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AD FONTES

A JOURNAL OF PROTESTANT LETTERS

ANTHONY CIRILLA

Wells and Buckets: A Defense of Christian Romanticism in Wordsworth and Coleridge

MATTHEW ROBERTS

The Pastoral Value of the Reformed Doctrine of Concupiscence

MICHAEL J. LYNCH

Christology and Metaphysics in the Seventeenth Century by Richard Cross

Also featuring: Philip Melancthon translated by E.J. Hutchinson, Brad Littlejohn on social conservatism, and more

Table of Contents

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

- 3 **WELLS AND BUCKETS: A DEFENSE OF CHRISTIAN ROMANTICISM IN WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE**
by Anthony Cirilla

- 11 **"IS PHILOSOPHY A HINDRANCE TO PIETY?"**
by Philip Melanchthon, translated by E.J. Hutchinson

- 15 **ON RE-READING MY COMPLETE FROST**
by Donald T. Williams

- 16 **THE PASTORAL VALUE OF THE REFORMED DOCTRINE OF CONCUPISCENCE**
by Matthew Roberts

- 24 **MAKING MISSING BIBLICAL ART WITH MIDJOURNEY**
by Ian Huyett

- 28 **THE SOUL OF EDUCATION: W.E.B. DUBOIS' THEORY OF THE UNIVERSITY**
by Onsi Aaron Kamel

- 34 **STARS**
by Rhys Lavery

- 35 **"SON OF MAN": VOL. 1, EARLY JEWISH LITERATURE BY RICHARD BAUCKHAM**
Reviewed by Andrew Koperski

- 38 **CHRISTOLOGY AND METAPHYSICS IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY BY RICHARD CROSS**
Reviewed by Michael J. Lynch

- 41 **SOCIAL CONSERVATISM FOR THE COMMON GOOD, EDITED BY ANDREW T. WALKER**
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

I was recently struck by some lines from the “East Coker” section of T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*:

In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
In order to possess what you do not possess
You must go by the way of dispossession.
In order to arrive at what you are not
You must go through the way in which you are not.
And what you do not know is the only thing you know
And what you own is what you do not own
And where you are is where you are not.

Among other things, Eliot is riffing on Socrates—the great philosopher who claimed (or seemed to claim) that all he knew was that he knew nothing. Yet, in his characteristic fashion, this folds in seamlessly with Eliot’s motif of “the way,” a way which wends throughout the *Four Quartets*. The poem is a pilgrimage, and “Little Gidding” is its hallowed terminus, where we find “the end of all our exploring” in a time and place where “the tongues of flames are in-folded/Into the crowned knot of fire/And the fire and the rose are one.”

The pilgrim way is a time honored Christian image. In Acts, Saul persecutes those belonging to “the Way”—in Greek *hodos*, the same word for “path” or “road”. This

way underpins Augustine’s *De Doctrina*; it opened up in John Bunyan’s prison cell under the similitude of a dream; it frames the beginning of J.I. Packer’s *Knowing God*. Eliot crystalizes here something understood by all such writers who reflect on the way: it is a way of lack. We are poor pilgrims—all beggars. The Christian way exposes to us how little we possess, how little we know, how little we *are*. Before our first step on the way, we may weave all manner of self-delusions to ignore our sense of lack. But we hunger for knowledge, possessions, and being which does not waiver, and we sense this hunger *can* be sated. But to do so first requires the confession that our heart and flesh cry out.

The Romantics felt the lack. Very many tried to fill it with nature or by diving deep into the chasms of the self, and thus we rightly see them as charting an unholy detour for us pilgrims, down which many have lately strayed. In the first essay of this issue of *Ad Fontes* however, Anthony Cirilla makes a compelling case for a Christian retrieval of Wordsworth and Coleridge, two men who plunged the deep romantic chasm and found that it led them back to an orthodox Christian faith. Following this, E.J. Hutchinson offers an original translation—for the first time in English—of Philip Melancthon’s short work “Is Philosophy A Hindrance to Piety?” Many Christians see philosophy

AD FONTES

as another way of the wicked, a perennial grasping at the tree of knowledge—and so it often is. Yet rightly understood, and “illuminated by the gospel” as Melancthon says, philosophy is the Socratic admission of our own ignorance, and a humble reaching out to know the *Logos*. Matthew Roberts then expounds the pastoral value of the Reformed doctrine of concupiscence—a vital doctrine under much attack today, in large part because it forces a confession of “that which we are not,” of how even our deepest desires and orientations lack the goodness God intended. Ian Huyett then makes an argument—which many *Ad Fontes* readers will doubtless find provocative—for the benefits of artificial intelligence in filling gaps in the canon of biblical artwork. Faced with the novel challenges of the A.I. revolution, Christians must admit that we stand often in the way of ignorance—few, if any of us, know what wisdom looks like in the days ahead. Yet if we make this admission, we can begin to chart a way forward, which—agree or disagree with here—Ian attempts here with candour and clarity. Finally, Onsi Aaron Kamel outlines W.E.B. DuBois’ vision for the university, in which education is a pursuit of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful, taken in the knowledge that fallen man lacks all three.

In our reviews section, Andrew Koperski delves into the vexed question of the origins of the Christological title of “Son of Man,” explored in an important new work by the eminent Richard Bauckham—a task which requires humility before the ambiguities of ancient history and the biblical text. Michael J. Lynch

then considers two areas where angels fear to tread in his review of *Christology and Metaphysics* in the seventeenth century. Finally, in his regular review slot, Brad Littlejohn considers the legacy of Robert P. George and the prudential question of how social conservatism can advance the common good.

As ever, poetry adorns our issue, and Colin Redemer has assembled contributions from Donald T. Williams and yours truly.

Over the past three years, we have been thrilled to see the steady growth of *Ad Fontes*. It is an invigorating time in the life of The Davenant Institute as we go from strength to strength and, at the outset of 2024, there are exciting plans in store for the work of *Ad Fontes* in the future.

When he spoke of the pilgrim way, Augustine famously distinguished between the *signum* and the *res*—the sign and the thing. In the end, the only *thing* is God—everything else in heaven and earth, seen and unseen, is a sign of him. It is our hope that each issue of *Ad Fontes*—in a particularly Protestant fashion—signposts him with intelligence, humility, and godliness, and aids your steps along the Way to the New Jerusalem, where all our lack shall at last be filled, world without end.

Rhys Lavery
Senior Editor
January 2024



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Wells and Buckets: A Defense of Christian Romanticism in Wordsworth and Coleridge

BY ANTHONY CIRILLA

In *Romanticism and Classicism*, T. E. Hulme wrote, “Romanticism then, and this is the best definition I can give of it, is spilt religion.” In this view, Romanticism holds that “man is intrinsically good, spoilt by circumstances;” while in classicism man “is intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent.” In Hulme’s view, Romanticism opposes Christianity at its core: “One may note here that the Church has always taken the classical view since the defeat of the Pelagian heresy and the adoption of the same classical dogma of original sin.” Romanticism is Pelagian; classicism is orthodox. Hulme provides the following metaphor: “To the one party man’s nature is like a well, to the other like a bucket,” because for the Romantic the poet runs deep with inspirational resources, while for the classicist, poets give shape and definition to inspiration drawn from elsewhere. Francis Jeffrey said of Wordsworth in his infamous contri-

bution to the 1814 Edinburgh Review, “This will never do.” Hulme says the same of the whole Romantic project: “I object even to the best of the romantics.”¹

Hulme’s totalizing dismissal of the Romantic project accords well with the concerns of many Christian thinkers: “You don’t believe in a God, so you begin to believe that man is a god. You don’t believe in Heaven, so you begin to believe in a heaven on earth. In other words, you get romanticism.”² Romanticism, for Hulme, is a heresy in verse, and just as you shouldn’t drink a little bit of poison, you shouldn’t embrace a little bit of heresy. By turning the poet into a well rath-

1. T.E. Hulme, “Romanticism and Classicism,” 187-189 IN *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume D: The Romantic Period*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 10th ed. (Norton: London, 2018) 187-189.

2. Hulme, “Romanticism and Classicism,” 188.

er than a bucket, so the argument goes, the Romantic poet puts himself in the place of God, inspiring himself to write his own scriptures of what Hulme calls “damp poetry.”

The contrary claim I make in this piece is that William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) ultimately labored to *unspill* Romantic religion, so to speak, back into the direction of orthodox faith, and that their essential return to Christianity was a fulfillment rather than simply a departure from their earlier Romantic years.

Such a claim may startle many. The Romantic poets often feature negatively in Christian decline narratives about the modern West. Carl Trueman, for instance, charges Wordsworth with being instrumental in the destructive “inward turn” of the modern self.³ Elsewhere, the apparent pantheism in Wordsworth’s poem “Tintern Abbey,” for example, understandably unsettles the Christian reader:

....And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

These lines could be taken as simply saying that “It is in God in whom we live and move and have our being,” were it not for Wordsworth’s persona, speaking to Dorothy, later saying, “I, so long/A worshipper of Nature, hither came/Unwearied in that service.

Wordsworth and Coleridge both departed from and later were reconciled to the Church of England. Wordsworth wandered as a noncommittal cloud through the political and philosophical fomentation of radicals in

3. Carl R. Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 131-138.

London and Paris; Coleridge took the pulpit as a Unitarian who saw trinitarianism as tyranny’s irrationality made dogma.⁴ Admirers of both leading Romantic writers saw them as traitors of the cause as both poets became more politically and theologically conservative—so Hazlitt thought of Coleridge and Browning of Wordsworth.

But the case I would make is that Wordsworth and Coleridge became, in fact, increasingly committed to the Church of England *in direct proportion to how deeply they saw its orthodoxy as fulfilling the yearnings of the Romantic heart*. As Romantics, Coleridge and Wordsworth believed that the imagination revealed truth, but not in a sense that indicates that truth is subjective or self-defined through imagination. Such a view would be more in keeping with John Keats when he wrote, “Whatever the imagination apprehends must be true whether it existed before or not.” Rather, for Coleridge and Wordsworth, the Romantic imagination did not make true what was not true. They do not regard the imagination as a license to believe whatever one wants *within*, but to believe what is *impressed upon* oneself from *without* through an honest and rigorous survey of the imagination’s functions.

Both poets write in response to the excesses of the Enlightenment, concerned that the reduction of knowledge to empirical and rational study would close out the first person perceptions of real individuals. While their initial response to this problem contained unorthodox elements, the core Romantic faith was maintained as their fidelity to Scripture grew. The Christian Romantic perspective put forward by Coleridge and Wordsworth is the ultimate upshot of their writing, which can be described best as a recovery of biblical epistemology. In this view, cultivating the imagination makes our minds more fully capable of entering the vision of the world put forward by the Scriptures.

THE FAITH OF THE CHRISTIAN ROMANTICS

4. See William Ulmer’s 2001 *The Christian Wordsworth, 1798-1805*, and Luke S.H. Wright’s 2010 *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Anglican Church*, for detailed expositions of their respective faith journeys.

Since I contend that Romanticism propelled both Wordsworth and Coleridge back into Christian orthodoxy, it will be useful to demonstrate that they both did indeed return to historic faith in Christ after some time in the far country.

It is worth noting briefly how both poets' unorthodox years were intertwined. Coleridge's promotion of a loose marriage of "One Life Philosophy" and Unitarian beliefs sent a younger Wordsworth adrift into a theism that embraced neither orthodox Christianity nor pantheism fully, but a noncommittal third way borrowing from both. Ulmer writes that Coleridge "brought with him the notion of the One Life," which "posited a single vital energy permeating and ontologically underlying all natural creation. Coleridge's version of the idea represented his reformulation of the radical Unitarianism of Joseph Priestly."⁵ The pantheistic implications found in "Tintern Abbey" trace their origin to some extent to Coleridge's influence.

What evidence, then, of the prodigals' return? Admittedly, Wordsworth was more reluctant to essay into the realm of apologetics and proselytizing than Coleridge. Many of his most direct assertions of Christian faith come in the context of letters, addresses, or reports from friends. His poetry, especially early examples such as "Tintern Abbey," rarely enters into doctrinal assertions. One looks in vain for the devotional poetry of a Herbert or Donne. Wordsworth explained his reason for this in another letter:

For my own part, I have been averse to frequent mention of the mysteries of Christian faith; not from a want of a due sense of their momentous nature, but the contrary. I felt it far too deeply to venture on handling the subject as familiarly as many scruple not to do. I am far from blaming them, but let them not blame me, nor turn from my companionship on that account. Besides general reasons for diffidence in treating subjects of Holy Writ, I have some especial ones. I might err in points of faith, and I should not deem my mistakes less to be deprecated because they were

expressed in metre. Even Milton, in my humble judgment, has erred, and grievously; and what poet could hope to atone for his apprehensions[169] in the way in which that mighty mind has done?⁶

Given this circumspection regarding matters of faith, the fact that religious themes do still show up in Wordsworth's poetry at all suggests the strength of his feeling. "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (1807) espouses belief in the immortality of the soul; *The Excursion* (1814) culminates in a priest's Romantic perception of God; the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* (1821) celebrate the history of the Church of England—all these Wordsworth wrote despite his broad reticence to poeticise about faith.

Christianity was too *close* to, not too far from, Wordsworth's heart for him to cheaply capitalize upon its poetic power. So much more meaningful is it then, when, in *The Prelude* (written *after* his return to the Church of England), Wordsworth asserts an apprehension of God through Nature even more evocative of Acts 17 than "Tintern Abbey": "With strength, reflecting in its solemn breast/The works of man and face of human life;/And lastly, from its progress have we drawn/The feeling of life endless, the one thought/By which we live, Infinity and God./Imagination having been our theme,/So also hath that intellectual love,/For they are each in each, and cannot stand/Dividually" (Book 13.ll.180-188). The imagination is the faculty by which we access the "rapture of the Hallelujah sent/From all that breathes and is, was chastened, stemmed,/And balanced, by a reason which indeed/I reason duty and pathetic truth" (*Prelude*, Book 13.ll.261-266). In this world "where man is sphered, and which God animates" (13.268), imaginative meditation upon Nature convicts the mind of the unbeliever without excuse.

Ulmer sees from "Tintern Abbey" to this later poetry a "gradual discovery of the spiritual insufficiency of natural religion," but I would add that it was the potent if imperfect power of that natural religion which became a central tool for renewing his reconversion to

5. Stephen Ulmer, *The Christian Wordsworth: 1798-1805* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 37.

6. William Wordsworth, "Letter to the Rev. H. (Afterwards Dean) Alford, 1848, in *The Prose works of William Wordsworth*.

