Issues in

HISTORY AND EXEGESIS

by CARL TRUEMAN & G.K. BEALE

The Best of Trueman & Beale from the Westminster Theological Journal
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INAUGURAL LECTURE

RAGE, RAGE AGAINST THE DYING OF THE LIGHT

CARL R. TRUeman

I. Introduction

Having been unable to find a suitable quotation from Bob Dylan as a title for my inaugural lecture, I have chosen instead a line from a famous poem by his partial namesake, Dylan Thomas. The whole stanza reads as follows:

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

My reason for choosing as my opening shot Dylan Thomas’s rant against the passive resignation of old age in the face of death is simply this: today, both old age and church history are generally regarded as irrelevant. In a culture obsessed with youth and driven by consumption, old age is something of an embarrassment. It is an unproductive, unmarketable concept; and, in a church which so often apes the larger culture, church history is usually regarded as having little or nothing of use to say. My purpose, therefore, is to cast a critical eye on this assumption, and to indicate that Westminster Seminary church historians are not simply going to acquiesce in the consensus concerning their irrelevance, but that they fully intend to rage, rage against the dying of the historical light.¹

A variety of factors contribute to the anti-historical thrust of the modern age, as I have argued elsewhere.² Suffice it to say today, however, that I believe that in a society dominated by ideologies of novelty and innovation—ideologies driven by the agendas of science, capital, and consumerism—the past will always be cast in terms which put it at a disadvantage in relation to present and future. In fact, it is vitally necessary in such societies for the past to be inferior; this is one important means of validating the present and justifying the future.

¹ It is worth noting that Westminster embodies this counter-cultural trend in the emphasis it gives to church history in the curriculum, with full courses being taught on ancient church, medieval church, the Reformation, and modern age. Most seminaries now compress church history into two courses, covering early church to medieval, and Reformation to modern.

Dare one say it, in America, a nation built on notions of an expanding frontier and of manifest destiny, a nation whose self-actualization is always seen as being just over the next horizon, such present-future orientation is particularly strong. But it is not just in America that such a viewpoint exerts its grip; it is a Western phenomenon as a whole, with even our language indicating this underlying value scheme: *innovative, original, ground-breaking* have, on the whole, positive connotations; *traditional, conservative, old-fashioned* have, on the contrary, negative ones. Within such a cultural framework, can history really serve any function other than that of a traveling freak show which parades the grotesques, the monsters, and the mediocrities of the past in order to allow the modern world to feel good about itself and its future?

A further problem for history as a discipline is the cluster of philosophies which are bracketed together under the general term *postmodernism*. Postmodernism has allegedly rendered implausible the whole idea of grand narratives and of the accessibility of truth in any traditional way. In a world of no grand narratives, of course, there can be no history in any referential sense, only various incommensurable narratives by which historians express their own values and tastes. Writing history is thus swallowed up in the politics of the present. Postmoderns tell us that because of this radically relativizing insight we therefore live in an age of epochal change, where everything once certain is now exposed as negotiable and volatile and that a fundamental cultural paradigm shift has occurred.3

As a historian, of course, I am never impressed by claims about epochal events and paradigm shifts. I am too well aware that every age has made claims to being epochal; the great Bob Dylan may well have sung, “Oh my name it is nothin’, my age it means less,” but nobody has ever really believed such sentiments about themselves and their own time. On the contrary, human beings have consistently and continuously engaged in the creative struggle to transform culture and to leave their mark on the world around them. This surely indicates something about the amazing and awesome human drive to make a difference, to make my name and my age the decisive one. Is the postmodern turn of epochal significance? Only time will really tell, but if I were a betting man, I would wager heavily against it being so.

At a more sophisticated level, my skepticism about postmodernism is rooted in my attraction to the arguments of critical theorists like Frederic Jameson, Perry Anderson, and Terry Eagleton.4 They argue that postmodernism, with

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4 Among Frederic Jameson’s voluminous critical works, see esp. *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); and *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the*
all of its vibrantly creative, chaotic, challenging, and exciting insights, is actually the cultural logic of late capitalism, to use Jameson's phrase. I myself prefer to speak of the cultural logic of advanced consumerism so as to avoid the prescriptive political and eschatological implications of Jameson's Marxism, but his basic point is, I believe, sound. To defend this thesis would take too much time today, so a single quotation from Karl Marx himself will have to suffice. In the Communist Manifesto Marx describes with unnerving foresight the epistemological and ethical anarchy which modernity, extended to its very limits, globalized, and universalized, will bring with it:

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe... Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away; all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.5

All that is holy is profaned: pardon the pun, but full marks to Marx for here predicting precisely the kind of anarchic world which would produce both the highly sophisticated philosophical hedonism of Michel Foucault and the crass redneck shenanigans of the Jerry Springer Show.

If, of course, postmodernism, with all of its disdain for history in any traditional sense, is the ideology of advanced consumerism, then it can just as easily be described as the quintessential ideology of modern America; indeed, in modern America, and in the West which follows America's social and economic lead, it is surely interesting to note that just about anything can be believed, however absurd, and any moral precedent can be overturned, however well-established, provided that such action can be successfully marketed as enhancing the American consumerist dream. Whether it is the nature of human sexuality, the definition of marriage, or access to abortion and euthanasia, American public morality is increasingly that of the marketplace, and moral truth is that which the cultural market forces permit, or, in some cases, demand. Think, for example, of the recent emergence of phenomena such as gay tourism and gay television channels. Would these things happen if they did not present opportunities for money-making? And can one overestimate how these things themselves then


feed into and reinforce the social normalization of homosexuality as a lifestyle choice (and I use the word choice precisely to make the point about the connection with the consumer mentality).  

This is where my narrative today connects to evangelicalism. If postmodernism was always destined to be the cultural logic of modern America, with its consumer-driven economy and cultural mores, then it was arguably inevitable that it was also destined to be the ideology of evangelicalism, which, with its individualism, its pragmatism, and its functional disdain for history, is Americanized religion par excellence.  

Now, there has been much hoo-hah over recent years about how the church in general, and evangelicalism in particular, must embrace many aspects of the (nebulus) cultural conditions called postmodernism. In part this is built upon a historiography which I shall presently call into serious question. First, however, I want to draw attention to the fact that the proponents of postmodern or post-conservative evangelicalism generally consider themselves to be saying something new. They are calling, as they see it, for a fundamental recasting or revisioning of evangelical theology in postmodern, anti-Enlightenment categories. At this point, I want to begin to demonstrate the value of history as a critical discipline by applying to postmodern evangelicalism the principle articulated so well by Quentin Skinner, the Cambridge historian and philosopher: when reading an historical text, Skinner points out, one must not simply ask what the writer of the text is saying; one must also, and more importantly, ask what the writer of the text is doing.

Now, when one approaches the major texts of postmodern evangelicalism and asks what they are saying, the answer is exciting: they claim they are opening up

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6 Of course, I assume here that the dynamic or logic of the marketplace is itself complex and not something which is simply driven either by supply or by demand. Rather, there is a complex negotiation between supplier and consumer which also takes into account wider cultural factors, such as previous history, established values, etc. Thus, e.g., programs like Will and Grace and Friends in the U.S. or Eastenders in the U.K. which have undoubtedly done much not simply to reflect but also to shape wider cultural understandings of sexual morality, relationship, etc., have not simply done so by presenting an alternative reality which the public has then absorbed in some uncritical manner; other factors, such as the rise in disposable income, the material limits and possibilities of professional urban life, the wider significance of the televisual media in general, along with many other factors, have all played their part. Yet I believe my central point is sound: the marketplace is perhaps the single most powerful nexus of cultural forces in the modern Western world.

7 The one possible rival to this characterization of evangelicalism as the quintessential American religion is Mormonism: see Nathan Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). For a thorough critique of the impact of consumerism and American values on evangelical Protestantism in the U.S., see the tetralogy by David E Wells, No Place for Truth; or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and Above all Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World (Grand Rapids: Eerdns, 2005).


radical new directions for theology; but when one approaches the same texts and asks what they are doing, the answer is somewhat more prosaic. Far from pointing to new ways of doing theology, these texts are on the whole appropriating an admittedly new idiom, that of postmodernism, in order to accomplish a very traditional and time-honored task: they are articulating a doctrinally minimal, anti-metaphysical "mere Christianity." Like pouting teenagers in pre-torn designer jeans and Che Guevara tee-shirts, they look angry and radical but are really as culturally conformist and conservative as a tall latte from Starbucks.

Any historian worth his salt can see that this "mere Christianity" agenda has a well-established pedigree in Christendom. At the time of the Reformation, Erasmus, writing against Luther, used a combination of Renaissance skepticism, intellectual elitism, and contemporary Catholic teaching on church authority to argue for a Christianity which was essentially practical in orientation and minimally doctrinal in content. In seventeenth-century England, Richard Baxter adopted a linguistic philosophy suggestively akin to that of his contemporary Thomas Hobbes in order to undercut the traditional metaphysical basis of Christian orthodoxy and offer a minimal account of the doctrines of the faith. In the early nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher responded to Kant's critical philosophy by fusing pietism, Romanticism, and a post-Kantian anti-metaphysical bent to reconstruct Christian doctrines as statements about religious psychology, not transcendent theological truths. And evangelicalism, from its roots in revivalism and pietism, through its development in the pragmatic, anti-speculative culture of America, to its current existence as a more-or-less amorphous, transdenominational coalition, has historically embodied in its very essence an antipathy to precise and comprehensive doctrinal statement. To make the point of immediate relevance in a Westminster context, it was this kind of evangelical position, and not really true liberalism in the technical sense, against which Machen was fighting at Princeton prior to 1929. Therefore, it would seem at least arguable from the perspective of history that the evangelical appropriation of certain aspects of postmodernism is not really a radical break with the past. It might simply be a co-opting of the latest cultural idiom to give trendy and plausible expression to a well-established and traditional ideal of "mere Christianity."

Let me interject a clarification at this point lest I be misinterpreted as saying that mere Christianity is something wrong in itself, a matter to be despised. That is emphatically not what I am saying at all. Salvation does not depend upon the individual's possession of an elaborate doctrinal system or a profound grasp of intricate and complex theology. Yet this is not my point. What I am

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10 See Bernhard Lohse, The Theology of Martin Luther (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 162.
12 The obvious example of this is the reception within evangelical ranks of C. S. Lewis, the impact of whose book Mere Christianity within American evangelical circles has been immense.
13 See D. G. Hart, Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).
claiming is that *mere Christianity*, a Christianity which lacks this doctrinal elaboration, is an insufficient basis either for building a church or for guaranteeing the long-term stability of the tradition of the church, that is, the transmission from generation to generation and from place to place, of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. What is disturbing is that the advocates of postmodern mere Christianity are not debating how much one must believe to be saved; they are actually proposing a manifesto for the life of the church as a whole, a somewhat more comprehensive and ambitious project. It is the validity of this that I question.

To return to my main point: eclectic, simplistic, and popularized appropriation of Wittgensteinian linguistics and uncritical engagement with pop culture finds fertile soil in a movement committed not so much to the real implications of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language as to the defusing of the problems faced by a transdenominational movement seeking a place at that often-mentioned but somewhat nebulous “table.” Evangelicalism is, after all, based not upon comprehensive dogmatic formulation but upon a loose collection of elective affinities, only some of which are doctrinal. I would argue, therefore, that seen in this light, the long-term contribution of postmodernism to evangelicalism will ultimately be seen to be more of form than of substance; ho-hum, the singer changes yet again, but, in the words of Led Zeppelin, the song remains the same. This is surely why evangelical expressions of postmodernism are often so tame and uncritical compared to their counterparts in the secular academy; and why they are rarely taken seriously by those outside of the evangelical subculture. In my admittedly limited experience it does not really seem to be the case that postmodern evangelicals want to engage with the truly radical philosophical implications of the various postmodern philosophies; it is rather that evangelicals are drawn to the idiom of postmodernism because it facilitates a hip, trendy, and culturally plausible in-house defense of the classic, established evangelical notion of a mere Christianity.

Further, evangelical postmodernism often fails to subject postmodernism itself to any radical critique. Instead, it seems to assume its basic validity as a given and

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14 The dilemma created at Wheaton College by the conversion of faculty members to Roman Catholicism and that created in the Evangelical Theological Society by the conversion of office bearers highlight the problems faced by institutions and organizations with minimal, albeit evangelical, doctrinal bases. In the cases of Joshua Hochschild at Wheaton and Francis Beckwith in the ETS, both men made good claims to be able to sign the relevant doctrinal bases while yet being good Catholics. In my opinion, their positions were certainly arguable by the letter of the law, even if at odds with its spirit.

15 For example, I have never come across a self-proclaimed postmodern Christian who regards the biblical prohibition on child sacrifice as being purely contingent and contextual; yet in the university setting where I initially worked as an academic I had numerous friends who regarded child sacrifice as definitely not something one would want to do in the Senior Common Room of a British university but who also regarded any attempt to make the prohibition a universal moral imperative, binding on all contemporary societies, as an act of Western imperial hubris. I address some of these issues in my response to Franke’s “Refounding Theology” (see n. 8 above); I leave it to the reader to decide if his attempt to answer the challenge is a cogent one: see Carl R. Trueman, “It Ain’t Necessarily So,” *WTJ* 65 (2003): 311-25; John R. Franke “Postmodern and Reformed? A Response to Professors Trueman and Gaffin,” *WTJ* 65 (2003): 331-43.
therefore, by implication, as ideologically neutral. Postmodernism’s allegedly overwhelming cultural dominance does not, of course, in any way prove its validity; yet one must search hard for any serious postconservative evangelical discussion of the possibility, articulated so well by Jameson, Anderson, and Eagleton among others, that postmodernism might itself be a highly ideological modernism extended to its absolute limits. The reason for this critical lacuna? To quote Bob Dylan again, you never ask questions with God on your side; and to the extent that postmodernism is the all-embracing, omnipresent, god-like cultural system which imperiously castrates and internalizes all opposition; and to the extent that mere Christianity is the evangelicals’ God-given ideal, there is no need to ask the really critical questions.\textsuperscript{16} Postmodern evangelicalism, like much of postmodernism, presents itself to the world with all the smug self-importance of a radical revolution. Yet this is an illusion, because the end result at which it aims is as old as the hills, as exclusively doctrinaire as it can be, and as traditional and conservative as it comes: an old-hat, mere Christianity, articulated in a contemporary cultural idiom which actually renders it utterly powerless to challenge the dominant culture and yet impervious to criticism.\textsuperscript{17}

II. \textit{The Problem of Reformed Orthodoxy}

This brings me to the issue of Reformed Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{18} The postmodern evangelical literature has little time for Reformed Orthodoxy, typically characterizing it as an example of how Enlightenment rationalism infected and perverted

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\textsuperscript{16} Examples of this abound. Take, e.g., the use which the late Stanley Grenz makes of \textit{Star Trek} for understanding. Grenz, who is rare among writers on postmodernism in being able to make the subject accessible and entertaining, certainly makes numerous helpful observations on how one can track wider cultural changes in society by looking at how humans are portrayed vis-à-vis aliens in the various incarnations of the Star Trek franchise, from the 1960s to the 1990s. Yet he never asks the really interesting questions, such as “Who is paying for this?” “Why do they project these images the way they do?” “Why is \textit{Star Trek} on this channel at this particular time of day?” In other words, for all of the criticism of modernism as aspiring to presenting reality as it really is, there is a sense in which Grenz himself operates with the assumption that what is portrayed on \textit{Star Trek} is, in a deep and real sense, a mirror of reality. See Grenz, \textit{A Primer on Postmodernism}, 1-10. The same critical thinking might be applied to \textit{The Simpsons}. Rather than simply worrying about the fact that Ned Flanders is such a pious goof and thus about how the church needs to shed this public image (a most laudable intention with which I have no quarrel!), Christians should first ask if the reason why Christians are portrayed this way has more to do with the agenda of the scriptwriter or the network than the reality of Christianity in America. It is surely worth a moment’s pause to wonder why Fox, the most politically conservative of all stations, chooses to give \textit{The Simpsons} a nightly slot just after dinner time.

\textsuperscript{17} The politically disempowering impact of postmodernism is clearly identified by Terry Eagleton: see his \textit{Illusions of Postmodernism and After Theory}; by analogy, the same disempowerment applies to theology and to the gospel.

\textsuperscript{18} I define Reformed Orthodoxy as that theological movement which arose after the Reformation (ca. 1560 onwards) and sought to consolidate the insights of the earlier Reformers within the wider culture of the university and the church, evidenced particularly in the development of ecclesiastical confessions and catechisms. In addition, in the increasingly complex cultural, polemical, ecclesiastical, and pedagogical environment, Reformed theology during this time underwent considerable doctrinal elaboration, an elaboration which should not be interpreted by misusing categories such as \textit{scholastic} and \textit{rationalism} to explain developments. The major study of doctrinal elaboration during this period is that of Richard A. Muller, \textit{Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725} (4 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).
Christian theology. Yet I would suggest that the real problem which postmodern evangelicalism has with Reformed Orthodoxy is not so much that it is a form of rationalism. That claim can be, and has been, easily debunked time and time again. The claim’s persistence as received truth therefore indicates that something else, other than the actual evidence, is keeping it alive. Let me therefore indulge in a moment of speculation: the problem, I suspect, is rather that Reformed Orthodoxy is, well, orthodox, that it offers a fairly detailed and extensive account of the Christian faith which stands in clear opposition to the traditional mere Christianity which evangelicals have co-opted the idiom of postmodernism to help them express. Therefore, those postmodern evangelicals who criticize orthodox responses to their positions as being too preoccupied with epistemology are, I think, quite correct: the postmodern evangelical project is not primarily an epistemological one; it is rather one of aesthetic preference, bound up with matters of taste; I speculate, but perhaps postmodern evangelicals simply find distasteful extensive and detailed doctrinal statements which aspire to universal validity; and their epistemology is on the whole simply instrumental to validating such a preference. Indeed, it is arguable that taste is the key to truth these days, a fulfillment of what Friedrich Nietzsche (a much-neglected prophet of postmodernism) anticipated in Also Sprach Zarathustra: “And do you tell me, friends, that there is no dispute over taste and tasting? But all life is dispute over taste and tasting!”

