jesus’ body was some sort of hybrid. This was the Apollinarian heresy that Jesus merely entered a human body that was devoid of His personality or nature.<sup>18</sup> The natures of Christ are not to be confused.<sup>19</sup> Christ was truly sent in the likeness of sinful flesh though He was without sin. Jesus was not part God and part man. He is fully God and man; as such, He is the one and only God-man. Jesus was a real man of flesh and blood. He did not have God flesh and

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<sup>16</sup> This is not to mean that Jesus was a created being. As the eternal God, He did not possess a body for this was the necessity of the virgin birth. Jesus is forever one with God as His only-begotten Son. Such proclamation was formulated by the Nicene Council in the following manner: “and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages: Light of Light. True God of True God. Begotten not made. Of one essence with the Father. Through whom all things were made. . . .”

<sup>17</sup> For further documentation see chapter 12, “A Mormon Doctrine or, Mere Speculation?” in James White, *Is the Mormon My Brother?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Dale Moody, *The Word of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 411-12.

<sup>19</sup> The doctrine of the hypostatic union of Christ seeks to answer the question as to the result of Christ’s human and divine natures being combined. This phenomenon of the human and divine natures is known as the “hypostatic union,” as it is derived from the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1: “the assurance of *things* hoped for.” When this doctrine is applied to Jesus Christ it refers to the union of the two “substances,” that is, the human and divine natures. Both the human and divine natures are actual and not merely similar. Furthermore, the natures are complete and not merely partial. The Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) used this terminology to refer to the one person (ὁ πρόσωπον), Jesus Christ, who possessed the two genuine natures (φύσεις) as united.

neither did He have God blood. He did not possess a bloodless human body that was somehow infused with divine blood. Insistence for the divine blood of Christ is nearly denying His full humanity. The chemistry of Christ's blood is the same as every man since it was produced in His own body.

### ***The Shedding of Blood***

While it is absolutely true that believers are saved on the virtue of Christ's death, it is also true that Christ had to shed His blood since the Father required a blood-shedding sacrifice (cf. Heb 9:22) so that it would be evident that the life of the sacrifice had been outpoured. On the cross, Christ shed His literal blood as a literal sacrifice. The shedding of Christ's blood was not enough to save; the sacrifice had to result in death. If there was efficacious value in the blood alone then Christ would not have needed to die on the cross since either the sweat that "became like drops of blood" (Luke 22:44) in the Garden of Gethsemane or the blood shed in His scourging could have atoned for sin. No doubt the soldiers that scourged Jesus had some of His literal blood upon them but that literal application of His blood was not efficacious.

The blood of Christ must be understood as referring to the atoning work of Christ. Furthermore, shed blood refers to death from Genesis to Revelation. Genesis 9:6 states, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." The biblical passage does not mean if a man cuts a man and makes him bleed that the person he made bleed should in turn make him bleed. The passage means that if one man kills another that his life will also be taken from him. This is a clear example where the shedding of blood has the metaphor of death. When the New Testament references Christ's shed blood it refers to His life being taken from Him violently.

### ***The Precious Blood***

Christ's blood is precious for the exact reason that the shedding of His blood in death was substitutionary atonement for the sins of both Jews and Gentiles who would be redeemed (1 John 2:2). When Christ shed His blood in the supreme sacrificial act, He both ratified the New Covenant and purchased the believer's redemption. Vincent Taylor has noted that when Scripture references Christ's blood it does so nearly

three times as often as it mentions the cross of Christ. Additionally, the Bible references the blood of Christ five times as often as it references the death of Christ.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, αἷμα (“blood”) is the prominent term used to reference the atonement in the New Testament. As it is referenced in the New Testament, the blood of Christ indicates the all-encompassing redemptive work of Christ upon the cross.

When 1 Peter 1:18-19 references the blood of Christ, the parallel in the Petrine passage is between corruptible things and the precious blood of Christ. Nothing whatsoever in the Scripture states Christ’s blood is the incorruptible fluid of God. Christ’s blood was human; it was not divine blood. If one is to accept such statements that His blood is divine then one could also argue (*on that basis*) that Christ’s fingernails and hair were also divine. The fantasy, rather than sound biblical teaching, would not cease based on such faulty conclusions. Since Christ’s blood was truly human blood it would have been subject to the same end as other human blood when it is shed.

The term “blood” indicates atonement. It is Christ’s shed blood that is the basis of the believer’s atonement. The sacrifice of Christ is understood to be efficacious by virtue of His death. Accordingly, the blood of Christ can be understood to demand attention upon the atoning death of Christ. Likewise, *The Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* reads, “References to the ‘blood of Christ’ always mean the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross.”<sup>21</sup> Superstitious views in regards to the blood of Christ are unfortunately often based upon inaccurate conceptions as to the nature of His blood, which makes it important to understand the blood of Christ in harmony with Scripture. The next section of this article will address some of the superstitious views that attribute mystical power to the blood of Christ.

#### THEORY OF MYSTICAL POWER OF THE BLOOD OF CHRIST

The theory that Christ’s blood possesses a mystical power is certainly not a new perspective. For instance, it is a superstition that received great attention throughout medieval Roman Catholicism. Church historian

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<sup>20</sup> Vincent Taylor, *The Atonement in New Testament Teaching* (London: Epworth, 1945) 177.

<sup>21</sup> Herbert Lockyer Sr., gen. ed., *Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986) 186.

Philip Schaff documented that during the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church was even sharing a bowl with one another that was said to contain Christ's literal blood.<sup>22</sup> The following is a revealing quote from the *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

However, chiefly since the Council of Trent (Sess, XIII, c. 3) called the body and blood of Jesus "partes Christi Domini" the trend of theological thought has been in favour of the Dominican teaching [e.g. "The Precious Blood is therefore a part of the Sacred Humanity and hypostatically united to the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity."]. . . . Faber writes: "It is not merely a concomitant of the flesh, an inseparable accident of the body. The blood itself, as blood, was assumed directly by the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity" (Precious Blood, i). The blood shed during the triduum of the Passion therefore reunited to the body of Christ at the Resurrection, with the possible exception of a few particles which instantly lost their union to the Word and became holy relics to be venerated but not adored. Some such particles may have adhered and yet adhere to the instruments of the Passion, e.g. nails, scourging pillar, *Scala Sancta*. Several places like Saintes, Bruges, Mantua etc. claim, on the strength of ancient traditions, to possess relics of the Precious Blood, but it is often difficult to tell whether the traditions are correct. Viewed as a part of the Sacred Humanity hypostatically united to the Word, the Precious Blood deserves latreutical worship or adoration. It may also like the Heart or the Wounds from which it flowed, be singled out for special honour, in a way that special honour was rendered it from the beginning by St. Paul and the Fathers who so eloquently praised its redeeming virtue and rested on it the Christian spirit of self-sacrifice.<sup>23</sup>

The blood of Christ was worshipped as if there were salvific power separate from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup> At times this mystical belief persisted not only in relation to the blood of Christ, but also the blood of choice Catholic saints. The so-called "blood relic miracles" were so prominent in the Middle Ages that churches throughout Europe were claiming that they actually possessed the blood of certain Catholic

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<sup>22</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1907) 5:198-99. See also Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, 11 vols. (New York: MJF Books, 1957) 6:234.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph F. Sollier, "Precious Blood," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911) [online] (New Advent, accessed 13 July 2009) available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12372c.htm>.

<sup>24</sup> This practice is certainly consistent with Roman Catholic teaching in regards to the Mass as a non-blood sacrifice. See Ron J. Bigalke Jr., "The Theory of Sacrifice in the Mass," *Conservative Theological Journal* 10 (May/June 2006): 49-74.

saints. Benjamin Warfield, who documented these alleged claims, wrote: “To say that relics lie at the center of the miracle-life of Catholicism is not far from saying that they lie at the center of the Catholic religious life; for the religious life of Catholicism and its miracle-life are very much one.”<sup>25</sup> According to Warfield, the rationale for the blood relics

lies in the belief that the men whose remains are honored after their death, were in their lifetime filled with special power by virtue of which they were in position to work extraordinary things. . . . It was because much was hoped from these relics that they were cherished and honored; and since mankind suffers most from bodily ills the relics have naturally been honored above everything else as instruments through which bodily relief and bodily benefit may be obtained.<sup>26</sup>

Although they could be classified within the Protestant tradition,<sup>27</sup> the Moravians (a mid-eighteenth century movement renewed by Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf in the 1720s, but actually founded in 1457 by the followers of John Hus, after his death in 1415) gave undue honor to the “blood and wounds” of Christ.<sup>28</sup> Zinzendorf (1700-60) had an influence upon the group since he protected the Moravians in the 1720s in Lower Saxony. Zinzendorf and his associate, Augustus Gottlieb Spangenberg, are credited with helping the Moravians settle in America. Zinzendorf believed strongly in a mystical power of the blood of Christ in speaking of himself as “a poor sinner washed in the blood of the slaughtered Lamb in which I live, and to swim and bathe in Jesus’ blood is my element.”<sup>29</sup> German Pietism also had a heavy influence upon the Moravians and it was this negative influence that led the group to neglect serious Bible study and place a higher emphasis upon the sensational, which would explain the undue honor that they gave to the “blood and wounds” of Christ.

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<sup>25</sup> B. B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1972) 101.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 97-98.

<sup>27</sup> The Protestant Reformers did not accept these mystical views of the blood of Christ.

<sup>28</sup> Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*, 2 vols. (Westchester: Cornerstone Books, 1980) 2:327.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 2:326.

### *Mystical Power in the Blood*

Mystical views in regards to the blood of Christ inevitably affected Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations through the influence of E. W. Kenyon. His teachings had a profound influence upon the “Word of Faith” division of these denominations.<sup>30</sup> A man who was greatly opposed to evangelical teaching, Kenyon wrote, “When Christ carried His blood into the Holy of Holies and the Supreme Court of the Universe accepted it, Redemption was a completed thing.”<sup>31</sup> Contrary to Christ’s own words upon the cross—“It is finished”—Kenyon taught that redemption was not completed until Christ carried his blood into heaven.

Pentecostal preacher H. A. Maxwell Whyte also affirmed a highly mystical view in regards to Christ’s blood. He taught, “Jesus’ blood was different” to the extent that if His blood were in the hospitals “everyone who could obtain a transfusion of Christ’s Blood would actually be receiving God’s eternal life in pure Blood.”<sup>32</sup> He also believed that to “reckon by faith that the Blood of Jesus avails for your home and cattle, it will do so, and the angel of death will just as surely be kept away from you and yours!”<sup>33</sup> According to his perspective,<sup>34</sup> “pleading of the Blood of Jesus” can prevent accidents and “prevents Satan from attacking us with germs.”<sup>35</sup> “It is not enough . . . to believe in an historic Blood of Calvary.” The blood “must be taken and *used* to bring terror to the enemy.”<sup>36</sup> According to this perspective, it was

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<sup>30</sup> D. R. McConnell, who did graduate work at Oral Roberts University, wrote, “E. W. Kenyon . . . formulated every major doctrine of the modern Faith Movement. . . . The roots of Kenyon’s theology may be traced to his personal background in the metaphysical cults, specifically New Thought and Christian Science. . . . Kenyon attempted to forge a synthesis of metaphysical and evangelical thought. . . . The resultant Faith theology is a strange mixture of biblical fundamentalism and New Thought metaphysics” (D. R. McConnell, *A Different Gospel* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995] 184-85).

<sup>31</sup> E. W. Kenyon, *New Creation Realities* (Lynnwood: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, 1945) 44.

<sup>32</sup> Whyte, *Power of the Blood*, 18.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 39-40.

<sup>34</sup> Such notions are entirely consistent with pagan practices not biblical revelation. See Bill Ellis, *Raising the Devil: Satanism, New Religions, and the Media* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000) 28-31.