Christian orthodoxy.⁷ While no direct repudiation of the pantheistic language in “Tintern Abbey” exists as far as I am aware, Ulmer posits that Wordsworth’s inability to finish his poetic magnum opus on his earlier Romantic philosophy, *The Recluse*, was because “it presumed a religious position he continued to find congenial in some respects, but which in other ways he had outgrown.”⁸

**IN CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY,
WORDSWORTH’S MATURE
ROMANTICISM FINDS ITS HOME**

A poem such as “Michael,” for example, seems to corroborate this interpretation: it attempts to apply the consolations of “Tintern Abbey” to a story, and yet the deeply tragic ending seems to sit ill with their efficacy. His subsequent composition of the “Immortality Ode,” which points to a more supernatural comfort than Nature can provide if not seen as flowing from the God who made our souls:

The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy! (ll. 59-66)

From “Tintern Abbey” to “Michael” and then the “Immortality Ode,” we see Wordsworth’s Romanticism beginning to turn more and more to the Church of England. In Christian orthodoxy, Wordsworth’s mature Romanticism finds its home.

One can also find explicit commendations of the Christian Scriptures and the Church of England in Wordsworth’s letters and addresses. For exam-

7. Ulmer, *Christian Wordsworth*, 34.

8. Ulmer, *Christian Wordsworth*, 82.

ple, he writes, “The blessing of Providence has thus far preserved the Church of England between the shocks to which she has been exposed from those opposite errors.... her doctrines are exclusively scriptural, and her practice is accommodated to the exigencies of our weak nature.”⁹ Elsewhere, in an 1835 address Wordsworth describes the ideal process in a young man preparing to enter the ministry:

It is natural that a boy or youth, with such a prospect before him, should turn his attention to those studies, and be led into those habits of reflection, which will in some degree tend to prepare him for the duties he is hereafter to undertake. As he draws nearer to the time when he will be called to these duties, he is both led and compelled to examine the Scriptures. He becomes more and more sensible of their truth. Devotion grows in him; and what might begin in temporal considerations will end (as in a majority of instances we trust it does) in a spiritual-mindedness not unworthy of that Gospel, the lessons of which he is to teach, and the faith of which he is to inculcate.¹⁰

If Hulme would consider such devoted sensibility to the truth of Scripture “damp,” so be it—let the faithful minister be damp.

Coleridge, as noted, rejected his native Anglicanism in favor of Unitarianism for a time. In *Biographia Literaria*, he recollects being “a zealous Unitarian in religion; more accurately, I was a Psilanthropist, one of those who believe our Lord to have been the real son of Joseph, and who lay the main stress on the resurrection rather than on the crucifixion. O! never can I remember those days with either shame or regret.”¹¹ However, his eventual return to orthodoxy is clear in 1816’s *Confessio Fidei*—an apparently straightforward assertion of

9. William Wordsworth, “V. Of the Catholic Relief Bill,” 1829, in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. 1, I. Political, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/16550/16550-h/16550-h.htm>. Poetry is found in Stephen Gill’s anthology, *William Wordsworth: The Major Works, including The Prelude*.

10. William Wordsworth, “I. Of Legislation for the Poor, the Working Class, and the Clergy: Appendix to Poems,” 1835. *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. 1: II. Ethical.

11. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Ch. X.

Christianity which nonetheless embeds both Romantic ways of thinking into its logic while also tracing out the move from Unitarian to trinitarian in brief.¹² Coleridge writes, rather without dampness, “I believe, and hold it as the fundamental article of Christianity, that I am a fallen creature; that I am of myself capable of moral evil, but not of myself capable of moral good, and that an evil ground existed in my will, previously to any given act, or assignable moment of time, in my consciousness. I am born a child of wrath” (Article IV). Only one answer will do for this condition: “I receive with full and grateful faith the assurance of revelation, that the Word, which is from all eternity with God, and is God, assumed our human nature in order to redeem me, and all mankind from this our connate corruption” (Article V). As religion goes, this is not very spilled, nor very inclined to confuse man with God. The *Confessio* also contains a clear confession of trinitarianism. Coleridge similarly defended orthodoxy at length in *Aids to Reflection*, *The Statesman’s Manual*, and *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, among others, honing his religious posture as the “Sage of Highgate” in his later years.

As with Wordsworth, the question arises: upon his return to orthodoxy, did Coleridge repudiate his earlier work? In short, no. For one, more heterodox works such as “Religious Musings” were written under the fear of censor and so composed with sufficient plausible deniability that Unitarianism could not be overtly detected. For another, his *Biographia Literaria* was produced at the same time as the *Confessio*, and offers no such repudiation, but rather revision. Admittedly, works such as *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and others were subjected both to revision and analysis by his own hand even as he was sorting out his identity as an Anglican philosopher, but revision is not the same as repudiation.

Furthermore, it can be shown that even in such a boilerplate confession as *Confessio Fidei*, undoubtedly Romantic ideas emerge. In the second article of the confession, he asserts belief in God, and provides this corollary:

The wonderful works of God in the sensible world are a perpetual discourse, reminding me of his existence, and shadowing out to me his perfections. But as all language presupposes in the intelligent hearer or reader those primary notions, which it symbolizes; as well as the power of making those combinations of these primary notions, which it represents and excites us to combine, even so I believe, that the notion of God is essential to the human mind; that it is called forth into distinct consciousness principally by the conscience, and auxiliarily by the manifest adaptation of means to ends in the outward creation.

Just as the material substrate of words on the page do not convey the author’s intention without the capacity of the reader to read and mark out meaning with a shared understanding of language, the power of Nature as a language which manifests the glory of God calls a response from the image of divinity housed in the individual. So for Coleridge, God is not found through scientific means any more than authorial intent can be found in the material of ink blots or the digital systems which convey that intent:

It is, therefore, evident to my reason, that the existence of God is absolutely and necessarily insusceptible of a scientific demonstration, and that Scripture has so represented it. For it commands us to believe in one God. I am the Lord thy God: thou shalt have none other gods but me. Now all commandment necessarily relates to the will; whereas all scientific demonstration is independent of the will, and is apodictic or demonstrative only as far as it is compulsory on the mind.

Arguments from intelligent design do not move Coleridge; rather, one might say, it is the *poetic* design of Nature through which the imagination, as Wordsworth would also contend, can access this insight. So God can speak to Coleridge’s son Hartley through Nature as Coleridge depicts, hopes, and prays will happen in his 1798 “Frost at Midnight,” one of his finest so-called conversation poems:

12. This text can be found at the end of Coleridge’s *Literary Remains*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/8488/pg8488-images.html#section157>.

But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
 By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
 Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,
 Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores
 And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear
 The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible
 Of that eternal language, which thy God
 Utters, who from eternity doth teach
 Himself in all, and all things in himself.
 Great universal Teacher! he shall mould
 Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.

At the writing of these lines Coleridge was a committed, irascible Unitarian who saw Anglican doctrine as party to the totalitarian regime of William Pitt's censorious government. And yet here this classic piece of Romantic sentiment is indistinguishable from the later assertion that the "wonderful works of God in the sensible world are a perpetual discourse."

BIBLICAL EPISTEMOLOGY AND ROMANTIC THEORIES OF PERCEPTION

A way one might frame the entire sweep of Coleridge and Wordsworth's project is to again take seriously, and to restore the imaginative power of, the symbolic power of the Psalms. To modern readers, the Psalms may seem like sermons with symbolism in the way. How are we to contend with the metaphorical hyperbole (is it?) of Psalm 148?

Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the
 heavens: praise him in the heights.
 Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his
 hosts.
 Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye
 stars of light.
 Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters
 that be above the heavens.

Such natural phenomena no longer resound in modern ears with such easy personification. In *The Presence of the Word*, Walter Ong points out how our technological prowess has caused us to bottom out in the material of nature and so no longer hear it: "Could it be that God is not silent but that man is relatively deaf, his sensorium adjusted to the post-Newtonian silent uni-

verse?"¹³ Perhaps this Jesuit priest forgot to unspill his religion, or perhaps he knew that a heaven and earth full of God's glory comes with meaning already spilled throughout, a sentiment not different from Wordsworth's critique of Enlightenment thinking in "The Tables Turned": "Our meddling intellect/Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things;—We murder to dissect" (ll.26–28). Such a poem is favored by traditional readers of Wordsworth, who tend to his later writing, yet the beauteous forms of things receive a treatment no less Romantic than Christian in his 1835 "On the Power of Sound":

Break forth into thanksgiving,
 Ye banded Instruments of wind and chords;
 Unite, to magnify the Ever-living,
 Your inarticulate notes with the voice of words!
 ...As Deep to Deep
 Shouting through one valley calls,
 All worlds, all natures, mood and measure keep
 For praise and ceaseless gratulation, poured
 Into the ear of God, their Lord!

The Enlightenment emphasis on vision as the primary analog, as Ong would have it, receives critique as Wordsworth restores to our perception creation's hidden notes of the divine voice.

Coleridge expounds this critique in *Biographia Literaria*, where he denounces "that despotism of the eye" found in David Hartley's (1705–1757) empiricism (ironically, the same philosopher after whom he named his son). This empiricism puts us "under this strong sensuous influence," in which "we are restless because invisible things are not the objects of vision."¹⁴ In fact, Coleridge lays the foundation of the same critique of materialism later to be found in C. S. Lewis's *Miracles*, namely, that if our minds are merely products of our environments then their judgements cannot be trusted. An epistemology built on scientism self-destructs because there is no principle of judgment at work in the

13. Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 16.

14. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works*, ed. H.J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 213.

RATIONAL ARGUMENT WILL NEVER BE SUFFICIENT TO EXHAUST THE NEED FOR INTERPRETATION

thinker, as Coleridge observes: “In Harley’s scheme the soul is present only to be pinched or stroked.” But the act of beholding, for Coleridge, is far too dynamic to be reduced to mental facsimiles of thinking. The imagination must corroborate with Reason and the Senses for there to be agency involved in thought—for a mental calculation has no more self-referential power than a sensory stimulus. Thinking requires imagination; imagination is the province of poetry; to see reality requires, therefore, the poetic perception of the poet. His short poem, “Apologia pro Vita Sua,” makes this very point:

The poet in his lone yet genial hour
 Gives to his eyes a magnifying power:
 Or rather he emancipates his eyes
 From the black shapeless accidents of size—
 In unctuous cones of kindling coal,
 Or smoke upwreathing from the pipe’s trim bole,
 His gifted ken can see
 Phantoms of sublimity.

This depiction, in sum, is what I think Coleridge and Wordsworth believed and what I also regard as the truth of a Christian Romanticism: the imagination’s capacity for interpretation provides an indispensable resource for encountering the world as humans ought to encounter it, and purely scientific or purely philosophical apprehensions of the world are not sufficient for this process. Any theory of reality that does not factor in the fact of interpretation and the fact of interpreters is deficient. “Proof,” empirical evidence or rational argumentation, will never be sufficient to exhaust the need for interpretation.

To the charge that this view opens the door for solipsism, I believe Coleridge and Wordsworth would turn this charge on the Enlightenment, which ensured a solipsism wherein individuals could not see that their imaginations were as much at work as anywhere in a Romantic’s poetry. The notion that reality can be fundamentally interpreted without imagination becomes, for the Christian Romantic, like a husband trying to

know his wife by studying her body or her beliefs, but never her status as a real somebody whose self necessarily dwells in both but can be reduced to neither. Such a husband fails, as Wordsworth puts it in the subheading of the eighth book of *The Prelude*, to use imagination to let the “love of Nature” lead “to Love of Mankind.” Human dignity, in marriage or any other relationship, cannot be had in a purely empiricist framework which interprets only the “dead letter” of the mere sense perception of the human individual treated as “a Block/Or waxen Image which yourselves have made,/And ye adore” (ll.432-6). To see the “sanctity of nature given to man” and to see that “Blessed be the God/Of Nature and of Man,” “the mind/That to devotion willingly would be raised/Into the Temple and the Temple’s heart” (430-1, 469-71) requires an epistemology not to be found in the Enlightenment frameworks of *tabula rasa* and clear and distinct ideas. Interpretation, therefore, demands interpreters of good will and trustworthy character, or all so-called “reality” of empirical or philosophical study will merely be a fiction of convenience or tyranny.

This is not to say that Coleridge and Wordsworth believed the imagination should be unleashed unfettered. Fundamental to perception, the imagination nonetheless fails to do its work if it is not putting us into deeper contact with the Real. We see this in Coleridge’s *Biographia Literaria*:

This has been my object, and this alone can be my defence—and O! that with this my personal as well as my LITERARY LIFE might conclude!—the unquenched desire I mean, not without the consciousness of having earnestly endeavoured to kindle young minds, and to guard them against the temptations of scorners, by showing that the scheme of Christianity, as taught in the liturgy and homilies of our Church, though not discoverable by human reason, is yet in accordance with it; that link follows link by necessary consequence; that Religion passes out of the ken of Reason only

where the eye of Reason has reached its own horizon; and that Faith is then but its continuation: even as the day softens away into the sweet twilight, and twilight, hushed and breathless, steals into the darkness.¹⁵

Is such a view that Faith is the logical continuation past the limits of Reason a Romantic view, or the view of the orthodox Christian who submits to the apophatic heights of a God whose ways are higher than our ways? The answer is both:

It is night, sacred night! the upraised eye views only the starry heaven which manifests itself alone: and the outward beholding is fixed on the sparks twinkling in the awful depth, though suns of other worlds, only to preserve the soul steady and collected in its pure act of inward adoration to the great I AM, and to the filial WORD that re-affirmeth it from eternity to eternity, whose choral echo is the universe.¹⁶

When imagination is divorced from the eye of Reason, the fullness of consciousness that puts us in touch with experience is lost. This is true both in nature and in human nature, but it is perhaps even more true as regards the supernatural. If we cannot muster enough imagination to see wonder in trees, flowers, and rainbows; in human smiles, struggles, and triumphs; then the attempt to reach higher and meet with our imaginations the God who is sovereign over both nature and human nature can only be helplessly frustrated. The reconciliation of faith and reason is not to reduce faith to reason, but to elevate reason to the brink, to see that to be fully rational is to admit for horizons of the sublime that reason can glimpse but not capture.

CONCLUSION: BUCKETS ARE IMAGES OF WELLS

I would like to propose an amended metaphor to Hulme's depiction of Romanticism, or at least the Christian Romanticism of Wordsworth and Coleridge. Rather than a well or a bucket *per se*, I would like to say that for the Christian Romantic the poet is the well's

bucket. If we imagined a bucket with personality at the brink of the well, we could imagine that bucket afraid and awed by the circle of darkness at the well's opening, unsure of what resides at the bottom. By bravely crossing that threshold and descending into the depths where the currents of inspiration flow, the bucket becomes well-like, and in fact treats the well as a sort of earthen bucket which gives shape to the search for meaning which mirrors its own. Like the philosopher emerging from Plato's Cave, the bucket emerges with water as an emissary of the well. And yet the darkness is not simply to be escaped, but is also the resource of refreshment which others desire.

