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AD FONTES

A JOURNAL OF PROTESTANT LETTERS

JACOB HUNEYCUTT

"Perfect Submission; Perfect Delight:" Fanny Crosby, Spousal Piety, and Muscular Christianity

EPHRAIM RADNER

The End of Interpretation: Reclaiming the Priority of Ecclesial Exegesis

TIM PERRY

Mary in the Reformed Confessions

Also featuring: poetry from James Matthew Wilson, E.J. Hutchinson on Bob Dylan, and more.

Table of Contents

- 1 **FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK**
by Rhys Lavery

- 3 **"PERFECT SUBMISSION; PERFECT DELIGHT:"**
FANNY CROSBY, SPOUSAL PIETY, AND MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY
by Jacob Huneycutt

- 10 **ON PALM SUNDAY (GREEK ANTHOLOGY 1.52)**
Translated by E.J. Hutchinson

- 11 **MARY IN THE REFORMED CONFESSIONS**
by Tim Perry

- 18 **ON LYING**
by Onsi Aaron Kamel

- 23 **THE RETURN**
by James Matthew Wilson

- 24 **ROOTS OF ANTI-CONFESSIONALISM IN CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL HERMENEUTICS**
by Robert Strivens

- 30 **FOLK MUSIC: A BIOGRAPHY OF BOB DYLAN IN SEVEN SONGS AND**
THE PHILOSOPHY OF MODERN SONG
Reviewed by E.J. Hutchinson

- 36 **VC**
by Tom C. Hunley

- 37 **THE END OF INTERPRETATION: RECLAIMING THE PRIORITY OF ECCLESIAL EXEGESIS**
BY R.R. RENO
Reviewed by Ephraim Radner

- 43 **SACRED POLITIES, NATURAL LAW AND THE LAW OF THE NATIONS IN**
THE 16TH-17TH CENTURIES
Reviewed by Brad Littlejohn

About

AD FONTES IS A QUARTERLY JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE DAVENANT INSTITUTE.

Ad fontes, "to the sources," was a rallying cry of the Reformation. The Reformers bequeathed to us a heritage, rooted in the Scriptures and their wide-ranging humanistic studies, which sought to address the hard questions of theology, philosophy, and culture in a way that was true to the revelation of God's word and God's world. *Ad Fontes* channels this ethos into a modern context, seeking to explore our questions alongside the great cloud of witnesses and the many exemplars who have gone before us.

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From the Editor's Desk

“Things just aren’t that simple.” This can be a trite phrase at times—something which, as you reach the end of your teens, you find adults telling you constantly. Of course, you begin to feel it, even at that age—both in your personal life, and as you get the lay of the land in the wider world. In your own life, you have competing loyalties—do I stay in my hometown, or hit the road for new opportunities? Out in the world, you start to develop competing principles—should people be left to themselves, or should the state get involved in their lives? Christians find that this becomes true in their faith as well. The realities of adulthood and survival in the big bad world can leave us yearning for the clarity and certainty we experienced as children or back in church youth group—simpler times. While there are certain things that never change of course—the core of the Gospel, the reliability of the Scriptures—we inevitably realize there’s a lot more to life than those. And, indeed, the way that those things play out in life is often not simple—despite the fact that many Christians may insist otherwise.

This is why The Davenant Institute has, for the past decade, sought the renewal of Christian *wisdom* for the benefit of the contemporary church. Wisdom is what

sees us through when the world is more complicated than we expected, and when we find ourselves navigating things which Scripture does not explicitly address. In an increasingly polarized evangelical and Reformed church, in which people on all sides offer simple explanations and dubious panaceas for all our cultural ills, true wisdom seeks a better course. This is not a course which simply reduces to a lowest common denominator “third-wayism”, which smugly pats itself on the back for being “too liberal for the conservatives, and too conservative for the liberals.” Rather, it is a course which pays close attention both to God’s spoken Word and his created world, and seeks to live in harmony with both.

The reality of things not being as simple as we would like seems to pervade the essays and reviews in this issue of *Ad Fontes*. In our opening essay, Jacob Huneycutt explores how simplistic narratives about a division between “muscular” and “feminine” forms of Christianity in the early twentieth century simply don’t hold up, exploring the widespread popularity of Fanny Crosby’s highly affective hymns in unlikely places. Tim Perry then illuminates what the Protestant confessions reveal about the early Reformers’ attitudes toward the Vir-

AD FONTES

gin Mary, with surprising results. Onsi Aaron Kamel then considers Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s mature thought on the question of lying, unpacking the ethical moves which the great anti-Nazi pastor made as he wrestled with what exactly truth-telling meant in a land under tyranny. Robert Strivens then explores some of the roots of Reformed anti-confessionalism, unearthing the problems caused for orthodox faith when nonconformist Protestants attempted to keep the Christian faith “simple” by rejecting extra-biblical theological terminology.

In our book reviews, E.J. Hutchinson tackles both a new book about Bob Dylan and Dylan’s own recent book *The Philosophy of Modern Song*, skewering simplistic readings of our greatest living singer-songwriter and inviting us to consider the complexities which Dylan hides in plain sight. Ephraim Radner then reviews R.R. Reno’s recent book on biblical exegesis, largely positively, but taking issue with the Catholic author’s restrictive magisterial safeguards. Our President, Brad Littlejohn, then reviews a recent volume of sixteenth and seventeenth century political theology and, amid some disappointing chapters, has high praise for one

entry on the complicated relationships between divine will and natural law, as well as Church and state.

Even our poetry entries, ably assembled by Colin Redemer, continue this theme of complexity over simplicity. E.J. Hutchinson’s verse translation considers the paradox of Palm Sunday, and original works by James Matthew Wilson and Tom C. Hunley find themselves in the murky shadows of the Vietnam war.

There are, of course, things in life that are simple. Hard, perhaps—but simple. As we build our journal of Protestant letters at *Ad Fontes*, we hope to always be clear on the heart of the Gospel, the central teaching of Scripture, and the key foundations of the Protestant Reformation. But outside of that, we must stick closely to Lady Wisdom, and remember what she promises: “I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me” (Proverbs 8:17).

Rhys Laverty
Senior Editor
April 2023

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ESSAYS

“Perfect Submission; Perfect Delight:” Fanny Crosby, Spousal Piety, and Muscular Christianity

JACOB HUNEYCUTT

INTRODUCTION

Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) is sometimes described as the “Queen of Gospel Hymn Writers.”¹ She was a prolific author, penning over nine thousand hymns by the end of her life, despite having been blind from a young age. During her lifetime, several of her hymns became massively popular, and she became a household name.² Even today, a few of the hymns that she wrote, such as “Blessed Assurance” (1873) and “To God Be the Glory” (1875), remain recognizable standards to evangelicals around the English-speaking world.³

Hymns often tell stories beyond just their theological content. For one, they are windows into the context of their authors and those who first sang them, imbibing their content in spiritually formative ways. Crosby’s

hymns are no different, and they provide an interesting window into ideas about gender, spiritual affection, and piety among American evangelicals during the mid-nineteenth through the early twentieth century.

THE RISE OF HYMN SINGING

Crosby began her hymn-writing career during the mid-1800s—a period which saw an explosion in the popularity of hymns. Hymnbooks, which had previously been primarily used as personal, devotional resources, were beginning to be widely used in churches.⁴ A new style of hymn was ascendant—the “gospel hymn,” which was usually musically simpler and written in a popular style, with a focus on core truths of sin, redemption, and personal testimony.⁵ Their ease of use, and adoption of contemporary musical style, contributed to their swift inclusion in Sunday morning worship across America.

1. Bernard C. Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby: The Hymn Writer* (Ulrichsville, OH: Barbour, 1995), 130.

2. Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby*, 130.

3. Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby*, 114; Ian M. Randall, “Conservative Constructionist: The Influence of Billy Graham in Britain,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (1995), 322.

4. June Hadden Hobbs, *I Sing for I Cannot Be Silent: The Feminization of American Hymnody, 1870-1920* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 27-8.

5. Donald Hustad, *Jubilate!: Church Music in the Evangelical Tradition* (Carol Stream: Hope Publishing Company, 1981), 234.

AD FONTES

Hymns had been a staple of public worship in some evangelical Protestant churches since the late seventeenth century. However, their use was controversial, as many churches preferred to sing metrical psalms. In addition, hymns were generally seen as private, devotional literature for use at home.⁶ Given the realities of gender in the Victorian era, in which the private, domestic sphere remained the reserve of women, home-based female hymn writers and poets were commonplace and accepted in England and the United States. Several of the most famous hymns from the first seventy years of the nineteenth century, including, “Just as I Am,” “Jesus Loves Me,” and “Jesus Paid It All,” were written by women: Charlotte Elliott, Anna Bartlett Warner, and Elvina M. Hall, respectively. But as hymns exploded into the public sphere in the postbellum United States, from 1870 onward, the language used by Crosby and other female hymnodists gained increasing power to shape the piety of millions of American Protestants.

Two hundred years earlier, in Puritan New England, sermons, poems, and other writings were filled with a model of affective piety in which the individual soul was married to Christ, the Bridegroom. Amanda Porterfield argues that this form of piety, paradoxically, allowed female leaders like Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643) to “experience empowerment” through “feminine submission” to God and dependence on him, as claiming direct spiritual empowerment from God may give one a source of empowerment outside the authority structures of one’s community. Hutchinson, having done so too boldly and defiantly, “threatened her community,” and was ultimately exiled from Massachusetts.⁷

Fanny Crosby’s hymns employed this same model of piety: empowerment through feminine surrender. Her hymns also conveyed a high level of affective piety that perhaps emanated from the higher level of surrender to Christ necessitated by her blindness.

6. Hobbs, *I Sing for I Cannot Be Silent*, 27-8; also, see footnote 32 on the Regulative Principle of Worship in Reformed theology.

7. Amanda Porterfield, *Feminine Spirituality in America: From Sarah Edwards to Martha Graham* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 38.

PURITAN SPOUSAL PIETY

Seventeenth-century Puritan writers often spoke about the Christian believer’s union with Christ using spousal language. For example, in his book *Of Communion with God*, John Owen (1616-1683) wrote, “Christ gives himself to the soul...to be its Saviour, head, and husband, for ever to dwell with it in this holy relation. He looks upon the souls of his saints, likes them well, [and] counts them fair and beautiful.”⁸ Historians have written about how this spousal imagery—rooted in both Song of Songs, and the Puritans’ emphasis on personal devotion—pervaded Puritan piety, even among men. Michael Winship comments that “its use was extensive, if not dominating.” He describes how Puritan men in New England wrestled with a certain sense of “gender polymorphousness,” as they interpreted the language of Song of Songs as having them take the role of the bride in that allegory.⁹

HER HYMNS ALSO CONVEYED A HIGH LEVEL OF AFFECTIVE PIETY THAT PERHAPS EMANATED FROM THE HIGHER LEVEL OF SURRENDER TO CHRIST NECESSITATED BY HER BLINDNESS.

For women, this Puritan spousal piety contained two primary characteristics: it emphasized an affective union with Christ, and it held up submission as the ideal feminine disposition. The spousal metaphor obviously caused less “gender polymorphousness;” indeed, Marilyn Westerkamp notes how Puritan sermons and other literature highlighted how “women were weak and in great need of male protection” and how “[f]eminine piety... [was] accompanied by a complete surrender to God.”¹⁰ She also highlights how some empow-

8. John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Each Person Distinctly) in Love, Grace, and Consolation; Or, the Saints Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost Unfolded* (Oxford: 1657). A new edition. (London: Printed by W. Nicholson, Warner-street, for W. Baynes, 54, Paternoster-row, 1808), 64.

9. Michael P. Winship, “Behold the Bridegroom Cometh! Marital Imagery in Massachusetts Preaching, 1630-1730,” *Early American Literature* 27 (1992): 172. Note: Winship’s language here may read slightly controversially to us now, given the excesses of contemporary gender ideology. However, it would be anachronistic to read him as seeking to “queer” Puritan spirituality or anything of the sort, and we should take his language more neutrally.

10. Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America*, 25.

erment accompanied this affective union with Christ that Puritan women were encouraged to emphasize. For example, the fact that examples of Spirit-led women who fought for the faith, like Anne Askew (1521-1546), were held in high esteem in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* shows that women leading in the public sphere to some extent could sometimes be an accepted outworking of their dependence on the Holy Spirit.¹¹ Porterfield makes similar observations about how Anne Hutchinson "depended on God with a radical assurance that disturbed and threatened her community" and how it was through this "feminine surrender" that she "experienced empowerment."¹²

Historians have demonstrated that this mystical form of Puritan piety largely died out in preaching by the 1740s.¹³ However, it persisted in the hymn tradition that began to form among English and American evangelicals. This tradition particularly formed among dissenting denominations, such as the Baptists and Methodists, as well as among evangelical Anglicans, during the eighteenth century. One of the most prominent early hymn writers was the English Congregationalist Isaac Watts (1674-1748), who, in 1707, published *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. Hymn number 66 in Book One of this collection, "Let Him Embrace My Soul and Prove," based on Song of Solomon 1:2-5, 12, 13, and 17, is explicit in utilizing the metaphor of Christ as the Bridegroom of the soul. The singer calls on Christ to "embrace my soul, and prove mine interest in his heavenly love." Then, in a comparison to marital sexuality, he describes Christ as one who "draws virgin souls to meet [his] face." He describes his soul as taking a position of feminine surrender and dependence in response, as "[his] soul shall fly into [Christ's] arms."¹⁴ When this hymn was published, spousal imagery was still being used by New England Puritan preachers, prior to its mid-century decline. However, Watts' hymns would only become more influential throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century.

Hymns and Spiritual Songs was widely adopted by evangelicals in the British American colonies, especially in New England, and its use only increased after the 1740s. Despite common Protestant objections to hymn-singing in public worship, and even though it would be another century and a half until hymnals were widely used in church services, Jane Giscombe has demonstrated that Watts' hymns were widely sung in New England Congregationalist churches as early as the 1710s.¹⁵ This was likely aided by the fact that Watts' hymns were often explicit interpretations of the Psalms, and by George Whitefield (1714-1770) using Watts' hymns in his 1740s revivals. Additionally, Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) published *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* in Philadelphia, in 1742, and Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) used them in public worship services in his church.¹⁶

FANNY CROSBY'S BACKGROUND

At just six weeks old, Fanny Crosby suffered an illness that left her blind for the rest of her life.¹⁷ Despite this, the young Crosby still took an early love for hymns and poetry. Born in Connecticut in 1820, she took pride in her Puritan stock, writing in 1902, "My ancestors were Puritans; my family tree rooted around Plymouth Rock."¹⁸ However, as she was growing up, she witnessed an eclectic mix of hymnody traditions, with the influences of Puritanism and evangelicalism converging around her.

Crosby's first exposure to hymns was in her family's Calvinistic Presbyterian church. Her diaries recall that the hymns she heard there were mostly composed by the church deacons and that actual hymnals were rare. In Reformed churches like hers, these hymns were mostly psalm-based, as their interpretation of

11. Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America*, 26.

12. Porterfield, *Feminine Spirituality*, 38.

13. Winship, "Behold the Bridegroom Cometh!", 180.

14. Isaac Watts, "Let Him Embrace My Soul and Prove (1707)", <https://ccl.org/ccel/watts/psalmshymns/psalmshymns.I.66.html>.

15. See: Jane Giscombe, "The Dissemination and Reception of Isaac Watts's Hymns and Psalms in the British North American Colonies to 1748." In *Negotiating Toleration: Dissent and the Hanoverian Succession, 1714-1760*. Nigel Aston and Benjamin Bankhurst, eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 231-52.

16. Giscombe, "The Dissemination and Reception of Isaac Watts' Hymns," 244, 246.

17. Fanny J. Crosby, *Memories of Eighty Years: The Story of Her Life, Told by Herself: Ancestry, Childhood, Womanhood, Friendships, Incidents, and History of her Song and Hymns* (Boston: James H. Earle & Company, 1906), 19.

18. Edith L. Blumhofer, *Her Heart Can See: The Life and Hymns of Fanny J. Crosby* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 1.

AD FONTES

the regulative principle of worship wrought a suspicion of man-made hymns.¹⁹ In addition to using metered Psalters, deacons would write out hymns closely based on Psalms and then lead the church in a lined-out singing of them. Occasionally, Isaac Watts' hymns, most of which were closely based on psalms, would be permitted.²⁰

Crosby's first knowledge of a broader hymn tradition was imparted to her by a Methodist tailor who, when she was 12 years old, invited her to his church. At these Methodist services, Crosby "came to love the stately and beautiful hymns of Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts."²¹ She later officially became a Methodist by the time that she was attending the New York Institution for the Blind (NYIB), between the ages of 15 and 18.²² And when she was at the NYIB, she was instructed in poetry, reading a wide variety of authors, including more Wesley.²³

Thus, Crosby grew up amid the confluence of these various strands of hymnody. At first, only having been exposed to psalm-based hymns composed by the deacons at her "primitive-stock" Presbyterian church, she remembers that by the age of 8, though blind, she felt that she could write better ones.²⁴ Given her eventual encounters with Wesley and Watts, it is not surprising that their use of affective, spousal language proved formative for Crosby.

