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VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1 | JANUARY 2013

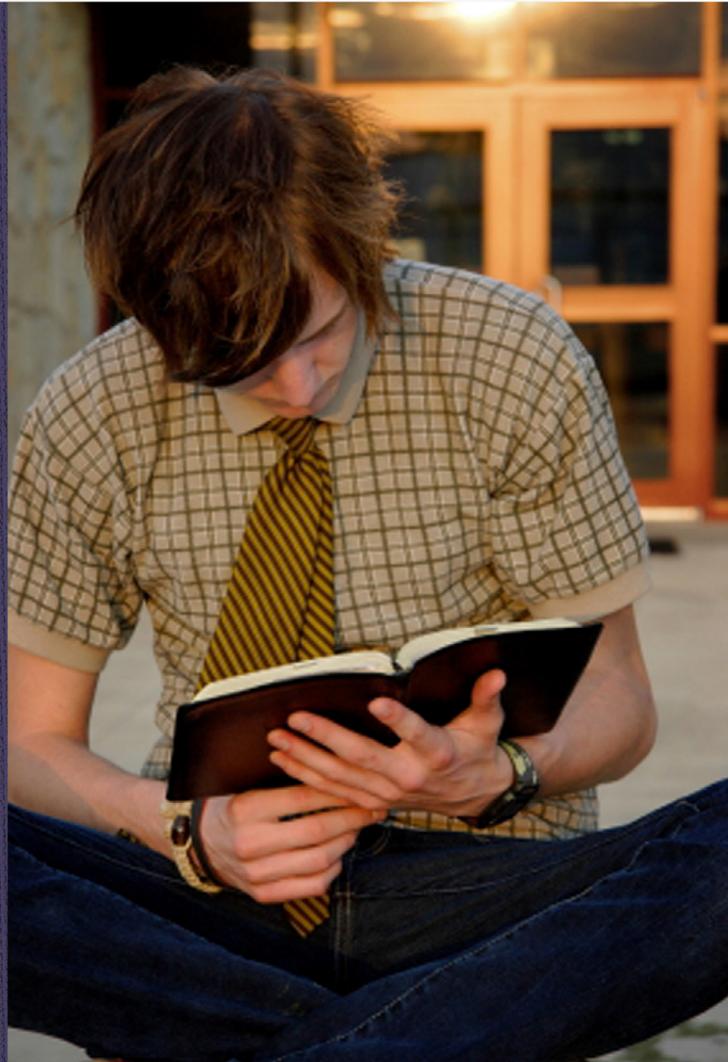
PURGATORY

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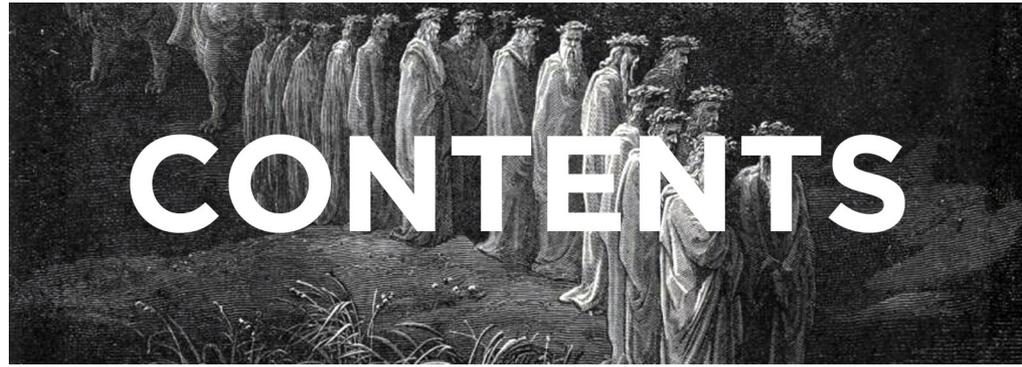
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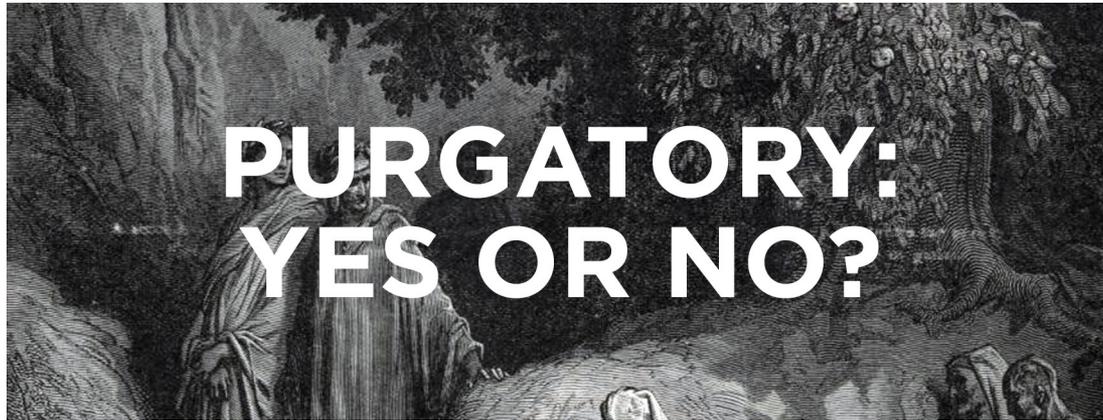
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This issue of *Credo Magazine* might come as a surprise. Purgatory? Really? I thought we addressed that back in the sixteenth-century? Think again. Not only is purgatory a hot button issue once again on the table, especially given the current excitement with some Protestants returning to Rome, but most recently there has been a renewed interest in purgatory among committed evangelicals. For example, in his new book, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation*, Jerry Walls addresses evangelicals today, arguing not only that Protestants should whole-heartedly embrace purgatory, but that such a doctrine as this can serve as an ecumenical bridge with Catholics. Spoiler alert: The purgatory Walls has in mind does not look exactly like your Catholic grandmother's. You will have to read this issue of *Credo Magazine* to see why.

So what should we think about purgatory anyway? My guess is most evangelicals know little about the history of purgatory, let alone how to jump into a debate over purgatory with their Catholic friends. And to complicate things even more, today we even have evangelicals incorporating purgatory within their Protestant theological framework. So the topic is a relevant one. To give just one anecdote, I was speaking at a conference on the topic recently and to my surprise a pastor approached me afterwards. He shepherds a congregation in a city where Roman Catholicism has a strong presence. Often he has Catholics in his pews, considering Protestantism for the first time. Among other doctrines, they want to know whether purgatory is a biblical “yes” or “no.” Perhaps that is you. Or perhaps you are that pastor. Either way, this issue is for you.

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Cover Photograph by Kevin Dooley

David & Sally Michael

1 Where did you each grow up and how did you become believers?

Sally: I grew up in Virginia, Rhode Island and Ecuador, S.A., moving eight times the first eighteen years of my life. My father was in the U.S. Navy, and when he retired, my parents became missionaries in Ecuador where they had been for two years with the Navy. My mother was saved when I was twelve after taking mandatory Bible classes at Barrington College, where she was attending to complete a degree in elementary education. She introduced my sister and me to the Bible, which I received as “good news.” This eventually led me to saving faith.

David: I grew up about 175 miles northwest of New York City in Binghamton, New York. The Lord delivered me from a life of multiple addictions, crime, deviant behavior and perversions of every kind by giving me parents who faithfully pointed me to Christ. My parents taught me the fear of God and by their example showed me the joy of following in the path that leads to life. I mark my “conversion” at age seven when I responded to the gospel call initiated by my Sunday School teacher who also happened to be my mom. However, God’s saving work in my life began long before

and continued long after that event in my life.

2 How did you start working together with children and families?

We started teaching the Bible to children while in college through a Friday night Bible club ministry. While raising our own two daughters and working in Sunday School, we were burdened for the faith of the next generation. This burden motivated us to begin a parenting class in our church teaching parents how to nurture the faith of the next generation. Eventually we were asked to develop a ministry to parents and children in our church. At that time, we weren’t enthused with the children’s curriculum that was then available, and we wanted to develop a series of curriculum for kids that lined up with the theological emphases that we were hearing from John Piper’s preaching on Sunday mornings.

3 What have you appreciated most about ministering alongside of John Piper?

There has been so much to appreciate about ministering alongside John Piper but if we have

to narrow it to one thing, we would say, his solid, God-centered ministry of the Word. God has used John's faithful ministry of the Word to ignite passion for the glory God in the hearts of so many, including our own. As we were gripped by that passion, we were also moved in our hearts to spread this passion for God to the next generations.

4 Who else besides Piper has had an impact on your ministry and walk with God?

Sally: Of course, my husband and good Christian friends have had a great impact on me. Thirty-two years of sitting under John Piper's teaching, preaching and influence has surely been a most significant impact. But I also read a great deal and have received much spiritual nurture from the writings of other Christians. If I had to single out a few favorites I would mention Jeremiah Burrough's *Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones' *Spiritual Depression*, and Jerry Bridges' *The Joy of Fearing God*. One of the greatest spiritual influences has been studying the Word of God in preparation for writing children's Bible curriculum.

David: In my formative years, God used the influence of my parents along with my older brother Eric to show me that no life is worth living apart from Christ and there is no greater joy in life than a life wholly devoted to him. It would be difficult to overstate the significance of Sally's influence in my life at every level. Most certainly it was Sally's contagious passion

for teaching the Bible to children and imparting to them a Biblical vision of God that shaped our parenting and certainly influenced the past sixteen years of our ministry. I have also profited greatly from Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* and the writings of Charles Spurgeon.

5 Sally, you've written 20 curriculums for Children Desiring God. What components go into your curricula and what makes them distinct from other curriculum on the market?

Perhaps most immediately noticeable in the Children Desiring Curricula is the *intentional scope and sequence* focusing on the "full counsel of God." In the hopes of making well-rounded disciples of Christ, our curricula emphasize these six elements: chronological Bible stories, the gospel of Christ, biblical theology, systematic theology (focusing on the doctrine of God), moral instruction, and book-of-the-Bible studies/Bible study skills. The deliberate *God-centered emphasis* as well as the intentional teaching of the essential doctrines of the faith is also somewhat unique. We are careful to teach correct systematic theology to kids, even while telling the stories of the Bible in an understandable and engaging way.

Biblical literacy is a very important skill we want children to acquire. So we have placed an intentional focus on teaching children to correctly read and understand the Bible, encouraging them toward thoughtful examination of the text, integration

of the text with the other teachings of Scripture and guidance toward rightly interpreting the text.

We also believe that Deuteronomy 6:4-7 and Ephesians 6:4 place the responsibility of teaching children ultimately on the shoulders of parents. For that reason, we have attempted in the curriculum to *partner with parents* as the primary faith nurturers through parent resource pages, parent-child journal exercises, and parent-child reading opportunities.

Sally, you've also written *God's Names* (P&R, 2011) and *God's Promises* (P&R, 2012). Do you have any books in the works?

Presently P&R is working on *God's Providence* aiming for a spring 2013 release. I would also love to write a Bible story book for children that is careful to teach systematic theology accurately, even while capturing the attention and moral imagination of children and making biblical-theological connections along the way.

David, how can pastors best minister to families? Is there anything they can do besides preaching to help strengthen families?

O my yes! But let's not pass too quickly over preaching. Preaching has had a profound effect on our families. If parents are spiritually thriving and growing in Christ, the whole family benefits. If parents are struggling, often this takes its toll on the children. When the preacher helps us see the splendor of God's

majesty, the beauty of Christ, and the truth of his Word, and when God uses the preacher to open the eyes of parents to see everything in the light of his Word, parents sense an urgency to make these things known to their children.

Beyond the faithful, passionate preaching of the Word, a pastor who can articulate a God-centered vision for the next generation with strength and conviction helps parents to see the significance of their calling as parents. Just as a parent's example will influence his children (for better or for worse) so also the pastor's own example as a husband and father influences the parents in his church in powerful ways.

David, what biblical principles are essential for men's discipleship?

First, generally speaking, if the husband/father is flourishing spiritually, usually the marriage and family is flourishing as well. If he is struggling, usually that struggle is manifested in the home.

Second, men's discipleship begins with little boys in preschool and should continue as that future man develops. Understanding this has huge implications for what youth ministry in the church should look like. Third, I think one of the most effective strategies for men's discipleship is to encourage them to team up with two or three other husbands/fathers and stir each other

up to faithfully fulfill their calling as husbands and fathers. One resource that we found useful to help get men started is the Dad's of Destiny material from the National Center for Fathering

We have attempted in the curriculum to partner with parents as the primary faith nurturers...

(www.fathers.com). Like other resources, it has its measure of strengths and weaknesses but we found it useful for getting men connected with each other and challenging them in practical ways.

9 After working with children and families for over twenty-five years, do you have any parenting advice that you feel is especially needed today?

Well, this could fill a book! But in a nutshell, we would encourage parents to take seriously the spiritual nurture of their children and not assume that their children will “absorb” their beliefs. A trend that we would warn parents about is that they avoid being child-centered and instead make God the focus of their family and their marriage the second priority. The challenge that we would give Christian parents is to focus on their children’s hearts—what affections drive their children—and not merely on their behavior. We would encourage parents to carefully examine their goals, methods, and instruction to discern if they are based on a biblical worldview. Parents should examine their hearts and pray for a biblical mindset rather than uncritically adopt cultural norms. One book we would highly recommend is *Gospel-Powered Parenting* by William Farley.

10 If someone wants to find out more about your ministry to children and the materials you’ve produced, where can they go?

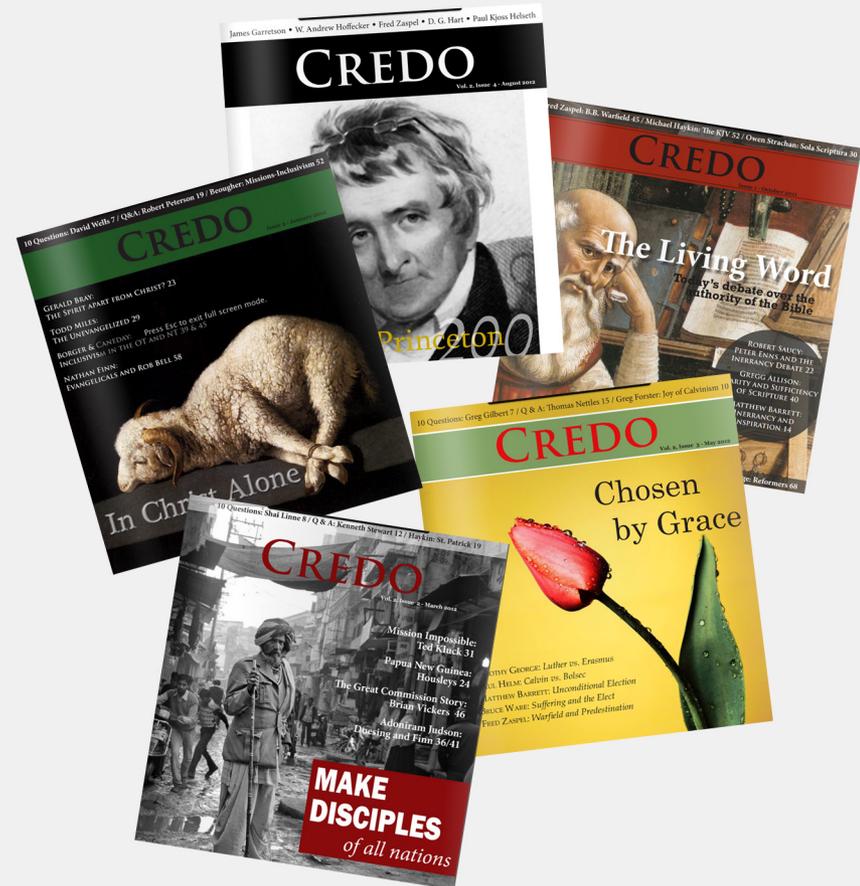
There are two places they can go:

Children Desiring God: childrendesiringgod.org

Bethlehem Baptist Church: hopeingod.org
(check Family Ministry and Resources)

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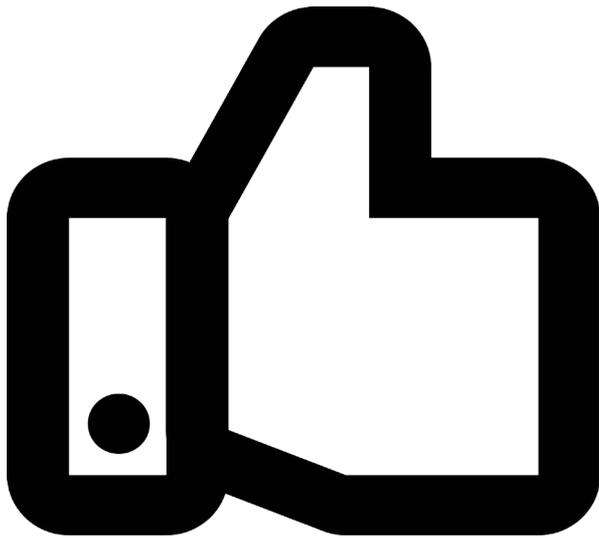
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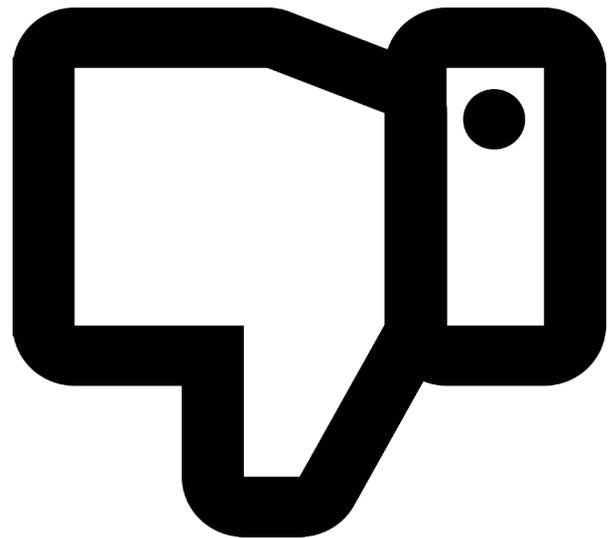
BRUCE WARE / JOHN FRAME
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AND MANY MORE

Should Evangelicals Believe in Purgatory?



Evangelicals **SHOULD** Embrace Purgatory

Evangelicals should embrace the doctrine of purgatory, since it is merely an extension of their understanding of sanctification. Because all of us—except for a few saints—will die with un-confessed sins and disordered desires, with some of us further away from perfection than others, and because “nothing impure will enter [heaven]” (Rev. 21:27), it seems undeniable



Evangelicals Should **NOT** Embrace Purgatory

The primary reason is that *purgatory is not biblical*. Christ “entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12; cf. 9:26; 10:10; Rom. 3:21-26; Gal. 3:10-14). No satisfaction for sins remains for Christians to remit in purgatory.

that some posthumous transformation of the believer is necessary. The question, however, is how long it takes. There are only two options: it is either instantaneous—i.e., it happens immediately after death—or it is gradual. The former seems implausible, since the logic of sanctification requires suffering and effort over time on the part of the believer (Rom. 5:3-5), and “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 1:6)

So, it is unsurprising that some understanding of posthumous transformation was widely and uncontroversially embraced by Latin and Eastern Christians from the Church’s earliest days. Thus, if Evangelicals come to accept purgatory, it would show that they have come to realize that they are as entitled to the Church’s inheritance as those who call Rome or Constantinople home.