The bucket could also be said to function similarly to the imagination for both poets. In our daylight life outside of the well, we require refreshment. As the bucket on a rope can descend into the hidden waters of the well, so the imagination can extend to those experiences just outside of our immediate rational grasp and put us in touch with what we need for life. How can we return to a biblical epistemology if we stay in the daylight certainty of reason which treats human perception as the final analysis? For Coleridge and Wordsworth, cultivating the imagination helps us to remember two things: First, we do not simply *see* the world around us, but have to develop patterns of perception which make sight possible. Second, and by extension, in desiring not to overreach and usurp God's place, we must also be careful not to erase the implications of humanity as bearing God's image. The implications of this truth relate to our imaginations as well as to our capacities for sensory and rational knowledge. If we are to see the world as the psalmist sees, we must remember that perception itself requires imagination, so that in nature and human nature at once we can glimpse patterns of divine creativity. And above that, we can see God's Word afresh, to restore wonder at revelation as that which will require the full extent of our faculties—our imaginations included—to grasp, to learn, and to inwardly digest.

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15. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Ch. XXIV.

16. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Ch. XXIV.

“Is Philosophy a Hindrance to Piety?”

BY PHILIP MELANCHTHON

TRANSLATED BY E.J. HUTCHINSON

INTRODUCTION

In Colossians 2:8, the Apostle Paul wrote, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (ESV). The relationship between Christians and philosophy has been “#complicated” ever since, with writers such as Tertullian (Prescription of Heretics 7) and Augustine (Confessions 3.4.8) invoking the verse in an apparently anti-philosophical sense. The long shadow of “Christianity as anti-philosophy”¹ reaches us today through biblicism in all its guises.

On the other hand, we are also living in a time of great educational renaissance, as seen in classical Christian education at all levels from kindergarten through college, a development to be greeted with gratitude following the almost unfathomable regress of humane education—and humane action—in our major institutions and instruments

of education in the twentieth century, and its latter half in particular, to say nothing of the twenty-first. Its educational program is not the same as that of our forebears from a couple of centuries ago, and most of these differences are to be regretted (I think here especially of the proportion of original-language texts to translations in formal educational settings, which we have inverted from that of bygone ages); but it is far from nothing, and it would be peevish to complain of a great gift because it did not also include other gifts.

Both of these themes—educational revival and an exhortation to gratitude for it—are treated in the oration of Philip Melanchthon below, now translated into English for (I believe) the first time. In “Is Philosophy a Hindrance to Piety?,” Melanchthon rebukes the anti-philosophical posturing of would-be theologians and argues instead that the Christian use of philosophy (which here means dialectic, natural philosophy, and ethics) is endorsed by Scripture itself. He does this through a characteristic reliance on the distinction between law and gospel: though he does not use the phrase itself, his entire analysis turns on the difference

1. I borrow from the title of F.R. Leavis’s *The Critic as Anti-Philosopher*

between the gospel, which is the forgiveness of sins and emphatically not philosophy, and the realm of law, that is, the realm of God's good creatures that we encounter everywhere in life, including in philosophy and liberal learning. More briefly, something can be good without being redemptive, and it is under the rubric of creaturely goodness that we find philosophy. We are to use God's good creatures. The Bible itself tells us that we are to use them.

Not only so, but something can also be necessary without being redemptive. Melancthon makes this stronger claim, too, on behalf of philosophy, touching on education's civic function: no commonwealth can survive without the "public patrimony" of liberal learning. This secular, civic function is not somehow separate from God. Instead, all of it—law and gospel, sacred and secular, civic and ecclesiastical—occurs under the aegis of God's benevolent superintendence. We should do our work in the law's domain in gratitude to God and with a smile, knowing that he has already smiled upon it, and upon us, in the gospel (Eccl. 9:7; Rom. 4:5; Gal. 3:20).

For more on Melancthon and philosophy, see my essay "Reason Diabolical, Reason Divine: Philosophy, Classical Humanism, and the Scripture Principle in Philip Melancthon and Niels Hemmingsen," in *Philosophy and the Christian*, ed. Joseph Minich (Lincoln, NE: The Daventant Press, 2018), 214–49.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The following is the first of Melancthon's *Quaestiones Academicæ*, short pieces of oratory that were used for disputations in the Wittenberg Academy. I translate the text as found in *Corpus Reformatorum* 10, ed. C.G. Bretschneider (Halle an der Saale: Schwetske, 1842), 689–91. Bretschneider's text depends in turn on the collection of Paul Eber, *Quaestiones de rebus cognitione dignissimis, explicatae in publicis congressibus in Academia VVitebergensi. Item utiles aliquot commonefactiones de disciplina et legum dignitate, recitatae a Rectoribus ante lectionem Statutorum: Scriptae pleraeque a Philippo Melancthone (Wittenberg: Rhau, 1557), sig. A1r–A3r.*

— E.J. Hutchinson, January 2024

Is Philosophy a Hindrance to Piety?

None of you is ignorant of the fact that duty brought me here to speak, since our school's custom puts this burden upon me. For that reason, I ask you to give me mercy in keeping with your kindness, if my speech will be insufficient for you owing to the weakness of my mind; nature has invested me with it and this crowd increases it. For, in addition to the rest of my difficulties, the following, too, is added: since I have to speak about the praises of philosophy, I judge that, in a case that has been argued so many times, people are looking for a *new* speech, and, according to the proverb, Τὰ κοινὰ καινῶς [*ta koina kainōs*, "common things said in a new way"].² But this cannot be done by a mediocre talent. And so, since philosophy has previously been adorned with true praises in this school in such a way that it has not been lauded more honorably in the literature or monuments of any other age, I, having omitted an encomium for the time being, have decided for my own part to touch on just one topic.

Some people are deficient in fairness to philosophy because they think it is a hindrance to piety. However, due to time constraints, I will not explain what useful flowers the theologian can pluck from the individual parts of philosophy, especially since Augustine has written so sufficiently about this matter in *On Christian Teaching*. And those advantages are too well known to be able to be disregarded, even by the ungrateful. I shall dispute only—and that in a few words—with the sort of men who use piety as a pretext for their own ignorance in order to avoid undertaking these studies. For no argument can be more efficacious in good men's eyes for commending philosophy than if they should understand that it is approved by God; if they should see what uses God made it known to the human race for; if they should reflect on the fact that the gift of God is not to be despised, but is rather to be preserved and adorned with unparalleled piety.

Perhaps some men are of quicker intelligence than I am; I do not hesitate to admit my own slowness. I was never able to understand what philosophy was

2. Cf. Philostratus, *Discourses* 1.

**I WAS NEVER ABLE TO UNDERSTAND WHAT PHILOSOPHY WAS OR WHAT USES IT HAD BEFORE
I ENCOUNTERED THE SINCERE TEACHING OF THE GOSPEL**

or what uses it had before I encountered the sincere teaching of the gospel that has recently been reborn by the altogether unparalleled kindness of God. I expect that there are many in this assembly who would say the same thing—that they first understood the worth, power, and use of philosophy once they had learned Christian teaching. And I see in the writings of the previous age that there were many who philosophized to no advantage, because they did not pay attention to the judgment of Scripture about philosophy, nor did they perceive the distinction between the gospel and philosophy. Now, therefore, since the worth of philosophy has been revealed and illuminated by the gospel, those who do not wish to make use of this kindness of the gospel—who scorn these studies that the Holy Spirit earnestly proclaims to us—must be judged to be ungrateful.

And see what perversity belongs to men's dispositions! At that time when theologians did not know what philosophy was useful for, there was no one who did not think he should grow old in its study.³ Now, when the gospel has made known to us the power of these arts and extols their study, what do we do? No one shrinks back in horror from the most beautiful disciplines as much as those who want to be called students of the Sacred Scriptures. Really, as if the gospel had been purged for this one reason alone: to remove the arts from their rightful domain! Now, on the other hand, reality itself tells us that by the kindness of the gospel the worth of the arts is made manifest and increased. This fact ought to have spurred on men's industry and roused them to learning. Formerly, men had the hots for these studies—it's amazing how much so—when those who could teach them were lacking. Now, in the greatest abundance of the best instructors, the schools are not very crowded at all. And, the arts, although they previously lay covered over by dirt and squalor, have

now gotten back their luster. Dialectic had been absolutely buried by certain slanders of the grammarians, and no practice in speaking was applied to its study, though it cannot be understood without it. Natural philosophy was in tatters, for mathematics, from which nearly all the demonstrations in natural philosophy are borrowed, was lacking. Ethics had attacked and seized the domain of theology, so that the entire course of the Christian life was now being sought more from philosophy than from the gospel. In such a way, the entire multitude of the disciplines, which ought to have been a harmonious chorus, had been thrown into confusion and disorder. Now, after they have been corrected and each has been set in order in its proper place, that zeal for studies that formerly existed has been snuffed out again. And there is no other reason, in my view, than the fact that it is so much a part of men's nature to habitually turn up their noses at the good things that are right in front of them. But if we desire to be seen to be pleasing to God, from whom these enormous goods have come to us, we must by all means make an effort not to be seen to have scorned them; it will be a part of our piety to acknowledge the gifts of heaven and to both cultivate and preserve them. And it is not only for our own sake that we should do this, but we also owe this effort to the commonwealth and to all of our posterity. For the commonwealth has placed us in this station to preserve the arts that are useful for life. Nor should anyone think that he has defrauded the commonwealth in a small matter if he has done his duty negligently. Every head of household owes it to his children to be more eager to leave behind this public patrimony than his own piece of land. For private property cannot be maintained unless the commonwealth has been well constituted.

3. I.e., should devote his entire life to it.

AD FONTES

I have used rather many words⁴ to speak about these matters so that those who despise the good arts⁵ under the pretext of the gospel may remember that they⁶ are doing grave harm to the glory of the gospel. It is much more becoming for Christians to revere the gifts of God and to use them with thanksgiving, as Paul says.⁷ And I beseech Christ that he would govern our studies

4. Recall that he said at the outset that he would be brief—and in fact, despite his protestation here, he has.

5. *bonae artes*, a synonym for the liberal arts.

6. I read *se* with Eber's text, misprinted in *CR* 10 as *si*.

7. "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim. 4:4-5 [ESV]). For Melancthon, these verses (among others) serve as a charter for philosophy. See his comments on Col. 2:8 discussed in Hutchinson, "Reason Diabolical," 232.

for the purpose of their public usefulness and would preserve the good arts, since, as they have been made known to the human race by God, so they cannot be preserved except by him.

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On Re-Reading My Complete Frost

BY DONALD T. WILLIAMS

I've walked with Frost in the Yellow Wood
And later watched it fill with Snow.
Upon the Hills of View I've stood
And seen the farms spread out below.

I've seen that Snow go all downhill
To fill a swift West-Running Brook,
Seen Birches bent by a Boy's Will
Across the pages of my book.

To see how deep I could look in,
I've stood on Beaches continent-backed
'Til Truth seemed to have broken in
With all her playful Matter of Fact.

To hear the Poem as it was printed,
To see the picture beneath the paint,
I've tried to take the Hints that's hinted
And not take any of them that ain't.

The Pastoral Value of the Reformed Doctrine of Concupiscence

BY MATTHEW ROBERTS

THE DOCTRINE OF CONCUPISCENCE

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

— Joel 2:12-13

The Desire to Sin

The issue of concupiscence has risen to prominence in orthodox Christian circles in recent years.¹ While it is the issue of “LGBT” lifestyles and identities which has brought it back into focus, historically it has been of

great importance without any reference to such issues.² At stake is the nature of sin and its effect on human nature, a right understanding of repentance and the grace of Christ, and the nature of Christian discipleship. If concupiscence is relevant to contemporary sexuality debates, that is only because it is relevant to our whole understanding of sin and salvation. So clarity on this issue will not only help us address questions of sexuality and gender faithfully and with pastoral wisdom; it will also be of great value for our preaching of the gospel and ministering it to people in all other areas of life. Therefore in this essay my aim is to consider concupiscence in more general terms.

1. I have tackled this previously, and engaged with some of the literature, in *Pride: Identity and the Worship of Self* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2023), Chapter 4.

2. Necessarily, of course, since the concept of sexual “identity” only arose to prominence in the late twentieth century, having been first invented in the late nineteenth; and the concept of a ‘gender identity’ was almost unknown outside a small circle of Queer Theorists until the twenty-first.

Concupiscence means “lust” or “desire,” and like those words (and the Greek New Testament word *epithumia*, which they often translate) can be used to mean a desire for something good or bad. However, rather like the English word “lust” it has in practice been used (since Augustine) almost exclusively for the desire *to sin*, and it is in that sense that I will use it in this essay. Speaking of concupiscence enables us to distinguish clearly between two different things which are both internal and invisible: the unbidden *desire* to sin, and *mental acts of the will which indicate an assent* to some degree with that desire. These may range from the maximal (detailed planning of how to commit a sin, or extensive imaginative enjoyment of what it would be like to do so) to the minimal (momentarily lingering on, rather than immediately refusing to entertain, a sinful desire). But all involve a measure of deliberate intentionality, albeit one known only to the individual concerned. Concupiscence, on the other hand, refers to the desire which precedes any such acts. It is, in short, the desire to sin.

The issue at stake is whether (to quote Article 9 of the 39 Articles of the Church of England) “concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of sin.” Is it a sin to desire to sin? Do I incur guilt before God for *wanting* to sin, even if I do not act upon that desire? Do I need to be forgiven for such desires? Did Christ need to atone for them, and do I today need to repent of them?³

3. An important clarification will be useful at this point. In discussions of the question by Protestant theologians, intentional sins are called by the name “actual” sins, because they are *acts* of the will, breaking the law of God either by commission or omission (e.g. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* 9.13.1.). Unfortunately in modern colloquial English “actual” means something more like “true” or “real”, and therefore “actual sin” can sound to some like it is in contrast to things which are “not really sin.” This has led some writers on the topic to significant misunderstandings, in which statements which rightly distinguish between actual sin and concupiscence are taken to mean by that distinction that concupiscence is not sin. An example is in the Sydney Anglican Diocesan Doctrine Commission report on the Doctrine of Concupiscence of 2022: “... having a propensity for such attractions should not be equated with the commission of actual sin... actual sin only occurs when we fail to resist temptation and allow ourselves to be enticed by our own desires (Jas 1:14-15). Therefore, while we are right to lament our fallen condition, we are not called to repent of temptation but to resist it.”(6.5). The first two clauses are formally correct, but the “therefore” of the final clause indicates that the authors have misunderstood what “actual sin” means. Furthermore, the final clause contradicts the report’s own clear earlier statement that concupis-

The Sinfulness of Concupiscence

The universal orthodox Protestant understanding of concupiscence has been, until recently at least, that it is of the nature of sin.⁴ That is, in itself it is an offense to God, and incurs God’s wrath; it is therefore to be repented of, and forgiveness sought only in the cleansing blood of Christ.