FANNY CROSBY'S HYMNS

The lyrics in Fanny Crosby's hymns routinely emphasize feminine surrender and dependence in affective

union with Christ. One of Crosby's most-sung hymns, "I Am Thine, O Lord," written in 1875, gives this away in its title and opening words: "I am thine, O Lord/I have heard thy voice/and it told thy love to me." Crosby wrote this hymn following a conversation, on a sunset walk with her friends Howard and Fanny Doane, about the nearness of God. In it, the singer declares himself to be a possession of the Lord, who has drawn him into an intimate, loving relationship.²⁵ He desires more of this: "But I long to rise/in the arms of faith/and be closer drawn to thee." And the chorus asks, "Draw me nearer; nearer, blessed Lord/to the cross where thou hast died/Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord/to thy precious, bleeding side."²⁶ Also, in addition to employing the idea of feminine surrender to Christ, the hymn also suggested that the audience would receive spiritual empowerment through doing so. If, in the first verse, the singer describes himself in a posture of surrender to the Lord, the second verse emphasizes the empowerment experienced in this gracious union: "Consecrate me now to thy service, Lord,/by the pow'r of thy divine grace." "I Am Thine, O Lord" was enormously popular, getting published in hymnals that were used weekly, in church, by millions of American evangelicals in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The same themes are clear in two less popular Crosby hymns, "Thou My Everlasting Portion" (1874) and "Savior, More Than Life to Me," (1875). In "Thou My Everlasting Portion," the singer describes Jesus as "more than friend or life to [him]."²⁷ There is a deeper relationship there—one of "everlasting" affection. He asks if he may walk "close to thee [Jesus]" through his whole "pilgrim journey" on the earth. This request is repeated numerous times throughout. Finally, at the

19. The Reformed doctrine of the Regulative Principle of Worship is described in Chapter 23, Paragraph 1 of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), which states, "The acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture." The language that God may not be worshiped "according to the imaginations and devices of men" led many Calvinists, including the New England Puritans, to tend toward the idea that man-made hymns were dangerous and that it was best, in worship via song in church, to stick with the Psalms, which they viewed as written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

20. Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby*, 24.

21. Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby*, 31.

22. Crosby, *Memories of Eighty Years*, 55.

23. Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby*, 39.

24. Fanny Crosby, *Memories of Eighty Years*, 55.

25. I am choosing to use the pronouns "he/him/himself" for the singer throughout my descriptions of Fanny Crosby's hymns—even though Crosby, the hymn writer and authorial voice behind the lyrics, was a woman—because my primary point in this article, in relation to these hymns, is to show how their being sung by evangelical American *men* complicates the notion of male evangelical piety in the early twentieth century being dominated by "muscular" Christianity. Thus, I am asking the reader to, while reading these descriptions, imagine what it was like for these hymns to be sung from the male perspective.

26. Fanny J. Crosby, "Draw Me Nearer" (1875), Hymnary.org, https://hymnary.org/text/i_am_thine_o_lord_i_have_heard_thy_voice.

27. Fanny J. Crosby, "Close to Thee" (1874), Hymnary.org, https://hymnary.org/text/thou_my_everlasting_portion.

end of the third verse, he looks forward to entering “the gate of life eternal...with thee [Jesus].” The singer describes a relationship of eternal affection for and dependence upon Christ, which grants spiritual empowerment, enabling him to “toil and suffer” within “the vale of shadows” before reaching “life eternal.”

In “Savior, More Than Life to Me” the singer opens by declaring that he is “clinging, clinging close to [his Savior, Jesus Christ]. The word “clinging” here suggests a passive, feminine submission and dependence. In this relationship with Jesus, he experiences Jesus’ “tender love to [him],” about which he asks, “may [it] bind me closer, closer Lord, to thee.” This relationship of tender love in union with Christ is spiritually empowering as it provides a “reconciling” to God, a “cleansing,” and makes it so that he “cannot stray.”

The most vivid example of these themes of feminine affective dependence, and surrender, to Christ is arguably found in Crosby’s 1874 hymn “Hold, Thou, My Hand.” This hymn begins with the singer asking Jesus to “Hold [his] hand”—a phrase with possibly romantic, and at least, very affective connotations because he is “weak” and “helpless.”²⁸ He describes his life as one of total surrender and submission to his “loving Saviour,” declaring that he “dares not take one step without [Jesus’] aid.” The result of this is spiritual empowerment, since, with Jesus holding his hand, “No dread of ill shall make [his] soul afraid.” In the second verse, then, Crosby repeats the same themes, with the singer asking Jesus to “closer, closer draw [him] to [Him] self— [his] hope, my joy, my all,” and, again, to “hold [his] hand,” “lest haply [he] should wander, and missing [Jesus], [his] trembling feet should fall.” Jesus, in an intimate relationship with the singer, provides him safety as he surrenders passively to His guiding lead. In the third and fourth verses, Crosby then gives several descriptions of spiritual empowerment; Jesus holding the singer’s hand gives him “heights of joy” and “rapturous songs,” with her finally seeing “heav’nly light” when she “reach[es] the margin of that lone river.”

28. Fanny J. Crosby, “Hold Thou My Hand” (1874), Hymnary.org, https://hymnary.org/text/hold_thou_my_hand_so_weak_i_am_and_helpl.

One lyric in what has arguably become Crosby’s most popular hymn, “Blessed Assurance,” written in 1873, perhaps encapsulates empowerment by feminine surrender more than any other. This hymn quickly achieved immense popularity, especially thanks to extensive use in Dwight Moody’s (1837–1889) revival campaigns of the 1870s and 1880s. Ira Sankey (1840–1908), who was in charge of the worship for Moody’s campaigns, wrote that it was “one of the most popular and useful” hymns that they used.²⁹ Later, it was employed as one of the core hymns in Billy Graham’s (1918–2018) crusades, becoming familiar to millions of people around the world if it was not already—though one scholar notes that one reason Graham used “Blessed Assurance” in the United Kingdom, specifically, is that it was already so widely known among evangelicals there. Given that Crosby was American, this demonstrates its wide-reaching influence.³⁰

“Blessed Assurance” contains less affective language than the other hymns discussed thus far, being mostly a bare-bones Gospel hymn. However, two lines, both about “Perfect submission,” sum up the themes we have considered. The second verse opens with “Perfect submission; perfect delight!”³¹ The juxtaposition of “perfect submission”—submission being a feminine disposition—and “perfect delight” illustrates that spiritual empowerment comes through a spousal relation to Christ. Then, the third verse opens with the lyrics, “Perfect submission; all is at rest! I, in my Savior, am happy and blest.” This goes further than the last line, indicating that this position of “perfect submission” is one in which the singer is *in* Christ—in an intimate, affective union with Him. And in this union with Jesus, is spiritual empowerment: “all is at rest;” he is “happy and blest.” He is given that most empowering thing of all: “blessed assurance.”

CONCLUSION

Two hundred years earlier, Anne Hutchinson’s reliance on spiritual empowerment through feminine submission, “threatened the community,” resulting in her ex-

29. Ruffin, *Fanny Crosby*, 147.

30. Randall, “Conservative Constructionist,” 322.

31. Fanny J. Crosby, “Blessed Assurance” (1873), https://hymnary.org/text/blessed_assurance_jesus_is_mine.

ile. Likewise, Crosby's hymns received pushback from male leaders who saw Gospel hymnody as emblematic of a societal move, characterized by "the development of a corporate, consumer-oriented society," toward effeminacy, and who wanted to advocate a more "muscular" Christianity.³² However, in Crosby's case, her hymns were so popular that "muscular" Christianity would prove simply unable to challenge their influence.

Historians have identified this "muscular Christianity" as a popular movement in American Protestantism between 1880 and 1920. On the national, political level this was epitomized by President Theodore Roosevelt; on the social/community level, by organizations like the Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.); and on the religious level, by the revivalist Billy Sunday.³³ Advocates of muscular Christianity thought that nineteenth-century evangelical Christianity had been too "emotional, emphasizing heart over head" and identified this...with Protestantism's feminization.³⁴

This "muscular Christianity" movement can be read as, in part, a reaction against the likes of Crosby. Despite its best efforts, however, Crosby's hymns remained enormously popular in evangelical worship throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, as we will see later, they often remained popular with the exact demographic which "muscular Christianity" claimed had been alienated by the supposed feminization of Protestantism. Now, advocates of "muscular Christianity" may have said this was precisely the problem, and why their work was necessary. Regardless, it is clear that no single gender-inflected model of piety dominated American evangelicalism in this period.

The early twentieth century saw some backlash to Gospel hymns, including ones written by Fanny Crosby. Some leaders thought that they were too effeminate.

32. Gail Bederman, "The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough: The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism," *American Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1989): 435.

33. See Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Bederman, "The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough," 432-65; and Kristen Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020), 15-22.

34. Bederman, "The Women Have Had Charge," 441.

This was part of a larger phenomenon occurring in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Historians—including Kristen Du Mez, who, in the first chapter of her 2020 book *Jesus and John Wayne*, introduced this historical phenomenon to a mass audience—have written about how, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there arose, among American Protestants, a "muscular," masculine, Christianity that challenged the "gentility and restraint" of Victorian Christianity.³⁵ Du Mez describes how, during World War I, this "muscular" masculinity was a phenomenon widely embraced by mainline Protestant churches in support of the war effort, before being embraced by fundamentalist Protestants in the 1920s. Thus, it was embraced by American Protestant Christians across the board.³⁶

Du Mez argues that this set the stage for a "militant masculinity" that would define much of twentieth-century white American evangelicalism. Underlying this movement was the idea that there were up to three million "missing men" from Protestant churches in America, which had become too feminized and thus did not appeal to men. Advocates of "muscular Christianity" advocated for churches to embrace physical and outdoor activities—sports, especially—to bring men back into the Church.³⁷

However, the popularity of Fanny Crosby's hymns in the early twentieth century complicates Du Mez's and others' arguments about the rise of "muscular" Christianity. While this article does not dispute that the phenomenon of "muscular" Christianity occurred, it does offer evidence to suggest that it may have not been as dominant as Du Mez and others suppose. Consider American Protestantism in the 1910s, for example: on the one hand, as Du Mez notes, the evangelical evangelist Billy Sunday (1862-1935) was preaching revivals in which he "preferred to pack his 'old muzzle-loading Gospel gun with ipecac, buttermilk, rough on rats, rock salt, and whatever else came in handy' and let it fly," and in which he would jump on top of a pulpit, waving

35. Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 14-17.

36. Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 17-22.

37. Bederman, "The Women Have Had Charge," 440.

an American flag.³⁸ His choice of hymns to be sung at his revivals reflected this—he liked “Onward Christian Soldiers,” the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” and “The Fight is On.”³⁹

Yet Clifford Putney argues that “it was clearly white, liberal churchmen who espoused the [“muscular” Christianity] movement first” and, like Du Mez, he argues that it was not until the 1920s that evangelical and fundamentalist Christians widely adopted the movement.⁴⁰ This tracks with the fact that, for example, Crosby’s hymn, “I Am Thine, O Lord,” was featured in hymnals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from more evangelical or conservative denominations like the Baptists, the Methodists, the Southern Presbyterians, as well as numerous Lutheran and Pentecostal hymnals, while not being included in the hymnals of The Episcopal Church or the northern Presbyterians—more modernist and high-church denominations.⁴¹ So, perhaps one could argue that “muscular” Christianity was predominantly popular before the 1920s in places where, largely, Fanny Crosby hymns were not sung: modernist and/or high-church denominations, rather than evangelical ones.

Yet there is no simple divide to be made pre-1920 between a “muscular” Christianity among liberals and a more affective piety among evangelicals. Billy Sunday was no liberal Protestant but was already advocating muscular Christianity before the 1920s. And yet, one historian notes how Billy Sunday did, in fact, sometimes cave and allow “Blessed Assurance” to be sung at his revivals, because his audience of working-class men would request it.⁴² Hence, we can infer that at least a fair number of his audience of working-class, evangelical men were interested in another kind of piety than “muscular Christianity”—even if they were simultaneously interested in “muscular Christianity,” as well.

Additionally, the massive popularity of Fanny Crosby’s hymns endured well beyond the 1910s. Even as late as

the 1950s and 1960s, several of Crosby’s hymns, including “Blessed Assurance,” were centerpiece at the revivals of Billy Graham—the most prominent evangelist in the world during the twentieth century. If “muscular Christianity” and evangelicalism are meant to be synonymous, it is hard to square this with evangelicalism’s longstanding embrace of Crosby’s affective, feminine piety.

Ultimately, the massive popularity of Fanny Crosby’s hymns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries testifies to the presence of an influential strand of piety in American evangelicalism that was neither a “muscular” masculinity nor a Victorian piety of “gentility and restraint.” Rather, Crosby’s hymns injected the spousal piety of a believer experiencing deep feelings of affection, in union with Christ—the bridegroom to the soul—into the lives of millions of American evangelicals, 250 years after its apogee in Puritan New England. Emphasizing spiritual empowerment as coming through a posture of feminine surrender to and dependence upon Christ, in affective union with him, these hymns offered a dramatically different—and more feminine—view of personal piety, which existed in the mainstream of American evangelicalism alongside “muscular” Christianity.

Though “muscular” Christianity arose partly in opposition to the “feminization” of Christianity, and its advocates saw hymns like Crosby’s as one feminization’s main culprits, Crosby’s hymns remained unrelentingly popular, even among the audience to which advocates of “muscular” Christianity were most attempting to appeal—white, American, evangelical men. It is striking and illustrative to consider a Billy Sunday revival during the 1910s. While he was jumping on the stage, waving an American flag, and encouraging everyone to sing about how they were soldiers under the command of Jesus Christ, there were working-class men there who wanted to sing about “Perfect submission; perfect delight.”

38. Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne*, 18.

39. Hobbs, *I Sing for I Cannot Be Silent*, 144.

40. Putney, *Muscular Christianity*, 10.

41. Hobbs, *I Sing for I Cannot Be Silent*, 144.

42. Hobbs, *I Sing for I Cannot Be Silent*, 144.

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On Palm Sunday

Greek Anthology 1.52

TRANSLATED BY E.J. HUTCHINSON

Εἰς τὰ Βαῖα

Χαῖρε, Σιών θύγατερ, καὶ δέρκεο Χριστὸν ἄνακτα

πῶλῳ ἐφεζόμενον καὶ ἐς πάθος αἶψα κιόντα.

Daughter of Zion, hail and see

This veiled celestial mystery:

The cosmic Lord upon a foal

(As presaged in the ancient scroll)

Lights out in haste for suffering—

A slave's death for the King of Kings.

ESSAYS

Mary in the Reformed Confessions

TIM PERRY

In my book *Mary for Evangelicals*, I considered how Reformed and evangelical Christians should think about the Virgin Mary—something we usually think reserved for Roman Catholics. I focused my attention there on the Reformers, notably Luther, Zwingli, Bullinger and Calvin, and the confessional dogmatics that unpacked both Lutheran and Reformed confessions.¹ I observed there that early Protestant antipathy toward the Virgin Mary emerged gradually and was directed against abuses of piety rather than dogmatic, specifically Christological, assertions. No questions of significance were raised against Mary's perpetual virginity; her status as *theotokos* (even if the word was deemed suspect by some) was regarded as necessary; there was even some acknowledgement of her unique calling, and (most surprisingly of all to modern Reformed Christians) her consequent preservation from sin is sometimes acknowledged until the Reformation is well into its third generation.

Yet the Reformers and post-Reformation dogmatians represented the start of a trend in Protestant theology in which extended reflection on Mary dwindled to silence. Every once in a while, anti-Catholic polemic would pop up, but Mary simply wasn't a subject of dogmatic inquiry and barely registered as a matter of reflection among the theologians. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), in his dogmatics, simply dismisses the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke (and accordingly, dogmatic reflection on Mary) as irrelevant to authentic faith, while his Christmas sermons present her as no more than a model housewife.²

I did not treat the confessions (whether Lutheran or Reformed) extensively in *Mary for Evangelicals* because I believed (and still hold) that, as summaries and guides for belief and practice, they do not add significantly to this thesis. But there's more to this article than simply filling a lacuna in earlier research. Specifically because of their brevity and consistency, the con-

1. Tim Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals: Toward an Understanding of the Mother of Our Lord* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 209-225.

2. Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 225.

fessions allow us to press deeper into the assumptions held by the Reformers regarding Mary—assumptions which, as noted, surprise many of those who purport to stand in the confessional tradition of these Reformers, and should perhaps serve to curtail the tone (if not the substance) with which they criticize Roman Catholics on the topic of Mary. I begin with the documents of the Continental Reformation.

