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“ENLIGHTEN MY MIND IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST”:

EVANGELICALISM AND ENLIGHTENMENT AT THE CAMBUSLANG REVIVAL, 1742

BY MOSES BRATRUD

What has Evangelicalism to do with the life of the mind? Christians, and critics of Christianity, have been asking this question since Evangelicalism first developed into its modern form in the early eighteenth century. The Victorian critic Leslie Stephen wrote that Evangelicals possess “a form of faith which has no charms for thinkers.”¹ More recently, Mark Noll offered an indictment no less severe, writing, “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.”² Long before Stephen or Noll put pen to paper, David Hume summed up the attitude of his generation toward evangelicals, commonly called “enthusiasts.” For Hume, the religious enthusiast rejects “human reason” and “delivers himself over, blindly, and without reserve, to the supposed illapses [inflowing] of the spirit, and to inspiration from above. Hope, pride, presumption, a warm imagination, together with ignorance, are, therefore, the true sources of Enthusiasm.”³

1. Thomas Ahnert, *The Moral Culture of the Scottish Enlightenment, 1690–1805* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 15.

2. Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 3.

3. David Hume, “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” *Essays, Moral and Political*, 1741, <https://davidhume.org/texts/emp/full>.

But Stephen and Hume are mistaken. There is an evangelical mind, it has great appeal to “thinkers,” and it by no means rejects “human reason.” The study of Evangelicalism before 1900 makes clear that

its rich intellectual heritage dates to its earliest days. Unfortunately, the intellectual dimensions of evangelicalism have sometimes been forgotten or dismissed, by evangelicals and their critics alike (which, really, is Noll’s point). A study of Scotland’s largest eighteenth-century revival will reveal many of the commonly known hallmarks of Evangelicalism while also demonstrating Evangelicalism’s surprising commonalities with the most influential intellectual movement of its time: the Enlightenment.



THE OLD PARISH CHURCH IN CAMBUSLANG, SCOTLAND

Neither Evangelicalism nor Enlightenment as such began in Scotland, but I contend that Scotland was the place where these two phenomena first met. Evangelicalism was arguably not present in other Enlightenment strongholds (France, Prussia), while the Scottish Enlightenment was far more developed than in other areas where Evangelicalism was taking off in the eighteenth century (England, New England). The unique circumstances of Scotland’s Cambuslang revival can teach us lessons about the interplay of vigorous intellectual output and vibrant Evangelical spirituality. How

do these forces conflict? How can they be reconciled? Eighteenth-century Scotland can help us answer our questions.

. . .

A phenomenon of heightened religious experience gripped the inhabitants of Cambuslang in the Scottish Lowlands in 1742. What would become known as the “Cambuslang Wark” culminated on August 12, with the largest open-air revival in Scottish history at the “conversion brae,” a rolling hill outside Cambuslang that forms a natural amphitheater. Between 20,000-30,000 people were present for George Whitefield’s preaching, and about 1,700 received tokens to take Communion. For participants and many observers, it was an answer to fervent prayer and a manifestation of the Holy Spirit’s power. The parish minister at Cambuslang, William McCulloch, collected written accounts from hundreds of people attesting that their lives had been transformed through the revival work. For others, however, Cambuslang was an outbreak of dangerous and manipulative religious “enthusiasm.”

Differing perceptions of the Cambuslang revival arose out of differing attitudes within the Scottish national Kirk. In Scotland, in contrast to some countries on the European continent, Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment were both largely ecclesial movements, their ideas disseminating among the black gowns and white collars of the Scottish clergy. Unlike in France, where the anti-clericalism of Voltaire and others led eventually to the storming of churches and ultimate disestablishment, the Scottish Enlightenment led to larger and grander churches and a learned, “Moderate” ecclesiastical elite with a firm grip on the reigns of churchly power.

Clerical reactions to the events at Cambuslang provide a window into broader shifts within Scotland’s—and the Anglophone world’s—religious culture. A flurry of pamphlets published at Edinburgh and Glasgow attacking and defending the revival from various angles shows that the events at Cambuslang were extremely important to contemporaries. The Cambuslang Wark, in fact, revealed a cultural fault-line that would divide the Scottish church: between the Enlightened “Moderates” and “Evangelicals”—both, in their own ways, products of new intellectual movements in the eighteenth century.

The Moderates who took part in what Thomas Ahnert has called the “religious Enlightenment” of the Church of Scotland had no place for “enthusiasm,” the belief that direct communication with God was possible.⁴ As seen above, David Hume had made his views on enthusiasm clear only the previous year, and though we tend to think of Hume as a “secular” figure, he had deep friendships with Scottish churchmen, and his sentiments were shared by most figures of the “religious Enlightenment” in Scotland, the majority of whom were clergymen.⁵

4. Ahnert, 10-11.

5. These included Dugald Stewart, William Robertson, and John Playfair. Cf. the pioneering work of the historian Richard B. Sher, especially in his *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment*.

But the enlightened Moderate clergymen had a new force to contend with in the mid-eighteenth century: open-air preaching and revivals that tested religious institutions. Evangelicalism’s Great Awakening had begun.⁶ This movement started in colonial America and spread throughout the British Isles between 1730 and 1750. Although “Enlightenment” is often seen as a competitor of revival, in the Anglophone world there were important commonalities. The influence of the Enlightenment on Jonathan Edwards, the doyen of eighteenth-century Evangelicalism, is well-attested.⁷ But the Enlightenment was also near at hand for the thousands who walked from Glasgow and even Edinburgh to participate in the revival at Cambuslang, such as John Erskine.

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Erskine was a student at Edinburgh University when he witnessed the revival. The son and grandson of prominent Scottish gentlemen, he studied law before switching to divinity, in part because of his revival experience: “I went to Cambuslang on Saturday [August 11, 1742]. The place where their tent [covered preaching stand] was, the most commodious for hearing ever I saw...It was reckoned there were 20,000 there that day, but I’m certain a voice near as good as Mr. Whitefield’s could have reached a greater number had they been there.”⁸ On the following Monday, Erskine entered McCulloch’s

own dining room, where more than twenty people were assembled in the “deepest distress.” He writes that it was “impossible for any that saw them to doubt the reality of their concern...What they seemed most affected with was the sin of unbelief, and a sense of the hardness and perverseness of their hearts. Some of them were so overpoured with grief that they could not speak.”⁹

Erskine’s reasoned defense of the revival, which appeared in his pamphlet *The Signs of the Times Consider’d* in late 1742, is particularly noteworthy.¹⁰ It is a point-by-point refutation of the skeptical attacks which were already being directed at the Cambuslang revival. But in defending Whitefield and McCulloch’s work, Erskine did not accept the validity of the testimonies of revival participants simply because they were expressed in religious terms. He writes that “there may be foolish virgins, mixed with the wise.”¹¹ For Erskine and Scotsmen sympathetic to the Cambuslang Wark, it was important to portray the revival as “orderly and rational” rather than “enthusiastic,” in the words of Erskine’s most recent biographer.¹²

6. “Modern” Evangelicalism is understood to have arisen in the 1730s along with the transatlantic wave of revivalism. The term is notoriously difficult to define, especially in modern contexts, but for our purposes evangelicalism is religion that emphasizes (1) religious experience, which provided evidence from the senses for the truths of religion, and (2) personal sanctity, within or outside traditional confessional boundaries.

7. Josh Moody, *Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment: Knowing the Presence of God* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005).

8. Jonathan Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism: The Life and Thought of John Erskine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 33.

9. Yeager, 33.

10. John Erskine, *The Signs of the Times Consider’d: Or, The High Probability, that the present Appearances in New-England and the West of Scotland, are a Prelude of the Glorious Things promised to the Church in the latter Ages* (Edinburgh: T. Lumisden and J. Robertson, 1742).

11. Yeager, 35. A reference to the Parable of the Ten Virgins in Matthew 25:1-13.

12. Yeager, 36.

The Cambuslang revival needed defenders. Hume's essay on enthusiasm could not have been far from the minds of Moderate clergymen suspicious of Whitefield and revivalism. A heated argument over the revival's validity broke out among pamphleteers publishing at Edinburgh and Glasgow and dueling for the attention of literate Scots. There were three main viewpoints: (1) For Erskine and the revival participant Rev. Alexander Webster, the Wark was a genuine outpouring of God's Spirit resulting in real conversion and repentance; (2) for some clergy, the revival was invalid and Whitefield was a fraud (he was, after all, an Anglican priest, not a Presbyterian minister)—thus, the Wark was indeed of supernatural origin, but diabolical rather than divine;¹³ (3) a third perspective, in contemporary pamphlets and later written accounts, must be teased out at more length.