THE UNIVERSAL ORTHODOX PROTESTANT UNDERSTANDING OF CONCUPISCENCE HAS BEEN, UNTIL RECENTLY AT LEAST, THAT IT IS OF THE NATURE OF SIN

The exegetical starting point for the Protestant conviction is the widespread biblical conviction that all mankind, from conception onwards, stands guilty before God.⁵ This can only be the case if we are sinners before ever sinning; our condemnation arises from our nature before that nature has issued any sinful acts. This is explicit in passages such as Ps. 51:5, and Ps. 14:1-3, and Romans 3:9-20. Further, some biblical texts directly make the connection between our sinful desires or lusts and God’s wrath: “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming” (Col. 3:5-6).

Paul’s teaching has clear roots both in the teaching of Christ and the Old Testament. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ locates sin in the heart rather than in the actions: the lustful look makes a man guilty of adultery. Now it could be argued that Jesus has in mind a mental act of *imagining* adultery, rather than simply the unbidden desire to do so. Yet his reference to anger as an internal version of murder suggests otherwise, for

cence “is fully deserving of God’s wrath and damnation” (4.4). The report as a whole fails to distinguish both between internal mental acts and concupiscent desire, and between internal and external temptation (to be discussed in detail below). These are serious failures which undermine its whole treatment of the subject.

4. See the fine discussion in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 142-144

5. The Westminster Confession of Faith Q5 cites Prov. 20:19, Ecc. 7:20, Jas. 3:2 and 1 Jo. 1:8,10 in support of this point. It therefore takes the universality of sin as sufficient to prove that concupiscence is sinful.

anger is far more easily understood as a concupiscent desire than a mental plan to do harm. Conclusive is Jesus' statement in Mark 7:20–23 that it is what comes “out of the heart of man” that defiles him. The list contains many sinful actions, but Jesus' point is that they arise from the desires of the heart. Moreover, the list includes coveting, pride, and envy; which are not actions at all but concupiscent desires. “All these evil things”, says Jesus, “come from within, and they defile a person.”

ALL STREAMS OF THE MAGISTERIAL REFORMATION INCLUDED THE SINFULNESS OF CONCUPISCENCE IN THEIR CONFESSIONS

The Tenth Commandment, invoked here by Jesus, is explicitly about the desire to sin rather than a deliberate mental act. Covetousness is the desire for what is not mine. Paul takes this as his great example of the power of sin in his fallen human nature in Rom. 7:7–11; indeed, it was the (unbidden) rise of covetousness in his heart which he says “killed [him].” It is beyond question that Paul sees the covetous desire of his own heart as the reason for God's just wrath towards him. Indeed, alongside coveting, all of the most serious sins in Scripture—pride, greed, sexual lust, sinful anger—are matters of desire.

It is for these reasons, along with the matrix of systematic concerns to be explored below, that all streams of the magisterial Reformation included the sinfulness of concupiscence in their confessions.⁶

CONCUPISCENCE AND THE GOSPEL

Rome: Putting Righteousness Within Reach

Concupiscence became a significant issue in the Reformation period because it goes to the heart of the different understandings of the gospel held by Protes-

6. See the Augsburg Confession (Article 2), Belgic Confession (Article 15), Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England (Article 9), Heidelberg Catechism (Question 10), and Westminster Confession of Faith (Ch. 6.5).

tants and Roman Catholics. For Rome, righteousness is something which we achieve ourselves, with the assistance of divine grace.⁷ While justification includes forgiveness of sins committed before baptism, its main significance is the transformation of the individual so that he may merit eternal life *for himself*. For “Justification establishes co-operation between God's grace and man's freedom.”⁸ The final judgment, and the quantity of sin yet to be cleansed away in Purgatory, depends on the merit of our own good works. The non-sinfulness of concupiscence is vital for this scheme, because it depends upon truly meritorious works being possible. And given that the desire to sin unquestionably remains in the sinner, this can only be so if the desire to sin *itself* incurs no guilt. As Steven Wedgworth says in relation to Trent's position, “If concupiscence has the nature of sin, then the baptized cannot truly be said to be righteous.”⁹

The Reformation: Sin Lies in the Heart

Luther, and the Reformation after him, asserted instead that justification is a sovereign declaration by God that Christ's righteousness counts as ours. It must be so, for Scripture is clear that the true believer remains a sinner in this life, no matter to what degree his acts and habits of body and mind have been transformed. The righteous are righteous not on their own account, but because Christ's righteousness has been imputed to them. Otherwise, what could Paul have meant by calling himself the foremost of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15)? Why does he consider all his own righteous works to be excrement (Phil. 3:8)? These powerful statements lean upon the assumption that, in a regenerate man, who strives for righteousness, those acts which are a rejection of sinful desire and a deliberate choosing of what is good, *nevertheless* are filthy rags before God. And they are so because, beneath all our good thoughts and deeds, there still lurks a heart which desires to do

7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), Section 2010, 437.

8. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Section 1993, 433.

9. Steven Wedgworth, “The Heart Wants What It Wants: A Protestant Assessment of the Doctrine of Concupiscence,” in *Ruined Sinners to Reclaim: Sin and Depravity in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2024 (forthcoming)), 654. Wedgworth's treatment of the history of the doctrine is excellent.

evil. And that evil desire condemns, even when the acts of the will are righteous.

Far from inclining Luther and all those who have followed him to despair, however, this realization was the key to true gospel assurance. For it signals the absolute need to give up on works-righteousness. And giving up on that is the essential element in Christian faith: for it is when we despair of our own righteousness that we are able to cast ourselves fully upon Christ for his. For in every way—deeds, words, thoughts, and desires—Christ has been righteous where we have not.

Christ and Concupiscence

This of course raises essential questions about Christology. Christ is our savior because he was tempted in every way as we are, yet was without sin (Heb. 4:15). But what was the nature of Christ's temptations, and the status of his desires? Does the fact that he was tempted mean that he desired to sin? If concupiscence is itself sin, then the answer to that question must of course be no. But how then are we to understand his temptations?

The answer to that is to recognise that there is a significant range in the meaning of "temptation" in Scripture. Πειρασμος, the normal Greek word, means in general a "trial." Often, of course, it means testing by external inducements towards sin, which is how we normally understand "tempt" in English. Heb. 4:15 clearly includes the latter, but probably has in view the wider sense too: Jesus was enticed towards sin by the Devil and the world, and also endured terrible trials of circumstance, and in both experienced what we do. He did not sin in the least in response to either.

But within the narrower meaning of πειρασμος as an inducement towards sin, there is an important distinction as to *who does the tempting*. James puts it this way: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire' (Jas. 1:13-14). James exposes that in our temptations the thing responsible for "luring and enticing" us to sin is our own desire. This is one of the clearest biblical

assertions that concupiscent desire is culpable before God. In this sense Jesus most definitely was *not* tempted, for if he were, then he himself would be guilty of sin. Thus the writer to the Hebrews and James are using temptation to refer to two distinct things. Hebrews speaks of temptations arising from outside ourselves (e.g. the Devil tempting Christ), for which we are not responsible, while James of those arising from inside ourselves, for which we most certainly are. We must make a distinction, then, between internal and external temptation. Our Lord was tempted externally, by the Devil, and others around him (Peter, for instance, in Mark 8:33); but he was not tempted internally, for he had no sinful desire to "lure and entice" him.

A further distinction is necessary here also. For Christ did have *unfallen* human desires, some of which the Devil attempted to use in his temptation. Our Lord was hungry, and the Devil sought to use this as a means to induce him to misuse his divine power. But this is a different thing from desire to sin; the natural desire for food did not, in Christ, turn into or merge with an evil desire to disobey God. Therefore there is an important sense in which Christ's temptations were *not* like ours. He did not, using his own words to his disciples in Gethsemane, "enter into" temptation. He did not have an internal battle with sin, for sin found no foothold within him. His own heart never sided with the Evil One in luring his will toward sinful acts.

Christ Our Righteousness

Some fear that all this means that Christ's empathy with us (clearly of concern to the writer to the Hebrews) is impaired.¹⁰ This, however, is misguided, as can be seen by looking at this from two angles.

First, if we imagine that Heb. 4:15 means the Lord shared *every sinful desire that we have* then, far from presenting Christ as our perfect savior, it would make

10. For example, Andy Robinson of Living Out: "In order to make the point that temptation to sin is sin in and of itself you have to spend a lot of time demonstrating that Jesus' temptations are different to ours. The problem is that the NT makes precisely the opposite point. And if we lose sight of that we have lost one of the chief pastoral helps in the midst of temptation." <https://twitter.com/andyscgp/status/1722564544914993356>, accessed 4th December 2023

him the worst of all men.¹¹ For none of us is tempted by every sinful lust known to man. The greedy may not be prone to pride; drunkards may not be drawn to sexual vice. But if Heb. 4:15 refers to our sinful desires as Jas. 1:14 does, then Christ must have desired every sin ever desired by the hearts of sinful men, making his heart darker and his desires more depraved than any other individual ever. Such a blasphemous and ridiculous conclusion of course demonstrates the error of the premise.¹²

**CHRIST COULD ONLY ATONE FOR THE
GUILT OF OUR DESIRES BECAUSE HE
HIMSELF DID NOT SHARE THEM**

Second, let us ask: what is the hope the gospel offers to sinners? It is precisely that Christ is righteous where we are not; that his righteousness supplies our lack of righteousness, and his sufferings have atoned for our wickedness. And so the comfort that he brings to me when I bring before him the evil desires of my own heart is not an impotent sympathy: “Yes, me too. Terrible, isn’t it?” Rather, my corruption is answered by his absolute integrity. Confronted by the same external temptations as I am, the beauty of our savior is that his heart, in glorious contrast to mine, did *not* join in with them to draw him towards sin. It is precisely this which the writer to the Hebrews rejoices in: “For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens” (Heb. 7:26).

Moreover, Christ could only atone for the guilt of our desires because he himself did not share them. What he could not present as perfect to the Father, he could not redeem in us. Had he sinned with his lips, he could not have atoned for our sinful words; had he sinned with his mind or hands, he could not have atoned for our sinful thoughts or actions. And likewise, had he

taken sinful desires to the cross, he could have offered no atoning sacrifice for our sinful desires.

**THE PASTORAL VALUE OF
UNDERSTANDING CONCUPISCENCE**

The Reformed doctrine of concupiscence therefore goes to the heart of the gospel. It has profound implications for how we understand the whole of Christian faith and life.

The desire to step back from the guilt of concupiscence, as demonstrated by Rome, is driven by a desire to lessen my guilt, so that it can be solved by my innocence rather than by Christ’s righteousness. And for that reason Protestants have always felt the need entirely to reject Rome’s account. Either I am saved by Christ’s righteousness, or by some limitation in my sinfulness. Either I can persuade myself that I can achieve sufficient merit before God, or I must flee to and lean wholly on Christ who has achieved it for me. Here lies the doctrine of concupiscence’s great significance: it is knowing that sin is a matter of the heart that must drive our own discipleship, and shape the pastoral care of Christians in the church.

The Nature of Repentance

As long as we think that sin lies merely in acts of the will, repentance similarly will only involve acts of the will, which is the root of the Roman doctrine of penance. But if sin lies in the desires of the heart, mere penance is inadequate. It is tearing our garments, but not our hearts.

True repentance, in contrast to penance, is all about the heart. Like David in Ps. 51:5-6, repentance must go beneath our actions to the reason *why* we did them: because we were “brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” David sees his desire to sin, with him from conception, as itself arousing God’s wrath. True repentance is not grief about having *done* what is bad, for there may be many reasons—not all of them godly—for regretting a sinful action. True repentance is grief over *wanting* to do what is bad. It is the realization that what I *am* is *itself* an offense to God’s holy being. This is especially important in a culture obsessed with Self. “This is just who I am” is a means of

11. I am grateful to my friend Jonty Rhodes for this observation.

12. Please note I am not accusing any of those who do not distinguish between external and internal temptation of blasphemy—merely that this would be a logical conclusion of that position if applied rigorously to Christology.

declaring our desires good, and their fulfilment essential. Christians, in contrast, must surrender the worship of self as the idolatry that it is, and despairing of our own righteousness, come to God in Christ with broken and contrite hearts.

Temptation

A number of writers have argued that, since Christ “in every respect was tempted as we are, yet without sin,” therefore temptation itself, for us, does not involve sin. As regards external temptation this is true. I would have no need to repent of an external inducement to sin which was (as for Christ) not joined at all by my own desire. Yet this is rarely true of us. When my *internal* desire—perhaps joining with the external invitation—lures and entices me, I must indeed repent of it.

In the Roman view, it was possible to see temptation as a thing to be welcomed; an opportunity to exercise virtue.¹³ But this fails utterly to understand the seriousness of sin, proudly believing in my own righteousness when my very desire to sin exposes instead my guilt before God and my great need of Christ. Temptation is to be met not with smug confidence in our strength of resistance, but in broken-hearted flight to Christ alone for refuge.

Thus, temptation is never something with which we are to make peace, no matter how comforting we might find it to do so. We cannot grant quarter to our lusts. We are not to seek to find good in them, or settle for an acceptable level of them, allowing them a permanent place in our lives. We are to flee from temptation, for the desires of our hearts are desperately wicked.¹⁴

13. *Materia exercendae virtutis*, to use Aquinas’ phrase (though Aquinas does not approve of this view; *Summa Theologica* 1.48.5). A striking example in my own experience was being invited by work colleagues (who knew I was a Christian) to attend a strip club with them, on the basis that it would “give me a chance to show how virtuous I am” by resisting the temptations on offer. Needless to say, I declined.

14. John Owen speaks of how, since “lust and temptation are mixed together... nothing but what can kill the lust can conquer the temptation... all other dealings with it are like tamperings with a prevailing gangrene: the part of the whole may be preserved a little while, in great torment; excision or death must come at last... it must come to this, - its lust must die, or the soul must die.” John Owen, ‘Of Temptation’, *Works* vol. 6 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 113.

True Conviction of Sin

It is of the nature of conviction that we learn to *hate* sin in our hearts. Paul commends the hatred of the sin of covetousness (Rom. 7:15); *epithumeia* is to be “put to death” for it is “on account of these the wrath of God is coming” (Col. 3:5-6). But if we don’t believe that God hates (and therefore judges) concupiscence, nor will we. Why would we hate what God does not?

Consider, for example, a normally chaste man who clicks on a link to a pornographic website, or a normally patient mother who loses her temper with an irritating child after a sleep-deprived night. In each case, the deliberate sin is the work of a moment, and may be rapidly regretted and concluded. In such cases it is easy to blame the sin on an accident, a momentary loss of self-control, or the action of another in extending the temptation in the first place. But if concupiscence itself is sinful, this is impossible. C.S. Lewis described growth in Christian maturity like this: we “begin to be alarmed not only about what we do, but about what we are... If there are rats in a cellar you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats: it only prevents them from hiding.”¹⁵ The lapse into sin simply exposed what was in my heart already. I should of course grieve for having committed a sinful act; but I should grieve much more that I *wanted* to do it. Thus true conviction of sin must be the conviction of the guilt of my sinful desires. To come to Christ for salvation, I must realize that it is my heart, not my clothes, which needs to be torn.