THE CONTINENTAL CONFESSIONS³

In the earliest confession to be considered, Zwingli's *Sixty-Seven Articles* of 1523, Mary, though unnamed, is easily discerned. The first sixteen articles summarize the Gospel, stressing throughout that Christ has no rival: "whoever seeks or points to another door [i.e., than Christ] errs—yea is a murderer of souls and a robber." When reflecting on matters of piety and prayer, Zwingli reiterates that there is indeed no other mediator "beyond this life" but Christ, and while we pray for one another "on earth" we trust "through Christ alone all things are given to us." One is immediately struck by the deep interconnection of the Reformation *solas*, in this case *Sola Scriptura* and *Solus Christus* and how they are perceived immediately and directly to call into question long-held notions of created mediation, saintly intercession, and the intercommunion of the church militant and the church triumphant. Though unnamed, Mary is of course "first in line" in each of these neuralgic subjects and, given the context, we are not wrong to see Marian piety indicted here. Seven years later, in his contribution to Augsburg, *A Reckoning of the Faith* (1530), Zwingli would reiterate his rejection of that same piety with these words: "For this is the one, sole Mediator between God and men, the God and man Christ Jesus."⁴

This ought not to be taken to mean, however, that Zwingli was a modern Protestant Marian minimalist. In the same document, he summarizes his doctrine of the incarnation thusly: "I believe and understand that

the Son assumed flesh, because he truly assumed of the immaculate and perpetual Virgin Mary the human nature, yea, the entire man, who consists of body and soul." "Immaculate" and "perpetual" are words most contemporary Protestants are not used to seeing, but there they are—the former affirming, in whatever fashion, Mary's preservation from original and actual sin and the latter her perpetual virginity until the end of her life on earth. Modern Reformed Christians may read references to Mary as "Virgin" in the confessions as referring purely to her virginity at the time of Christ's conception, and not necessarily implying that she retained perpetual virginity. Yet that is clearly not the case for Zwingli here. Nor was it for Luther.⁵ It would be anachronistic to assume that the early Reformers did not understand references to "the Virgin Mary" to refer to a perpetual virginity. Similarly, modern Protestants may likewise be unsure of exactly what "immaculate" refers to with regard to Mary. Suffice to say, at the time of the Reformation, any reference to Mary's "immaculate" status would have been taken to refer to her sinlessness; i.e., that she was in some way preserved from the ravages of original sin and did not sin throughout her life.

Far more than some sort of ecumenical gloss for the sake of Lutherans and Catholics at Augsburg, these adjectives accurately reflect Zwingli's ongoing affection for the Mother of God.⁶ As we'll see below, perpetual virginity and preservation from sin are hardly unique to the Swiss Reformer. Further, he thus introduces what will become the standard distinction in Reformed confessions. On the one hand, Mary is from here on expressly named as a guarantor of the true humanity of Christ and the unity of his person, while on the other, Marian piety, whether as included in a general rejection of created mediation and the cult of the saints or singled out, is rejected in the strongest of terms.

Another Augsburg document, *The Tetrapolitan Confession* (1530), takes a similar stance. Reflecting the Reformed faith of the cities of Strasbourg, Constance,

3. All quotations taken from Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds., *Creeeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, Volume 2, *Reformation Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

4. Similar sentiments are expressed in *The Ten Theses of Bern*, drawn up in 1528 by Berchtold Haller and Franz Kolb: "As Christ alone died for us, so he is to be worshiped as the only Mediator and Advocate between God the Father and us believers. Therefore, to propose the invoking of other mediators and advocates beyond this life is contrary to scripture." *The Ten Theses of Bern*, 6.

5. See Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 214-17.

6. Tim Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 217-18.

Memmingen, and Lindau, and prepared by Martin Bucer (1491-1551) and Wolfgang Capito (c.1478-1541), its standard Christology includes this credally reminiscent summary of Christ's incarnation: "conceived by the Holy Ghost, then born of the Virgin Mary." Pious abuses, however, are named and condemned: "Another abuse concerning these things has been rejected, by which some think that by fastings and prayers they can so oblige the Virgin Mary that bare God, and other saints, as, by their intercession and merits" to be delivered from evil and receive divine favour. Mary and the saints are to be held in high esteem, even honored, but appropriate devotion is found not in prayer to them, but in following their holy examples: "Yet [our clergy] teach the duty of honoring the most holy Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and all saints, with the greatest devotion, but that this can be done only when we strive after those things which were especially pleasing to them," namely, holiness in conduct, after their own examples. It is striking that although *theotokos* language does not appear in the Christology section, it appears twice later even as certain abuses of piety are clearly condemned.

We turn now to the *Confession of Basel*, prepared in 1534 by Oswald Myconius (1488-1552). In Article 4, "Concerning Christ, the True God and Man," we read: "we believe that he was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the pure, undefiled Virgin Mary." By now almost boilerplate, it is worth noting that language of immaculacy ("pure") and perpetual virginity ("undefiled") are included without comment or controversy. This is carried over into the second of Basel's confessions, which appeared in 1536 and was produced by a committee led by Henrich Bullinger (1504-1575): "From the undefiled Virgin Mary by the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, this Lord Christ, the Son of the living, true God, has assumed flesh which is holy through its unity with the Godhead in all things like unto our flesh yet without sin." At the same time, however, it is not difficult to see the abuses typically associated with the cult of the saints and Mary especially in the same article: "Here we reject everything that represents itself as the means, the sacrifice, and the reconciliation of our life and salvation, and we recognize none other than Christ the Lord alone."

Remaining with Bullinger, piety comes to the fore in *The Second Helvetic Confession* of 1566. Chapter 4 rejects both the "idols of the Gentiles," and "the images of the Christians." Further, Chapter 4 asks rhetorically, "since the blessed spirits and saints in heaven, while they lived here on earth, rejected all worship of themselves and condemned images, shall anyone find it likely that the heavenly saints and angels are pleased with their own images before which men kneel, uncover their heads, and bestow other honors?" Mary is not named, but she is clearly implied. Likewise in Chapter 5, Mary is implicated in the rejection of the cults of the saints: "we do not adore, worship, or pray to the saints in heaven, or to other divine beings, and we do not acknowledge them as our intercessors or mediators before the Father in heaven." Saints are living members of Christ who are objects of love and honor; they are certainly worthy of imitation, but not worship. Their true relics are not bits of bone or cloth, but their virtues, doctrine and faith. Chapter 11, entitled, "Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World," nevertheless continues to describe Mary as "Ever-Virgin" who "most chastely conceived by the Holy Spirit." It indeed implies that such a description is, with the doctrine of the incarnation as traditionally understood, a matter of basic fidelity to the Gospels: "as the evangelical history carefully explains to us."

Our final three examples continue to plow the same furrows. Thus, *The Geneva Confession* of 1536 explicitly links the intercession of saints with mistrust in the "sufficiency of the intercession of Jesus Christ." Similarly, while *The Geneva Catechism* of 1541-1542 continues to use "Virgin" with respect to Mary, it also decries the use of images in worship and insists that "God has not assigned to saints this office of aiding and assisting us."⁷ To cultivate such devotion, in fact, is not merely a distraction from the unique office of the Mediator, but a lack of trust in him: "it is a sure sign of infidelity if we are not contented with what the Lord gives to us. Moreover, if instead of having a refuge in God alone, in obedience to his command, we have recourse to them [i.e., all that conflicts with the divine order

7. On the incarnation see Q 49, on images, Q 147-148, and on the saints, Q 238-39.

of prayer], putting something of our reliance on them, we fall into idolatry, seeing we transfer to them that which God has reserved for himself.” Likewise *The Belgic Confession* (1561), which affirms that “The Son took the ‘form of a servant’ and was made in the ‘likeness of man,’ truly assuming a real human nature, with all its weaknesses, except for sin; being conceived in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, without male participation.” And yet it insists that “sheer unbelief has led to the practice of dishonoring the saints [with intercessions, etc.], instead of honoring them.” Last, the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) teaches that the “eternal Son” took upon himself “true manhood from the flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary through the action of the Holy Spirit,” but that images should never set “in place of books for unlearned people” in churches.

WHILE LATER CONFESSIONS ARE MORE MUTED, NONE DENY WHAT THE EARLIER ONES SEEM TO AFFIRM.

The pattern is now well in place. Mary is affirmed in articles pertaining to the incarnation. She is the guarantor of true manhood and the unity of Christ’s person and therefore necessary in the articulation of a robust Christology. Though none of the documents use *theotokos* explicitly, its anti-Nestorian content is preserved and expressed in other turns of phrase. Devotion to Mary—as with devotion to all the saints—is also affirmed, not in terms of images, intercession or other pious practices, but in terms of emulation and encouragement toward holiness of life. The one curiosity is the loss over time of explicit language of perpetual virginity and immaculacy. I conclude that this loss is part and parcel of the trend toward silence that I mentioned in the introduction. Still, it is worth noting that while later confessions are more muted, none deny what the earlier ones seem to affirm, namely that “Virgin” means “Ever-Virgin,” and that Mary was in some way graciously preserved from the ravages of sin. Though I venture to guess that very few Dutch, German, or Swiss Reformed Christians would affirm perpetual virginity or sinlessness today (especially the latter), de-

parture from these in any explicit way is simply not found in the Reformed Confessions surveyed thus far.

THE ENGLISH CONFESSIONS

Turning first to England, we might consider *The Ten Articles* (1536), the first confession of Henry VIII’s “reformed” church—albeit a highly transitional document with an interesting political background. These mention Mary twice and allude to her once. The positive tone of these references is unique among the confessions examined here, both from the continent and the British Isles. For example, images of Christ and Mary should appear in churches as “representers of virtue and good example, and that they also be by occasion the kindlers and stirrers of men’s minds, and make men oft to remember their sins and offences.” On the other hand, abuses such as “censing of them, and kneeling and offering unto them, with other like worshipings,” must be discontinued. Saints in heaven are to be honoured not simply because they are elect, but also because they already share in Christ’s reign, and have left us examples of virtue. While perhaps more fulsome than continental reflections, it is not a departure. Until the insistence that saints are to be taken “in that they may, to be advancers of our prayers and demands unto Christ.” Article 8 then expands just what “taking a saint” implies:

It is very laudable to pray to saints in heaven everlastingly living, whose charity is ever permanent, to be intercessors, and to pray for us and with us, unto Almighty God... and in this manner we may pray to our blessed Lady, to St. John Baptist, to all and every of the apostles or to any other saint particularly... [We must not] think that any saint is more merciful, or will hear us sooner than Christ, or that any saint doth serve for one thing more than another, or is patron of the same.

The cult of the saints is curtailed, pious abuses thereof restrained, but it is explicitly affirmed rather than eliminated. Representing the earliest stage of the English Reformation, when Henry’s need for an heir was more significant than matters of doctrine or practice, *The Ten Articles* are clearly more Roman than they are Reformed. Penned by an English delegation sent to

meet German Lutherans in 1535 to explore a possible accord, they were, as Gerald Bray puts it, “phrased in the way they were in order to get past the eagle eye of Henry VIII and to be acceptable to the Convocation of Canterbury.”⁸ We can only speculate on exactly what the Lutheran-influenced authors of the articles personally felt about Marian devotion at this point in time, and to what extent they viewed the document’s statements about Mary as a compromise, but the *Ten Articles* nevertheless offer a crucial snapshot of a specific moment in the unfolding confessional life of the Reformation.

IF ANY FOCUS ON THE UNIQUENESS OF MARY IS EQUATED WITH IDOLATRY, WE CANNOT BE SURPRISED IF ORTHODOX CHRISTOLOGY FOLLOWS.

After the definitive move toward a strongly Protestant church during the short reign of Edward VI, and the failed reinstatement of Catholicism under Mary, it fell to Elizabeth I and her theological advisors to craft a confession for the Church of England that Parliament could affirm and the majority of English Christians could practice, even if Catholics and Puritans at the extremes could not. The resulting *Thirty-Nine Articles* follow the established Reformed pattern perfectly. Article 2 asserts that Christ “took man’s nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, of her substance” so that two natures were inseparably joined in one person. At the same time, however, Article 22, simply titled, “Of Purgatory” groups images, relics, intercessions—the entire edifice which had Mary at the head—under one condemnation: “The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardons, worshiping and adoration, as well of images as of relics, and also invocation of saints, is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warranty of Scripture but rather repugnant to the word of God.” It is clear, then, that the basic Reformed pattern was part of the Elizabethan settlement, and that

would not change significantly until Newman and the Tractarians of the nineteenth century.

It is perhaps not surprising that the Scottish confessions represent the exception to the pattern by being even more reluctant to say much of anything about the Mother of Our Lord. Thus, she is anonymous even in Article 6, “The Incarnation of Christ Jesus,” of *The Scots Confession* of 1560: “God sent his Son, his eternal wisdom, the substance of his own glory, into this world, who took the nature of humanity from the substance of a woman, a virgin, by means of the Holy Ghost.” John Craig’s 1581 *The King’s Confession*, intended to supplement the 1560 document, doesn’t acknowledge Mary at all, but we can still glimpse her beneath all anti-Catholic polemic: “we especially detest and refuse...his [i.e., the Roman Antichrist’s] canonization of men, calling upon angels or saints departed; worshipping of imagery, reliquaries, and crosses.”⁹ However, with *The Irish Articles* (1615), penned by Archbishop James Ussher for the Church in Ireland, there is a reversion to the broader Reformed pattern. Thus, Article 29, on the incarnation, says, “the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father, the true and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, of her substance, so that two whole and perfect natures—that is to say, the Godhead and manhood—were inseparably joined in one person, making one Christ very God and very man.” Article 47 reminds readers that Christ alone is the mediator, and Article 54 insists that “All religious Worship ought to be given to God alone.”

The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) and *Shorter Catechism* (1648), English-speaking Reformed theology’s classical statements, hew to the well-established formula. In the confession, Chapter 8, “Of Christ the Mediator,” affirms Mary’s virginity, Christ’s humanity, and personal unity with these words: “conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance...the only Mediator between God and man.” And Chapter 21 definitively rules out any notion of created mediation and saintly veneration or intercession: “Religious worship is to be given

8. Gerald Bray, *The History of Christianity in Britain and Ireland* (London: Apollos, 2021), 193.

9. John Craig, *The King’s Confession*.

AD FONTES

to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and to him alone, not to angels, saints, or any other creature, and since the fall, not without a mediator, nor in the mediation of any other but of Christ alone.” The *Catechism’s* summary of the incarnation is similarly stated: “Christ, the Son of God, became man, by taking to himself a true body and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and born of her, yet without sin.” Finally, Question 47 on the first commandment reminds catechumens that only God is to be worshipped and Question 51 adds that such worship is to be entirely image free.

CONCLUSIONS

Three conclusions suggest themselves as I review the data above. First, even if Mary’s preeminence dwindled in the minds of the Reformed as each generation succeeded the last, the confessions quickly established a pattern that was kept with only minor deviations: Mary was a Christological necessity; her virginity and maternity were matters of biblical record; affirming them guaranteed the full yet unique humanity of her Son and the unity of his person. Above, I called this the Christological intent of *theotokos* language. Though none of the documents surveyed use this term, earlier ones do approach it. There is, in modern terms at least, a high view of Mary in the confessions.

But from whence then comes the growing silence about Mary as Reformed confessionality progressed? It stems largely from the recognition that although *theotokos* and “Mother of God” both say something necessary about the incarnation of Christ, and Mary’s role therein, historically, they were used to justify many things said about Mary that the Reformers were loath to approve. Such reticence—even as its Christological necessity continued to be acknowledged—grew after John Calvin’s reluctance to use the term became well-known.¹⁰ In a 1552 letter to the French church in London, Calvin famously wrote:

I cannot conceal that the title [i.e. “Mother of God”] being commonly attributed to the Virgin in sermons is disapproved, and, for my own part, I cannot think such language either right, becoming or suitable. Nei-

ther will any sober-minded people do so, for which reason I cannot persuade myself that there is any such usage in your church, for it is just as if you were to speak of the blood, of the head, and of the death of God. You know that the Scriptures accustom us to a different style; but there is something still worse about this particular instance, for to call the Virgin Mary the mother of God, can only serve to confirm the ignorant in their superstitions.¹¹

With such a Reformed luminary as Calvin stating his opposition to well-worn Christological terminology regarding Mary, it is no surprise that those after him followed his lead and shied away from certain statements in their own confessions.

Second, the documents make clear the early emergence and ongoing persistence of the Reformed conviction that Marian piety could be separated from the incarnation in order to be criticized and rejected. This is not to say, however, that there is no development over time on this score. Earlier documents make clear that they are rejecting abuses but still want to hold up Mary and/or the saints as virtuous examples, and insist that the proper form of “devotion” and honor to them is emulating their holy lives. Later documents, however, do not make this distinction; they simply speak of the rejection of the errors.

It seems to me that these two conclusions can come into tension with each other, as Calvin himself recognized. He knew that the Christology which culminated in the Council of Ephesus and the enshrining of *theotokos* said something true about the person of Christ. He also knew that all subsequent Marian piety developed from this watershed moment.¹² His solution was that of the confessions: preserve the intent; reject the piety. The question is, did it work?

While we cannot prove causation, history does suggest that the answer is, in certain quarters, no. If any focus on the uniqueness of Mary is simply equated with idol-

10. Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 221.

11. John Calvin, “To the French Church in London,” *Letters of John Calvin*, vol. 2, ed. Jules Bonnet (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858), 362.

12. Perry, *Mary for Evangelicals*, 221.

atrous worship and scrubbed, we cannot be surprised if orthodox Christology follows. Erasmus predicted this would happen, and with the advent of Schleiermacher and liberal Protestantism, it did. It would be reductive to lay the blame for the advent of liberal Protestantism entirely on this point, but it bears consideration.