Francis J. Beckwith
Professor of Philosophy
Baylor University

Moreover, purgatory is unnecessary as a place of sanctification. Paul wrote, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6, ESV). Our sanctification is completed “at [or until] the day of Jesus Christ”—i.e., at his Second Coming. Since many Christians are “alive and remain” when Christ returns (1 Thes. 4:17), at least these people will have their sanctification completed “at” that moment without experiencing purgatory in the intermediate state. John teaches, “What we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when [Christ] appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). We pursue sanctification now in hope that it will be completed at the Second Coming. We don’t need purgatory. All we need is to “see him as he is.”

Steven B. Cowan
Jim Young Associate Professor of Philosophy
and Religion
Louisiana College Caskey School of Divinity

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Five Minutes with

Lee Gatiss

Interviewed by Gary Steward

I first met you when you were an Associate Minister at St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, in London, and through you, I also learned about Oak Hill Theological Seminary and other evangelical Anglican institutions in England. Tell us a little about the current state of evangelicalism within the Anglican Church in England.

Evangelicalism within the Church of England is split into two. There are “open” or liberal evangelicals and there are conservative evangelicals. Very broadly, they might identify with N. T. Wright and J. I. Packer respectively, if that gives you some

sense of the dividing line theologically. The fault lines between them are on issues of authority, leadership and gender, cultural engagement/social issues, and (often) attitude towards the denomination (especially financially). Conservatives generally have until fairly recently been too passive or disengaged from the structures of the denomination, concentrating more on local church life and parachurch ministries alongside conservative evangelicals in other denominations, while “open” evangelicals have been able to move up in the Anglican hierarchy more easily. Charismatics within the Church of England would call themselves

evangelical too, and would also divide into those who are more conservative and those who are more “open.” We conservative evangelicals are sadly a small minority within the Church of England, which has significant “Anglo-Catholic” and Liberal/Revisionist sections, and a sizeable soft underbelly of moderate middle-of-the-roadness.

Conservative evangelicalism is strong at Oak Hill, in university towns with churches such as St Ebbe’s in Oxford, St Andrew the Great in Cambridge, and St Helen’s, Bishopsgate and All Souls, Langham Place in London. There are some excellent conservative evangelical Anglicans all over the country, and a good concentration of them in the North West particularly, part of a cross-denominational grouping called the North West Gospel Partnership. Our leading lights are preachers and teachers such as Vaughan Roberts from Oxford, Professor Gerald Bray with the Lattimer Trust, Dick Lucas with the Proclamation Trust, and Rico Tice with Christianity Explored. Both “open” and conservative evangelicals would claim the late John Stott as “one of them” on some things! Our shibboleths are expository preaching (preaching consecutively through books of the Bible, letting the text set the agenda and tone for the sermon) and biblical evangelism (that is, sticking people’s noses into the Scriptures and letting them do the work of converting people). We tend to work well with Baptists and Presbyterians who share those core concerns, and have more in common with them than with other species of Anglican.

Given your observations, how do British evan-

gelicals tend to differ from American evangelicals?

The UK is officially a Christian country: we have an established church including bishops in the House of Lords (our equivalent of your Senate), the Queen promised at her coronation to maintain “the true profession of the gospel... the Protestant Reformed religion,” and in 2011 the national census revealed that 60% of people classed themselves as Christian. But we have the fourth lowest rate of

church attendance in Europe, and obviously only some of those people would self-identify as evangelical (just over a million, all told). The best estimates I’ve seen put the *evangelical* population of the USA at somewhere between a quarter

and a third of the entire population - that is, you have way more evangelicals than we have people. If we had anything like that proportion here, it would feel to us like an end-of-the-world revival!

American evangelicals are immensely blessed in terms of numbers and in quality of leadership, particularly in confessional circles. You have more celebrity pastors, though, and other problems of “success”; while we tolerate huge amounts of eccentricity (doctrinal and otherwise) in our leadership because we are small and need to stick together, and are intuitively suspicious of anyone who is too professional or prominent (“tall poppy syndrome”). American evangelicalism has an entrepreneurial vigor and a laudable, gospel-motivated “can do” attitude, it seems to me; while many here are tending towards passivity or self-censorship in the public square because of increasing secularization and the mounting hostility of the media

and legal system to traditional Christian beliefs.

Your ThM thesis was on Augustus Montague Toplady (1740-1778), author of the hymn Rock of Ages. What else did he do and write besides this hymn?

Toplady was an Anglican minister, who preached the doctrines of grace with great power, passion, and poetry during the Evangelical Revival of the 18th century. He was vicar of small parishes in out-of-the-way places, but had a huge impact in those villages for the gospel. He didn't aspire to be a Whitefield or a Wesley, working the conference circuit so-to-speak; he compared such men to God's cavalry, while he himself was a guardsman, watching over a more circumscribed area and attempting to be a faithful soldier of Christ there.

He was a writer too, of many hymns of course, but was also particularly notable as a historian. His classic work (which I am editing for republication soon) was called *The Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England*, and examines the founders and foundations of the Church of England in the 16th and 17th centuries. This inevitably brought him into controversy, especially with John Wesley who was vehemently Arminian and attacked the much younger Toplady in the most unseemly ways. My work on Toplady was published a couple of years ago as *The True Profession of the Gospel: Augustus Toplady and Reclaiming our Reformed Foundations*, and

American evangelicals are immensely blessed in terms of numbers and in quality of leadership, particularly in confessional circles.

I tried there to apply some of the lessons from Toplady's short life and ministry for evangelicals today (both inside and outside Anglicanism).

Your PhD work at Cambridge is on John Owen (1616-1683). What is the focus of your work on Owen?

People know Owen, if at all, as a great puritan theologian. But like almost all the great theologians of his era, he wrote not just theology but biblical commentary. That aspect of his work has been hugely neglected in the scholarship. So I spent a lot of time reading through his mammoth commentary on Hebrews, which at about two mil-

lion words in length is nearly three times as long as the entire Bible! In the nineteenth century, Thomas Chalmers said of this that it was "a work of gigantic strength as

well as gigantic size; and he who hath mastered it is very little short, both in respect to the doctrinal and practical of Christianity, of being an erudite and accomplished theologian." I guess that's what I'm attempting to become. People are often surprised when I tell them that Owen's commentary was written deliberately as a commentary: it's not just written-up sermons, but a carefully crafted, detailed exposition of everything from textual criticism to exegesis of the Greek text to historical debates about it and pastoral application.

Few commentaries today do all that as well as Owen. He isn't content with shallow interpretation, or with imposing a piety or a doctrinal frame-

work onto the details of the Bible to smooth out difficulties. He adores the fullness of the Scriptures and works at the text with the best tools at his disposal. That includes using a huge number of Jewish sources (such as the Mishnah, Talmuds, Targums, Midrashim, and rabbinical commentaries) to put Hebrews into its first century Judaic context. Some people think that's a modern "new perspective" on the New Testament, but Owen was doing it 350 years ago, and out-exegesis his unorthodox interlocutors along the way.

You recently edited a two-volume set of sermons by George Whitefield (Crossway). Are Whitefield's sermons valuable for us today?

Whitefield shows us how to put Reformed and Evangelical truth into penetrating and passionate form. Toplady said Whitefield was "a most excellent systematic divine" and he certainly was a well read, Oxford-educated man (as many of my footnotes in the two volumes try to bring out). Yet his preaching managed to connect with people of every age and class. That's a magnificent thing for those who like reading theology to remember and emulate. Many seminarians are tedious and turgid to listen to once they're allowed into a pulpit. Although they may have picked up some excellent theology they haven't chewed on it sufficiently to be able to serve it up to their congregations in digestible form. So they think they have to either abandon deep and profound biblical exposition

(and leave their congregations fat and flabby without a decent weekly workout) or they desperately seek out opportunities to share their supposed gems with more erudite people who will appreciate their cleverness (on a blog or at a conference perhaps).

Whitefield is a wonderful example of a man who clearly loved theology, and loved people enough to enthuse, strengthen, and challenge them with all its stratospheric truths, but in their own language and idiom.

Whitefield is a wonderful example of a man who clearly loved theology, and loved people enough to enthuse, strengthen, and challenge them with all its stratospheric truths, but in their own language and idiom.

Amazingly, though he was no great fan of popular culture (especially theatre, the TV-Hollywood of his day), he managed to connect with people's hearts and bring them to Christ!

Also, of course, his actual theology was unapologetically Calvinistic - and yet he was an astoundingly effective evangelist. It's stupendous how often people assume these two things can't co-exist! So I treasure people such as Whitefield (and Charles Spurgeon) who demonstrate so clearly that they can, do, and must.

Lee Gatiss is Director of Church Society, editor of *Theologian*, and Lecturer in Church History at Wales Evangelical School of Theology. He also blogs at www.gatiss.net and www.meetthepuritans.com. His latest book is called *For Us and For Our Salvation: "Limited Atonement" in the Bible, Doctrine, History, and Ministry*.

ON A SCALE FROM



DO EVANGELICALS TODAY HAVE A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE AFTER DEATH?

5 Evangelicals generally understand that there is life after death (so do many non-evangelicals), but most find the Bible’s teaching too intimidating to search out answers; even pastors shy away from the topic. Sadly, what results is a Christianity in which Christ’s disciples long for their next weekend gateway more than the infinite joy set before them in heaven.

Dan Barber

Author of *Life Everlasting: The Unfolding Story of Heaven*

6 If Walls’s misguided effort to rehabilitate the doctrine of purgatory is any indication, evangelical believers are increasingly in danger of losing their historic view and consensus regarding life after death. The biblically faithful and pastorally wise view of the Heidelberg Catechism well expresses the evangelical view: “That not only my soul, after this life, shall immediately be taken up to Christ, its Head; but also that this my body, raised by the power of Christ, shall again be united with my soul, and me like unto the glorious body of Christ” (Luke 16:22; 23:43; Phil. 1:21, 23).

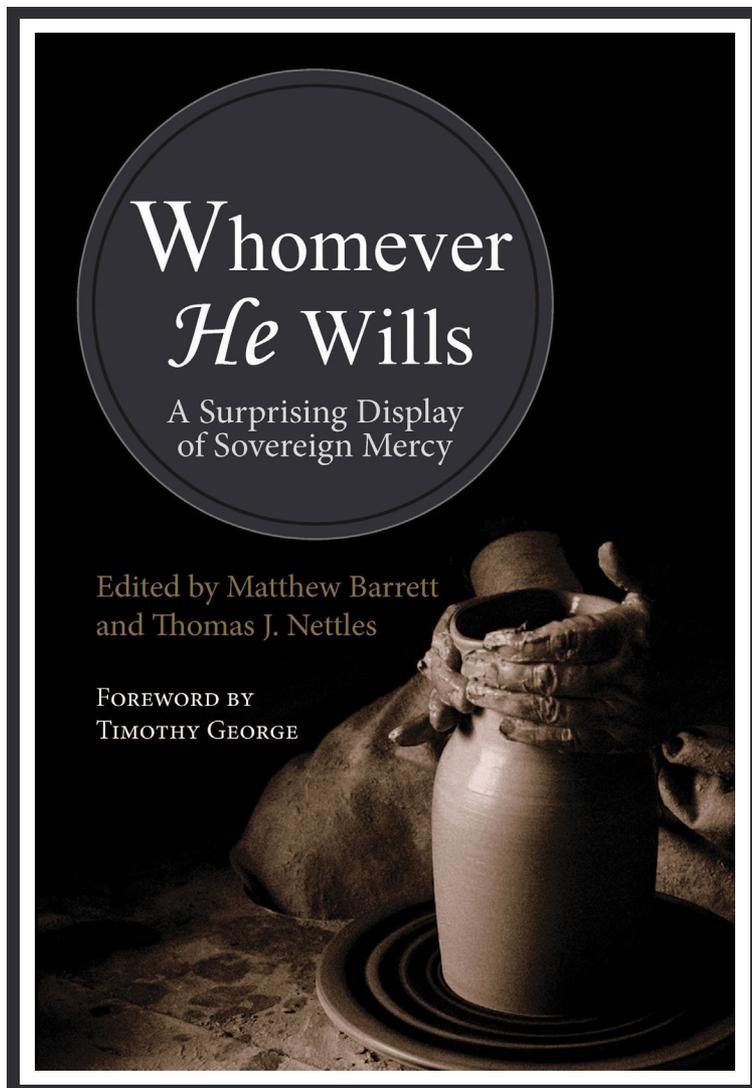
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“The essays here do represent a serious engagement by a team of thoughtful Baptist pastors and theologians to come to grips with a major tension inherent in the Christian Gospel itself. As such, it deserves to be read, discussed, and responded to.”

— **TIMOTHY GEORGE**, Dean, Beeson Divinity School; author of *Theology of the Reformers*

“The issues in this book are essential to a consistent Theism. They are essential to any confession of divine rescue. They are an essential part of the very fabric of the biblical revelation of divine salvation. They are essential to a right understanding of the gospel. They are essential to a worship that would rightly acknowledge God as the Savior of sinners. And they are basic to a realized joy in God’s salvation.”

— **FRED ZASPEL**, author of *The Theology of B. B. Warfield*; Pastor, Reformed Baptist Church of Franconia, PA

“The doctrines of grace, which form the subject matter of this book, have often proven to be the stuff of controversy in the church’s history. What I deeply appreciate about these studies of these precious truths, though, is the irenicism that informs them. And this is as it should be. To paraphrase the Apostle: here we find the speaking of the truth about divine grace in love.”

— **MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN**, Professor of Church History, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Edited by **Matthew Barrett and Thomas J. Nettles**
Foreword by **Timothy George**



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

GREGG ALLISON DISCUSSES THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ROMAN CATHOLICISM & PROTESTANTISM

In recent years a number of Protestants have converted to the Roman Catholic faith. Why is this the case?

Protestants convert to the Catholic faith for several reasons (the following are not necessarily in any particular order).¹ First, they desire certainty of salvation and truth concerning God and his ways. Disturbed by the multiplicity of interpretations of Scripture and theological formulations within Protestantism, they are attracted to what they consider to be a monolithic, consistent Catholic biblical and theological position (such a view is an utopian vision of Catholicism that does not exist in reality). Second, they want to feel connected to the church of the past and be organically

related to Christians from ancient times. They lament the apparent Protestant loss of traditional/historical moorings, which is evidenced by the neglect or rejection of liturgies, creeds, traditional practices, and the like within many Protestant churches and movements. Third, they long for the unity of all churches because they are scandalized by the historical and current divisions among Christians. They believe in the vision, fueled by Catholicism's claim that "the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church,"² that the Catholic Church is the bastion of unity by and to which all other churches will eventually be reunited. Fourth, they yearn for authority and thus are attracted by the authority of the Church and its Magisterium,

whose responsibility it is to provide the authoritative interpretation of Scripture and Tradition and guide the Church properly.

What would you say to evangelicals today who are thinking of converting to Rome?

Before making the journey to Catholicism, consider a robust Protestant vision and its implications for the above four areas. First, for those searching for certainty of salvation and truth concerning God and his ways, a robust Protestant vision offers such assurance. In terms of its “big picture” it embraces creation—fall—redemption—consummation, the very storyline of Scripture. It rests foundationally on the triune God and his works of creation, providence, and salvation. It embraces the inspired Word of God that is wholly true in all that it affirms, completely sufficient for salvation and for living a life that pleases God fully, authoritative to command faith and obedience, intelligible to all who read it, necessary for knowing God and his will, and powerful to rescue fallen human beings and transform them into the image of Jesus Christ. Such a vision magnifies the complete sufficiency of the death and resurrection of Christ and

makes no provision for a cooperative effort by which people depend on the grace of God while working to merit eternal life. It highlights the many faceted mighty works of God to actualize such salvation in human lives, from election to regeneration, from justification to sanctification, from perseverance³ to glorification. This vision offers certainty of salvation and truth concerning God and his ways.

Second, such a vision embraces the essential doctrines that Christians have always believed, defended, and lived—core truths like the Trinity and Christology hammered out in the earliest centuries of Christianity. But it does not embrace certain key elements held by Catholicism because the vision is forged in the context

Just because the early church and medieval church believed and practiced something does not mean that the church today must believe and practice that as well.

of a chastened tradition, accepting those doctrines and practices that enjoy Scriptural support and rejecting other beliefs that lack such warrant or are based on a faulty interpretation of Scripture.⁴ Just because the early church and medieval church believed and practiced something does not mean that the church today must believe and practice that as well. What is called for is a *chastened tradition* that distinguishes between doctrines and practices that have

biblical justification and those that do not. A robust Protestant vision clings to that which is rightly warranted. Furthermore, it inherits proven doctrines and practices from the Reformation that were essential for the church both in terms of modifying already existing beliefs and discovering new ones that came to light in that desperate situation of a carnal and spiritually bankrupt Roman Catholicism. This vision is properly connected to the church of the past.

Third, an intense longing for the unity of all churches so as to overcome the historic and current divisions between them is not satisfied by leaving Protestantism and joining the Catholic Church, for the latter does not even consider Protestant “ecclesial communities” to be true churches, a fact that patently does not overcome the problem of disunity.⁵ A robust Protestant vision will certainly not overcome this problem either, but it does embrace a universal church of which all genuine Christians—both those in heaven with Christ and those currently alive—are members and that manifests itself in local churches that establish strong connections with like-minded churches for high impact ministries in their region. These churches long for the actualization of the vision of

What is called for is a *chastened tradition* that distinguishes between doctrines and practices that have biblical justification and those that do not.

perfect unity still to come, when those “from every tribe and language and people and nation” will worship the Lord together (Rev. 5:9-10). This vision encourages and provides for a realistic unity of churches now and a hope for perfect unity in the future.

Fourth, as for the yearning for authority that attracts people to the Catholic Magisterium, it is one thing to long for an authority that is perfect and inerrant, and quite another thing to long for an authority that rests on some claim of infallibility but that demonstrates that it is susceptible to error. With respect to the former, such perfect and inerrant authority does not belong to any human institution—religious or otherwise—but to God and his Word alone. With respect to the latter, the Catholic Magisterium may be established as the official interpreter of Scripture and Tradition and may claim infallibility for (some of) its pronouncements, but due to its errors in interpretation and theological formulation, it must be regarded like other human authorities. It is certainly not a panacea that satisfies in reality the yearning for perfect authority. A robust Protestant vision places such authority in its proper place—in God and his authoritative

written Word. This robust Protestant vision places such authority in its proper place.

Thus, I would encourage evangelicals who are contemplating a journey to Catholicism to embrace a robust Protestant vision of salvation, authority, history, chastened tradition, and the like, and stay the course on which they are journeying.

Sola Scriptura was at the very center of Martin Luther’s “Here I Stand” speech. How do Protestants and Catholics differ in how they understand Scripture and Tradition, and why is this issue so important?

A major point of division between Catholicism and Protestantism focuses on the issue of ultimate authority for the church. Catholicism embraces a triadic structure of authority, with written Scripture, church Tradition, and the Magisterium (the teaching office of the Catholic Church) constituting a three-fold authoritative collective. This structure is akin to a three-legged stool; as the three legs prop up the seat, so Scripture, Tradition, and the magisterium support the church and its doctrine and practice.