For Moderates within the church, the events of Cambuslang were indeed disorderly, but not the work of the devil. Instead, they were caused by unscrupulous ministers (and their assistants) who worked the common people up into a frenzy, and exploited the decidedly non-spiritual phenomena of mass hysteria and delusion for their own profit. This passage from the first known pamphlet to attack the Cambuslang revival is typical for a hostile description of Whitefield's preaching:

[T]he speaker delivers himself, with the greatest vehemence both of voice and gesture, and in the most frightful language his genius will allow of. If this has the intended effect upon one or two weak women, the shrieks catch from one to another, till a great part of the congregation is affected; and some are in the thought, that it may be too common for those zealous in the new Way to cry out themselves, on purpose to move others, and bring forward a general scream...being told such things were arguments for the extraordinary presence of the Holy Ghost with them.¹⁴

Ministers under the influence of Whitefield and others changed their preaching styles to take into account the winds of revival issuing from New England, sometimes with dramatic results. But the evangelical appeal to new birth through a harrowing process of conversion was not the only new preaching movement in the Kirk.¹⁵ Elizabeth Mure of Caldwell notes a change around this time among students of divinity, who were "falling in with the English fashionable way of

13. Charles Chauncy, *A letter from a gentleman in Boston, to Mr. George Wishart, One of the Ministers of Edinburgh, Concerning the State of Religion in New-England* (Edinburgh: 1742).

14. *A Letter from a gentleman in Scotland, to his friend in New-England. Containing an account of Mr. Whitefield's reception and conduct in Scotland, the two visits he made there; and also of the work at Cambuslang, and other parts: wherein many mistakes, relating to these things, that have been formerly and lately transmitted to this country, are rectified, and the whole affair set in a true and impartial light* (Boston: T. Fleet, 1743), 12-13.

15. Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971), 18.

preaching...And love to call grace virtue...which differs much from our good old way in this Church."¹⁶ To "call grace virtue" was to deny the doctrine of original sin and to assert human perfectibility. This was a common theme for thinkers like Francis Hutcheson and for the clergymen who, under Hutcheson's influence, formed the "religious Enlightenment."¹⁷

Evangelicalism and Enlightened moderation: these two movements—one dedicated to making Christian belief and practice rational and modern, and the other focused on the emotional resonance of being miraculously born again through God's Holy Spirit—seemed destined to clash with one another. But there were also harmonies between these different expressions of Scottish Christianity in the eighteenth century, and they could be found at Cambuslang.

The best example of this is Rev. McCulloch's remarkable *Examinations*, the written accounts he collected from many whose hearts were changed during the revival. The *Examinations* has been called Scotland's first oral history because it presents the experiences of common people in their own words.¹⁸ The narratives are intensely compelling even today, but McCulloch's exhaustive work recording and validating these religious experiences is the most striking thing about them. His immense regard for truth led him to present the Cambuslang conversion accounts in their untutored plausibility, with few embellishments.

McCulloch defended the reasonableness of the seemingly miraculous events at Cambuslang simply by letting firsthand accounts speak for themselves.

In one account, a young man speaks of falling into a "trance" while at the Lord's table, where Christ shows His wounds which "He had suffered for me, in satisfying Justice." Speaking of a "trance" would have confirmed the dark suspicions of anti-revivalists, and this is perhaps why McCulloch or another redactor emended the "trance" from the main narrative. However, in the same account, the young man hopes that Christ, "in his own due time, [would] enlighten my mind in the Knowledge of Christ..."¹⁹ We see, then, that the narratives feature displays of such emotional intensity that modern readers, to say nothing of moderate clergymen, are made uncomfortable. And yet, many of the narratives beseech God for the "knowledge of Christ." This hunger for knowledge, although it is expressed in religious terms, is *reasonable*—it is, after all, a request for "enlightenment."

16. Fawcett, 15.

17. Ahnert, 1.

18. Keith Edward Beebe and the Scottish History Society, *The McCulloch Examinations of the Cambuslang Revival (1742): A Critical Edition: Conversion Narratives from the Scottish Evangelical Awakening* (Woodbridge, UK: Scottish History Society, 2013), xxii.

19. Beebe, 212-14.



A CARTOON, ENTITLED "ENTHUSIASM DISPLAY'D," DEPICTING GEORGE WHITEFIELD PREACHING (1739)

For this reason, McCulloch, Erskine, and others were not altogether mistaken when they defended the revival as a *reasonable* occurrence. Pushed by pamphlets attacking the revival, the revivalists vigorously fought back, seeking to prove the success of the revival by winning over members of the literate Scottish public. Such was the scale of the revival that most Scots would have been familiar with it, and indeed the near-term success of the revival can be inferred from the fact that it was so threatening to Moderates within the Kirk.

Though the Enlightenment *per se* in Scotland was at this point confined to the “high culture” of universities and well-read gentry clergymen, the Cambuslang revival was defended in terms that prefigured the Scottish Enlightenment philosophy of common-sense “realism,” as David Bebbington argues:

This realism, or common-sense view, allowed that certain basic axioms of thought are grasped intuitively. It enabled Evangelicals to express in a fresh way their belief in the accessibility of God. Defenders of the validity of the conversions at Cambuslang anticipated an aspect of [Thomas] Reid in asserting the trustworthiness of their senses.²⁰

In other words, revivalists rested part of their argument on human sense perception, against “sense skeptics” like David Hume. McCulloch, Erskine, and other defenders of Cambuslang made conscious choices about how to portray the events they witnessed. Instead of appealing to the authority of the church or to the *a priori* validity of religious testimony, they appealed to reason and the reliability of human sense perception. They spoke in terms their Enlightened compatriots would have understood. By shrewdly moderating their language and defending spiritual events in secular terms, the revivalists broadened their appeal and ensured their place in the history books.

Though the revivalists hoped for more expressions of God’s favor on the scale of Cambuslang, no revival on a similar scale occurred until the twentieth century.²¹ But the written accounts of the Cambuslang revival make it clear how many lives were changed by what they encountered at Cambuslang and, crucially, preserved the events for posterity. The last of McCulloch’s *Examinations* is that of a young man from Carmunnock, close to Cambuslang. He writes, “[S]ince that time, the habitual prevailing bent of my heart, is after communion with God in Christ & conformity to him...so neither does my poor heart ever settle or take rest, till it fix on God in Christ, & find rest in him: To him be Glory Amen.”²²

Using firsthand accounts and arguing for the trustworthiness of what the men and women at Cambuslang heard and saw, the defenders of Cambuslang presented an Enlightenment defense for a supernatural work. Though this at first seems contradictory, given the hostility of some strands of Enlightenment to all revealed religion, it is in fact a natural development of the well-read and highly religious tone of Scottish print culture during the mid-eighteenth century. The winds of revival from New England, just as much as the winds of Enlightenment from the continent, blew on Scottish soil and produced a rational revivalism, and a religious Enlightenment, that could be found nowhere else in the eighteenth century.

What we see in the Scottish “enlightened revivals” is a small and intensely literate society grappling with intellectual and religious currents of change, while not being utterly divided over the most basic epistemological questions. For revivalist and Moderate alike, the betterment of Scottish society was to be accomplished largely within the institutions of the established Scottish Kirk (and in convenient nearby fields), not in a secular *lycée*, nor yet in a parliament. While far from perfect, this moment in Scottish history provides a beautiful vision of settling religious differences in a common forum (through pamphlets, books, and letters, or more formally through the Kirk’s General Assembly).



PORTRAIT OF SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT PHILOSOPHER THOMAS REID, SIR HENRY RAEBURN, 1796

The positive interplay of Enlightenment and Revival should inform our work to re-pristiniate the Church as a sanctum for both high learning and vigorous spirituality. True religion is as deep intellectually as it is emotionally—that is the legacy of the Scottish Reformation and of the eighteenth-century revivals. Christians who would recover these virtues face an uphill battle, but we serve a God who promises, in the words of a young woman who participated in the revival at Cambuslang, “I will guide thee by My Counsel & afterward receive thee to my Glory.”²³

Moses Bratrud is a Master's student in History at the University of Edinburgh. He is a graduate of New Saint Andrews College and serves as Director of Communications for Minnesota Family Council. He and his wife and daughter live in St. Paul, Minnesota.