Although the Reformers were right to reject that which is generally meant today by “Marian piety”—prayers for her intercession, her role as co-redemptrix, and so forth—the gradual silent rejection of any pious *attitude* towards Mary as a unique figure in salvation history, as a spiritual exemplar, and as the one rightly labeled *theotokos*, was neither necessary nor fruitful. I have heard Reformed theologians say (and have said myself) that Roman overemphasis on the Mother of God has contributed all too often to a loss of purchase on the humanity of Christ in their piety. The history of liberal Protestantism suggests to me that the converse is true for Protestantism: an underemphasis on the Mother of God has contributed to a loss of purchase on his deity, and his saving power. I believe that underemphasis is found, further, in the confessions themselves, especially the later ones.

Our examination of the Reformed confessions also brings us to a third conclusion: many Reformed Christians unwittingly decry as “Roman innovation” Marian beliefs that are actually present, in whatever fashion, in historic Reformed confessions. “Virgin,” in the later confessions is best read as a contraction of the earlier “Ever-Virgin,” rather than a rejection thereof. The same conclusion holds true with respect to Mary’s immaculacy. It is true that few, if any, of those earlier confessions containing starker Marian language are adhered to by existing Reformed denominations: none of the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Confession—the principle confessions of most orthodox Reformed denominations today—speak in such terms. Yet the fact is that the earlier documents affirm it, and the latter ones do not deny it.

Now, does this mean that, say, Zwingli affirmed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception as held by Roman Catholics today? Hardly—not least because it wasn’t a dogma until 1854. But it does mean that he and other early Reformers took the affirmation of

Mary’s (as yet to be dogmatically defined) sinlessness for granted. The evidence suggests that to say that the later Reformed confessions rejected Mary’s perpetual virginity and immaculacy without explicitly doing so fails on two related counts. First, these documents have no problem decrying “fond things, vainly invented” elsewhere, including those pertaining to Mary, so why not here? And second, it is simply too much weight to hang on what is at best an argument from silence. These are momentous claims which, if they were erroneous, would surely have been named and rejected. When debating with Roman Catholics on these matters, then, Reformed Christians would do well to know their own “family history” on the matter, and consider how this should color the way in which they inveigh against their interlocutors.

I am by no means concluding that those Reformers who confessed perpetual virginity and immaculacy are correct, by the way. It is unwarranted by the evidence examined. Besides, confessions are not creeds and are open to revision in the light of the Spirit’s guidance further into the truth of the Word. My aim is much more modest. First: the evidence above simply suggests that Reformed believers should check themselves when delivering apologetics against Roman Marian dogma, and be ready to dismantle Luther, Zwingli, Bullinger and others on this point. Second: although the abuses of Marian piety are clearly and rightly outside the bounds of the Reformed tradition, there is room within the Reformed tradition for exploration of Marian themes—both theological (for instance, as *theotokos*) and devotional (for instance, as a spiritual exemplar). And if my first two conclusions hold, then it seems to me this may well be one means of preventing the Christological vacuity of liberal Protestantism from repeating itself.

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On Lying

ONSI AARON KAMEL

Lying is bothersome. It bothers our consciences, although many of us lie with some regularity anyway, and it bothers those to whom we lie, particularly if the lie is serious and breaches trust. Chiefly, however, lying bothers moral philosophers and theologians, who can't seem to decide whether or not we should do it. Intuitions diverge.

The Syriac philosopher and theologian Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī (893-974), whose Arabic treatise *The Reformation of Morals* became a classic of Aristotelian ethics in the medieval Middle East, defined lying as “giving information about something contrary to what is the case,” and said that it “is abhorrent”—as long “as it is not for the sake of repelling harm that cannot be repelled except by this means, or, for reaping an indispensable benefit, which cannot be attained except by this means.”¹ Lying is impermissible, except when it's not. The French Reformed theologian John Calvin (1509-1564) held the opposite view. In his commentary on Exodus 1:18, in which God Himself blesses

the midwives who had just lied to Pharaoh and thereby prevented the slaughter of innocents, Calvin writes against those who think that certain lies are permissible: “whatever is opposed to the nature of God is sinful; and on this ground all dissimulation, whether in word or deed, is condemned.”² Lying is impermissible, even when God seems to approve.

How can our intuitions point us in such contradictory directions? How can we think lying is impermissible except when it is necessary, or think that it is absolutely prohibited even when the Bible suggests certain circumstances may permit it? Lying is such a tricky issue for moral philosophers and theologians precisely because our intuitions about whether it is permissible change depending upon the circumstances in which it is deployed. In some cases, it seems to be clearly wrong, but in others, it presents itself as not only permitted but even enjoined. I would like to propose that several thorny moral dilemmas raised by lying were resolved by twentieth-century Lutheran theologian Dietrich

1. Yah'ya ibn 'Adi, *The Reformation of Morals: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. Sidney H. Griffith, 1st edition (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 2002), 55.

2. Jean Calvin, Joseph Haroutunian, and Louise Pettibone Smith, *Commentaries*, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), Exodus 1:18.

Bonhoeffer (1906-1945). Bonhoeffer devoted serious attention to the question of lying, and for good reason: he lived in an ethically fraught time and place. Because he lived through the Weimar Republic and the Nazi regime which succeeded it, Bonhoeffer was confronted time and again with the question of ethical living and decision-making.

HOW CAN WE THINK LYING IS IMPERMISSIBLE EXCEPT WHEN IT IS NECESSARY, OR THAT IT IS ABSOLUTELY PROHIBITED EVEN WHEN THE BIBLE SUGGESTS CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES MAY PERMIT IT?

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Bonhoeffer's views shifted as he aged and as Nazism became ascendant in Germany. In Bonhoeffer's early ethical thought, moral principles are, as such, rejected in favor of contextual decision-making; in his mature thought, however, Bonhoeffer assumes both that divine law is binding and that to know what it requires demands contextual awareness. Put another way, where in his early thought Bonhoeffer rejected ethical principles in favor of contextual immediacy and obedience to God's will as revealed in a given moment, in his mature thought he builds relationality and context into his definitions of acts, thereby freeing him to both consider the law binding and to account for the moment-by-moment responsibility of the Christian before God. I suspect Bonhoeffer's mature position can help us to account for our divergent intuitions concerning the permissibility of lying, and tracing his thought from his early "Basic Questions of a Christian Ethic" to his late "What Does it Mean to Tell the Truth?" will illuminate just where the relevant moral and situational issues lie.

In his early "Basic Question of a Christian Ethic," Bonhoeffer immediately rejects the possibility of an ethic of fixed moral laws which must be applied to a variety of situations. "There are not and cannot be Christian norms and principles of a given nature."³

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, eds. Clifford J. Green &

He provides a couple of reasons why he believes this to be the case. First, ethics is a firmly this-worldly affair—"a matter of blood and a matter of history...its face changes with history."⁴ As a result, ethical norms will vary from nation to nation and generation to generation: "There is a German ethic as well as a French ethic and an American ethic," and social developments in the past twenty years of German life "produced four spiritual or intellectual generations" with distinctive ethical sensibilities. It is important briefly to note that Bonhoeffer wrote this essay early in his career in 1929, prior to the rise of Nazism in Germany; his appeals to "blood" and "nation" as ethically relevant categories will disappear later.

Second, Bonhoeffer contends—channeling, he no doubt thought, Luther—that, at heart, ethics attempts to speak "of the path from [man] to God."⁵ This, Bonhoeffer believed, opposes the heart of Christianity, for Christianity "speaks of grace while ethics speaks of righteousness." For Bonhoeffer, ethics is a kind of category error from a Christian perspective. It seeks to achieve by human strength what Christianity holds to be impossible: human merit in God's sight. Thus, Christian ethics is an absurd undertaking—a kind of square circle.

The contention that Christianity and ethics are incompatible seems, as Bonhoeffer himself was well aware, decidedly awkward in light of the ubiquity of principles and commands in the New Testament. He argues, however, that "the significance of all Jesus' ethical commandments is rather to say to people: You stand before the face of God, God's grace rules over you."⁶ Ethical commandments are to impress upon the Christian, in the words of Bernd Wannewetsch, that he is responsible "at the very place in which he finds himself placed."⁷ One cannot fall back upon the Law; "God has a certain will and wants to see that will done," and

Michael P. DeJonge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 75.

4. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 75.

5. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 77.

6. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 79.

7. Bernd Wannewetsch, "Responsible Living' or 'Responsible Self'? Bonhoefferian Reflections on a Vexed Moral Notion." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 18, no. 3 (December 2005): 125-40. doi:10.1177/0953946805058804, 131.

He will, presumably, “reveal the nature of that will” at the appropriate time.⁸

Indeed, the Christian can expect no consistency in this will of God. The Christian must rather always “establish anew [his] relationship with God’s will.” As Joshua Kaiser writes, Bonhoeffer contended that, “for those in unity with God, there is no need to rely on a supposed understanding of good and evil to make moral decisions because one enjoys a direct relationship of obedience with God.”⁹ Bonhoeffer takes this to be the New Testament’s “law of freedom.” Furthermore, Bonhoeffer writes that “The Holy Spirit is found only in the present...not in fixed moral regulations or in an ethical principle.”¹⁰ In light of the apparent mutability of the divine will, the most striking, and perhaps disturbing, consequence of Bonhoeffer’s contextualism is hardly surprising. Because the individual must listen for God’s will, and because God’s will in the situation at hand may not be the same as His will in the prior situation, “There are no acts that are bad in and of themselves; even murder can be sanctified.”¹¹ As an aside, although James Burtness, for instance, argues that Bonhoeffer belongs among the teleological ethicists rather than the situational ethicists, Bonhoeffer’s “The Basic Question of a Christian Ethic” seems firmly situational.¹² His primary concern is not “the consequences of actions” but the “decisions appropriate to changing conditions and situations.”¹³

After making the provocative claim about murder, however, Bonhoeffer appears to temper his position. While there may not be detailed ethical regulations given by God, there ought to be a general orientation to the Christian’s ethical decisions, and it is cruciform. “In every instance the idea of the cross, as the example of God’s love...determines our actions, since it places

divine love above all other characteristics of God.”¹⁴ In sum, then, in Bonhoeffer’s early ethical thought, fixed law and regulation is rejected in favor of an individual who is understood as responsible to the immediacy of God’s will in a given situation. The Christian can be confident that this loving will of God will have a generally cruciform contour, but it may sanctify even murder, given the right circumstances.

**BONHOEFFER STATES THAT TRUTH-TELLING
“MEANS DIFFERENT THINGS, DEPENDING
ON WHERE ONE FINDS ONESELF.”**

Bonhoeffer’s mature ethical thought, as articulated in “What Does it Mean to Tell the Truth?” (written sometime in 1943–44, during his time in prison) shares a remarkable similarity to his early thought insofar as it maintains a crucial role for responsible, contextual analysis of a situation. But here, Bonhoeffer appears to have a more positive vision of ethical principles. Bonhoeffer claims both that the mandate to tell the truth is binding and that the truth can only be ascertained and spoken when one has analyzed one’s context and determined what speech best articulates reality.

Bonhoeffer begins his essay by noting the asymmetry in the relationship between parents and children. Parents demand absolute truthfulness from the child and have every right to it, but the child does not have the same right with respect to the parents.¹⁵ Bonhoeffer takes as a consequence of this that truth-telling “means different things, depending on where one finds oneself.” He further contends that the relevant difference, which changes what it means to tell the truth in a given situation, is “whether and in what way a person is justified in demanding truthful speech from another.” At this point, Bonhoeffer’s definition of truth-telling becomes relevant. He writes, “*What is real is to be expressed in words.*”¹⁶ This definition builds context into the very definition of “truth,” for, as shall be shown,

8. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 80.

9. Joshua A. Kaiser, *Becoming Simple and Wise: Moral Discernment in Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Vision of Christian Ethics* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 28.

10. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 82.

11. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 81.

12. James H. Burtness, *Shaping the Future: The Ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (Fortress Press, 2009), 16.

13. Burtness, *Shaping the Future*, 16.

14. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 83.

15. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 750.

16. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 751.

LYING IS, INSTEAD, THE EXPRESSION OF UNREALITY, INCLUDING A WRONG CONSTRUAL OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SPEAKER AND THE PERSON TO WHOM HE SPEAKS.

what is “real” includes not only that the words correspond to a given reality (“formal truth”) but also the relationship between the speaker and the person demanding truth. Thus, he writes, “Quite apart from the truthfulness of its content, the relationship [a word] expresses between me and another person is already true or untrue.”¹⁷ Not only must the relationship be properly understood, but the words one speaks must also be understood as carrying a particular meaning within that relationship. Speech to one’s family is not speech to one’s coworkers, etc.¹⁸ These various “orders of society” (family, state, other institutions, and so on) must respect one another, only demanding from the other orders information to which they have rights.

To illustrate this, Bonhoeffer provides a justly famous example. Suppose a teacher publicly asks a student whether his father is an alcoholic. The student “perceives that this question is an unjustified invasion into the order of the family and must be warded off.” In other words, the student recognizes that the teacher has no right to the family’s business, let alone a right to make such business public. Crucially, the teacher has “[disregarded] the reality of this order.” This puts the child in a bind: to answer the teacher “truthfully” would be to tell a lie about the relationship between the teacher and the order of the family, to falsely affirm that the teacher has some right to know the inner-workings of this order. But if the child does not tell the teacher what his father does, he has spoken an untruth. In effect, the student lies either way. Thus, as this example illustrates, lying should not be simply equated with “a formally untrue statement,” nor is it “the contradiction between thought and speech.”¹⁹ Lying is, instead, the expression of unreality, including a wrong

construal of the relationship between the speaker and the person to whom he speaks.

At this juncture, it is important to point out that Bonhoeffer does not mean to justify lying. On the contrary, he writes that lying is “something downright reprehensible.” It is “a contradiction of the word of God as it was spoken in Christ and in which creation rests.”²⁰ As if such language were not strong enough, he concludes that it is “the negation, denial, and deliberate and willful destruction of reality as it is created by God.” Precisely because Bonhoeffer defines truth-telling as speaking rightly about and in the context of reality, lying must be wrong speech which attacks reality, i.e. creation, itself. These claims shed light on Bonhoeffer’s comment in his *Ethics*, for example, that Immanuel Kant’s (1724-1804) claim that he would give up a friend’s whereabouts to an intruder is “grotesque.”²¹ Although not articulated in these terms in the *Ethics*, for Bonhoeffer, Kant is not telling the truth about the way reality is constituted. He misconstrues the proper relationship between the intruder, who has no right to know the friend’s whereabouts, and himself. In sum, then, Bonhoeffer does not defend lying. He argues instead that formal untruths may actually be *truer* than formal truths in particular circumstances; they may better express reality than formal truth. We will return to this point below.

How, though, does one speak truthfully, in Bonhoeffer’s model? Bonhoeffer gives three criteria by which the truthfulness of one’s speech may be judged. First, it must recognize “who calls on me to speak and who authorizes me to speak.”²² Second, one must take account of one’s context, “the place in which [one stands],” and third, a statement must faithfully articulate the subject

17. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 752.

18. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 753.

19. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 754.

20. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 755.

21. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (Fortress Press, 2015), 197.

22. Bonhoeffer, *The Bonhoeffer Reader*, 755.

of one's speech accurately in "this context." There is, then, an obligation upon the individual to faithfully understand the context of a situation and to make a judgment about what kind of speech would constitute true speech in said context. "Concrete responsibility, for Bonhoeffer, means to never lose sight of 'the whole,' to which response is required."²³

Bonhoeffer defines truth in such a way that one's context, and therefore one's contextual obligations, becomes a constitutive element. One cannot properly ascertain the truth without contextual awareness, and yet one is still *obligated* to tell the truth, to faithfully represent the created reality to the best of one's ability. The ethical obligation remains fixed as a general principle, but the principle demands responsible contextual assessment and decision-making. It is, in fact, always and ever an offense against God to lie, but to know what constitutes a lie changes from situation to situation. This stands in stark contrast with Bonhoeffer's earlier thought, as explicated in "Basic Questions of a Christian Ethic," in which all ethical principles are abandoned in favor of contextual decision-making. What Bonhoeffer has shifted fundamentally is the *location* of contextual consideration—the place in ethical decision-making at which context takes up its importance—from a replacement of principle to a necessary element in the definition of terms. In so doing, Bonhoeffer is able to preserve ethical demands while simultaneously allowing for the responsibility that the Christian bears before God at every moment.

Between Bonhoeffer's "Basic Question of a Christian Ethic," and "What Does it Mean to Tell the Truth?" Bonhoeffer's thought developed dramatically: in the former, context's rightful place is in the moment of decision, as a substitute for applying a fixed command from God (or any other form of ethical principle). In

the latter, context's rightful place is in assessing the situation so as to understand what the commandment *means*. The binary between the moral vision of Ibn 'Adi and Calvin turns out to be false: it is not the case that we must either permit lying in a variety of circumstances or condemn formal untruths without reservation. Bonhoeffer's redefinition of lying as bearing false witness to the reality of God's creation, and his insistence that this demands more than speaking formally true statements, and that this demands honestly witnessing to the character of the relationships to which one is a party, help us to escape the binary. Calvin's vision of what constitutes truth-telling is too narrow; Ibn 'Adi permits lying. Both of these, Bonhoeffer suggests, are errors. It is not simply that laws apply differently to different contexts; rather, we cannot understand the requirement of the law—that we tell the truth—without context. This way of articulating the relationship between principles and context leaves the burden of responsibility upon the Christian in the sight of God. This responsibility is precisely what Bonhoeffer wished to preserve, for "responsibility is the entire response, in accord with reality, to the claim of God and my neighbor."²⁴ The Christian cannot simply appeal to abstract laws or regulations; nor can he excuse his falsehoods. He must decide.