19 The portrayal of Reformed Orthodoxy in Grenz and Franke, Beyond Foundationalism, is most misleading. For example, while the work of Richard A. Muller is cited on the issue of scripture, the authors demonstrate no actual knowledge of his argument at all in the way they present Reformed Orthodox approaches to scriptures as leading to a radical methodological antithesis between scripture and tradition: see Beyond Foundationalism, 102-4. Beyond this misuse of Muller, the authors ignore all of the massive volume of scholarship on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century exegesis and theological method which has been produced in this field over the last thirty years, and this critical lacuna in their argument feeds directly into their analysis of the subject.


21 “Of the Sublime Men,” in Thus Spoke Zarathustra (trans. R. J. Hollingdale; London: Penguin, 1969), 140. Despite the emphasis in the literature on postmodernism representing a linguistic turn, it is also arguable that it represents just as much of an aesthetic turn, whereby matters of taste become determinative of that which is deemed to be true and good. For example, much of recent anti-theism argumentation, such as that of Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens, has emphasized the distasteful results of religious commitment in attempting to refute theism as a viable option. On postmodernism as an aesthetic movement, see Terry Eagleton, The Ideology of the Aesthetic (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); also his application of this approach in Holy Terror (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). An interesting example of this kind of approach is provided by Franke in his rejoinder to my response to his “Reforming Theology” article (see nn. 8 and 15 above). His response starts with objections to my tone, and thus the rhetorical strategy is from the start an aesthetic one which helps to obscure the more substantive issues raised in the initial exchange. In other words, the rejoinder is itself a good example of postmodern idiom: see his “Postmodern and Reformed?”
Given Westminster’s commitment to upholding the Westminster Standards, it is inevitable that the church historians on faculty must justify their existence by fulfilling their role in this larger institutional task. On one level we can do this by doing what I have tried to sketch out in the first section of this lecture: by placing the latest cultural trends in the context of history and thus exposing as premature and uncritical all the hype and the hoo-hah that so often surrounds new trends. A world, and a church, which is hooked on novelty like some cultural equivalent of crack cocaine needs the cold, cynical eye of the historian to stand as a prophetic witness against it. And make no mistake, when it comes to my approach to trendy evangelical claims to epoch-making insights, beneath the cold, cynical exterior of this particular historian beats a heart of stone.

The other level at which we must fulfill our task as Westminster historians is by exposing the incorrect historiography on the basis of which the postmodern evangelical pundits so often dismiss Reformed Orthodoxy as a necessary prelude to asserting their own theological claims. It is to this that we now turn our attention. The typical picture of Reformed Orthodoxy offered by the popular postmodern evangelical market is that which we find, for example, in a recent volume which offers an analysis of the tradition based upon a very selective examination of the writings of Charles Hodge. The picture that emerges from this slender reading of Hodge is first read back into Turretin and then extrapolated as if normative for the whole of the confessional Reformed tradition. At the same time, an understanding of scholasticism as an essentially rationalist and deductive method is thrown into the mix. Thus, a particular picture of Reformed Orthodoxy is transmitted to the pulpits and the bookshops which inform the literate wing of evangelicalism, a picture which is as depressing and pejorative as it is historically inaccurate.22

22 The portrayal, and use, of Charles Hodge in Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, is inaccurate and misleading. For example, the authors state that he basically follows the scholastic paradigm (14). The problem here is that scholastic paradigm, even within Reformed Orthodoxy, could be used to express a significant variation of theological opinions and detailed content; it is a category mistake to confuse scholasticism with content. Further, by eliding the difference between Hodge and the variegated Reformed tradition, it also sets the tone for using Hodge throughout the work as the touchstone of what Reformed Orthodoxy says, thus obviating the need to deal with the variations within that tradition on key doctrinal and hermeneutical issues. More importantly, given the constructive project Grenz and Franke are proposing, this move effectively cuts off the seventeenth century as a possible resource for contemporary theological reflection. None of the major historical work of, say, Richard Muller on scholastic method and Reformed Orthodoxy, nor any of the constructive philosophical work of scholars such as Antonie Vos and Paul Helm, both of whom appropriate seventeenth-century Reformed theology for contemporary philosophical and theological projects, is cited, utilized, or even critiqued. Indeed, it is also surprising to see that Grenz and Franke still seem to hold to the long-discredited central-dogma theory of divine sovereignty as the structural center of Reformed Orthodoxy: see *Beyond Foundationalism*, 263-64 (where the authors seem unaware that Hodge is actually quoting the Westminster Shorter Catechism on the decrees, a document which clearly gives neither the structural nor the dogmatic significance to the decrees which the authors impute to Hodge). On the fatal flaws in the central-dogma theory of Basil Hall, Ernst Bizer et al., see the following examples of the growing body of literature on this topic: Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957),
First, the authors of such works have failed to engage either with the range and complexity of the seventeenth-century sources of Reformed Orthodoxy, or with the problem of historical development, or with the relevant secondary scholarship in the field. Had they done so, they would have realized that, for example, their definition of scholasticism as essentially rationalist is historically untenable. Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, William of Occam, Jacob Arminius, Francisco Suarez, John Owen, Johannes Cocceius, Thomas Barlow, Francis Turretin: all were scholastics, yet represent a diverse and, in some cases, mutually exclusive range of epistemologies, philosophies, and theologies. Scholastic method does not demand a particular doctrinal or philosophical position; it is simply a basic way of arranging, investigating, and describing objects of study, which was developed in the schools (hence it is scholastic), and which demands no single philosophical or theological conviction.

Further, the highly contentious assumption that the nineteenth-century Charles Hodge is typical of the Reformed tradition should set the alarm bells ringing. To take those areas in which Hodge is most often used in such literature as being representative of the tradition as a whole, those of epistemology and revelation, it is arguable that these are the very issues where he deviates most significantly from the seventeenth-century confessional tradition. Most telling in this regard is Hodge's failure to pick up on and develop the distinction between archetypal theology (generally, God's infinite knowledge of himself) and ectypal theology (that knowledge of God which is revealed in finite forms to finite creatures), a point on which I myself erred in a discussion of Hodge some years ago.

This distinction was formally developed by Francis Junius in the late sixteenth century but it has roots in the voluntarism of late medieval Scotist understandings of God and of how language refers to God. In Reformed theology, the distinction functions in such a way as to delimit human knowledge of God and to underline the fact that theology is utterly dependent upon God's act of condescending to reveal himself. This acknowledgement ensures that theological statements are only apprehensive, not comprehensive, of the truth as it is in God.

77-78 (where Barth seems to think that the Reformed Orthodox in practice paid too little attention to predestination, not too much); also Richard A. Muller, Christ and the Doxum: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986).


See my review of Alister E. McGrath, A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism, WTJ 59 (1997): 155-38. I still think it is arguable that the content of the distinction is present in Hodge, but the terminology is absent, and any critical impact it has upon his theology is somewhat muted.

Francis Junius, "Tractatus de Vera Theologia," in D. Francisci Junii Opuscula Theologica Selecta (ed. A. Kuyper; Amsterdam: Broekhaus, 1882), 37-40. The major difference between the Scotist use of this type of distinction and that of the Reformed is that, for Scotists, the epistemological problem is primarily an ontological one which points to the problem of a finite being's knowledge of an infinite being; for the Reformed, the noetic impact of sin is also a fundamental part of the problem.
Language can thus be referential, but there is no simple one-to-one correspondence between human words and divine realities as they exist in God himself. The presence and function of this distinction in, say, the Leiden Synopsis, or Francis Turretin or, later, in Herman Bavinck, denotes a theological sensitivity to the innate weakness of human language when talking of God; and it roots such God-talk not in any true rationalism but in the free, condescending, revelatory acts of God himself. Such language is still referential; and truth still has a non-negotiable objectivity; but it is not rationalism in any recognizable Enlightenment sense.\(^{26}\)

Furthermore, the archetype/ectype distinction in fact precludes any possibility of natural theology in the Enlightenment sense. There can be no autonomous knowledge of God built independent of God’s continuing, active, sovereign condescension. Thus, the virtual absence of this conceptual distinction in Hodge marks his deviation from the dominant tradition and effectively disqualifies him from being used as typical on this point. One might also add that the distinction’s all-pervading presence in the Reformed Orthodoxy of the seventeenth century makes the latter somewhat less vulnerable to the later Kantian epistemological critique than might otherwise have been the case. Indeed, it is an established historical fact that it was precisely the Arminian rejection of this distinction which left the theology of the Remonstrants peculiarly vulnerable to incursions of rationalism in the later seventeenth and then the eighteenth centuries.\(^{27}\) To decry Reformed Orthodoxy as a whole as rationalistic and a precursor of the Enlightenment is thus historically indefensible. History shows that it was the Arminians and figures such as John Locke, advocates of an embryonic form of mere Christianity, who ultimately had difficulty in maintaining any semblance of historic orthodoxy.\(^{28}\)

Epistemology is not the only area where Reformed Orthodoxy is habitually misrepresented as a prelude to being rejected. Another frequent allegation is that Reformed Orthodoxy is overly concerned with pedantic doctrinal precision and little else. This may indeed be so in certain individual cases; but, to

\(^{26}\) Johannes Polyander, Andreas Rivetus, Antonius Walaeus, and Antonius Thysius, Synopsis purioris theologiae (Leiden, 1625), 1.3-4; Francis Turretin, Institutes of Elictic Theology (ed. James T. Dennison Jr.; trans. George Musgrave Giger; 3 vols.; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992–1997), 3.2.6; Herman Bavinck, Prolegomena (vol. 1 of Reformed Dogmatics; ed. John Bolt; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 212. For discussion in the secondary literature, see Muller, Prolegomena to Theology, 225-38; Willem J. Van Asselt, “The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in Seventeenth-Century Thought,” \textit{WJ} 64 (2002), 319-35. That Grenz and Franke in \textit{Beyond Foundationalism} do not address this basic distinction in their critique of Reformed Orthodox views of God renders their analysis inadequate. One cannot dismiss Reformed Orthodoxy on the basis of Charles Hodge: what about the basic work of Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf on prolegomena? Or the summaries of Reformed epistemology found in works such as the Synopsis purioris theologiae? To ignore works such as these is fatal to any analysis of the epistemology of Reformed Orthodoxy.


\(^{28}\) Indeed, we can see the incursions of rationalism into Reformed Orthodoxy precisely in the work of a man like Richard Baxter whose agenda was the simplification of Orthodoxy: see Trueman, “Richard Baxter on Christian Unity”; Trueman, “A Small Step Towards Rationalism: The Impact of the Metaphysics of Tommaso Campanella on the Theology of Richard Baxter,” in Trueman and Clark, eds., Protestant Scholasticism, 147-64.
borrow a thought from the National Rifle Association, doctrines don't kill people; people kill people. Yes, there has been much unpleasantness in the history of Reformed theology, but that is the product of the unpleasantness of theologians rather than any overly-dogmatic essence of Reformed Orthodoxy. Indeed, careful historical work can be of benefit here. When one looks at those confessions which constitute the ecclesiastical expressions of Reformed Orthodoxy, it is quite amazing how economical they are, defining very clearly indeed those issues upon which they pronounce, but leaving much scope for legitimate disagreement in areas where they decline to speak. In comparison either to the Canons of Trent or to the Lutheran Book of Concord, Reformed confessions are, on the whole, concise and sparing in their statements.29 This pattern is repeated in seventeenth-century discussion of fundamental articles (those minimal things which one must believe to be a credible Christian). Again, the Reformed Orthodox lists of such articles are remarkably short. Thus, to reduce the tradition to dry, pedantic, overly-elaborate orthodoxy is again historically incorrect.30

While on the subject of Reformed Orthodoxy's alleged doctrinalism, it is also worth noting that the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed were deeply rooted in the ongoing Western theological tradition. There is indeed an irony in the postmodern evangelical accusation that Reformed Orthodoxy involves an arrogant isolation from the wider theological impulses of both West and East. Given that postconservativism itself frequently seems to articulate views of language, of knowledge, and indeed of God, of Christ, and of divine revelation, which are without orthodox precedent within the bounds of historic Christianity since patristic times, such criticism begs obvious questions about who exactly it is who is indulging in hubris with regard to the wider Christian tradition.31

Nevertheless, to address the matter positively, when one analyzes, say, the work of a figure such as John Owen or George Gillespie or William Perkins or

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29 As a source for Reformed confessions, the best collection available is that in E. F. K. Müller, *Die Bekanntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1903), a far more comprehensive collection than that available in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983). Reading through Müller is an excellent way of seeing the theological unity in cultural and ecclesiastical diversity of the Reformed faith in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

30 The Reformed Orthodox wrestled long and hard with exactly which items of the Christian creed were necessary to be believed for credible Christian profession and which found expression in the various lists of *fundamental articles* which exist. While there was no confessional consensus on exactly which articles, and how many, should be included, a representative list can be found in Turretin, *Institutes* 1.14.24. On the whole issue of fundamental articles, see Müller, *Prolegomena to Theology*, 406-30; Martin I. Klauber, *Between Reformed Scholasticism and Pan-Protestantism: Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1671–1737) and Enlightened Orthodoxy at the Academy of Geneva* (Selingsgrove, Pa.: Susquehanna University Press, 1994), 165-87.

31 See, e.g., John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology: A Postconservative Evangelical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). I am intrigued by the philosophy of language articulated by Franke, which seems to me to be and large a popularization of the later Wittgenstein and yet to lack clarity as to whether or not the world is a linguistic construct: this seems to be the thrust of his argument on pp. 23-26, yet the following statement offers qualifications the precise import of which is both crucial and left unclarified by the writer: "[T]he world we experience is mediated in and through our use of
Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf or Gisbertus Voetius or Francis Turretin, one finds in every single case a vast range of historic theological sources being used. The pages of their theologies overflow with citations of rabbis, of patristic authors West and East, of medieval scholastics, from Anselm to Occam, and of contemporary theologians and thinkers, Protestant and Catholic; and their library catalogues confirm the voracious catholicity of their reading habits. Indeed, I have myself argued that John Owen’s theology needs to be understood as, on one level, a Protestant modification of an essentially Augustinian-Thomistic theology, and the work of Antonie Vos at Utrecht has pointed to the significant dependence of Reformed theology on the metaphysics of Duns Scotus, particularly on discussions of necessity and contingency. Theological sources do not come more catholic, in every sense of the word, than those used by the Reformed. In addition, the classic creedal categories of Trinitarianism and Christology are central to the Reformed Orthodox project, giving a catholic foundation to all Reformed reflection upon God and salvation.

It is true, of course, that Reformed Orthodoxy does break with the established tradition in key areas. For example, the Reformed uniformly reject the medieval notion that Jesus Christ is mediator only according to his human nature; instead, they insist on mediation according to both natures, and this language, meaning that to some extent the limits of our language constitute the limits of our understanding of the world. Further, since language is a socially construed product of human construction forged in the context of ongoing interactions, conversations, and engagements, words and linguistic conventions do not have timeless and fixed meanings that are independent from their particular usages in human communities and traditions. In this sense, language does not represent reality as much as it constitutes reality” (26; emphasis added). To what extent do the limits of our language constitute the limits of our understanding of the world? What exactly does it mean to say language does not represent reality as much as constitute it? These are questions which Franke does not appear to answer, leaving this reader with the suspicion that he wants to have his cake and eat it too when it comes to language and truth claims.

32 See Richard A. Muller, “Ad fontes argumentorum: The Sources of Reformed Theology in the Seventeenth Century,” in After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press), 47-62; also Carl R. Trueman, John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 5-33. In addition to the various library catalogues for seventeenth-century divines which are extant (e.g., those of Arminius, Baxter, Owen), there is a fascinating work by John Owen’s Oxford tutor, Thomas Barlow, which is a recommended basic reading list for theological students at Oxford (presupposing, of course, a B.A. degree as a prerequisite). Barlow was a vigorously Reformed Orthodox theologian, bishop, and philosopher, and the catholicity of his reading list (together with a marked emphasis upon biblical textual and exegetical works) is most instructive for understanding Reformed Orthodoxy as it really existed: see his Autoschediasmata de Studio Theologiae; or, Directions for the Choice of Books in the Study of Divinity (Oxford, 1699).


34 See Muller, Christ and the Decree; also Trueman, The Claims of Truth. My central thesis in this book is that Owen’s theology represents a self-conscious attempt to integrate classic, creedal, catholic Trinitarianism with anti-Pelagian notions of grace in the context of Reformed Protestantism’s modifications of western Christology.
change is introduced in order to underscore that mediation is the act of a person, not of an impersonal nature. In other words, the more speculative and metaphysical thrust of certain aspects of patristic and medieval theology is tempered by the Reformed emphasis upon the importance of the historical person of the mediator, and the need to do justice to biblical history. Yet even such breaks with tradition arise out of a serious attempt to connect the new insights of the Reformation with longstanding traditions of theological and conceptual discussion. The greatness of seventeenth-century Reformed Orthodoxy, and of the Westminster Seminary tradition which stands in its line, is that it is possible to have one’s cake and eat it: all the greatest theology of the church can be co-opted in the process of theological formulation. And it is the role of Westminster’s church historians to demonstrate how this catholicity worked itself out in history; and that not in some amorphous relativism or in a mere Christianity but in clear, thorough, and principled confessional formulation and subsequent ecclesiastical life.

Another area where careful historical work can undo much of the misrepresentation of the notion of the popular variant of a vast cultural gulf between today and the world of the past is in the whole area of context and contextualization. Now, it is certainly true that we today have a better conceptual vocabulary for reflecting self-consciously upon issues of context, but it is important to note that both the Reformers and their successors were acutely aware of many contextual issues. At a simple level, the theologically driven desire to produce Bible translations and vernacular liturgies bears witness to this fact; further, sensitivity to context is evidenced by the variation among the Reformers on matters such as worship practices, church-state relations, pastoral counseling, and discipline. For example, the existence of Stranger Churches of European exiles in London during the reign of Edward VI indicates a clear awareness of ethnic differences and a repudiation of the “one size fits all” monolithic mentality so often laid at the door of the Reformed Orthodoxy. And in an era where almost continual political upheaval made exile and geographical displacement fairly typical experiences for many Protestants, issues related to these points were never far from the surface. Indeed, Calvin spent almost his entire theological career as an exile, and did more than his fair share of theologizing against the background of ethnic tensions between old Genevan families and French immigrants.