<sup>35</sup> Whyte, *Power of the Blood*, 53-54.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 58-59.

necessary that Christ carry His blood into heaven to sprinkle upon the heavenly Mercy Seat.<sup>37</sup>

Healing revivalist Benny Hinn attributed his interest in the power of the blood of Christ to the ministry of Whyte.<sup>38</sup> Similar to his predecessor, Hinn believes that Christ presented His blood in heaven as evidence of redemption.<sup>39</sup> Hinn also teaches that applying the blood can stop demons,<sup>40</sup> provide a “hedge of protection,”<sup>41</sup> and (using Job as an example) the blood is something that through prayer can be applied to one’s family.<sup>42</sup>

However, in contrast to these spiritual charlatans, Scripture states that Christ ascended into heaven as the victorious conqueror who had completed the work of redemption, having “disarmed the rulers and authorities” through His death on the cross (Eph 4:8; Col 2:14-15; Heb 2:14-15). The majority of this unbiblical teaching comes from a combined belief in a non-literal (unbiblical) understanding of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus and that Christ sank into hell for three days and three nights to finish the work of redemption even though the Bible states that believers “have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace” (Eph 1:7).

### ***Blood Covenants***

It is true that the one universal and necessary requirement of sacrifice is blood. For instance, all ancient religions would agree with

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>38</sup> Benny Hinn, *The Blood: Its Power from Genesis to Jesus to You* (Orlando: Creation House, 1993) 21.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 82.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. 57, 73.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 67. Word of Faith proponent Don Gossett wrote concerning an alleged instance wherein Satan threatened to inflict foxes with rabies to kill another believer’s children. The man held his index finger upward and “actively drew a bloodline around his farm, specifically around the boundary lines.” In a matter of just ten days, five foxes were found dead around the boundary line. Gossett concluded, “The blood of Jesus had been applied by ‘the word of their testimony’ [referring to Rev 12:11] and the foxes had all dropped dead. . . . I challenge you to take this action step: Hold up your index finger, begin to make a circle as you cover your life, your vehicle, your home, your loved ones with the precious blood of Jesus” (Don Gossett, “The Power of the Bloodline,” *Dominion* 8 [Winter 2000]: 22).

<sup>42</sup> Hinn, *The Blood*, 68.

Mephistopheles that “blood is a very special juice” (*Blut ist ein ganz besonderer Saft*).<sup>43</sup> Certainly in light of pagan cultures, Kenyon was correct in his statement that the “strongest, most sacred covenant” is a blood covenant. However, Kenyon erred grievously (and others who share his perspective) by attempting to equate the sacrificial blood of Christ with pagan rituals. Henry Clay Trumbull (1830-1903) provided a meticulous account of primitive rites of blood covenants and “its bearings on Scripture.”<sup>44</sup> He described one ancient Semitic rite of blood-covenanting in detail.

It was two young men, who were to enter into this covenant. They had known each other, and had been intimate, for years; but now they were to become brother-friends, in the covenant of blood. Their relatives and neighbors were called together, in the open place before the village fountain, to witness the sealing compact. The young men publicly announced their purpose, and their reasons for it. Their declarations were written down, in duplicate,—one paper for each friend,—and signed by themselves and by several witnesses. One of the friends took a sharp lancet, and opened a vein in the other’s arm. Into the opening thus made, he inserted a quill, through which he sucked the living blood. The lancet-blade was carefully wiped on one of the duplicate covenant-papers, and then it was taken by the other friend, who made a like incision in its first user’s arm, and drank his blood through the quill, wiping the blade on the duplicate covenant-record. The two friends declared together: “We are brothers in a covenant made before God: who deceiveth the other, him will God deceive.” Each blood-marked covenant-record was then folded carefully, to be sewed up in a small leathern case, or amulet, about an inch square; to be worn thenceforward by one of the covenant-brothers, suspended about the neck, or bound upon the arm, in token of the indissoluble relation.<sup>45</sup>

The relationship of the two friends described by Trumbull is called a “Covenant of Blood.” The two friends were then regarded as “Brothers of the Covenant.”<sup>46</sup> Some “Word of Faith” teachers have attempted to argue that David and Jonathan formed a blood covenant with each other (cf. 1 Sam 18:1-4; 20:14-17).<sup>47</sup> Supposedly both men slit

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<sup>43</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Cyrus Hamlin, trans. Walter Arndt (New York: Norton, 1976), 41 (Part I, line 1740).

<sup>44</sup> H. Clay Trumbull, *The Blood Covenant*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: James Family Christian Publishers, 1970).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 5-6.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 6.

<sup>47</sup> The sort of covenant that David and Jonathan enacted with each other was a parity treaty. Two individuals would commit themselves in a close relationship. The participants approved the conditions of the covenant (see Ron J. Bigalke Jr., “The

some part of their body and then rubbed their cuts against each other. The blood was then caught from both in a goblet of wine, mixed together, and then drank to seal the covenant.<sup>48</sup> The error in this teaching should be obvious since God commanded the nation of Israel, “you shall not cut yourselves” in the manner of the heathen (Deut 14:1). God also commanded the nation not to drink blood of any kind (Gen 9:4; Lev 3:17; 7:26; 17:10; 19:26). The pagan nations did cut themselves in making covenants with each other; however, God would not have approved this practice among the nation of Israel.

The practice of blood-covenanting is found in many other lands such as Africa, America, Arabia, Assyria, Egypt, Europe, and India. Although every culture differs in its intent of a blood covenant, it is the “oneness of nature” (or life) that is recognized by all. At times this oneness was believed to occur between fellow human beings and, at other times, the oneness was thought to occur with the gods.<sup>49</sup> Trumbull wrote, “The oneness of nature which comes of sharing the same blood, by its inter-fusion, is rightly deemed, by the Arabs, completer than the oneness of nature which comes of sharing the same milk; or even than that which comes through having blood from a common source, by natural descent.”<sup>50</sup>

Although Kenyon spoke favorably of the pagan practice,<sup>51</sup> it is certainly not endorsed in Scripture. The cutting of one’s flesh and drinking of blood was strictly forbidden. Indeed, the drink offerings of blood under the Mosaic Covenant were outpoured since to drink the

Implications of the Biblical Covenants” [online] (Eternal Ministries, accessed 8 July 2009) available from <http://www.eternalministries.org/articles/covenants.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> Philadelphia House of Prayer, “Blood Covenant” [online] (accessed 23 June 2009) available from <http://www.libertynet.org/~prayer/CovenantWeb.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Trumbull, *Blood Covenant*, 90-91. Johannes Behm wrote: “Hellenistic blood mysticism is to be seen in the Dionysus-Zagreus-cult, in which union with the god is achieved by eating the divine animal torn and consumed in a wild frenzy . . . and esp. in the taurobolium and criobolium of the Attic mysteries, with their regeneration and divinisation of the devotee through the blood of the sacred animal sprinkled over him” (Johannes Behm, “αἷμα,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols., eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 1:176).

<sup>50</sup> Trumbull, *Blood Covenant*, 12.

<sup>51</sup> E. W. Kenyon, “The Blood Covenant,” narr. Steven Sobozenski (Lynnwood, WA: Kenyon’s Gospel Publishing Society, n.d.) audiotape. He referred to the account of *New York Times* journalist, Henry Stanley, and the reporter’s encounters with the famed American missionary David Livingstone.

blood would have been to receive the life that was associated with it. The Mosaic ritual typifies the future work of Christ. There is clear difference between the blood sacrifices of the Old Testament and that of the pagan nations. Trumbull asserted that God communicated the typology of the sacrifices without ambiguity to the nation of Israel.

the substitute “blood of bulls and of goats” [Heb 10:4] cannot be a means of man’s inter-union with God. Lest, indeed the Israelite should believe that a blood-covenant union was really secured with God, rather than typified, through these prescribed symbolic sacrifices and their sharing, he was repeatedly warned against that fatal error, and was taught that his true covenanting must be a faith-filled recognition of the symbolism of these substitute agencies; and by the implicit surrender of himself, in loving trust, to Him who had ordained them as symbols.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, John Osteen was certainly influenced by Kenyon in writing the following: “When Abraham was circumcised, he mingled his blood with God’s blood” and when He shed His blood, Christ also mingled “the human and the divine.”<sup>53</sup> Both Kenyon and Osteen believed that this blood covenant began with circumcision and extended to the cross of Christ. Kenyon taught, “The blood covenant was the basis of all primitive religions” and then stated that the “Lord’s Table is based upon the oldest known covenant in the human family.” According to Kenyon, if missionaries were to realize the power of the blood covenant today this “would open the doors in every tribe for the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>54</sup>

Kenyon believed that the disciples understood the blood covenant and at the Last Supper the disciples were aware “that when they cut the covenant with Jesus in the upper room that night, they had entered into the strongest, most sacred covenant known to the human heart.”<sup>55</sup> Scripture does not indicate that Christ and the disciples ever cut themselves and mingled their blood. Instead of the efficaciousness of Christ’s blood resulting from the fact that He gave His life as a substitution, Kenyon believed that the power of Christ’s blood is derived from the “strongest, most sacred covenant” known to man, that is, the

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<sup>52</sup> Trumbull, *Blood Covenant*, 252-53.

<sup>53</sup> John Osteen, *Unraveling the Mystery of the Blood Covenant* (Houston: John Osteen Publications, 1988) 42.

<sup>54</sup> Kenyon, “Blood Covenant.”

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

blood covenant which has been practiced throughout the centuries by pagan tribes. Walter Clippinger wrote, “In all probability there is no trace of the superstitious use of blood in the OT, except perhaps in 1 K. 22:38 [“and one washed the chariot in the pool of Samaria; and the dogs licked up the blood; and they washed his armour; according unto the word of the LORD which he spake”]; but everywhere it is vested with cleansing, expiatory, and reverently symbolic qualities.”<sup>56</sup>

### *Stigmata*

The most extreme example of mystical views of the blood of Christ is the paranormal phenomenon called stigmata. The term “stigmata” is derived from the Greek word *stigma*, meaning “mark.” It is claimed that certain holy individuals (predominantly women) manifest the bloody wounds of Jesus Christ in His suffering. Based upon a faulty interpretation of Galatians 6:17 (“I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus”), advocates attempt to argue that the apostle Paul was the first stigmatic. However, the apostle was not referring to the modern occult phenomenon; rather, he was referring to the literal persecution that he received as a follower of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 11:24-27).

The first reported case of stigmatization is said to have occurred with Francis of Assisi (1186-1226). His stigmata was claimed to be of such character that had not appeared subsequently: “in the wounds of feet and hands were excrescences of flesh representing nails, those on one side having round back heads, those on the other having rather long points, which bent back and grasped the skin.”<sup>57</sup> Dr. Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre’s work, *La Stigmatisation*,<sup>58</sup> attempted to document over 300 stigmata from the time of Francis of Assisi in the 12<sup>th</sup> century to Marie de Moerl (1812-68) and Louise Lateau (1850-83) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A modern case of stigmatization within the “ultra-charismatic” world is

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<sup>56</sup> W. G. Clippinger, “Blood,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., gen. ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 1:526.

<sup>57</sup> Augustin Poulain, “Mystical Stigmata,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912) [online] (New Advent, accessed 13 July 2009) available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14294b.htm>.

<sup>58</sup> Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre, *La Stigmatization* (Clermont-Ferrand: Bellet, 1894).

Lucy Rael.<sup>59</sup> In 1988, she appeared on the stage of T. L. Osborn's International Gospel Center bearing the bloody marks of Christ on her hands and feet. Rael claimed that the bloody marks were a work of God to draw people to Christ.

Although the phenomenon has been a distinctive characteristic associated with the Roman Catholic Church, there has been no official position given in regards to the nature or cause of stigmatization. The Catholic Church still attempts to investigate every claim of stigmata but will not make an official statement as to the validity of the bloody marks. However, one Catholic source has said the following:

Mystically, Christ has even expressed Himself to some of the people that have the stigmata by saying, Are you willing to take on My suffering that I may rest a while? He did that with Padre Pio [a Franciscan monk], who was just beautified. Now what wonders of love that we cannot really understand, where Almighty God is asking us for help. All these aspects help validate the mystery and the mystical experience of the stigmata.<sup>60</sup>

With the exception of Rael, advocates of stigmata believe that the bloody marks help provide atonement for sin. Such beliefs are certainly dangerous teaching when Scripture clearly states that redemption is through the blood of Jesus Christ alone (Eph 1:7).