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23. Bernd, "Responsible Living' or 'Responsible Self'?", 131.

24. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 197.

The Return

BY JAMES MATTHEW WILSON

The uncle, lately back from Vietnam,
Returned, ear dampened by machinegun fire,
His only story that he'd learned to break
The necks of roosters with a sudden crack.

They saw in thought those birds, their mortal run
Around the gravel, limp crests dangling,
As some last fire belatedly grew dark,
A stench of phosphorus smoldering in the air.

The jolt of blood, the click, the bang, the silence,
They come in time for everyone we know
To punctuate the hours that we live
And, in the course of time, to end them, too.

Roots of Anti-Confessionalism in Contemporary Evangelical Hermeneutics

ROBERT STRIVENS

It is a commonplace of theological retrieval that contemporary evangelical hermeneutical approaches to Scripture differ significantly from those of the Church Fathers, medieval commentators, and Reformers. Pre-critical exegesis assumed the unity of Scripture, on grounds of its divine inspiration, and adopted a Christological hermeneutic in a way that many commentators today often regard as unscholarly and illegitimate. The joke is often made that Augustine's approach to Scripture (to say nothing of St. Paul's) would not pass muster in most seminary classes on biblical studies. Contemporary Bible commentary tends to approach Scripture as it would any other literature, attending closely to the meaning of the words in their literary and historical context, but treating the particular passage or book in question as principally, if not exclusively, the work of its human author. Divine authorship, even if believed, is in practice sidelined, called in to aid assertion of the authority or inerrancy of Scripture, rarely to inform its theological interpretation. That the Bible

speaks with one voice—and that voice divine—is now denied by many either directly or in practice, leaving commentators free to set one part of Scripture against another or to avoid altogether the task of addressing how Scripture coheres into a unified theological whole. The idea that the Old Testament could have very much, if anything, to say about Christ is downplayed or ignored. These trends have left their mark on evangelical commentary too, so that it can look very different from the commentaries and sermons of earlier centuries that have come down to us.

THE SHIFT IN EVANGELICAL HERMENEUTICS

This essay builds on and develops a paper that I presented at the Davenant UK Convivium Irenicum held at Oak Hill College, London, in September 2022.¹ In that paper, I subjected to close examination the

1. A recording of that paper can be found here: <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/finding-theology-in-the-biblical-text-hebrews-1-1-4/id1160974597?i=1000580872627>.

history of the exegesis of the first three or four verses of the letter to the Hebrews, beginning with John Chrysostom's 34 homilies on the epistle.² The paper shows how orthodox trinitarianism underpinned Chrysostom's exegesis of the exordium of Hebrews, with the preacher demonstrating at length how those verses teach Christ as the only-begotten of the Father, consubstantial with him, co-creator and one with the Father in his essence, yet with a subsistence of his own as the Father has.³ Chrysostom's exegesis provided the foundation for subsequent exposition of Hebrews for centuries to come. Contemporary evangelical commentary on the opening verses of Hebrews reads quite differently, on the whole. These commentaries are welcome for the range and detail of their exegesis of the biblical text, the connections that they make with Old Testament and other texts, and the care with which they work out and present their conclusions. They all, as befits evangelical commentaries, understand the opening verses of Hebrews as propounding the deity of the Son. They particularly emphasize how the verses teach that the Son shares in the divine eternity. What they do not do, however, is express the relationship of the Son with the Father in the terminology of classical, historic trinitarianism. In particular, modern evangelical commentaries eschew the use of the terminology of "essence" and "subsistence" and tend to avoid references to eternal generation, though they are willing to speak of the "eternal Son." For these evangelicals, the first verses of Hebrews teach us how God has chosen to reveal himself in and through the Son, who shares in his deity, and by him to bring about salvation and inherit all things. Their explanations of how the author of Hebrews achieves this is admirable, stirring and edifying. But their failure to articulate the teaching of these verses in terms of traditional trinitarian categories represents a significant shift in the exegesis of an important passage of Scripture.

Commentaries such as these represent a move away from the hermeneutical approach of the tradition founded on Chrysostom. My Convivium paper sought

to identify when this shift took place and focused on the work of the early eighteenth-century Dissenting minister Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), whose *Family Expositor* included an exposition of the entire New Testament. Although less so today, Doddridge was a well-known and influential figure within the British evangelical tradition during his lifetime and until the early nineteenth century, and his legacy lives on today (as we will see). I showed that, in his section on the opening verses of Hebrews, Doddridge avoided any theological exposition of the relationship of the Father to the Son. Though he sought to uphold the deity of the Son, he made no reference to the concepts of essence or subsistence. The difference from the exegetical tradition up to this point is subtle but marked. Doddridge is clearly to be identified as an evangelical: he believed in the divine inspiration and reliability of Scripture and in the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith and was, in most respects, Calvinistic in his understanding of them.⁴ His departure from the exegetical tradition with regard to the opening verses of Hebrews is thus significant and remarkable.

Much of the literature on theological retrieval would understand this exegetical shift in terms of the large-scale changes in biblical hermeneutics brought about, it is said, by the Enlightenment and especially as a result of the work of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). I want to suggest that we need to look back a little earlier than that, to find the roots of this shift. It may be helpful, first, to be clear about the kind of shift of interest in this essay. Those who identify Kant as central to a hermeneutical shift tend to focus on the move toward viewing Scripture as no different from other literature. The hermeneutical task is therefore confined to an analysis of the literary features of the biblical text within its context. So far as the substantive content of the text is concerned, efforts to access the intended meaning of the human author have been abandoned by many exegetes as an impossible task, subjective intentions being inaccessible to others. Insofar as the Bible may be regarded as connected with divine revelation, it is to be understood as a *witness* to that revelation,

2. John Chrysostom, "On the Epistle to the Hebrews," in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, series 1 (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1890), 335-524.

3. See Chrysostom, 'Hebrews,' 2.1.

4. See further Robert Strivens, *Philip Doddridge and the Shaping of Evangelical Dissent* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

AD FONTES

rather than as itself constituting revelation; the revelation itself is said to consist in the events to which the biblical text makes reference. A primary task of the exegete, on this latter view, is to explore the historical background to the biblical text. The aim is to find a way to “go behind” the biblical text, which is likely to be marked by error and partiality, in the hope of reaching the genuine historical acts that lie behind it, insofar as they may be recoverable.

The shift I am identifying, however, is rather different. For evangelicals, the Bible is still the inspired, trustworthy revelation of God by which God speaks. The task of the exegete, therefore, is to come to a right understanding of the biblical text, so as to hear rightly what it is that God has to say to us. That aim surely underlies all biblical commentary that is genuinely of an evangelical nature, whatever strand of the broader evangelical theological tradition may be held by any particular commentator. Contemporary evangelical commentaries make genuine attempts to understand accurately what Scripture is teaching, so that preachers and teachers can convey clearly the true message of God found in that text. Although evangelical commentators make plentiful use of the specialist linguistic, literary, and historical tools available today to biblical exegetes, their aim is to understand what the text says, rather than trying merely to access the intended meaning of whoever wrote Hebrews or go behind the text to discern the historical realities that underlie it. Something of these latter tasks may well be apparent in evangelical commentary, but they do not represent the ultimate aim, which remains an accurate understanding of the biblical text.

The shift that we have identified, then, does not lie so much in the understanding of the nature of the text that is being handled. Rather, it lies in *the extent to which that text may be understood as teaching or defending orthodox theology*, particularly of the kind that is articulated in the historic creeds and confessions of the Church. Many modern evangelical commentators have concluded that it is not legitimate to impose (as they would see it) “confessional theology” and its terminology on the authors of Scripture. They feel constrained, by the canons of the discipline within which they work,

to confine their comment on the biblical text to the questions and issues that arise directly from that text, on its own terms and expressed as far as possible in the phraseology of the text and the thought-world of its presumed human author. It seems anachronistic to these commentators, in discussing a New Testament text, to use theological terminology about the deity of Christ from the Council of Nicaea (325 AD), or about the incarnation of Christ from the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), or about the nature of justification from the Westminster Confession (1646)—gatherings which, even if they were carried out by sincere, orthodox believers, occurred centuries after the writing of the New Testament. Their commentary will generally extend to a consideration of other biblical texts that may have influenced the text on which they are commenting in some way. It will not, however, extend to a consideration of how the text relates to the confessional theology and terminology used by the Church subsequent to the New Testament. Chrysostom and those who for centuries followed his exegesis, in contrast, believed that the opening verses of Hebrews were legitimately to be used in the defence of the Church’s creedal understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son, over against the heresies of Arians, Sabellians, and others.

It is important to note the difference between these two shifts in approach to Scripture, one initiated and developed by those who view Scripture just like any other literature and the other adopted by evangelicals who want to understand Scripture as God speaking. This is important because the two shifts can too easily be regarded as effectively one and the same, in which case the second, evangelical shift usually tends to be subsumed by the first. The historical descriptions and explanations for the first shift are then simply applied to the second, evangelical shift. The blame for the shift is thus placed firmly on what is often rather generally referred to as “the Enlightenment” and the finger is pointed at the writings, especially, of Kant in the later eighteenth century. It is my contention that this is the wrong place to look, so far as concerns the peculiarly evangelical shift that we have noted. I believe that it is necessary to go further back than Kant. It is here that Philip Doddridge becomes of interest.

PHILIP DODDRIDGE AND EARLY ANTI-CONFESSIONALISM

Doddridge's avoidance of theological language in his exposition of Hebrews was no mere oversight on his part. In other writings, he makes clear his reluctance to use non-scriptural theological terms drawn from the historic creeds and confessions. He disliked the term "person" in trinitarian discussion, because he said it had such a variety of meanings; he preferred to avoid the phrase "eternal generation;" and while he himself held clearly to the deity of Christ, he was prepared to accept the way in which others chose to express their understanding of the relations between the Father and the Son even when this appeared to put in jeopardy the full deity of Christ, at least as understood in historic, orthodox trinitarianism. Doddridge's firm preference was to express biblical truth in biblical language. He believed strongly that the use of extra-biblical, merely human language to express the teaching of scriptural truth was likely to breed division and factionalism among Christians.⁵

Doddridge was not, of course, alone in this approach in the early part of the eighteenth century. Other Dissenters whose understanding of Scripture and of its main teachings was clearly evangelical took a similar line. This was the issue at the heart of the dispute which broke out at the conference of Dissenting ministers at Salters' Hall in London in 1719, which had been called to discuss what to do about the disagreements over trinitarian doctrine that had arisen in the Dissenting meeting in Exeter where James Peirce (d. 1726) had been a minister.⁶ Peirce's views on trinitarian doctrine had come under suspicion among his Exeter congregation; he had been asked to sign an orthodox statement on the doctrine but had refused to do so. Ostensibly concerned with the doctrine of the Trinity, the debate at Salters' Hall soon became divided between those who believed that ministers should be required to subscribe a confessional statement on the doctrine in question and those who opposed such subscription. Doddridge was too young to have been

at Salters' Hall, but it was the non-subscribers' position that he later adopted and which led him to avoid the use of confessional language where possible.

Anti-confessional attitudes that aspired simply to exegete Scripture as it stands, without recourse to extra-biblical creeds or orthodox theological dogma, can be found elsewhere in the early eighteenth century and earlier. The book that influenced many Dissenters (and others) in an anti-trinitarian direction was *The Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* by the Church of England minister Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), published in 1712. As its title suggests, it sought to expound the doctrine of the Trinity from Scripture, without dependence upon traditional orthodox trinitarian terminology or categories. The result was an account which departed in important respects from the doctrine as historically held by the Church. Earlier, in the seventeenth century, William Chillingworth (1602-1644) had famously pronounced, "The Bible and the Bible only is the religion of Protestants;" Scripture alone was all that was needed to refute and suppress heresy.⁷ The 1694 Assembly of the General Baptists resolved that debates about trinitarian doctrine must be carried out "in Scripture words and terms and in no other terms."⁸ Such views reflected the emphasis of the anti-trinitarian Socinians, who rejected the orthodox doctrine entirely on the basis, as they argued it, of the plain teaching of Scripture alone, understood without reference to creeds and confessions of merely human manufacture.

Doddridge's refusal to rely upon such creeds and confessions and his consequent avoidance of traditional trinitarian categories in his exposition of the opening verses of Hebrews was thus not new in the early eighteenth century. It has forerunners, though it is not clear to what extent these actually influenced Doddridge's own approach. He may have been influenced principally, in this regard, by the pietism that he and some of his colleagues in Dissenting ministry certainly imbibed from Germany: two addresses by Doddridge's tutor, John Jennings (c.1687-1723), were published in 1723,

5. See further Strivens, *Philip Doddridge*, 47-65.

6. See Stephen Copson, ed., *Trinity, Creed and Confusion: The Salters' Hall Debate of 1719* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2020).

7. See William Chillingworth, *The Religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation* (Oxford, 1638).

8. Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol. 1, *From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 373.

AD FONTES

with a preface by Isaac Watts and a letter on preaching by the German Pietist Augustus Franck (1663-1727), as translated by David Jennings—these were all well known to Doddridge and shared his theological outlook.⁹ The publication is clear evidence of how this group of English Dissenting ministers were influenced by German Pietism, with its distaste for confessional theology.

Whatever the influences that led Doddridge to his own distrust of creeds and confessions of faith, however, there can be little doubt about the extent of his own influence on subsequent generations of evangelicals. His *Family Expositor*, in which his exposition of Hebrews appears, was designed, like modern-day daily devotionals, to be read and used in the home by heads of households and other laypeople. Its hermeneutical approach would thereby go on to influence how many ordinary evangelical Christians sought to understand Scripture. Yet perhaps even more influential upon subsequent generations of evangelicals was Doddridge's work as a tutor training men for pastoral ministry. Over 100 men went through his academy with a view to ministry and heard Doddridge's lectures, which adopted an equally anti-confessional approach.¹⁰ These lectures were published posthumously in 1763 and went through several editions until the early nineteenth century, proving influential in a wide range of Dissenting academies. Philip Doddridge's anti-confessional stance towards the interpretation of Scripture must be accounted significant in the development of the hermeneutical approach that has been identified above as now typical of contemporary evangelical commentary.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL MINISTRY

What practical implications does all this have for evangelical ministry today? There is a great deal to be gained from contemporary commentaries, in terms of linguistic analysis and historical and cultural background, as well as stimulating connections with other parts of Scripture and thought-provoking explorations

of themes interwoven through the various stages of divine revelation. Nevertheless, the lack of confessional theology in evangelical commentary today and the avoidance of its attendant technical terminology represents a significant weakness which does no service to the Church. In our fragmented, over-individualized culture, there is a desperate need for a unified theology. Evangelicals believe that Scripture, though multi-authored, ultimately speaks with one voice, that of the living God. It is that voice that we wish and need to hear in the exposition of Scripture. If evangelical commentators are to help us hear it, they must recover confidence in the unified message of the Bible: though it comes to us from many human pens at many different places and in many different ways, yet in the end it comes through the Son—all of it, Old as well as New Testament, even if the new covenant revelation comes in an especial and unique manner as in or by the Son.

This means, surely, that the teaching of the whole of Scripture on any of its principal topics—the nature of God, the person of Christ, the plan of salvation—must be capable of being captured and summarised by those in the Church who have the ability and the resources to study it in sufficient depth. In other words, there is such a thing as the “analogy of faith:” a reliable doctrinal summary of the Christian faith, drawn from and summarizing the sweep of Scripture, which serves as a governing rule for the interpretation of any particular scriptural passage. This is something which the creeds and confessions of the Church attempt to express in their own terminology. It is surely legitimate to make use of such a tool in an authoritative manner in the exegesis of individual portions of the Bible. As R.R. Reno puts it, “To a great extent, the Nicene tradition as a whole should be understood as an argument made across many generations about how best to account for the truth of scriptural teaching, church practice, and apostolic proclamation,” though it may involve “constant restatements, reconsiderations, and revisions.”¹¹ I would go further on this point than those, such as Kathryn Greene-McCreight, who argue that the rule of faith should be used as a boundary marker to rule

9. John Jennings, *Two Discourses* (London: J & B Clark, 1723).

10. See Isabel Rivers, *The Defence of Truth Through the Knowledge of Error: Philip Doddridge's Academy Lectures* (London: Dr Williams's Trust, 2003).