A foundational tenet—called the *formal principle*—of Protestantism is that the ultimate source of divine revelation, and hence the supreme authority for the church,

is the written Word of God only (*sola Scriptura*) and not Scripture plus church Tradition. This latter position is embraced by Catholicism, which considers Tradition as consisting of teachings that Christ passed down orally to the apostles, who in turn passed them down to their successors, the bishop. This Tradition is maintained in the Catholic Church and occasionally promulgated as official church dogma, specifically, the immaculate conception of Mary (Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus*; December 8, 1854)⁶ and her bodily assumption (Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus*; November 1, 1950).⁷ While Protestants reject this Catholic notion of Tradition, many embrace a chastened tradition—explained above—that provides wisdom from the past in terms of solid biblical interpretation and sound theological formulation.

Additionally, Catholicism insists that the prerogative to determine the correct and authoritative interpretation of Scripture belongs solely to its Magisterium, or teaching office (consisting of the pope and bishops). This was a decision made in response to the growing Protestant movement by the Council of Trent (1546) in its declaration “that no one relying on his own judgment shall, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions,

presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds. . . .”⁸ Thus, the Catholic Magisterium claims that it possesses the sole right to interpret Scripture. This mere claim, however, does not guarantee a correct interpretation, as the misinterpretation of some Scripture by the Magisterium is well in evidence.

In terms of salvation, what divided the sixteenth century

Reformers from the Roman Catholics of their day was their affirmation of sola fide. Is this still true today?

Yes, it is still true today, and I will concentrate my answer on the doctrine of justification as affirmed by both groups. Both historically and today, one of the most pronounced and crucial differences between Catholicism and Protestantism is their understanding of salvation.⁹ Catholicism joins together justification with other acts of God in salvation, specifically sanctification and regeneration: “Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man.”¹⁰ Specifically, justification is tied to baptism, through which grace for

regeneration is infused; it can and must increase through participation in the other sacraments, through which more grace is infused, and engagement in good works; and it may be lost through committing mortal sin, rendering any assurance of salvation impossible.¹¹ Thus, justification is a cooperative effort between God’s grace and human effort: at the initiative of grace, sinful people are enabled both to express faith in Christ’s atoning death and, moved by love and the Holy Spirit, to merit eternal life through involvement in the Church and good deeds.

Both historically and today, one of the most pronounced and crucial differences between Catholicism and Protestantism is their understanding of salvation

Protestantism dissents from this view. Justification is the mighty act of God by which he declares sinful human beings to be not guilty—forgiven of sins—but righteous instead, because the righteousness

of Christ is accredited to them. This declarative act of God is embraced by faith and faith alone, as Scripture constantly insists (e.g., Rom. 3:21-31). In Scripture, moreover, justification is presented as a forensic (legal) declaration, the opposite of condemnation (e.g., Deut. 25:1; Prov. 17:15; Rom. 5:16, 18); indeed, as those justified by divine grace, Christians are assured there is “no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1; cf.

Rom. 5:1, 9). While intimately linked with regeneration and sanctification, justification is distinguishable from those other two mighty works; Scripture itself notes these as different divine acts (1 Cor. 6:11).

Catholicism conflates these three: it mixes together the declarative work of God—justification, the pronouncement that sinful people are not guilty but righteous instead—with his transformative works—regeneration and sanctification, by which sinful people are born again to become new creatures and progressively renewed into Christ-likeness in character. Confounding these three mighty acts results in Catholicism’s false notion of justification: it is the infusion of righteousness instead of its imputation; it may increase or decrease instead of being either declared to be the case or not declared; it is tied to baptism and the other Catholic sacraments instead of being God’s mighty act alone; it incorporates human cooperation; and it can be lost instead of providing the assurance that the future verdict—“no condemnation” but perfect standing before God because of the perfect righteousness of Christ—has already been rendered for those who embrace Christ by faith alone. Out of deep gratitude for their justification, Christians obey God, exercise faith working through love, and engage in good works because they have been born again and have a

new nature—regeneration—and because God and them cooperate together in the ongoing process of greater conformity to Christ-likeness—sanctification—not to merit the eternal life that has been graciously given to them, but because they are new creations by faith in Jesus Christ.

Some evangelicals today are flirting with the idea of purgatory. Jerry Walls, for example, has proposed that evangelicals should adopt a “Sanctification model” of purgatory, where believers undergo further cleansing and purgation until they reach perfection. Is Walls right? Do evangelicals need to incorporate purgatory into their doctrinal beliefs?

Let me respond by discussing why Protestantism rejects the Catholic notion of purgatory, because some of the same reasons for this rejection may apply to an evangelical rejection of Jerry Wall’s proposal, with which I am much less familiar.

Protestantism believes that human beings face one of only two eternal destinies: eternal life for all whom God saves through his grace as they embrace the gospel by faith, or eternal condemnation for all who reject this salvation. Although Catholicism agrees with these two eternal destinies, it adds a temporal destiny for most people: temporal punishment in purgatory. “All

who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven."¹² This temporal punishment for final purification is called purgatory.

Protestantism rejects this doctrine for the following reasons: first, the idea of purgatory is based on an apocryphal writing (2 Maccabees 12:46), and Protestantism denies that the Apocrypha is canonical—and, hence, authoritative—Scripture (above). Second, the doctrine is based on poorly interpreted biblical passages (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:15 describes the testing of human works by the divine fire of judgment, not purgatory as a place of punishment for ultimate purification). Third, the doctrine is based on an incorrect idea of justification:

Purgatory makes sense on a view of justification that combines a declarative act of forgiveness with inward renovation, and this latter renewal process is not sufficiently advanced in a particular case; such a sinful person is in need of further purification in purgatory. However, if through justification that sinful person is declared to be not guilty—forgiven of sins—but completely righteous instead, there can be no

temporal punishment due to being imperfectly purified awaiting him in a final purification of purgatory. The Protestant doctrine of justification leaves no room, because it has no need, for a doctrine of purgatory.¹³

Thus, Protestantism rejects the notion of purgatory as a temporal destiny for most people, and holds to only two eternal destinies. My guess is that Wall's embrace of purgatory is wedded to an incomplete notion of justification (point three above).

Much of the following has been adapted from Gregg R. Allison, "A Response to Catholicism," in *Journeys of Faith: Evangelicalism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Anglicanism*, ed. Robert L. Plummer (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 115-128.

Endnotes

1 The following discussion is prompted by the excellent article by Scot McKnight, "From Wheaton to Rome: Why Evangelicals Become Roman Catholic," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45/3 (September 2002): 451-72.

2 The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church," June 29, 2007, <http://www.vatican>.

va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_respon-sa-quaestiones_en.html.

3 Recall that Catholicism denies that Christians may possess the assurance of their salvation because they may forfeit divine grace.

4 Catholicism does this sifting as well, only not to the extent that is demanded. For example, though the early and medieval church emphasized that the death of Jesus Christ was a ransom paid to Satan, later developed Catholicism moved away from this model of the atonement because of its lack of biblical support.

5 This point is brought out in the above mentioned “Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church.”

6 Pius IX, *Ineffabilis Deus* (December 8, 1854), <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9ineff.htm>.

7 Pius XII, *Munificentissimus Deus* (November 1, 1950), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_p-xii_apc_19501101_munificentissimus-deus_en.html.

8 Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, 4th session (April 8, 1546), *Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures*, in Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper, 1877 – 1905), 2:83.

9 Indeed, the doctrine of justification by grace alone through Christ alone by faith alone is referred to as the material principle of Protestantism, which insists that it is “the main hinge on which religion turns.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.1, LCC 20:726. According to the Lutheran Smalcald Articles: “Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered, even though heaven and earth, and whatever will not abide [all created things], should sink to ruin.” Smalcald Articles, 2.1.5, in F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau, trans., *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1921), 463.

10 Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, 6th session (January 13, 1547), Decree on Justification 7, in Schaff, 2:94.

11 For the Council of Trent’s pronouncements on justification in their entirety, see *ibid.*, Schaff, 2:89-118.

12 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1030, <http://www.usccb.org/catechism/text>.

13 Gregg R. Allison, “The Bible in Christianity: Roman Catholicism,” *English Standard Version Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 2615.

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The
GOSPEL
at
STAKE

REVISITING THE
ROMAN CATHOLIC
PROTESTANT
DEBATE

R.C. SPROUL

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The gospel of Jesus Christ is always at risk of distortion. This was especially true in the sixteenth century, at the time of the Protestant Reformation. It has also been true at innumerable other points of church history, and it is true today. This is why Martin Luther said the gospel must be defended in every generation. It is the center point of attack by the forces of evil. They know that if they can get rid of the gospel, they can get rid of Christianity.

There are two sides to the gospel, the good news of the New Testament: an objective side and a subjective side. The objective content of the gospel is the person and work of Jesus—who He is and what He accomplished in His life. The subjective side is the question of how the benefits of Christ’s work are appropriated to the believer. There the doctrine of justification comes to the fore.

Many issues were involved in the Reformation, but the core matter, the material issue of the Reformation, was the gospel,

especially the doctrine of justification. There was no great disagreement between the Roman Catholic Church authorities and the Protestant Reformers about the objective side. All the parties agreed that Jesus was divine, the Son of God and of the

I think the biggest crisis over the purity of the gospel that I have experienced in my ministerial career was the initiative known as Evangelicals & Catholics Together.

Virgin Mary, and that He lived a life of perfect obedience, died on the cross in an atoning death, and was raised from death. The battle was over the second part of the gospel, the subjective side, or the question of how the benefits of Christ are applied to the believer.

The Reformers believed and taught that we are justified by faith alone. Faith, they said, is the sole instrumental cause for our justification. By this they meant that we receive all the

benefits of Jesus’ work through putting our trust in Him alone.

The Roman communion also taught that faith is a necessary condition for salvation. At the seminal Council of Trent (1545–1563), which formulated Rome’s response to the Reformation, the Roman Catholic authorities declared that faith affords three things: the *initium*, the *fundamentum*, and the *radix*. That is, faith is the beginning of justification, the foundation for justification, and the root of justification. But Rome held that a person can have true faith and still not be justified, because there was much more to the Roman system.

In reality, the Roman view of the gospel, as expressed at Trent, was that justification is accomplished through the sacraments. Initially, the recipient must accept and cooperate in baptism, by which he receives justifying grace. He retains that grace until he commits a mortal sin. Mortal sin is called “mortal” because it kills the grace of justification. The sinner then must be justified a second time. That happens through the sacrament of penance, which the Council of Trent defined as “a second plank” of justification for those who have

made shipwreck of their souls.¹

The fundamental difference was this. Trent said that God does not justify anyone until real righteousness inheres within the person. In other words, God does not declare a person righteous unless he or she is righteous. So, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, justification depends on a person's sanctification. By contrast, the Reformers said justification is based on the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus. The only ground by which a person can

ECT stated that evangelicals and Roman Catholics have a unity of faith in the gospel. This statement went too far.

be saved is Jesus' righteousness, which is given to him or reckoned to him when he believes.

There were radically different views of salvation. They could not be reconciled. One of them was the gospel. One of them was not. Thus, what was at stake in the Reformation was the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though the Council of

Trent made many fine affirmations of traditional truths of the Christian faith, it declared justification by faith alone to be anathema,² ignoring many plain teachings of Scripture, such as Romans 3:28: "For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."

Liberalism and Ecumenism

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the gospel was threatened by theological liberals who denied the supernatural work of Jesus. This was still the biggest threat when I entered seminary in the 1960s. Eventually the compromises were so blatant I had to leave the church in which I was raised and ordained.

About ten years after I was ordained, a minister of the denomination in which I was ordained was tried in a church court for heresy. Such trials were nearly a thing of the past, but this man had publicly denied the atonement of Christ and would not affirm the deity of Christ as an ordained minister. His case went to the highest court of the church.

When that court handed down its decision, it made two affirmations. First, the court re-

affirmed the church's historical creeds, all of which declared the deity of Christ and the atonement of Christ. Then the court went on to say that this man's views were within the limits of interpretation of the creed. So, on the one hand, the court reaffirmed the creeds, but on the other hand, it said ministers in the church did not really have to believe the creeds.

That case showed me that the denomination I was in and in which I had been ordained was willing to tolerate the intolerable. A man could deny the deity of Christ or the atonement of Christ and remain a minister in good standing. This crisis revealed a deep-rooted and widespread antipathy to objective confessional truth.

I think the biggest crisis over the purity of the gospel that I have experienced in my ministerial career was the initiative known as Evangelicals & Catholics Together (ECT, 1994). This initiative was driven by deep concern among some leading evangelicals and Roman Catholics over so-called "common-grace issues," such as family values, abortion, and relativism in the culture. Protestant and Roman Catholic leaders wanted to join

hands to speak as Christians united against this growing tide of relativism. All that was fine. I would march with anyone—Roman Catholics, Mormons, even Muslims—for civil rights for people and unborn babies.

But in the middle of the ECT document, the framers said, “We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ.”³ In other words, ECT stated that evangelicals and Roman Catholics have a unity of faith in the gospel. This statement went too far. If I march with a Muslim because we agree on certain human rights, that’s one thing. It is another thing to say I have a unity of faith with the Muslim. That is not true at all. Neither is it true that I, as an evangelical, have a unity of faith with Roman Catholics. So, that initial document provoked quite a controversy within evangelicalism.

It was followed by ECT II: The Gift of Salvation (1997), which addressed much more fully the theological concerns that various people had expressed after the first initiative, particularly about justification. The two sides, evangelicals and Roman Catholics, affirmed agreement on many aspects of justification, including the requirement

of faith. But in the end, they left the language of imputation on the table. In my judgment, this document was far worse than the first one because the framers were willing to maintain their assertion of the unity of faith in the gospel without affirming imputation, which was the core issue in the sixteenth century.

The doctrine of imputation is, for me, the non-negotiable. In 1541, at the Colloquy

The doctrine of imputation is, for me, the non-negotiable.

of Regensburg, there were serious efforts by the magisterial Reformers to reconcile with Rome. They came close, but ultimately they could not reconcile their competing views on imputation. Martin Luther stressed that the only righteousness believers have in the sight of God is an alien righteousness, that is, the righteousness of Christ that God imputes, or reckons, to them. They have no hope of becoming so inherently righteous that God will accept them. If I had to become inherently righteous before God would accept me, I would de-

spair of Christianity tomorrow.

In 2009, a new document was released, The Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience. It was another effort to find common cause on such issues as the sanctity of life, traditional marriage, and religious liberty. The signers included evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox adherents. It was similar in many respects to the ECT initiative and was driven by many of the same people. Unfortunately, it gave the same blanket endorsement of Rome as a Christian body.

The Manhattan Declaration says, “Christians are heirs of a 2,000-year tradition of proclaiming God’s Word.” But who are the Christians it is speaking about? The document refers to “Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical Christians.” Furthermore, it calls Christians to unite in “the Gospel,” “the Gospel of costly grace,” and “the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” and it says it is our duty to proclaim this gospel “both in season and out of season.”⁴ This document confused the gospel and obscured the distinction between who is and is not a Christian. I do not believe that the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches are preaching the same

gospel that evangelicals preach.

For these reasons, I could not sign the Manhattan Declaration, and neither could such men as John MacArthur, Michael Horton, and Alistair Begg. We were in agreement with ninety-nine percent of what was in the declaration, and we all strenuously support the sanctity of life, traditional marriage, and religious liberty. But we could not agree with the declaration in its ecumenical assertion.

One of the ironies of ECT was that, among other things, the framers wanted to overcome relativism in the culture. However, they ended up relativizing the most important truth of all—the gospel.

Misunderstanding and Confusion

I think ECT and similar efforts to make common cause with Roman Catholics are based on a fundamental misunderstanding of where the Roman Catholic Church is theologically and what it actually teaches. There is no question that the Roman Catholic Church has changed since the sixteenth century. But the changes have not closed the gap between Rome and Protestantism. Indeed, the

differences are greater now. For instance, the formally defined proclamation of the infallibility of the pope and all of the Mariology statements have come since the Reformation. Neither has Rome backed down from any of the positions it took

I think ECT and similar efforts to make common cause with Roman Catholics are based on a fundamental misunderstanding of where the Roman Catholic Church is theologically and what it actually teaches.

in the sixteenth-century debate. In the updated Catechism of the Catholic Church, released in the mid-1990s, the treasury of merit, purgatory, indulgences, justification through the sacraments, and other doctrines were reaffirmed.

I think this misunderstanding has been driven primarily by confusion over the significance of Vatican Council II (1962–1965). It was only the second ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church since Trent, the other being Vatican Council I (1869–70). So, these councils are rare events, and the church and the world were surprised when Pope John

XXIII convened Vatican II.

The statements produced by Vatican I referred to Protestants as schismatics and heretics. In marked contrast, the rhetoric of Vatican II was kind, warm, and appeasing. Protestants were called “separated breth-

ren.” John’s passion, which he set forth in a pastoral letter, was that the Lord’s sheepfold would be one. There should be unity under one shepherd, he said, with all Christians returning to Holy Mother Church under the Roman pontiff.⁵ John was seen as kind, avuncular, and warm, so people jumped to the conclusion that Rome had changed its theology. However, many overlooked the fact that John ruled out any debate about justification at Vatican II.

In the same era as Vatican II, there was a major split within the Roman Catholic Church between the Western and Latin wings of the church. Much

of the Western wing adopted what was called the *nouvelle théologie*, “the new theology,” which was much more compatible with historical Protestantism than the classical orthodox Latin Roman theology.

Incidentally, this rupture shows that the contemporary Roman Catholic communion is not as monolithic as it traditionally has been. Some see this rupture as almost as serious as the Reformation. We can find priests and even bishops who sound Protestant in their views. But it is important to remember that when we analyze the Roman Catholic Church, we are not talking about the American church, the Dutch church, the German church, or the Swiss church. We are talking about the Roman Catholic Church. The supreme pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church is not the bishop of New York or Los Angeles. He is not the bishop of Berlin, Heidelberg, or Vienna. He is the bishop of Rome. He is the one who, along with church councils, defines the belief system of the Roman Catholic Church.

The new theology made great inroads, particularly in Germany, Holland, and the United States. As a result, Roman Catholic priests in these

countries began to sound like Protestants in the things they taught. They said they believed in justification by faith and so on. Nevertheless, their beliefs did not reflect the church’s official positions.

These changes have led many Protestants to join the Roman Catholic Church. I suspect there are vastly greater numbers leaving Rome for evangelical-

So, when people say the Reformation is over, that we no longer need to fight the battles the Reformers fought and that we can make peace with Rome, they reveal a serious lack of understanding of the history and current issues that divide Protestants.

ism than the other way around, but a number of leading evangelicals have embraced Rome, the most high profile of whom

was probably Francis Beckwith, who resigned as president of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2007 when he decided to convert to Rome.

I think there are several reasons for these conversions. First, those who are going to Rome love the Roman liturgy, seeing it as more transcendent than the informal and contemporary worship practiced in a growing number of evangelical churches. They long for the beauty, the sense of gravity, and the transcendent majesty of classical worship. I think this is the biggest factor pulling evangelicals toward the Roman Catholic Church.

Second, Protestantism seems to be splintered into an infinite number of divisions and troubled by endless disputes and discussions of doctrine, while Rome seems unified and doctrinally settled. This appeals to many who long for unity, peace, and certainty.

In the midst of all this, a 2005 book actually asked, “Is the Reformation Over?” and asserted “Things are not the way they used to be.”⁶ My response to this idea that the Reformation is over is that the authors did not understand either the Reformation, Protestantism, Roman

Catholicism, or all three. The Reformation was simply a commitment to biblical truth, and as long as there are departures from biblical truth, we have to

Our task, as I see it, is to be faithful not to our own traditions or even to the heroes of the Reformation. We must be faithful to the truth of Scripture.

be involved in the task of reformation. So, when people say the Reformation is over, that we no longer need to fight the battles the Reformers fought and that we can make peace with Rome, they reveal a serious lack of understanding of the history and current issues that divide Protestants and Roman Catholics.