In addition to this, one might also add that Reformed Orthodoxy emerged from and was articulated in a variety of European cultures and contexts which

55 See the discussions of the Reformed break with medieval Christological paradigms in its insistence on the mediation of Christ according to both natures in Muller, Christ and the Decree, 29-33, 142-49; and Trueman, John Owen: Reformed Catholic, 80-81. The Reformed Orthodoxy were quite capable of breaking with tradition when exegesis demanded it; and the result was a theology considerably less speculative than its medieval antecedents.


57 As yet there is no major study of Calvin and his theology in terms of his context and identity as an exile. Nevertheless, the excellent work of William G. Naphy on the impact of immigration patterns and ethnic tensions on the Genevan Reformation is highly suggestive of work which could be done in this area: see his Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); on the Geneva Academy as a European center of learning, see
were arguably more diverse in terms of political, social, and economic culture and organization than that of the rather uniform McDonald's/MTV/Disney-saturated modern West.38 Even the attempts by Marxist historians such as Christopher Hill to argue that Puritanism appealed to particular class interests now lie in ruins. Careful work over recent decades has demonstrated that religious conviction in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries cut right across the various categories—ethnic, class, gender—which later critical theory might anachronistically wish to impose.39 Again, Westminster church history can make a signal contribution at this point both by emphasizing that problems of context are as old as the Reformed faith itself, and by pointing to the ways in which the Reformed have addressed this issue in the past.40

Yet for all of this massive cultural, linguistic, political, social, geographical, and economic diversity in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, careful examination of the primary texts of Reformed Orthodoxy—whether Scottish or Hungarian, whether by an aristocratic Episcopalian such as Daniel Featley, or a down-at-heel tinker such as John Bunyan—reveals through the diversity a remarkably coherent and unified voice. The basics of the gospel and the Reformed faith were actually understood in astoundingly consistent ways across national, linguistic, cultural, and economic boundaries. Further, it is clear that this was not simply a coincidental unity, but arose from the positive, self-conscious conviction of its various advocates that they did indeed speak with a substantially unified voice. Again, historians are well-placed to explain how this was possible.


39 Christopher Hill's writings in this area are extensive, but perhaps the best expression of his Marxist analysis of the English Civil War is his The World Turned Upside Down (New York: Viking Press, 1972). His approach has been subject to widespread critique in recent years, where other issues (e.g., religion and Anglo-Scottish politics) have come to take center stage in the analysis: see Conrad Russell, The Causes of the English Civil War (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); John Adamson, The Noble Revolt: The Overthrow of Charles I (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007). Even a history which focuses on "the people" demonstrates that Hill's class-based categories of analysis of seventeenth-century society and religion are too simplistic and fail to do justice to the diversity in existence: see Diane Purkiss, The English Civil War: Peasants, Gentlemen, Soldiers, and Witchfinders in the Birth of Modern Britain (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

40 Some may object that, in fact, the patterns of immigration which the West has experienced over the last century or so do radicalize the diversity of society in an unprecedented way. For example, many of us now have Jewish, Moslem, and Hindu neighbors in a way that would have been impossible in the sixteenth century. This is certainly true, but I would offer two thoughts by way of laying the foundation for response. First, these differences must be set against the background of a vast amount of common popular culture "glue" which often creates a deeper unity than these other phenomena might suggest (e.g., sports teams, TV programs, commercial chains, designer labels, etc); and also that the situation on the ground in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was more diverse than can be ascertained through a study of elite cultural patterns, artifacts, and practices. Take, e.g., the work of Margo Todd whose study of kirk session records in the early modern period reveals a much more complicated world at the grass roots level in the church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than an exclusive focus on published literary texts would suggest: see The Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern Scotland (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
Any historically attuned study of Reformed Orthodoxy will see that the seventeenth-century theologians of, say, the Westminster Assembly, clearly understood humanity, made in the image of God, as a universal. Human beings were not simply cultural constructs, despite all of the diversity that existed between people of different cultures. It was this belief in human nature that then allowed the Reformed to set context, as it were, in context. While the French spoke French and lived under an increasingly absolutist Catholic monarchy, and the English spoke English and established a Puritan commonwealth, and the Dutch spoke Dutch and organized society itself along ecclesiastical-confessional lines, the shared human nature of each of these national groups provided an ultimately unified horizon. This meant that communication was possible between such disparate groups, and that theological content, while only ever occurring in specific space-time contexts, was never reducible to, or bounded by, such contexts. Culture was an artifact of human beings made in the image of God. Human nature thus logically preceded culture and provided the ultimate created context for all other contexts.

The other universal pole was the ectypal, revealed theology of which we have already spoken: God's revelation was just that—a revelation of God, not an expression of the psychological self-consciousness of the religious individual or community. Taken together, the human knower and the divine known provided a fusion of shared, universal horizons which had logical and methodological priority over all other particular contexts. The hyper-Kantian move of dissolving everything, even the human self, into language was—and, one might add, is—anathema to Reformed Orthodox theology. This is why claims that the opening lines of Calvin's Institutes offer a principle and a precedent for a post-modern contextual reconstruction of Reformed theology miss the point, both historically and theologically. What Calvin is saying in Institutes 1.1 is that our knowledge of who we are is intimately connected to our knowledge of God and vice versa. If he is making a claim about context at all, it is that God, and God's image in us, is the ultimate context for understanding God and humanity and the relationship which exists between them; he is not suggesting that "in the discipline of theology we must take account of the particular social and intellectual settings in which we engage in theological reflection and exploration." Important as these are, it is not what Calvin teaches in Institutes 1.1.41

There is much more that could be said about the misrepresentation of Reformed Orthodoxy in contemporary evangelical presentations: for example, I could address the typical allegation that the Reformed were prooftexters who did not understand the nature of exegesis or canonical formation. I have, you will be relieved to know, no time today to deal with this in detail. Suffice it to say that the seventeenth century was the golden age of Protestant linguistics, of biblical commentary, of thoughtful sifting and collating of traditions of exegesis, and of careful attention to the relationship between exegetical work and doctrinal formulation.42 Again, underlying all this was a commitment to scripture as ectypal

41 Contra Franke, The Character of Theology, 13-14.
42 On this, see the essays on the exegetical methods of the Westminster Divines in Richard A. Muller and Rowland S. Ward, Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship
theology, as the revelation of the one God speaking one message through finite human words. This commitment demanded the development of such linguistic and textual studies; yet it also controlled and regulated those studies in a way that made normative theological formulation possible, indeed imperative for the well-being of the church. Criticism of alleged Reformed Orthodox proof-texting by modern authors who themselves engage in almost no biblical exegesis as they offer their alternatives does raise obvious questions again about the difference between what is apparently being said and what is really being done. One might perhaps argue with some justification that the game being played today by post-conservative pundits is not so much that of challenging orthodox exegesis as that of questioning the very notion that it is actually possible to make ecclesiastically normative theological statements on the basis of scripture. But that is a long story, and one to be saved for another day. Suffice it to say that Westminster church historians are charged with making sure that the historiography behind such arguments is gently but firmly exposed for the illusion that it is.

III. Conclusion

There is a line in one of The Who’s greatest songs, “Who are you?” which goes as follows: “I remember throwing punches around and preaching from my chair.” I do hope that when I look back on my inaugural day in years to come, my memories will be a little more positive than that. Yet, it is part and parcel of being an academic, particularly at an institution such as Westminster, that one should throw some punches around and use one’s chair as a place from which to preach. Indeed, I hope that I have today been quite polemical at points; critical thinking and scholarly engagement necessarily require polemic, and such polemic is ultimately a positive, healthy, and vital exercise.

Will Westminster church history win a hearing in the wider evangelical culture? Possibly not. After all, the wider evangelical culture has drunk deeply at the anti-historical wells of the contemporary American scene. The task of history itself is thus one which finds little or no natural sympathy in today’s world. In addition, the study of Reformed Orthodoxy requires that we do justice to its sophistication, its nuances, its catholicity, its failure to conform to the expected clichés of postmodern consumerism. With the best will in the world, these are not particularly marketable qualities. Thus, I suspect that those who declare confessional Reformed theology to be some species of, say, rationalism, proof-textism, and/or ahistorical dogmatism, will continue to shape its popular image. After all, they tell a story which sells books, a nice, simple, straightforward story which confirms the popular belief in the superiority of a pragmatic, anodyne, merely Christian present that needs to forget its past and move on. That this story is told with a necessarily light scholarly apparatus and is demonstrably untrue in its principal historical claims is not a particular problem: it says what people want to hear; it is buoyed along by strong cultural currents; like

postmodernism itself, it speciously hides its conservatism under the language of radicalism; and it has the advantage that those books which tell the true story of Reformed Orthodoxy are not themselves easy reading.

Yet the Westminster church history department will never cede cheap ground to the arrivistes of evangelical historiography or to the aesthetics of the contemporary postmodern evangelical world. And, while it may save the surprisingly sensitive aesthetic consciences of some to convince themselves that our critiques are simply in bad taste, nothing more than the routine rants of rabid Reformed rottweilers, this is simply not the case. Not at all. I am most happy to acknowledge that the issues which the postmodern evangelicals are addressing and the questions they are asking are very important and need to be addressed with thought and not dismissed out of hand; but these things can only be done in any sound or effective manner on the basis of careful and precise historiography. One cannot critique the inadequacies of the past until one has understood the past; one certainly should not abandon the past on the basis of a caricature; and the kind of historical misrepresentations which undergird certain postconservative analyses of the tradition stands at odds both with the possibility of such critique and with the claims of the very same people that we need to engage with tradition in order to meet the challenges of the contemporary world. Thus, let me put this as precisely as I can: the vigor of my criticism of such writers is provoked as much by their seriously problematic historiography as by any serious heterodoxy within their theology; indeed, the careful reader will note that I do not offer any criticism of their theology as that is beyond the scope of this lecture.

This message is unlikely to prove popular in some quarters of the evangelical world, but that is of little consequence. Neither I nor my colleagues in the department do what we do in order to be well-liked, popular, or successful. Rather, we do what we do because we simply refuse to allow to go unchallenged the received mythology concerning the evils of Reformed Orthodoxy; we do what we do because we love the Reformed faith as much as we dislike shoddy historical writing; we do what we do to make our own small contribution to criticism of the bland aesthetic tastes of modern evangelical theology; and, above all, we do what we do because to remain silent at such a time as this would be to abdicate our moral responsibility to the church. In short, we do it because it is right for us to do so. The light may well be dying, but we will rage, rage against it; and be assured, we will never go gentle into that good night.
RICHARD BAXTER ON CHRISTIAN UNITY:  
A CHAPTER IN THE ENLIGHTENING OF 
ENGLISH REFORMED ORTHODOXY*

CARL R. TRUeman

In 1707 a group of non-conformist ministers made a fateful decision that was to have a dramatic effect upon the way in which the great Puritan divine, Richard Baxter, would be known to posterity. Their action effectively divorced Baxter's thought from the context of its times and more or less guaranteed that his reputation for subsequent generations would not be that which he himself would have chosen, or perhaps even recognized. This decision separated his so-called practical works from the rest and arranged that only the former should be republished. The result was four huge tomes of writings, covering everything from conversion through catechising to Christian household management.1 While the tomes were indeed huge, however, they actually represented less than half of what Baxter wrote in his lifetime and excluded precisely those doctrinal works upon which Baxter himself hoped that his reputation would come to rest.

The practical writings certainly struck a chord with the English-speaking public. Several editions were published over the subsequent centuries, most recently in the early 1990s. The particular brand of piety which they contained also proved popular in the Highlands of Scotland, where the practical writings enjoyed translation into Gaelic and came to form part of the

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literary culture of the legalistic wing of Scottish Presbyterianism. Indeed, so closely did Baxter's practical writings come to be identified with the legalism of Victorian non-conformity that, in The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot underlined the pharisaism of the nauseating Mrs Glegg by noting that she read Baxter's Saints' Everlasting Rest "on wet Sunday mornings—or when she heard of a death in the family—or when . . . her quarrel with Mr Glegg had been set an octave higher than usual." The resulting popular picture of Baxter, to friend and foe alike, is that of a man who was fundamentally concerned with the practical life and experience of the Christian believer, a pietist avant la lettre. This image has often been combined at a popular level with the notion that Baxter was the calm man of tolerance, the one who sought a middle-way between Arminianism and Reformed Orthodoxy as a means of promoting church unity—a view which has reinforced the image of him as a pietistic writer more concerned about experience and life than about the precise niceties of doctrinal disputes.

Such a picture, however, does Baxter an injustice, divorcing his practical writings from his life and works as a whole and divorcing his thought from its wider context in what was possibly the most turbulent century in English history. Baxter's image as a non-doctrinaire pietist cannot be sustained in the light of his doctrinal works; and his reputation for tolerant ecumenism cannot be sustained when his campaign for church unity is set against the backdrop of Civil War, Commonwealth, and Restoration.

Baxter's thinking on church unity is a highly complex subject, and this paper examines two aspects: the external social and political factors which shaped his views in this area; and the kind of theology and theological method which he used to develop his view of what it meant to be a "meere Catholick." The two sides are inevitably not unrelated, and tell us much about Baxter the Puritan theologian in the seventeenth century; but they also reveal some of the fundamental ambiguities of his thought which are indicative of the transitional nature of his theology, forming as it does a tenuous bridge between the old and the new in the intellectual life of England.

2 I am grateful to Donald Meek, Professor of Celtic at the University of Aberdeen, for bringing this to my attention.


4 This would certainly appear to be the case from the eighteenth century onwards, where a strong pietist tradition looked back to his practical works for inspiration: see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, Richard Baxter and Philip Doddridge: A Study in Tradition (London: Oxford University Press, 1951). Nuttall himself is very sympathetic to the pietist analysis: for him, Baxter is the one who "constantly writes out of experience and from his heart," ibid, 13. In his biography, he also underplays the strongly anti-Romanist dimension of his pursuit of church unity: e.g., Richard Baxter, 121, 122.

5 The relationship between Puritanism and Enlightenment is a highly complex one. Those such as Christopher Hill who operate with a Marxian view of history and see the Puritans as representative of the rising bourgeoisie and the Civil War as essentially a class struggle are
I. Baxter on Church Unity: the Historical Context

The key to unlocking Baxter’s thinking on church unity lies in his experience and understanding of the most cataclysmic event in England in the seventeenth century: the Civil War. The question of Baxter’s attitude to, and interpretation of, the Civil War has been obscured somewhat by the fact that his well-known later writings contain much hand-wringing and regret over the events of the 1640s, implying that he quickly became a disillusioned, if not reluctant, Parliamentarian, and his major statement on the war, his A Holy Commonwealth of 1659, which offered a more positive assessment of the conflict, remained an obscure treatise and never enjoyed popular appeal. The picture is made yet more complex by the fact that Baxter later repudiated this treatise in public in 1670, while continuing to recommend it in private as necessary reading for understanding the Civil War. Thus, in the preface to A Christian Directory in 1673, he states that the section on political theory is emphatically not the same work as in A Holy Commonwealth which he had recently repudiated. Yet in the same year he recommends the book to one Edmund Hough who is writing a history of the Civil War.

The reasons for Baxter’s apparent schizophrenia over the book are somewhat obscure, but the importance of them for understanding why Baxter inclined to regard Puritanism as an early modern movement whose ideology reflected this essential modernity: see his Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965). More recently “revisionist” historians such as Conrad Russell have called into question the central importance of social and economic class for the Civil War and have thus recast it not as one of the first of the bourgeois revolutions but as one of the last of the wars of religion: see Russell’s The Causes of the English Civil War (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). A parallel shift has been taking place in the discipline of the history of ideas with reference to studies of continental Reformed Orthodoxy. Previous scholarship saw the rise of Reformed Orthodoxy, with its increased use of scholastic argumentation and structure, as indicative of an incipient rationalism at work within Protestant theology and thus as adumbrating later Enlightenment emphases: see, for example, Brian G. Armstrong, Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969) and Ernst Bizer, Fruehorstodixie und Rationalismus (Zurich: EVZ, 1963). Of late this view has been subjected to vigorous criticism by scholars who point to the fundamentally pre-modern presuppositions of Reformed Orthodoxy and the equivocal use by previous scholars of the word, “rationalism,” and its cognates when applied to differing historical periods: see Richard A. Muller, Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics I: Prolegomena to Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987); Carl R. Trueman, The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998). Analysing the intellectual content of Puritanism, and tracing the intellectual relationship between Puritanism and Enlightenment is rendered difficult by the fact that the Puritans were excluded from English universities in the early 1660s, some time before the Enlightenment had any significant impact on English university curricula: see Trueman, Claims of Truth, 1-46.


A Holy Commonwealth, xix-xx; Calendar, no. 906.
chose to support the Parliamentary cause can scarcely be underestimated
and, as I will argue, provide at least one point of continuity between the
early and later phases of Baxter's political thought. While his positive po-
itical views may undergo significant change, the underlying concerns remained
fairly consistent.