Freedom from Slavery

Everyone who practices sin, said our Lord, is a slave to sin (John 8:34). Sin enslaves because *we love it*. Like an alcoholic—who is a slave not to drink itself but to his love for it—the reason we cannot escape from sin’s bondage is that we don’t want to. Like the rich young man, we walk away from God because our hearts have been captured by other things. Concupiscent desires are the shackles that bind us.

15. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (London: Fontana Books, 1952), 160

But as long as we are persuaded that sinful desires themselves carry no blame from God, we are unlikely to want to be rid of them. Indeed, given their pull upon us, we will tend to want to hold onto and treasure them; to imagine that we can keep them as a neutral part of who we are. It is quite possible for the outwardly moderate man to nurture and cherish greed in his heart; for the outwardly chaste man to feel pride in (or at least acquiescence toward) his secret lustful desires. But neither will ever be free from the slavery of sin. He may fall back into his greedy or lustful actions, or he may not, but never will the grip of those things on his heart be loosened.

TO DECLARE OUR SINFUL DESIRES NOT TO BE SIN IN THEMSELVES MIGHT WELL OFFER A SORT OF COMFORT. BUT IT WILL BE A COLD COMFORT.

But Christ's desire for his people is that they should be set free. The newly kindled love for God which he implants in the soul of those in Christ, should so overwhelm the soul that he sees its concupiscence for what it is, a stench in God's nostrils, and in the power of the Spirit wages war against it. Thus Paul says: "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" (Rom. 6:17-18). It is when we hate our sinful desires as God does, that we are set free from their power over us.

Sanctification: Mortification of Lusts

This leads us to consider how sanctification—in the classic Reformed sense of the transformation of character to become more like God in his holiness—takes place in the believer.

Paul tells us in Col. 3:5-6 that we are to "put to death what is earthly," and this includes both sinful acts ("sexual immorality, impurity") and sinful desires ("passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry"). What this demonstrates is that, while concupiscent desires

may be stubborn, they are not immutable. They do not form a fixed part of our characters to be either endured or proudly embraced. Rather, they can be put to death. They can be fought against, opposed, refused, and starved; and as we do so we should expect that they will shrivel and lessen. Like ruts in a dirt road, they push us in a certain direction; but determined refusal of them, and following Christ's commands instead, will begin both to level them and lay new tracks in better directions.

Of course, there is no promise of entire sanctification on this side of Christ's return; on that day we shall be like him, but not before. But this does not mean that we cannot, in the power of the Spirit, see their mastery over us overthrown and their power to lure and entice us away from Christ decline. For though sin persists in a Christian's heart, it does not *reign* there any longer (Rom. 6:12-14).

If, therefore, we would see our temptations lessen, we must repent of the part which our own sinful desire has played in them. We must learn to hate sin with a holy hatred. We should pray to see our sins as God sees them; and driven by love for him, in the power of the Spirit, strive to put off the old self and put on the new self. Conversely, of course, if we convince ourselves that God does not hate our desires to sin, we will not hate them either.

Cultivating Humility

One of the glorious paradoxes of Christian faith is that, as we grow in godliness, we should lessen in pride; the more we advance in Christlikeness, the more keenly we should know our own sin and the more humble we should be. Paul knew himself as the foremost among sinners, and all mature Christians should say the same.

But if concupiscence has not the nature of sin, how could this possibly be? Are all mature Christians actively pursuing and committing great sins, and doing so more seriously than non-Christian people are? We should not deny, of course, that all Christians do continue to commit wilful sins, and should repent continually of them. Nevertheless, it simply is not the case that Paul, or Peter, or Isaiah, or for that matter any of the

ordinary, godly, mature saints in all of our churches are committing greater sins than those who know nothing of Christ and are (in Paul's words) "full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness" etc. (Rom. 1:29). Christ's sanctifying work is real, and his holy people are truly no longer what they once were.

And yet Christ's saints are not pretending when they bewail and confess their own sinfulness. They do so because they know that sin lies most truly in the heart; and the more they grow in grace, the more they are able to see it for what it is.

IT IS THEREFORE AT THE HEART OF THE PASTOR'S MINISTRY TO DIRECT PEOPLE TO SEE BOTH THE SINFULNESS OF THEIR CONCUPISCENCE, AND CHRIST'S TOTAL FREEDOM FROM IT

CONCLUSION: SALVATION IN CHRIST ALONE

Christ's aim for every Christian is that he or she should come to him, take his yoke, and forsaking his own desires set his mind and heart on Christ. He is to abandon all hope of justifying himself, recognising that sin has corrupted not only his hands but his heart; and he is therefore to flee to Christ as his perfectly pure redeemer and head, and find in him the one who is our righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

The work of pastoral care is to proclaim this to people, and to help them to see both how great their need for Christ is and how totally he meets that need. What we have seen is that it is essential to this for them to realize that their sinful desires—greed, slothfulness, pride, covetousness, rage and others, including of course sexual lusts—are the core and the heart of sin. Sin is at heart about a misdirected love—a love for what is evil. The significance of our wilful sins is that they reveal us to have already had a sinful heart.

It is only when we truly see this that real repentance is possible. And it is only when we see Christ's purity of heart in contrast to ours that we will flee to and rest on him as our only savior. It is therefore at the heart of the

pastor's ministry, his preaching and teaching, both in public and from house to house, to direct people to see both the sinfulness of their concupiscence, and Christ's total freedom from it.

The alternative, to declare our sinful desires not to be sin in themselves, might well offer a sort of comfort to those who hear. But it will be a cold comfort, for it pretends to elevate us beyond much need of a savior, even as it lowers Christ from a glorious redeemer to a mere sympathizer and example. If we leave the corrupt desires of our hearts off of the ledger of our sins, then the grace we need in Christ is catastrophically reduced. And with it our love for him is reduced. For he who is forgiven little, loves little.

The Reformed doctrine of concupiscence, in contrast, forbids us to find a false comfort by persuading ourselves that we are not so bad as God, in the Scriptures, has said that we are. It drives us to a far more stark understanding of the depth and severity of our sin than we would ever naturally want to admit. It leaves me facing the holy, righteous God, knowing that my sins are not only as high as heaven but go down to the deepest parts of who I am. And in so doing it leads me to Christ, who in his perfect purity of hands, mind, and heart has provided one, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, offering, and satisfaction for all of my sins. In him alone, when he returns in glory and raises us to eternal life, will we finally come to love God as he did, with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.

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Making Missing Biblical Art with Midjourney

BY IAN HUYETT

Catholic educator Julian Ahlquist is one of the first Christian artists to use generative AI to create and disseminate religious imagery. Ahlquist's online community, "Generation of the SAInts," uses a combination of Midjourney and Photoshop to churn out images of Catholic saints.

As a philosemitic Protestant and occasional Bible history podcaster, my own hopes for AI-generated Christian art have a somewhat different focus.

I have long complained that—while Christianity has produced beautiful art from St. Catherine's Pantocrator to Salvador Dali's Catholic period—the Christian artistic tradition contains a gaping hole it has never addressed. That hole consists of almost all of the adventure of the Old Testament.

Consider the biblical king Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat was a real historical figure—as real as Julius Caesar—and accomplished important military victories, legal reforms, and foreign alliances. At the time of this writing, however, the Google Image results for "Jehoshaphat" are mostly sketches from children's bibles. It's as if Je-

hoshaphat was a character from Mother Goose—not a head of state who defeated real Moabites in battle.

In fact, you can find much better art of *fictional characters*—including obscure figures from the lore of George R.R. Martin—than of most Old Testament kings. Martin's internet fan community, which has made most of this art for free, is apparently more invested in Aegon the Conqueror than any Christian artist has ever cared for Hezekiah. Popular Renaissance subjects like David are the exception that prove the rule.

Neglecting all biblical art other than children's illustrations has consequences. It is easier today to learn the names of Roman emperors, whose faces are reflected in stone, than the names of the Judahite kings who no Michelangelo has ever loosed from the quarry. Instead, the church has subconsciously trained Christians to think of Old Testament stories as taking place within a kind of non-historical Narnia, fit to be taught to children but not studied by thinking adults. Mother Goose-style sketches of Hezekiah may be sufficient as a rudimentary visual aid for small children, but they cannot capture the king's character, fire us to aspire to



Jebu assassinates the Omride kings

Original AI-generated art

his nobility, or draw out the depths of his doubts and the heights of his triumphs. Nor do they even try to.

We could speculate all day about the reasons that there is no high art of Hezekiah. Regardless, Christian artists are not making it. Can generative AI help correct the church's failure to depict the heroes of the Hebrew Bible? Can Midjourney manufacture missing

biblical artwork? To find out, I took a page from Julian Ahlquist.

Current generative AI is proficient at depicting architecture, landscapes, and people—in that order. As early as 2021, when I first started toying with “WOMBO Dream,” I noticed that the AI had a peculiar ability to create awe-inspiring High Medieval cathedrals.

WOMBO could also go a few steps further, building cathedrals in cosmic landscapes and surrounding them with spacecraft inspired by John Berkey. What Dream could not do—not even remotely—is create people. As anyone who used Dream in 2021 will tell you, any attempts to create human characters inevitably resulted in incoherent, surreal, and only vaguely anthropoid shapes.

Midjourney, which entered open beta testing in 2022, is different. In my first foray into Midjourney, I tasked it with creating artwork of the Catholic futurist theologian Teilhard de Chardin. Although the AI sometimes gave Chardin six fingers, it was—on the whole—more than capable of creating compelling portraits of the priest. Like its predecessors, Midjourney also excels at creating beautiful settings for its subjects. The AI can even be directed to draw upon the styles of specific artists. It will obediently paint, for example, Teilhard de Chardin in space “in the style of Salvador Dali’s nuclear mysticism period.” So long as your Midjourney prompts are limited to a single subject and a landscape, the AI is an efficient servant. My portraits of Teilhard, for example, required little tinkering and no photo-shopping. When the occasional sixth finger emerged, simply re-running the prompt was sufficient to fix it.

When I sat down to begin creating Old Testament scenes, then, I had high expectations. My first idea for creating missing Old Testament art was ambitious: a depiction of 2 Kings 10:15-16. In one of the most visually-loaded moments in the Books of Kings, the Israelite general Jehu—who has just begun a Yahwist revolution against the faithless Omride dynasty—is riding his chariot towards Israel’s capital. On his way, Jehu meets a man named Jehonadab on the road. Jehonadab, an early precursor of John the Baptist, has been living a Bedouin lifestyle in the wilderness, isolated from Israel’s corrupt society. The bronze-armored Jehu extends his hand to Jehonadab and beckons him to climb up into his chariot. “Come with me,” he says, “and see my zeal for the Lord.”

Although at least one decent depiction of this scene exists, it is closer to a comic book image than a classicist painting. In fact, there is little visual artwork depicting

Jehu at all. Other than a colorful nineteenth century painting of Jehu confronting Jezebel by Edward Henry Corbould, most modern depictions of Jehu appear to be children’s Bible illustrations. This despite the fact that Jehu was perhaps the single most influential Hebrew king after David—founding a dynasty that lasted for five generations and reshaping the religious and cultural landscape of the entire Levant.

I knew that Midjourney had difficulty creating any scene with multiple people, and that portraying both Jehu and Jehonadab would be asking too much. Still, I thought that I might create the image from Jehonadab’s perspective, with Jehu extending his arm towards the viewer. I soon discovered that even this expectation was naïve. While Midjourney can create excellent portraits and landscapes, it struggles to get human figures to physically interact with other objects—including other humans—in any specific way. In one well-known example of this problem, a famous AI-generated image of Trump and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez holding hands shows both figures’ hands fused together.

In my own case, Midjourney had difficulties even creating an image of a chariot. It conjured up incoherent wooden contraptions and chimerically fused Jehu’s chariot with the bodies of horses. As for Jehu himself, getting him to extend his arm towards the viewer neared the limits of Midjourney’s abilities. Fine-tuning Jehu’s armor to make it historically accurate proved to be impossible.

The latter difficulty was almost certainly a result of Midjourney’s data set. When I had requested images of Teilhard de Chardin, Midjourney had little difficulty in ensuring that Teilhard had a priest’s collar, adjusting the style of his cassock, or giving him a cross pendant. Presumably, the AI simply had more data on modern Catholic priests than on ninth century BC Levantine warriors.

Moderating my expectations, I decided to settle for a loose depiction of 2 Kings 9:24, in which Jehu draws his bow to assassinate the Omride kings, in the style of Jacques-Louis David. This time, Midjourney’s “variations” feature was helpful. Midjourney answers each

prompt with four different images, then allows the user to select the best of the four—which the AI, in turn, rearticulates into four new variations. Using the variations feature multiple times can act as a kind of evolutionary process, steering the art in the direction of your internal vision before eventually reaching a point of diminishing returns. Unfortunately, adjusting the prompt text and exhausting the variations feature was almost never sufficient to create any coherent image of a man drawing a bow. The bow would terminate at odd angles, the bowstring would run through the neck of Jehu's horse, and second or third strings would poke nonsensically out from the bow and into the air.

Remembering that Julian Ahlquist often uses Photoshop to fine-tune his images, I decided to settle for the most satisfactory variation Midjourney had given me. Next, I downloaded and tinkered with GIMP, a free alternative to Photoshop. The “GIMP Resynthesizer” plugin, which I learned how to use on YouTube, allowed me to remove the pesky protrusions from Jehu's bow and clear other nonsensical visual tumors out of the image. Overall, this process made me more sympathetic with James Allen—the digital artist who infamously won an art fair with his Midjourney-generated image “Théâtre D'opéra Spatial.” Allen says he inputted “at least 624” text prompts before Midjourney delivered the image he envisioned—adjusting the scene, coloration, and style of the image. I believe him.

Midjourney cannot yet, by itself, replace the biblical artists that modern Christians have failed to raise, call, and educate. AI-based art—especially biblical art—still requires significant fine-tuning and other work. I do not expect to see a flourishing of artwork depicting Old Testament scenes until Christians reemphasize the visual arts as a calling—or until Midjourney, or an AI like it, makes significant steps forward.

Both scenarios are interrelated. Present AI technology could help to hasten a renaissance of Christian visual arts. While Midjourney does not close the gap between our abilities to imagine and create, it does shorten it. If would-be Christian artists are heartened by the tools now available to them, and begin to make the most of

current generative AI, biblical art could enter a new period of flourishing tomorrow.