The indisputable fact is that Rome made a number of strong, clear theological affirmations at the Council of Trent. Because Trent was an ecumenical council, it had all the weight of the infallibility of the church behind it. So, there is a sense in which Rome, in order to maintain her

triumphant view of the authority of the church and of tradition, cannot repeal the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent. As recently as the Catechism of the Catholic Church at the end of the twentieth century, it made clear, unambiguous reaffirmations of the teachings of the Council of Trent. So, those who argue that Trent's teachings on justification are no longer relevant to the debate between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism are simply ignoring what the church itself teaches. Yes, there are some Roman Catholic priests and scholars who dispute some of the teachings of their communion, but as far as the Roman hierarchy is concerned, the Council of Trent stands immutable on its teaching regarding justification. We cannot ignore what Trent said in evaluating where we stand in relation to the Roman Catholic Church and the ongoing relevance of the Reformation.

Thankfully, we are witnessing today an upsurge of interest in the biblical gospel marked by endeavors such as Together for the Gospel, which sponsors conferences that pull together thousands of ministers and laypeople, most of whom are in their twenties and thirties.

It is this young group that excites me. We are seeing a new generation of young ministers who are committed to Reformational and biblical truth. My hope is that they will become more and more grounded in the theology they are embracing.

Rome vs. Protestantism

In this book, I have a simple goal. I want to look at Roman Catholic teaching in several significant areas and compare it to Protestant teaching. I hope to show, often using her own words, that the Roman Catholic Church has not changed from what it believed and taught at the time of the Reformation. That means that the Reformation is not over and we must continue to stand firm in proclaiming the biblical gospel.

We begin by looking at "Scripture and Authority," which was the formal cause of the Protestant Reformation, then turn to the material cause of the Reformation, the question of justification. Next, we look at the Roman Catholic Church's notion of the relationship of the visible church to redemption. In chapter 4, we will compare and contrast the Roman Catholic and Protestant

views of the sacraments, and then take up the issue of papal infallibility, which, of course, is of great concern for Protestants. Finally, we consider the division of Roman Catholic theology known as “Mariology,” or the study of the place, the role, and the function of the Virgin Mary in the Christian life.

Our task, as I see it, is to be faithful not to our own traditions or even to the heroes of the Reformation. We must be faithful to the truth of Scripture. We love the Reformation because the Reformers loved the truth of God and stood for it so courageously, and in doing so, they brought about a recovery of the purity of the gospel. We should be willing to die for those truths that are absolutely essential to the Christian faith. When the gospel is at stake, we have to “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also.”⁷

Endnotes

1 “As regards those who, by sin, have fallen from the received grace of Justification, they may be again justified, when, God exciting them, through the sacrament of Penance they shall have attained to the recovery, by the merit of Christ, of the grace lost: for this manner of

Justification is of the fallen the reparation: which the holy Fathers have aptly called a second plank after the shipwreck of grace lost.” (Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Chap. XIV, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/trentall.html>, accessed March 12, 2012.)

2 “If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.” (Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Sixth Session, Chap. XVI, Canon IX, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/trentall.html>, accessed March 12, 2012.)

3 Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium, <http://www.leaderu.com/ftissues/ft9405/articles/mission.html>, accessed March 12, 2012.

4 The Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience, <http://manhattandeclaration.org/the-declaration/read.aspx>, accessed March 12, 2012.

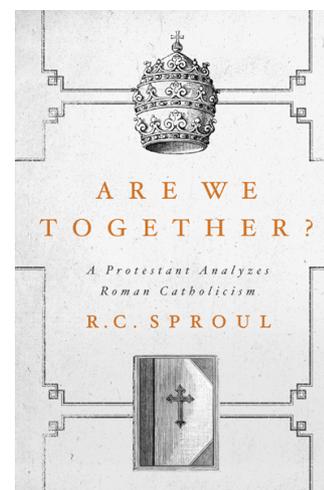
5 G. C. Berkouwer, *Vatikaans*

Concilie en Nieuwe Theologie (Kampen: JH Kok N.V., 1964), 15.

6 Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). “Things Are Not the Way They Used to Be” is the title of chapter 1.

7 From the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” by Martin Luther, 1529.

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PURGATORY'S
LOGIC,
HISTORY &
MEANING

by Chris Castaldo

Whenever I talk about Catholicism, the question of purgatory inevitably emerges. Folks often confuse it with the doctrine of “limbo,” or they may ask, “Didn’t the Church stop teaching purgatory at Vatican II?” And this is among Catholics! Ask an informed Protestant about purgatory and you’re likely to hear the story of how it motivated Martin Luther to swing a hammer in Wittenberg. Chances are, however, that one’s knowledge doesn’t extend much further. This is unfortunate given the frequency with which the topic arises and in view of the opportunity that it presents for gospel witness.

In what follows, we will consider the logic of purgatory, a sketch of its historical development, and a word about its meaning for Reformed theology.

The Logic of Purgatory

According to the *Catholic Dictionary*, edited by Peter M. J. Stravinskias (1993), purgatory is “The state or condition of cleansing for one who dies in God’s friendship (‘state of grace’), but who still has sins or temporal punishment for which to atone. Neither the nature nor the duration of purgatory is specified in Catholic doctrine; however, the existence of purgatory is a dogma of the Faith. The faithful are encouraged to assist the ‘poor souls’ by their prayers and penances” (406). Undergirding this summary are several concepts. Such ideas are building blocks on which the doctrine fits together and grows into shape. It is in this assembly of these elements that the logic of purgatory comes into focus.

(1) Purgatory depends on the belief that the dead are judged. The first of these judgments is expected to occur at the moment of death and the second at the end of time (called the “particular”

and “general” judgments, respectively). The intervening time period consists of the complex judicial proceeding known as purgatory. Unlike the Hebrew *Sheol*—the dark, stagnant abode of the dead—purgatory is a place of activity in which the soul is perfected. This judgment is most frequently portrayed with the metaphors of fire or ice.

(2) Purgatory is predicated on the notion of individual responsibility and free will. While all of humanity shares the guilt of original sin, purgatory executes

From these four building blocks, one begins to recognize the central question of purgatory: *How does a follower of Christ enter the holy presence of God when he or she has died with venial sins?*

judgment upon sins that men and women have chosen to commit. In Catholic terminology, these include “venial” sins: minor acts of disobedience that offend God’s holiness without rising to the level of “mortal” sins. More on this to come.

(3) Purgatory implies a particular understanding of the relation of the soul and the body. Accordingly, Christians have affirmed that the soul separates from the body at death to be later rejoined in the resurrection. In this sequence, questions concerning the soul’s nature (whether it is corporeal or incorporeal) is secondary to the belief that the soul is endowed with a substance that can be punished.

(4) Purgatory is an intermediary world in which suffering of the dead may be shortened by the intercessory prayers (or “suffrages”) of the living. In this eschatological scenario, the souls of purgatory

are regarded as belonging to “the Church suffering,” a real part of Christ’s Body over which the Church on earth is thought to exercise (partial) authority.

From these four building blocks, one begins to recognize the central question of purgatory: *How does a follower of Christ enter the holy presence of God when he or she has died with venial sins?* It is crucial to understand that we are not speaking about guilt (*culpa*), which pertains to “mortal” sins: The deliberate, conscious, free transgression of a moral law that involves a serious matter, resulting in separation from God. Venial sins, by contrast, are understood to be minor moral infractions performed without adequate knowledge, freedom, and full consent of the will. Mortal sin, on the other hand, destroys divine love and compromises righteousness. It thus makes one “guilty” before God, robbing him of justification (which is why they are called “mortal” sins). The only way to absolve mortal sin is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation (or Penance), which involves contrition, confession of sin to a priest, reparation, and absolution.

Venial sins are categorically different from mortal in that they don’t jeopardize one’s state of grace (in Protestant lingo, they don’t cause you to lose your salvation). But they are serious nonetheless. This is reflected in the above-mentioned definition where it describes the need for “cleansing” and “temporal punishment for which to atone.” Perceptive readers will notice a distinction in these two expressions. It is because the first, “cleansing,” pertains to *sanctification*. It asks the question, *how is an imperfect creature able to enter the presence of the holy God?* On the other hand, the second reference concerning

“temporal punishment” pertains to *satisfaction*. It asks, *how are venial sins punished when the sinner fails to do penance in this life?* The answer to both of these questions is “purgatory.”

According to Catholicism, the logic of purgatory is specifically concerned with these two issues: making the believer actually holy and with making reparation for one’s unconfessed sins. The doctrine asserts that it is not enough to have simply been forgiven in the past or to have had righteousness imputed in a purely legal fashion. Because entrance into God’s holy presence requires complete sanctification and satisfaction, cleansing and punishment are both essential. The following historical sketch considers how these ideas have developed over time.

Purgatory’s Historical Development

For those who wish to read an in depth account of the historical development of purgatory, *The Birth of Purgatory* by medieval historian Jacques Le Goff is of great value. Quoting from primary sources, Le Goff traces the construction of the doctrine, piece by piece, through each century, grabbing inspiration from great and obscure theologians alike. Here are some highlights.

Augustine (354-430) was among the early figures who contributed to the doctrine of purgatory by promoting an idea that gave rise to its popularity. In his *Confessions* he suggests that prayers for the dead can hasten entrance into heaven on behalf of the deceased in Christ, a hope that he addressed specifically to his mother, Monica. Years later he reiterated this notion in his work, *The City of God*, suggesting that intercessory prayer may

benefit a sinner who had exhibited evidences of grace during his lifetime. In Augustine’s words, “It is for those who, having been regenerated in Christ, did not spend their lives so wickedly that they can be judged unworthy of such compassion, nor so well that they can be considered to have no need of it” (*The City of God*, XXI:24).

Pope Gregory the Great (540-604), who had an interest in mapping the geography of the afterlife, distinguished upper hell, later identified by the Fathers as “Limbo”—the place where Old Testament believers awaited the person and work of Christ—from lower hell, where the wicked suffer in torment. In this context, he developed some of the metaphors commonly associated with purgatory, particularly fire.

Le Goff suggests that the next 500 years were insignificant for the growth of purgatory. While some recent scholars have questioned this thesis, identifying proponents such as the Venerable Bede (672-735), it is generally accepted that the next major development of the doctrine occurred in the twelfth Century. Although forerunners had emerged around the year 1030 at the monastery at Cluny, France, where they started to celebrate “All Souls Day” (originally called “Day of the Dead”) on November 2, it wasn’t until the decade of 1170-1180 when the word “purgatory” was used as a proper noun. With the idea of purgatory growing in popularity during these years, the thirteenth century was the era of organization and doctrinal definition. In this vein, a statement was promulgated by the Council of Lyons in 1274:

However, owing to various errors that have

been introduced by the ignorance of some and the malice of others, (the Roman Church) states and proclaims that those who fall into sin after baptism must not be rebaptized, but that through a genuine penitence they obtain pardon for their sins. That if, truly penitent, they die in charity before having, by worthy fruits of penance, rendered satisfaction for what they have done by commission or omission, their souls, as brother John has explained to us, are purged after their death, by purgatorial or purificatory penalties, and that, for the alleviation of these penalties, they are served by the suffrages of the living faithful, to wit, the sacrifice of the mass, prayers, alms, and other works of piety. . . . (Le Goff, 285)

While the word *purgatorium*, purgatory, does not appear, the statement is important nonetheless for it represents the first Church Council to issue official approval of the doctrine. Notice that while both concepts of sanctification and satisfaction are present in this formulation, it’s the latter of these—the penal activity—that is emphasized. Such, however, was not consistently the case. Depending upon whom you read, you might find one or the other, judgment or sanctification, taking precedence.

A popular example of the sanctification or cleansing model is found in the masterpiece by Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), the *Divine Comedy*, the single most important literary work on purgatory. Written sometime between his Florentine exile in 1302 and his death in Ravenna in 1321, Dante describes his poetic visit to Mount Purgatory where Christian souls were purged of each of the seven deadly sins. The

imagery is frightful, but the mood is optimistic as one progressively moves closer to paradise. Despite the pain, the narrative is permeated with a joy that comes from having one's sins cleansed, affections ordered, and soul directed toward God. Unfortunately, this positive vision faded into the background in subsequent centuries.

By the sixteenth century, purgatory had taken center stage. This was mostly due to the "indulgence"—a remission of temporal punishment (either partial or full) which could be purchased on behalf of languishing souls in purgatory. Memorably described by Roland Bainton as "the bingo of the sixteenth century," this lucrative expedient received impetus from a major Basilica building project of Pope Leo X. The result was a doctrinal travesty perhaps best remembered by John Tetzel's indulgence sermon, "Remember that you are able to release [the dead from judgment], for as soon as the coin in the coffer rings the soul from purgatory springs." Alas, salvation was not only on probation, it was also for sale.

Most people, with even a cursory grasp of church history, know the outcome. In a word, "Protestantism." Not that indulgences or purgatory were the main catalysts. The issues of church authority (*sola Scriptura*) and justification (*sola fide*) were larger. But the purgatory problem was especially important for the way it highlighted the Catholic abuses of authority and salvation. In Calvin's words: "[W]e must cry out with the

We must cry out with the shouting not only of our voices but our throats and lungs that purgatory is a deadly fiction of Satan, which nullifies the cross of Christ, inflicts unbearable contempt upon God's mercy, and overturns and destroys our faith.
- John Calvin

shouting not only of our voices but our throats and lungs that purgatory is a deadly fiction of Satan, which nullifies the cross of Christ, inflicts unbearable contempt upon God's mercy, and overturns and destroys our faith (*Inst.* 3.5.6). Indeed, this is why Protestants often shrill at the mere mention of the word "purgatory." It flies in the face of cherished theological values. Our final section will explain why this is the case, but, first, let us conclude our historical survey.

In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Council of Trent (1545-1563) acknowledged abuses related to the sale of indulgences, while simultaneously reaffirming the validity of the doctrine of purgatory. In its twenty-fifth session (1563), it censured "superstition" and the "savour of filthy lucre," while also exhorting Bishops to recognize purgatory by promoting pious acts of devotion such as intercessory prayer, sacrifices of masses, and almsgiving.

While the Tridentine balance of sanctification and satisfaction has generally defined the doctrine over the last four centuries, there has been a recent shift in Catholic theology towards downplaying the penal side in favor of purification (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §§1030-32, 1054-55, 1472-73).

It is widely known that C. S. Lewis was a proponent of purgatory. While firmly rejecting the notion of retributive punishment where the devils inflict horror upon hapless victims, he was unwilling to entirely jettison the doctrine. Lewis valued the

devotional practice of praying for the dead, and, more importantly, he believed in the soul-cleansing activity of purgatory as a natural demand of a God who abides in unapproachable light. His view, as expressed in *The Great Divorce* and *Reflections on the Psalms*, addresses the cry of one's sin-stained heart by purging every last bit of imperfection in fulfillment of humanity's redemptive hope.

There is much more to say about purgatory's varied and complex history. It should be acknowledged that Eastern Orthodoxy has its own version of the doctrine in which postmortem souls are brought to full divination through a transformation process (although the metaphor of fire is seldom used). Furthermore, whether it is in a Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant formulation, there are a host of ancillary questions revolving around the doctrine. These involve, for example, post-death physical identity (Is that you Aunt Lucy?), timing (Am I done yet?), the prospect of obtaining a second chance (Man, that's hot... I surrender), and the precise relationship between purgatory and the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Did you say "absolved"?). Interesting and important as these issues are, we will devote the remainder of this article to one question: *Is Reformation theology justified in rejecting the doctrine of purgatory?*

Purgatory and Reformed Theology

Perhaps the most distilled statement of Reformed theology on the topic of purgatory is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith:

The bodies of men, after death, return to dust, and see corruption: but their souls, which

neither die nor sleep, having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them: the souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God, in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies. And the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Besides these two places, for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none (32:1).

Jerry L. Walls, author of *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (Oxford, 2012), disagrees. He has written an article for *First Things* titled "Purgatory for Everyone" in which he challenges the Reformed position by arguing that purgatorial suffering is in fact a good gift that allows one to review life from God's perspective, including the regretful outworking of one's sin. Looking back with beatific hindsight, the deceased in Christ are enabled to adequately repent of evil, which results in the dual benefit of penal reparation (satisfaction) and moral cleansing (sanctification).

Perfection of the soul, according to Walls, is the final conclusion of redemption. As a self-identified member of the Wesleyan tradition, Walls emphasizes actual righteousness as a requirement of heaven. He rejects the Reformed notion that "salvation is only, or even primarily, a forensic matter of having righteousness imputed or attributed to believers" (27). Rather, he insists that only when people are actually made perfect through purging are they finally saved.

But is this an accurate portrayal of Reformed

teaching? Remember, Walls's argument is not leveled against Reformed Protestant *practice*, it is challenging Reformed *theology*. Of the three Reformed exemplars whom Walls cites—John Calvin, Charles Hodge, and Jonathan Edwards—it is Edwards who receives most of the attention. The reason is obvious to anyone who knows anything about Edwards: he lays great stress on the necessity of sanctification. Indeed, for this reason, some scholars (mistakenly) accuse Edwards of having been a crypto-Catholic (the recent book, *Jonathan Edwards and Justification*, edited by Josh Moody, argues persuasively against this thesis). A better reading of Edwards, however, is to recognize that he is simply faithful to the Reformed tradition.

While it is true that Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century such as Martin Bucer, Peter Martyr Vermigli, and John Calvin, not to mention numerous upper-level Catholic prelates such as Gasparo Contarini and Girolamo Seripando, emphasized a forensic imputation of divine righteousness as the formal cause of justification, none of them permit the idea that, as Walls states, “salvation is only, or even primarily, a forensic matter.” Indeed, the whole Reformed project was directed against this notion. Calvin, for instance, makes this point in the structure of Book 3 of his *Institutes* where he not only places the doctrine of sanctification before justification, but he also initiates chapter one by affirming that “as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us” (*Institutes* 3:1:1).

Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr, also stressing the necessity of internal renewal by the Spirit, went

so far as to include regeneration and sanctification under the aegis of justification. At first blush, this will look to some like another form of crypto-Catholicism, except that they made a crucial distinction. While sinners are restored and renewed by their habit of virtue and by living rightly in the image of God, it is the forensic imputation of righteousness that constitutes the formal ground of justification. In other words, sinners are ultimately accepted by God on the basis of what Jesus has done and not what we do. Nevertheless, according to this expression of Reformed theology, works remain a necessary component of justification, without which there is no basis for assurance.

It is no coincidence that Jonathan Edwards's doctrine of salvation so strongly emphasized the sanctifying work of the Spirit when one considers that the writings of Calvin and Vermigli were among the most popular in seventeenth century Puritan New England. Such was the thought-world into which Edwards was born. All of this is to make the simple point that while Reformed theology insists on grounding the formal cause (or most fundamental basis) of justification in the imputation of Christ's righteousness, it is never to the exclusion of, or priority over, internal renewal. Together, the gifts of forgiveness and renewal constitute a “double grace,” as Calvin put it, which can never be separated.

Another major target of Walls's critique is the idea that sins are cured simply by shedding one's dead body. Here again, he quotes Jonathan Edwards:

The saved soul leaves all its sin with the body; when it puts off the body of the man, it puts off the body of sin with it. When the

body is buried, all sin is buried forever, and though the soul shall be joined to the body again, yet sin shall never return more.