In chapter thirteen of the work, Baxter gives a brief account of why the
parliamentary cause was justified in the light of the political theory which
he has spent the previous twelve chapters developing in some detail. On the
whole, this chapter focuses on the various infringements of parliamentary
and popular rights in which the king had indulged in the time immediately
prior to the hostilities. Distinguishing carefully between the person and
position of the king, and the king’s will and actions, Baxter argues that the
war was in its origin an attempt to curb the latter not to overthrow the
former. Nevertheless, to the highly theoretical core of his argument Baxter
adds a number of more pragmatic considerations which speak eloquently
about his own wider, and perhaps not so theoretical, concerns. First, he
claims that he was driven into the arms of the parliamentary forces by the
pro-Royalist mob in his own parish who had left him fearing for his life as
one of the despised Puritans. Thus, geographical location and personal
safety were at least contributing factors in his choice.9

Second, and undoubtedly more significant for understanding Baxter’s
intellectual position, were his fears about the potential ascendancy of popery.
On the international stage, two related issues appear to have preoccupied
him in the early stages of the war: the recent massacring of Protestants in
Ireland by Catholics; and the fact that this would appear to fit well with
what he perceived to be a pro-French, pro-Catholic party which was gaining
influence at court, presumably (though he does not make the connection
explicit) through the King’s French wife. In an eloquent passage, Baxter
describes the fear which the Irish massacre and its implications had aroused
in him:

If you say, What was all this to England? I Answer, we knew how great a progress
the same party had made in England, and it was them that we were told by the
Trustees of our safety, that we were in danger of, and the fire was too near us to
be neglected; and our safety too much threatened, to be carelessly ventured into
the heat of the peril; or to be wholly taken out of our Trustees hands, when
thousands were thus suddenly butchered by the Papists in our own Dominions,
and those Papists likely to have invaded England, when they had conquered
Ireland, and their friends were so powerful about the Court, and through the
Land. . . .10

What is clear from this passage is Baxter’s fear that the pro-French party
at Court were effectively removing from the hands of Parliament the ability
to deal with the very serious threat posed by the Irish, and thus Catholic,
problem.

9 *A Holy Commonwealth*, 211-12.
10 Ibid., 219.
This is very important for understanding Baxter’s later approach to church unity which cannot be understood in isolation from the wider context of international religious politics. For Baxter, the Civil War was above all a war worth fighting because it was the only means of establishing a Protestant state with the various resources necessary for resisting the infiltration of French-Catholic influence into England. This, I believe, is what provides the continuity between Baxter’s early political thought and that of his later years: he may change his mind concerning the nature and competence of political structures, but he never changes his mind about the need to ward off the Catholic threat to English society.

Baxter’s attitude to the Catholic threat makes it quite clear that it would be a grave error to interpret him as in any way a precursor of modern notions of tolerance or liberty of conscience. In order to underline the fundamentally anti-Catholic purpose of the Civil War, Baxter reminds the reader of A Holy Commonwealth that it was not a war fought for freedom of any religion but rather freedom for the true, i.e., Protestant, religion which was, in good Presbyterian style, to be maintained by the power of the civil magistrate:

Nor was it [the purpose of the war] the altering of Laws, which is not to be done by force, but freely by the Law-givers. And therefore it was not to procure a cessation of the Magistrates Power in Religion, for encouraging well-doers, and restraining intollerable Deceivers, which some call Liberty of Conscience. . . . [I]t was former connivance at Popery that they [Parliament] were offended at, and not a Liberty for Popery that they fought for; and that Heresie and Popery were Covenanted against by them, is well known; though the Liberty of Truth and Godliness they defended.\(^{11}\)

For Baxter, then, the Civil War was, on one level, very much a war of religion where Protestant was pitted against Catholic, not a war for freedom, in any modern sense, against the forces of oppression. This basic rejection of Catholicism, and the need to formulate a coherent Protestant policy against it, was something which was to stay with Baxter until the day he died and provided one motive—and one important boundary-marker—for his quest for Christian unity: the unity sought must provide a strong Protestant consensus against Catholicism and thus, by implication, protect England against the French.

That Baxter continued to reject the notion of liberty of conscience as a basis for social and religious stability is demonstrated by his attitude to the Cromwellian settlement. In the passage quoted above from 1659, it is clear that he is unconvinced by the various attempts that had been made during the Commonwealth to establish liberty of conscience and to interpret the Parliamentary cause along these lines. Indeed, in his massive autobiographical work, Reliquiae Baxterianae, written, of course, after the repudiation of his

\(^{11}\) Ibid., 225.
more positive assessment of the War and Commonwealth, Baxter paints a picture of Cromwell as a man whose religious policy of tolerance for the sects is driven solely by the pragmatic requirements of his own insatiable ambition. Baxter dates this from the remodelling of the army in 1645, which he interprets as a selling-out of the parliamentary cause to the radicals and sectarians with the connivance of Oliver Cromwell. Much recent research has called into question the picture, painted most influentially by Marxist historian, Christopher Hill, of the New Model Army as a hot-bed of social and theological radicalism and has highlighted the orthodoxy of many of its leading religious lights. This, however, is somewhat irrelevant to the case of Baxter: it does not matter if the army was indeed more orthodox than Hill has claimed; the fact is that Baxter clearly perceived it as a focal point of subversive radicalism and this coloured his own later interpretation of the War, the Army, Cromwell, and the Protectorate.

Work on the religious policy of Oliver Cromwell has not been extensive, and the source material for the Lord Protector’s own religious views is thin and somewhat ambiguous. Nevertheless, in two carefully argued articles, Blair Worden has made a reasoned case for understanding the intention, if not the outcome, of Cromwellian religious policy as being that of establishing a religious settlement built upon a basic Trinitarian confession upon which Protestants could agree and around which they could exercise a significant degree of freedom of conscience in regard to other doctrinal matters. Such a settlement, while obviously excluding the Catholics and

12 Baxter’s attitude to Cromwell is summed up by his interpretation of his military policy: “The two designs of Cromwell to make himself great, were, 1. To Cry up Liberty of Conscience, and be very tender of Men differing in Judgment, by which he drew all the Separatists and Anabaptists to him, with many soberer men. 2. To set these self-esteeming Men on work to arrogate the Glory of all Successes to themselves. . . . The truth is, they did much, and they boasted of more than they did.” Reliquiae Baxterianae: or, Mr Richard Baxter’s Narrative of The most Memorable Passages of his Life and Times, edited by M. Sylvestre (London, 1696), I, 48.

13 “These things [the apparent success of those armies dominated by religious men] set together caused almost all the Religious sort of men in Parliament, Armies, Garrisons and Country to be for the new modelling of the Army, and putting out the looser sort of Men (especially Officers) and putting Religious Men in their steads. But in all this Work the Vanities in the House and Cromwell in the Army, joined together, outwitted and over-reach the rest, and carried on the Interest of the Sectaries in special, while they drew the Religious Party along as for the Interest of Godliness in the general.” Reliquiae, I, 47.


15 Baxter himself estimated that the number of sectarians in the Army was very small, though their influence with the leaders gave them power beyond their numbers: Reliquiae, I, 53.

16 The best biography of Cromwell which takes serious account of his personal religious beliefs is that by R. S. Paul, The Lord Protector: Religion and Politics in the Life of Oliver Cromwell (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955).

the Socinians, would provide sufficient breadth to produce an overall Protestant consensus—and it was consensus and union which Cromwell was seeking, not some early realisation of tolerance: disagreement on secondary matters would be allowed, but heresy would not be tolerated.\footnote{See Worden, “Toleration,” 210-11.}

What is interesting about the picture of Cromwellian religious policy and ambitions portrayed by Blair Worden is their superficial similarity to those proposed by Baxter as the basis for establishing Christian unity. Baxter himself argued that a basic subscription to the supreme authority of Scripture, combined with the Apostles’ Creed as a subordinate standard, was all that could reasonably be expected from believers as a basis for church unity. This was the policy he pursued during the Protectorate in the so-called Worcestershire Association which comprised members who varied on issues of church government yet who found unity on essential doctrinal matters.\footnote{See Nuttall, Richard Baxter, 64-84.}

It also lay behind Baxter’s attempts after the Restoration to produce a non-conformist consensus, an attempt which failed in part because of the view of John Owen that the terms of subscription, the Apostles’ Creed, the Lord’s Prayer and the Decalogue, were not sufficient to exclude Socinians and Papists.\footnote{Calendars, nos. 769, 771.} Thus, like that of Cromwell, the content of the Baxterian proposal stressed the bare minimum of doctrinal agreement as the basis for Protestant consensus. What is surprising, therefore, is the distaste Baxter had for the Cromwellian settlement. Indeed, it was the Cromwellian notion of liberty of conscience which Baxter had singled out, so he claims, as the distinguishing ideological mark of the sectarians in the army, before any issues such as baptism, church government, or the antinomian question.\footnote{Reliquiae I, 53.}

For him, its weakness lay in the fact that it allowed the sects to proliferate, a proliferation which threatened to undermine the very fabric of society.\footnote{Baxter develops this argument in a discussion of the five principle sects (Vanists, Seekers, Ranters, Quakers, and Behmenists) in Reliquiae I, 74-79, where he lists their errors, their prominent leaders, and their antisocial behaviour. All five are, he claims, a varied assortment of “infidels and papists,” and the Quakers in particular are singled out for the “popish plot” treatment, since they have been thoroughly infiltrated by the Franciscans (77).}

In addition, it ran counter to the intentions of the Solemn League and Covenant to protect the king against “schism, as well as against Popery and Prophaneness.”\footnote{Reliquiae I, 52.} This attitude is what motivated him to warn Parliament in 1654 that “Thousands might curse you for ever in Hell if you grant such a liberty to all men to deceive them and entice them thither.”\footnote{Humble Advice: or the Heads of those Things which were offered to many Members of Parliament by Mr Richard Baxter (London, 1655), 2, quoted in Worden, “Toleration,” 210, n. 13.} While Baxter did concede that Cromwellian policy had allowed freedom for true
gospel preachers as well as the sects, his attitude remained that of basic disapproval.25 This attitude was to persist, and was only confirmed by his view that any moves towards toleration in the years of the restored monarchy were always driven by a desire to give Roman Catholics the upper hand and eclipse the true gospel yet further.26 If the Protestant consensus envisaged by Baxter was to provide a bulwark against the international Catholic threat, this itself depended upon the suppression of sectarianism. The church depended upon the maintenance of the proper hierarchical order of things to achieve this, and the democratic leanings of the sects posed a threat to such stability: this is why Baxter claimed always to say at least one thing in every sermon that nobody in the congregation understood in order that ordinary church members did not consider themselves equal, or even superior, to their minister and overthrow the proper system of church government.27

In the light of this, and in the context of the need to ward off the political threat of France and the Catholics, we must be wary of taking some of Baxter's apparently tolerant rhetoric at face value. Nuttall, at the close of his biography of Baxter, tries to claim Baxter as a precursor of tolerant non-conformity who made the basis of Christian subscription wide enough to include Roman Catholics and Socinians. In evidence, he quotes the following statement from Baxter's autobiography in response to those who criticised his proposal of Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer and Decalogue as containing all essentials: ""A Socinian or a Papist will Subscribe all this [they said.] I answered them, So much the better."28 On the following page, Nuttall then speaks of Baxter's ""desire for terms of communion wide enough to admit a Socinian."29 The final section of the first quotation, however, sheds a somewhat different light on the whole statement:

But if you are afraid of communion with Papists and Socinians, it must not be avoided by making a new Rule or Test of Faith which they will not Subscribe to, or by forcing others to Subscribe to more than they can do, but by calling them to account whenever in Preaching or in Writing they contradict or abuse the Truth to which they Subscribe. This is the Work of Government.30

Given in full, the quotation is in no way a plea for some kind of embryonic religious tolerance—what Baxter wants to avoid is a doctrinal formula

25 Reliquiae I, 86.
26 Reliquiae 3, 99-100.
27 Reliquiae I, 93. Clearly Baxter's attitude to social hierarchy and its relation to his attitude to sectarians on the one hand and Roman Catholics on the other is an important aspect of his thinking on church unity and begs all of the traditional questions about the relationship between materialism and ideology. There is not space to deal with the issue in this paper, although it is clear that any full study of Baxter on this topic must take into account the findings of materialist analyses such as those of Christopher Hill.
29 Ibid., 123 (my italics).
30 Reliquiae I, 139.
which is so precise that it not only keeps out heretics but unnecessarily excludes some orthodox Protestants. Heretics may subscribe to the doctrinal basis, but as soon as they show their true colours, then the civil magistrate, in good, intolerant Presbyterian fashion, will deal with them. This passage is thus not a plea for the toleration of Roman Catholicism but is of a piece with Baxter’s desire to forge a Protestant consensus against the Catholic and radical threats to English society. It is this desire for such a consensus, and not the development of an ecclesiastical program marked by tolerance, as some of Baxter’s admirers have claimed, which drives Baxter’s vision of church unity. Such a consensus required a theology which both excluded Catholics and defused the dangerous differences between Protestants.

II. Theological Foundations

We can see, then, that two basic concerns preoccupied Baxter, concerns which would inevitably co-ordinate with his theological writings: the first was the need to form a Protestant consensus capable of excluding any pro-Catholic or pro-French policy; the second was the need to avoid a settlement which allowed the sects to continue fragmenting society and placing souls in danger of hellfire. The need, therefore, was for Baxter to articulate a theology, or a theological method, which allowed him to meet the requirements these two concerns imposed upon him.

The obvious model for a Reformed, Puritan divine such as Baxter was that provided by the Reformed Orthodox. The most obvious example of this in England was that provided by John Owen. Owen’s theology stands well within the broad contours of continental Reformed Orthodoxy and would have provided a first-class way of keeping the Catholic threat at bay, being as intolerant of any hints of papal sympathies as of any other perceived error. Nevertheless, Owen’s theology was self-consciously developed in part in sharp opposition to Arminianism, and, indeed, to any who deviated to any degree from strict Reformed Orthodoxy. As such, it scarcely provided the opportunity for building a broad Protestant consensus, immediately excluding as it did the numbers of Protestants who did not subscribe to Owen’s brand of theology and offering no basis, other than that provided by the total surrender of any opposition, for forging an alliance with those of another, albeit Protestant, persuasion. Indeed, as we shall see below, Baxter regarded the zeal for doctrinal precision evident in men such as Owen as functionally the same as the theology of the radical sectarians—it served primarily to fragment society and thus opened the door to the very social chaos which Baxter’s ecumenical agenda sought to close forever. For this reason, the combination of Reformed Orthodoxy and a vigorously

31 On Owen’s theology, see Trueman, The Claims of Truth.
Presbyterian view of church and state was no answer either, relying ultimately upon brute coercion for maintaining social unity since its theological basis was far too strict and narrow to generate genuine religious, political and social stability.

Thus, it is against this background, on the one hand the pressing political and social need for church unity, on the other the inadequacy of available models of unity, that Baxter’s great systematic arguments for an “ecumenical” theology, A Catholick Theologie and the Methodus Theologiae, must be understood.32

To anyone who has plowed their way through it, the full title of Baxter’s major work of 1675 can only have an ironic ring: Richard Baxter’s Catholick Theologie: Pure, Plain, and Peaceable for Pacification of the Dogmatical Word-Warriors. It is quite possible that Baxter wrote and published more words in the English language than anyone before or since, and this work is amongst the most dogmatical and excessively verbose pieces he ever penned. Nevertheless, as a source for understanding Baxter’s mind, it has no equals in his immense body of work.

The premise of the work is really quite simple: the church formulated the Apostles’ Creed before any canonical book was written and this provided both the basic confession upon which early Christians united and the grid through which the scriptures were to be interpreted. Any attempt to go beyond this and to create a more detailed basis for agreement represented a fundamental deviation from primitive Christianity and thus a decline from the ideal of the early church. This much of the argument is laid out in a brief preliminary letter to the reader.33 The rest of the work is then devoted to an analysis first, of the origins of doctrinal controversies, and second, of their resolution. It is Baxter’s analysis of the first which directly leads to the answers he proposes in the second.

Following his passion for tripartite division of everything into power, wisdom, and goodness or love, a distinction he adopted from Tommaso Campanella, he sees the origins of the fragmentation of the church lying in three areas: the abuse of power; the abuse of wisdom; and the abuse of goodness or love.34

On the first point, the abuse of power, Baxter recites the usual litany of criticisms of the Roman Church, stressing its greed and its acquisition of civil power as the bases for creating a church driven by secular interests and not by a desire to see the gospel taught and believed. The result is a church which outlaws those who speak the truth and thus forces out true believers in order to keep hold of its power and its revenues.35

32 Richard Baxter’s Catholick Theologie: Plain, Pure, Peaceable (London, 1675); Methodus Theologiae Christianae (London, 1681).
33 See Catholick Theologie, i-v (no numbering in original).
34 See ibid., (Preface) vi (no numbering in original). On the influence of Campanella on Baxter, see Trueman, “A Small Step Towards Rationalism.”
35 See Catholick Theologie (Preface), vii-x.
The second and third points, abuse of wisdom and abuse of love, are closely related—the latter leading to the over-zealous application of the former. It is, therefore, upon the first of these two—the abuse of wisdom—that I wish to concentrate.

According to Baxter, there are two kinds of abusers of wisdom in the church. The first are the straight Romanists whose basic error lies in their multiplication of the numbers of dogmas to which true believers must subscribe. The net result is that the majority of believers have in fact been cut out of the church, while the institutional church itself has “slipped into the grossest errors almost that humane nature is capable of (even to making it necessary to salvation, to deny our own and all the sound mens senses in the World in the case of Transubstantiation).”  

What is particularly interesting at this specific point in Baxter’s argument is that he cites the patristic debates “about Persona and Hypostasis” as being early examples of precisely this kind of unhelpful and hair-splitting theology which lay at the root of much of the church’s troubles, a point to which we shall return.

The second source of abuse of wisdom in the churches is the Schoolmen. Baxter himself, as he confesses in the Preface and in his autobiography, was at one time hypnotized by the subtlety and power of the arguments of the scholastics but later came to reject their theology. Indeed, in a passionate passage, he declares that it is not just Roman schoolmen who have generated the problem:

The case of the Schoolmen, and such other Disputing Militant Theologues, who have spun out the doctrine of Christianity into so many Spiders Webs and filled the World with so many Volumes of Controversies, as are so many Engines of contention, hatred and division: And I would our Protestant Churches, Lutherans and Calvinists, had not too great a number of such men, as are far short of the Schoolmens subtilty, but much exceed them in the enviousness of their zeal, and the bitterness and revilings of their disputes, more openly serving the Prince of hatred against the Cause of Love and Peace.