### CONCLUSION

The emphasis of Scripture on the blood of Christ is not as a charm or incantation that one can appropriate for his own benefit. Rather, the blood of Christ is associated with His death (Heb 12:24). The power of the blood of Christ is that He outpoured His life as a perfect substitutionary sacrifice in order that He may redeem those who trust in Him alone for their redemption. All the Old Testament sacrifices demonstrated the impossibility of forgiveness without shedding blood, which the Epistle to the Hebrews explains so masterfully. The shedding of His blood on behalf of the redeemed and His resurrection on the third day, according to the Scriptures, is the climax of history. If the Lord

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<sup>59</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, "Stigmata: The Wounds of Christ" (World of Strange Powers) (Carmel, CA: Pacific Arts Video, 1985).

<sup>60</sup> The Great Crusade of Love and Mercy, "The Stigmata, the Wounds of Christ" [online] (Love and Mercy.org, accessed 11 July 2009) available from <http://www.loveandmercy.org/loveandmercy/stigmata.htm>.

Jesus did not shed His blood in the flesh there is no redemption. Those who are attributing a mythical power to Christ's blood are more in harmony with paganism than with biblical Christianity. The power of Christ's blood is defined in the merits of His death upon the cross.

The Lord Jesus Christ was born fully human and fully divine—without sin—to die as substitute for those He came to save. If his blood were somehow divine (and therefore different from humanity), He would not be qualified as the approved sin offering. The emphasis of Scripture, therefore, is not the nature of the blood of Christ but the accomplishments of His shed blood as an acceptable substitutionary death to procure eternal redemption. To think of Christ's blood as divine, or that the physical liquid is preserved in heaven or possesses some mystical quality is unwarranted and entirely pagan, and as such does not bring glory to God.

Moreover, sin is not a component of the physical flesh or blood, in the sense of some deficiency in the molecules of one's blood. Sin is the bondage of the will, which manifests its presence in disobedience and rejection of the holy and righteous commands of God. Even the redeemed experience the tension between the flesh and the Spirit (cf. Rom 7). The flesh and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ was true humanity, yet He was without sin (Heb 4:15; 9:28). Any theory that would indicate that the physical blood He shed was not true blood of sinless humanity, but was divine blood with mystical power functioning in some magical form disgraces the Gospel and trivializes the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus. There is indeed great value and worth to the blood of Christ, and it cannot be esteemed enough, but attributing mystical and pagan attributions to it may degrade the shedding of His blood.

On the cross, Christ Jesus shed His physical blood as a literal sacrifice for the wages of sin; redemption was not accomplished through the shedding of blood into the ground of Calvary's cross, or through the preservation of His shed blood somewhere in heaven, or even through some alleged offering upon the heavenly mercy seat. Christ's salvific work as the sinless Substitute was accomplished by His death, and not because His blood possessed DNA different than humanity. The sufficiency of His shed blood was as the sinner's substitute, and it is the means by which He entered "the holy place once for all," of which the Old Testament tabernacle and Temple were representations, and therefore stresses the effectiveness of His substitutionary work upon the cross. Consequently, the death of the sinless Substitute is the means by

which believers can also enter boldly into the eternal presence of God for they have been sanctified by grace through faith, and this is “by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through . . . His flesh” (9:11-12; 10:19-22).





## THE DEMISE OF BIBLICAL AUTHORITY IN MODERN EVANGELISM

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The purpose of this article is to answer whether modern methods of evangelism have de-emphasized the authority of the Bible. It will seek to answer whether the purpose of the worship service has changed gradually from a *theocentric* to an *anthropocentric* emphasis. Undoubtedly, a person's perspective in regards to the authority of Christ and Scripture has profound implications on his comprehension of critical doctrines. Consequently, and as a result of decades of new ideas, philosophies, and peculiar ideologies, the church is witnessing the drastic disfiguring of the "face" of evangelical Christianity. The programs, strategies, and techniques that one would find in the financial markets, business world, public educational system, and in civil government have usurped the authority of Scripture in the critical areas of missions, evangelism, and worship. MacArthur commented,

Many church leaders have radically changed the way they look at the gospel. Rather than seeing it as a message from God that Christians are called to proclaim as Christ's ambassadors (without tampering with it or changing it in any way), they now treat it like a commodity to be sold at market. Rather than plainly preaching God's Word in a way that unleashes the power and truth of it, they try desperately to package the message to make it subtler and have usurped sound doctrine and good theology.<sup>1</sup>

He further noted, "Evangelicals these days care less about theology than they do about methodology. . . . What's the heart of the problem? It boils down to this: Much of the evangelical movement has forgotten who is Lord over the church. They have abandoned or downright rejected their true Head and given His rightful place to evangelical pollsters and church-growth gurus."<sup>2</sup>

### PRAGMATISM AND MODERN EVANGELICALISM

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<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *The Truth War* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007) 147.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 150

Before one concurs quickly with his assessment and dismisses every strategy or plan that impacts the modern church, it is prudent to respond carefully to MacArthur's strong criticism. Since he was addressing pragmatism, one must begin with a definition. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*,<sup>3</sup> pragmatism is "the method of testing the value of any assertion that claims to be true, by its consequences, i.e. by its practical bearing upon human interests and purposes." Hence, if an action produces favorable results (according to one's expectations) then that action can be called "valuable" through the pragmatic perspective. To the pragmatist, the end legitimately justifies the means, and consequently, what is valuable is now considered "truth." However, that "truth" is not necessarily biblical truth. When the means include the deliberate violation of Scripture, then the violator has disobeyed clear biblical teaching.

For example, consider a pastor of a small, suburban church who is struggling financially. He decides to perform weddings for a local chapel, even if it means he will conduct ceremonies for believers who want to marry unbelievers. However, he needs the money. Despite the clear violation of Scripture (2 Cor 6:14), he starts to accumulate abundant cash. He rationalizes his actions by his false assumption that God is blessing his new ministry. The means do not justify the end and he has demonstrated a lack of faith and obedience to the Word of God. Similar to Eli's sons in 1 Samuel 2:17, he has failed to adhere to specific biblical instruction, and the outcome is holding God's Word in contempt.

What about pragmatism in church evangelism and worship? Has biblical truth been compromised (as MacArthur argued) because the results of "new" methods of ministry have produced phenomenal growth in church attendance and tens of thousands added to the church membership lists? Are the "tried and true" marketing, advertising and management practices outside the church applicable within the church? Generally speaking, D. A. Carson agreed that the creator's motive in a particular church methodology may be questionable since the innovative creativity may only be designed to "titillate the masses."

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<sup>3</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 20 vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. John Simpson and Edmund Weiner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 12:279.

We must not suggest that the motives of those involved are necessarily bad. Human hearts being what they are, doubtless wicked motives abound on all sides of this discussion. But if we conclude (and I think we must) that the tide of evangelicalism is drifting toward more and more pragmatism, as often as not the reasons lie less with self-conscious desire to transform the gospel into something it is not, or with a self-centered wish to appear to be on the “cutting edge,” as with a desire to be “fruitful in ministry.”<sup>4</sup>

Notice what Carson did not say. He did not say that the utilization of various and sundry methods necessarily makes the preacher a pagan or false prophet. He did say that apparently many of these ministers sincerely want to build their ministries to accomplish two main goals: reach the lost and to make the Body of Christ healthier. However, biblical principles must take precedence over the “felt needs” of both believers and unbelievers.

Some of MacArthur’s arguments concerning the use of pragmatic methods in the church deserve further discussion. *First*, he asserted that pragmatism attacks the sufficiency of God’s Word in evangelism. He rightly claimed that diminishing the Gospel message just to make it more amenable to the unsaved diminishes the power of the message to change the hearts of people.<sup>5</sup> However, although there are many who have wrong motives in their evangelistic methodologies, he cannot assume that every method in and of itself is destructive to God’s message. Recall in Paul’s letter to the Philippians how the great Apostle recognized the fact that Christ is proclaimed in spite of the wrong motives of many preachers. (Phil 1:12-18) Furthermore, he spoke of personal adaptation to his particular audience as a means to win souls (1 Cor 9:19-23).

Jesus accommodated His message according to His audience. Christ proclaimed with power and impact, instructed his disciples toward obedience, used patterns, experiences, and activities to encourage life change, and incorporated familiar surroundings to reinforce a principle. Even the chief priests recognized the fact that He taught what was right—never demonstrating partiality—and always taught the truth (Luke 20:21). Certainly the sovereign God can overrule any misguided plans of men for the sake of His Word and the salvation of souls (Prov 16:1; 19:21; Isa 14:26-27).

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<sup>4</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 472.

<sup>5</sup> John MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Dallas: Word, 1991) 151.

*Second*, he noted, “Wherever pragmatism exists in the church, there is always a corresponding de-emphasis on Christ’s sufficiency, God’s sovereignty, biblical integrity, the power of prayer, and Spirit-led ministries.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, this is true in many instances. However, once again, he wrongly concluded that the existence of any degree of pragmatism automatically negates the Gospel message. If he alluded to the *total* reliance on pragmatic methods in the ebb and flow of church ministry, then that would substantiate his claim. Furthermore, he wrongly regarded all “different” approaches to ministry as contrary to the Word of God. Perhaps they are “different” because they are not practiced in his church. However, does that make them necessarily unscriptural? Fortunately, God can and does intervene in the lives of people and the ministries of His churches whenever His will is to be accomplished. Just as the Holy Spirit equips the saints with various gifts for service, so also God can use various methods to bring sinners to Christ. However, those plans must not contradict clear biblical teaching. “All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the Lord weighs the motives.” (Prov 16:2)

*Third*, pragmatism has a profound impact on evangelical ministry to the extent that preaching is man-centered and “dominated by a relation mentality that attempts to reconcile man to men, and not men to God.”<sup>7</sup> MacArthur rightly claimed that relationship-building, which is an important and vital part of any thriving fellowship, must not take precedence over two fundamental elements—man’s relation to his Creator and a solid doctrinal foundation in the fundamental orthodox teachings of historical Christianity. To that end, and in agreement with Jesus’ summary of the Old Testament Law and prophets in Matthew 22:34-40, one’s love of God is first and foremost. When believers are in right standing with the Father, then it necessarily follows that from God’s perspective, they will develop a “spiritually” healthy self-image (since they are created in the image of God) that will make itself manifest in healthy relationships with those with whom believers associate on a day-to-day basis.

Earlier in his book, MacArthur correctly noted that the ally to pragmatism is Arminianism (with which this author would concur). Whenever an aberrant theology such as Arminianism, which denies God’s unconditional elective purposes and creates a “synergistic”

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 152.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 153.

process of mutual cooperation between man and God, marginalizes God's power, the preacher undoubtedly resorts to the use of clever, imaginative, and convincing arguments (i.e. *pragmatism* to influence an individual to trust Christ). According to this doctrinal scheme, the Spirit's prevenient grace enables the sinner to cooperate with God in the salvation process. Hence, the preacher becomes more of a salesman, who cleverly convinces a person to buy the "product" (salvation) in spite of any hesitation or reluctance on the "buyer's" part. It was Robert Schuller who made this evident.

For the church to address the unchurched with a theocentric attitude is to invite failure in mission. The nonchurched who have no vital belief in a relationship with God will spurn, reject, or simply ignore the theologian, church spokesperson, preacher, or missionary who approaches with Bible in hand, theology on the brain and the lips, and expects nonreligious persons to suspend their doubts and swallow the theocentric assertions as fact. The unconverted will, I submit, take notice when I demonstrate genuine concern about their needs and honestly care about their human hurts. For decades now we have watched the church in Western Europe and in America decline in power, membership, and influence. I believe that this decline is the result of our placing theocentric communications above the meeting of the deeper emotional and spiritual needs of humanity.<sup>8</sup>

How does the church meet the "deeper emotional and spiritual needs of humanity" if she does not address the foundational theological issues? Such a perverted view results from the misplaced ministerial emphasis on human relationships rather than a focus on God. Jesus did not create any confusion in this matter. A right relationship with God and recognition of His personal authority as revealed through His inspired, inerrant Word, establishes a right view on relationships. "And He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. And the second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt 22:37-39).

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Schuller, *Self Esteem: The New Reformation* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982) 12.

## A CRITIQUE OF TWO PRAGMATIC CHURCHES AND THE CHURCH GROWTH MOVEMENT

In order to expand upon some of the previous observations and offer a defense of the core of MacArthur's argument (i.e. the rule and reign of pragmatism versus the Bible's authority in missions, evangelism, and worship), this article will review the foundational principles of the Church Growth Movement (CGM)—a movement that has powerfully influenced much of the modern evangelical churches across America and around the world. The “church” landscape has been drastically altered. Listen to the words of one writer.