Implicit in Edwards's statement, says Walls, is a sort of "Gnosticism" that relegates sin to one's physical body without appreciating the need for human souls to undergo a full and final cleansing. Thus, Reformed theology *à la Edwards*, in Walls's view, suggests that sanctification is largely effected by releasing the soul from the physical body, making it "a passive matter that requires no cooperation on our part" (29).

Once again, it is not quite as simple as Walls suggests. While Reformed theologians insist that God is the subject who actively sanctifies sinners, there is nevertheless a real cooperation on our part. As Charles Hodge states in his *Systematic Theology*:

In the work of regeneration, the soul is passive. It cannot cooperate in the communication of spiritual life. But in conversion, repentance, faith, and growth in grace, all its powers are called into exercise. As, however, the effects produced transcend the efficiency of our fallen nature, and are due to the agency of the Spirit, sanctification does not cease to be supernatural, or a work of grace, because the soul is active and cooperating in the process (3.215).

Calvin makes a similar point in his commentary on 2 Peter 1:5 where believers are exhorted to "make every effort to add [virtue] to your faith."

As it is an arduous work and of immense labour, to put off the corruption which is in

us, he bids us to strive and make every effort for this purpose. He intimates that no place is to be given in this case to sloth, and that we ought to obey God calling us, not slowly or carelessly, but that there is need of alacrity; as though he had said, 'Put forth every effort, and make your exertions manifest to all.'

Sanctification is a gift for which God is ultimately responsible, but this does not preclude human cooperation. It is precisely because God is at work in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure, that we continue to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12-13).

Is Reformation theology justified in rejecting the doctrine of purgatory?

In his book, *Purgatory*, Walls elaborates on his contention that Reformed theology's body-shedding hope is guilty of a sort of Gnosticism. According to Walls, this error consists in the notion that the body is inescapably sinful and the soul is made entirely pure at the point of death by simply leaving the physical body behind. While acknowledging that Edwards's and the Reformed tradition's doctrine of the resurrection avoid a thorough-going Gnosticism, Walls nevertheless reads them as guilty of a body-soul dualism because, as he puts it, Reformed theology implies that "sin dwells exclusively, or even primarily, in the body" (45).

It must first be acknowledged that the term "dualism" is often used by theologians in multiple senses and rarely are they differentiated. Probably the most common usage describes a duality of *being* (ontology), which regards physical matter, including human bodies, to be inherently evil, while spiritual entities are thought to be blameless

and pure. This, however, is not what Reformed theology has in mind when it describes the experience of dying in this world and entering into the next. Instead of a duality of *being*, it is, rather, a duality of *time* (eschatology)—the distinction between our current age and the age to come. The former, which Scripture calls the “present evil age” (Gal 1:4), is marred by sin and death, the latter, however, is the new creation of God, the new life experience into which men and women enter when they are born again in Christ.

It is precisely because this new creation has been inaugurated in Christ that Christians have the hope of exiting this mortal coil into the loving

The purging of our sin happened once and for all when Christ shed his blood and rose from the grave.

arms of the Father, quite apart from purgatorial fire. In Christ, we have already been “rescued from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the Son” (Col 1:3). “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:20). “You have been raised with Christ . . . where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Col 3:1). Accordingly, such men and women are now in union with Christ, having died to our sinful, Adamic identity, “hidden” and “clothed” with Christ (Col 3:3; Gal 3:27). These are the cherished theological values that purgatory offends. I wouldn’t expect my non-

Reformed brothers such as Walls to necessarily agree with this eschatology, but they should be able to distinguish it from a Gnostic dualism.

I started this article by suggesting that discussion about purgatory provides an opportunity for gospel witness. Returning to the two questions raised earlier concerning purgatory’s purpose—the question of sanctification (*how is an imperfect creature able to enter the presence of the holy God?*) and satisfaction (*how are lesser sins punished when the sinner fails to do penance in this life?*)—the answer should not be “purgatory,” it should be “the cross and resurrection.” The purging of our sin happened once and for all when Christ shed his blood and rose from the grave. “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit” (1 Pet 3:18). Because the ultimate ground of our identity is Christ and we are clothed in his righteousness, we have the privilege of entering God’s presence as children, fully accepted by the Father. That, my friends, is good news.

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MARTIN LUTHER ON THE DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY

BY JEFF ROBINSON

When the Protestant Reformation broke out in 1517, the sale of indulgences by the Roman Catholic Church was the focal issue that ignited what flamed into the greatest revival of the Gospel since Pentecost, but a related issue which has received less ink was also at play for the reformers: the doctrine of purgatory.

The connection between the two issues is expressed in Johann Tetzel's infamous sales pitch: "When in the coffer the coin rings, out of purgatory the soul springs." In his famous *95 Theses*, Martin Luther was directly attacking indulgences and, by good and necessary inference, he was also fomenting against the "unbiblical fiction" Rome called purgatory.

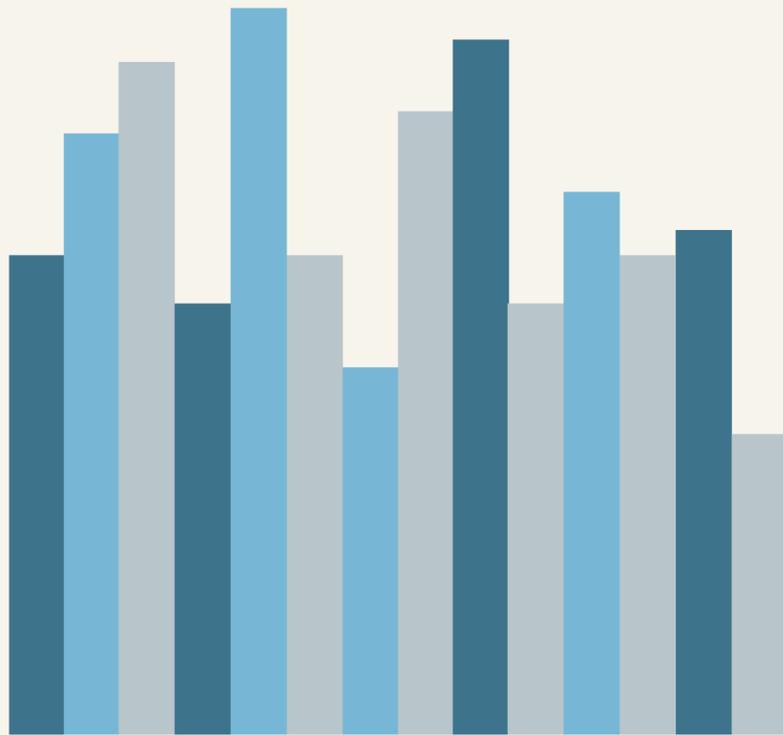
In theses 27 and 28, Luther directly addressed Tetzel's avarice-driven slogan: "There is no divine authority for preaching that the soul flies out of the purgatory immediately the money clinks in the bottom of the chest" and "It is certainly possible that when the money clinks in the bottom of the chest avarice and greed increase; but when the church offers intercession, all depends in the will of God."

Some historians have argued that Luther, because he did not directly deny the existence of purgatory in the theses, may have been in solidarity with Rome on the issue. Luther, who busied himself during the early portion of his career articulating and defending justification by faith, continued to develop doctrinally and later made clear his opposition to purgatory in a series of lectures on Genesis that commenced in 1535. Purgatory, Luther argued, is not only unbiblical, but undermines the doctrine of salvation

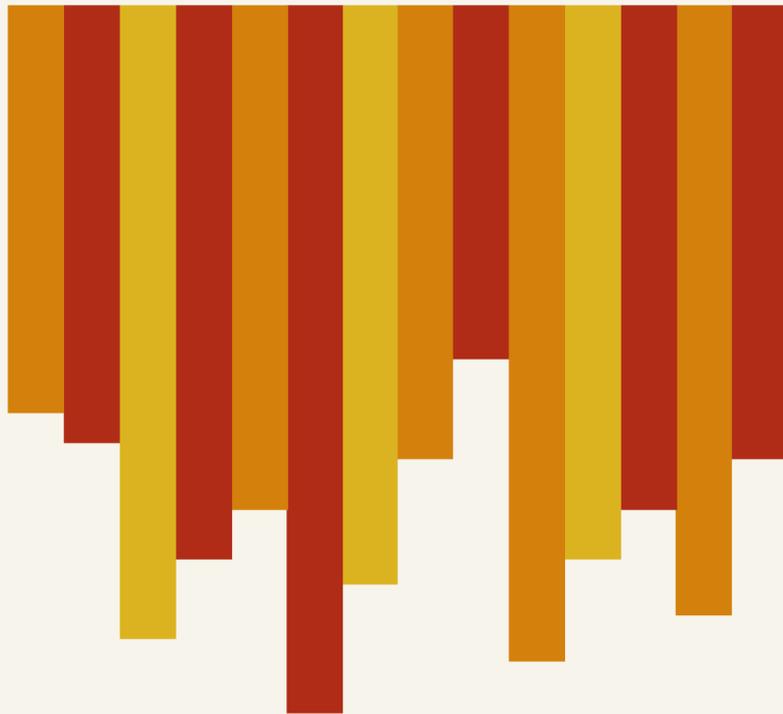
sola fide, sola gratia, solo Christos. Luther wrote, Purgatory is the greatest falsehood because it is based on ungodliness and unbelief; for they deny that faith saves, and they maintain that satisfaction for sins is the cause of salvation. Therefore he who is in purgatory is in hell itself; for these are his thoughts: 'I am a sinner and must render satisfaction for my sins; therefore I shall make a will and shall bequeath a definite amount of money for building churches and for buying prayers and sacrifices for the dead by the monks and priests.' Such people die in a faith in works and have no knowledge of Christ. Indeed, they hate Him. We die in faith in Christ, who died for our sins and rendered satisfaction for us. He is my Bosom, my Paradise, my Comfort, and my Hope.

One will search the Scriptures in utter futility to find such a doctrine, he argued. Thus, Luther concludes, it is a doctrine conjured up from the depths of hell itself: Of purgatory there is no mention in Holy Scripture; it is a lie of the devil, in order that the papists may have some market days and snares for catching money. . . We deny the existence of a purgatory and of a limbo of the fathers in which they say that there is hope and a sure expectation of liberation. But these are figments of some stupid and bungling sophist.

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SHOULD EVANGELICALS **EMBRACE** THE DOCTRINE OF **PURGATORY**?



MATTHEW BARRETT

Jerry L. Walls is without embarrassment a Protestant who believes in purgatory. And his most recent book *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (Oxford University Press, 2012), which finishes his trilogy on the afterlife, is his theological apologetic.

Walls begins with a detailed survey of the history of purgatory, starting with pagan philosophers, moving next to a very brief treatment of the biblical text (specifically highlighting what texts advocates have appealed to), and then tracing the doctrine from the patristic period to twenty-first century advocates like Cardinal Ratzinger, now Benedict XVI. Though Walls admits that purgatory was not officially affirmed until the Second Council of Lyons (1274), he is convinced that the doctrine has a rich heritage prior to Lyons.

Chapter 2 then evaluates Protestant objections to purgatory, including both Reformed and Wesleyan traditions. Walls's rejection of the Reformed view is no surprise, but what is fascinating is his critique of his own Wesleyan heritage. Walls believes adopting purgatory resolves the tension in Wesleyanism between the need to reach entire sanctification and instant glorification at death. "Purgatory extends the time available for the process of salvation to run its course, and is arguably a natural development of a view of soteriology that requires real transformation and human cooperation in achieving it" (47). The Wesleyan affirmation of glorification as a unilateral, instantaneous act of God at death smacks of Calvinism. Rather, argues

Walls, would Wesleyans not be more consistent to affirm purgatory, whereby the sinner continues his cooperation with God until he reaches entire sanctification? (47) Walls is dumbfounded by John Wesley's reasons for rejecting purgatory, namely, he agreed with his Reformed counterparts that the doctrine is "contrary to Scripture and antiquity." Furthermore, for Wesley justification meant that there no longer is condemnation. Therefore, the believer is justified when he leaves this world and will have nothing laid at his charge in the life hereafter. Walls rebukes Wesley for thinking of salvation primarily in terms of justification.

Three Views of Purgatory

But lest we think all advocates of purgatory are uniform, Walls reminds us in chapter 3 that broadly speaking there are at least three views: (1) the Satisfaction Model, (2) the Satisfaction/Sanctification model, and (3) the Sanctification Model. In the Satisfaction Model, guilt may be cleansed by contrition, but punishment remains and must be dealt with. Hence the need for punishment not only in this life, but in purgatory, where one will finish paying the penalty (making atonement) for his sins committed after baptism. One must suffer the punishment one's sins have merited (i.e., expiation). And the sins one did not atone for through penance and good works in this life, are then carried over into purgatory until one's debt is paid. Walls rejects this first view not because it is inconsistent with Scripture but because it has no ecumenical potential since even Protestants who deny the imputation of

But perhaps Walls is most shocking of all not merely in his affirmation of postmortem conversion, but in the real possibility of a postmortem purgatorial apostasy as well.

Christ's righteousness still affirm that "the gift of salvation through Christ pardons them of sin in such a way that they are no longer required to pay any sort of debt of punishment" (69). Also, in this first view, though there is a debt to be paid, nevertheless, at death the soul is still perfect. Walls considers such a tension "morally dubious" and "incoherent." Walls believes he has the solution to this paradox, namely, perfection is received at the end of purgatory, rather than at the beginning. "It would make more moral sense if the souls in purgatory experienced punishment and pain precisely as the persons who still had the moral defects and blemishes as well as the guilt of their sins to expiate" (70).

In the Satisfaction/Sanctification model the payment of debt is the means by which God cleanses the soul and makes it spiritually healthy. This view tries to have its cake and eat it too since metaphors of cleansing/healing *and* debt/payment are adopted. Walls's critique is multi-faceted: (1) This view fares hardly better for ecumenical dialogue, since Protestants will reject any notion of punishment to satisfy debt. (2) The correlation between satisfaction and sanctification is problematic, since a person may be healed of character flaws but still have to stick around to pay a sufficient penalty, or vice versa. (3) It is questionable that embracing a punishment is a sufficient condition for sanctification. (4) Advocates of this model affirm that pain in purgatory is worse than pain in this life. But for Walls, such an overwhelming amount of pain would negate the person's libertarian free-will response which is necessary if one must experience

genuine transformation. Freely cooperating is essential, says Walls, otherwise why wouldn't God perfect all souls when they die? (5) Last, it is not clear how this model accommodates indulgences.

The Sanctification model is the one that Walls adopts. According to the sanctification view, one does not suffer in purgatory to pay a moral debt or "complete penance in order to satisfy divine justice" (82). Rather, suffering occurs to grow one into perfection. Walls argues that such a view "is not in any way incompatible with

Protestant accounts of justification by faith." By analogy, Walls appeals to the fictional character of Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens, a wretched, self-centered man, is slowly transformed in character when three spirits help "him to see others in ways he had not been able to before" (85). Walls concludes that in his model Protestants should not hesitate to pray for the dead and their sanctification (88).

Postmortem Conversion and Apostasy

While Walls's case for purgatory explores other territory as well (e.g., ch. 4: "Personal Identity, Time, and Purgatory"), we must focus our attention on perhaps Walls's most dramatic modification of the doctrine in chapter 5, namely, purgatory and the opportunity for a "second chance" at salvation (i.e., postmortem conversion). Walls argues that if lost sinners have multiple opportunities before death to repent, why not after death as well? (127) Furthermore, if God truly loves all people, is he not willing to extend every opportunity? If not, argues Walls, is he truly willing to save them? (129; 137;

Walls argues that if lost sinners have multiple opportunities before death to repent, why not after death as well?

143) Assuming Molinism as well as an Arminian view of divine love, Walls concludes that “optimal grace” implies that “God is not content with merely giving everyone some chance for salvation, but desires to give everyone every opportunity” (129).

But perhaps Walls is most shocking of all not merely in his affirmation of postmortem conversion, but in the real possibility of a postmortem purgatorial apostasy as well. In other words, a believer in purgatory may very well lose his salvation. Rather than progressing to heaven, he may digress to hell! After all, “if we allow for people to turn to God after death, is there any good reason to think they cannot likewise turn away from him?” (147). Drawing from his Wesleyan-Arminian tradition, Walls places great weight on libertarian freedom at this point, arguing that the believer can resist “the demand for sanctification and transformation in purgatory and turn away from God” (147). Walls concedes that his view is “somewhat speculative,” but this does not bother him since “Scripture simply does not give us detailed information either way on this question, and the best we can do is lay out the view that seems most likely, given what we think scripture does clearly teach” (150).

In the end, Walls concludes that his model of purgatory is perfectly compatible with Protestant theology and “makes better sense of how the remains of sin are purged than the typical Protestant account that it happens instantly and immediately at or after death” (90).

An Evangelical Response

How should evangelicals respond to Walls’s proposal? And is Walls’s version of purgatory an

option for evangelicals? In response, the answer must be an unwavering “no” for a variety of reasons.

First, and perhaps most importantly, purgatory is *never* affirmed, either explicitly or implicitly, by the biblical text.

On the other hand, Scripture *does* affirm, both explicitly and implicitly, that the soul of the believer goes directly and immediately into the presence of God at death, thereby precluding the existence of purgatory. Several texts stand out in this regard. In 2 Corinthians 5 Paul addresses our heavenly home and explains that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. However, we “would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). In other words, the intermediate state is one in which the soul of the believer goes to be with the Lord immediately upon death (“home with the Lord”).

Paul makes the same point in Philippians 1:21-23, though this time he is far more personal. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” Again, to depart from the body in this life (i.e. death) is to go to be with Christ. This is the hope of every believer, for it is much better.

Paul’s teaching here is consistent with narrative passages as well. Perhaps the most explicit passage is Luke 23:43. There Jesus is crucified and as he is dying on the cross one of the criminals next to him cries out, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus responds, “Truly, I say

to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” What is so remarkable is how this passage directly contradicts Walls’s view of purgatory. For Walls, purgatory is so necessary because the believer is a sinner in need of sanctification, which for even the most holy of saints can only be finished in purgatory. But here on the cross hangs a criminal who has lived his entire life in disobedience. It is only in his last minutes during execution that he repents and trusts in Christ. And yet, Jesus promises him that today he will be with him in Paradise! Not only does this passage demonstrate that the believer goes immediately and directly to be with the Lord upon death, but it also demonstrates that a purgation period after death, even for those who repented at death and therefore never experienced a life of sanctification, are ushered directly into heaven. The need for purgatory is nowhere to be found in Luke 23:43, a text one would surely expect to see it if Walls is correct.

The same truth is evident in Stephen’s martyrdom. Being put to death for his faith in Christ, Stephen cries out as he is being stoned, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). Surely Stephen understood that his death was at hand and that the moment had come for him to meet his Savior. As with the criminal, so too with Stephen: his spirit went to be with the Lord immediately upon death (cf. Ps. 17:15).

Finally, the author of Hebrews gives us insight as well. In Hebrews 12 we read that believers “have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly

Walls simply assumes a Wesleyan-Arminian view of sanctification—where God’s persuasive efforts are dependent upon man’s libertarian freedom.

of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect” (Heb. 12:22-23). The assembly the author refers to is the one in heaven, consisting of those who have died already and are in the presence of the living God. Here we have a glimpse into the heavenlies, and what we see there is that those who have died in faith are with the Lord. The spirits of the righteous, referring to Old and New covenant saints, await their resurrected bodies, but in this time period in between death and resurrection they are present with God.