Baxter is, of course, playing on the typically ambiguous Protestant understanding of Schoolmen in this passage—he himself is quite happy to utilize scholastic method when it suits his purpose, as is clear from his massive Methodus Theologiae. What he is objecting to is the scholastics’ alleged obsession with logic-chopping and overly-pedantic arguments and distinctions.

Baxter follows this description of scholasticism with an account of why it should have such an enduring appeal within the church. Clearly speaking from experience, he stresses the carnal satisfaction to be achieved from an appearance of learning and the ease with which knowledge, as seated in the

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36 See ibid. (Preface), xi.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
appearance of learning and the ease with which knowledge, as seated in the human intellect, is in fact a much more subtle and easier way for Satan to achieve his goal of shipwrecking individuals and the church—by over-feeding the intellect, the Devil distracts men and women from issues relating to the will, such as morality and holiness, and creates a religion of mere formalism. In addition, Baxter also blames the influence of teachers: “And it is not the most that have the happiness of very wise, experienced, and thoroughly Learned Teachers; but most are instructed by half-witted men.”

It is quite clear from this that Baxter sees this kind of scholasticism as one of the major reasons for the breakdown of church unity—while the Roman church may be ruthlessly ambitious in terms of its worldly power, and may have overburdened its people with dogmas and overly subtle theology, the Protestant church too has fallen prey to at least the last of these, and this is a major factor in the crisis in Protestantism which Baxter perceives as he looks around. This is why, as I said earlier, the Owens and Rutherford of the seventeenth-century world are, in fact as dangerous to church unity as the radical sectarians: their over-precise theology is as damaging as the wild and unsophisticated creeds of the Quakers, the Ranters, and the Family of Love.

Whatever the reasons for the appeal of scholasticism (in this sense of the word), the significant point about its damaging effect on church unity is not the motivations that lie behind it but the way in which it leads theology away from the truth. This is summed up by Baxter in an extremely important passage in the Preface:

Learning is of many ages got into certain forms of words; and he that hath got some organical arbitrary Notions, passeth for a Learned man; or he that can speak many Languages: while true real wisdom (which consisteth 1. In knowing the Greatest Things, and 2. In fitting words to things) is much neglected. . . . All words (being arbitrary signs) are Ambiguous; And few Disputers have the jealouse and skill which is necessary to discuss equivocations, and to agree of the meaning of all their terms before they use them in disputing: And so taking Verbal differences for Material, doth keep up most of the wretched Academical and Theological Wars of the World.40

Baxter here argues that words are only meaningful when they refer to something real. The form of the word is entirely arbitrary; it is the thing to which the word refers which gives it its meaning. True wisdom, therefore, consists in knowing these real things and being able to fit words to them; problems arise when words take on a life of their own, and are assumed to refer to something real when, in fact, they refer to nothing at all.

What this argument does is to thrust to the forefront of the theological enterprise the need for linguistic analysis. Now, while such analysis does not

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39 Ibid. (Preface), xii.
40 Ibid. (Preface), xiii.
form part of the formal prolegomena in either of Baxter’s great statements of theology, the *Catholic Theologie* and the *Methodus Theologiae*, in both works there are prefaces which state the importance of this issue for all future theological procedure. Indeed, in the *Methodus*, Baxter makes it clear that theological method is, in effect, to follow the pattern of theological reality and it does this when the words and sentences it uses are themselves patterned after the nature and order of that reality.41

Given Baxter’s statement that words are arbitrary signs, the key question becomes, of course, how the meaning of these arbitrary signs is fixed. What are the things, the res, which provide the words with their meaning? It is here that Baxter points once again towards the minimal doctrinal core which he believes Christian theology can competently articulate and upon which sound, biblical Christian unity can be built: there is one church; this church has the one Holy Spirit as its soul; it has one hope of heaven; it has one Lord and Savior; it has one basic symbol, that of the Apostles’ Creed; and it has one baptismal covenant; and one God and Father of all.42 The immediate realities to which these things refer are the basic stuff of theology, the essential content of the Bible, and theology, in its structure and its choice and use of words, is to aim to reflect this fact as closely as possible.

This then gives Baxter a rationale for understanding where the strictly orthodox err and pose a threat to church unity. The manifestation of their error lies in them multiplying the number of dogmas which need to be believed, or narrowing the definitions of dogmas to an absurd degree which illegitimately excludes others. This position is in fact the end-result of two basic methodological errors: one is the failure to establish before hand the meanings of the words being used in any given disputation or controversy; the second is the failure to realize that some words actually have no real reference point and are thus meaningless. Both points are brought out by Baxter in a passage of typical passion:

41 "Syllabarum partes sunt literae, verborum syllabae, sententiarum verba, orationis sententiae, cuius ordo et debita compaginatio Methodus est ordo aut rerum aut verborum et sententiarum est; Hic autem et rebus et menti dicentis, et audientium seu legentium mentibus adaptandus est. Quoniam autem conceptus et verba sunt rebus conformanda, vera methodi ratio in conformitate hac consistit. Et qui rerum ordinem et harmoniam nescit, is scientiae neque laudem meretur, neque nomen. Qualis ille physicus est, qualis astronomus, quals geographus, quals arithmeticus, quals musicus etc. qui rerum ordinem nescit, non opus est ut pluribus aperirem. Non est regnum, non civitas, non ecclesia, non schola, non dominus absque ordine. Qualis erit concio, qualis oratio aut alius cultus divinus absque ordine? Et quis eum mentis compotem existimaverit, qui verba incohaerentia tantum nullo ordine loquitur... Conceptuum autem et verborum veritas consistit, in eorum conformitate rebus ipsis ut prius dictum est... Methodus et intellectionis et memoriae magnum adiumentum est. A radicalibus seu fundamentalibus incipiendo, consequentium et minimorum facilitor sit investigatio. Et vix sperandum est eum bene procedere qui male incepit: Ex uno falso plurima sequuntur. Et notatu dignum est. Relations plerumque in ordine fundatas esse, et in scientiis pluribus partes tantas tenere relationes, ut earum inscius paucam admodum possunt recte explicare."  

*Methodus Theologiae: Praefatio*, i (no page numbering in original).

42 See *Catholic Theologie* (Preface), xviii.
And those few that at great cost and labour come to the bottom of the differences do perceive, that the Proud Opinionators have striven partly about unrevealed or unnecessary things, but chiefly about mere ambiguous words and arbitrary humane notions; and multitudes condemn and revile each other, while they mean the same things, and do not know it.  

This, then, is the problem: the Orthodox do not preface their theological thinking with a careful analysis of the language they are using. Were they to do so, many of the disputes in which they were engaged would simply disappear.

Elsewhere in his work, Baxter applies this principle to the issue of church history. We noted earlier that he mentioned the words *hypostasis* and *persona* as the kind of meaningless words which generate needless controversy. In his (inevitably) long and laborious work on church history, *Church History of the Government of Bishops and Their Councils Abbreviated* (London, 1680), Baxter is very critical of the developments which took place within the early church which displaced the original simplicity of the Apostles' Creed and put in its place a plethora of creeds and confessions which served only to generate factions and undermine unity. Such was the net result, he argues, of the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon. He even goes so far as to argue that there was no real difference between Cyril and Nestorius, and that the whole issue turned on mere verbal, apparent differences which derived from a failure to distinguish between Christ as God and that by which Christ is God. Later in the treatise, he cites this simple failure to realise that words are being used in a different way by different factions as the source of all the christological controversies amongst the orthodox catholics of the early church.

Now, the sources of Baxter's thinking on this issue are impossible to establish with any degree of accuracy. In arguing for words as arbitrary signs, he stands within a linguistic tradition which goes back at least as far as Plato; in arguing that the meaning of words depends upon the reality of that which they signify, he stands within a broad tradition of logical debate. Neither of these positions is in itself distinctive. What is distinctive, and what is most important, is the methodological prominence which Baxter gives to this kind of linguistic analysis in the theological task. Using this to

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43 Ibid. (Preface), xxiv. Cf. his comment earlier in the Preface, when describing his slow disillusionment with the Schoolmen: "I came by many years longer study to perceive, that most of the Doctrinal Controversies among Protestants (that I say not in the Christian World) are far more about equivocal words than matter; and it wounded my soul to perceive what work, both Tyrannical, and unskilful Disputing Clergie-men had made these thirteen hundred years in the world!"

44 *Church History*, 110.

45 "For my part, I again say, past doubt, that neither Nestorius nor Cyril were heretical de re; but that they were of one mind, and that one spake of Christus qui deus and the other of Christus qua Deus." *Church History*, 94.

46 *Church History*, 182.
undergird his drastic simplification of Christian faith by emphasising the limited number of meaningful realities to which words can refer, he creates a theology which dramatically reduces the scope for theological speculation and which carries with it strong anti-metaphysical tendencies which are not dissimilar in some ways from those being exhibited in the developing English empiricist philosophical tradition as epitomised by Thomas Hobbes, with whom Baxter was familiar, and later by John Locke whose work, particularly on Christian theology, carries within itself an anti-speculative current not dissimilar to that of Baxter. This stands in stark contrast with the work of, say, an Owen or a Rutherford in the British context, or of a Francis Turrettin on the continent, whose systems and theology tended to operate within the broad ontological and epistemological parameters laid down in the Middle Ages. In contrast to them, Baxter appears as one whose theological presuppositions and methodology represent something of a move towards a more critical approach to the logical and epistemological foundations of theology, something which is indicative, I believe, of a small but significant shift away from traditional ways of doing theology, a development which is also discernible in his appropriation of the Campanellian critique of Renaissance Aristotelianism as the basis for, among other things, broadening the scope of natural theology and developing a speculative doctrine of the trinity.47

A good example of the way this approach affects his thought and changes the terms of theological debate is provided by his attempt to mediate between the views of the Arminians who sought to avoid determinism by using the Molinist notion of middle knowledge and those Reformed Orthodox who rejected middle knowledge on the basis of a premotionist understanding of God’s relationship to the world.48 The debate focused on a wide number of issues, particularly on the notion of causality, with the premotionists arguing that God could not even hypothetically conceive of a world where his will was not, in the final analysis, the specific cause of any given specific events.49 There was, however, a strong logical side to the debate which addressed the issue of God’s knowledge of conditional statements, a notion upon which the Arminian position depended.

Baxter’s solution to the problem is not that of, say, his great contemporary and rival, John Owen. Owen’s argument focused on the issue of causality,  

47 By adopting the Campanellian division of being into power, wisdom, and love, Baxter allows for a close analogy to be drawn between the natural world and the being of God of precisely the kind that Reformed theology typically rejected out of hand, and thus opened the way for a speculative approach to the trinity: for a detailed discussion, see Trueman, “A Small Step Towards Rationalism.”


and could have been cribbed from any Thomist textbook: every specific action required a specific cause; if that specific cause was not ultimately God, then something else stood at the head of that particular causal chain; therefore there was another first cause in addition to God; therefore there was another god. It was, thus, the issue of causality which he regarded as the weak link in the chain.  

Baxter's approach, however, is somewhat different. While he does argue about causality and appears to side on this issue with the Arminians in allowing God a general upholding influence which individual creatures are then able to turn to specific objects as they wish, his position has to be distinguished from that of the Arminians because of the vigorous logical assault he launches on the idea of God's knowledge of future conditionals. Indeed, in his major discussion of this issue, that in the Methodus Theologiae, the burden of discussion falls upon the analysis of the meaning of the linguistic terms being used, culminating in his statement that, while God knows future conditional statements because human beings know them, he does not think in terms of future conditional statements and therefore the logical problems deriving from such statements should not be imputed to God. In other words, the whole doctrine of middle knowledge, as Baxter understands it, is built upon the linguistic mistake of assuming that the human language of future conditional statements bears a close enough resemblance to the way God thinks for its logical properties to be as problematic for God as they are for humans.

Lest, however, the reader thinks that Baxter is simply employing this linguistic analysis as a means of scoring points off the Arminians, we should note that he then immediately proceeds to turn the same weapon on the Reformed Orthodox under the guise of attacking the medieval distinction between God's knowledge of simple understanding and his knowledge of vision. Having presented a concise but thorough exposition of the terms, their meanings and implications, he declares the whole lot to be very unhelpful, to represent impious speculation about the inner workings of the divine mind, and to go well beyond what he considers to be all that can safely be said about God. What can be said about God is that all good is the result of God, all evil is from the abuse of free will, our destruction is our own fault, and all our help and salvation come from God alone. Any discussion


51 See Catholic Theologie, Part 3, 38.

52 Methodus Theologiae 1.2.1-27, 72-78. This is in essence a slight expansion of his argument in Catholic Theologie, 42-44.

53 "De Scientia autem Conditionali tenendum est, ut jam dictum est, 1. Deam non scire per propositiones, neque multarum cogitationum seriem et itum Intellectus Divino (sicut humano) des cribendas esse: Non igitur talis propositio ut in Mente Divina fingenda est [si hoc aut illud prius fecero inde aliusd illud sequatur]." Methodus Theologiae 1.2.23, 77.

54 Ibid., 1.2.24.

55 Ibid., 1.2.26.
of God's will must take these as the basic points of reference and concentrate simply on explanation, not speculation.

It is not within the scope of this paper to judge whether Baxter's critiques of the Arminian and Orthodox positions are at all coherent, or whether his own proposed alternative is in any way adequate. Certainly, anyone who has ever read through the Catholick Theologie or the Methodus Theologiae will be left with many doubts about whether Baxter's own theology lives up to the non-speculative criteria which he sets for others. What we must be clear about, however, is the nature of the theology which Baxter is, at least in theory, proposing. It is emphatically not a synthesis which seeks to take what is good or compatible from both sides, Arminian and Reformed, in order to come up with some kind of "third way" through the middle. Rather, what he is presenting is a critical approach to theology which undercuts the established debate by arguing, on the basis of his view of language, that the whole argument as currently pursued is wrong-headed, based upon a series of meaningless concepts and distinctions. The result, then, is not a synthetic compound of Arminian and Reformed ideas but a theology which solves the disagreement by denying the legitimacy of theological speculation and debate in those areas where the two sides disagree. It is not therefore some kind of tolerant inclusivism which proposes a basic doctrinal confession as the ground for theological unity; it is instead a rather intolerant theological exclusivism which rejects as impious and arrogant any attempt to move beyond this confession.

III. Baxter on Church Unity: Some Preliminary Conclusions

When taken together, the motives behind Baxter's quest for church unity—the need to provide for an orthodox Protestant consensus against both the Roman Catholics (and thus the French) and the sects who threatened to tear society asunder—and the method proposed to achieve this—a basic confession founded on careful linguistic analysis—appear as two halves of the same coin. Baxter was far from offering a model of church unity which placed the basic confession at the center of a theological consensus around which a variety of theological opinions could be tolerated—this was the essence of the Cromwellian policy of which Baxter himself was so suspicious precisely because it allowed the sects to peddle their distinctives with impunity. Instead, he aimed at nothing less than making this basic confession the boundary of theological speculation, something which would provide the theological basis of the consensus he desired and which he achieved through his emphasis upon the priority and importance of linguistic analysis in the theological task. As he makes clear in the famous passage quoted in part above, where he accepts that his creedal proposals are those to which Roman Catholics and Socinians might subscribe, they might agree to the words, the verba, but they did not subscribe to the things signified, the res, and, when their actions made this clear, the magistrate would deal with
them.\textsuperscript{56} Baxter’s point was that one should not make creedal subscription so precise as to exclude orthodox Protestants, not that one should welcome papists and sectarians.

Moving on from this, it is clear that the priority Baxter gives to linguistic analysis serves to transform the terms of theological debate, as is clear from the example of his discussion of middle knowledge. This change is important. With the current revision of the relationship between Reformed Orthodoxy and the Middle Ages and the Reformation which is being developed in the work of scholars such as Richard Muller and Willem Van Asselt,\textsuperscript{57} there is a clear need to look again at the related question of the relationship between Reformed Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment. In this context, English Puritanism is at something of a disadvantage compared to its continental counterparts, as the Puritans were ejected from the universities in the 1660s, some years before Enlightenment thinking made significant impact upon English institutions. Nevertheless, it has been suggested in numerous places that Baxter, with his constant appeals to human reason, represents something of a transitional figure between the old-style Reformed Orthodoxy and the theology of the age of the Enlightenment, and as such he surely possesses singular importance.\textsuperscript{58} These suggestions have on the whole been rather impressionistic and have not been worked out in any detail. My own findings here and elsewhere, however, would seem to confirm this picture of Baxter—his use of Renaissance anti-Aristotelian metaphysics and the critical placement of such vigorous linguistic analysis at the head of his theological system both represent decisive breaks with the past and serve to give his theology a profound ambiguity—it is an attempt to defend what Baxter regards as the Reformed tradition epitomized by Dordt using presuppositions and methods which are perhaps more suited to the ultimate overthrow of that same tradition. Such is certainly the case with his arguments regarding the theology of church unity: the minimal doctrinal confession for which he argues would ultimately prove more practicable in a world where liberty of conscience and even tolerance were to become the hallmarks of religious policy. Obviously, more work is required in this area—for example, the parallels between Baxter and Hobbes on religious language are at the very least suggestive,\textsuperscript{59} and there is a pressing need to see how Baxter fits into the larger picture of English thought in the seventeenth

\textsuperscript{56} See Reliquiae I.ii, 198.

\textsuperscript{57} See Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics; W. J. Van Asselt, Johannes Cocceius: Portret van een theoloog op oude en nieuwe wegen (Heerenveen: J. J. Groen en Zoon, 1997).


\textsuperscript{59} See, for example, Hobbes’ claim that absurdities arise from a failure between disputants to agree on the meaning of terms beforehand, and from the failure to see that certain words signify nothing and are thus meaningless: Leviathan, 1.5.8-15.
century before firm conclusions can be made—but there would seem to be enough evidence already to suggest that Reformed Orthodoxy in England did not pave the way for the Enlightenment through vigorous application of traditional scholastic method and Aristotelianism but, on the contrary, made way for a more “reasonable” Christianity through its very abandonment of these things, as we see, for example, in Baxter’s appropriation of Campanella and the priority he gives to his critical linguistic analysis and the implications these have for theological speculation.