Today the portrait is utterly different. Clergy have little influence in people's lives or in matters of cultural determination. Churches compete for people's attention and time, not only within the faith arena, but also with other economic, leisure, and community options. Basic concepts such as “absolute moral truth” have been trashed. Notions of loyalty to one God, one Savior, one Church, or even one theologically consistent belief system have been replaced by the perception that all faiths teach the same lessons, no faith is better than any other, there are no absolute faith principles, and religious truth can be customized to meet one's personal needs.<sup>9</sup>

Is it surprising that one finds churches constantly adjusting their worship, evangelism, and doctrine just for consistency with the changing culture? Although it is difficult to avoid sarcastic criticism of the “new church” environment, nevertheless doctrinal compromise for the sake of attendance is a very serious matter.

Undoubtedly the CGM has substantially increased church attendance.<sup>10</sup> When one considers that the movement is founded in missions,<sup>11</sup> it is no surprise that the goal is numbers (not necessarily

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<sup>9</sup> George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998) 131.

<sup>10</sup> “It is true that the growth of the church as a percentage of world population has been remarkable in recent decades, and we should be greatly encouraged by this” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994] 1124).

<sup>11</sup> Towns commented, “Church growth is that science that investigates the planting, multiplication, growth, function, health, and death of churches. . . . The heart of the Church Growth Movement involves research into growth to establish principles to guide others in the harvest” (Elmer Towns, “The Relationship of Church Growth and Systematic Theology,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29 [March 1986]: 64)

valid conversions, but more names on the church membership list). While pragmatic at its core, the CGM operates under the unbiblical assumption that people naturally seek God. Therefore, the terms “seeker sensitive” or “seeker friendly” is the terminology one will often find in evangelical communities. Moreover, pragmatic principles govern the praxis by which the seeker churches attempt to reach the lost with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. One CGM proponent argued,

The Church Growth Movement has always stressed pragmatism, and still does even though many have criticized it. It is not the kind of pragmatism that compromises doctrine or ethics or the kind that dehumanizes people by using them as means toward an end. It is, however, the kind of consecrated pragmatism, which ruthlessly examines traditional methodologies and programs asking the tough questions. If some sort of ministry in the church is not reaching intended goals, consecrated pragmatism says there is something wrong which needs to be corrected.<sup>12</sup>

Hence, there exists a dynamic tension between obeying the clear biblical teaching in regards to missions and evangelism and the powerful influence of pragmatism. Ironically, the only thing that is constant is *change*, and one lives in a world of continuous, relentless change. However, one must not conclude that the Scripture has changed or that it must be adjusted to accommodate the times. God’s Word is the only accurate and safe means of finding direction in life.

Assuredly, believers must be like the men of Issachar (1 Chron 12:32) for they “understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” Dramatic shifts in society have forced churches to reexamine ministry. However, in that self-examination process, biblical authority and infallibility are often compromised for the pressing “need” to stay constant with the times. Many will agree that a sterile, though biblically-orthodox church is not very attractive to most people. However, can one equally agree that a church that focuses its efforts upon entertainment and “felt needs” will attract many onlookers, but fail miserably to address the “heart issues” of those who enter the church building?

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1984) 201.

## A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES

Two of the most dynamic seeker ministries that exemplify the CGM are Willow Creek Community Church and Saddleback Valley Community Church. Their founders, Bill Hybels and Rick Warren, have set the standard for the pragmatic approach to church growth.<sup>13</sup> (Please note that these are not the only seeker churches that adhere to the CGM philosophy. Nevertheless, with combined weekly attendance in the thousands, they do represent the apparent success of the movement.) Their philosophies and practices for church growth warrant biblical scrutiny as one answers the key question, “Is the phenomenal growth of the seeker movement the result of careful application of the Bible’s authority and its teaching on evangelism?” If so, then all churches should emulate the methods and share in the growth. However, if a large number of followers is equal to a successful ministry, then Jesus’ earthly ministry would have to be deemed a failure! Consider just one passage where many disciples abandoned their brief walk with Christ simply because His words were difficult to understand (John 6:60-66). Gangel made this insightful observation:

Thinking Christian leaders must accept the challenge to focus on healthy churches while recognizing that church size is never a guarantee of spiritual quality. Churches must face the future with total dependence on the sovereignty of God and the power of His Word, while being careful to avoid marrying the spirit of this age and becoming a widow in the next.<sup>14</sup>

With this introduction, it is prudent to discuss the teaching and practice of the CGM as represented by these two characteristic “megachurches.” This is not, however, intended to be a condemnation of these churches (for only Christ has the final word on judgment), because they have certainly been a powerful voice for Christianity for nearly thirty years. Nor is it a personal attack on the sincerity of Hybels and Warren, or their devotion to their ministries. However, it is suggested that the veneer

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<sup>13</sup> G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 11. Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church is quickly moving up the ranks of the megachurches. Although our discussion does not directly address Osteen’s theology or methods, the criticisms presented apply equally to his gaining popularity at the marginalization of the Gospel.

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth O. Gangel, “Marks of a Healthy Church,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (October 2001): 468.

needs to be exposed. If they practiced what they say they believe (as confirmed by their own writings), then the Gospel would be offensive rather than friendly; and more would reject the message, abandon the church, and probably never return. The called and chosen of God will remain!

### ***Orthodoxy?***

Characteristic of most CGM pastors, Hybels and Warren claim to be evangelical. For example, with respect to *sin*, Hybels has written, “We all have the tendency to avoid the sin issue. The message would be so much more comfortable without it. But unless men and women are aware of their sin, they won’t recognize their need for a Savior who offers eternal life to all who call on His name.”<sup>15</sup> Additionally, both men agree that the truth can be communicated without compromise, and the message need not be “dummied down” or diluted in order to speak the language of the postmodern culture. Warren states emphatically that the inerrancy of Scripture is a “nonnegotiable belief.”<sup>16</sup>

However, in actuality these churches will minimize portions of orthodox Christian doctrine if they want the “seekers” to respond. They do not want to offend visitors. This “pick-n-choose” methodology avoids the “contentious” doctrines of the Christian faith and thus persuades the visitors to casually consider the claims of Christ. Unfortunately, such a mindset aligns with what Bill Goff reminded his readers. He referenced Craig M. Gay (“Sensualists Without Heart: *Contemporary Consumerism in Light of the Modern Project*,” in *The Consuming Passion: Christianity & the Consumer Culture*, ed. Rodney Clapp [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998] 19-20) and noted,

When this [consumerist mentality] is reflected in the church, there is projected an upward social and economic mobility by belonging to a church that utilizes the techniques of modernization and entrepreneurial know-how. Assuming a position of cultural identity with consumerist mentality and practice makes the church appear as a competitor with the world, but this attitude could undermine the spiritual integrity needed by the church to move into the world

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<sup>15</sup> Bill Hybels, *Christians in the Marketplace* (Wheaton: Victor, 1988) 41.

<sup>16</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 189.

as servant and shepherd of those who are needing its special guidance and care.<sup>17</sup>

The seeker churches focus on felt needs of the audience rather than the exposition of the Bible. They diminish the truth of God's sovereignty, holiness, and judgment. Moreover, they structure the worship service for the people and not the Father. After all, it is much easier to sell God's love rather than apologize for His hatred of sin. One critic strongly noted,

Seeker church proponents do not abandon the Gospel truth but repackage it in a kinder, gentler format. They introduce seekers to the Christian message by presenting the exclusivist theology of evangelicalism in the friendly guise of an egalitarian, fulfillment-enhancing, fun religious encounter with God.<sup>18</sup>

As previously mentioned, in order to justify his pragmatic methods and secure the seeker's response, the CGM preacher must emphasize human responsibility and participation in salvation. MacArthur rightly observed:

The philosophy that marries marketing technique with church growth theory is the result of bad theology. It assumes that if you package the gospel right, people will get saved. It is rooted in Arminianism, which makes the human will, not a sovereign God, the decisive factor in salvation. It speaks of conversion as a "decision for Christ." Such language and such doctrine have begun to color modern ministry. The goal of market-driven ministry is an instantaneous human decision, rather than a radical transformation of the heart wrought by Almighty God through the Holy Spirit's convicting work and the truth of His Word. An honest belief in the sovereignty of God in salvation would bring an end to a lot of the nonsense that is going on in the church.<sup>19</sup>

Tragically, both Warren and Hybels appear to replicate the teaching of many New Testament false teachers. Like those of the first century, they tickle their audience's ears (2 Tim 4:3); they appeal to the "lovers of self" (2 Tim 3:2); and, *in practice* they deny the power of the Gospel (2 Tim 3:15).

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<sup>17</sup> Bill Goff, "Cross-Cultural Ethics for World-Class Christians," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 42 (Spring 2000): 51.

<sup>18</sup> Kimon Sargeant, *Seeker Churches* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000) 93.

<sup>19</sup> John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993).

When a preacher has to manipulate the message to appeal to the listeners, he removes its power and authority. When his messages contain more stories and illustrations rather than evidence of careful, prayerful, and thoughtful exegesis of specific Bible passages, then his congregation retains its biblically illiterate status. In a classroom, if the students have not learned the lesson, then the teacher has not “taught” the lesson. Likewise, in the church, if the people have not learned more about God through His Word, then the preacher has not biblically preached. It is a lose-lose proposition.

These observations are further validated through recent surveys of worship and belief systems among adults. For instance, in a survey of adults who claim the title of “evangelical Christian”, it is not surprising that over one half of the respondents (i.e. “Christians”) have formulated a syncretistic religious worldview. The survey noted:

In fact, one reason why beliefs fluctuate is that most Americans’ hold few convictions about their faith. For instance, even among those who disagree with orthodox views, many do so while hedging their bets. Most Americans have one foot in the biblical camp, and one foot outside it. They say they are committed, but to what? They are spiritually active, but to what end? The spiritual profile of American Christianity is not unlike a lukewarm church that the Bible warns about.<sup>20</sup>

Christ is glorified and the regenerating ministry of the Holy Spirit is unimpeded when the unadulterated Gospel of Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, is preached with power and uncompromising conviction and truth. The church service centers on the worship of the Lord and the edification of the saints, not the evangelism of the lost. Once again, MacArthur remarked,

There is simply no warrant in Scripture for adapting weekly church services to the preferences of unbelievers. Indeed, the practice seems to be contrary to the spirit of everything Scripture says about the assembly of believers. When the church comes together on the Lord’s Day, that is no time to entertain the lost, amuse the brethren, or otherwise cater to the ‘felt needs’ of those in

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<sup>20</sup> “Barna’s Annual Tracking Study Shows Americans Stay Spiritually Active, But Biblical Views Wane” [online] (Barna Group, 21 May 2007, accessed 28 May 2009) available from <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/18-congregations/103-barnas-annual-tracking-study-shows-americans-stay-spiritually-active-but-biblical-views-wane>.

attendance. This is when we should bow before our God as a congregation and honor Him with our worship.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Orthopraxy?***

In their ministries, Warren and Hybels rely upon worldly approaches when appealing to their congregations. The focus has shifted from doctrine to practice; from orthodoxy to “seeker orthopraxy.” The following examples are not derived from their church doctrinal statements, but certain practices of the CGM are a reliable measure of the unbiblical soundness of their methods.

### **Do Unbelievers Seek after God?**

The CGM believes that the lost are on a quest for God. One may generally agree that people search for meaning to life, however they perceive it to be. Nevertheless, the Bible clearly and unmistakably teaches that no one seeks for God (Rom 3:10-11). One can compare the CGM to a means of marketing Christianity that is in competition with other religious viewpoints. Christianity is sold to the consumer like a used car is sold to an unsuspecting car buyer; only tell them what they want to hear, what the ultimate cost will be, and the best features of the product. It is usually sold “as is” with no warranty. They have three days to test drive the vehicle and return it to the dealer if not satisfied. The premise is intuitively obvious. The church will draw the seekers into the car lot (church) and convince them to “buy” Christianity as the best on the religious market; and, if they grow tired with it, they can exchange it for another model (false religion). This is contrary to the biblical record. Indeed, the Bible depicts unbelievers as spiritually dead (Col 2:13), rebellious (Eph 2:1-3), and hardhearted (4:18). The ungodly reject the general revelation of God (Rom 1:21) and do not seek God. Instead God draws those whom He desires to save (John 6:44). Consequently, with respect to this first practice, the CGM has built a theological foundation on shifting sand.