Before moving on, it should be noted that the underlying issue in all of this is biblical authority. Walls believes it is unproblematic if Scripture is silent on the issue. Walls, quoting J. F. X. Cevettello and W. E. Hayes, both of whom state that purgatory is tradition-based not Scripture-based, even acknowledges that defenders of purgatory have no biblical grounds. However, for Walls, Scripture’s silence demonstrates that Scripture never precludes purgatory either. While one expects such concessions from Roman Catholics given their denial of *sola Scriptura*, it is shocking to hear the same admission from a Protestant. Walls concludes that “there is no direct way to settle the issue by straightforward biblical exegesis of isolated texts.” I disagree, as have Protestants since the sixteenth-century Reformation. As briefly seen above, there is ample biblical evidence that the believer does not enter a purgatory cleansing period, but rather goes directly and immediately to be with the Lord. Scripture, in other words, is far from silent.

Second, Walls’s theological method is misguided from the start.

For Walls, since Scripture is silent, the case for purgatory must be made by testing whether purgatory follows from other doctrines (56). However, Walls never makes a biblical-theological case for these corresponding doctrines. Rather, he simply assumes they are true and then concludes that purgatory must follow. It is hard to see how Walls avoids the classical fallacy of “begging the question” (*petitio principii*). For example, Walls assumes libertarian freedom to be true in his argument for purgatory. He writes,

Others [in the Reformed camp] seem to assume that holiness is perfected by a unilateral, instantaneous act of God, so that sanctification is consummated simultaneously with glorification. . . . And such an account of a unilateral act of God is quite consonant with the Reformed view that God unconditionally elects whom to save and determines all their choices that lead to salvation. Such a unilateral act of perfecting holiness does not, however, cohere so easily with the view that God requires our undetermined free cooperation in salvation. If God takes our freedom seriously in his work of transforming us in this life, it is reasonable to think he will continue to do so in the next. In short, purgatory is a perfectly rational theological inference for those who take seriously the role of human freedom in salvation (56-57).

Not only does Walls caricature the Reformed view—which, correctly understood, sees election, regeneration, and glorification as unilateral and

monergistic, but views sanctification as involving man’s willful and active cooperation (via “freedom of inclination,” which the Reformed see as compatible with divine sovereignty)—but he fails to make the case for “undetermined” or contra-causal (libertarian) freedom anywhere in his book. Why is this a problem? It is a problem because Walls simply *assumes* a Wesleyan-Arminian view of sanctification—where God’s persuasive efforts are dependent upon man’s libertarian freedom, whereby he either progresses in godliness or regresses towards apostasy—and then, based on this assumption, Walls concludes that man must continue his libertarian free-will cooperation with God in purgatory until he reaches perfection. Anything less (i.e., unilateral glorification at death) and God would fail to respect man’s libertarian freedom.

What we see here is a problematic theological method: (1) Walls assumes certain theological beliefs without testing them against Scripture. (2) Walls then allows these theological assumptions to drive him to certain conclusions regarding purgatory and post-mortem salvation. The danger is this: if one’s theological assumptions are unbiblical, applying those unbiblical assumptions to other areas of theology (in this case, the afterlife) can also lead to unbiblical conclusions. To clarify, while it is a completely valid theological endeavor to ask how other loci influence what we believe about the afterlife, nevertheless, these loci themselves must be defended as biblical in the first place, lest we run the risk of importing an unbiblical system onto our understanding of the afterlife.

Third, Walls not only opens the evangelical door to purgatory, but he then argues that

the doctrine itself demands post-mortem conversion or apostasy.

For Walls, such a view is perfectly acceptable since Scripture is silent. Nothing could be further from the truth. Scripture repeatedly teaches that the souls of unbelievers go directly and immediately to eternal punishment at death, thereby precluding post-mortem conversion. For example, the author of Hebrews writes, “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Walls protests that this text never specifies when this judgment occurs and, furthermore, it is likely to occur not at death but at the end of the world (145). However, Walls misses the point. The text directly connects death to the final judgment (even if it be at the end of the world), giving no indication that there is an intermediate period for post-mortem conversion. The same is true in Luke 16:19-31 where the rich man dies and goes directly to Hades where he is tormented. In contrast, Lazarus is with Abraham. Jesus assumes the Jewish belief that upon death the soul of the wicked man is sentenced to irreversible torment, while the soul of the righteous man goes to be with the Lord. Additionally, a number of texts (Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 2:5-10; 2 Cor. 5:10) show that our final judgment is based on what we have done in this present life, *not* on deeds or choices committed after death.

Moreover, Walls ignores the doctrine of original sin in his assumption that all people deserve a second chance at salvation after death. Scripture, however, never teaches this. Instead, Scripture teaches that all of us are born into this world a child of Adam, so that by nature we are children of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3; cf. Rom. 5:12-21). As Paul argues at length, no one is righteous but everyone stands

guilty before God, condemned, and deserving nothing but eternal punishment and condemnation (Rom. 1:18-3:20). God owes no sinner a “second chance.” Indeed, the only thing God owes the sinner is justice, giving him the due for his evil deeds.

Finally, Walls undermines Christian assurance in his affirmation of post-mortem purgatorial apostasy. Not only is such a view entirely speculative and contrary to everything Scripture teaches about the preservation of the believer (John 6:38-40; 10:27-29; Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:13-14; 1 Pet. 1:5), but it also kills Christian assurance by leaving open the real possibility that though you were a believer in this life, in purgatory you may turn away from your Savior and enter into hell forever. Indeed, even when Walls tries to reassure the reader that this is unlikely (148-149), his reasoning is based on man’s intelligence (i.e., there are “far deeper and more intelligible motivations for choosing God than for choosing against him” [148]), rather than in the omnipotence of God who promises to bring to completion the salvation he first begun (Phil 1:6).

Fourth, it is questionable whether Walls’s version of purgatory escapes the charge of works-righteousness.

Walls believes that his “Sanctification model” of purgatory—which is not “about satisfying divine justice or paying a debt of punishment” but rather a “matter of continuing and completing the process of sanctification” (87)—in no way violates the sufficiency of Christ’s atonement nor *sola fide* as the Roman Catholic “Satisfaction model” does. He concludes that it “is simply beside the point to appeal to the blood of Christ as grounds for

rejecting purgatory, unless one assumes the whole point of purgatory is punishment to satisfy the justice of God” (55). And again, “Unless grace is limited to forgiveness and justification, the claim that the doctrine of purgatory represents a version of salvation by works is simply misguided” (55).

But has Walls escaped such a charge simply by making purgatory about sanctification rather than satisfaction (justification)? The reason the Reformers rejected the punitive or “Satisfaction model” of purgatory was because it made the cross of Christ insufficient and made justification dependent upon our ongoing works of righteousness. As Calvin states, “The blood of Christ is the sole satisfaction for the sins of believers, the sole expiation, the sole purgation, what remains but to say that purgatory is simply a dreadful blasphemy against Christ?” (*Institutes*, 3.5.6.). But what Walls misses is that the sufficiency of Christ’s work not only impacts justification but sanctification as well. The believer need not fret over finishing his sanctification via suffering in purgatory because his salvation rests not in how perfect he can become before entering heaven, but rather in the all-sufficient life and death of Christ. Do not miss my emphasis on the *life* of Christ. Christ not only paid the penalty for our sins, but he lived the perfect, sanctified life of obedience we could never live and he did so in our place, earning righteousness for us. What Walls ignores is that purgatory is not only unnecessary

because of Christ’s *passive* obedience, but because of his *active* obedience as well (see Phil. 3:9; 1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 5:19; Matt. 3:15).

Additionally, the Christian’s sanctification in this life need not be added to in purgatory since God places his stamp of approval on our works of sanctification in this life as if they were whole. The Christian’s good works in sanctification are of course imperfect but nonetheless the fault in them is buried in Christ and is not charged to his account. It is hard to improve upon the words of John Calvin when he writes,

What Walls misses is that the sufficiency of Christ’s work not only impacts justification but sanctification as well. The believer need not fret over finishing his sanctification via suffering in purgatory because his salvation rests not in how perfect he can become before entering heaven, but rather in the all-sufficient life and death of Christ.

A work begins to be acceptable only when it is undertaken with pardon. Now whence does this pardon arise, save that God contemplates us and our all in Christ? Therefore, as we ourselves, when we have been engrafted in Christ, are righteous in God’s sight because our iniquities are covered by Christ’s sinlessness, so our works are righteous and are thus regarded

because whatever fault is otherwise in them is buried in Christ’s purity, and is not charged to our account. Accordingly, we can deservedly say that by faith alone not only we ourselves but our works as well are justified. Now if this works righteousness—whatever its character—depends upon faith and free justification, and is effected by this, it ought to be included under faith and be subordinated to it, so to speak, as effect to cause, so far is it from having any right

to be raised up either to destroy or becloud justification by faith (*Institutes* 3.17.10)

All in all, I am not convinced that Luther and Calvin's protest against purgatory as a means of salvation by works is entirely escaped by Walls's view simply because he places the emphasis on sanctification rather than satisfaction. The believer in Walls's purgatory is still left with the incredible burden that he must somehow perform enough good works (by his own libertarian freedom) to attain God's favor to let him into heaven. Until the believer earns that perfection in purgatory, heaven is kept at bay. Certainly this still smells of salvation by works, even if it be coated differently.

Fifth, rather than being governed by the biblical text, Walls is driven by an ecumenical agenda.

At the end of the book, Walls reveals his motives. His aim in adopting purgatory, at least in part, is to bridge the gulf between Protestants and Catholics (178). However, as this article has sought to show, Protestants committed to *sola Scriptura* cannot walk across this bridge. Evangelicals do not share a common belief with Catholics in the doctrine of purgatory (nor in any modification of it) first and foremost because the doctrine is not only absent from Scripture, but contrary to Scripture.

Conclusion

To conclude, with the 500th anniversary of the Reformation nearly upon us (2017), the question

must be asked: Is the Reformation over? The answer is "No." And Walls's book is a case in point. While the Reformers were able to unite with one another against the Roman Catholic Church of their day, in our own day evangelical Protestants, have no such luxury. Not only is our battle with those outside, but our battle is within, namely, with those in our own ranks who claim the "evangelical" label. What a shock it would have been to Luther and Calvin to see evangelicals not only ignoring our differences with Roman Catholics on issues as large as justification by faith alone, but even going so far as to adopt Roman Catholic doctrines such as purgatory.

The believer in Walls's purgatory is still left with the incredible burden that he must somehow perform enough good works.

An abridged version of this article will appear as a book review in the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. This article has been published with permission.

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PURGATORY

T H E S A M E

YESTERDAY,
TODAY, &
FOREVER

BY JAMES WHITE

When Oxford Press published Jerry Walls's book, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* this past year, one could almost hear the echoes of C.S. Lewis reverberating through what is called evangelicalism today. The ecumenical spirit is not even noteworthy any longer. Quote Benedict XVI, aka, Cardinal Ratzinger, who for years headed up the modern incarnation of the Inquisition? That's hardly even trendy any more. And use him as a biblical scholar? That only shows you are "open" and "accepting."

The irony of Walls's work is that while it promotes a view of purgatory that is consistent with his form of non-Reformed, Wesleyan-Arminian evangelicalism, he must at the same time repudiate the dogmatic formulation of the doctrine that remains the standard of the Roman communion, no matter how generously, or inconsistently, one interprets Benedict XVI. Specifically, he has to construct a doctrine of post-mortem sanctification that rejects the very essence of the Roman doctrine, which, as we shall see, is focused upon the remission of the temporal punishments of sins through *satispassio*, the divine suffering undergone in purgatory itself. This dogmatic definition is presented as being out of step with modern Roman thought, which itself immediately raises the entire spectrum of questions regarding Rome's alleged infallibility and authority. But leaving that aside for the moment, Walls writes,

As we have seen, moreover, it is arguable that the contemporary Roman Catholic account of the doctrine is a sanctification model that is essentially the same as the view of purgatory affirmed by a number of recent Protestant theologians. The current pope, Benedict XVI,

has attempted to articulate the heart of the doctrine in a way that will have ecumenical appeal, and that will be consistent with the fundamental

theological conviction that salvation is by grace through faith. He repudiates the punitive notion of purgatory, while affirming that a process of transformation is essential for final salvation.¹

And note as well Walls's phrase, "that salvation is by grace through faith." Notice a little something missing?

Is it really just an issue of updating the old concepts, removing a few objectionable elements, so that we have a sterilized, "safe" version of purgatory we can put on the table? And note as well Walls's phrase, "that salvation is by grace through faith." Notice a little something missing? Everyone says salvation is by grace through faith. That was never an argument unless you happened upon one of the rare breed known as a full blown Pelagian (there are a few still out there). The Reformation wasn't about salvation by grace through faith. It was about salvation by grace through faith *alone*, not alone as in "in isolation," but alone as in "by no other means, no admixture." And the concept of purgatory, as defined by Rome herself, is completely contradictory to *sola fide*. This fact is borne out by the recognition that the historical framing of the belief has to be abandoned if there is going to be any ecumenical advance on the subject:

The prospects for such an ecumenical version of the doctrine are raised not only by the fact

that a number of Protestant spokesmen have shown a willingness to reconsider it lately, but also by the fact that contemporary Catholic accounts of purgatory are much more amenable to Protestant theology than previously.²

Can purgatory be “cleaned up” and made “amenable to Protestant theology”? Or would Protestant theology, and purgatory as well, have to be completely redefined to accomplish such a feat of theological genetic engineering?

The Real Doctrine of Purgatory

The heart of the doctrine as it was officially defined at the Council of Florence goes directly to the life stream of the gospel: the atonement, justification, and forgiveness. We recognize, of course, that the dogmatic definition found in Florence itself is the end result of centuries of development. It is still important to understand what was once taught as unchanging and unchangeable divine truth:

Council of Florence (1439): DS 1304 [*De novissimis*]: It has likewise defined, that, if those truly penitent have departed in the love of God, before they have made satisfaction by worthy fruits of penance for sins of commission and omission, the souls of these are cleansed after death by purgatorial punishments; and so that they may be released from punishments of this kind, the suffrages of the living faithful are of advantage to them, namely, the sacrifices of Masses, prayers, and almsgiving, and other works of piety, which are customarily performed by the faithful for other faithful according to the institutions of the Church.

Clearly, a full discussion of the authority claims of the Roman Catholic communion go beyond our purview here, but it is hard to address such dogmas as purgatory without at least noting that today many Protestants are crossing the Tiber River for the very reason that Rome, allegedly, offers certainty of truth and doctrine due to her standing in “apostolic succession” with the primitive church. Yet, if that is so, we have to ask what the nature of this succession is.

Not even the most fanciful historical reconstruction can trace an unbroken line to the Apostles, so the only meaningful kind of apostolic succession one can present is a succession of *truth*. That is, does one hold to and present the same body of truth the Apostles did, or not? And if we accept this standard, the doctrine of purgatory is surely removed from the realm of the desirable for any follower of apostolic teaching.

The historic doctrine of purgatory, as developed long after the Apostolic period, contains at its very heart a fundamental denial of the finished nature of the work of Christ in salvation.

Note the words of Florence: the language of satisfaction is immediately present, for it speaks of making satisfaction for sins. It goes on to speak of cleansing the soul by “purgatorial punishments” as well as by the actions of the living (Masses, prayers, other works of piety). Satisfaction and

Can purgatory be “cleaned up” and made “amenable to Protestant theology”?

cleansing are not anti-Catholic strawmen, they are the words of dogmatic definition, enshrined in the allegedly infallible teachings of the Roman See. This doctrine is part of a complex of doctrines that are, I would argue, utterly irreconcilable with any meaningful and biblical doctrine relating to God’s purposes in redemption, his sovereignty in salvation (one reason you do not find solidly Reformed men looking to rehabilitate some form of purgatory), the finished and perfect atonement, the freedom of grace, the truth of justification, or the finality of redemption. These include Rome’s emphasis upon the “Eucharistic sacrifice” of the Mass, the sacerdotal character of the priest as an *alter Christus*, and the nature of justification itself. It is simply impossible to remove purgatory from this complex of beliefs and still have purgatory, at least in any historical or logical sense. If Protestants wish to come up with some other post-mortem sanctification process due to some weakness in their own view of the imputation of Christ’s righteousness or the like, they are free to do so, but it would be best to call it something other than purgatory, to be sure.

Walls and others recognize that the historic doctrine of purgatory, as developed long after the Apostolic period, contains at its very heart a fundamental denial of the finished nature of the work of Christ in salvation. This flows directly from its association with the parallel development in history of the concept of transubstantiation and

hence the propitiatory nature of the Mass. Rome has no finished work of Christ, no imputation of his righteousness, hence, purgatory becomes not only an option, but a necessity. This leads inevitably to the satisfactory nature of the sufferings in purgatory, the very thing Walls’s and others seek to avoid. But it is at the heart of the Roman doctrine itself:

The remission of the venial sins which are not yet remitted, occurs . . . as it does in this life, by an act of contrition deriving from charity and performed with the help of grace. This act of contrition, which is presumably awakened immediately after entry into the purifying fire, does not, however, effect the abrogation or the diminution of the punishment for sins, since in the other world there is no longer any possibility of merit.

The temporal punishments for sins are atoned for in the purifying fire by the so-called suffering of atonement (*satispassio*), that is, by the willing bearing of the expiatory punishments imposed by God.³

We can fully understand why the Reformers, and those who followed in their footsteps, rejected, with prejudice, such teaching. The only atonement Christians need is the one accomplished by the God-man on Calvary. The idea that post-mortem suffering *on the part of the sinner* could in some way “complete” the work of Christ, bringing perfection to the sufferer, is a fundamental denial of everything the believer confesses about his Savior.

But the real question we should ask is, “Has Rome really changed its views? Has purgatory become consistent with at least a non-Reformed,

Not even the most fanciful historical reconstruction can trace an unbroken line to the Apostles, so the only meaningful kind of apostolic succession one can present is a succession of truth.

when we do encounter one of the most important post-Vatican II documents that speaks directly to the nature of the Roman view of grace and salvation. It is titled *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, the Apostolic Constitution on the Revision of Indulgences. This is a document I recommend to the reading of every person confused by Rome's speech on grace. In fact, I have directed some who were clearly desirous of swimming the Tiber to its words, knowing that anyone who has sensed deeply their utter dependence upon the grace and mercy of an all-sufficient Savior cannot help but recoil in horror from its assertions. Of course, few of those who have then made the leap took up the challenge to consider its teachings fairly.

Space does not allow a full review of its many assertions, but a sampling is sufficient to ascertain its true character. Remember,

Arminian/Wesleyan evangelicalism?" One must remember that Ratzinger has been front and center in the development of Roman theology for many decades now. As much as some would like to hope that he could break with Roman tradition and dogma, it is far more logical to interpret his words in light of those traditions rather than in isolation from them. And

this document is less than fifty years old. It represents modern Rome's teachings with clarity.

The doctrine of purgatory clearly demonstrates that even when the guilt of sin has been taken away, punishment for it or the consequences of it may remain to be expiated or cleansed. They often are. In fact, in purgatory the souls of those 'who died in the charity of God and truly repentant, but who had not made satisfaction with adequate penance for their sins and omissions are cleansed after death with punishments designed to purge away their debt.'⁴

If Rome's view of purgatory has abandoned its concept of post-mortem satisfaction, expiation, cleansing, debt, etc., the authors of this post-Vatican II document failed to get the message. It must be remembered that the guilt of sin is taken away through the sacraments, but these sacraments do not avail to remove the punishment of sin (the sacrifice of Christ providing grace, but because there is no substitutionary atonement and union of the elect with Christ in his death, the punishment can be separated from the guilt so that one can be "forgiven" and yet still facing punishment).