Finally, it is clear that the use of Baxter’s writings after his death was, in many ways, antithetical to their intended purpose in his lifetime. Nowhere is this clearer than in his writings on church unity. The fact that his writings could be used by Unitarians in the eighteenth century to add weight to their refusal to subscribe to a creedal statement of trinitarian doctrine perhaps tells us less about Baxter’s own thought than it does about the way he was read by others. We have noted the ambiguity of his thought—the fact that it was in effect an attempt to defend what he regarded as traditional teaching in a rather modern fashion—and this ambiguity was lost once his writings were divorced from their immediate historical context, a divorce both symbolised and in part effected by the republication only of his practical works. The ecumenical rhetoric of the man, without the background of French Catholicism and the Presbyterian fear of radical sectarianism, could now be read as an early plea for religious tolerance or the liberty of conscience which he so much despised, in just the same way as the warm piety of the pastoral works, without the counterweight of the Methodus Theologiae, could be read as foreshadowing eighteenth-century pietism and not as the practical outworking of a highly sophisticated dogmatic system. In being the victim of such misreading, Baxter was not unique—the expulsion of the Puritans from the universities and the subsequent Anglican hegemony of higher education in England meant that Puritan works were thereafter for the most part read only by later pietists, most of whom lacked the formal theological training necessary to plumb the depths of the Puritan mind. Like those who later went in search of the historical Jesus, they looked down the well of history and saw nothing but dim reflections of themselves staring back upwards. The great irony in the case of Baxter is that they focused on what he said, the verba and missed that which the words signified, the res; and this, as Baxter tells us, is the root of all misunderstandings—religious, ecclesiastical and, as he would no doubt have observed, scholarly.

60 It is worth noting at this point that Baxter’s innovative proposals in the areas of metaphysics and theological language do not prevent him from continuing to use the scholastic quaestio method for articulating his theology (e.g. in the Methodus Theologiae), pointing to the basic complexity of the relationship of form and content in seventeenth-century Reformed theology where new ideas could quite easily be framed in terms of traditional language and structures.

61 See Trueman, The Claims of Truth, 5–6; John Coffey has noted that a similar fate befell Samuel Rutherford in the Scottish context: see his Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions: the Mind of Samuel Rutherford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5–11.
SPECIAL LECTURE

CAN THE BIBLE BE COMPLETELY INSPIRED BY GOD
AND YET STILL CONTAIN ERRORS?
A RESPONSE TO SOME RECENT “EVANGELICAL” PROPOSALS

G. K. Beale

There has been much literature written over the past fifty years on the topic of the authority of the Bible, especially discussions within so-called “evangelicalism” concerning the nature of the notions of infallibility and inerrancy. Recent writers have especially questioned the traditional understanding of inerrancy. In particular, a central idea underlying inerrancy has been that since God is true and without error and, therefore, his oral word is true and without error, consequently, his word in Scripture is true and without error. This implication or theological inference that reasons from God’s flawless character to flawless Scripture has been challenged, and it has been argued that it is a logical deduction that is never made in the Bible. Accordingly, it is argued that though God, of course, is true and without error, he can, and indeed has, inspired all of Scripture in such a way that, nevertheless, the marks of human fallibility are woven into it. Thus, there are what we would consider to be “errors” in the biblical text, but God has inspired even those “errors” to form a part of his message to his people.

There have been recent books that have argued this.1 But perhaps the clearest example is A. T. B. McGowan’s recent book, The Divine Authenticity of Scripture.2 McGowan says, for example:

The basic error of the inerrantists is to insist that the inerrancy of the autographa is a direct implication of the biblical doctrine of inspiration (or divine spiration). In order to defend this implication, the inerrantists make an unwarranted assumption about God. The assumption is that, given the nature and character of God, the only kind of Scripture he could “breathe out” was Scripture that is textually inerrant. If there was

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1 For instance, I think this is an implication of Peter Enns’s book, Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), e.g., see the implication of pp. 48-49. For an extensive review of Enns’s book see G. K. Beale, The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism ( Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 25-122.

even one mistake in the autographa, then God cannot have been the author, because he is incapable of error.5

Again he says that the inerrantist argument is that

Since God is perfect and does not mislead us and since God is all powerful and able to do all things, it is inconceivable that he would allow mistakes in this process of Scripture-production. . . .

One can see the logic of this progression from biblical proposition (Scripture is God-breathed) to implication (therefore Scripture must be inerrant) by means of a conviction about the nature and character of God (he is perfect and therefore does not lie or mislead).4

This inerrantist presupposition sets McGowan’s agenda for this part of his book, as he says:

First, I shall demonstrate that inerrancy is, at best, an implication rather than a biblical doctrine. Second, I shall demonstrate that it is rationalist. Then, third, I shall demonstrate that the underlying assumption underestimates God and undermines the significance of the human authors of Scripture.5

According to this view then, one should believe that every word of the Bible is divinely inspired but not that the Bible is without error.

My article will attempt to respond from the book of Revelation to views like that of McGowan. I will contend the following: (1) that John is more explicit about the doctrine of inerrancy than many think; (2) that John, in particular, explicitly refers to Christ’s character as “true” and then applies the attribute of “truth” from Christ’s character to the written word of Revelation as being “true.” Thus, I will argue that John repeatedly sees a clear connection between the flawlessness of Christ to that of Scripture in Revelation. In the conclusion, I will reflect on whether this is a unique feature of John’s Apocalypse and other apocalyptic books like Daniel and Ezekiel or whether there are some pointers in Revelation itself that apply John’s notion of the full truth of his book to that of other books of the OT. There will also be comment on the “word/concept” confusion concerning whether or not the actual word “inerrancy” has to be used in Scripture for the concept to be a biblical concept. I will argue that while the precise word “inerrancy” does not appear in Scripture, the concept explicitly does. This does not make the doctrine an implication unless one violates the “word/concept” distinction.

There are three major parts of this article, the first two of which are crucial background against which to view the third section, which is the main response to McGowan’s thesis. In the first part of the article, I argue that John was given the same prophetic commission to write God’s word as was Ezekiel the prophet. Second, I look at the significance of Rev 22:18-19 for the prophetic authority of

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5 Ibid., 113.
4 Ibid., 114.
5 Ibid.
the written form of Revelation, where John puts his writings on an authoritative par with Moses' Scripture.

With these two introductory ideas that demonstrate that John puts his writings on a par with those of Ezekiel and Moses, I will then proceed to address the main topic of the article: does John make the explicit and necessary connection between God's "true" character or Christ's "true" character and the "true" character of Scripture?

I. John's Prophetic Commission to Write Is Based on the Prophetic Commission of Ezekiel to Write

There are repeated commissions of John within the Book of Revelation, which are based on the repeated prophetic commissions of Ezekiel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ezekiel</th>
<th>Revelation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:2 As He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet</td>
<td>1:10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:12 Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a great rumbling sound behind me</td>
<td>4:1 After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, &quot;Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:14 So the Spirit lifted me up and took me away ... and the hand of the Lord was strong on me.</td>
<td>Rev 4:2 Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:24 The Spirit then entered me and made me stand on my feet, and He spoke with me</td>
<td>17:3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness</td>
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<tr>
<td>8:3 and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem ... Ezek 8:4 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there</td>
<td>21:10-11 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem ... having the glory of God</td>
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The introduction of John's commission in 1:10 is coined in the language of the prophet Ezekiel's repeated rapture in the Spirit, thus identifying John's revelation with prophetic authority like that of Ezekiel. Uppermost in mind are the references from Ezek 2–3 (especially 3:12), though the other references may be included.  

The phrase concerning the “trumpet” in Rev 4:1c followed by the rapture in the Spirit (4:2a) shows a link with ch. 1, since the same combination occurs in the commissioning section there (1:10-11ff.) and John refers to the “first voice” which he had heard (cf. 1:12, where it appears to be the voice of Christ). This link to ch. 1 shows that John is continuing to fulfill the prophetic commission to write by recording the following visions. The introductory section of 4:1-2a concludes with a reflection of the prophet Ezekiel's repeated rapture in the Spirit, further identifying John's prophetic commission with that of Ezekiel's.

In the beginning of Rev 17:3, an angel “carried” John “into the desert in the Spirit” in order to transport him to another dimension where he could view the vision. The phrase “in the Spirit” expresses instrumentality and sphere: “in and by the Spirit.” This is a formula of a prophetic commission, which is based on the similar formulas expressing Ezekiel's repeated prophetic commissions (especially Ezek 8:3; 11:1, 24; 43:5, though Ezek 2:2 and 3:12, 14, 24 likely collectively contribute to the picture). In each case, Ezekiel is caught up by the Spirit to emphasize that his message is from God. Similarly, John's transport into the realm of the Spirit underscores his prophetic commission and authority, as already seen in Rev 1:10 and 4:2. The same allusion to Ezekiel's prophetic commissioning occurs in Rev 21:10.

Particularly significant is the commission in Ezek 43:5: “The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold the glory of the Lord filled the house.” Since Ezekiel has been transported into the inner court, he stands in the midst of this divine glory. Part of his prophetic commission in this context is “to describe the temple to the house of Israel” by “writing it in their sight” (43:10-11). This is likely the tip of the iceberg that reveals that Ezekiel's prophetic commission entailed the entire written form of the book attributed to him. Consequently, his prophetic commission extends not merely to his prophetic speech to Israel but to his conveying God's message in written form. Likewise, John's commission entails not only seeing visions from God and hearing God's word but also putting these visions and divine words into written form.  

There is one more extended reference to Ezekiel's commissioning that is applied to John's:

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6 This identification with prophetic authority is enforced by the additional description of the voice which John heard as "a great voice as a trumpet," evoking the same voice which Moses heard when Yahweh revealed himself on Mount Sinai (Exod 19:16, 19-20).

7 See Rev 1:10-11, 19, which refer to the writing of the entire book, as well as 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 12, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5, which refer to the writing of parts of the book.
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<th>Ezekiel 2–3</th>
<th>Revelation 10</th>
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<tr>
<td>2:8 “Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.”</td>
<td>10:8 Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, “Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.”</td>
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<td>2:9 Then I looked, and behold, a hand was extended to me; and lo, a scroll was in it. 2:10 When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe.</td>
<td>10:9 So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, “Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.” 10:10 I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter. 10:11 And they said to me, “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:1 Then He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” 3:2 So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. 3:3 He said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.” Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. 3:4 Then He said to me, “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them.</td>
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The seer’s reception of the book symbolically connotes his prophetic call. The command and the carrying out of the command to take the book and consume it is a picture portraying his formal re-commission to become a prophet. As we have seen, this has already been stated in Rev 1:10 and 4:1-2 by means of allusion to the prophet Ezekiel’s prophetic commission. In the same manner, the Ezekiel allusion is applied again with the identical idea of issuing a prophetical commission to John. The precise reference is clearly to Ezek 2:8–3:3. The prophet Ezekiel, like John after him, is commissioned by being told to take a scroll and to eat it, with the result that its revelatory message “was sweet as honey in my mouth.” The prophet’s eating of the scroll signifies his identification with its message. He is the appointed minister of God not only to deliver the message of warning, but especially to announce the judgment upon which God has already decided, though a remnant will respond and repent (e.g., Ezek 3:20; 9:4-6; 14:21-23).

Ezekiel’s eating of the scroll is applied to John with the same meaning, although the historical situation is different. Though there are some differences between the details of Ezekiel’s and John’s commissioning, the metaphorical

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8 For fuller explanation of the use of Ezek 2:8–3:3, see G. K. Beale, Revelation (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 550-53.
eating of God's word represented for both prophets their total identification with and submission to the divine will as a qualification for their being suitable prophetic instruments in the hand of God. Their message carries with it the power of God's word because it is God's word, and it is this that they are commissioned to deliver. In contrast to Ezekiel, John is warning, not Israel, but the church against unbelief and compromise with the idolatrous world, as well as warning the world of unbelievers themselves.

The point of repeatedly applying Ezekiel's commission to that of John's throughout the Apocalypse is to underscore that he has the same prophetic authority as Ezekiel the prophet. As we have seen in the case of Ezekiel, John not only speaks God's word but God commissions him to put the divine word into written form (see Ezek 43:11 [cf. 24:1-2], Rev 1:10-11, 19, and the introduction to each of the seven letters; likewise note the implication of Rev 22:18-19). In fact, the idea of an authoritative prophetic commissioning that extends to the written form of a prophet's message has its roots in the OT. In particular, the command to "write in a book" (γράψω εἰς βιβλίον) in Rev 1:11 is reflective of the charge given by Yahweh to his prophetic servants to communicate to Israel the revelation they had received (so LXX of Exod 17:14; Isa 30:8; Jer 37:2; 39:44; Tob 12:20). All such commissions in the prophets were commands to write testimonies of judgment against Israel (so LXX Isa 30:8; Jer 37:2; 39:44; cf. also Exod 34:27; Isa 8:1; Jer 36:2; Hab 2:2). For example, Jer 37:2 (LXX) says, "Thus speaks the Lord God of Israel, saying, Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book." Much of John's message likewise is concerned with announcements of judgment, as apparent through observing the judgments of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, as well as other descriptions of judgment found in the book.

In the light of contemporary debates over "infallibility" vs. "inerrancy" or debates about the very definition of "inerrancy" itself discussed in the introduction, is it an unsuitable modern question to ask about the nature of Ezekiel's and John's commission to write down the word of God? That is, is it conceivable that their written word contains a mix of fallible matter with inerrant material, however so slight the former? Or, is their written word to be seen exhaustively in all its details to be God's flawless word? This issue will first be addressed in Ezekiel in order to ascertain how it may help to answer this question in Revelation. Then I will focus only on the evidence of Revelation itself to determine if it may shed light on this thorny issue.

The very first time Ezekiel's commission is stated (Ezek 2:2), one of its purposes is that Israel "will know that a prophet has been among them" (2:5; so also 33:33). The summary of what Ezekiel is to say as a prophet is "you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God'

(2:4; likewise 2:7, "you will speak my words to them"). Recall that Ezekiel's commission includes putting these divine words into written form. Significantly, Ezekiel's words are contrasted with the "false" and "lying" words of false prophets in Israel (12:24; 13:7, 9, 23; 21:23, 29; 22:28). For example, the false prophets prophesy that there will be "peace" in Israel, despite the nation's sin (13:10, 16). Their prophecy will be shown to be "false" and Ezekiel's prophecy that destruction is coming for Jerusalem because of her apostasy will come true, which
shows he is a true prophet: “So when it comes to pass [Ezekiel’s prophecy]—as it surely will—then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst” (33:33). The false prophets speak error because they “prophesy from their own heart” and “they follow their own spirit” in their prophesying (13:2-3).

Thus, the contrast between Ezekiel and the other prophets is that the former speaks and writes only God’s word, whereas the latter prophesy from themselves and speak mistakenly. There is no hint of entertaining anything fallible, false, or untrue in Ezekiel’s word or of sifting out the impure from the pure divine word in Ezekiel’s writings. Rather, there is an absolute contrast between the prophet Ezekiel and the false prophets. This background is part of John’s appeal to the repeated prophetic commissions of Ezekiel, which can be seen even from the repeated commissions for John to “write,” which are placed in contrast to false prophets in the midst of the churches. We will see the issue of false teaching in contrast to John’s written word arise again in the book.

II. The Significance of Revelation 22:18-19 for the Prophetic Authority of the Written Form of Revelation

Verses 18-19 summarize the Book of Revelation as a new law code to a new Israel, which is modeled on the old law code to ethnic Israel. Though many commentators note only Deut 4, John alludes to a series of warning passages throughout Deuteronomy:

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<tr>
<th>Deuteronomy</th>
<th>Revelation 22:18-19</th>
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<tr>
<td>hear the statutes... you shall not add to the word... nor take away from it (4:1-2; likewise 12:32); and it will be when he hears the words... every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven (29:19-20).</td>
<td>I testify to everyone who hears the words... if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which have been written in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book... , God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city...</td>
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</table>

9 See Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 150-59, who also acknowledges the prophetic commissioning of Ezekiel as the background for John’s commissioning in Rev 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10. Though he does not focus on the written form of either Ezekiel’s or John’s prophecy, he does say that John’s claim that “the whole revelation [that] came to him in ννεύματι” was “for the purpose of passing on the revelation” (158), and that “the authentication of John’s message therefore lies not in the experience as such but in the claim that it took place under the control of the Spirit and came to him through Jesus Christ from God” (159). Likewise, the Spirit “inspired John’s reception [of the message], in the Spirit, of a prophetic message to be given to others” (159).

10 See Rev 2:12 in relation to 2:14-15 and 2:18 in relation to 2:20-24; recall also that these commands to write are extensions of 1:10-11, which partly appeals to Ezekiel’s prophetic commission.
Further similarities enhancing the link between Deuteronomy and Rev 22:18-19 are:

(1) in the light of the directly preceding and following contexts of each of the three Deuteronomy passages, it is clear that all three are specific warnings against idolatry, as is the case in Rev 22 (cf. 21:8, 27; 22:15);
(2) a positive response to both the OT and NT warnings results in the reward of life in the new land (Deut 4:1; 12:28-29; cf. Rev 21:1-22:5 with 22:14, 17-19);
(3) both also use the terminology of “plagues” to describe the punishment for unfaithfulness (see τὸς πλῆγμας in Deut 29:21 and Rev 22:18).

What is the meaning of “adding to” and “taking away from” the revelatory words? The answer must be sought in Deuteronomy. In both Deut 4:1-2 and 12:32 the language serves as a twofold warning against deceptive teaching that affirmed that idolatry was not inconsistent with faith in the God of Israel (see Deut 4:3, which alludes to the Baal-Peor episode of Num 25:1-9, 14-18, and Deut 13). Those who deceive in this way are false prophets (so Deut 13:1-2ff.); note that Deut 12:32 of the English text and of the LXX (also = 13:1) is placed by the Hebrew Bible and the Targums (Onqelos and Neofiti) as the first verse of ch. 13, which introduces the subject of false prophets (cf. the false prophet Balaam who was behind the deception of Baal-Peor: also see Rev 2:14). Such false teaching amounts to “adding to” God’s Law. Furthermore, it is tantamount to “taking away from” God’s Law, since it violates the positive laws against idolatry, consequently nullifying their validity. The disobedience of following this false teaching is probably included in the dual warning of Deut 4:2 and 12:32, as Deut 29:19-20 confirms.