20. David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1993), 59.

21. Billy Graham’s All Scotland Crusade in 1955.

22. Beebe, 308.

23. Beebe, 145.

MARTIN LUTHER AND TAX:

A PROTESTANT PERSPECTIVE ON REDISTRIBUTIVE TAXATION

BY ALLEN CALHOUN

Along with many other Reformers, Martin Luther advocated taxation as an instrument of poor relief. Protestants today are divided on the advisability of using tax policy to redistribute society's resources, but at the very least, an understanding of the place that Luther's view of redistributive taxation occupies in the history of political theology might lead us toward a distinctly Protestant conception of taxation. That Luther wrote more about taxation than the other Reformers is perhaps not surprising. In his early political theology, Luther sharply differentiated between the ways in which Christians and non-Christians related to civil government and its laws. "Christians should be subject to the governing authorities and be ready to do every good work," Luther wrote, because "in the liberty of the Spirit they shall by so doing serve others and the authorities themselves and obey their will freely and out of love."¹ Citing Matthew 17, Luther insisted that the "children of the king, who need nothing," should nevertheless freely submit and pay "the tribute."² For the unbelieving subject, on the other hand, the "temporal sword" is a "terror," restraining "the un-Christian and wicked so that—no thanks to them—they are obliged to keep still and to maintain an outward peace."³

Following the peasants' revolt, Luther began drawing the line between the two kingdoms, the spiritual and the temporal, in a different way. Fearing anarchy, Luther felt obliged to refine his political theology so that it could accommodate intervention by civil authorities in ecclesiastical affairs. The two kingdoms no longer meant a simple distinction between church and magistrate; now even earthly church life became a part of the earthly kingdom. Luther's two kingdoms theology had initially earned him the rebuke of Huldrych Zwingli and others who considered it dangerously close to the teaching of the Anabaptists, who believed that the government should not have any power over

religious matters and that civil laws should not be imposed on Christians. However, as a practical matter Luther's doctrine later came to resemble Zwingli's Christian commonwealth.⁴



LUTHER PREACHING, PREDELLA OF THE REFORMATION ALTARPIECE, LUCAS CRANACH, CIRCA 1547-1548

Even before the peasants' revolt, however, Luther was eager to place the task of relieving the needs of the poor in the hands of civil authorities. He was deeply disturbed by how the church in his time handled poor relief—primarily through the system of almsgiving, which represented for Luther a particularly pernicious form of works righteousness. Calling for social reforms in his "Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate" (1520), Luther urged the princes and nobility to eliminate the mendicant orders in their territories to help erase begging from the land.⁵ Luther's views on poverty stand in stark relief against both the medieval system of almsgiving, with its promise of salvation to the generous, and John Calvin's later insistence that poor relief form an integral part of the church's mission. Luther's conception of government-administered social assistance uniquely situated him to reflect on the use that the civil authorities could and should make of taxation in helping the needy.

THE LEISNIG ORDINANCE

In September 1522, Luther traveled south from Wittenberg to assist the parish at Leisnig in preparing an ordinance for a "common chest." The citizens and authorities of Leisnig had been impressed with Luther's calls for social reform in his sermons and his "Open Letter," namely (among many others), his requests that the princes forbid their subjects to pay the pope's taxes, that they prohibit the alienation of German benefices, that they eliminate the mendicant orders from their territories to help erase begging from the land, and that they cease referring any temporal matters to Rome for adjudication. Lu-

1. Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *LW* 31:369. Unless otherwise noted, citations from the works of Martin Luther are from *Luther's Works (LW)* (American Edition), ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman, 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press and Fortress Press, and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86).

2. Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian," *LW* 31:369.

3. Martin Luther, "Temporal Authority: To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed," *LW* 45:91.

4. See Matthew Tuininga, *Calvin's Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church: Christ's Two Kingdoms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 46.

5. Martin Luther, "An Open Letter to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate," *LW* 44:172-73.

ther not only helped draft the Leisnig ordinance; he endorsed it by writing its preface and having the two documents published together.

The ordinance provided for ongoing taxation to maintain funding of the common chest so that it could disburse money for relief of the poor:

We the nobility, council, craft supervisors, gentry, and commoners dwelling in the city and villages of our whole parish, have unitedly resolved and consented that every noble, townsman, and peasant living in the parish shall, according to his ability and means, remit in taxes...a certain sum of money to the chest each year, in order that the total amount can be arrived at and procured which the deliberations and decisions of the general parish assembly, on the basis of investigation in and experience with the annual statements, have determined to be necessary and sufficient...By the grace of God these practices have now been restored to the true freedom of the Christian spirit.⁶

Not only was this ordinance probably the genesis of the modern welfare state in Germany and the Nordic countries, and not only did it influence how Western Europeans and North Americans eventually came to think of “state-funded social assistance,”⁷ it is also historically significant because (1) it anticipates the ability-to-pay principle of progressive taxation (“according to his ability and means”); (2) it distributes the chest’s funds based on need; and (3) the collection of revenue, maintenance of the chest’s funding levels, and distributions from the chest were to be carried out in a regular, universal, consistent, and methodical manner.⁸

Restoration of the practice of poor relief “to the true freedom of the Christian spirit” meant, for the drafters of the Leisnig ordinance, that the task of meeting the needs of the poor passed from the sphere of individual charity to that of political justice. This was not because Luther decried voluntary charity, but because he abhorred the abuses in the medieval system of poor relief, i.e., in almsgiving. As early as 1517, in the *Ninety-Five Theses*, he rejected the long-standing view that the poor are the treasure of the church, providing the rich with a “sin-redeeming” benefit through acts of charity.⁹

But there were deeper theological currents at work, too. Luther’s emphasis on the doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum* and the redistributive grammar of his theology of the Lord’s Supper underlie his vision for poor relief and, thus, implicate redistributive taxation—at least in the embryonic form that it took in the Leisnig ordinance.

6. Martin Luther, “Fraternal Agreement on the Common Chest,” *LW* 45:192.

7. Samuel Torvend, “Greed Is an Unbelieving Scoundrel,” in *The Forgotten Luther: Reclaiming the Social-economic Dimension of the Reformation*, ed. Carter Lindberg and Paul A. Wee (Edina, MN: Lutheran University Press, 2016), 38.

8. See Carter Lindberg, “Luther on a Market Economy,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 30 (2016): 379.

9. See Jacob Viner, *Religious Thought and Economic Society*, ed. Jacques Melitz and Donald Winch (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978), 76.

LUTHER’S THEOLOGY OF REDISTRIBUTION

Through faith, Luther writes, the soul is united with Christ “as a bride is united with her bridegroom,” and, thus, “everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil.”¹⁰ This “happy exchange” (*fröhliche Wechsel*) between Christ and the believer models the exchange between the two natures of Christ,¹¹ and, therefore, Christ distributes to Christians the “privileges” of “priesthood and kingship” that he obtained.¹² Christ’s distribution of the prerogative of *priesthood* carries the redistributive dynamic beyond the relationship between Christ and believer. Because priesthood implies a redistribution of what is received, Christians distribute to others what they have received from Christ.¹³

LUTHER ABHORRED THE ABUSES IN THE MEDIEVAL SYSTEM OF POOR RELIEF... HE REJECTED THE LONG-STANDING VIEW THAT THE POOR ARE THE TREASURE OF THE CHURCH, PROVIDING THE RICH WITH A “SIN-REDEEMING” BENEFIT THROUGH ACTS OF CHARITY.

Luther’s distributive logic turns the believer’s attention to the *need* of his neighbor. The “good things” flowing from Christ to the believer “flow on to those who have need of them.”¹⁴ Because the believer is *distributee* as well as *distributor*, she lives in a place of abundance, free from all the anxieties that would beset her if she were responsible for securing her own welfare. For Luther, the goods of the church are (or should be) common property, not because of a pre-existing state of communal ownership,¹⁵ but because

“there is no greater service of God than Christian love which helps and serves the needy.”¹⁶ The common chest, therefore, was “for all who were needy among the Christians.”¹⁷

Nor are the redistributed “good things” only spiritual: they include material benefits for the materially needy. Luther writes:

In this sacrament [of the Lord’s Supper], therefore, man is given through the priest a sure sign from God himself that he is thus united with Christ and his saints and has all things in common, that Christ’s sufferings and life are his own, together with the lives and sufferings of all the saints... But in times past this sacrament was so properly used, and the people were taught to understand this fellowship so well, that they even gathered food and material goods in the church, and there—as St. Paul writes in I Corinthians 11—distributed among those who were in need.¹⁸

10. Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” *LW* 31:351.