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<sup>21</sup> John MacArthur, “How Shall We Then Worship?” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, gen. ed. John H. Armstrong (Chicago: Moody, 1996) 181

### **When in Rome, Do as the Romans!**

The CGM marketing strategies are very similar to those found in the business world. The most effective plans identify a target market before a product is promoted, distributed, and eventually sold. Barna agreed with the target strategy when he wrote,

The essence of target marketing or segmentation ministry is to focus your limited resources on the people you are most likely to impact. Research clearly indicates that failure to target segments of a mass audience will likely result in spreading limited resources over too broad a population . . . allocating finite resources to reach the people who are most likely to respond makes it possible to target future markets and expands the efficacy and impact of the church in an orderly and planned manner.<sup>22</sup>

Is marketing research necessary for church growth? Since when does the Bible take a secondary or tertiary role in reaching the lost or ministering to congregational needs? God's Word will reach its intended audience in spite of the "limited resources" of the local church. The key is the proclamation of the truth of Scripture. However, Strobels encouraged targeting and wrote,

Once the bull's-eye of a target audience is defined, the next step is to determine how to get the arrow there. That means developing a workable strategy for reaching that group. . . . When [church members are] regularly hanging around Unchurched Harry and Mary, talking with them over dinner or going out to movies with them, they naturally get to know the kind of approach that will attract or repel them.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, in order to reach people with the Gospel, the "salesman" must understand the felt needs of the seekers. In other words, the Gospel according to Hybels and Warren is not powerful enough to reach into the hearts of sinful people until that message is packaged to address the *symptoms* of human depravity rather than the core of their dilemma, that is, their depraved hearts, disobedience, and rebellion.

Let the question be asked another way. Is thinking like the lost the most effective method to preach the Gospel? Is this the method used

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<sup>22</sup> George Barna, *Today's Pastors* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993) 109-11.

<sup>23</sup> Lee Strobels, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) 166.

during the Apostolic Age? Some modern church planters assert that homogeneous groups will grow quicker than heterogeneous groups. Hence, one would expect that churches, which target people of the same race, ethnicity, language, and so forth, should be the most vibrant. However, the opposite occurred in the first century churches. Churches were planted and flourished in response to God's saving grace rather than through marketing strategies. Moreover, they consisted of people from various demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic backgrounds (consider, for example, the Corinthian church). Does not Paul command believers to separate from the ungodly in Ephesians 4:17-18? This does not imply that Christians are not to engage their culture or live in a monastery. The church is, however, to stop *thinking* like unbelievers. Jesus' words should remind believers that they are in the world, but NOT of the world.

No one can lead a person to a saving knowledge of Christ simply by identifying and addressing his perceived needs. Only God can change a heart. Only the Holy Spirit can cleanse a heart. Only the Word of God can penetrate the darkness and layers of unbelief. Only God calls sinners to Himself, and He alone (not marketing strategies) is sovereign in the salvation process. Therefore, if the church is to act like unbelievers before they can receive the Gospel, then they merely obtain a church full of pseudo-Christians who think they are saved when in fact they are tragically deceived and lost. The Gospel is offensive to the natural man (1 Cor 2:14), but when God does the saving, a person is saved indeed. He does not need manipulation to bring souls into the Body of Christ.

Interestingly, in an issue of *Christianity Today*, Matt Branaugh wrote an article that appears to vindicate the points made in this section.<sup>24</sup> Apparently, after years of promoting and conducting seeker-sensitive services to reach the "unchurched" with a non-committal Gospel, Willow Creek Community Church has realized its theological and ecclesiastical shortcomings. The results of a church survey indicated that 63% of those members who were dissatisfied with the role of the church in a believer's spiritual growth and were "stalled" in their growth strongly considered leaving the church. Unfortunately, according to Branaugh the church felt it could not "provide greater depth to mature believers by its moves." Clearly one may understand that the preaching

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<sup>24</sup> Mark Branaugh, "Willow Creek's 'Huge Shift,'" *Christianity Today* 52 (June 2008): 13.

of a “shallow Gospel” eventually leads to spiritual weakness and a plethora of church members who either never confessed their sins and repented unto salvation, or only emotionally responded to “felt needs” therapy. However, Willow Creek proves it cannot easily change its methodology. Indeed, they plan to select a target audience with new “felt needs.” Will they ever learn their lesson?

### **The Show Must Continue!**

Lawson described the overemphasis on entertainment in today’s postmodern church.

A new way of doing church is emerging. In this radical paradigm shift, exposition is being replaced with entertainment, preaching with performances, doctrine with drama, and theology with theatrics. The pulpit, once the focal point of the church, is now being overshadowed by a variety of church-growth techniques, everything from trendy worship styles to glitzy presentations to vaudeville-like pageantries. In seeking to capture the upper hand in church growth, a new wave of pastors is reinventing church and repackaging the gospel into a product to be sold to “consumers.”<sup>25</sup>

Hybels and Warren have discovered a formula for seeker success. They suggest that the preacher should tell stories with plenty of illustrations to present a message without intimidation. They argue that since Jesus was a storyteller, so must the modern minister. Additionally, the preacher needs to communicate a clear message without the use of obscure theological terms. The key is simplicity—do not challenge the people to think, and of course, focus the messages on felt needs. Clearly, such an approach results in light and superficial sermons, which present a distorted Gospel that appears good initially, but cannot withstand adversity. Is entertainment the purpose and the ultimate goal of the Gospel message? Why did Jesus tell stories? Was He sent to entertain or save? Many do not know that Jesus’ parables were not presented as entertainment, but to obscure the spiritual truth from those to whom God had chosen NOT to reveal it (Matt 13:11-17). Indeed, He explained the meanings to His disciples so they could understand. The once

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<sup>25</sup> Steven J. Lawson, “The Priority of Biblical Preaching: An Expository of Acts 2:42-47,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (April 2001): 198.

overflowing crowds, soon departed as soon as Jesus called for commitment, sacrifice, and death to self. Heidinger wrote,

Evangelical pastors and theologians can learn from the mainline experience of placing relevance above truth. We must avoid the lure of novelty and soft sell, which, we are told, will make it easier for moderns to believe. . . . We have truths to affirm and errors to avoid. We must not try to make these truths more appealing or user friendly by watering them down.<sup>26</sup>

### CONCLUSION

Unbiblical methodologies for engaging in ministry have influenced the modern church—impacting both doctrine and practice. The historical, orthodox teachings of the evangelical church have been replaced by the “tried and true” marketing strategies of the business world, designed to draw the “seekers of truth” to a worship service where sin and judgment are minimized and “felt needs” are emphasized. The true church is witnessing the demise of *theocentric* worship and the rise of *anthropocentric* activities—all within the evangelical community. The Church Growth and Emerging Church movements have merged to propagate their principles through the philosophies of pragmatism and postmodernism. Moreover, megachurches such as Saddleback Valley Community Church and Willow Creek Community Church have led the movements. Their leaders claim to be orthodox in writing but are “unorthodox” in practice. The result is a large number of biblically illiterate churchgoers and pseudo-Christians who have a perceived appearance but lack credibility.

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<sup>26</sup> James V. Heidinger II, “Toxic Pluralism,” *Christianity Today* 37 (5 April 1993): 16-17.





## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Link* by Colin Tudge and Josh Young. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2009. 262 pp., cloth, \$25.99.

*The Link* was recently released to coincide with the introduction of the Darwinius Massillae fossil (hereafter known as Ida) and the television special of the same name. This book has gained a great deal of exposure in a short amount of time due to its rather extraordinary claims. As the title implies, *The Link* purports that an ancient connection has been found between apes and man. Because of this fantastic conclusion, those who support this work have made it well known by enlisting their greatest ally: the secular media. Upon reading this book it rapidly becomes apparent that it is largely given to sensationalism and hyperbole. Even the title is an exaggeration as the primary author (Tudge) must have known that those seeing it would assume that the book is about the so called “missing link” finally being found. However, it only says that Ida is “a link,” that is one of many. Even more unexpected, the book admits that Ida may not even be of direct ancestry to man.

The first chapter contains a very unusual account of the events leading up to Ida’s death. The intention here is not to be harsh, but the writing comes off as being written for children. It is certainly not something you would expect from an author who is seeking to expound upon a serious scientific claim. “She now has the freedom to roam, climb, and fend for herself. Moving as though she’s chasing down the wind . . .” (p. 3). The coincidental yet appropriate wording here makes for an ironic connection to Ecclesiastes 1:14. Next, the account of obtaining the fossil is recorded. To be fair, there is some interesting information contained here. The story of obtaining Ida is one that could be likened to a spy mission. Jorn Hurum was under a great deal of pressure to purchase Ida from a black market fossil dealer. He was concerned that another scientist may seek to snatch the discovery out from under him. After painstaking efforts, Hurum was able to garner the support of The Oslo Museum and purchase the fossil for an undisclosed seven figure sum. Of note is the unbridled passion of Hurum and his colleagues. They express a great deal of love for their find and fossils in general. However, their exuberance may have caused them to make some hasty generalizations.

Chapter three describes Ida's Eocene world (the mysterious realm of 47 million year old earth). There is quite a bit of information to be found here regarding the life forms, the hot climate and various beliefs about the Eocene. The problem is that this information is only related to the fossil but does not deal with it directly. At this point in the book it starts to become obvious that the authors are simply adding unneeded text. If they did not add this padding then we would only have a pamphlet to read. In the next chapter the Messel Pit is introduced. The pit was the result of magma rising close to the subterranean water table causing an explosion. For the sake of brevity it need only be said that this pit is filled with very well preserved fossils. Several of these fossils (including Ida), are presented in high quality color pictures in the book. Regardless of your views on evolution, the fossils are so well preserved and unique that many readers will find them fascinating. However, in no way do they evoke sympathy with the text's theories or help make a better case for evolution.

The next couple of chapters treat us to the tale of how primates came to be and their supposed evolution. It is an odd account as it manages to be pedantic without providing any real information. Apparently, the consensus among most evolutionists is that apes and monkeys derived from tarsier-like animals. For Ida to be significant, lemurs would have to replace the tarsiers as the ancestors to apes and man. Sadly, it is still unclear how this proves that Ida is a possible link to man.

Chapter seven goes into detail about events that happened during the Eocene and how certain evolutionary lines split off. "On the whole, more recent computers can do more than the earlier ones in a greater variety of ways and commonly with less effort; and the same on the whole is true of more recent animals compared with their ancient ancestors" (p. 165). This segment of the book was absolutely shocking as the author actually compares evolution to items which are designed and created. The tacit implication here is that an intellect was guiding evolution.

Next, several hypotheses are presented about the various branches of evolution and how man and apes are ultimately related. Again, only some of this information relates to Ida. The final chapter covers Ida's revelation to the world. Ida was discovered and researched for a significant amount of time before more than a handful of people even knew about her. This comes off as highly unusual given how

scientific studies are generally introduced. A bit of information given to the public every few weeks over the course of a few years is more legitimate.

The book ends with an epilogue that makes a weak appeal to creationists. First, we are reminded that St. Francis of Assisi felt that the animals and plants were his brothers and sisters. Then we get this rather odd line, “Charles Darwin, who suggested that all creatures must have arisen in the deep past from a common ancestor, said in effect that this is literally the case. If everything is God’s creation, why would we want to be aloof from it? Who are we to be so superior” (p. 246)? Given the focus of the previous text, this segment feels as though it was thrown in to deal with a particular audience and their possible objections to *The Link*.

The bottom line is that this book is a hodgepodge of evolutionary minutiae that does not provide a coherent narrative. A new fossil was discovered that does indeed look very nice. Other than that, there is nothing inherently useful to be found in this work. It is hard to see how this book could convince even committed evolutionists to accept its claims. Indeed, it is even possible that this book may hinder the efforts of the evolution accepting scientific community.

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***Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*** by Michael Horton. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008. 270 pp., cloth, \$19.99.