11. R. R. Reno, “What Makes Exegesis Theological?,” *Nova et Vetera* 9 (2011), 85.

out certain unacceptable interpretations of Scripture, but not as a means of mandating particular interpretations of Scripture.¹² It is true that confessions and creeds must always be subject to Scripture and are therefore only a subordinate authority. They must not be used to force a biblical text to teach a doctrine that it does not in fact teach. Yet creeds and confessions nevertheless have a derived authority, born of the fact that they are held to be a summary of the teachings of Scripture as a whole. In that sense, it is surely right to use them positively as well as negatively, to help arrive at the true teaching of a biblical passage, in the context of the whole of Scripture, and not just to exclude illegitimate readings. They can help us to decide what Scripture must be saying, not simply what it cannot be saying. This is the approach that we have seen centuries of Christian commentators adopting toward the opening verses of Hebrews. This is the approach that, in my view, we need to see recovered in our day.

If we do not, we need not be surprised to find the ancient heresies on the rise again. Indeed, that is precisely what we have found. Recent decades have seen prominent evangelical theologians deny the eternal generation of the Son and cast doubt on the absolute equality of the Father and the Son in the Godhead. If our commentaries on the biblical text are not demonstrating explicitly how that text teaches and defends the historical confessions of the Christian church, preachers will not be provided with the material that they need in order to show their congregations how the doctrine and the terminology of those confessions are indeed biblical. If our congregations are not hearing their ministers and preachers expound those things from the biblical text, or if our seminarians are not being put through their theological paces to understand them in depth, then they will begin to imagine that the truths of confessional theology are somewhat suspect and its terminology redundant. A gradual, or perhaps precipitate, slide into some heresy or other may then be anticipated.

None of this means that we have to adopt every aspect of patristic exegesis uncritically and wholesale. There are disagreements, of course, between the early commentators on this passage from Hebrews just as on any other part of Scripture. We must be discerning and prayerful and make careful use of the linguistic and other specialist expertise that contemporary commentators provide, some of which is undoubtedly superior to that which the early church had at her disposal. I am far from suggesting that we slavishly follow Chrysostom or any other commentator, ancient or modern, at every point. John Webster illustrates this in an article on these verses of Hebrews. He takes issue with the general patristic exegesis of the phrase, “express image of his person” in verse 3. Because of the word *ὑπόστατις* used there, the Church Fathers tended to make this a reference to the distinct subsistence of the Son from that of the Father. Webster, with other modern commentators, argues that *ὑπόστατις* cannot have the technical theological meaning that such an interpretation assumes; the phrase is simply saying in a different way the same thing as the first phrase, expressing the “perfect ontological accord in the relation of Father and Son.”¹³ Exegesis may be improved in the detail without impugning the general validity of the theology of the analogy of faith. What I believe to be urgently needed is a recovery of confidence in the analogy of faith in the exegesis of biblical texts so as to show the Church today, through our preaching and teaching, that the truths taught by the historic confessions of the Christian church in the terms in which those confessions teach them are the truths taught by Scripture as the one, true message of the one, true, and living God.

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12. Kathryn Greene-McCreight, ‘Hebrews – Yesterday, Today, and Future: A Theologian’s Response’, in Jon C. Laansma & Daniel J. Treier, eds., *Christology, Hermeneutics and Hebrews: Profiles from the History of Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 235.

13. John Webster, ‘One Who Is Son: Theological Reflections on the Exordium to the Epistle to the Hebrews’, in Richard Bauckham et al., eds., *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 87.

Folk Music: A Biography of Bob Dylan in Seven Songs and The Philosophy of Modern Song

REVIEWED BY E.J. HUTCHINSON

"I just tried to disguise myself the best I could."

"I mean, I'm still the same person. You know, like Hank Williams would say, my hair's still curly, my eyes are still blue. And that's all I know."

—Bob Dylan, interview with Mikal Gilmore, Rolling Stone, December 22, 2001

[TITLE]¹

The first Bob Dylan album I ever owned was *Blood on the Tracks*. It was a Christmas gift; I think I was 19. Though I had asked for the CD, I went in cold, no idea what was coming. Listening, I was puzzled: it was nothing like what the title had made me think it would be. I expected fire. What I heard was rain—buckets of it.

At this stage I knew nothing about its putative relation to Dylan's "real life," the musical pun in the title, or the possible connection of "Tangled Up in Blue" to Joni Mitchell's *Blue*. And yet, for all that—for all my ignorance and misplaced expectations—the more time I spent with the album, the more it changed, and the more I changed with it. Over twenty years on, my opinion of Dylan is the same as Karl Barth's opinion of John Calvin. He is

a cataract, a primeval forest, a demonic power, something directly down from Himalaya, absolutely Chinese, strange, mythological; I lack completely the means, the suction cups, even to assimilate this phenomenon, not to speak of presenting it adequately.

Blood on the Tracks was not the first Dylan I had heard. The first, I think, was probably Guns N' Roses' version of "Knockin' on Heaven's Door," a cover I still love even more than that of the great Warren Zevon, whose ren-

1. This one is for John Somerville.

dition is almost a toned-down cover of GNR's cover of Dylan, rather than of Dylan directly.

It is fitting that my first introduction came through covers—through people impersonating Dylan—for that is a kind of photographic negative of Dylan's own style, as he has taken on dozens of different *personae* over several decades, inhabiting one for a time before discarding it for something else. He's always been mercurial, a shape-shifter, a trickster.

**DYLAN HAS TOLD US HOW TO READ HIM—
AS AN UNQUIET MAN OF MANY TURNINGS,
A TENNYSONIANIZED ULYSSES—FOR A
LONG TIME.**

This is why Greil Marcus's claim on the fifth page of his new book, *Folk Music: A Bob Dylan Biography in Seven Songs* (Yale, 2022), that "[t]he engine of [Dylan's] songs is empathy," is such a terrible blunder.² Dylan is Proteus, but with the word "empathy" Marcus translates him into a psychiatry textbook, taking him from thespian to therapeutic. The term couldn't be more wrong—not because Dylan's songs are inhumane (they aren't)—but because it confuses the *way* in which the humanity, the human sympathy, of the imaginative arts in general, and Dylan's art in particular, works. This, I believe, is what Marcus really wants to talk about; his confusion on this point is a regrettable but perhaps unsurprising symptom of our disordered modern fixation on empathy as, apparently, the chief virtue.

In brief, "Bob Dylan" doesn't exist. His name isn't even real. "Robert Allen Zimmerman," Dylan's birth name, refers to a person, or at least it did—legally, "Robert Zimmerman" ceased to exist in August, 1962. "Bob Dylan" is a character, a pose, a cipher, an avatar, a set that is full of a hundred different and contradictory things, and simultaneously empty of them all. Not for nothing did Todd Haynes call his 2007 biopic *I'm*

Not There, casting six different actors to play not even different versions of Dylan but different facets of his personality. Dylan's songs aren't instances of "empathy" any more than his character in the video for "Things Have Changed" is an instance of "empathy" for Professor Grady Tripp in *Wonder Boys*.

Dylan has told us how to read him—as an unquiet man of many turnings, a Tennysonianized Ulysses—for a long time. He made it clear on "Queen Jane Approximately" (*Highway 61 Revisited*, 1965) that he knew what it meant to be "tired of yourself and all of your creations." This was already true before 1965 (the previous year saw him giving his "Restless Farewell" on *The Times They Are A-Changin'*), and it has remained true ever since. You hear it in the wish for a "New Morning" (*New Morning*, 1970) and a "New Pony" (*Street-Legal*, 1978). Dylan has always been putting on his next costume before he'd cut the tags off of the previous one, has always been putting on a fresh coat of paint before the last one was dry.

He told us who he wasn't in "Brownsville Girl" (*Knocked Out Loaded*, 1986): "There was a movie I seen one time, I think I sat through it twice/I don't remember who I was or where I was bound." More recently, he told us in "Mississippi" (*Love and Theft*, 2001): "Well my ship's been split to splinters and it's sinking fast/I'm drownin' in the poison, got no future, got no past."

Most recently, he has told us again on *Rough and Rowdy Ways* (2020). The man who "contain[s] multitudes" ("I Contain Multitudes"), who "[c]an't remember when [he] was born and forgot when [he] died" ("False Prophet") puts it pointedly in "My Own Version of You":

All through the summers and into January
I've been visiting morgues and monasteries
Looking for the necessary body parts
Limbs and livers and brains and hearts

I want to bring someone to life—is what I want to do
I want to create my own version of you

2. *Folk Music: A Bob Dylan Biography in Seven Songs* by Greil Marcus. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022. 288pp. Hardcover. \$27.50.

Dylan isn't empathizing, he's ventriloquizing. "I'll bring someone to life—someone for real/Someone who feels the way that I feel." He's not your worried friend. He's Pygmalion. Is it an accident that the non-live portion of Dylan's 1970 album *Self Portrait* (that is, 20 of the 24 tracks) consists almost entirely of covers of songs by other people? No; no, it is not. The man made a movie called *Masked and Anonymous*. This is not a feature of his art that he is trying to hide.

Because this is so, a conventional biography of Dylan the artist may be beside the point, if not ultimately impossible (though Clinton Heylin's tremendous 2021 *The Double Life of Bob Dylan* is very much worth reading). Indeed, Marcus, a student of Dylan for decades, seems largely to understand this. Thus his misguided emphasis on "empathy" sits uneasily with his better interpretation of Dylan, once even within the same sentence. After referring to empathy as "[t]he engine of his songs," he immediately refers to Dylan's "desire... to restage and re-enact the dramas others have played out" (5). Later: "[I]t may be that his true biography is his inhabiting of other lives, whether they're musically inherited, like Handsome Molly, or coming to life in his own hands, the Frankenstein monsters, made of parts from different graves..." (211), before quickly reverting back to "empathy" (223, 228, 234).

Although not wholly realized, Marcus has enough of a sense of the "dramatic" nature of Dylan's work to eschew a conventional biography, choosing instead to get at Dylan through the examination of seven songs. The length of the chapters is frequently inversely proportional to the length of their respective songs. The longest chapter is on the shortest song, "Blowin in the Wind." The two shortest chapters, almost identical in length, are on "The Times They Are A-Changin'" and the 11-minute "Desolation Row." For me, it was those short chapters that packed the biggest punch, and the revelatory one on "Desolation Row" more than the rest. I will never hear the song the same again, for two reasons—one aesthetic and allusive, the other historical and substantive.

On the first: Marcus argues convincingly that Charlie McCoy's lead part on acoustic guitar at the beginning

of the track was inspired by the similar opening of Marty Robbins's "El Paso," itself a kind of desolation row. Second: the recollection of Robbins's 1959 murder ballad is reinforced by the speculative but utterly convincing theory that Marcus floats about the song's enigmatic opening lines:

They're selling postcards of the hanging
They're painting the passports brown
The beauty parlor is filled with sailors
The circus is in town

Though there is no external evidence to prove it, once you've read Marcus connect it to the lynching of three black circus workers in Duluth, MN, where Dylan's father and grandfather lived, in 1920—an event depicted on a postcard that was popular at the time—well, that puts the song in a whole new light. (Further support for Marcus's theory, which he does not note, is the color the passports are painted.) It is anecdotes like this that make Marcus's book a pleasure to read.

This is not to say it does not have some other faults besides the one I mentioned above. Marcus's writing can be uneven. When he comes upon what he evidently regards as a Big Idea, he can bludgeon it to death. Consider: "All I could hear was a few minutes of the sort of aesthetic measuring and balancing necessary to write two people who would have otherwise been forgotten into history, and write a song that would itself become part of history, and make its own history" (100). This is followed by: "And we could hear the way the song was made to write its own history" (104); "The song was writing history, rewriting it, unwriting it" (105); "It was humbling to hear how songs not only mark history, or even make it" (117); "He wrote songs that as he put them out into the world wrapped their arms around history and then walked into it" (192). At least once, his adjectival straining becomes positively Germanic: in discussing "Murder Most Foul," Marcus mentions Dylan's "Sinatra-alone-at-the-bar-in-his-trench-coat-and-hat-while-the-party-swirls-around-him-on-the-cover-of-*No-One-Cares* voice" on "Murder Most Foul" (229-30).

The penchant for profundity shows up in other ways, too. For example, there is a moment in the chapter on

“The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” that includes a superficially erudite but confused and, finally, vacuous reverie on politics and the Good, lumping together Aristotle, the Enlightenment, civic virtue, and the search for one’s “true self,” and making it seem as if these were somehow magically combined in just the right way in, of all times, the 1960s. Indeed, Marcus seems, as far as I can make out, to think the 60s and 70s were a kind of Aristotelian apogee in America, at least aspirationally. This is of course self-evidently absurd, but further evidence that he really does believe it is provided by comparison to his ludicrous account of what followed, such as his description of Ronald Reagan as “for decades the tribune of a revanchist, brutalist right-wing vision of the world,” so that, by the 1980s, “even the existence of civic virtue...became impossible to talk about” (106). The level-headed reader finds himself constitutionally incapable of taking such pronouncements seriously.

One need not swear allegiance to Reaganomics to realize that Marcus’s hyperbole beggars belief, and so one wonders if the animus is simply generational. After all, Marcus loathes Dylan’s music of the 1980s as well (66-67; 192), even though much of it is quite good. He likewise scoffs at Dylan’s Christian albums despite his own secularized and immanent but nevertheless redemptive view of history, in which the dynamics of promise and fulfillment seem to be operative and it is a moral failing if the promise is deferred. Self-mythologization is a typical Boomer vice, and Marcus is afflicted with it in a way that Dylan (who is not a Boomer) is not.

Marcus, it is true, is a sympathetic listener of Dylan’s most recent albums. This is welcome, but unsurprising—such is *de rigueur* among critics. One only wishes that he had done something truly surprising and extended sympathy to the 80s material that he is much too quick to dismiss.

Folk Music tries to split the difference between music and life in the field of Dylanology, even if the balance happily tilts toward music. By contrast, Dylan’s own recent book, *The Philosophy of Modern Song* goes all the way (as he says in “I Contain Multitudes,” “I go right

to the edge - I go right to the end”), where “life” disappears and the music is all that remains.³ Given that I said above that I believe this to be the best way to think about Dylan, it will come as no shock for me to suggest this book gives us perhaps the best peek into our cipher to date. This is because the book isn’t about Dylan’s songs at all, and is even less about his life and times. Instead, it’s about the songs he loves, the ones he thinks and feels with. In that way, it is unparalleled in the light it sheds on Dylan as a creative sponge and on his music as a palimpsest.

The Philosophy of Modern Song is the first book that Dylan has published since *Chronicles: Volume One* in 2004. It collects 66 paraphrases and reflections on songs ranging from compositions by Stephen Foster in the mid-nineteenth century (“Nelly Was a Lady”) to Warren Zevon in 2003 (“Dirty Life and Times”). In between, Dylan runs the gamut, from country and rockabilly singers (Merle Haggard, Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson, Carl Perkins), to crooners (Perry Como, Domenico Modugno, Bing Crosby), to soul (Ray Charles, Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes, The Temptations), to rock and roll (Elvis Costello, The Who, The Clash).

Sixty-six songs—the same as the number of books in the Bible. A coincidence? Almost certainly not. As Dylan said in a 1997 interview with Jon Pareles, “Those old songs are my lexicon and my prayer book. All my beliefs come out of those old songs, literally, anything from ‘Let Me Rest on That Peaceful Mountain’ to ‘Keep on the Sunny Side.’ You can find all my philosophy in those old songs. I believe in a God of time and space, but if people ask me about that, my impulse is to point them back toward those songs. I believe in Hank Williams singing ‘I Saw the Light.’ I’ve seen the light, too.”⁴

The Hank Williams song Dylan includes in his book is “Your Cheatin’ Heart,” and his reflections follow the most common pattern. First, there is an imaginative

3. *The Philosophy of Modern Song* by Bob Dylan. London: Simon & Schuster, 2022. 352pp. Hardback. \$22.50.

4. *Dylan on Dylan: The Essential Interviews*, ed. Jonathan Cott (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2006), 396.

paraphrase written in the second person. From these, you can see how Dylan inhabits songs as stage-plays before he steals and reforms them:

In this song you're the swindler who sold me a faulty bill of goods....Your cheatin' heart had unlimited power, was unreliable, corrupt, and treacherous—it was responsible for bringing poison and pestilence into the homes of millions, and you commended yourself for it, you celebrated yourself....Soon you'll be on a cryin' binge, wide awake and troubled, your consciousness filled with self-disgust....Soon you'll be marching on the same side of the road as what I'm on, we'll see how you handle that. (164)

Is it too much to hear a premonition after the fact of the singer's posture in "Don't Think Twice, It's All Right"? Or a rejection of that posture in "You're Gonna Make Me Lonesome When You Go"? Maybe. Then again, maybe not.

Second, Dylan appends a short essay. In the one for "Your Cheatin' Heart," he comments on the way in which the song is an instance of aesthetic perfection and simplicity while also being anything but simple morally as it "make[s] you examine yourself—all your actions." This discussion is a prelude to a large-scale indictment of the very different sledgehammer simplicity of contemporary popular culture:

That's the problem with a lot of things these days. Everything is too full now; we are spoon-fed everything. All songs are about one thing and one thing specifically, there is no shading, no nuance, no mystery. Perhaps this is why music is not a place where people put their dreams at the moment; dreams suffocate in these airless environs.