11. Martin Wendte, “Mystical Foundations of Politics? Luther on God’s Presence and the Place of Human Beings,” *Studies in Christian Ethics*, August 7, 2018, accessed April 27, 2020, journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0953946818792628.

12. Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” *LW* 31:354.

13. Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” *LW* 31:355.

14. Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian,” *LW* 31:371.

15. Compare Thomas Aquinas’ view of property in the *Summa theologiae* (Latin-English Edition), trans. Fathers of the English-Dominican Province (NovAntiqua, 2013), II-II, questions 58 and 66.

16. Martin Luther, “Ordinance of a Common Chest, Preface,” *LW* 45:172.

17. Luther, “Ordinance of a Common Chest, Preface,” *LW* 45:173.

18. Martin Luther, “The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods,” *LW* 35:52, 57.

After the peasants' revolt in 1523, Luther might have become more reticent to analogize life in the temporal order to life in the church, but the early Luther, in "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods" (1519), draws a parallel between communion in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the common citizenship of those in political community.¹⁹ When resources are scarce, the neighbor's needs are a threat and self-interest drives society. Justice becomes the resolution of conflict between each person's self-interest, a matter of striking a balance between those interests. In Luther's extended metaphor in "The Blessed Sacrament," on the other hand, the fellowship with Christ and the saints in the Lord's Supper "is like a city where every citizen shares with all the others the city's name, honor, freedom, trade, customs, usages, help, support, protection, and the like, while at the same time he shares all the dangers of fire and blood, enemies and death, losses, taxes, and the like."²⁰

But the Lord's Supper is not merely a "figure" of solidarity and commonality; it is also a "sign" that the believer does, in fact, hold all things in common with Christ and the saints.²¹

A sign in this sense is something material that contains "something spiritual."²² A sign, in Luther's theology, is like a sacrament, except that it has no salvific effect. Scripture, Luther writes, is full of signs "given along with the promises"—the sign of the rainbow given to Noah, the sign of circumcision given to Abraham, and the rain on Gideon's fleece, to name just three.²³ Material things mediate the Word, so that something accompanies the Word "to which we may cling and around which we may gather."²⁴

In Luther's theology, the Lord's Supper, which is both sign and sacrament, erases the distinction between "the sacred and profane spheres," according to Martin Wendte. It is the most salient example of the way in which "God and God's Word are always working for humankind in a materially mediated way."²⁵ Communion discloses "God's way of acting with all creation."²⁶

In the Lord's Supper, the distribution of the spiritual benefits Christ possesses is a means of salvation. The distribution of material goods

19. Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament," LW 35:50-51.

20. Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament," LW 35:51-52.

21. Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament," LW 35:52.

22. Martin Luther, "Treatise on the New Testament," LW 35:86.

23. Luther, "Treatise on the New Testament," LW 35:86.

24. Luther, "Treatise on the New Testament," LW 35:86.

25. Wendte, "Mystical Foundations of Politics."

26. Wendte, "Mystical Foundations of Politics."

to the needy is also a means of grace, though not in a salvific sense. The formal logic is the same; what changes in the shift from sacrament to "mere" sign is the soteriological content. Thus, Luther can affirm on the one hand that distributing "alms to the poor" and "food and other necessities...to the needy" is "quite another thing from the testament and sacrament, which no one can offer or give either to God or to men,"²⁷ while bemoaning with equal force the fact that, in the Roman Catholic mass, possessions are not "given, with thanksgiving to God and with his blessing, to the needy who ought to be receiving them," as Luther believed they had been in the practice of the Early Church.²⁸



THE PEASANT WEDDING, PIETER BRUEGEL THE ELDER, CIRCA 1567

TAX AND NEED

Luther was undoubtedly influenced by the understanding of the relationship between property and *necessitas domestica* [domestic necessity] that prevailed in his world. Historian Renate Blickle brilliantly summarizes that understanding as it stood in late medieval and early modern Germany: "Domestic necessity" was a legal norm, not just a moral and social norm, dictating that economic resources in a

society of scarcity be distributed according to the principle of *need*, defined in terms of household subsistence.²⁹ The principle was both a sword against lords who lived luxuriously to the detriment of others and a shield against poverty for the peasants. *Necessitas domestica* was an egalitarian principle, one to which all households of all ranks could appeal, so it was not tied to class.³⁰

Need, Blickle writes, gained legitimizing power through the concept of "subsistence," just as freedom would later be justified by the idea of "property." Need and property are both answers to the question "to whom do the goods of the world legitimately belong?"³¹ To those who need them, or to those who possess them legally but may not need them? The question remains the same; the two answers are based on drastically different foundational principles.

Blickle argues that the legitimizing concept of subsistence gradually gave way to the legitimizing principle of property in the eighteenth century. "Property as a private right," according to Blickle, no longer included "any kind of responsibility toward another person. It was the legitimate right of its owner regardless of the needs of others." The

27. Luther, "Treatise on the New Testament," LW 93-94.

28. Luther, "Treatise on the New Testament," LW 96.

29. Renate Blickle, "From Subsistence to Property: Traces of a Fundamental Change in Early Modern Bavaria," *Central European History* 25, no. 4 (1992): 381.

30. Blickle, "From Subsistence to Property," 377-82.

31. Blickle, "From Subsistence to Property," 377.

idea of the needs of the poor, to be sure, still has force in tax theory;³² ultimately, however, property became “a material guaranty and a manifestation” of the civil individual’s freedom, with the consequence that property was finally “elevated into a sacrosanct human right.”³³

Luther lived before the elevation of property into that kind of right. His thinking bears the imprint of *necessitas domestica*. That is not to say that he devalued private property. He was adamant, especially after the peasants’ revolt, that the Seventh Commandment (“Thou shalt not steal”) prohibits any form of interference with another’s property: “God forbids every kind of robbery, theft, and fraud, as well as sinful longing for anything that belongs to our neighbor.”³⁴ But that is only what God “forbids.” Luther characteristically includes in his catechism what the Seventh Commandment “requires” as well, namely, that “[w]e should help our neighbor to improve and protect his property and business” and “help him in every need.”³⁵

How can Luther’s theological reasoning for a redistributive form of taxation to meet the needs of the poor help us formulate tax policy today? How might Luther help us develop a distinctively Protestant theory of taxation which nevertheless possesses broad appeal?

EQUITY AND EFFICIENCY

Taxation is generally regarded as having three uses: (1) to fund the provision of public goods and services; (2) to influence the behavior of the members of society; and (3) to redistribute resources directly or indirectly. The third use—redistribution—is the most controversial of the three, at least in American discourse, and it has surfaced as a matter of urgency and contention in recent political debates and as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Equity and efficiency are the two standards by which tax systems are typically judged. A tax system is “efficient” if it collects the amount of revenue that the state needs with as little impact as possible on the decisions taxpayers make. The meaning of “equity” is less clear. It often refers to “vertical equity,” which means that those with greater ability to pay should pay more taxes. The idea of vertical equity exerts powerful influence in liberal democratic societies because of the happy coincidence that imposing higher rates of tax on those with more income or wealth (which seems fair) does the least amount of damage to economic productivity (which seems to be in everyone’s interest). Equity and efficiency are taken to converge in progressive

tax (especially income tax) rate structures, justified by the “ability-to-pay” principle.³⁶

In the context of the ability-to-pay principle, the term “equity” means little more than *fairness*, that is, how fairly the tax burden is allocated. We can call this “thin” equity. Sometimes, however, “equity” can refer to “thicker” equity, i.e., a move toward greater economic equality or at least less inequality. Prominent among “welfarist” approaches, which give thicker accounts of equity than the ability-to-pay principle, are the “optimal” tax models: formulas that offer a three-step method for arriving at the “optimal” balance between equity (in the thick sense) and efficiency. First, set the state’s revenue target; second, determine the society’s “social welfare function” (i.e., a ranking of social outcomes, typically reflecting how inequality-averse the society is); and third, use the resulting degree and curve of progressivity, proportionality, or even regressivity in tax rates as benchmarks against which to judge the equity and efficiency of actual taxes.³⁷

Policy has not followed theory. In recent U.S. tax policy, inequality-aversion has remained low. So have top marginal individual income tax rates. It has proved easier to shift the equity component of tax-and-spending arrangement to the spending side. As of 2018, three-quarters of redistribution at the federal level occurred through spending and only one-quarter through tax itself, i.e., most redistribution occurs through money being given to the poor, not through progressive income tax rates.³⁸ Especially since the popularization in the 1980s of the “Laffer curve,” which showed that there is a tax rate somewhere between 0% and 100%, but much closer to 0% than to 100%, that maximizes government revenue, many Americans have assumed that lowering taxes can increase revenue.