In this critical analysis of the church in America, the author begins his work very intently and passionately. As the title suggests, he is accusing the church of being nothing less than “Christless.” That is, the church has become so distracted by everything from false teaching (examples given include Joel Osteen and Joyce Meyer) to energy-sapping programs, to faulty understanding of the purpose and mission of the church, that it has lost Christ Himself in the mix. Christianity need not explicitly deny any key foundational teaching to become Christless; it merely needs to buy into a “series of subtle distortions and not-so-subtle distractions” (p. 20). “My argument in this book,” Horton writes, “is not that evangelicalism is becoming theologically liberal but that it is becoming theologically vacuous” (p. 23). It is for this reason that “precisely the most numerically

successful versions of religion will be the least tethered to the biblical drama of redemption centering on Christ” (pp. 54-55). In Horton’s view “we are living out our creed, but that creed is closer to the American dream than it is to the Christian faith” (p. 21).

These are damning critiques of the American church. If true, Christians have misplaced Christ in the midst of our service for Him and are dangerously close to losing Him altogether. Have we, like the Pharisees of the first century, marginalized the Lord out of the faith even as we passionately pursue Him? Does Horton present evidence that proves his case? I have to say, he does a pretty good job. Still, to me he seemed a bit long on generalities and short on specifics. For example, Horton is on target when he writes, “I think that the church in America today is so obsessed with being practical, relevant, helpful, successful, and perhaps even well-liked that it nearly mirrors the world itself. Aside from the packaging, there is nothing that cannot be found in most churches today that could not be satisfied by any number of secular programs and self-help groups” (pp. 16-17). Horton is on to something here, but he paints with a broad brush and he is skimpy on details.

He does, in fact, devote considerable attention to the teaching of Joel Osteen (pp. 67-100), although strangely he does not footnote a single statement from Osteen’s writings. But Osteen is hardly an evangelical and not particularly germane to the argument of this book, in my opinion. Osteen and other prosperity gospel leaders, along with theological liberals (see p. 167) and cults, have surely distorted the gospel and the church but this is neither news nor representative of the evangelical mainstream. While the information is helpful (although limited without documentation) it does not address the “sins” of those Horton is trying to convince. For that he would need to turn to Rick Warren, Bill Hybels, *Christianity Today*, James Dobson and the like. If he is to prove his case Horton would have to do so in the solidly evangelical arena represented by such as these. This he does not do, although he does take random shots at George Barna (p. 61), emergent leader Brian McLaren (p. 114), Willow Creek (pp. 192-94), and Dan Kimball (p. 117).

Because Horton did not connect the dots from his thesis (that we are living in the day of Christless Christianity) to specific evangelical leaders and organizations, I found myself frustrated. While my own research would resonate with Horton’s indictment, I found little in this volume that provides proof he is correct. One specific piece of evidence

Horton does offer a study taken from 47 sermons on the Prodigal Son delivered in Southern Baptist and Presbyterian Churches (USA) from 1986-1988 (pp. 48-61). This study, while obviously dated, suggests that these sermons present a therapeutic message rather than a Christ-centered one. This is a good point, but Horton himself is in danger of importing the gospel message of reconciliation through the cross into the Prodigal Son account, even though it is not there (p. 56). This is no doubt due to Horton's view, commonly held, that the whole Bible is about Jesus (pp. 143). With this approach to Scripture the meaning of the biblical texts cannot stand on their own—they must somehow always directly point to Christ. This leads to allegorizing and excessive typology (pp. 148-52). I am not disagreeing that in the big picture all of Scripture is framed by Christ and the gospel, but we must be careful not to press each detail so hard that we distort the authorial meaning of individual texts.

I appreciate how Horton clearly shows the works-based theology of Joel Osteen and other prosperity teachers (pp. 78, 79, 87, 134). Yet, I am less certain about Horton's views on other matters such as these:

- Horton is covenantal in his theology but he seems to go beyond the covenantal system in attributing saving power to the sacraments (pp. 178, 218-24).
- What should be the actual content of our sermons? Is the gospel the only legitimate message? What exactly does Horton mean by “the gospel?”
- Does he not over-emphasize the role of pastors and elders at the expense of the ministries of the body (pp. 184, 199, 223)?
- Is he correct that the purpose of worship is to receive, not give to, God (p. 198)?
- What does he mean, “The church is the creation of the Word” (p. 220)?

On the positive side, however, while he is short on specifics Horton is right in general. He shows from church history, especially the revivalism of Finney and company, that the roots of Christless Christianity run deep (pp. 44-52, 173, 159-87). Liberalism started by downplaying doctrine in favor of moralism and experience (p. 24). Today, therefore, “Across the entire spectrum from conservative to liberal, we are being told that we need to focus on deeds, not creeds” (p. 121). In addition, Christianity

today draws from pietism and romanticism as it locates ultimate authority in experience rather than Scripture (pp. 221, 227, 232, 240). And Horton is right on the money when he warns that the church's mission is not to fix the planet but to call people to Christ (pp. 141, 208, 217). It does not matter if the "drumbeat is abortion and gay marriage or global warming and famine if our programs and activities subtly replace Christ's" (p. 207). Nor are we called to focus on "What would Jesus do?" Rather our attention should be on what has Jesus done (pp. 25-26, 110, 117). Horton is again correct when he states, "Once you make your peace of mind rather than peace with God the main problem to be solved, the whole gospel becomes radically redefined" (p. 39).

Even with the issues I have raised, *Christless Christianity* is nevertheless a book well worth reading. I believe Horton is correct in his general thesis—the church is losing sight of Christ even as it seeks to serve Him. I think the book would be far more valuable if Horton would address more specifics within evangelicalism and if he would clarify some of his statements. But the overall assessment of Christianity in America is on the mark. We can only hope that many evangelical leaders will take notice.

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***MacArthur's Millennial Manifesto: A Friendly Response*** by Samuel E. Waldron. Owensboro, KY: RBAP, 2008. 172 pp., paper, \$12.99.

At the 2007 Shepherds' Conference, John MacArthur delivered an address entitled "Why Every Self-Respecting Calvinist is a Premillennialist" (an edited version of this talk is found in Appendix Two). Though MacArthur is respected in Reformed circles, this address did not sit well with some covenant theologians. One such example is the volume by Samuel Waldron entitled "MacArthur's Millennial Manifesto." This "friendly response" consists of twenty-four brief chapters in which are briefly discussed matters such as the clarification of terminology, historical issues, key biblical texts (e.g. Gal 6:16, Rom 9:6, Eph 2:12-19), hermeneutics, the Church as the continuation of Israel, and an appendix regarding the future of physical Israel. Though the back cover of this book claims it to be irenic, and complimentary things are said about MacArthur (p. 1), the overall tone is set early on when Waldron charges MacArthur to be "badly misinformed" and "led

along a path of misconceptions by his own theological prejudices” (p. 2; see also, pp. 9, 19, 36, etc.). The book seeks to set straight these supposed misconceptions.

Waldron writes that he is “an amillennialist who rejects the whole idea that the Church replaces Israel. I also emphatically reject the kind of spiritualizing or allegorizing hermeneutic that would be necessary to defend such a view as biblical” (p. 4). This statement will be unpacked as the book progresses. Summarily, however, it can be said that Waldron will argue for a type of supersessionism in which there is a present and future salvation of Israel (see Appendix One), but neither a restoration of national Israel nor a fulfillment of the Old Testament covenants by Israel is to be expected.

This volume stresses three important points. First, amillennialists should not use “replacement” terminology when presenting their view (pp. 6, 11, 12, 29, 30, 33). In what could be taken as the thesis statement of the book, he explains that “to speak of the Church replacing Israel is to forget that the Church *is* Israel in a newly reformed and expanded phase of existence. In a word, terminology like replacement theology or supersessionism disguises the biblical fact that the Church is really the *continuation* of Israel” (p. 7). Second (and connected to the first), Waldron objects to MacArthur’s characterization of Amillennialism as holding that the Church is a completely different entity than Israel (p. 11). Consequently, a running theme through his exposition of New Testament passages is that there is no basis to see a distinction between Israel and the Church, for they are one people. And third, the book is concerned to defend the consistency between unconditional election and Amillennialism. One of the prime reasons Waldron shies away from “replacement” language is that it implies Israel has forfeited her status as God’s elect nation through disobedience. This, MacArthur argues, is tantamount to an Arminian view of election (pp. 10-11). Thus, Waldron prefers to say that the Church is a continuation of Israel in a new phase rather than a different entity. A key portion of the book to understand Waldron’s case is five, “Not Your Father’s Amillennialism.” He importantly states that “they [amillennialists] teach that God is continuing to fulfill His promises to Israel in the ongoing and future conversion of (at least a remnant of) ethnic Israelites” (p. 30). Hence God does keep his promises to ethnic Israel and preserves them in keeping with Calvinistic theology.

In defending his claims, Waldron includes exposition of key New Testament texts. Though he claims that there are actually “a zillion passages to prove the Church is the Israel of God” (p. 36), Waldron names two as the classic ones—Romans 9:6 and Galatians 6:16 (p. 38). Regarding Galatians 6:16, despite the fact that “Dispensationalists have stubbornly defended the idea that the phrase ‘Israel of God’ in the text cannot refer to the Church” (p. 39), he “tries again to make clear” to his “Dispensational brethren that the Israel of God *is* and *must be* a reference to the Church of Christ” (p. 39). Thus, ethnic Israel is not in view here but the entire Church (p. 41). He interprets *kai* in the phrase “and upon the Israel of God,” as having an exegetical or appositional force so that the “Israel of God” is clarifying the identity of “those who walk by this rule,” Jews and Gentiles who compose the Church (p. 47). This interpretation argues against the Dispensational view that there is a distinction between Israel and the Church (p. 48). The second classic passage to which Waldron appeals is Romans 9:6. His main point in this section is that elect Gentiles are not separate to the people of God, but a part of the people of God, namely Israel (pp. 53, 55). The same point is argued in relation to 1 Corinthians 10:18, 12:2 (chapter nine), and Ephesians 2:12-19 (chapter ten).

In chapters 11-16 Waldron tackles the important issue of hermeneutics. He writes that his belief regarding the Church as the Israel of God does not imply a spiritualizing hermeneutic (p. 109), but rather “the addition of the converted Gentiles to God’s Israel also *literally* fulfills the Old Testament” (p. 67). The idea that the Bible should be interpreted literally wherever possible is said to be “hopelessly naïve” (p. 74). The text used as an example is Revelation 13:1 which “the Dispensationalist teachers who taught me the ‘literal wherever possible’ view would have . . . understood . . . symbolically” (p. 74). Further, Waldron accuses MacArthur of duplicity since he would acknowledge there to be poetry and symbols in Scripture (pp. 81-83) and of inconsistency in his interpretation of Revelation 20 related to the binding of Satan (p. 86).

Chapter nineteen deals with the New Covenant. Waldron places great stock in the fact that the second part of our Bible is called the “New Testament” or “New Covenant.” He says that this is a “gigantic problem that Dispensationalism has never solved” and the fact that the name “New Testament” is used “refutes Classic Dispensationalism” and “calls into question the two-fulfillment theory of the New Covenant held by

Progressive Dispensationalism” (p. 107). This is because every passage in the New Testament which refers to the New Covenant “assumes the Church as the people with whom the New Covenant is made” (p. 108). The final important section of Waldron’s critique of MacArthur’s “manifesto” is chapter twenty-four. He graciously gives Dispensationalism a pass by saying that it is not heresy (p. 127), however, immediately adds that it “raises very basic issues with regard to the true nature of Christianity and the Gospel” and if the Church is not the fulfillment of the Old Testament then this “drastically and basically affects our understanding of Christianity” (p. 129).

As with any book of this nature, there is much room for interaction between both sides of the debate. Waldron is to be commended for courageously engaging in this discussion and forthrightly stating his conclusions. It is obviously not possible in this format to discuss each issue and offer an exegesis of every text, however, some items will be highlighted which deserve further reflection. First, even if one uses “continuation” terminology in lieu of “replacement” terminology, the essence of the difference between Covenant and Dispensational Theology remains—a different entity other than the nation of Israel fulfills the covenants. In the Old Testament, the Gentiles were to be blessed through the Jews, while in the New Testament passages discussed by Waldron, Jews and Gentiles are on equal footing in one body. Whether this body is said to be a continuation of Israel or a replacement of Israel is ultimately a moot point, and the fact remains that this is a different group than the one in covenant with Yahweh. Could this be the spirit behind MacArthur’s comment regarding Arminianism?