Other, more human steps might expedite this process. Before the breakthrough of Midjourney, I suggested creating a DAO to pay Christian visual artists to create images from biblical and church history. The development of AI art could make a proposal like this less urgent but more immediately practicable. At the same time, the further development of Generative AI is inevitable. Midjourney can already identify, create, and modify objects in response to human instructions. It is only a matter of time before we can simply tell the AI about that sixth finger, extraneous bowstring, or other visual tumor and ask the AI to remove it. Once this happens, of course, it will become rare for such protrusions even to appear in the first place.

Likewise, while the next iteration of Midjourney may not be trained on depictions of bronze plate armor, it may be able to understand and implement human instructions at a higher level of specificity and, accordingly, create a better approximation of all the visual details in our imagination. If this process continues to its logical conclusion then—God willing—the volume and quality of artwork in the world will be limited by only two variables: our willingness to conceive of beautiful things and the degree of beauty we can imagine.

Currently, the beauty of the Christian faith is partially obscured from the world by the unwillingness of the church to cultivate beauty. This unwillingness depresses the number of Christian artists in the church and limits the resources available to those artists who do emerge. If AI art reaches its full potential, however, it could unshackle Christian art from these cultural and logistical obstacles. The beauty of the Christian faith may then shine forth anew and more fully illuminate the world.

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The Soul of Education: W.E.B. Du Bois' Theory of the University

ONSI AARON KAMEL

It is no secret that U.S. higher education is in something of a crisis. On the heels of a Gallup poll which found that a mere 36% of Americans have “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in higher education, a national survey conducted by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* found that not even one-third of Americans think “colleges are doing an excellent or very good job of leveling the playing field for success in society.”¹ Whatever one thinks of these survey results, most striking about the *Chronicle of Higher Education's* survey is the wide variety of things colleges are expected to be able to achieve, and concomitantly the wide variety of things colleges are expected to *be*. The

survey's questions and responses suggest that colleges should give graduates access to better jobs than they would otherwise have, provide a broad set of Americans with opportunities for “success,” contribute to the nation's civic and economic fortunes, expose students to meaningful socioeconomic and racial diversity, and even help students figure out who they are and who they want to be. Put simply, this survey captures three different conceptions of the aims and goods of the university: individual pursuit of goodness and truth, facilitation of society-benefiting scientific advance, and broad social uplift.

Of course, debates about the purpose and proper function of the university are not new, and they have exercised the minds of many key figures in American intellectual history. Indeed, the tensions exemplified by this tradition of discourse are thrown into relief in the writing of W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963). His engagement with the vision of education promoted by Booker

1. “What the Public Really Thinks About Higher Education,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 5, 2023, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/what-the-public-really-thinks-about-higher-education>, accessed 18 October 2023; Gallup Inc, “Americans' Confidence in Higher Education Down Sharply,” *Gallup.com*, July 11, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/508352/americans-confidence-higher-education-down-sharply.aspx>, accessed 18 October 2023.

T. Washington, and his critique of that vision in *The Souls of Black Folk*, constitute a substantive reflection on the aims of American higher education.

Du Bois' two broad lines of critique against Washington—what I call his “pragmatic” and “intrinsic” critiques—illuminate the tensions which have attended American reflection on higher education for a century and a half. In short, in his pragmatic critique of Washington, Du Bois argues that Washington's project, which, according to Du Bois, entails the diversion of resources away from institutions of higher education, is impossible without colleges. But there are hints elsewhere in Du Bois' work that colleges exist for another purpose: the enabling of intellectual elites to pursue the Transcendentals—the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.

THERE ARE HINTS IN DU BOIS' WORK THAT COLLEGES EXIST FOR ANOTHER PURPOSE: THE ENABLING OF INTELLECTUAL ELITES TO PURSUE THE TRANSCENDENTALS

WASHINGTON THROUGH DU BOIS' EYES

Du Bois devotes a chapter in *The Souls of Black Folk* to discussing Washington's proposed program of Black social and economic advancement in the context of the recent history of Black leadership. Du Bois begins with two themes of present concern: money and education. Du Bois claims that Washington was the first person to “indissolubly link” a program of industrial education with “an honorable alliance with the best of the southerners.”² To carry out this program, Du Bois claims, Washington had to do two things. First, he had to gain the sympathy and cooperation of the white south, and second, he had to gain standing in the north. He succeeded at both.

By the writing of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois had come to think this project entirely wrongheaded. Black America needed another Frederick Douglass, not a Booker T. Washington. Du Bois identifies Douglass with a period of “self-development.” Douglass's ultimate ideal was “freedom and assimilation,” and the means by which he sought to attain this ideal was political self-assertion. As Du Bois put it, “Douglass in his old age still stood bravely for the ideals of his early manhood,—ultimate assimilation *through* self-assertion and on no other terms.”³

Contrasting with Douglass's program of political equality through self-assertion, Du Bois suggests that Washington sought a compromise between the North, the South, and African Americans. Du Bois further claims that this represents what he calls “the old attitude of adjustment and submission” to American racism. What made Washington's program unique, however, was that he combined this old disposition of submission with an attempt to capitalize on the industrialization of the South. Washington preached “a gospel of Work and Money.”⁴

A sense for Washington's project can be gained from a brief look at his Atlanta Exposition Address, which gained him national acclaim and the initial sympathy of Du Bois. To his audience of mostly white Southerners, Washington proposes that Black Americans focus on economic rather than educational advancement and cease direct advocacy for social equality, and he asks white Southerners in his audience to partner with Black Southerners for the attainment of these ends.⁵ Thinking of those who advocated for a more direct approach, which Du Bois himself would come to favor, Washington argued that Black Americans must focus upon the fundamentals of living rather than the higher aspirations of culture: “the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands... [we] shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the su-

2. William E. B. Du Bois and Terri Hume Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk: Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, 1st ed., A Norton Critical Edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 34.

3. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 39.

4. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 40.

5. Washington, “The Atlanta Exposition Address,” in Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 168.

perfidial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws of life and the useful.”⁶

After speaking to those ostensibly of his own race, Washington then asks the white audience to employ the African Americans already in the South and do business with them rather than hiring foreign, immigrant labor. He recalls to their minds the faithful and hard work that African Americans provided under slavery and asks that they cooperate with African Americans, saying that Black Americans “will buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields and run your factories.”⁷ He promises that they will be “patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful.”⁸ Thus, disclaiming the “the agitation of questions of social equality” as “the extremist folly,” Washington believed that only Black economic power could provide the foundation for social equality, for “no race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized.”⁹ Washington does state that there will come a time when racial animosity will be “blotted out,” absolute justice will reign, and all classes will submit to the mandates of the law. In sum, then, Washington combines a mollifying posture toward white Americans and economic pragmatism with an end goal of ultimate assimilation and equality.

DU BOIS’ CRITIQUE OF WASHINGTON

Du Bois breaks down Washington’s program into three main planks, organized in terms of what Washington advocates Black Americans “give up.” First among these is political power, second is the insistence on civil rights by means of self-assertion, and third is “the higher education of Negro youth.”¹⁰ In contrast to these three aims, Washington, according to Du Bois, wants African Americans to concentrate all their energies on “industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and

the conciliation of the South.”¹¹ Du Bois tries to show that there is a paradox at the heart of each of Washington’s aims. It is impossible for property rights to be secured without suffrage, for example. Self-respect and thrift are enjoined for Black Americans, but so also is submission to civic inferiority, and it is not feasible that any group of people should maintain self-respect in the face of the utter lack of broader societal recognition. It is in Du Bois’ criticism of Washington’s third means, namely, putting off or forswearing altogether higher education, that we arrive at the place where Du Bois’ vision of the good of a university and Washington’s vision of black American progress conflict.

DU BOIS CLEARLY HAD THE SENSE THAT THE UNIVERSITY WAS NECESSARY FOR THE ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT OF BLACK AMERICANS

DU BOIS’ POSITIVE VISIONS: PRAGMATIC AND INTRINSIC GOODS OF THE UNIVERSITY

Du Bois argues that Washington’s program of common school and industrial training would not function if it were not for individuals who were educated at colleges or universities. It is in this argument that we find the first articulation of the “pragmatic vision” of the university. Washington’s relentless focus on such industrial training has contributed to the diminution of funding for such colleges, leading to a situation in which not even the sites of industrial education can be staffed. Thus, Du Bois identifies the university or the college as a *sine qua non* of even the sort of industrial project that Washington advances, much less a more ambitious project of racial economic and social uplift.

Du Bois clearly had the sense that the university was necessary for the economic advancement of Black Americans. Later in *The Souls of Black Folk*, he writes that “the common school” should be founded “on the university and the industrial school on the common

6. Washington, “The Atlanta Exposition Address,” in Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 168.

7. Washington, “The Atlanta Exposition Address,” in Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 169.

8. Washington, “The Atlanta Exposition Address,” in Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 169.

9. Washington, “The Atlanta Exposition Address,” in Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 170.

10. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 40.

11. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 40.

DU BOIS' IDEAL UNIVERSITY HEWS CLOSE TO TIME-TESTED MEANS OF ARRIVING AT TRUTH, GOODNESS, AND BEAUTY

school.”¹² Du Bois anticipates that many of the college educated would become teachers in common and technical schools, having themselves trained by college-educated teachers. In this way, the university is understood as the apex of an ecosystem: the “highest” rise to the top and then return to serve those at the bottom, equipping all with the basic skills necessary to navigate a complex labor market, some with the skill-set to become artisans, and a gifted few with the possibility of attending college themselves.

This pragmatic vision of college-educated men training up a generation of Black Southerners so as to help them escape poverty sits somewhat uneasily with Du Bois’ own recounting of the difficulties he encountered during his time as a teacher. A Fisk student at the time, Du Bois struggled to find teaching work and faced real difficulties given the circumstances of rural Southern education. His school was one room, but not charming. The benches lacked backs and even legs, and the students could attend only irregularly—they were needed in the fields.¹³ Everyone in Du Bois’ “little world” had a “half-awakened common consciousness” of the existence of the Veil, which “hung between [them] and Opportunity.”¹⁴ Some of his students, awakened by education, yearned for more, but those whose fates are known to him when he returns are farming, some with success, lazing about, or dead, all still separated from the world by the Veil.

Although Du Bois clearly thinks that the educational ecosystem he has described, with universities, common schools, and industrial schools, is necessary if Black Americans are to be given real economic and social Opportunity (notice his capitalization of the

term), he does not think that education should aim at wealth. He bemoans that the attainment of wealth is even the ideal of public schooling; public schooling should aim rather at the pursuit of the transcendentals: “Truth, Beauty, and Goodness.”¹⁵

It is here that we begin to get a sense for Du Bois’ conception of the intrinsic goods of higher education. He describes in glowing terms the quality and content of the education provided by Atlanta University:

In a half-dozen classrooms they gather then,— here to follow the love song of Dido, here to listen to the tale of Troy divine; there to wander among the stars, there to wander among men and nations,—and elsewhere other well-worn ways of knowing this queer world. Nothing new, no time-saving devices,—simply old time-glorified methods of delving for Truth, and searching out the hidden beauties of life, and learning the good of living. The riddle of existence is the college curriculum that was laid before the pharaohs, that was taught in the groves by Plato, that formed the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, and is today laid before the freedman’s sons by Atlanta University.¹⁶

Notice again Du Bois’ invocation of the transcendentals as the end of education. Du Bois’ ideal university dismisses “progress”: his university neither utilizes new educational methods nor aims at the training of technically proficient workers for an industrialized labor market. It hews to what in Du Bois’ view are time-tested means of arriving at Truth, Goodness, and Beauty—ends truly worthy of a human life. He connects the medieval educational model based on the *trivium* and *quadrivium* to the sciences of the ancients. The connection between the knowledge of the pharaohs and that of the Greeks, and chiefly Plato,

12. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 61.

13. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 48-49.

14. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 50. A fuller discussion of the Veil is not possible in this context, but it is a crucial concept for Du Bois, describing the alienated separation of Black Americans from the broader white world but also from themselves.

15. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 57.

16. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 58.

is particularly striking, given that this connection is a key dimension of how the Greeks presented their own intellectual tradition. Finally, in Du Bois' account of the intrinsic goods of college, he suggests colleges are good not because of what they do for the economy, but only and ever because their one true goal is nothing less than facilitating students' discovery of the meaning of life: "The true college will ever have one goal,—not to earn meat, but to know the end and aim of that life which meat nourishes."¹⁷

**THE FINAL PRODUCT OF OUR TRAINING
MUST BE NEITHER A PSYCHOLOGIST NOR
A BRICKMASON, BUT A MAN**

But in like manner to the tension in Du Bois' pragmatic account of education, in which the university educated play a crucial role in elevating those without Opportunity and yet fail in many cases, we are here again met with a real tension. In his description of Atlanta University's excellence with respect to various other universities of the highest caliber—Harvard, Leipzig, Yale, and Columbia—Du Bois writes that his students possess "the determination to realize for men both black and white the broadest possibilities of life, to seek the better and the best, to spread with their own hands the Gospel of Sacrifice."¹⁸ Whereas above, Du Bois claims college aims at discovering the end of life, here, it aims at opening up the "broadest possibilities" of opportunity.

There is a further complication to Du Bois' picture, what he calls "the rule of inequality." It cannot be forgotten that "of the million black youth some were fitted to know and some to dig; that some had the talent and capacity of university men, and some the talent and capacity of blacksmiths; and that the true training meant neither that all should be college men nor all artisans..."¹⁹ Given this, Du Bois argues that the university-educated should be "missionaries" of

culture to those who lack such an education. Presumably, he hopes this will elevate everyone participating in this system to the highest level of intellectual attainment of which they are capable. Thus, the system of education Du Bois propounds includes within it a theory of human capacity which holds that not all are equally educable; Du Bois nevertheless thinks that the university plays a crucial role in the social uplift of those not educable to university standards by virtue of the services that the university-educated render as missionaries of culture to those beyond the academy.

Du Bois does attempt to synthesize his intrinsic and pragmatic accounts of the end of education. He writes as follows:

The final product of our training must be neither a psychologist nor a brickmason, but a man. And to make men we must have ideals, broad, pure, and inspiring ends of living,—not sordid money-getting, not apples of gold. The worker must work for the glory of his handiwork, not simply for pay; the thinker must think for the truth, not for fame. And all this is gained only by human strife and longing; by ceaseless training and education; by founding Right on righteousness and Truth on the unhampered search for Truth; by founding the common school on the university and the industrial school on the common school; and weaving thus a system not a distortion, bringing a birth not an abortion.²⁰

In this, Du Bois' clearest attempt to synthesize the two accounts we have to this point been describing, the university, he says, should produce *men*, which is to say, fully grown adults, in possession of their faculties, capable of self-mastery, pursuing the transcendentals, and cognizant of the glory being human. The workers will be educated in the common schools or industrial schools, both of which participate in the system of schools modeled on the university, and will thereby be raised to their full stature as well. In keeping with the aforementioned rule of inequality, this stature will differ from the stature of one who is capable of uni-

17. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 58-59.

18. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 59.

19. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 59.

20. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 60.

versity education, but it will be a glory to the person who works with his hands nonetheless. Still, Du Bois seems to take it for granted that, for example, modeling the common school on the university and the industrial school on the common school will produce the social results he wishes to produce—even if they are not capable of learning what universities teach, manual laborers can nevertheless be educated in a manner *modeled on* the education fit for intellectual elites. Such a thing the ancient figures Du Bois so admires never considered.

DU BOIS DOES ATTEMPT TO SYNTHESIZE HIS INTRINSIC AND PRAGMATIC ACCOUNTS OF THE END OF EDUCATION

Du Bois anticipates that this will contribute to Black American ascension above the Veil, each according to his capacity. But it is not at all obvious, given his commitments about human inequality concerning innate capacities, that what helps the intellectually capable ascend to the heights of the transcendentals will necessarily be the appropriate model for him who would become a master craftsman. And even if that is the appropriate model for becoming a master craftsman, since Du Bois thinks that attainment of the transcendentals is what lifts one above the Veil, it is not clear how the majority of men will be so lifted, since the majority of men will never be capable of that kind of intellectual attainment.²¹

There is a further difficulty. Du Bois is confident that classical education will produce the kind of person who pursues truth, goodness, and beauty; he also expects that an educational system hierarchically organized with the classical university at the top will produce certain social goods. But his own writing seems to suggest that common school education taught by those in the university does not necessarily produce such results. How, then, does Du Bois think the successful synthesis of his two visions of the university will be achieved?

Perhaps, when pressed along these lines, Du Bois would concede that there is an unresolved tension in his thought. In keeping with his softened posture later in life toward Washington's project, perhaps Du Bois might be willing to grant that what was needed to bring coherence to his educational model was a synthesis of his project with Washington's. Wrong to disparage "the picture of a lone black boy poring over a French grammar amid the weeds and dirt of a neglected home," perhaps Washington nevertheless recognized that for those not capable of personal communion with Marcus Aurelius above the Veil, it would be sufficient to maximize their economic prospects by emphasizing industrial education. If Du Bois were to grant this picture, he would be able to preserve his vision of the role of the intellectual elites with respect to those who were not intellectual elites—emissaries of culture and providers of visions of what might be—without expecting the university to produce an educational model fit for all.

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21. Du Bois and Oliver, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 61.

Stars

BY RHYS LAVERTY

The stars were constancy itself
to ancient eyes, the heavens' wealth
immutable in circuits.

The shifting stuff of earth below
all surely longed to up and go
reposing where the sun sits.

But lovers of the stars did find,
as planets opened to their minds,
that lines were looping oddly,
and perfect circles ever strayed
elliptical and retrograde;
so monks enquired, godly.

Their monkey fingers, well-peeled eyes,
and astrolabes, probed sneaking skies,
frustration ever mounting;
the sexagesimal old years
could not translate the rolling spheres,
into their human counting.

But even when Copernicus
revealed the sun was turning us
(news welcomed by the Pope then),
the stars could not retain their place
as changeless beacons out in space,
as things most apt for hoping.

For soon we learned that every day
they slip a little more away,
forever further fetching;
and all the maps that we have known
of heaven, set as if in stone,
we should in wax be etching.

One day on earth there may then be
a sailor on an unlit sea,
set for some destination,
who fathoms not how, at one time,
some pin-pricks in the air gave rhyme
to human navigation.

What else could we all but elect,
what better totem all erect,
to stand against devolving?
Yet even these, bright lights and still,
will spurn then turn and burn their fill,
and point past their revolving.

“Son of Man”: Vol. 1, *Early Jewish Literature*¹

BY RICHARD BAUCKHAM

REVIEWED BY ANDREW KOPERSKI

Some years ago now, I took an eye-opening course on “the Historical Jesus.” In this first real exposure to the world of New Testament Studies, many things caught my attention, not least that there seemed to be no aspect of the Historical Jesus that had not come up for high-pitched debate among scholars at some point. By my lights, among the most surprising of the controvertible items was the meaning of the term “Son of Man” as it appeared in the Gospel accounts and other biblical passages. To me, the issue had always seemed straightforward: the Gospel references to the “Son of Man” plainly alluded to the vision of Daniel 7, where “one like a son of man” (v. 13) receives power and honor from the more patently divine “Ancient of Days.” Jesus had obviously used this allusion to Daniel as a subtler alternative to “Messiah.” Case closed—or so I thought. In reality, the semantics of the “Son of Man,” as I soon discovered, came laden

with some hefty footnotes indeed, creating a rocky, uneven subfield of its own.

In the first entry of his two-volume project, “*Son of Man*,” Richard Bauckham looks to pave a straight path through this terrain with his bulldozer of choice: greater and painstakingly close attention to the primary sources. Most of the evidence examined in this first volume hails from the Second-Temple period or the decades immediately thereafter; the second book will consider Jesus and the Gospels themselves. To put the overarching thesis of Volume One as concisely as possible, Bauckham posits that the “Son of Man”—if there even can be said to be a unitary figure in the ancient Jewish imagination—never held divine status in the eyes of our sources.

Bauckham focuses the whole first half of this book on the so-called Parables of Enoch. From there, he marches systematically through other crucial primary sources such as the Old Greek (i.e., in this particular

1. Richard Bauckham. “*Son of Man*,” *Volume One: Early Jewish Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. Hardcover. 447 pp. \$44.99.

case, what we often if somewhat vaguely call the “Septuagint”) of Daniel 7, 4 Ezra, the early rabbis, and even Josephus. For each of these texts wherein the “Son of Man” appears or where one finds strong allusions to Daniel 7, Bauckham argues that the figure is exactly what the Semitic idiom would suggest on its face. Namely, the “Son of Man” indicates a human being, a special human being perhaps, but not a divine personage and certainly not an extension of Israel’s God.

**IN A FEW PLACES, BAUCKHAM’S
TOTALIZING THESIS SEEMS
LIKE A STRETCH**

While Bauckham’s style and organization are relatively clear and unhindered by needless complexity, casual readers may still not find this to be the easiest of reads from cover to cover. Technical and replete with information throughout, many chapters feel more like a connected, streamlined elaboration of notes (an impression confirmed by the preface where Bauckham describes the project’s origins as such). Other sections—especially later in the book—take a more conventional, less compressed form. Many chapters provide helpful tables at their conclusion, which put side-by-side the main literary passages at issue for the given chapter. Readers might find it helpful to read these block quotations of the primary sources *first* before reading the unfolding chapter. Likewise, for the book’s first half devoted to the Parables of Enoch, those unfamiliar with the text would do well to read through this entry in the Enochian corpus before delving fully into Bauckham’s analysis.

For this reviewer—conversant but not a specialist in these areas—the main thrust of Bauckham’s argument strikes home. In any case, he seems to have shown that it was not at all common or natural for ancient Jews to envision a divine Son of Man. At some points, however, Bauckham’s granular analysis feels overreaching or strained in support of his rather absolute claim that *no* Jews on record ever conceived of the Son of Man this way. One example: in considering the Old Greek ver-

sion of Daniel 7, Bauckham attempts to refute the more straightforward interpretation of Benjamin Reynolds, who has found on linguistic and thematic grounds that this Greek translation assimilated the Son of Man to the “Ancient of Days” in that same passage and to the God of Israel as described throughout the Old Testament.² When, for instance, the Old Greek seems to say that the “Son of Man was present *as* an Ancient of Days,” Bauckham makes an extended linguistic argument that optimal Greek syntax does not support this English rendering. Philologist though I am not, the Old Greek does not strike me as especially pristine Greek in the first place, such that it may be ill-suited to sustain the finer syntactical parsing Bauckham employs to sidestep the inconvenient but (in my view) more natural reading of Reynolds. Here and in a few other places, Bauckham’s rather totalizing thesis seems like a stretch.

And this leads naturally to a larger question for the reader: why does Bauckham seem so keen to ward off any notion of divinity from the Son of Man in the first place? What are the deeper theological stakes to his argument? Boiled down, the “Son of Man” constitutes part of a broader debate about whether Jesus was unique and unanticipated—or not. While this observation does not concern an explicit focus of the book, Bauckham’s interest in this issue is worth considering for a moment.

Modern (and ancient) Christian preachers and readers can vacillate between understandable impulses in both directions. On the one hand, we wish to preserve a sense of the continuity and prophetic nature of Scripture, by maintaining that the incarnation is anticipated in the Old Testament, in places such as Daniel 7, the Psalms, or Isaiah. The “mystery” and “irresolution” of such passages prior to the coming of Christ is a common feature of much contemporary preaching. But if ancient Jews had for centuries been discussing and expecting a divine or quasi-divine Son of Man to come and fulfill God’s plan for history, then Jesus and the earliest Christians may merely seem to be appropri-

2. Benjamin E. Reynolds, “The ‘One Like a Son of Man’ According to the Old Greek of Daniel 7,13-14,” *Biblica* 89, no. 1 (2008): 70–80.

ating a long-standing, common eschatological motif in Judaism. Subsequently, the claim that Jesus was both God and human loses much of its surprising zest; other Jews conceivably might have made similar claims about themselves, and the whole idea starts looking more like cultural background radiation in ancient Judaism.

Conversely, in the alternative perspective, Jesus' divine status is historically startling, unforeseen, and (in a sense) revelatory. This too is a mainstay of much of Christian preaching—the uniqueness of the incarnation, and the scandal of the Word made flesh. In turn, the “scandal” helps make sense of data points such as John 5:18, where mere impolitic hints of Jesus' divine origins are enough to anger some of his fellow Jews. If the idea of a Jewish God-man was not scandalously novel, it seems odd that it could provoke as much zeal as it did.

This nettlesome question of Jewish continuity in Christianity's origins then seems very much a case of “damned if you do, damned if you don't.” Take a silly illustration. Had the story been that Jesus beamed down to Augustus' empire speaking not Aramaic but something called “Klingon,” teaching not about the law of Moses and the kingdom of God but the precepts of someone called “Kahless,” critics ancient and modern would justly complain that the whole yarn was so unprecedented, novel, and *non sequitur* that it was clearly nonsense spun from an overactive imagination. Indeed, such things have been said in real life against religious movements such as the Latter Day Saints. For Christianity's claims to be weighed with any seriousness, we would all demand there to be at least *some* noticeable continuity on certain points of thought and terminology with ancient Judaism.

For a less fanciful comparison, we could look to the specific claim of Jesus' resurrection: if ancient people generally or Jews specifically thought people often did come back with revived bodies, then the story might start to look awfully less like history and more like folktale, the sort of thing that evoked into-the-sleeve laughter from a Cicero or a Plutarch. Then again, even the most devout, persuaded Christians would

not say the resurrection was wholly unforeseen: hints, pre-echoes, “types,” and the general resurrection itself all appear in the Old Testament (though resurrection was, of course, one of the principal disagreements between the Pharisees and Sadducees, which was itself linked to the broader debate over which books were authoritative).

Similarly, one could argue that the anticipation or non-anticipation of the divine Son of Man does not especially affect the force or credibility of the early Christian *kerygma* in either direction. Suppose some Hellenistic Jews, after many years pouring over texts such as the Torah, Isaiah, Daniel, and the Psalms, had begun to suspect that the coming Son of Man would be something more than a human being. Would that really detract from the claims about Jesus? Indeed, at some points, Bauckham's own readings of the various versions of the Son of Man almost seem to walk right up to this very reconstruction and stare it in the face: the Son of Man, we are told, is often a human agent returned from the scriptural past (e.g., Enoch, Joshua, Elijah) now invested with God's power and authority, who might even appear to sit on God's own throne itself. Is it really such a surprise that the early Christians would be willing to push the theological envelope just a bit further?

Most of that, however, concerns a meta-issue hovering over the book and much less a break in the real bones of its reasoning. Altogether, I sense Bauckham has still far and away achieved his main objective. “*Son of Man's*” first volume will become an essential bibliographic entry on this topic, and so too on the Parables of Enoch. One suspects, however, that the sequel will prove even more important and perhaps controversial. For that reason, this reviewer awaits Volume Two with anticipation.

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*Christology and Metaphysics in the Seventeenth Century*¹

BY RICHARD CROSS

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL J. LYNCH

As the name of the book would suggest, Richard Cross' recent volume on seventeenth century Christology focuses on one of the many metaphysical curiosities related to the incarnate Christ, namely, the metaphysics of the incarnation itself. More particularly, *how* the Word or divine hypostasis of the Son assumed a human nature—what is the underlying logic or metaphysics of the hypostatic union itself? This volume comes on the heels of two earlier works by Cross, the *Metaphysics of the Incarnation: From Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus* (2003) and the *Communicatio Idiomatum: Reformation Christological Debates* (2019). Accordingly, as Cross admits, much of the terminology and concepts employed in this most recent volume are introduced in the prior works.

Speaking of terminology, *Christology and Metaphysics in the Seventeenth Century* is heavy sledding, requiring a comfort with Aristotelian metaphysics along with all the requisite classical Christological language used by scholastics in the medieval and early modern period. Cross traces how these philosophical and theological concepts were employed by Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed theologians to intelligibly explain the incarnation. According to Cross' taxonomy, seventeenth century theologians fell into two broad camps. Some, following Scotus, held to what he calls a "union theory" of incarnation, which held that in order for the person of the Son to be united to human nature, there was a necessary, created metaphysical tie (as it were) which bound the two together, the tie typically identified as a dependence relation. The other position, following Thomas Aquinas (cf. *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 2 q. 2 a. 2), called a "communion theory," posited that such a created tie was unnecessary or even impossible, and instead held that the only two items necessary for the union are simply the divine person (or nature)

1. *Christology and Metaphysics in the Seventeenth Century* by Richard Cross. Oxford University Press, 2022. xxii + 333pp. \$105.00. Hardcover.

and human nature. Cross explains the latter theory like two pieces of Velcro which simply attach to each other without the need of a bonding agent. In the medieval period, Scotus' union position became the majority position and continued to be the default position during the early modern period. However, because of Tommaso de Vio Cajetan's sixteenth century defense of Thomas' communion theory, many Thomists adopted the latter position, but not all.

**SEMINARIES AND THEOLOGICAL
INSTITUTIONS HAVE NOT ADEQUATELY
PREPARED THEIR STUDENTS TO READ
SUCH A BOOK AS THIS**

There are a few rather surprising theological narratives offered by Cross. One is the fact that many Thomists in the seventeenth century—including the Salmanticenses and long-time professor at Salamanca, Pedro de Godoy—preferred the union theory over the Thomistic communion one. Of course, one of the ways such Thomists argued for their union theory was by reinterpreting Thomas, wherein the latter's *prima facie* denial of union theory was, in fact, not a denial at all! Needless to say, Cross finds such hermeneutical gymnastics less than convincing. Another important early modern development for Scotus' union theory was the Jesuit Francisco Suarez's rejection of Scotus' categorical relation as the bond between the divine person and human nature, opting instead for a mode of subsistence in the human nature as the uniting bond.