Regardless of the validity of this assumption, it reflects an important social belief, prominent among welfarists in the United States and many other liberal democracies, namely, that society as a whole is better off materially when the tax system preserves the maximum amount of private wealth and creates conditions for the maximum amount of private wealth-creation. This belief entails a strong commitment to efficiency. Thus, once equity in either its thick or thin form is taken to merge with efficiency, equity is no longer a separate variable in the tax balance. It is seen, rather, as a fortuitous byproduct of the alliance between government and job-producing, wealth-creating large corporations and top income-earners.

TAX AND PROPERTY

All that has been said up to this point about U.S. tax policy can be reduced to one phrase: the government should interfere with prop-

32. See, e.g., Marc Fleurbaey, “Welfare, Libertarianism, and Fairness in the Economic Approach to Taxation,” in *Taxation: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Martin O’Neill and Shepley Orr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 47; there are “good reasons” in optimal tax theory to give “absolute priority to the worse off”—good *utilitarian* reasons, it turns out.

33. Blicke, “From Subsistence to Property,” 384.

34. Martin Luther, *Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1943), 73.

35. Luther, *Small Catechism*, 74.

erty rights as little as possible. To do more, the narrative runs, works to everyone's detriment. The state achieves social justice by honoring private property.

Recognizing that both the state and the agents of wealth-creation may, in fact, operate with less benign motives than welfarists assume, other tax theorists seek to attenuate the inviolability of property rights. They propose a measure of redistribution, however modest. To do so, they must defend the claim that some person or entity other than the possessor of property is morally and legally entitled to some of that property.

One such "attenuation" approach is *conventionalism*. In *The Myth of Ownership*, Liam Murphy and Thomas Nagel reject "everyday libertarianism" in favor of this oft-cited view: "Private property is a legal convention, defined in part by the tax system; therefore, the tax system cannot be evaluated by looking at its impact on private property, conceived as something that has independent existence and validity."³⁹ Conventionalism abandons natural or moral rights to property but preserves legal rights to property. It does so, however, with few safeguards against the elimination of those rights. In other words, it does not offer as robust an account of the good of private property as Luther and other Reformers believed to be included in the seventh commandment.



TWO TAX-GATHERERS, MARINUS VAN REYMERSWALE, CIRCA 1540S

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is another "attenuation" approach, but one that moves in a different direction. CST's founding statement, *Rerum novarum* (1891), and its successor encyclicals have affirmed four core principles: the common good, the "universal destination of goods," subsidiarity, and solidarity. The first two are the most important for redistributive taxation. Unlike conventionalism, CST affirms a "natural," pre-political right to private property that the state must protect. At the same time, however, that right must be balanced by the universal destination of goods. In *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), Pope Pius XI affirmed "the twofold character of ownership, called usually *individual* or *social* according as it regards either separate persons or the common good."⁴⁰ When quoting *Rerum novarum*, Pius specifically omitted language that had called the state "unjust and cruel if under the name of taxation it were to deprive the owner of more than is fair."⁴¹ Instead, Pius wrote:

But not every distribution among human beings of property and wealth is of a character to attain either completely or to a satisfactory degree of perfection the end which God intends. Therefore, the riches that economic-social developments constantly increase ought to be so distributed among individual persons and classes that the common advantage of all ... will be safeguarded; in other words, that the common good of all society will be kept inviolate.⁴²

Within the CST tradition, the pendulum has swung back and forth between greater stress on the state's protection of private property and a greater emphasis on redistribution in light of the fact that all property is under a "social mortgage";⁴³ but it seems fair to say that a balance between those two goals is required and that taxation is an important means—if not the primary instrument—of striking that balance. Throughout the CST tradition, however, "the exact point of equilibrium" between "the right of legitimate owners and their duties toward others" depends on the requirements of the common good.⁴⁴ "The frontiers among 'charity,' 'commutative justice,' 'distributive justice' and 'general justice,' and the precise meaning of 'social justice' are not always clear or stable."⁴⁵

These unanswered questions in CST illustrate the difficulty in "attenuated" approaches to redistributive taxation: whenever rights to property are balanced against each other, they conflict. The question remains: when, how, and in what quantity may the goods of one person be reallocated to other people?

As vague as the principle of the common good is, it remains a strength of CST. Policy can be developed between the guardrails set in place by universal destination, property rights, subsidiarity, and solidarity. These guidelines serve as correctives to both the individualist (efficient) and utilitarian (equitable) commitments that our society's dominant narratives try to balance. Protestantism has not preserved as specific a conception of the common good as CST, and it therefore struggles to mediate among competing values in the societies in which it finds itself. Protestants tend to adopt other dominant political views, whether market conservatism or redistributive progressivism, rather than thinking through these issues as Protestants.

39. Liam Murphy and Thomas Nagel, *The Myth of Ownership: Taxes and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8.

40. *Quadragesimo anno*, no. 45 (quoted in Cristóbal Orrego, "The Universal Destination of the World's Resources," in *Catholic Social Teaching: A Volume of Scholarly Essays*, ed. Gerald V. Bradley and E. Christian Brugger [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019], 275).

41. *Rerum Novarum*, no. 47 (quoted in Orrego, "The Universal Destination of the World's Resources," 277).

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42. *Quadragesimo anno*, no. 57 (quoted in Orrego, "The Universal Destination of the World's Resources," 278).

43. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), no. 42 (quoted in Orrego, "The Universal Destination of the World's Resources," 294).

44. Orrego, "The Universal Destination of the World's Resources," 279.

45. Orrego, "The Universal Destination of the World's Resources," 279.

“THICK EQUITY”

That said, on the question of tax justice, Reformation theology does supply the conceptual resources for formulating an ethical account of taxation. I do not mean to suggest that such an account should compete with CST, but that perhaps it can complement CST. Different readings of “the universal destination of goods,” an important principle in CST, are available. However, CST has arguably not been entirely consistent on whether it favors “thin” or “thick” equity. Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum novarum* (1891) offered a strong defense of “the right to private property against the overreaching of the socialist state.” Leo’s position was nuanced or at least clarified, however, in later encyclicals, which acknowledged “some right of the state to use legal means to redistribute riches as a requirement of the common good.” If a Luther-inspired, sacramentally-driven political theology is permitted to touch on the question of taxation and equity in our contemporary discussions, it has the potential to re-center “thick” equity in those discussions.

Luther’s theology of redistribution, manifested in the ongoing collection of tax to fund the common chest, might shape the way we think about tax in three ways, among others. Luther was careful to distinguish his remarks about taxation that were written specifically for true Christians from his remarks written for society as a whole. Taxation is a mercy to the righteous, enabling them to disclose the distributive pattern of God’s own mercy to the needy; but to the unrighteous it is a divine visitation to “teach [them] manners.”⁴⁶ The three ways in which his theology can shape our approach to tax likewise pertain to different audiences.

First, for policymakers, a theory of tax informed by Luther’s communal Eucharistic theology will be *dynamic*, responding to changing circumstances. In a purely secular “theology” of taxation, the authorities are unlikely to reevaluate the needs of society’s disadvantaged members on an ongoing basis. In a neoliberal context, the tax laws are set once a balance is struck between the demands of economic growth and the state’s revenue needs, until a new administration, with different economic policies, changes them. The dynamism of Luther’s Eucharistic theology, while far from countenancing the abolition of private property, relativizes private property by exulting in the overflow of good things that results in redistribution of material resources to the poor. The amount of revenue to be collected will constantly be re-examined, and the objects of government spending will be subject to change. The resulting tax will look like an optimal tax that gives absolute priority to those below a predetermined income-and-asset threshold by making them the primary recipients of revenue raised through taxation.