Indulgentiarum Doctrina addresses as well the *thesaurus meritorum*, the so-called "treasury of merit" that many, even in the Roman communion, think was "done away with" by Vatican II or some such thing. But it is alive and well, to be sure. Note these words:

On the contrary the "treasury of the Church" is the infinite value, which can never be exhausted, which Christ's merits have before God. . . . This treasury includes as well the

prayers and good works of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They are truly immense, unfathomable and even pristine in their value before God. In the treasury, too, are the prayers and good works of all the saints, all those who have followed in the footsteps of Christ the Lord and by his grace have made their lives holy and carried out the mission the Father entrusted to them. In this way they attained their own salvation and at the same time cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body.⁵

The so-called treasury of merit taught in this apostolic constitution presents a mixture of the merit produced by the supererogating sacrifice of Christ (that is, Christ's work merited far more than was needed to redeem the world), the "immense, unfathomable and even pristine" value of the merits of the Virgin Mary, as well as the excess merits of the rest of the saints who have "attained their own salvation" but through their excess merit "cooperated in saving their brothers in the unity of the Mystical Body." The term "synergism" could hardly get a fuller example.

For "God's only-begotten Son . . . has won a treasure for the militant Church . . . he has entrusted it to blessed Peter, the key-bearer of heaven, and to his successors who are Christ's vicars on earth, so that they may distribute it to the faithful for their salvation."⁶

Here soteriology and ecclesiology intersect, for this treasury of merit, so effective, we are told, for the salvation of souls, is placed firmly under the control of the Roman See. This was the entire foundation of the indulgence trade of Luther's day, and while the practices have been altered and

policed, the underlying theology has not changed—indeed, *cannot* change, no matter how much spin the current Pope may put upon the language.

In fact, in granting an indulgence the Church uses its power as minister of Christ's Redemption. It not only prays. It intervenes with its authority to dispense to the faithful, provided they have the right dispositions, the treasury of satisfaction which Christ and the saints won for the remission of temporal punishments.⁷

The biblically attuned ear hears, and the biblically attuned soul recoils, at the conjunction of Christ and the saint in the "winning" of satisfaction for the "remission of the temporal punishments." Again, the synergism of Rome is blatant, the diminishment of the intention and accomplishment of Christ's sacrifice even more so. The spotless Bride of Christ would, of course, never claim for herself the authority Rome claims here, to be certain!

The real question we should ask is, "Has Rome really changed its views?"

Moreover, the religious practice of indulgences arouses again confidence and hope that we can be fully reconciled with the Father.⁸

Indulgences are meant to arouse hope that we can be reconciled to the Father? Can the regenerate believer who trusts solely in the work and merit of Jesus ever embrace such a claim?

Believers are reconciled to the Father by the work of Jesus Christ *alone!* Indeed, Scripture teaches that we *have been* reconciled (past tense):

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (Rom. 5:10-11; see also 2 Cor. 5:18-20).

The Roman concept of purgatory was properly rejected by the Reformers when the light of the gospel burst across Europe in the sixteenth century. An honest evaluation of Rome's evolution in theology since that time does not lead one to believe that her doctrine of purgatory, already established prior to the Reformation, deeply rooted in the very teachings that the Reformers identified as fundamentally destructive of the gospel, has been altered in any positive way. The concept remains thoroughly unbiblical.

So why would anyone wish to adopt even a "cleaned up" version of the idea? What ever entices men and women to look for any succor beyond that which is provided by the Spirit in the Word? Such discontent arises from a lack of understanding, or a lack of passion, for the truths clearly stated in Scripture. Do we really trust that God has a purpose in creation? That he has spoken with clarity in his Word? That Jesus truly is capable of saving his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), and that without failure (John 6:38-39)? Do we really trust that his sacrifice perfects those for whom it is made, and that without the need of repetition (Heb. 7:24, 9:24-27, 10:10, 14)? Do we fully

enter into the joy that is ours in confessing that we possess peace with God since we have truly been justified by faith (Rom. 5:1)? If we do, we will not be looking for theological constructs outside of Scriptural revelation to fill in the holes we have left in our own understanding of the gospel.

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Endnotes

- 1 Jerry Walls, *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 178-179.
- 2 Ibid., p. 178.
- 3 Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, IL: Tan Book Publishers, 1974), 485.
- 4 *Indulgentiarum Doctrina*, 3.
- 5 Ibid., 5.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., 8.
- 8 Ibid., 10.



REVIEWS

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Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice

by Edwards W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

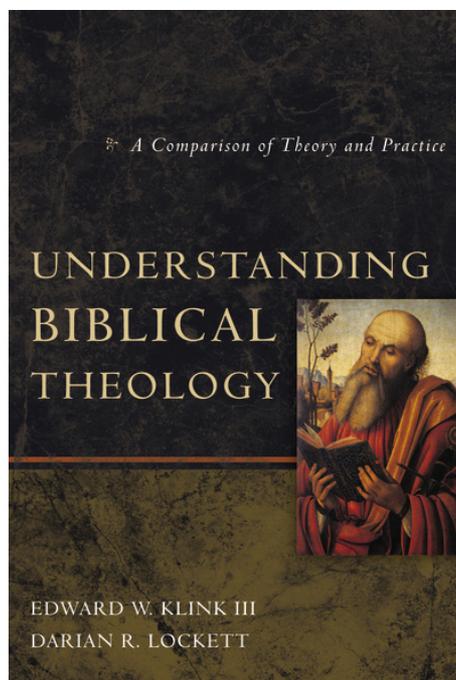
Our generation has seen a dramatic rise of interest in Biblical Theology (BT), and as the discipline itself has grown, varying approaches to it have emerged with it. As a result, the field has become complex, especially for students just getting started. Why and how do so many who are doing BT differ? Did Ladd do the same thing, say, as Clowney? Carson? Wright? Childs?

In short, at some point it was inevitable that someone would need to sort through the various BTs out there and provide an introduction, analysis, and comparison for the rest of us. This is what Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett have done for us in their new *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice*. They summarize the major approaches as follows:

- BT1 – BT as Historical Description (James Barr)
- BT2 – BT as History of Redemption (D.A. Carson)
- BT3 – BT as Worldview-Story (N.T. Wright)
- BT4 – BT as Canonical Approach (Brevard Childs)

- BT5 – BT as Theological Construction (Francis Watson)

The book is structured very simply. Allowing and recognizing varieties within these major categories, Klink and Lockett provide first a definition / description and then an examination of a representative spokesman for each of these approaches. The relation of OT and NT, the unity and/or diversity of theological content, sources (Scripture only or backgrounds also?), subject matter, and disciplinary location (Is BT a churchly or academic field?) — each of these topics is taken up under the consideration of each approach before surveying the work of the given representative scholar. In the end, Klink and Lockett have provided a helpful summary-introduction to this complex field of study.



Two questions came to mind while reading. First, I felt that their “appreciative critique” of Carson overstated his understanding of the controlling role of exegesis in both BT and Systematic

Theology (ST). Carson’s insistence on the priority of exegesis is made with the explicit recognition that exegesis is itself influenced by BT, ST, and so on — each of these disciplines has influence on all the others. Of course, exegesis is never done in a vacuum. Yet in terms of logical, controlling priority, exegesis must be given first place. No one but Carson can speak for Carson, of course, but I felt while reading this section (88-89) that if his method actually suggested that “there are

forms of exegesis that are not influenced by biblical theology,” and that “there are forms of systematic theology not nourished by biblical theology,” Carson himself would disagree also!

My other question concerns the usefulness of this as an introductory text in the classroom. The short answer, I’m sure, is, Yes. But for the beginning student with no or little exposure to the field, the book will still require further supplementation from the professor. While reading the book through I tried to imagine the beginning student trying to grasp some of these various approaches and concepts — without some context and

exposure the book will be challenging at certain points. This is just the nature of the case. Still, *Understanding Biblical Theology* is a most helpful introductory text, and each approach is presented clearly with relative simplicity. And this in under 200 pages! And as far as I am aware, there is nothing else like it — it fills a needed niche. And for the many of us who do not specialize in BT, this book serves as a helpful map of the territory.

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How to Go from Being a Good Evangelical to a Committed Catholic in Ninety-Five Difficult Steps

by Christian Smith, Cascade Books, 2011.

Wild boars are potentially dangerous. They indiscriminately charge and maul adversaries with their tusks. Less violent but equally destructive are religious converts. Perhaps for this reason Pope Leo X (1513 – 1521) in *Exsurge Domine* described Martin Luther as a wild boar when the young German from Wittenberg threatened the Pontiff’s ecclesial vineyard. Christian Smith’s recent book—*How to Go from Being a Good Evangelical to a Committed Catholic in Ninety-Five Difficult Steps*—like Luther before him, may also do damage to the Catholic cause. According to Smith, the book seeks to persuade readers that the evangelical tradition doesn’t ultimately make sense, even on its own terms, and

can’t live up to its own claim to truth (2). It “is written for American evangelical Protestants who for whatever reasons are intrigued enough to be open to the possibility or may be even actively contemplating the idea of becoming Catholic” (3). The introduction lays groundwork concerning the book’s purpose and framework. With reference to the work of philosopher, Thomas Kuhn, Smith unfolds the process by which life’s major decisions (such as religious conversion) typically occur. These choices require nothing less than a “paradigm revolution,” a psychological sequence that comprises the book’s organizing framework.

Protestants will gain insight from chapter one, which consists of Smith’s summary of “normal evangelicalism,” the assumptions, perspectives, and ideas that comprise a “standard evangelical paradigm.” As Professor of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame, Smith is suited to provide this portrait, having dedicated much of his professional career to analyzing the cultural complexities of conservative Protestantism. His

portrayal of popular evangelicalism is remarkably precise. At points you'll cringe. It would be a shame, however, if readers were to make the mistake of reducing all of evangelicalism to this popular portrait. It is the shallow side of the pool in which Smith is conducting his exposition, and it is unfair and patently false to define the whole by this part. Unfortunately, there is no consideration of "normal Catholicism" here or anywhere in the book.

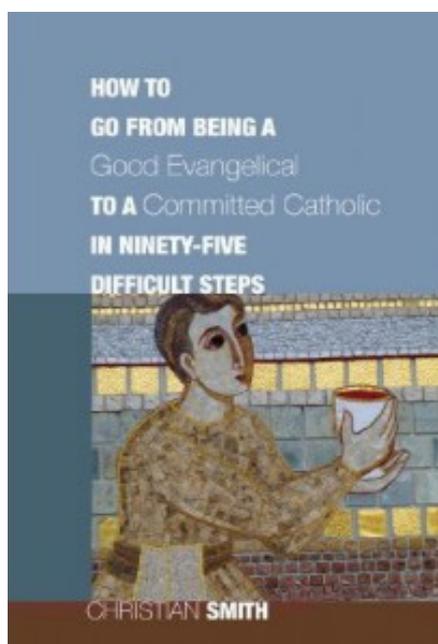
Subsequent chapters enumerate Smith's observations of evangelical culture, "anomalies" in Kuhn's nomenclature, which, from Smith's perspective, reveal elements that range from the untenable to the deplorable. Some of these critiques are deserved: i.e., rootlessness, fragmentation, disunity, and a fascination with relevance. It's not long however before evangelicals are pigeonholed with the most simple-minded and shallow exemplars of Protestant conservatism. Following are a few examples; many more could be cited.

In at least two places Smith accuses evangelicalism of intellectual inferiority, especially in regard to literary progress (44, 77-78). After suggesting that C.S. Lewis was perhaps more Catholic than Protestant, Smith defines evangelical authors by the work of Frank Peretti, Tim LaHaye, and the scads of romance novel writers, which he describes as "pathetic" (44). One can't help but wonder, is it possible that these are the only evangelical authors with whom Smith is acquainted? Apart

from his Protestant colleagues at Notre Dame, whom Smith names, evangelicals are weighed in the intellectual scales and found wanting.

In his second installment of anomalies, Smith tells readers to "Start wondering when the supposed 'great apostasy' happened and where the true Christian church was for the 1,000-1,400 years between then and the Reformation" (60-61). If you are scratching your head in confusion over where Smith found this term "great apostasy," there is a reason. It is used by the Mormon Church to describe the period between the Apostles and Joseph Smith's vision in 1820. It is a cultic notion that has no place in orthodox Protestant theology. The attribution of this doctrine to evangelicals by Smith is based either on ignorance or propaganda. The former is an egregious error and the latter is derisive.

Smith credits Protestantism with spawning and promoting secularization which in turn demystified the world and infected it with individualism and anti-traditionalism (68-69). There is a valid element here; but is it true of all Protestants? And are Catholics really immune to the problem? After reading such a bold statement, one would expect to see the imprimatur of Smith's Bishop somewhere on the volume now that Smith has been liberated from Protestantism's captivity to individualism and anti-traditionalism. The Bishop's endorsement is missing. Think about that. The doctrine of justification by faith alone, the



material cause of the Reformation and central barrier to rapprochement, is covered in just three pages (81-83). Smith argues that this division no longer exists in light of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JD) signed by the Vatican and Lutheran World Federation in 1999. He writes, “The truth is: reconciliation has been achieved—time to return home. Time to wake up and smell the coffee, and undo the divisions of the past. Can evangelicals deal with that?” (83).

It is true that the JD is a significant achievement that illuminates some implications of our common Augustinian heritage, but it is overstated and theologically imprecise to conclude that unity has thus been reached and the Reformation is therefore now over. Even if one were to stand on his head and read the JD with an eye closed, differences concerning baptismal regeneration, the pope, Mariology, and the significance of *simul iustus et peccator* are still glaring. Most fascinating, however, is that nowhere does Smith mention that it was the Catholic side of the dialogue that made the largest concession when, in its annex, it officially endorsed the doctrine of *faith alone*. Unhelpful generalizations are also evident in Smith’s treatment of *sola Scriptura*, which trades on the misunderstanding that evangelicals look to Scripture as the *sole* religious authority, as opposed to the only inspired source of authority (83). More creative still is his conspiracy theory of *sola Scriptura*’s origin, which he attributes to the political stratagem of Martin Luther (90).

The final chapter, titled *Shifting and Solidifying Careers*, focuses on the practical steps involved in actually becoming Catholic. The apologetic edge that characterizes previous chapters fades and

gives way to a warmer, almost pastoral approach to helping readers navigate the challenges of conversion. This, unfortunately, is short-lived. Smith concludes by giving full expression to his triumphalism. After developing the metaphor of a drunken roommate dancing by herself in denial after her party guests have gone home and a football team on the field an hour after the game has concluded, he writes: “That is something like what evangelical Protestants who today continue to oppose, attack, and remain separated from Catholicism in the name of the Reformation are doing. Somebody needs to give them a clue. To that end, the message of this book is this: ‘Um, people? The Reformation is over. Go home’” (174).

Major flaws plague Smith’s book. Here is the central one: from cover to cover he portrays evangelicalism at its worst and Catholicism at its best. As a new convert, perhaps Smith is unaware that this approach is explicitly denounced by the Catholic Church. For instance, the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in the document titled *Summons to Witness to Christ in Today’s World* says, “We also admit that there are negative aspects of witness which should be avoided and we acknowledge in a spirit of repentance that both of us have been guilty of proselytism in its negative sense. We affirm that the following things should be avoided . . . *comparing the strengths and ideals of one community with the weaknesses and practices of another community*” (36).

Following from the above flaw is Smith’s erroneous suggestion that the Reformation is now over. It is true that the developments of Vatican II have resulted in deep changes in the culture and theological articulation of Rome. Evangelicals

should be aware of these developments, and, when appropriate, celebrate them. But as Smith himself demonstrates in his sections addressing Scripture and justification, essential theological differences between Catholics and Protestants are as relevant today as they were in the sixteenth-century, a fact that is sadly confirmed by the omitted word between “Gordon-Conwell” and “gothic” in the index (where the word “gospel” should have appeared).

The most disappointing aspect of Mr. Smith’s book is the realization of what it could have been. Anyone who has read Smith appreciates his amazing insight into how cultures work. At this time in history, when movements such

as the New Evangelization of Pope John II and Neo Calvinism are stimulating discussion between Catholics and Protestants, the need for doctrinally measured, life-giving insight is greater than ever. Given his expertise, Mr. Smith is poised to serve this need in a significant way. Sadly, this book delivers more heat than light.

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Isaiah by the Day: A New Devotional Translation

By Alec Motyer. Scotland: Christian focus, 2011.

No book review can ever be fully objective, but I should warn readers this review particularly falls short of that goal. Alec Motyer holds a special place in my own spiritual and theological development. While serving in a local church during my undergraduate days, I was given the responsibility to teach the adult Sunday school hour. For reasons mysterious to myself, I began studying through Isaiah. Honestly, at the time, I was not too excited about the Bible. I was more interested in Christian philosophy and apologetics than in the Christian Book itself. Ravi Zacharias was one of my greatest heroes, and it was to his kind of ministry I gravitated. It was important in my formative years that Ravi demonstrate the intellectual as well as poetic coherence of the Christian faith. Through him, I was introduced

to G.K. Chesterton, perhaps the embodiment of an intellectually and poetically satisfying Christian faith. Nonetheless, at no fault of his own given his ministry objectives, I also came away with an inflated view of my own intellectual powers and a “source-theory” of Christianity that leaned more heavily on culture than on the text of scripture. Alec Motyer changed all that.

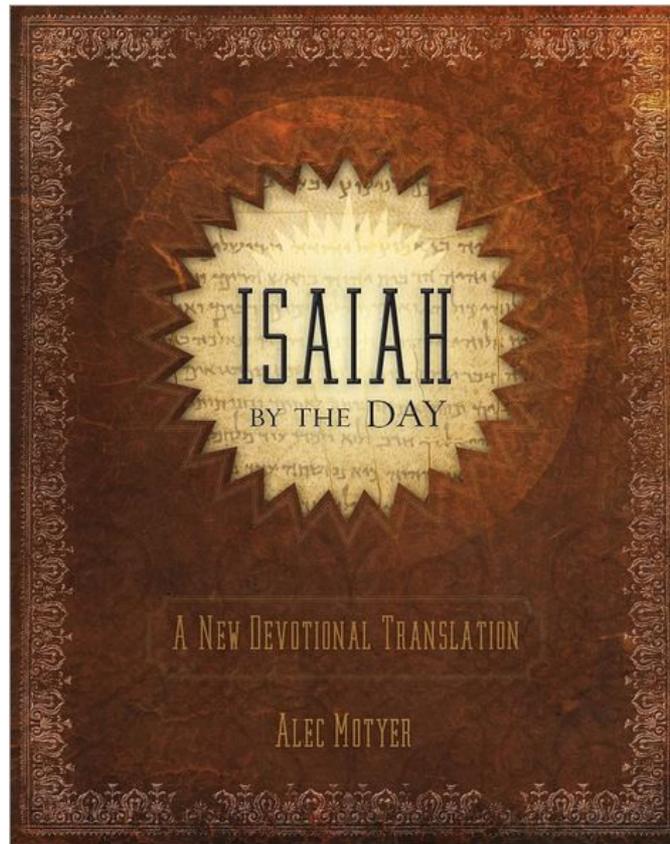
Again, in a mysterious coincidence, I picked up Motyer’s stand-alone commentary off the shelf at the library as my primary resource while working through Isaiah. For most people, including myself, reading the OT prophets was a frustrating experience. It is impossible to see the flow of thought, everything seems disjointed and random, images and metaphors (not to mention inaccessible cultural references and place names) are thrown together in something analogous to Cajun gumbo. The resulting indigestion was not particularly edifying.