And it's not just songs—movies, television shows, even clothing and food, everything is niche marketed and overly fussed with. There isn't an item on the menu that doesn't have half a dozen adjectives in front of it, all chosen to hit you in your sociopolitical-humanitarian-snobby-foodie consumer spot. Enjoy your free-range, cumin-infused, cayenne-dusted

heirloom reduction. Sometimes it's just better to have a BLT and be done with it. (165)

By turns bookish, bawdy, and brash—one moment professorial, the next playful, and then pugnacious—Dylan wears his encyclopedic knowledge of American music lightly, idiosyncratically, and authoritatively. If you want to know how and why songs work as vehicles for stories, sensations, moods, and ideas, in a way that illuminates Dylan's own music better than many analyses of that music, this is the book to read.

"In my beginning is my end," Eliot says. So let us return to the crucial difference between "empathy" and the artistic indwelling of other selves and other lives. For this, I take three chapters in Dylan's bible of song as programmatic.

It is noteworthy that the very first singer Dylan treats is named "Bob": the country singer Bobby Bare and his 1963 song "Detroit City." In the chorus, the speaker of the song, which takes the form of a confession of the difference between the life he really leads in Detroit (unhappy, empty) and the version he tells his family about (successful, worthwhile), laments, "I want to go home"; but one gets the impression that he won't be able to. The track is an ancestor in the direct line of "Like A Rolling Stone."

Dylan's comment on the singer's *persona* weaving a pseudobiography within the artifice of the song—"He's able to manufacture a completely fictitious life just by penning some letters back home"—is a metonym for artistic creation outside the song (5). (And given that the first-person narrator of "Detroit City" works in the auto industry, Dylan's pun on "manufacturing" is particularly clever: life is once again reframed as art.)

Second, there is another "Bobby," Bobby Darin, one of the few singers to get more than one chapter in the book with both "Mack the Knife" and "Beyond the Sea." Where "Bobby Bare" is the real name of Robert Joseph Bare Sr., "Bobby Darin" is the identity assumed by Walden Robert Cassotto. And what does Dylan have to say about him?

Bobby Darin could sound like anybody and sing any style. He was more flexible than anyone of his time. He could be Harry Belafonte. He could be Elvis. He could be Dion, he could be a calypso singer, he could be a bluegrass singer or a folk singer. He was a rhythm and blues singer. The guy was everybody if anybody. But here's the thing about chameleons, if you don't watch them changing colors they just look like an ordinary lizard. Their uniqueness lies in their transformative nature. So, more fairly, Bobby Darin was more than a chameleon, for each of his guises he inhabited with verve and gusto and even in repose he just about vibrated with talent. (87)

Substitute Dylan's own name in the paragraph above, try it on for size. If there is a better description of him, I don't know of it. And Dylan's "own name?" That's no more real than Darin's. Everybody mentions Dylan Thomas as the source of Dylan's *nom d'art*, but one has to wonder if Robert Allen Zimmerman, when he became Bob Dylan, was thinking of Warren Robert Cassotto becoming Bobby Darin. (It's worth pointing out that before he was "Bob Dylan," he was, for a time, "Bobby Dylan.")

The third is Chapter 31, on Johnny Paycheck (most famous for "Take This Job and Shove It"), born Donald Eugene Lytle. Dylan writes:

There's lots of reasons folks change their names. Some have new names thrust upon them as part of religious ceremonies, coming-of-age rituals or arrival into new lands where the unusual diphthongs or combinations of consonants coupled with hitherto unseen umlauts and tildes force ethnic names to be shortened into blander alternatives.

And then there are those who change their own names, either on the run from some unseen demon or heading toward something else. Donald Eugene Lytle knew he was born for more than his birth name had in store. And by the time he was a teenager, his hometown...could barely contain him. (147)

Again, substitute "Robert Allen Zimmerman" and see what happens. As Dylan said in a 2004 interview with

Ed Bradley, "Some people—you're born, you know, the wrong names, wrong parents. I mean, that happens."⁵

Why belabor this point? What "Bob Dylan" means is the music and the words that fly under that banner, the music and the words that have been begged, borrowed, and stolen over decades ("Brownsville Girl" again: "Oh if there's an original thought out there, I could use it right now"), melted down together as ore in the bardic furnace, and turned into "a monument more lasting than bronze," to quote the Roman poet Horace, by whomever, or whatever, that name signifies. As in the case of Homer, the name means the poetry. Say "Homer", and you mean the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, not the man himself. So, too, "Bob Dylan" means the songs. *Folk Music* gets us part of the way there; *The Philosophy of Modern Song* dispenses with half measures. This was only to be expected. Dylan gave us the key on his most recent album, in "Mother of Muses." Note the ambiguity of the first word:

Forge my identity from the inside out
You know what I'm talking about

In the domain of the Muses, the art is the biography that counts. Outside of that domain, the watchword is found on Dylan's "When He Returns", from 1979's *Slow Train Coming*: "Surrender your crown on this blood-stained ground, take off your mask."

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5. The remark can be found online at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-bob-dylan-rare-interview-2004/>.

VC

BY TOM C. HUNLEY

I just tripped on bamboo in Trung's backyard.
It snapped, not too loud but loud enough
for him to catch me. We're eleven, playing "VC"
with his four brothers. VC is like Tag,
but if you're "it," you have to pretend
to be the Viet Cong. It's my turn
to be the Viet Cong, but first Trung wants
to tell me something broken and jungle dark.
His brothers' laughter betrays their hiding places.
I don't have the heart to find them.

Trung tells me about his sister wailing,
looking back home, looking ready to turn into salt;
about their father's slap on her cheek
followed by a caress on the red spot.
The seasick boat rocks and awaits them.
The late night air is chilly.

Half of Trung's brothers have peed themselves.
I'm the Viet Cong, and I can almost smell it.
Ten years later, Trung and I smoke some strong
stinky weed together on break from our different
colleges, and I lose him in the haze. I look
on Facebook and in the phone book.
I'll never find him.

The End of Interpretation: Reclaiming the Priority of Ecclesial Exegesis

BY R.R. RENO

REVIEWED BY EPHRAIM RADNER

“What the Bible says accords with what the church proclaims” (7). This conviction, reiterated and explored in various ways, forms the main thread of R. R. Reno’s lucid and invigorating book on scriptural interpretation, *The End of Interpretation*.¹ Taken as a whole, the volume stands as a justification for what today is called (and what Reno himself calls) “theological exegesis” or “theological interpretation of Scripture.” The volume functions as a spare and attractive invitation to understanding Scripture as primarily the Church’s book. Reno also provides one of the finest and most accessible modern apologies for traditional Christian reading of the Bible in the face of its contemporary detractors, an apology that is intellectually substantive and religiously appealing. Christians of every stripe and background have much to learn from this superb distillation of scriptural wisdom from one of our culture’s sharpest minds and most probing hearts.

Reno, Editor of *First Things*, trained as a moral theologian at Yale and here revises a number of earlier essays in the rhetorical register of his now well-honed journalistic style. The essays fall into three categories. There are opening discussions of biblical interpretation more broadly, dealing with modern questions, practical quandaries, and what one might call “theory.” These lay out the broad outlines of Reno’s defense of a “doctrinal” or “theological” approach to grasping the Bible’s “true” meaning. Several essays then look at historical examples of the kind of scriptural reading Reno advocates—Origen; the writer of the late medieval classic poem *Piers Plowman*; Reformation era readings of the Epistle of James; and the contemporary effort to do “theological exegesis” of Scripture in the *Brazos* series of biblical commentaries, of which Reno has been the chief editor. Finally, Reno provides two examples of his own theological reading of Scripture, involving the opening of Genesis and John 17.

1. R.R. Reno, *The End of Interpretation: Reclaiming the Priority of Ecclesial Exegesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022, 170 pages. \$22.99.

A central question for the book is “how do we square doctrine with Scripture?” (xiv). This question arises in response to the more personal question, “how should I interpret so that I remain true to what Scripture says?” (xv). Reno answers: “When it is in accord with what the church teaches.” This could seem, immediately, to indicate a view of scriptural interpretation that must be expressive of and even bound to institutional formulae. One would be forgiven for assuming so, given that Reno, a Roman Catholic, puts himself under the authority of the Roman magisterium. Yet Reno provides various definitions of “doctrine” or “what the church teaches.” He will write of articulated and authorized dogmas of both Catholic and Protestant churches. He will also stretch this to “explicit” and “implicit” “belief” (27). Or he will point to a broader “Nicene horizon” shared by most Christians (27), or even of the “unruly” traditions (23) that have tugged at the Church’s varied life. He is in fact wary of what he calls “doctrinal supersessionism” with respect to reading the Bible—an attitude that basically approaches Scripture as a store of proof texts for ecclesial claims of one kind or another. Near the end of his first programmatic essay on interpretation, he provides what seems to be the definition most reflective of his sense of “doctrine”: “not only official teachings but also the church’s liturgical practice, moral formation, and spiritual discipline”; in short (borrowing from the Old Testament scholar Walter Moberly) “patterns of living” (34).

This is a “thick description” of doctrine, in line with George Lindbeck’s more anthropological way (via Clifford Geertz) of putting it. Reno repeats himself often in the book, but this is salutary: a sense of how doctrine “accords” with Scripture can only come through the long experience of living with the church’s scripturally formed existence. Any “true” reading of Scripture requires “repeated” practice and encounter within the Church’s ongoing engagement with Scripture. Reno’s volume of explication reflects this, as an immersive primer in this life. And the final essay, on the *Brazos* series and its reception, amounts to a celebration, not of a scholarly enterprise (which, as he explains, had only limited publishing success), but of a certain way of reading that is in fact a way

of living the Christian life in the church—scripturally saturated, delighted, and ensnared.

I want to stress Reno’s existential posture, over and against the more purely cognitive attitude that tends to dominate discussion of “biblical hermeneutics.” The posture reflects much of Reno’s larger outlook on the theological responsibilities of the intellectual class who write books and dictate programs of learning. There has been a real continuity, I would argue, in Reno’s writing over the decades, despite some seemingly radical changes in its location. Reno is best known today as *First Things*’ Editor, and as someone committed to a range of radically conservative political and cultural projects, championing revived notions of social solidarity and populist policies. He is frequently put on lists of writers on the political right. But he began his career as a moral theologian, examining ideas of the self and of salvation in very traditional ways. He was properly sensitive to social realities, however, and became increasingly concerned about the weakness of contemporary corporate integrities—including the Church—in whose dissolution many individuals have floundered. But Reno never viewed the character of corporate existence as self-sustaining or simply a matter of policy: rather, it was God-shaped. Scripture, then, inevitably loomed ever larger in his interests, as one can see in his writing in the 1990s and early 2000s. Though he became a Catholic in 2004, his was a Word-oriented ecclesialism from the start. And its Word-orientation was aimed, in part, at human flourishing within a polity. The close link Reno draws between Scripture’s right interpretation and the life of the Church is utterly consistent with his evolving concerns, but so is his sense that Scripture’s must be rightly apprehended in enjoyment by individuals who live in community.

Reno’s vision might seem ecclesiocentric and, in fact, brazenly “Catholic” in its presuppositions: “read Scripture in a way that discovers and articulates its coherence with church teaching.” He has no apologies for his own ecclesial commitments and his sense that Scripture coheres with them. But the whole tenor and practice of his exegesis and reflection is more humanistic (in a Christian sense) than institutional. Scripture and doctrine cohere in the sense that it is *persons* in the

first place, not institutions, let alone social causes or forces, that are touched by God in revelation and interpretive grace. The little skirmishes with historical criticisms Reno engages throughout the book have this as one of their motives: Scripture is given to actual people, who actually live and pray together, and face actual life together over time; Scripture is not an artifact of rational analysis handed over to timeless formulations, let alone to the formulating experts. This is why, in my opinion, Reno's book is a "warm" book, not a polemical one (despite its sometimes biting critiques). As such, it is a wonderful invitation and apologetic, as well as a witness to the healing gifts of Scripture.

**RADNER MAKES A GOOD CASE FOR THE
CAPACIOUS CHARACTER OF HIS OWN
CATHOLIC COMMITMENTS.**

It is also why I think, in a volume of consistently splendid quality, the essay on Origen is the best: it is about a *person* who reads the Bible in such a way that its words are experienced as engendering the life of the Church's *people*. The essay is a wonderfully succinct presentation of some of Origen's arguments about Scripture and the early church more broadly. There is a little philosophy here, a little intellectual history there, but the essay's *theological* persuasiveness comes from Reno's description of how Origen's creative figural exegesis worked to embody the Word's own liveliness in the world, and in Origen's own discipleship. Strings of verbal and thematic association unfurl in Origen's readings, wrapping themselves around the realities of the Christian life in a way that furthers the conformity of the Christian to the life and truth of Jesus.

Modern readers often do not quite know what to make of this approach. It seems fluid, often open-ended, unmoored from the "pithy" abstractions of predetermined dogmatic formulae. But the approach is not *less* bound to the Church and her life for all that; it is the *more* so, in its constant return to a common life that is lived under Christ Jesus. There is something charismatic about Origen's way of reading Scripture, but the charisms in question are always enacted within and for the Church.

Origen remains probably the most influential single scriptural commentator in the church's history—not because of some "method," but because of a certain kind of scripturally enmeshed life of intellect and moral thirst that he offered up to the church.

Reno rightly stresses the liveliness that Origen's exegesis entails, in part because it is faithful to the liveliness of the biblical words themselves. One of Reno's consistent and most persuasive critiques of contemporary approaches to exegesis is the way they require the excision of texts that don't fit the given perspective's criteria of truth. Historical criticism, for example, despite its benefits, usually ends up "flattening" and "silencing" large swathes of Scripture rather than illuminating them. But because Scripture is "thickly forested" (28), and in this is reflective of the abundance of its divine source, a truly theological interpretation will seek to take in more and more of the Scripture, not less and less.

This ravished imbibing of Scripture's divine meanings does not come across nearly as clearly in Reno's discussion of various Reformation approaches to the Epistle of James. The chapter is meant to show how Catholic and Protestant doctrinal commitments regarding grace and righteousness—in this case, "doctrine" is used in a more formal and narrow sense—shape, for all their divergence, a shared vigor in appropriating James' letter as a revelatory scriptural text. The "presumption of accordance" was held by all parties—Luther, Chemnitz, Calvin, Trent, Lapide—and that presumption gave rise, in Reno's vision of the feedback loop between Scripture and doctrine, to richly effective exegesis. Reno's concise arguments are intriguing, but by definition "after-the-fact": very little Origenistic *jouissance* is on display among these sixteenth-century actors, and they themselves rarely viewed their efforts in such terms. The doctrinally pressed exegesis of James in this period of Christian conflict was, rather, mostly seen as part of a struggle often waged in physical as much as in intellectual terms.

Likewise, Reno would be the first to admit that his own contemporary efforts at scriptural exegesis pale in comparison with masters like Origen. Nonethe-

less, Reno provides his readers with some scintillating scriptural reading. He insists throughout the book that “theological interpretation” of the Bible is not a “method,” but an ongoing practice of having Bible and doctrine or Bible and Church mutually shape our understanding of Scripture itself. And thus his personal discussions of biblical texts or books do not exemplify an applied set of analytic steps, but range about with the kind of space and freedom that the common Christian life must necessarily afford. This is most evident in his essay on the opening verses of Genesis, which picks up details from his full commentary on the book in the *Brazos* series. Here, Reno takes up basic metaphysical logic (causes, creation, matter, time), common sense (if sharp) personal ponderings, comparisons with other scriptural texts, and associated traditional Christian assertions. He then lets these elements move along in a kind of feedback loop. The formulated “doctrine” of *creatio ex nihilo* (God’s creation “out of nothing”), he shows us, is not an abstract notion imposed by later Christian philosophers on the Genesis text, but one that both emerges from the text and its reflection, and that also, once apprehended, clarifies and fructifies the text. In the course of his reading of Genesis, Reno makes use of other interpreters, like Augustine and the Jewish commentator Rashi, trying on and finally commending an interpretation of the book’s opening verses in terms, not of simple “temporal,” but of “absolute beginning.” The claim, as he points out, radically affects one’s view of the world as a whole.

Reno’s exegesis of Genesis is illuminating. Yet although taken up several times in other essays, and wide-ranging in its own small scope, it is also dense, sometimes tough to chew on, and certainly lacking the excited vigor of Origen’s fluid range of motion. Reno’s reading of John 17, in the other strictly exegetical essay, while filled with flashes of insight that press against standard platitudes about church unity, is less expansive still. Its undeniable “truths” too often verge on the truisitic, not because of superficiality, but for reasons of the arguments’ diminished scale. As “examples” of biblical reading, these chapters can seem only to scratch the surface, and withdraw a bit into the shadows of Reno’s more lengthy and programmatic essays. One wonders if the criticism aimed at so much writing on “theolog-

ical interpretation”—that it majors in discussion “about” interpretation, rather than in actual reading of Scripture—may in fact be true. It is a critique Reno himself acknowledges.