Equally interesting is how committed the Lutherans were to Aquinas' communion theory. All of the Lutherans surveyed in the book opt for a communion theory, most coupling that with Johannes Brenz's *homo assumptus* Christology, which Cross argues strains classical Chalcedonian orthodoxy, sounding Nestorian and leading to the so-called *genus maiesticum*, whereby divine attributes are predicated of Christ's human nature. The last few chapters of the book are dedicated to the later Lutheran understanding of the *communicatio id-*

iomatum, and how such semantics compared with the Catholic and Reformed theologians.

Because of the Christological polemics among the Reformed and Lutherans, it is no surprise that these two groups consistently found themselves on opposite ends of the two theories. Accordingly, the Reformed, at least if Cross is right, almost always opted for some version of a union theory, with Amandus Polanus being a notable exception. Consonant with my own observation of early modern Reformed theology, Cross observes that the Reformed generally avoided discussions of Christological metaphysics. His survey of the Reformed tradition did leave me a bit perplexed. I have a hard time believing his claim that Polanus is such an outlier by taking communion theory. If Polanus held it, there almost certainly are more. Cross may have found more diversity among the Reformed tradition had his survey gone beyond those theologians who fit within the Swiss or Dutch orbit and looked at the Bremen faculty, especially Mattaeus Martinus' comprehensive *Theologia De Unica Domini Nostri Jesu Christi Persona*, or the faculty at Saumur in France. Perhaps he did check those sources and found nothing noteworthy.

The Reformed theologians Cross does examine are Antonius Walaeus, Samuel Maresius, Francis Turretin, Heinrich Alting, Petrus Van Mastricht, Johannes Wollebius, Friedrich Heidegger, Marcus Wendelin, and David Pareus. In a tantalizing footnote, Cross also notes Edward Leigh's affirmation of a substantial mode of union belonging to the human nature attending the hypostatic union. Unfortunately, he could not find any other Reformed theologians taking this Suarezian union approach. Another noteworthy find is Van Mastricht's wholesale denial of the *enhypostasis* of Christ's human nature. According to Van Mastricht, Christ's human nature hypostatically depends upon Christ's divine nature—and in that sense the former is anhypostatic—but in no way is the divine subsistence communicated to the human nature. Were the divine nature's subsistence communicated to the divine subsistence, then Christ's human nature would become a person and divinized, both of which effects are clearly deemed heretical options. Cross' assessment of van Mastricht is decidedly positive: "I must confess that I find myself very sympathetic to Mastricht's approach."

Cross also covers three conciliarists between the Reformed and Lutheran Christological debates, the two Englishman, Joseph Hall and Richard Hooker, and the famous philosopher G.W. Leibniz.

As I noted at the beginning, this book is not an easy read. Indeed, as I read it, I was reminded of Suarez's introduction to his *Metaphysical Disputations*: "It is impossible to become a fully-formed theologian unless one has first laid secure foundations with metaphysics." Seminaries and theological institutions more generally in my experience have not adequately prepared their students to read such a book as this. To be sure, it does not help that Cross depends on his own terminology developed in his earlier studies on Christology. Cross admits as much at the beginning of this volume, including a glossary of such terms. However, the chief hurdle is that such theologians with whom Cross engages are steeped in a nearly forgotten Aristotelian metaphysical linguistic world, writing in a foreign language hardly anyone has mastery of today. Cross is clearly an expert of both and thus can engage these theologians, but it remains that such a book will only

be fruitful to those who have the theological as well as philosophical chops to distinguish between *esse* and essence, follow various medieval positions on predication, and have some skill with the Latin language.

Cross is not to blame for our educational malaise. *Christology and Metaphysics in the Seventeenth Century* is an impressive volume befitting the publisher. Cross carefully moves through a dizzying array of thinkers. Those looking for a particular discussion issue will be well-served by the very helpful index in the back. The price of the work is as one would expect, but in this case the content is certainly worth it.

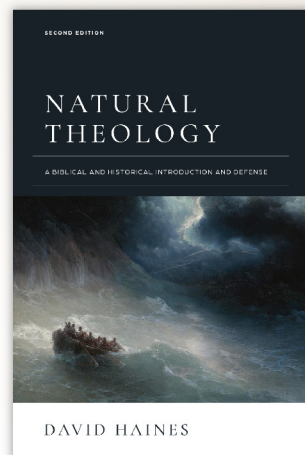
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*Social Conservatism for the Common Good*¹

EDITED BY ANDREW T. WALKER

REVIEWED BY BRAD LITTLEJOHN

Few book genres are as promising, or as regularly disappointing, as that of the festschrift. Conceptually, it seems like an easy win: take an eminent scholar, nearing the end of a long career, and collect a dozen or so of his most eminent students, friends, and colleagues to offer a respectful engagement with his work. Such a book is sure to feature some scholarly heavy-hitters, covering a range of important topics, offering illuminating perspectives on the life's work of the honored scholar. And yet, so often they fall flat. The essay topics are scattered and unfocused, with half the contributors taking the opportunity to expound their own pet projects. Out of respect for the honoree, critical engagement is often minimal, limiting the value of the conversation. And the secondhand summaries of a great scholar's contributions often turn out to be less clear and less engaging than just reading the scholar in his own words.

Thankfully, Andrew Walker's recently edited collection, *Social Conservatism for the Common Good: A Protestant Engagement with Robert P. George* avoids most of these pitfalls, offering instead a wonderful gateway to the extraordinary life, work, and Christian witness of perhaps the greatest Christian public intellectual of our time. This is partly, perhaps, because it isn't exactly a festschrift, as the subtitle suggests. An ordinary festschrift for such an eminent Catholic moral philosopher, after all, would feature a star-studded cast of mostly Catholic contributors. What Walker offers us, though, is something much more interesting: an engagement with George's new natural law theory and jurisprudence offered entirely from the ranks of evangelical Protestants. As such, the book offers a valuable barometer of just how far Protestants have come (and how far we still need to go) in engaging these critical fields of moral philosophy and philosophy of law.

For most of the latter twentieth century, Protestants certainly made their presence known in the Ameri-

1. *Review of Social Conservatism for the Common Good: A Protestant Engagement with Robert P. George*. Edited by Andrew T. Walker, foreword by Ben Sasse. Crossway, 2023. 400pp. \$18.99.

can public square, but their sophomoric contributions tended to generate more heat than light. Skeptical of reason and schooled in apocalypticism, most failed to develop the philosophical or rhetorical toolkits to engage debates over abortion, marriage, and the purposes of government with any degree of sophistication, alienating their opponents more often than they persuaded them. Into this intellectual vacuum stepped conservative Catholics such as John Finnis and Robert George, taking clear intellectual leadership of social conservatism by the turn of the millennium, and providing nearly all the key arguments in the battle against same-sex marriage.

THE BOOK OFFERS A VALUABLE BAROMETER OF JUST HOW FAR PROTESTANTS HAVE COME IN ENGAGING MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHY OF LAW

However, the last quarter century, for all its political and cultural setbacks, has witnessed two very promising developments. The first is a thawing of relations between Catholics and evangelical Protestants, who are more likely to consider one another estranged brethren than heretics, and who regularly seek to learn from one another. The second is a rapid Protestant recovery of natural law discourse, a recognition that not only are such philosophical tools critical for cultural engagement, but they are a deep part of our own theological heritage, securing the continuity of creation and redemption. This book is a powerful testament to both trends. The mere fact that Walker was able to assemble a team of fourteen evangelical scholars to engage George's work so perceptively (and that it would be easy to think of a half-dozen others who could have contributed equally well had space permitted) is proof that Protestant moral and political philosophy is in a state of rapid revival. And the warm appreciation that all fifteen contributors show to George himself and his work suggests a return to an earlier era, one when Protestant scholars regularly cited and drew upon Catholic

philosophers and theologians, rather than hiding behind confessional walls.

To be sure, the book still shows that Protestants have some ways to go. Aside from articulating a general sense that George's view of reason is a little too rosy and his reliance on Scripture a bit too minimal, few of the essays make much effort to tease out the substantive and methodological differences between Protestant and Catholic moral theology. Nor do most contributors show more than the barest grasp of the contours of the fierce debate between the "new natural law" and "old natural law" theories that is now well into its fourth decade. Among Catholic philosophers, this debate has reached a very high level of sophistication, shedding considerable light on questions of anthropology, philosophical method, and the nature of moral experience. Although some essays, such as Andrew Walker's own, do offer some helpful orientations to this debate, one gets the sense that most of the contributors to this volume are not yet philosophically competent to engage it in any detail.

One might also complain that the festschrift-y-ness of the volume does still tend to limit the scope of critical engagement. Most authors are exceedingly respectful toward George, offering only the gentlest pushback. Several key questions are left entirely unasked in these essays. Three in particular would've made for a much richer discussion.

First, none of the contributors ask whether or not the framework of "rights," which has been so central to George's legal philosophy and public engagement, needs reconsidering in light of the anarchic and subjectivist tendencies of rights-language over the last century. Important challenges to this framework have come not only from George's Catholic critics such as Patrick Deneen but from leading Protestant moral theologians like Oliver O'Donovan and Nigel Biggar. Ultimately, I think George's uses of the natural rights concept mostly withstands such challenges, but it's certainly a conversation worth having.

Second, very few of the essays take note of the "elephant in the room": if George's work as a public in-

tellectual is so powerful and persuasive, both in terms of its philosophical rigor and rhetorical winsomeness, why does it seem to have failed so spectacularly over the last three decades? Of course, to ask this question is not to suggest that George himself, or any of his comrades, need take the blame for this failure. Perhaps we simply needed more Christians with their courage and cogency, and *Obergefell* might have turned out differently. Still, it seems likely that we are facing cultural deformities deeper than failures of public reason or wise jurisprudence, deformities that no amount of sophisticated new natural law arguments will be able to repair. I'd have liked to see at least a couple of the essays grappling more fully with the limitations of George's form of public intellectual witness, and what other forms of witness might complement it.

Third, it is worth asking more insistently just how much George's commitment to classical liberalism is consistent with the earlier Christian moral and political tradition upon which he draws. To be sure, George's liberalism is a very modest form, rejecting Rawlsian neutrality and the absurd notion that you can keep morality out of law. Micah Watson's essay, with its fine exposition of George's 1993 *Making Men Moral*, may surprise some New Right Christians who have been led to think of George as some kind of socially conservative libertarian. He is clearly no such thing. That said, there are still some fault lines here. He and his allies like to cite Thomas Aquinas's observation that human law cannot punish every vice or promote every virtue, but there is a subtle difference between Aquinas and most modern advocates of free speech and religious freedom. Aquinas recognizes that in any society there will be barriers to the pursuit of public virtue and one will have to compromise with the realities on the ground—indeed, he (in)famously gives the example of prostitution as an evil one may have to tolerate. But he does not say that there are certain classes of evil, like blasphemy, which should *always* be tolerated; much less does he indulge in Millian raptures about the ways that a space for free debate and inquiry will always advance the cause of truth, as George and his allies sometimes seem to. Don't get me wrong; old-fashioned liberalism may indeed be an advance on Thomistic communitarianism, an advance for which Protestantism can take

some credit, but there is at least a difference there that deserves some hashing out.

All three of these concerns, I should add, are areas in which George has been taken to task (indeed, to the woodshed in some cases) by his "post-liberal" Catholic critics such as Patrick Deneen, and parallel debates are taking place now within Protestant ranks. That said, those skeptical of George's form of winsome, reasoned public engagement based on rational common ground, might be surprised by some of what they find in *Social Conservatism for the Common Good*.

For one thing, critics would complain that folks like George, comfortably ensconced at elite institutions, simply don't understand how hostile the culture is becoming—don't understand just how much we live in what Aaron Renn has called "Negative World." Of course, this is silly—if anyone understands what Negative World is like, it's going to be Christians like George who have spent their careers at the heart of highly secular progressive institutions. And sure enough, in a striking passage from a 2014 speech that Walker quotes in his introduction, George declared, "To be a witness to the gospel today is to make oneself a marked man or woman. It is to expose oneself to scorn and reproach" (7). George's style of public engagement, far from being designed for a neutral world in which Christianity is treated indulgently, is intended precisely for a world in which Christians find themselves subjected to a withering barrage of political, intellectual, and cultural opposition, and must learn how to fight smart and yes, winsomely.

Fighting smart means knowing whom *not* to fight, or when to cultivate friendship even in the midst of important battles. Perhaps the most powerful essay in the book, then, is Paul Miller's "Partners in Truth Seeking," dedicated to describing and understanding the remarkable two-decade-long friendship between Robert George and Cornel West. From all we read in the media about the depth of political polarization, friendships just aren't supposed to be able to cross such ideological boundaries anymore. And yet George and West's friendship is no mere charade for the cameras, or a matter of polite academic respect for a worthy ad-

versary; it is a deep spiritual and intellectual bond on which both men have come to rely for mutual support and sharpening. “True friendship,” writes Miller, “is a spiritual discipline, an antidote to what ails our democracy and our universities, and an answer to the plight of loneliness that many people experience in contemporary culture. George and West did not become friends for these purposes, but their friendship shows a path forward for our spiritual, cultural, and political good” (280).

Not only in this friendship, but in his towering intellectual achievements, his unflappable optimism, his perseverance amidst adversity and defeat, and his unshakeable commitment to the ideal of *persuasion* in a culture that has increasingly despaired of it, Robert

George shows a path forward for our spiritual, cultural, and political good. *Social Conservatism for the Common Good* offers a compelling introduction to that path, and I hope it will inspire many Protestant readers to take up and read George’s work, and learn from his example of cultural leadership.

Bradford Littlejohn is the founder and president of the Davenant Institute, and a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center. He is recognized as a leading scholar of the English theologian Richard Hooker and has published and lectured extensively in the fields of Reformation history, Christian ethics, and political theology. He lives in Landrum, SC, with his wife, Rachel, and four children.

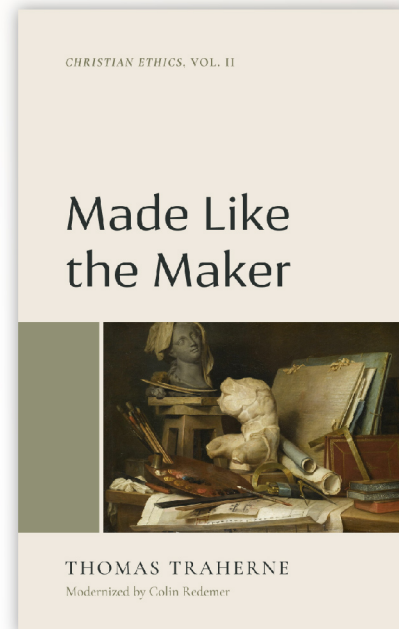
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