Therefore, “adding and taking away” refers not to mere, general disobedience to the divine word, but to false teaching about the inscripturated word and following such deceptive teaching. Belief in the abiding truth of God’s word is the presupposition for positive obedience to it: cf. Deut 4:2, “you shall not add . . . nor take away in order that you may keep the commandments of the Lord.”

The ancient Near Eastern treaty documents, after which Deut 4 is modeled, also were protected against intentional alterations by means of inscriptive sanctions and curses.11 The written form of such treaty documents was absolutely authoritative and inviolable, as were the concepts expressed in them. A curse would come upon anyone who altered any part of the written form of the record or if one did not fulfill any part of the obligations. For example, in the treaty of Tudhaliiyas IV with Ulmi-Teshub the following inscriptive curse is expressed: “Whoever . . . changes but one word of this tablet . . . may the thousands of gods of this tablet root that man’s descendants out of the land of Hatti.”12 Not only was there prohibition against “changing the wording” or “altering” but if one did “not fulfill the words of this treaty . . . the gods . . . of the oath will blot you out.”13

12 Ibid., 29.
13 See ibid., 30, for the primary sources of these quotations.
That gods would enforce the penalty of breaking such treaties implied the treaties themselves, down to their very words, possessed divine authority. Likewise, the related magical incantations of Egypt were said to be ultimately authored by various gods.\textsuperscript{14} That the authority of these ANE documents extended not merely to the concepts expressed in them but down to their very words is also a background to the Deuteronomy treaty written for Israel and given to them by God through Moses. This is the most probable way to take Deuteronomy's statement that "you shall not add...nor take away in order that you may keep the commandments of the Lord" (Deut 4:2) and the conceptually oriented warning in Deut 29:19-20: "and it will be when he hears the words...every curse which is written in this book will rest on him [who has disobeyed the commands written in the book], and the Lord will blot out his name from under heaven (29:19-20)."

The twofold warning of 22:18-19 is directed against those who foster or follow such seductive teaching. This Deuteronomic background is remarkably suitable to Rev 22:18-19, since the descriptions in the three vice lists of 21:8, 21:27, and 22:15 all conclude by emphasizing the deceptiveness of the ungodly in connection with idolatry. Consequently, "to add" to the words of John's prophecy is to promote the false teaching that idolatry is not inconsistent with faith in Christ. "To take away from the words of the book of this prophecy" is also to advance such deceptive teaching, since it would violate and vitiate the validity of Revelation's exhortations against idolatry. And, as in Deuteronomy (and enforced by its ANE background), both the very words and the concepts or commands expressed by those words were inviolable and carried absolute authority.

Remarkably analogous is 1 En. 104:11, where not "to change or take away from my words" means the readers should not "lie," should not "take account of...idols," not "alter and pervert the words of righteousness" and not "practice great deceits." The 1 Enoch text is part of the Deuteronomic tradition into which John also has tapped.

In strikingly similar fashion, Josephus (Ag. Ap. i.42-43) alludes to the same wording of Deut 4:2 and sees it as a warning against doctrinally malicious scribes as well as any Israelite who would think about not regarding the entire OT "as the decrees of God," not abiding by them and uttering "a single word against them." Both 1 Enoch and Josephus also see that both breaking the conceptually expressed commands of Deuteronomy and merely altering the very individual words are being warned against.

This analysis fits well also with the situation of the churches portrayed in chs. 2-3 of Revelation, which depict all the churches confronting idolatry to one degree or another, though often not successfully. Strikingly, some of the false teachers and their followers encouraging idolatry in the church of Pergamum are identified as those "who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling-block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit immorality" (see 2:14). The same deceptive teaching was also prevalent in the church of Thyatira (see 2:20-23). Such false prophets who

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 31.
distort the truth are either adding false theology or taking away from the revealed truth. Even one who would intentionally change the very words is likely in mind, since such an intention would probably be related to false teaching.\textsuperscript{15} In contrast, “the words having been written in this book” by John are truth and utterly trustworthy.

**III. John’s Prophetic Commission to Write True Words Is Based on the Truthful Character of God and Christ from Whom the Words Come**

In addition to the background of Ezekiel and Rev 22:18-19, which I addressed in the first two sections of this article, how does the Book of Revelation itself attest more specifically to the nature of John’s written record? We have seen in the first two sections above that Rev 22:18-19 shows that the written form of Revelation is absolutely inviolable, and we have seen that the repeated commands to “write” at the beginning of each of the seven letters is a direct development of the initial prophetic commission in 1:10-11. We have also seen that the Ezekiel commission involved the prophet speaking and writing down God’s very words, and that John’s commission is defined in the same manner.

A little more reflection on John’s commission “to write” unswervingly truthful words may be further illuminating, especially as this is linked to the flawless character of God and Christ. The imperative to “write” in the letters carries this idea. After each command to John to “write,” the following message becomes the very words of Christ, which at the end of each letter is also said to be the words of the Spirit: “he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Thus, John’s written word is also the word of Christ and of the Spirit. Can any of these seven epistolary messages contain human error on John’s part mixed with the true message of Christ and the Spirit? There is certainly no hint in the letters that this could be the case. In fact, after the command to “write” in each of the letters, there follows immediately a self-introduction by Christ, drawing on some feature by which he was portrayed in ch. 1 in his act of giving John his prophetic commission. Some of the features in ch. 1 and in chs. 2–3 describe Jesus as a divine being.\textsuperscript{16} As divine being, it is hard to imagine that Christ could commission John to “write” his (Christ’s) words and to countenance that John’s words would not represent at every point Christ’s words. That is, John’s carrying out of Christ’s commission cannot contain any human flaws that would obfuscate Christ’s message at any point.

It is true that this conclusion about John’s flawless message, however, rests technically on logical deductions, which I think flow directly out of the data in Ezekiel, Ezekiel’s use in Revelation, and in Rev 22:18-19 so far examined. These inferences are, indeed, inferences not merely drawn by later interpreters of Revelation (such as myself) but I will contend that they are inferences also explicitly

\textsuperscript{15} This preceding section on Rev 22:18-19 is based on Beale, *Revelation*, 1150-54, on which see further.

\textsuperscript{16} On which see the commentary on Rev 1:8, 14, 17, and 3:7, 14 in Beale, *Revelation*, in loc.
and exegetically deduced later in Revelation itself. These explicit inferences will now be addressed.

The remainder of this article will argue the following: (1) that John is commanded to "write" down the oral "words" from God and Christ in a "book," (2) and the written words will be "faithful and true," (3) because they come from Christ and God, who are "faithful and true." (4) And because John writes under prophetic inspiration and authority, what he writes unwaveringly represents what he has heard God or Christ say. Therefore, the character of God and Christ as unwaveringly "true" is given as the basis of John's written word in Revelation as being unwaveringly "true." Thus, the logical deduction about the nature of Scripture that is today increasingly being called into question is the very deduction that I will conclude is being made in Revelation.

There are four passages in Revelation that together demonstrate that John's written word is entirely "true" because it is from the God who possesses the attribute of absolute truth:

Rev 3:14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:"
Rev 19:9 Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God."
Rev 21:5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."
Rev 22:6 And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.

1. Revelation 3:14

Revelation 3:14 focuses on the truthful divine character of Christ, and chs. 19, 21, and 22 apply this divine attribute to why John's written word is to be considered true. In fact, the statements in Rev 21:5 and 22:6 are a direct development of Rev 3:14, since they all contain the statement "faithful and true" (and, as we will see, Rev 19:9 is probably also linked to the later statements in chs. 21 and 22). Furthermore, the link between Rev 3:14 and that of 21:5 and 22:6 is strengthened by observing that all three of these passages allude to Isa 65:16:

Because he who is blessed in the earth will be blessed by the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth will swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My sight!

This allusion to Isaiah first needs to be established in Rev 3:14, and then it can be seen how the other passages are dependent on both Rev 3:14 and its reference to Isaiah. That Isa 65:16 is the primary source for Christ's titles in Rev 3:14 is supported by several lines of evidence, which will be summarized here.17 First, ὁ ἀμήν ("the Amen") is a Semitic equivalent to the Greek "faithful" (πιστός), as

17 These lines of evidence are expanded upon in ibid., 297-301.
well as “true” (ἀληθινός), which is evident from the Septuagint’s typical translation of verbal and nominal forms of the root ἀληθίνος (“to be faithful”) mainly by πιστός, but also sometimes by ἁληθινός. Therefore, the threefold name in Rev 3:14 could be an expanded translation of Isaiah’s “Amen.” Such an amplification of Isaiah’s “Amen” is pointed to further by recalling that the Hebrew text refers twice to God as “the God of truth [ויהי אמת],” which is translated in the following ways by different versions of the Greek OT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isaiah 65:16</th>
<th>Revelation 3:14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“the God of amen . . . the God of Amen.”</td>
<td>(Christ is) “the amen, the faithful and true witness,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Early Greek Bibles have at this point “the God of amen” (ἁμὴ), others have instead “the true [ἀληθινόν] God,” and still others the “faithful [using a nominal participial form of πιστός] God.”)</td>
<td>ἁμὴ, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός καὶ ἁληθινός</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this light, the title “the faithful and true witness” in Rev 3:14 is best taken as an interpretative translation of “Amen” from Isa 65:16. Thus, the four Greek versions of Isa 65:16 together have virtually the same amplified renderings as that of Rev 3:14. Nowhere else in Scripture are these three words, “Amen, faithful, and true,” found in combination, and this is true even with the combination of “faithful and true.”

Another feature pointing to an allusion to Isa 65:16 is that “Amen” in both the OT and NT usually is a response by people to a word from God or to a prayer, and it sometimes refers to Jesus’ trustworthy statements. However, an observation underscoring a further link between Isa 65:16 and Rev 3:14 is that these are the only two passages in the entire Bible where “Amen” is a name. Finally, the “blessing” of the “God of truth,” which is only generally referred to in Isa 65:16, is precisely understood in the following verse to be that of the new creation which he

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18 See Hatch and Redpath, *Concordance to LXX*, in loc.
19 The Septuagint has “the true God” (τὸν θεὸν τὸν ἁληθινὸν, LXX); the versions of Theodotion and Symmachus support the translation of “the God of Amen” (ἁμὴ); Aquila, Jerome, and MS 86 support the basic reading of “the God of faithfulness” (Aquila reads ὁ τὸν ἐκπειστομυνός, which employs the adverbial form “faithfully” as part of the fuller phrase “by which the one blessing himself in the earth will be blessed faithfully by God”).
20 Dan 2:45 (Theod.) also a bit more loosely combines the two words (“true is the dream and faithful is its interpretation” [ἀληθινὸν τὸ εὐπνίου καὶ πιστὸν η τύχης αὐτοῦ]), but there is no mention of new creation there as there is in Rev 3:14 (though see the possible secondary reference of Dan 2:45 in the discussion of Rev 22:6 below). See also 3 Macc 2:11 where God is referred to as “faithful . . . true” (πιστός . . . καὶ ἁληθινός), but in this reference there is nothing about creation or new creation but God’s faithfulness in eventually executing judgment. If this were in mind, it would still be making the same point about God’s character. The Daniel and Maccabees texts themselves may well also be allusions to Isa 65:16.
will bring about: “For behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth” (Isa 65:17). Likewise, the directly following clause in Rev 3:14 after “The Amen, the faithful and true witness” is “the beginning of the creation of God,” which probably refers, not to the beginning of creation in Gen 1, but to the resurrected Jesus as the beginning of the new creation. The common pattern appears as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isaiah 65:16-17</th>
<th>Revelation 3:14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“the God of amen ... the God of Amen.”</td>
<td>(Christ is) “the amen, the faithful and true witness,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“for behold, I create new heavens and a new earth”</td>
<td>(Christ is) “the beginning of the (new) creation of God.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, just as in Isa 65:16-17, so in Rev 3:14 the divine attributes of “Amen” (= “faithful and true”) are followed by reference to new creation. This unique two-fold pattern points even further to Rev 3:14 being a development of Isa 65:16-17. That Christ as “the beginning of the creation of God” refers to the new creation is also apparent from recognizing that Rev 3:14 is a development of Rev 1:5:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revelation 1:5</th>
<th>Revelation 3:14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“the faithful witness,”</td>
<td>“the amen, the faithful and true witness,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“the first-born from the dead”</td>
<td>“the beginning of the creation of God.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first parallel in Rev 1:5, Christ as “a faithful witness,” is directly followed by his being “first-born from the dead,” just as in 3:14 Christ as “a faithful witness” is directly followed by “beginning of the creation of God.” Hence, this parallel shows that the “beginning of the (new) creation of God” is begun in Jesus’ resurrection (see the chart above). This parallel is demonstrated further by recalling that every one of Christ’s self-introductions in each of the other letters in Rev 2–3 is either a restatement or development of something in ch. 1. It is unlikely that the phrase “the beginning of the creation of God” is the only part of Christ’s seven self-introductions that is not derived from ch. 1. It is probable that this phrase “the beginning of the creation of God” is not alluding to the first creation in the book of Genesis but is an interpretative paraphrase of Jesus as “the first-born of the dead” in 1:5. In this light, Rev 3:14 has developed Rev 1:5 through understanding it as a beginning fulfillment of Isa 65:16-17.

It needs to be underscored and clarified at this point that the “blessing” of the “God of truth” [or “amen,” or “faithfulness”], which is only generally referred to in Isa 65:16, is precisely understood in the following verse to be the promised blessing of the new creation which he will bring about: “For behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth” (Isa 65:17; note also the identity of Isa 65:16 with
65:17 in the repeated phrase of the second line of each verse, “the former troubles [things] are forgotten [shall not be remembered].” This name of God is His guarantee that he will surely bring about a new creation, which he promises to do in Isa 65:17. Therefore, God promises in Isa 65:16-17 to create a new earth, and he gives assurance in v. 16 that he will fulfill this promise because he is completely trustworthy, dependable, reliable, and true. God’s word of promise is true and it cannot be broken or nullified nor can he be seen to be mistaken in making this promise.

The main point of what I want to say about Rev 3:14 is that Christ is identified with the “true, faithful, and amen God” of Isa 65:16. Since Jesus is identified with the God of Isaiah, he is just as trustworthy, dependable, reliable, and true in his character and spoken word (Rev 3:7 also affirms that Christ’s character is “true” [ὁ ἀληθινὸς], also by way of associating him with the God of Isaiah).

I would hope that no Christian theologian would think that God’s and the divine resurrected Christ’s attribute of “truth” could contain any mixture of error.

But the question arises, while the character and spoken word of God and Christ are true, that is, flawless, could not some inaccuracies enter into the human recording in Scripture of this spoken word? Would not such fallibility in part of the recording of Scripture reflect the human facet of the Bible? In the case of Revelation, I think we have an answer to this question.

2. Revelation 21:5

God commands John to “write” the announcement of v. 5a “because these words” about the coming new creation “are faithful and true” (πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοὶ), a phrase rooted in Isa 65:16, as we have seen above in the discussion of Rev 3:14. Against this background, the expression of 21:5 is to be seen as an interpretative translation of ἐνθαρσία from Isa 65:16. Accordingly, Rev 21:5 is a development of Rev 3:14, which interprets Isaiah’s “Amen” in the same way and is also directly connected to an expression about the new creation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revelation 3:14</th>
<th>Revelation 21:5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christ is “the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the [new] creation of God.”</td>
<td>And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 See BAGD, 43, which gives the following ranges of meaning for ἀληθινός: (1) pertinent to being in accord with what is true, true, trustworthy; (2) pertinent to being in accordance with fact, true; (3) pertinent to being real, genuine, authentic, real. BAGD, 820-21, gives the following for πιστός: (1) pertaining to being worthy of belief or trust, trustworthy, faithful, dependable, inspiring trust/faith; (2) pertinent to being trusting, trusting, cherishing, faith/trust.

22 On which see Beale, Revelation, 283, where Christ as the holy, the true occurs, the former title “the holy” likely deriving from the repeated reference in Isaiah to God as “the holy one of Israel.”
An allusion to Isa 65:16 is also corroborated by Rev 21:5 where the one “on the throne” says ἵδοι καὶ ἐπιτίθησαι πάντα (“Behold, I make all things new”), a reference to Isa 43:19 and 65:17, and then he refers to this declaration as “faithful and true.” This declaration itself is a development of the earlier allusion to Isa 65:17 in Rev 21:1 (“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth”). All of this further cements a direct link between Rev 3:14 and 21:5. A difference between Rev 3:14 and that of 21:5 is that in the latter the words are in the plural. The likely reason for the difference is that the focus in 3:14 is on the character of the singular Christ, whereas in the latter the focus is upon God’s written “words” (plural) that John is commanded to write down.

Thus, Rev 21:5 takes the statement about Christ’s character and word in Rev 3:14, along with its allusion to Isa 65:16-17, and applies it now to John’s writing down of God’s (or Christ’s)\(^{23}\) words, “Behold, I am making all things new.” In particular, the expression “these words are faithful and true” provide the reason (“because,” ἵνα) for why John is commanded to put into writing God’s words: “write, because these words are faithful and true.” In other words, the affirmation about Christ’s unswervingly true character and spoken word in Rev 3:14, as we have seen in that text and in Isa 65:16 to which it alludes, is applied to the nature of God’s/Christ’s words in written form, which John is commissioned to “write.” The inference that is being made from 3:14 is that just as Christ’s divine character and spoken word are flawless, so is John’s recording of the divine words in written form. He is to write such unswervingly true divine words that he hears in order that the churches may have a pure and undoubted divine word addressed to them in writing.