But in this case, I don’t think the criticism is fair. To see why not, we should consider the other outstanding essay in the collection, on *Piers Plowman*. Reno’s discussion of Langland’s fourteenth-century poem is a fascinating amalgamation, carefully pursued, of Scripture, theological reflection, social consideration, and political counsel, all rooted in a Christian faith. The whole reflection, seemingly in the mode of literary criticism, is in a fact a sterling example of the reach and richness of Scripture’s theological interpretation, which is not simply a textual exercise, but a way of placing Scripture within the world (or the converse) and quite directly of opening up a space in which God’s life looms up with fearsome yet inviting power and personal grasp. Most importantly for this discussion, only in this essay does Reno engage the question, not only of “what is doctrine?” but “what is the Church?”. *Piers Plowman*’s assessment of the Church’s failures is central to its story, but in a way that digs into Scripture’s own Christological claims about the Christian life in community. As Reno follows Langland’s lead, he also delves into the biblical material itself, uncovering some of the implications of taking seriously—morally and spiritually—the Church as Christ’s own body. This identification is mentioned only in passing by Reno in his opening programmatic essays. But here, in confronting Langland’s late medieval struggles and questions, the scripturally rooted corporeal character of the Church is faced head-on, and in a way that deepens and complexifies any notion of “doctrine” as an easily extractable entity from Christian life and its challenges.

The question of whether Reno’s actual “theological exegesis” is less engaging than his talk about such exegesis turns out to be misleading precisely because a discussion of the Church’s life, tethered to her scriptural character, is itself a kind of biblical exegesis. The history of Scripture’s interpretation, understood as a tracing of the Church’s own life with the Word, is itself a form of theological exegesis. If Scripture’s nature as God’s Word is to order the life of the Church as her tangi-

ble articulation—a life lived in the rich contexts of the world’s precincts—then a properly theological interpretation cannot be reduced to merely reading the text. It must involve the gathering up of the world’s things into Scripture’s hand: persons, places, contexts, struggles, encounters, and events. It must involve pouring through the Church Fathers, sixteenth-century polemicists, medieval poets and social critics, contemporary university professors and church members, citizens and their drifting progeny. All are part of the “living patterns” of the Word’s referentiality, which are granted observable contours in the form of the Body. Reno, then, is a certain *kind* of theological exegete, the scope of whose commentary is deliberately wider than a literary discourse.

My main question about Reno’s volume is why he chose to mute the implications of this reality of the Church’s bodily relation to Scripture, at least in his extended discussions. There is, as I just noted, the conclusion to his *Piers Plowman* essay; there are comments on Origen’s sense of bodily suffering as a divine gift, linked intimately to the often self-denying practice of scriptural reading. But more often, Reno seems to hold back from this reality—one that coheres better with his larger claims regarding God’s status as absolute creator and ours as trembling creatures invited into His vast and mysterious being. These are, after all, claims that properly lie behind Reno’s critique of modern (and some pre-modern) domestications of Scripture by self-protecting human prejudices. Reno’s winsome humanism can seem too willing to let ecclesial life stand unjudged, and the body of Christ therefore lies before us as the invulnerable manufacturer of doctrinal wares. The scriptural consequence risks offering a Bible more gently prodding and less drastically creative and recreative than, as I believe, is the case. If “ecclesial exegesis” of Scripture is a “priority,” as the subtitle to *The End of Interpretation* has it, then much depends on how one construes the Church’s own character.

It is telling that Reno (though qualifying his certainty on the matter) believes that “the term ‘theological exegesis’ emerged during the final decades of the twentieth century” (4), linking this emergence to George Lindbeck and the “Yale School” that loosely included

scholars like Brevard Childs, and later David Yeago. Reno will speak of this late modern, though somewhat short-lived, context as one of “ecumenical optimism” (164), and, though his comments on John 17 might somewhat belie such positivity, he seems willing to let this gentler scholarly moment inform his outlook: theological exegesis seems to be expressive of a confidence in the Church herself, however broadly or narrowly conceived (Reno will sometimes allude, in his own Catholic voice, to “Holy Mother Church”).

But, in fact, the category of “theological exegesis” seems to be a relatively early product of ecclesial conflict. In 1613, an Augustinian priest, Henrik Lancelotz, wrote a “theological exegesis” of the Epistle of Jude, of over 500 pages, using the letter among other things, to trace the contours of heresy (including Protestant heresy) more broadly. Lancelotz and others of the period, including Protestants, wrote what they explicitly called “theological exegeses” of the Psalms, of Daniel’s prophecies, and of Romans. Much of this material was deliberately designed to confute religious opponents. In the eighteenth century, German and French (and later English) writers associated “theological exegesis” with “spiritual” reading of Scripture, employed by pneumatic Christians, suspect for their idiosyncrasies or celebrated for resisting the desiccated religion of the world. “Theological exegesis” could take on a technical sense as an interpretive focus (versus philosophical or historical exegesis) upon scriptural terms that had dogmatic purchase: grace, election, vocation, liturgy. And by the mid-nineteenth century, “theological exegesis” was also explained as a way of reading Scripture “whole” according to “the analogy of faith”—a definition perhaps more in line with Reno’s Yale School usage. Still, through the early twentieth century, the phrase continued to indicate, sometimes quite negatively, a more “spiritual” or “pneumatic” way of reading Scripture, embraced against opponents, or used as a smear.

Theological exegesis, historically at least, is as often a posture of dispute as it is an invitation to scriptural wonder. As such, it has reflected the character of those who have read the Bible, and not necessarily in a flattering way. And if one adopts, as Reno does, a view of doctrine that verges on conflating it with the Church’s

life itself, one also opens up the Church to a difficult promise. The Church, after all, both receives the Word and enacts it somehow. But the Church also is judged by the Word and reformed by it. Yet the interpretation of Scripture within such a Church judged and reformed—ever reformed in my view, as bound to the one who is “in agony even until the end of the world” (Pascal)—is neither pure *jouissance*, nor confidently reliant on doctrinal articulation.

Reno knows all this; he hints at it and sometimes openly admits it. Dogmatic decrees (as well as liturgies and other embedded ecclesial practices) have a way of shifting their weight and attraction over eras and places, sometimes to the point of simply being let go of quietly, if not formally. The most egregious examples concern longstanding and often dogmatically stated evaluations of Jewish perfidy and reprobation. But so too matters involving the status of this or that other “Christian”—heretical or schismatic—corporate body or individual. Even less personally-oriented dogmatic judgments involving theological formulations regarding not only the nature of faith itself but also the nature of God have had their quite formal “anathemas” removed from objectors, as with the recently agreed statements on Christology between Catholics and Copts, citing 1500 years of “misunderstanding.”

All the same, “misunderstanding” is not ruled out of truly authoritative ecclesial doctrine, and I would indeed uphold Reno’s call for interpretive integration of Scripture and doctrine *understood as an ongoing task* of doctrinal self-reiteration in light of Scripture. That is, most ecclesial doctrines—I would include here even less “historic” bodies like Quakerism and Pentecostalism (objects of the more pejorative application of those doing “theological exegesis”)—*are* in fact scripturally founded, to whatever extent. But that argues for a wider, nimbler, more nuanced and more humble dogmatic treasury than most ecclesial traditions themselves allow. The challenge cuts in all directions.

In short, I am less sanguine than is Reno about the clear-cut dogmatic framework offered by “the Church” to which our scriptural interpretation should “accord”—less sanguine about identifying it at all in a

simple, coherent and integrated way; but also less sanguine about trusting its directive authority. That said, Reno seasons his notions of “ecclesial priority” with numerous qualifications and, more importantly, with a consistent commendation of the openness and breadth of theological exegesis. In doing so, he makes a good case (though perhaps not one shared by all of his ecclesial confreres) for the capacious character of his own Catholic commitments.

In the interest of full disclosure, as well as of articulated gratitude, I must note that Reno and I have been good friends and happily cooperative colleagues for several decades. I am mentioned in the book a few times (happily, not many). As my remarks above indicate, however, we do not share quite the same views about everything. But Reno’s way of outlining the generous, creative, and vivifying space that a properly theological reading of Scripture provides Christians has been proven and embodied in our friendship. A Catholic and a *sola Scriptura* Anglican, two persons of distinct, if overlapping, ideological commitments and intellectual habits, can be spiritually challenged and divinely nurtured in a mutually supportive way—not by ignoring our distinctive habits, deeply as they may be rooted, but by engaging in a common ordering of our hearts and minds through the impress of Scripture’s wider divine power. This is a power that grants both freedom and guiding imperative, not in some abstract way, but through the willingness to live together in Christ’s body, the one space in which the Word has chosen to demonstrate its universal sway in an open manner, however disturbing to our complacencies and self-certainties.

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Sacred Politics, Natural Law and the Law of the Nations in the 16th–17th Centuries

REVIEWED BY BRAD LITTLEJOHN

Protestants today seem increasingly unsure whether to celebrate or lament their tradition's contribution to the modern world. There was a time when all of this self-doubt was perhaps a healthy response to triumphalistic "Whig history," in which Luther and his heirs gave us liberty and representative government and scientific progress and all the rest, leaving future generations to live happily ever after, supping on these golden fruits. However, so far has the pendulum swung that in many quarters it has become a form of masochism, with Protestantism blamed for generating a whole host of evils, from tyrannical statism to libertine individualism, from fideistic dogmatism to rationalistic skepticism, and much in between.

The proper response to all of these grand narratives—whether tragedy, comedy, tragical-historical, or tragical-comical-historical-pastoral—is, as the name of this journal suggests, to go *back to the sources*. What, in particular, do the seminal texts of early modern Protestant philosophy and political theory tell us about the intellectual innovations—or lack thereof—that are thought to have set the stage for profound moral and political shifts at the dawn of modernity? Although

Anglo-Americans have long obsessed over the interpretation of Hobbes and Locke, it was their Continental counterparts, Hugo Grotius (1583–1645, a Dutch Arminian) and Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694, a German Lutheran), who were arguably both more interesting and more historically significant. So I was exuberant to discover the recent essay collection, *Sacred Politics, Natural Law and the Law of Nations in the 16th–17th Centuries*, which represents an earnest grappling with the sources that helped define the intellectual and political world of Protestant Europe—and, through it, the early American Republic.¹

Unfortunately, the volume suffers many of the usual drawbacks of the genre—published proceedings of a specialist academic conference. It is, of course, too expensive for almost any buyers beyond institutional libraries, and the essays are of varying readability, a problem accentuated by the fact that few if any of the contributors have English as their first language.

1. *Sacred Politics, Natural Law and the Law of Nations in the 16th–17th Centuries*. Edited by Hans W. Blom. Leiden: Brill, 2022. €133. Hardback. xii + 349 pp.

More importantly, there has been little effort on the part of the editor to hammer the volume's 14 essays into a coherent and complementary shape. Rather than representing a well-molded and relatively systematic series of inquiries into the central topics and figures of the period, we are treated instead to a scattershot lineup of deep but narrow investigations into particular texts and questions, as one might find at an academic conference.

This is particularly so in the first half of the volume, headed "Humanist Inroads into Natural Law." The essays in this section touch on some of the most important (and often neglected) writers and texts of late sixteenth and early seventeenth century natural law and political theology, including the Danish Lutheran scholar Niels Hemmingsen, the great Reformed theologian Franciscus Junius and his treatise *On the Mosaic Polity*, the towering Catholic neo-scholastic Francisco Suarez, and the anonymously written masterpiece of Reformed resistance theory, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*. While full of interesting reflections, none of these essays really stand out as offering either striking originality of insight or the breadth of vision that would enable its targeted inquiry to shed much light on the wider field. I found them instructive, but not particularly invigorating.

The same, thankfully, cannot be said of the second half of the volume, headed "Hugo Grotius and Samuel Pufendorf." Here, the essays do not merely benefit from the tighter framing around just two main thinkers, but also revolve largely around two critical questions: the relationship of natural law to divine will, and the relationship between Church and state. And although the essays are of widely varying quality, we are treated to some flashes of true brilliance, especially in Denis Ramelet's magnificent essay "Moral Entities, Divine Will and Natural Law According to Pufendorf," which should be required reading for any student of early modern intellectual history. To understand why, a bit of context may be in order.

Since at least the year 1300, discourse over natural law has been divided between the proponents of "rationalism" and "voluntarism." "Rationalist" theories of natural law, generally associated with Thomas Aquinas, lay their stress on *nature* rather than *law*; for them, the natural law is simply *the way things are*; it is that which

is objectively good given the nature of God and the nature of man. It is determined by the intrinsic ends and goods of human nature, with natural law describing the best way to achieve those ends. It is a product of the divine reason (hence the term *rationalism*) that is then received and grasped by the human reason as a kind of participation. Such natural-law doctrines are closely linked to metaphysical realism, with its conviction that forms and essences (and thus ends) are intrinsic to the nature of things and wholly objective.

"Voluntarist" theories of natural law, often attributed to Duns Scotus or William of Ockham, lay their stress on *law* rather than *nature*; for them, the natural law describes that which God has propounded and promulgated as his will for creation. It should be seen as contingent rather than necessary; God could, conceivably, have authorized a different morality for his human creatures, even after creating them. It is a product of the freely choosing divine will (hence *voluntarism*), which derives its force from his binding command and coercive enforcement of that command; moreover, since it is good *because it is commanded*, it can only be fully received by the human will responding to it in obedience, rather than merely intellectually grasping it. Such natural-law doctrines are often (though not necessarily) linked to metaphysical nominalism, with its teaching that created reality is irreducibly particular, with forms and patterns merely being the impositions of mind or convention.

If that summary sounds like an over-simplistic caricature, that's because it is—and yet I fear that it is rather more sophisticated and nuanced than the bulk of the scholarly literature that casually tosses these terms around. (Including Ramelet's fellow authors in this volume!) Indeed, I am not above suspecting that the very longevity of this debate owes mostly to the devious quest for academic job security. (Philosophers have a vested interest in the perpetuation of debates over abstruse questions, real or imagined, and historians have a vested interest in perpetuating debates over which side of those abstruse questions some historical thinker fell into.) Rationalist natural law, we are told, gives us a God who had no choice but to create a world exactly like this one (since he knew it to be best); whereas voluntarist natural law gives us a God who can rewrite the rule book whenever he wishes (since he wills it to be so). But most Christian natural law thinkers worth

their salt have steered well between these two poles, converging on something that Pufendorf calls “hypothetical necessity”:

“For although God was under no constraint whatsoever to create man, ... yet, when once He had decreed to create him a rational and social animal, it was impossible for the natural law not to agree with his constitution, and that not by an absolute, but by a hypothetical necessity. ... But after man had once been created by God, an animal which could not be preserved alive unless he observed the natural law, it is no longer possible to believe that He will annul or change the law of nature so long as He makes no change in the nature of man” (quoted on pp. 300, 302).

In other words, God did not have to create at all, and if he did create, he did not have to create the human race. But, having eternally willed to do so, God (being perfectly righteous) had to simultaneously will the moral law as we now know it. Why? Because any other moral law would not “agree with our constitution—that is, it would not be fitted to man’s nature. And since God has committed himself to the world he did in fact create, the natural law is fixed and immovable as the means by which human nature achieves its proper ends. By means of a set of carefully-argued distinctions, expertly summarized by Ramelet, Pufendorf cuts through the fog of most of the sterile debates about “rationalism” and “voluntarism,” offering us a natural law theory that is at once wholly dependent on God’s righteous will, and wholly anchored in the permanent structure of created reality.

My only critique of Ramelet’s splendid article is that he is perhaps too quick to credit Pufendorf with a unique contribution to resolving this debate. Without disparaging Pufendorf’s admittedly brilliant work, we may note that much the same synthesis had been offered by Suarez in his monumental *On Law and God the Lawgiver* several decades earlier, and in briefer form by Richard Hooker (1554-1600) before him. Indeed, one might plausibly suggest that Aquinas’s own theory had not been all that different, and that indeed much of the great rationalist-voluntarist debate was imaginary, both then and now.

Ramelet’s essay is not the only one to suffer from a bit of specialist historical tunnel-vision, however; indeed, others suffer much more in this regard, especially the essays that focus on the critical questions of religious establishment and toleration in early-modern Protestantism. Stefanie Ertz investigates this issue in Grotius’s thought, and Thomas Behme and Heikki Haara in Pufendorf. While all three essays are rich, fascinating, and eminently worth reading, it is surprising how little the authors engage with the preceding century of Protestant debate over “the two kingdoms”: the freedom of individual conscience in internal religion and the authority of the Christian magistrate over external religion. Ertz for instance credits Grotius with a “pioneering” distinction between the obliging force of divine natural law and divine positive law that is substantially identical to that already offered by Hooker. Behme, for his part, asserts that “the territorial church government that emerged in the Lutheran territories... had no dogmatic basis in Luther’s theology” (262-63), apparently oblivious to recent scholarship by Torrance Kirby and James Estes that has demonstrated otherwise.

In short, *Sacred Politics, Natural Law, and the Law of Nations* is a good example of both the blessings and curses of modern specialist intellectual history. On the one hand, it offers deep dives into historically crucial but commonly neglected texts and thinkers, shedding light on the complex developments that tied the Reformation to the modern world, and offering fruitful resources for the renewal of Protestant political theology today. On the other hand, it obscures the value of these insights by its own narrow tunnel-vision, jargon, and clumsy prose, ensuring that these forgotten wells of insight will remain largely untapped. Let’s hope that the next generation of scholars will succeed in unstopping the clogged springs of the sources that once watered the fertile fields of Protestant civilization, so that we can reap a fresh harvest from them today.

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