46. Martin Luther, “Admonition to Peace: A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia,” *LW* 46:22–23.

Secondly, for a specifically Christian audience, such a tax theory will take little account of merit or responsibility. The believing taxpayer is free to view the tax-and-spend system without anxiety and without an overly scrupulous attachment to “strict human justice.”⁴⁷ Confronted with the dangers of abuse in such a system, Luther replied, “We have to expect that greed will creep in here and there. So what?”⁴⁸ Luther did not countenance any measure of greed, of course. He meant that it was better for Christians to err on the side of generosity than to err on the side of withholding resources from those in genuine need.

Finally, of relevance to both policymakers and Christian citizens, a tax system underwritten by a theology of gracious distribution and redistribution—although, admittedly, not necessarily one that requires a theology of the Lord’s Supper to underwrite it—will reorient the idea of social justice away from equilibrium among competing social commitments and toward a web of interpersonal duties. It will have that effect for three reasons. First, it will direct tax policy away from a mere balancing of the dictates of economic growth and

general administrative needs of the state and toward a balance that explicitly takes into account mitigation of poverty. Secondly, without questioning the rightful place of charitable giving, redistributive taxation motivated by *any* political or theological commitments is far more likely to meet the needs of the poor than voluntary charity alone could. Thirdly, redistributive taxation avoids the awkward power differential between rich and poor that voluntary giving perpetuates and the resentment that unequal willingness to give on the part of the well-off can engender.⁴⁹ This vision of taxation can orient Christian members of society toward Luther’s theology of neighbor-love. Once the neighbor’s well-being is understood as a duty, and tax-paying as a means of fulfilling that duty, tax-paying becomes an act of love toward others.

A TAX SYSTEM UNDERWRITTEN BY A THEOLOGY OF GRACIOUS DISTRIBUTION AND REDISTRIBUTION...WILL REORIENT THE IDEA OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AWAY FROM EQUILIBRIUM AMONG COMPETING SOCIAL COMMITMENTS AND TOWARD A WEB OF INTERPERSONAL DUTIES.

Allen Calhoun is a McDonald Distinguished Fellow at the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University. After twenty years working as an attorney and writer and editor in the legal profession, he is currently researching and writing at the intersection of law and theology. His book tentatively titled Tax Law, Religion and Justice: An Exploration of Theological Reflections on Taxation is forthcoming from Routledge.

47. See Luther, “Ordinance of a Common Chest, Preface,” *LW* 45:172.

48. Luther, “Ordinance of a Common Chest, Preface,” *LW* 45:172.

49. See Véronique Munoz-Dardé and M. G. F. Martin, “Beggar Your Neighbor (Or Why You Do Want to Pay Your Taxes),” in *Taxation: Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. Martin O’Neill and Shepley Orr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 138 (“The challenge with which we started was why, given the possibility of meeting these needs through private organizations, we should ever deem it reasonable to suppose funds should be provided through centrally raised taxation. A salient answer to this, we suggest, is that reflection on the kind of world in which charities provide all of the resources for the destitute, imposes emotional and time costs on the rest of us which could be easily avoided through a scheme of redistributive taxation. Even if some prefer always to have the choice whether to give or not, the burden that this imposes on the rest of us makes it unreasonable to insist on having only a minimal state”).

THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT (AND WRONG):

A REVIEW OF *PROTESTANTS AND AMERICAN CONSERVATISM*

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2019 (336 PAGES)

REVIEWED BY ADAM CARRINGTON

Public intellectuals enjoy writing obituaries. Less interested in literal death, many instead love to play both coroner and graveside minister to movements. *En vogue* obit industries declare, examine, and pontificate on the death of, among others, two movements: Modern Conservatism and Evangelicalism. It is no coincidence that these movements receive post-mortems in 2020 America. Both now are seen as failures by large swaths of right-leaning pundits: Modern Conservatism failed to limit government's expansion or the sexual revolution's march, and Evangelicals failed to sustain Protestantism's orthodoxy or expand the number of its adherents.

Professor Gillis Harp's book, *Protestants and American Conservatism: A Short History*, helps place these assessments in a broader context. His volume includes discussions of the modern Right and Evangelicalism, but those movements form only a subset of America's conservatism and Protestantism. Harp strives primarily "to demonstrate the ways in which conservative thought has been formed by religious views associated with different strands of orthodox Protestantism" (2). In so doing, Harp contends that "Protestant beliefs have made several significant contributions to conservatism both in the abstract realm of ideas and in the arena of political positions or practical policies" (2). As we will see, Harp understands these contributions to form a distinct, important, and ultimately superior articulation of conservatism in comparison to its counterparts.

Thus, *Protestants and American Conservatism* accepts the existence and legitimacy of two forms of inquiry: political theology and political philosophy. Both seek to answer the essential question of political life: what is justice? In addressing that question, both pursue knowledge of who should rule, for what purposes, and according to what means. The two diverge regarding the final source and thus standard of such knowledge. Political theology ultimately grounds itself in God's revelation. Political philosophy sees man himself—whether his reason or will—as the norm by which to discern justice. This difference does not mean the two cannot concur; the God who reveals Himself also

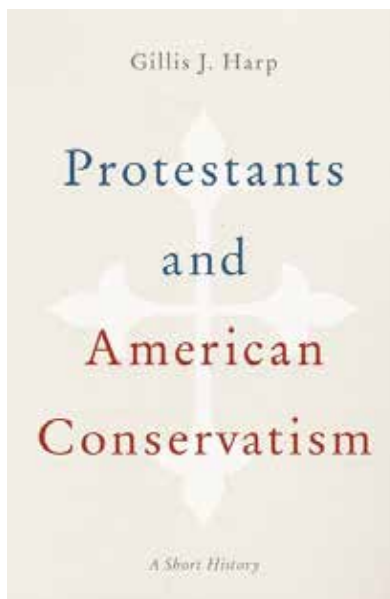
created man. Yet it does leave open the possibility that their conclusions will be in tension if not outright contradiction. After all, human reason errs; human will is sinful.

As the title portends, Harp seeks to engage a distinct strand of political theology—Protestant—with a distinct strain of political philosophy—conservative. His history must show the former's possibility and the latter's coherent existence across American history. Protestant political theology's possibility depends on whether Scripture, Protestantism's source of special revelation and thus its unrivaled standard, contains teachings on the essential concerns of political life. Harp's history describes three responses in American history to this question.

The first consciously says "no." Scripture discusses salvation of souls. It teaches little to nothing about political life. Thus, Christians and the Church should focus on souls and avoid politics. Early twentieth-century Evangelicals largely took this route. So did antebellum, Southern, Old School Presbyterians, though Harp notes how even they seemed to see a distinctly Christian basis to political rule.

The second response gives an unconscious "no." It does claim Biblical warrant for conservative positions. But in reality, it merely adopts conservative political philosophy, adding a thin veneer of Christianity as sugar-coating. Christian Conservatives took this option for much of the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, especially the Evangelicals who make up so much of the contemporary Republican Party. Harp claims that:

[s]ince the turn of the twentieth century (if not earlier), the most common approach of Christian conservatives has been activist and atheoretical, rarely evidencing deep theological reflection. Accordingly, their political theology often differed little from the sort of generic civil religion assumed by many less religious Americans, and they have sometimes confused partisan tropes with essential tenets of the faith (12).



Third, finally, and preferably, Harp sees a great number of American Protestants affirming the existence of their own, Scriptural political theology. God's Word does discuss justice, the question of rule, the purposes of government, and the means political communities may use. These form a coherent body of thought that neither ignores politics nor subsumes itself under contemporary partisanship. Instead, it is an independent interlocutor, engaging other perspectives from Protestant postulates. Harp sees this position articulated in a nearly unbroken stream from the first settlers in the early 1600s until the late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century. In these sections, he introduces the reader to an impressive but now lesser-known list of Protestants who consciously considered principles and practices of political life, including Tayler Lewis, Yale's Theodore Woosley, and Princeton's Lyman H. Atwater and William Brenton Greene, Jr.