Why are the prophets so difficult to read? Looking back now, I think the problem for myself, and perhaps for others, is that I viewed the Bible too narrowly in “propositional” terms. Yes, the Bible is often nothing less than “propositional,” but it is just as often something more. It was that something “more” of which I had only a little inkling. I had learned from a young age to read the Bible as a collection of proverbs, instructions, and moral stories scattered around like candy colored eggs in an Easter egg hunt. The prophets simply did not conform to those “reader expectations.”

As I worked and read through Motyer’s commentary, two blessed and glorious epiphanies occurred. First, I realized I had been reading the prophets in an entirely inappropriate way. I had divorced my interest and love for the mythopoetic from the scriptural worldview, as if the Bible were a sterile set of ethical precepts and not an epic story of creation and redemption. Through Motyer, I discovered that the Bible is as much interested in painting a world to inhabit as it is in encouraging the type of action that occurs in that world. Instead of allowing the symbol-laden world of Scripture to baptize my imagination, I was trying to pigeon hole my view of Scripture into my preconceived ideas of a religious text.

Various genres of scripture appeal more strongly to the mind, heart, or will; the prophets clearly appeal most strongly to the heart. They appeal to our imagination, allowing us to forge connections across Scripture through imagery, nostalgia, wanderlust, the sound of words, the remembrance of words, the stories of old, and “the undiscovered country.” Whereas many (by no means all) of the Psalms accomplish something similar by

focusing on the subjective experience of the individual or community in relation to God, the prophets develop a more objective experience of the numinous by drawing our attention to the grand sweep of God’s redemptive story. The prophets are the bridge between the Testaments, the enchanted “wood between the worlds,” to draw from Lewis’ *The Magician’s Nephew*. Motyer was the first to open my eyes to this wider horizon through Isaiah.



Second, having recognized its evocative nature, Motyer was able to explain Isaiah’s poetic structure. In other words, the flow of thought began to make sense. Whereas I was attempting to read the prophets like one of Paul’s epistles—with pedantic and logical transitions—Motyer helped me realize that the structure of the prophets is more akin to a narrative. There is exposition, conflict development, climax,

and denouement. There is a narrative arc to the prophets that builds tension, hope, and release. I did not have the vocabulary for it then, but this was biblical theology in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos, and I couldn't get enough of it.

I have often wondered how I could re-create the same experience I had working through Motyer's commentary without basically reproducing the year-long exposition it took for me. I need not wonder any longer. Motyer has satisfied that hope with this new book, *Isaiah by the Day: A New Devotional Translation*, which takes the reader on a 71-day journey through the entire prophetic book. Each day contains Motyer's original translation, textual notes, literary and historical summaries, and a section on application. At every point, Motyer is careful to keep the reader well-informed of the bigger picture as it is all too easy to get lost in this enchanted wood.

I can envision this book as a great gift to many a hungry soul looking for a deeper, more enriching vision of the biblical faith. Clearly, Motyer is possessed of the same eagerness that others might experience Isaiah the way he introduced him to me: "I send you this invitation as one who loves everything about [Isaiah]—the way he writes, his mastery of words, the rhythmic beauty of his Hebrew and, above all, the magnificent sweep of his messianic vision" (4).

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Jesus and his World: The Archaeological Evidence

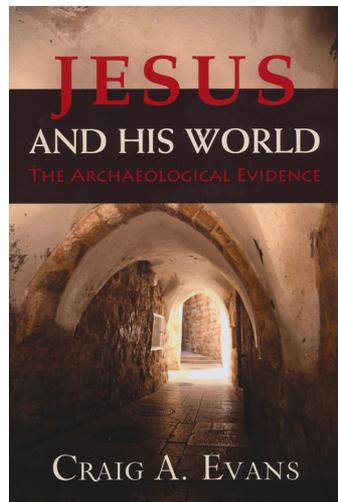
By Craig Evans, Louisville, KY:
Westminster John Knox, 2012.

Craig Evans is distinguished professor of New Testament at Acadia Divinity College in Nova Scotia, Canada. In his recent book, *Jesus and His World: The Archaeological Evidence*, he offers to readers an impressive array of archaeological discoveries from the Ancient World and demonstrates how they confirm and clarify the NT gospels. Throughout the book, Evans shows a remarkable ability to draw from both ancient and modern sources, as well as how to connect them to NT studies.

The book is divided into five major chapters with two appendices and a number of indexes. Chapter topics include the city of Nazareth – Jesus' hometown – and the role of the synagogue in Jewish life (in opposition to Howard Clark Kee who wrote in the mid-1990s that all references to synagogues in the NT and in Josephus were anachronistic). Other chapter topics include reviewing what we know about literacy in Israel at the time of Jesus, the role of the priest and the temple, and Jewish burial traditions, which, in light of yet another recently debated discovery of the "Jesus' tomb," makes the chapter highly relevant.

More than a book on obscure artifacts and potshards, Evans offers readers a vivid picture of life in first century Israel. This picture is rich with examples, and fleshed out with crucial details about the way of life, geography, and religious climate of the day in which Jesus lived. At every turn, Evans brings the archeological data alongside the NT gospels,

and this juxtaposition typically proves fruitful. Evans references and connects dozens of passages from the gospels with what we have discovered from the Ancient World. The picture he presents in the end is one in which the gospels, through the sheer amount of verisimilitude, must be taken seriously. Evans demonstrates how at every turn the gospels themselves reflect accurately the times and area in which Jesus lived. In so doing, he not only affirms historic Christianity's confidence in the veracity of the gospel accounts, but also offers a staunch challenge to skeptics, minimalists, and popular movements which divorce Jesus from his context and ignore the biblical data.



Evans is at his best in his chapter on literacy in first century Israel (chapter 3). Drawing from a legion of examples, inscriptions, papyri, graffiti, and ancient sources, Evans presents an overwhelming case for the reality that Jesus and his early followers were literate, as the gospels contend. This argument is in contention with some modern scholars who argue that Jesus was likely illiterate. In this chapter, Evans makes an interesting point, which has profound apologetic value: he argues that we have greatly misunderstood the longevity

of ancient documents, and not appreciated what this longevity means for the transmission of NT documents (75-76). Drawing from the work of George Houston, who demonstrated that manuscripts could have a life-span of up to 500 years, Evans suggests that if this was the case with the gospel autographs – and there is no reason to expect that it was not – then for a few hundred years, any copies of the autographs, and copies of those copies, would still be governed, shaped by, and compared to the originals. This argument rebuts the popular “copy of a copy of a copy” notion that suggests that the gospel manuscripts were open to distortions and errors.

The book is well written and, although it interacts with current scholarship in a number of fields, it still remains accessible not only to scholars, but also to students and pastors. Anyone looking to understand better the NT gospels and achieve a better understanding of Jesus and his world is recommended to read *Jesus and his World*.

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Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study

Constantine R. Campbell. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.

In his newly-released *Paul and Union With*

Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study (Zondervan, 2012) Constantine R. Campbell, senior lecturer in Greek and New Testament at Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, has provided the new “go to” reference work on the doctrine of union with Christ. I cannot decide whether to describe this new work as a model of theological exegesis or as a model of

exegetical theology. In fact, it is both, and it will likely prove to be the new standard on the subject.

The past century has witnessed a continuously growing interest in the doctrine of union with Christ, with varying viewpoints and emphases, and today interest in the subject seems at an all time high. But to my knowledge no one along the way has provided anything like the kind of resource we have in Campbell's new book. It is a milestone.

Campbell begins with a crisp summary of his subject, task, and conclusions (chapter 1), a helpful chapter that sets the reader well on course. Chapter 2 provides a helpful survey of the last 100+ years' scholarship on the subject, highlighting the varieties of approaches and conclusions that have shaped the discussion. This survey and the concluding summary provide a quick "up to the moment" understanding of the state of the doctrine.

As helpful as all this is, the bulk and foundational significance of Campbell's work is the detailed exegetical study provided in chapters 3 through 7. Here we have a careful guide through every Pauline passage that uses the language of union — *in Christ, in the Lord, in the beloved, in him, in whom, into Christ, with Christ, through Christ, etc.* Each expression in each of its occurrences is examined, uncovering its exact sense and nuance. Then he provides the same kind of exegesis of each occurrence of the union metaphors — body of Christ, Temple, building, marriage, and new clothing. These chapters are a gold mine of clear theological exegesis.

With this thorough foundation laid, the remaining

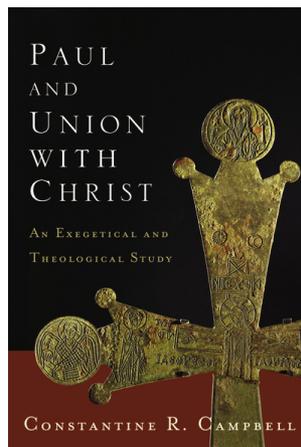
chapters move to systematic theology, bringing together the conclusions provided by Campbell's close exegetical work, demonstrating the shape of Paul's understanding of union with Christ in relation to the work of Christ, the Trinity, Christian living, and justification. His sorting through the discussion of imputation and union with Christ I found particularly lucid, but in every category he gives clarity and advance to the discussion.

Campbell concludes that union with Christ in Paul's thinking cannot be expressed or defined in any single term: the ideas of *union, identification, participation, and incorporation* are all in view,

however a given passage may stress one or another of these concepts. He also concludes that although it is probably not accurate to speak of union with Christ as the *center* of Paul's theology, overwhelmingly prominent as the theme is, it is *a key*, the "essential ingredient that binds all other elements together." Connected as it is "to everything else," it is the "webbing" that holds it all together.

It is for good reason that interest in this doctrine continues, essential as it is to an understanding of the gospel. Campbell's exposition of this marvelous theme is a genuine contribution to the study that leaves us in his debt. Combining thorough exegetical analysis and clear, simple theological precision, future discussion is now set on firmer ground. And certainly no pastor or teacher will want to expound Paul's epistles without this helpful aid close at hand.

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The Intolerance of Tolerance

By D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.

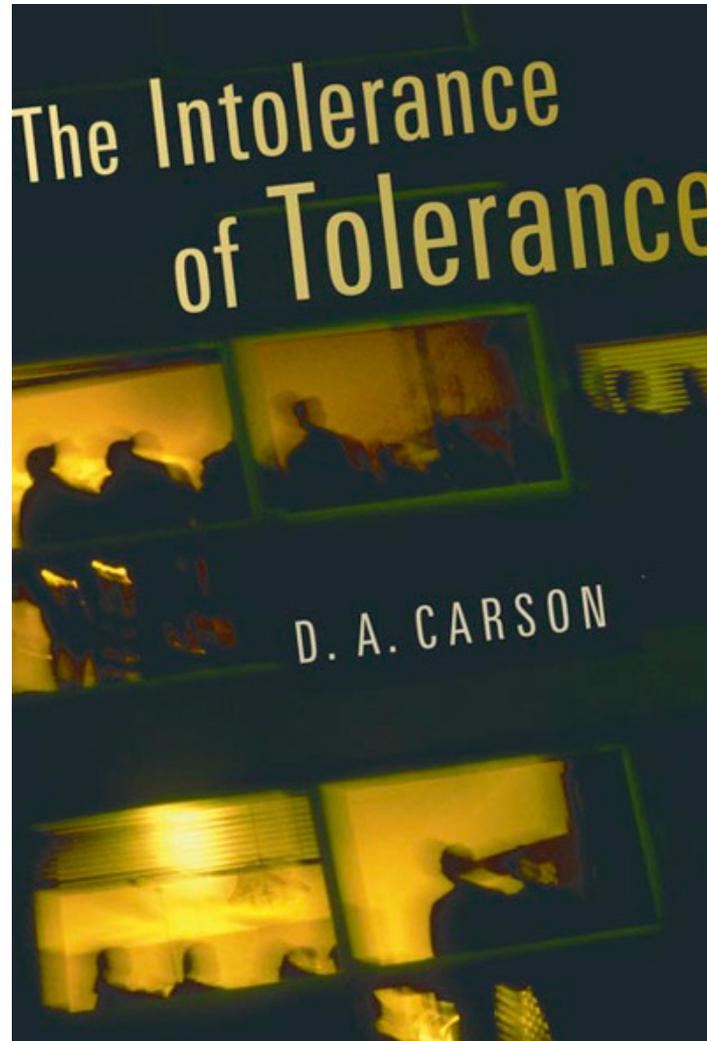
On May 8th the state of North Carolina approved a constitutional amendment to define marriage as between one man and one woman. The next day, Andrew Rosenthal of the New York Times, offered his take on the decision in his article, “A Trifecta of Intolerance.” He opens the article with these words: “Tuesday was pretty great for the forces of intolerance. North Carolina voters approved an amendment that makes discrimination an official part of their state constitution.” Regardless of one’s convictions concerning constitutional marriage amendments, one must reckon with the fact that the cry of “intolerance” is all too often heard in the West. In *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, D.A. Carson seeks to understand this cry and respond to it from a biblical worldview. The notion of tolerance has changed, and Carson argues, as implied by the title, “contemporary intolerance is intrinsically intolerant.”

In the introduction, Carson lays out the issue

of the book and sharpens the contrast between the old and new tolerance. Under the old view of tolerance, a person was considered tolerant because they insisted others had the right to dissent from their own view and argue a different case. They assumed there was objective truth, and the best way to discover the truth is to pursue it

and persuade others with reason and unhindered exchange of ideas. Even if the truth cannot be known in all domains, it was assumed to be wise to allow others to hold dissenting views. In contrast to this old view of tolerance, the new tolerance, grounded in a relativistic and postmodern worldview, argues that there is no one view that is true. Thus, one must be tolerant of all views, because there is no way to say one view is right or true. All paths are equally valid. Tolerance is now the supreme virtue in the “hierarchy of moral virtues,” and intolerance is the “supreme sin.” Carson argues that intolerance in the new

view must be understood to be “any questioning or contradicting the view that all opinions are equal in value, that all worldviews have equal worth, that all stances are equally valid.” The irony of such a position is that it allows no claims to exclusive truth except the claim that there is no



exclusive truth. There is simply no “tolerance” for those who disagree with this view of tolerance.

Carson reminds us how widespread this problem is, giving examples from the domains of education, media, homosexual behavior, as well as how this new tolerance is directed against Christians and Christianity. He then gives a helpful summary of the history of tolerance and intolerance, which brings into focus the “innovative and dangerous nature of this new tolerance.” The new tolerance arguably has other agendas at work, while seeing itself as intrinsically neutral and free from any other systems of thought (ethical, moral, religious). Carson rightfully shows how the problem is worse than mere inconsistency; the new tolerance brings in underlying assumptions and structures of thoughts and imposes them on those who disagree, but still insists it is others who are the intolerant people. What is even more striking for Christians are the challenges this new tolerance brings to Christianity and Christian truth claims, both inside and outside the church. Carson says there is a “subtle pressure to dumb down, dilute, and minimize the Gospel.” He wants to be clear that faithful Christians are bound to Scripture and bound to uphold certain truth claims, but this does not mean that Christians are “intolerant.” There is still evil in our world, and the new tolerance proves unable to deal with this reality, even though proponents would lead us to believe the world would be a better place if we were all more “tolerant.”

Carson’s cultural exegesis and application of a biblical worldview to the issue of tolerance and intolerance is quite astounding. Cultural examples that support his position abound throughout the book, making the weight of what is at stake

all the more heavy. There is a interweaving of biblical, theological, and cultural awareness that is an example of scholarship and exactly what one would expect from Carson. Chapter eight, “Ways Ahead: Ten Words,” is worth the price of the book for those who are seeking the way ahead. Many will be interested in this book who have yet to grasp the issue, but feel the uncomfortable tension when they are charged with “intolerance.” This volume will wonderfully assist them in understanding what is at stake, expand their knowledge of the history of thought and how we arrived at such a place, and provide them numerous examples that demonstrate how this new tolerance is working itself out in our culture. There will also be those who already understand the issues, but have not completely worked through the implications for the Christian faith or how to respond in a loving and biblical manner. Again, this volume will be an invaluable resource to these people, and Carson’s “Ten Words” will provide counsel and encouragement to those who want be bold in the face of challenges to the exclusivity of Christ and his claims. Moreover, this volume is a great resource for Christians and non-Christians alike to understand and debate these issues in a rational manner. One may not be fully convinced of every single argument made in the work, but one will not be able simply to dismiss Carson’s overarching case against the intolerance of the new tolerance.

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How *How-To* Sermons Make Our People Functional Roman Catholics

BY TIMOTHY RAYMOND

Several years ago a very dedicated church member pulled me aside. In a hushed, sober tone he said, “I’m concerned you’re being too hard on the Roman Catholics in your preaching and teaching. From time to time, you’ve specifically called-out Catholics as being wrong for this or that reason. But, frankly, when it comes right down to it, what Roman Catholics believe and what we believe is basically the same.”

At the time, I had nothing to say. I was so dumbfounded that I simply nodded my head and furrowed my brow and (to my shame) tried to change the subject. But in retrospect I concluded that this sincere man misunderstood what Roman Catholics and Evangelicals believe. And to make matters worse, I really don’t think he viewed that as much of a problem.

Somewhere along the way, Evangelicals embraced a different definition of what makes a Christian. While we once defined a Christian as someone who confesses the Evangelical gospel and gives

reasonable evidence thereunto, we slowly, imperceptibly, but eventually concluded that a Christian is one who strives to follow Christian ethics. The entire core shifted from those who embrace the faith once for all delivered to the saints, to those who live a certain lifestyle. And given this redefinition, I was being too hard on the Roman Catholics. “If my good Catholic neighbor attends church every week, reads his Bible, sings the same doxology we sing, opposes abortion, and supports traditional marriage, does it really matter if he thinks Jesus’ body is literally present during the Lord’s Supper?” I suspect the vast majority of our church members would answer in the negative.

How did this shift in definition take place? I’m convinced that much of the blame must be placed on Evangelicalism’s preoccupation with the how-to sermon. “Six keys for raising happy children,” “Four secrets for a healthy marriage,” “Five principles for managing your money,” and so forth.

Now please do not misunderstand me. Pastors must seek to apply God’s Word to Christians’ lives. To be a hearer of the Word but not a doer is the height of hypocrisy. However, a steady diet of how-to sermons devoid of the gospel, or weak on the gospel, or vague on the gospel, or that simply tack-on the gospel at the very end as a sort of formality implicitly yet powerfully communicate that Christianity is a lifestyle first and a faith second. They place ethics at the core and beliefs in the periphery.

If we Evangelical pastors desire our people to remain Evangelicals and not become functional (or literal) Roman Catholics, we must fight this tendency tooth and nail. Reaffirm again and again that Christianity is a faith first and a lifestyle second. Don’t succumb to the allure of popularity and perceived relevance, even if the mega-church across town is attracting your members. Learn how to legitimately preach Christ from every part of the Bible and how all practical application must be founded upon blood-bought grace. Preach through all of Romans or all of Isaiah, even if you must do so over the snores of some of your deacons. Don’t shy away from the difficult doctrinal passages in Scripture in favor of lighter, more “practical” messages. In short, be a faithful minister of the gospel who preaches the Word in season and out and refutes those who contradict (2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9).

In the end, Evangelicals are Evangelicals not because we follow four principles, five keys, or six secrets. In the end Evangelicals are Evangelicals because we build our lives on the Evangelical gospel.



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