Second, other than a passing reference to Ezekiel’s prophecy of a sin offering on page 85 (better purgation offering), there is no discussion of the vast amount of material found in virtually every Old Testament prophet regarding specific, millennial promises to national Israel. For example, it is difficult to apply some of these to the Church as the new Israel when they contain prophecies indicating that Israel will be the center of Gentile attention (Isa 14:1-2; 49:22-23), will be served by the Gentiles (61:5), will receive the wealth of the Gentiles (61:6b), and will be acknowledged to have been blessed by God (61:9). How are promises such as these and scores of others *literally* fulfilled in this reconstituted Israel? Moreover, there is no discussion as to how the non-spiritual features of the New Covenant (such as restoration to the land in Jer 31 // Ezek 36—37) are fulfilled in the Church. Third, when Waldron is

interpreting biblical passages, he has a penchant for citing Michael Vlach (assistant professor of theology at Master's Seminary) instead of MacArthur. This seems strange since MacArthur has published commentaries on the books containing the passages discussed by Waldron (Rom, Gal, Eph, and Cor). Since MacArthur's views are being critiqued, it would seem only fair to quote what he has written.

Fourth, "Israel" cannot be redefined to include believing Jews and Gentiles as Waldron claims. From the Romans 9—11 passage this is readily apparent: a) the contextual definition has been established in 9:4; b) the division in 9:6 is a division within Israel; c) the two occurrences of the term "Israel" in 9:27 fall plainly within this sense; d) the occurrence of "Israel" in 9:31 refers to ethnic Israel; e) the two occurrences of "Israel" in Romans 10 refer to ethnic Israel (19, 21); and, f) the four occurrences of "Israel" in Romans 11 refer to ethnic Israel (2, 7, 25, 26). Here are numerous uses of the word "Israel" all of which refer to ethnic Israel (including 9:6 because of 9:4). It is therefore exegetically unlikely that we would have a new definition of "Israel" as Jews and Gentiles. And yet Waldron's last statement in the chapter is: "such distinctions [Gentile/Israel], let me say it as politely as possible, are exegetical impossibilities." This is strong rhetoric in light of the evidence. Further, two of the most outstanding commentaries on Romans are Douglas Moo in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* and Thomas Schreiner in the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Moo gives three contextual reasons to reject the position taken by Waldron (p. 574). The same is true of Schreiner who states that "nowhere is the term Israel transferred to the church" (p. 494). Certainly there would be commentators who would agree with Waldron, but this passage is far from a slam-dunk for this version of the Amillennial view. It is puzzling, therefore, to aver that an Israel/Gentile distinction is an "exegetical impossibility" (p. 55).

Fifth, chapter seven dealing with Galatians 6:16 is one of the longest in the book. As Waldron treks his way to 6:16 he makes some leaps in logic along the path. For example, when Paul refers to Gentiles as "sons of Abraham," this does not indicate that Israel is now the Church. Just because a Gentile is referred to as a "son" says nothing about Israel changing what it is. The term "son" in Scripture is used many times to speak of one who shares the traits of the noun in the genitive. We are the "sons" of Abraham because we have the faith of Abraham. This is the point made by Paul in Galatians 3:6-9—the

Gentiles have faith like Abraham and are justified like Abraham which was foreseen in the Abrahamic Covenant. Gentiles had to become proselytes to enter Israel, but the church consists of Jews and Gentiles who enter it as Jews or Gentiles by faith (Eph 2:16; cf. the Jerusalem council in Acts 15; 1 Cor 10:32). Furthermore, Paul called Jew/Gentile equality in the church something unique which had not previously been revealed in Scripture (Eph 3:5). Before the day of Pentecost God worked through Israel, but after Pentecost through the new body of the Church (Acts 1:5; 11:15-16; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 1:18). In a sense, believers of all ages are all the people of God. Nevertheless God has dealt with different groups of them and has had different purposes for them in various periods of human history.

Waldron then comes to Galatians 6:16 which he understands to be the entire Church of Christ, and not exclusively ethnic Jews. As noted previously, this is what leads him to take the *kai* in the verse as apposition or exegetical. An ample discussion of this verse has been provided by S. Lewis Johnson (“Paul and ‘The Israel of God’: An Exegetical and Eschatological Case-Study,” in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost* [Chicago: Moody, 1986] 181-96). It is important to stress that Paul is attacking Jewish legalists in Galatians. His exasperation reaches its pinnacle in 5:12 where he desires that they be castrated (the ESV and NIV have “emasculate” and NASB has “mutilate”). Johnson notes that there are basically three views of the “Israel of God” in this verse: 1) the “Israel of God” is the Church. This view takes the “and” as an explicative *kai* translated “even” (an appositional sense—Waldron’s view) thus making the “Israel of God” the body composed of Jew/Gentile—those who “walk by this rule . . .”; 2) the “Israel of God” is a remnant of Israelites in the Church; and, 3) the “Israel of God” is the future redeemed nation. Regarding *kai* it should be kept in mind the hermeneutical principle that unless there are compelling exegetical, theological, or contextual reasons, we should avoid rarer grammatical uses when the normal uses make perfect sense. While the use adopted by Waldron is possible, it is comparatively rare (which he admits, pp. 46-47). Therefore, Waldron must produce strong evidence for its use here, which, in this reviewer’s mind he has not done. And yet Waldron insists that the text “demands” taking the *kai* according to the first view (p. 47) when in fact most contemporary scholars go against this interpretation (see Johnson, pp. 183-87). There simply is no instance in biblical literature where “Israel” is used for the Church, this text

notwithstanding. It is better to say that Paul has so blasted the Jewish legalists that he counters that in 6:16 by saying there is a remnant in the nation which has remained faithful.

For those who keep up with the debate between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology, this book has value in that it is a recent expression of the Amillennial perspective. Further, it attempts to give a more moderate version of the system, thereby making it interesting for those who study the field. However, those looking for new arguments in the debate or a change of tone will be disappointed.

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***Is Rome the True Church? A Consideration of the Roman Catholic Claim*** by Norman L. Geisler and Joshua M. Betancourt. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008. 235 pp., paper, \$17.99.

It is not uncommon for a Christian to change the church he attends. However, it is another matter when a Protestant converts to Roman Catholicism. Each week on the Eternal Word Television Network, one can watch an interview on “The Journey Home” program. Typically, a cradle Catholic who left the Church and has since returned will give his testimony, or a former Protestant who has “come home to Rome” will describe his journey. There are a number of reasons routinely given for this including such things as the aesthetics of worship, the writings of the early Fathers, and negatively, the plethora of Protestant denominations. In contrast to this final reason, stands the magisterium of the Roman Church backed by apostolic succession and papal infallibility which gives a sense of certainty and stability amidst a pluralism of religious ideas.

In *Is Rome the True Church*, Geisler and Betancourt correctly point out how high the stakes are in this phenomenon. If Rome is the true church, the implications are staggering. For instance, the Roman Church is the only infallible interpreter of Christ’s teachings and every person or branch of Christendom *willfully* out of step with Rome is in danger of damnation. When one converts to Catholicism “he or she must accept immediately as *de fide* [of faith] dogma many doctrines—including papal infallibility—as binding . . . of the Catholic Church, even those that may run counter to conscience” (p. 7). As the authors tackle the question posed by the title, eight chapters are included along with five

appendices. The chapters are of enough critical importance to warrant brief examination in this review.

The first chapter examines Rome's claim to be the true Church. In this section, seven factors are given which contributed to the evolution of the authoritarian government of the Church (pp. 10-11). This is followed by a lineage of sources since Peter to buttress the claim of Rome to be the true Church and the source from which one receives the fullness of salvation (pp. 12-16). Citations are provided from such notables as Cyprian, Augustine, the Second Council of Nicea (AD 787), the Fourth Lateran Council (AD 1215), Aquinas, Trent, Vatican I & II, and The Catechism of the Catholic Church (AD 1994). Of prime significance is the end of the chapter entitled "What the Claim to Being the True Church Does Mean" (pp. 18-21). Five ramifications are listed: 1) the Roman Church alone contains the full and proper expression of Christian truth; 2) the Roman Church alone contains the fullness of salvation; 3) non-Catholic churches are not true churches; 4) the Roman Church alone has the infallible truth of Christ; and, 5) anyone who dies knowingly rejecting this doctrine will go to hell.

Chapter 2 deals with the historical development of the Roman primacy structure. Here the authors begin to chip away at Rome's claim to authority with the thesis statement, "If there was no apostolic New Testament basis for an episcopal form of government, particularly an authoritarian and universal one, then there is no biblical basis for the primacy for anyone, Peter included" (p. 23). The chapter examines church government in the early church period and shows that there is a marked contrast between Rome's present hierarchical structure and the churches of the first century. Citations are provided from the New Testament and first and second century sources to buttress this discontinuity. A helpful discussion is also included regarding the general church councils. Rome insists that the twenty-one church councils (listed and briefly annotated, pp. 40-48) are binding on the whole Christian church in contrast to the other branches of Christendom which do not hold this view. The authors provide five reasons why Rome's claim is faulty in this area.

The next chapter deals with the primacy of Peter. This critical section points out that there are three links in the Roman Catholic claim to being the true Church: 1) the primacy of Peter among the apostles; 2) the infallibility of Peter when making official pronouncements on doctrine and morals; and, 3) apostolic succession (p. 61). "As is true of

any chain of reasoning, the argument is no stronger than its weakest link. Hence, if one link is false, then the whole argument crumbles” (p. 62). The first link is scrutinized in this chapter. The primacy of Peter is defined with citations from Trent. The authors then defend Peter’s primacy by laying out the three lines of argument used for the Catholic position. First is the biblical argument including the normally used passages: Matthew 16:18, John 21:15-17, and Luke 22:31-32. Seventeen lesser known texts are also included. Second is the historical argument which cites historical figures such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and Saint Leo the Great. The third argument is the theological which stresses the need for an authoritative interpreter. All three lines of argument are ably evaluated in the balance of the chapter.

Chapters 4 and 5 continue to discuss the Roman argument for the infallibility of Peter in an even more detailed fashion. Chapter 4 gives more definition for the doctrine with references supplied from The First Vatican Council (AD 1870), The Second Vatican Council (AD 1962-65), and The Catechism of the Catholic Church. The middle part of the chapter presents a three-step argument for the infallibility of Peter: 1) Peter went to Rome; 2) Peter was a bishop in Rome; and, 3) the bishop of Rome had universal authority which was infallible. The final part of Chapter 4 lists fourteen theological arguments for infallibility. A sampling of these arguments include: the nature of causality, the self-contradictory nature of *Sola Scriptura*, the consent of the Church Fathers, and hermeneutical anarchy. The fifth chapter evaluates the Roman arguments from the previous chapter by offering manly rebuttals to all of them. One fine statement as an example is that all the “essentials of the faith—including the Trinity, virgin birth, deity of Christ, his atoning death, bodily resurrection, bodily ascension, and second coming—can be known by non-Catholics without an infallible magisterium, then it is proof positive that an infallible magisterium is not needed to come to a sufficient and saving knowledge of the common essentials of the Christian faith” (p. 139). Indeed, while papal infallibility “looks sturdy . . . in practice it is a weak and wobbly chair in which Peter’s successor sits” (p. 148).

Even if, for sake of argument, Jesus ordained Peter as his infallible vicar on earth, it would still need to be proved that Jesus ordained successors extending in an unbroken line from Peter to the current Pope. Chapter 6 takes up the matter of apostolic succession. Evidence is given from the Bible and history for the doctrine followed by

evidence from the Bible and history against apostolic succession. While there may be some evidence from Scripture that Peter had early and temporary leadership among the apostles, a preponderance of evidence is marshaled against his apostolic primacy over them from the Bible and history. Importantly, nine reasons are given from the earliest Fathers to contradict the Roman view (pp. 162-64).

Chapter 7 is entitled “*Is Rome the True Church?*” This section summarizes the case against papal infallibility including material from the Bible and history, such as arguments from conflicting popes, heretical popes, and contradictory decisions of ecumenical councils. Toward the end of this chapter, a question is posed with which all Protestants must wrestle: is Rome a false church? In light of the tenuous nature of the infallibility of the Roman bishop, the final chapter concludes that some Protestants convert to Rome on other grounds. These include appeals to antiquity, tradition, beauty, family ties, intellectual tradition, and certainty—each of which is given a brief response.