Regarding conservatism, mainstream scholarship often denied that a consistent, coherent conservatism existed throughout American history. Harp admits conservatism is a "slippery and difficult...term to define" (5). He adopts Jerry Muller's description of conservatism as one that can provide some consistency. This definition sees conservatism as recognizing human fallibility, a predisposition to maintaining established institutions (including ones supportive of social hierarchy), rejection of social contract theories, and seeing social benefit to public religiosity.

It is not clear that this definition adequately holds the strands Harp defines as conservative together. One example comes in his discussion of social contract theory and the American Revolution. Many Loyalists rejected this theory, which holds that governments are formed by the consent of free and equal individuals for the protection of their rights. Such Loyalists are recognizably conservative by Harp's dividing line. But nearly all American Founders accepted some form of this doctrine. This poses a problem for the existence of conservatism for American history after, say, 1776. Harp names men like John Adams as a conservative Founder, but Adams, among others mentioned, clearly bought into a form of social contract theory. Thus, Adams comes across as conservative only in relation to his revolutionary counterparts. This instance partakes of a larger tendency in Harp's story, wherein conservatism seems constantly in retreat, forced to modify itself to new, decreasingly conservative paradigms as American history unfolds.

The volume succeeds more when understood as setting up Protestantism's interaction with essential political questions. To know justice, for instance, we must determine whether Aristotle rightly said that "man is by nature a political animal." Harp declares that Protestant political theology affirmed this claim, emphasizing the organic, God-ordained origins of politics over contract-based, artificially man-made beginnings. Harp helpfully discusses how these starting points inform how Protestants understood the interplay between individual and community, and the content of the common good.

Moreover, justice's definition involves determining who should rightly rule. Harp's discussion of equality in American politics and Protestantism touches on this topic. Inequality prefers rule by the one or the few. Equality supports rule by the many. Harp argues that conservatism tends toward inequality, toward hierarchy. This tendency manifests itself in numerous ways. One division concerns the relationship between reason and affection, with the few demanding the primacy of the head and the many that of the heart. Along these lines, Harp views the debate over the First Great Awakening through class conflict, seeing the "Old Light" anti-revivalism as partly manifesting elitist proclivities and "New Light" endorsement of revivals as more egalitarian. While he sides conservatism with inequality, the reality surely is more nuanced. Conservative defenses of hierarchy largely result from attempts to moderate democratic

tendencies at work, then and now, in our political community, not to deny all forms of human equality. Nor does it account for populist tendencies on the Right, including a traditionalism wherein patriotism preserves the principles, documents, and practices of the Founders.

Finally, justice's definition affects the purposes of government. To consider these points, political theologians must examine what demands God makes of humanity, politically constituted. For Harp, political philosophy of a more libertarian flavor sees law as originating from human will and only seeking to protect individual rights. A truly Protestant political theology, Harp argues, grounds law ultimately in God's character and will, with human law not only protecting body and goods but instructing the soul in virtue, including at least outward conformity to the moral law. Put from another angle, man as both political and religious being makes a public religion not a question of whether but of how. Laws will influence souls; they will have a posture toward God. In American history, Protestant political theology often sees this truth. However, the book more often finds this point reduced to articulating religion's utility for public life, from Washington's "Farewell Address" to arguments of the Moral Majority in the 1980s.

To make matters worse, Protestants today do not engage these questions. Mark Noll famously declared the scandal of the Evangelical mind to be the lack of one. Here, Harp shows the scandal of post-nineteenth century Protestant political theology is the same. This dearth leaves today's Christian Conservatism shallow, paltry, and fickle. It contributes to the failure of Evangelicalism and Modern Conservatism, and it gives Protestant Christians no footing from which to engage the emerging populist, nationalist Conservatism under President Trump.

Harp ends by calling for a renewal of Protestant political theology. He gives a sturdy outline of the questions it must answer and an illuminating reading list of past practitioners. However, he seems disconsolate about that project's prospects. Much of his melancholy

LAWS WILL INFLUENCE
SOULS; THEY WILL HAVE A
POSTURE TOWARD GOD.
IN AMERICAN HISTORY,
PROTESTANT
POLITICAL THEOLOGY OFTEN
SEES THIS TRUTH.

comes honest. After being so long lost, recovery seems daunting, the current climate deeply uninviting.

Still, perhaps there is more reason to hope than Harp lets on. Neither Modern Conservatism nor the new nationalism shows signs of a distinctly Protestant political perspective. To the extent either one has a political theology, it is dominated by Roman Catholics, who occupy the lion's share of both movements' intellectual wings. However, the issues driving these perspectives remain the same in substance as those serious Protestant thought addressed in the past. Parts of Modern Conservatism may skew too libertarian. Yet the movement's views can readily be engaged by John Winthrop's articulation of liberty as following the moral law and understanding persons as made for community. Harp sees the new nationalism as xenophobic. Yet, even in its flaws, the movement's emphasis on "America First" surely shows a striving for a more political man, gaining much power not just from love of strongmen (as Harp claims) but from an egalitarian revulsion against elitist meritocracy.

A Protestant political theology can recognize the truths hoped for in both movements while giving its own answer. These answers would be steeped in the biblical vision of God creating man for community and establishing politics for the cultivation of that community in body, mind, and heart.

A contemporary assessment both more charitable and more accurate would present more useful ground for developing these interactions and thus a relevant, principled Protestant political theology. Then, Harp's narrative could provide a useful intellectual history that, well-cultivated, might replace obituaries with tales of rebirth.

Adam M. Carrington is Associate Professor of Politics at Hillsdale College. He has published on matters of Constitutional law, separation of powers, and Protestant political thought.



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CHARIOTS OF FIRE: THE NEEDED RESTORATION OF ANGLICAN PREACHING

A REVIEW OF *THE FOOLISHNESS OF GOD*, BY J. BRANDON MEEKS

THE NORTH AMERICAN ANGLICAN, 2020 (227 PAGES).

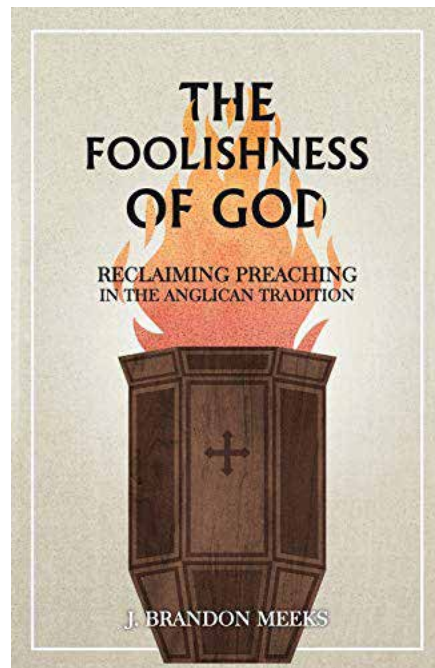
REVIEWED BY BARTON GINGERICH

Academics would describe this book as “idiosyncratic”; those outside the ivory tower would more likely call it “a hoot.” More than anything else, *The Foolishness of God* is an exhortation, and this explains many of its idiosyncrasies. It does not pretend to be an arid textbook, but it is, rather, a stirring call to better preaching in Anglican pulpits.

The need is great. At this moment in history, far too many Anglicans suffer lackluster, anodyne, weak, and downright bad preaching, even in parishes, dioceses, and provinces that consider themselves to be orthodox and evangelical. Meeks’s assessment is understandably biased toward his American context, but some of these oddities and defects are not uncommon in other parts of the Anglican world. And while there are notable exceptions within Anglicanism to this criticism, Meeks does a good job in pointing out that these problems transcend Anglicanism. Many churches today feature long, dry lecturing, an allergy to the affections, indirectness, fatalism, ambulance-chasing, hobby horses, and, perhaps above all, excuse poor preaching by an emphasis on the altar over the pulpit.

Indeed, the contemporary tendency to pit word against sacrament is a major theme throughout the book. It has become unsettlingly common in Anglicanism. The blogger who goes by “Laudable Practice,” and who is a priest in the Church of Ireland, has traced part of this tendency to the Parish Communion movement.¹ This effort, which picked up steam in the early 1900s, sought to make Holy Communion the main act of worship in the parish on a Sunday morning, well summarized by the slogan “the Lord’s people around the Lord’s table on the Lord’s day.” While it originated in the Liturgical Movement and Anglo-Catholic circles, it caught on with central and evangelical churchmen as well.