The only suggestion for this book is to include an index of historical references cited. Or, more desirable, would be an appendix arranged by topic with a listing of original Catholic sources such as councils, encyclicals, etc., which speak on each topic. Nevertheless, this volume is an important contribution in the ongoing dialogue between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Perhaps even more importantly, however, it serves an important pastoral function. This book needs to be read by Protestants to give them a greater understanding as to why they are Protestants; by Protestants who are considering conversion to Catholicism; and, by Catholics who are willing to honestly examine the foundation of their faith. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) averred that “the rest of professing Christianity is, at best, not a true church in the ‘proper sense,’” and that such communities are “gravely defective churches since they cannot trace their lineage to Saint Peter, the first pope” (p. 19). This assertion is demonstrably shown to be false.

**Jerry M. Hullinger, *Bible teacher*, Pensacola, Florida**

*The Moody Handbook of Theology*, revised and expanded, by Paul Enns. Chicago: Moody, 2008. 766 pp., cloth, \$39.99.

This fine handbook provides answers to basic questions in the area of theology. These areas are biblical, systematic, historical, dogmatic, and contemporary theology. The author's theological position is Dispensational, and the reader will recognize this in his analysis of the various viewpoints throughout the book. He acknowledges his indebtedness to many but especially to Drs. Walvoord, Pentecost, and Ryrie. Each significant topic has a very helpful section at the end called "For Further Study." Here is provided a list of several references, each classified according to the simple and more demanding. This revised edition of *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, just as in the original work, proves to be fair and accurate in presenting various viewpoints. Enns uses recognized authorities for each position.

The section on systematic theology covers the usual ten categories. It might have been helpful, given the author's theological position, to add Israelology as an additional category. The historical section includes ancient, medieval, Reformation, and modern theologies. His dogmatic theology includes Calvinistic, Arminian, Covenant, Dispensational, and Roman Catholic. Originally published in 1989, this revision and expansion was necessary because of the many new developments in theology since that time. Enns has added explanations and analyses of several of these, the most important being charismatic, open theism, the emerging church, the growth in evangelical feminism, Dominion Theology, replacement theology, and Progressive Dispensationalism.

The reader will appreciate the author's fairness in his analysis of these new developments. For example, he rightly points to the commendable evangelistic focus of the charismatic movement and explains that prosperity doctrine receives some of the harshest criticism from fellow charismatics. But he denounces Oneness Pentecostalism which denies the three persons of the Trinity, as well as the practice of allowing experience to take functional priority over the Scriptures.

Open Theism views God's actions as contingent on man's actions and requests. This view rejects God's attribute of omniscience as well as the inerrancy of Scripture since God does not fully know the future and, therefore, can't always keep His promises.

Enns addresses only the more liberal side of the emerging church. He commends the movement's attempt to address and adapt to our postmodern culture but recognizes it has embraced relativism and is suspicious of systematic theology. The movement's method of starting with culture or experience, then moving to behavior and then to belief is just the reverse of Scripture. The Scriptures teach that correct belief drives correct behavior. He concludes that culture has overwhelmed the movement. This reviewer found it interesting that the author classified Mark Driscoll as an adherent to the conservative side of the emerging church.

On the subject of evangelical feminism, Enns takes the complementarian position. Men and women are equals yet have different God-given roles. Evangelical feminists have rejected the Scriptures as authoritative and replaced them with experience and personal inclinations. His criticism of Dominion Theology is that it makes no distinction between God's commandments to Israel and to the church. Regarding Progressive Dispensationalism, Enns rejects its "already-not yet" view of the kingdom. In his mind the idea that the kingdom is here now demands an allegorizing method of interpretation which he strongly rejects. Jewish repentance is a prerequisite for the coming of the kingdom and this has yet to take place.

Dispensational and Covenant theologies are not new topics in this expanded edition but a few comments by the author might be useful to note. While it is true that Enns is a Dispensationalist, he has a few criticisms of the system. One is that Dispensational theology has sometimes left the impression that it has a negative attitude towards law as a result of the strong contrasts it draws between law and grace. The author rightly sees that God's law has been present in one or several forms throughout every dispensation. He is critical to some extent of the way some Dispensationalists have handled the Sermon on the Mount, making its usefulness to the church difficult to see, but recognizes recent Dispensationalists have taught the many applications of this sermon to the church.

In his evaluation of Covenant Theology, the author admits the possibility that the covenant of works may be correct even though he admits there is no clear statement from Scripture. This might be a little surprising to some Dispensationalists. He clearly understands that the covenant of grace is an oversimplification that incorrectly eliminates distinctions in the covenantal people. To ignore the distinctions one must

use an allegorizing approach. This handbook is an excellent introduction to theology. This reviewer highly recommends it to any growing follower of Christ.

**Jeff Heslop, dean, Tyndale Learning Center**

**Confessions of a Reformation Rev.: Hard Lessons from an Emerging Missional Church** by Mark Driscoll. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006. 207 pp., paper, \$16.99.

Mark Driscoll is at the center of much discussion today—partly because he is difficult to pigeon-hole. On the one hand he is a powerful preacher who holds to Reformed theology and has spoken at John Piper’s annual conference. On the other hand he is crude, admits to cursing and is prone to anger and sarcasm (Driscoll manages to insult and make fun of virtually everyone). I am often told that Driscoll is a work in progress (aren’t we all?) and has greatly matured in recent years. That may or may not be, but as a reviewer I must review the book at hand which was published only two years ago (2006).

On a positive note, *Confessions* reveals a man who holds nothing back. Driscoll passionately and aggressively pursues what he believes is best for the Lord’s work. He defines reformissional as “seeking to determine how Christians and their churches can most effectively be missionaries to their own cultures” (p. 15). Would that more of us seriously considered being reformissional by that definition. Driscoll also is an entrepreneur and visionary (e.g. pp. 60-61). Although he is the pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, his heart lies in evangelism, not pasturing. His preaching is intense, doctrinal and in your face. He is not a man who pulls punches. There is much commendable in Mark Driscoll. However, there is also much that should disturb us about the man.

- He is crude. From barnyard words (pp. 67, 94, 128, 129, 134) to the gross description of the affects of the stomach flu (p. 177), to sexual innuendos (pp. 59-60, 94-96, 128), to repeatedly referring to “God the Ghost” (pp. 7, 26, 34, 47, 74), Driscoll’s language is often shocking.
- He is an admitted curser (pp. 47, 50, 71, 97, 99, 128, 130). He is known as the cussing pastor in Donald Miller’s *Blue Like*

*Jazz* (pp. 96-97) and there is no indication in this book that Driscoll has reformed his foul language.

- He is also ruthless. Driscoll has a mission (to ultimately grow a church of 10,000 attendees – p. 164) and any who does not fit into that mission is dispensable (pp. 45, 63, 112, 131, 135, 148-50) or fired (pp. 146-47, 196). As Mars Hill grows to megachurch status, one has to wonder what has become of the multitude of people harmed in the process, especially as Driscoll admits his fits of anger when not pleased (pp 99, 128, 130).
- Separation from worldly activities does not fit Driscoll's missional strategy. He speaks often of drinking and frequenting bars (e.g. pp. 51, 131, 146), buying lottery tickets (p. 58), admiring and learning from foul-mouthed entertainers such as Chris Rock (pp. 43, 70), stealing a sound system (p. 62) and setting himself up for sexual temptation (which he resisted) (p. 128).
- Purity in the church is inconsistent. While Driscoll certainly desires to see Christians live morally, he is willing to use unbelievers in ministry, especially in his worship and concert bands (pp. 68, 158). It is one thing to reach out to those involved in such sins; it is another to use them in ministry.
- He has an unbiblical understanding of demonic activity and recommends the books of C. Fred Dickason and Neil T. Anderson on spiritual warfare (pp. 122, 123, 184).
- He is totally open to charismatic-style leading from the Lord through voices, dreams, visions and words of knowledge (pp. 39, 74-75, 85, 121) as well as tongues (p. 190). This is perhaps the most concerning issue related to Driscoll.
- His church has grown on the back of questionable activities such as non-Christian rock concerts (p. 40), hip-hop and punk-rock worship (pp. 93, 100, 126).

- While Driscoll has distanced himself from the more radical emergent movement (pp. 21-23), he is still associated with the Leadership Network (pp. 7, 82) which promotes emergent.

I found it interesting as well that Driscoll claims emerging churches reach out through relationships not programming, yet the whole book is about programming. Even the chapters are arranged (and titled) around the size of Mars Hill at various times. Nothing (or at least very little) is really said about relationship style evangelism; the emphasis is on what brings people to church services. Nor is there any discussion of the biblical model of the church. The implication is that the church is more shaped by culture than Scripture (pp. 21, 73). Mark Driscoll is much admired today because his strategy is working—that is, his church is growing (p. 155). But there is much need for careful reflection here.

**Gary E. Gilley, *senior pastor*, Southern View Chapel**

**TheoPhostic Counseling: Divine Revelation? Or Psycho Heresy?** by Martin and Deidre Bobgan. Santa Barbara, CA: EastGate Publisher, 1999. 143 pp., paper, \$15.00.

TheoPhostic counseling is a Christianized form of psychotherapy developed by Dr. Ed Smith in 1996. Smith claimed that he received his system as a direct revelation from God apparently given in February of that year (pp. 7-8). Its success rate, according to Smith, is nothing short of astounding. Much of the burden of the Bobgans' book is to challenge these claims, but first what is TheoPhostic counseling? This brief description is given.

Present problems are due to past (usually early-life) events, early interpretations of those events ("lies"), and their accompanying emotions. The "lies," which drive present thinking, feeling, and behaving, are embedded in early-life memories, located in the "dark room," which must be accessed through "drifting" into the past in search of early "memory pictures" that feel the same as the negative feeling accompanying the present problematic situation. During this search, the client is encouraged to find Jesus and describe what he is doing and saying. Once the memory holding the "original lie" has been located, the therapist must identify the "lie" (e.g., "I'm bad," "it's my fault," "I'm worthless"). Then comes "stirring the darkness," which involves having the client repeat the "lie" over and over again to intensify his

emotions and prepare him to hear God speak “truth” directly to him, thereby replacing the darkness with “light.”

Concerning the system the Bobgans attempt to challenge TheoPhostic’s claim to divine authorship by showing its misalignment with Scripture (pp. 33-48) and the oft repeated question as to whether God would deny his people access to this powerful therapy until 1996 (e.g. p. 42). Why would God not reveal such important and relevant information in the Scriptures, but then do so two millennia later through Dr. Smith? This is an excellent question. As for the effectiveness of the system, the Bobgans correctly observe that Smith’s claims are based entirely on testimonials, most of which are unverifiable (cf. pp. 24-26). In addition, TheoPhostic results have never been put to the test of objective third party investigation and, therefore, lack concrete evidence (pp. 29-31, 93).

The bulk of the Bobgans’ critique compares TheoPhostic counseling with other secular therapeutic systems, especially, “Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing” (pp. 95-110) and Freudian psychoanalysis (pp. 111-24). These chapters not only demonstrate that very little separates TheoPhostic theory from mainline secular psychological systems, but also that Smith created TheoPhostic counseling not from direct revelation from God but by borrowing from these other disciplines. In other words, the Bobgans have blown the cover off Smith’s claim of divine revelation.

The last chapter attempts to convince the reader that TheoPhostic counseling and other such theories are unnecessary in light of the believer’s complete sufficiency as found in Christ and the Word. While I am in agreement with the Bobgans, I was disappointed that they were content to state this view without providing actual means whereby sufficiency can be applied biblically to the problems of life. I would totally agree that “those who have been devastated by disappointment, who have suffered pain inflicted by sinful humanity, and who seek an end to suffering even unto death will find genuine, everlasting help in Jesus” (p. 142), but exactly how is this help found? Had the Bobgans fleshed this out thoroughly this book would have been more helpful. As it stands, the material serves as a helpful description and warning in regard to TheoPhostic counseling.

**Gary E. Gilley, *senior pastor*, Southern View Chapel**