Although correlation is not the same as causation, there has arisen in some circles the erroneous view that bad preaching can be excused since partaking in the Eucharist is the main point and culmination of Sunday worship. No doubt this example of sloth was far from the mind of the Parish Communion movement pioneers. Unfortunately, Eucharistic and liturgical emphases can become a refuge for the poor sermonizer.



In the American context, “conversionitis” may also play a role. New Anglicans coming from evangelical backgrounds may well have experienced lively preaching as a norm in their childhood, but they may have never experienced sacramental worship characterized by reverence, awe, and beauty (whether it be austere low church forms or more vibrant Anglo-Catholic ones). This newfound emphasis on sacramental piety can become a cornerstone for a convert’s new religious identity and its expression. Preaching becomes a relic of the past, and the strong biblical backgrounds and foundations can become something that a convert takes for granted. For example, it is not unusual to find new Anglicans rejoice in Prayer Book worship’s capacity to express their biblical convictions in a concrete, participatory manner. However, one must ask: would

the preaching in their congregation form similar convictions in a child raised in that parish, from infancy onward? If not, this is akin to sawing off the tree limb one is sitting on.

Regardless of the cause(s), this is an unacceptable state of affairs for Meeks (and no doubt many parishioners!). He constantly asserts and establishes the unity of Word and Sacrament. He rightly understands the sermon to be an indispensable part of the divine liturgy, “the verbal manifestation of the inner logic of the liturgy.”² Homiletical neglect indicates deeply erroneous theology and even sinful irreverence

1. “Review: J. Brandon Meeks ‘The Foolishness of God: Reclaiming Preaching in the Anglican Tradition,’” *Review* (blog), accessed August 24, 2020, <https://laudablepractice.blogspot.com/2020/07/review-j-brandon-meeks-foolishness-of.html>.

2. J. Brandon Meeks, *The Foolishness of God* (Omaha, NE: The North American Anglican Press, 2020), 56.

toward Almighty God. The stakes are high. Spiritual lives and the health of souls are on the line, as is God's glory, the seeking of which is part of our purpose as human beings.

The Foolishness of God is not primarily a how-to manual (though there are imperatives). Instead, to borrow some of Meeks's own vocabulary, it occupies itself with lots of indicatives: what preaching is (proclaiming "the lively oracles of God" under "the blessed burden of crying 'Hear Ye! Hear Ye! What the Spirit saith unto the churches!'"³ and "the chariot which God rides into the contemporary lives of his hearers"⁴), what preachers are ("shepherd[s] of the flock...constituted as herald[s] of the King"⁵), Who God is (none other than the Creator and redeemer of the entire universe, clothed in splendor and terrible), what prayer is ("an expression of God's own self-determination to give *Himself* to us"⁶), and what the Bible is ("the *vox dei* reverberating as the *verbum dei*"⁷). This elicits awe in the reader. Meeks invites his audience to put on biblical spectacles in order to rightly perceive what exactly occurs in preaching. He sees the sermon as a form of spiritual warfare; he emphasizes the majesty of God's being and acts; he consistently reiterates that this is the God with Whom we have to do in the preaching of the Word. Indeed, Meeks has a penchant for employing Scriptural language about God and salvation in Christ to make his points. Sometimes, Meeks simply establishes principles and truths that are essential to good preaching. How many homiletics books have a chapter on aesthetical theology? Of use to ministers, he gives practical counsel on how to improve one's preaching (particularly in the appendices) and some examples of good exegesis. Above all, Meeks discusses why worship is important and why preaching is integral to godly worship. It is clear that he desires pastors and lay-

men alike to have an encounter with the living God in the preaching of the Word.

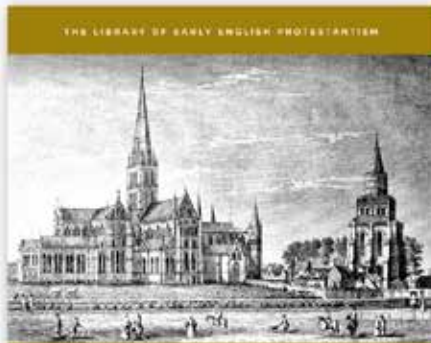
It is important to note the style of this book. Meeks is no hypocrite. He expects the preacher to captivate a congregation with the Word of God, which generally requires much prayer and effort, and he therefore makes his case in a suitably engaging manner. The reader may find himself laughing out loud, especially when Meeks hits a rhetorical bull's-eye. *The Foolishness of God* is filled with memorable quips and striking metaphors. Phrases like "the bland leading the bland"⁸ and "dearly-beloved-ism"⁹ populate the text. Biblical symbols make up the stylistic warp-and-woof of the discourse. At several points, and especially in the thirteenth chapter, Meeks's style is reminiscent of the late Robert Farrar Capon, famed Episcopalian priest and author of *The Supper of the Lamb*.

Do not be deceived by the artful form of this book. It has a good deal of scholarly horsepower under the hood, even if the roar of the motor is well-muffled by an avoidance of jargon. Meeks's talents, education, and research become more apparent when he goes into hermeneutics. He is an advocate for the *quadriga*, an interpretive method that assumes that Scriptures have various levels of meaning or senses: the literal sense, the allegorical (or typological) sense, the moral (or tropological) sense, and the anagogical sense. Meeks also warns against excesses when taking this approach (particularly in allegory), offering helpful examples from history. Nevertheless, he believes making allowance for allegory is essential to maintain a Christological hermeneutic—an approach to the Bible that assumes all of the Scriptures are indeed about Jesus Christ.

There are some peccadilloes. There were two spelling errors in the review copy, and the book's gutter is a bit small. This might be nit-

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3. Meeks, 2.
 4. Meeks, 4.
 5. Meeks, 1.
 6. Meeks, 132.
 7. Meeks, 163.

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8. Meeks, 20.
 9. Meeks, vii.



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picking, but there is an exclamation of damnation that seems unnecessary—not everyone ascribes to the Stanley Hauerwas school of theological discourse.¹⁰ Finally, Meeks’s rhetorical approach might not be everyone’s style. Some folks—no doubt bad preachers—would prefer something staid in tone, and the sprightliness may be off-putting.

Nevertheless, this is an excellent collection of essays. In fact, it is a good candidate for a homiletics curriculum at an Anglican seminary, and it is certainly a good book for the moment. Twenty-first century Anglicanism is working through the deleterious after-effects of various movements, ranging from heirs of revivalism, ritualism, and the third-wave charismatic movement. As has been observed before, there is an issue of an incoherence of identity within Anglicanism (greatly aggravated by heretical doctrine establishing itself in seminaries, ecclesiastical leadership, and local parishes, erupting into the Realignment divisions of the past decade or so). Moreover, orthodox provinces like the ACNA have been incorporating a small stream of recent converts from evangelical and other backgrounds (who then find their way into leadership); this can create an anxious atmosphere, with some bereft of sufficient formation and grounding and in dire need of biblical ballast. Thankfully, the ACNA has made catechesis a priority (an effort led in part by the late Rev. Dr. J. I. Packer), and this

10. For the uninitiated, Hauerwas is a theologian who is famous—infamous?—for his salty language.

priority fits hand-in-glove with a recovery of healthy preaching. Simply put, the theological and moral rot that created the Realignment in the first place still harms faithful Anglicans who left revisionist provinces and denominations, often without their realizing it. In short, there is a great need for Anglicans in the pews to be further rooted, nourished, and established in God’s Word.

Now is the time for better preaching. Men in holy orders must direct the hearts and minds of their congregations to the Holy Scriptures. They must attempt to foster an encounter with the living, resurrected Christ in the pages of sacred Writ. They must proclaim the Gospel message with infectious conviction to the end that God may be glorified. Anglican pastors must have the desire to improve their preaching, understand its significance, rightly handle the Word of God with fear and wisdom, and understand the essentials of preparing and delivering a sermon. Meeks lays a worthy foundation for such a project.

Barton Gingerich is the rector of St. Jude’s Anglican Church (REC/ACNA) in Richmond, VA and teaches at Westminster Academy. He earned a B.A. in History from Patrick Henry College and an M.Div. with a concentration in historical theology from Reformed Episcopal Seminary.

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