3. Revelation 22:6

Note the parallels again with Rev 3:14:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revelation 3:14</th>
<th>Revelation 22:6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christ is “the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the [new] creation of God.”</td>
<td>And he said to me, “These words are faithful and true;” and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{23}\) The person speaking in Rev 21:5 is likely God (so Beale, *Revelation*, 1052), though it is possible that it is the exalted Jesus, since the saying “first and last” in 21:6 is spoken by Christ in 1:17 and Christ is the one who “guides them to springs of the water of life” in 7:17, so that 21:6 refers to Christ who says, “I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life.” Whether or not these are God’s or Christ’s words is not significant for our purposes, since we have already seen that in Rev 3:14 Christ speaks the words of Isa 65:16, which there are spoken by God. Thus, Revelation, on the basis of an “identification with God” Christology, could easily move from God to Christ and back to God again as the speaker of these words.
Revelation 22:6 serves as a concluding statement for both the vision of 21:1–22:5, as well as for the whole book. The speaker could be Jesus, since v. 7 continues the statement (note the conjunctive “and” [καὶ]), where also Jesus is clearly the speaker. The speaker could just as well be an angel in line with the identification of the third person “he” in introducing the visions in 21:9-10 and 22:1.

Verse 6 summarizes the preceding vision of the New Jerusalem, which is apparent from its placement immediately after that vision and its verbal repetition of 21:5b, “These words are faithful and true” (οὗτοι οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοὶ). As we have seen from the discussion of 21:5, the phrase is based on Isa 65:16, which expresses confidence in God’s forthcoming act of new creation, which will come true because God’s word of promise is true and cannot be nullified or be seen to be mistaken. Indeed, the clause in 21:5 connotes precisely the same idea in conjunction with allusions to Isa 43:18-19, 65:17, and 66:22. The same wording in 22:6 thus repeats the same idea of certainty about God’s statements in 21:6–22:5 about his future act of new creation. The purpose of the repetition is to emphasize this idea. Accordingly, the same conclusions about Rev 21:5 are present here: Christ’s unswervingly true character and oral word in Rev 3:14 are applied to the nature of his words in written form (though his words may be spoken by an angel). The inference that is being made from 3:14 is that just as Christ’s divine character and spoken word are flawless in 3:14, so it may be inferred that John’s writing down of the divine words results in a flawless record of those words for the seven churches. Though there is not reference explicitly in 22:6 to the written form, it is likely in mind because of the parallel with 21:5 and because the following context refers to “the words of this book” (22:9) and “the words of the prophecy of this book” (22:10, and likewise 22:18-19). John “heard and saw these things” (22:8) and wrote them down in a “book.”

Together with the Isa 65:16/Rev 3:14 background, there may also be an echo of Dan 2:45b (Theod.) standing in the background of the phrase “the words are faithful and true”: “the dream is true [ἀληθινόν], and the interpretation of it is faithful [πιστά].” The clause in Dan 2 is the conclusion to a prophetic vision about the victorious establishment of God’s kingdom, and it inspires certainty that the prophetic vision has divine authority and, therefore, its contents are true and reliable. The allusion to Dan 2 has the same meaning here. The vision that Daniel saw and what he heard he communicated orally to the Babylonian king, and this is now applied to what John saw and heard and put into writing. Could there be anything in Daniel’s oral communication of the vision to the king that was inaccurate perhaps in a few details? Daniel’s concluding words, “the dream is true and the interpretation of it is faithful,” make this improbable, so that the Dan 2 echo, if it is in mind, enforces the idea of absolute infallibility in the written form of Revelation.

24 For further discussion about the validity of this Dan 2 allusion, see Beale, Revelation, 1124.
4. Revelation 19:9-11

Once again verbal correspondences between Rev 3:14 are observable:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revelation 3:14</th>
<th>Revelation 19:9-11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christ is “the amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the [new] creation of God.”</td>
<td>Rev 19:9 Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.” Rev 19:10 Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the witness of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Rev 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

John is commanded, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” The angel then immediately adds, “These are true words of God.” This second statement is likely a reason undergirding the first. That the second assertion is the ground for the first is also pointed to by the connection between the very similar sayings in 21:5, where John is first commanded to write about the coming new creation, and then it is immediately added “for these words are faithful and true.” It is less apparent in 19:9 that there is allusion to Isa 65:16 or Rev 3:14, but the reference to “true” may be an abbreviation of “faithful and true” from these other two passages. Regardless, the meaning is effectively the same: John is to put in written form God’s words through the angel because they “are true words of God.” The phrase “of God” indicates that they derive from or have their source in God. That is, these words are true because they come from God who is true. It is likely not coincidental that only one verse later “the witness of Jesus” is referred to (19:10), and then Christ is “called faithful and true” (19:11). If so, Christ’s “faithful and true” character is at least partly related to John’s written word being faithful and true (19:9) and lies behind the reliability of his “witness” (19:10). The character of the divine Christ, may well be part of what is behind the phrase in 19:9, “These are true words of God.”

Rev 19:16 clearly affirms Christ’s deity as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, especially in light of its allusion to Dan 4:37 (LXX), where the title is applied to God.
Verse 10 affirms that what John is writing is part of "the testimony [or 'witness'] of Jesus," which "is the Spirit of prophecy." Mention of πνεῦμα may mean that it is a prophetic testimony inspired by the Spirit: τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας as an objective genitive, "the Spirit inspiring prophecy." Thus, John's written words are faithful and true also because he is a prophet inspired by God's Spirit. In addition to the letters of Rev 2–3, that the Spirit inspires John is apparent also in Rev 14:13: "And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, 'Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.'" John is commanded to "write," and what he writes is affirmed by the Spirit to be true and dependable ("yes, says the Spirit"). Bauckham adds with respect to this verse, "The words of the Spirit are the Spirit's response, speaking through John, to the heavenly voice. As John obeys the command to write the beatitude, the Spirit inspiring him adds an emphatic endorsement of it."  

IV. Reflection on the Significance of the Reference to the Written Words of Revelation Being Referred to as Authoritative  

Revelation 19:9, 21:6, 22:6, 18-19 all refer to the written words of the book as "true" or "faithful and true" or as inviolable. The fact that not mere concepts but the very written words are to be seen as without mistake is apparent in noticing especially the specific references in 19:9 and 21:9. There only one sentence is spoken by God or an angel and then the sentence is referred to as "these words." It is implausible that there is reference here only to an unerring concept that is expressed through a mixture of perhaps just one or two imperfect words. It is really pedantic even to pose such a question, but the present debates over the inerrancy of Scripture call for posing such a question. Thus, both the concept expressed by the words and each of the individual words themselves are absolutely authoritative, so that words cannot be separated from concepts. In the same manner, all "the words of this book" (Rev 22:9-10, 18-19), the entire written form of Revelation, carries the same exact notion.

26 Cf. Zerwick and Grosvenor, 772; NEB. See likewise G. B. Caird, A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 233. Alternatively, the phrase may mean that those giving such a testimony are considered "prophetic people." Along these lines, πνεῦμα would be a collective or distributive singular and τῆς προφητείας would be a descriptive genitive: "prophetic spirit[s]" or "prophetic soul[s]" = prophets. This alternative would still see the words to be "prophetic": the prophets possess a spirit that receives inspiration from God. See further discussion in Beale, Revelation, 947 and 1124-25.

27 Bauckham, Climax of Prophecy, 160.

28 Of course, there can be words randomly expressed in a writing that are jibberish and express no concept. We are conceiving of the written words in Revelation being organized by John in such a way as to express concepts, which is a communicative speech act, but to think that the individual words are somehow separated from the precisely true concepts is a question that John would never have entertained, since he understood that the words that he was commissioned to write were God's very words.
V. Conclusion

If absolute flawlessness be granted about God’s character and spoken word, then the same should be granted about John’s written word. This inference is the same inference that John draws: since Christ’s character and spoken word are impeccable, John is commissioned to record Christ’s (God’s) words because they come from the divine being whose character is without flaw, including his knowledge of all things.

One might conclude that what Revelation teaches about its written nature cannot be applied to other parts of Scripture. But several observations militate against this: (1) in one of the key texts examined above, Rev 22:6, John is grouped with other prophets: “the Lord, the God of the spirits of prophets, sent his angel to show . . . .” This likely includes not merely NT prophets but likely OT prophets, especially since the phrase “the spirits of the prophets” appears to be an allusion to Num 27:16 (“the Lord God of spirits”), where it refers to God’s role of replacing Moses with Joshua, who would now be the prophetic spokesman for God’s people (cf. Num 27:12-21). (2) John is repeatedly given the same commission as a prophet as was Ezekiel the prophet. (3) The totality of John’s written record in Revelation is seen to be “faithful and true” in the same way that God prophesied that the new creation would definitely occur because Yahweh as “faithful and true” had prophesied it. (4) The concluding phrase of Rev 22:6, “God sent . . . to show . . . what must come to pass quickly,” is a clear reference to Dan 2:45, which records the conclusion of the prophet Daniel’s report of his vision in Dan 2. (5) Since John’s clearest affirmations about the unswerving truth of his own book are explicitly based on other apocalyptic OT works (e.g., Ezekiel and Daniel) with which he puts his book on a par, would not John’s affirmation about Scripture’s full truth be a claim that can only be made about apocalyptic books in the canon in which the apocalyptists received their revelation directly by vision and audition from God? But it needs to be remembered that John did not write down as a secretary taking dictation, but after his visions he put pen to paper and likely himself added some OT allusions in various places, so that the book is a mix of vision and literary production. Furthermore, that John’s appeal goes outside the apocalyptic OT genre is clear from recalling that he puts himself on a par with the authority of Moses in Rev 22:18-19, where he clearly applies Deut 4:1-2 and 29:19-20 to his own book. In addition, John makes reference to the OT more than any other NT writer, which implies that, since he clearly puts himself on a par with several of these OT writers—Moses, Daniel, and Ezekiel—that he would not only have the same view of their writings as he does of his but also it implies that he would have the same view of other OT writings to which he alludes outside of Moses, Daniel, and Ezekiel. It is likely for this reason that John alludes to all the various OT books that he does, since they hold the same status of authoritative Scripture for him.

In fact, much like Rev 19, 21, and 22, Ps 119:137-142 refers to God’s character as “righteous” and makes the conclusion that, therefore, his written Scripture is also “righteous,” “pure,” and “true”:
Ps 119:137 **Righteous are You, O LORD,**
   And upright are Your judgments [ = Scripture].
Ps 119:138 **You have commanded Your testimonies in righteousness**
   And exceeding faithfulness.
Ps 119:139 **My zeal has consumed me,**
   Because my adversaries have forgotten Your words.
Ps 119:140 **Your word is very pure,**
   Therefore Your servant loves it.
Ps 119:141 I am small and despised,
   Yet I do not forget Your precepts.
Ps 119:142 **Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,**
   And Your law is truth.

It is further interesting that in narrating his prophetic call according to the pattern of Ezekiel’s (Rev 10:1-10), John also weaves Ps 119:103 (“how sweet are your words to my palate, sweeter than honey to my mouth”) into Rev 10:9-10 (“in your mouth it [God’s word] will be sweet as honey,” found in both verses). In the Psalm, this is then directly followed by the Psalmist contrasting “understanding” from God’s “precepts” with “every false way” (Ps 119:104). Perhaps also Ps 19:10 is included in the allusion: God’s written Law is referred to as “sweeter also than honey,” and compared with “the judgments of the Lord are true” (Ps 19:9) and contrasted with “errors” (Ps 19:12: “Who can discern his errors?”).

Likewise, Rev 16:5, 7 compares God’s righteous character with his “righteous judgments,” which against the background of the combined OT allusions, refers to God’s word in Scripture:

> 5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things;
> 7 And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”

Psalm 119:37 may be included in these OT allusions (e.g., see the margin of NA27): “Righteous are you . . . and righteous is your judgment(s).”

Some might object to my overall argument by saying that nowhere does John or the OT refer to the actual word “inerrancy” in application to Scripture, but this would be making the “word/concept” confusion. I have tried to show that the words used by John in chs. 19, 21, and 22 (“true,” “faithful”) are essentially about the same concept as God’s word being without error. In fact, some of John’s very allusions to the OT, as in Ps 119 and 19 contrast God’s word as “true” and “sweet” to “false” and “error.” In this regard, it is also instructive to compare the reference in 2 Pet 1:20-21 to “Scripture” not “made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God,” which is immediately contrasted with “false prophets,” who “malign the way of truth” and speak “false words” (2 Pet 2:1-3). The great “God-breathed” text of 2 Tim 3:16 is also placed in the same kind of contrast with false teaching.

27 In addition to Ps 119:137 below, see also Ps 144:17 and Deut 32:4 for Rev 16:5 and Dan 3:27 (OG), the latter of which may be pulling together Ps 119 and 144 and Deut 32 in the same way that Rev 16:5 and 7 are doing.
Perhaps I come closest to basing my argument on an “implication” when I assume that God’s character and the resurrected Christ’s character are without error, even incidental error in their absolute and exhaustive knowledge of even the most apparently unimportant facts about creation or humanity or about the past, present, or future. But even this is a presupposition that is pieced together on the basis of scriptural testimony (e.g., see Ps 119 above; Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Isa 46:10; 48:3-8; Job 11:11; 23:10, 23; 34:25; Pss 1:6; 37:18; 44:21; 69:5; 94:11; 103:14; 138:6; 139:1-18, 23-24; Prov 24:12; Dan 2:19-23; Matt 6:8, 32; Luke 16:15; Acts 15:8; Rom 8:27; 1 John 3:20).

Finally, to repeat, the theological inference which some “evangelicals” are saying is unbiblical is, in fact, the very inference that John and other parts of Scripture repeated make: since God’s character is unswervingly true, his written word of Scripture is unswervingly true. My own understanding of the inerrant truth of Scripture is elaborated on in various ways in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.

Some might respond to my view of Rev 19:9, 21:5, and 22:6 by saying that “faithful and true” (especially in the last two texts) refer precisely only to the oral words of Christ and not specifically to the written form of those words. Accordingly, even though John is commanded to “write” the words he hears, could there not have been some slippage in John’s not exhaustively and precisely recording what was said, so that some small degree of error could have crept into the written form of the words?

My response to this is the following: (1) Would God “command/commission” John as a prophet to “write” his words knowing ahead of time that his prophetic word would be inaccurately recorded? We have seen that John writes with the authority of an OT prophet, and this would seem to carry the same authority as God speaking through a prophet. For example, John speaks and writes as a prophet: note that 19:10 says, “the Spirit inspires prophecy,” which has in mind John’s writing as a prophet in 19:9. And Rev 22:6b clearly places John as one among “the spirits of the prophets,” who has received a revelation that is “faithful and true” (22:6a), which is directly referred to in recorded form as “the words of the prophecy of this book” (22:7 and 22:18; so identically Rev 22:10) and “the words of the book of this prophecy” (22:19; see similarly 22:9).

(2) The very link between “faithful and true” and “write” indicates or assumes a link between these attributes and the written form.

(3) That point # 2 is valid is evident from the intertextual link between “write” in 1:9-10 and in the repeated command to “write” in the letters of chs. 2 and 3. John writes and then the written form is said to be the words of Christ and of the Spirit. At the least, the written form of the letters is presented to the churches as the words of the “Spirit.”

(4) The intertextual link between “write” in 1:9-10 and chs. 2-3 and 19:9 and 21:5 enforces the spirit-inspired nature of John’s apocalyptic writing task. That John’s spirit-inspired and directed prophetic task of recording what he has seen and heard results in a prophetic book is clear, as we have just seen, from Rev 22:7, 10, 18, and 19, which form an inclusio with Rev 1:3. Thus, the written record of
the vision and audition is equally prophetic; since the prophetic vision and oral audition are "faithful and true," so is the written prophetic form "faithful and true." This is just what Rev 19:9, 21:5, and 22:6 are affirming.

In the light of these four points, it would be a minimal conclusion (and an example of "thin description") to say that 19:9, 21:5, and 22:6 refer only to Christ's oral words being "faithful and true" and not view these verses as extending to the written prophetic form also being "faithful and true."

Thus, can the Bible be fully inspired by a perfect God and yet still contain errors? John and other scriptural writers say "no."
INAUGURAL LECTURES

THE COGNITIVE PERIPHERAL VISION
OF BIBLICAL AUTHORS

G. K. Beale

I. Introduction

The problem that this article attempts to address concerns those NT uses of the OT that appear on the surface to have a very different meaning that is not consistent with the original meaning of the OT passage being referred to. One of the examples addressed below is John 19:36, which says that not breaking Jesus' bones at the crucifixion was a fulfillment of Exod 12:46, which commands Israelites “not to break any bone of” the Passover lamb. The problem is that this is a historical description of a command to Israelites, not a prophecy about the Messiah. Another example is Matthew’s quotation of Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15. The Hosea passage says, “Out of Egypt I have called My son,” and Matthew quotes it and sees it fulfilled in Jesus. The problem with this is that Hosea’s wording is not a prophecy to be fulfilled but merely a historical reflection on Israel’s past exodus out of Egypt. Furthermore, Hosea’s wording refers to Israel as a nation and not to an individual Messiah, as Matthew takes it. Many would say that Matthew has twisted the original meaning of Hosea’s words. Many examples could be added to these, but these will suffice for now.

How do we deal with such problematic texts? There are a variety of responses to these thorny passages. Some say that the NT writers were wrong. Others say that their interpretive approach was wrong, but what they wrote was nevertheless inspired. Still others contend that they were strange exegetes who cannot be judged by modern-day standards. And others affirm that their exegesis is legitimate, but their approach is so unique that we dare not try to copy their method. And then there are those who argue that with caution we can try to imitate their method.

In this article I will argue that OT writers knew more about the topic of their speech act than only the explicit meaning they expressed about that topic. If

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so, there was an explicit intention and an implicit wider understanding related to that intention.\(^1\) It is sometimes this implicit wider intention that NT writers develop instead of the OT author’s explicit or direct meaning. These NT interpretations may seem strange at a first reading but when the OT and NT writers’ wider understanding is explored, the interpretations become more understandable. One clarification: this article looks primarily at what the human biblical author understood, though realizing that the human authors were aware that they were writing under divine inspiration and that God would certainly have a more exhaustive understanding of their intention.

II. Modern-Day Examples of Explicit and Implicit Meaning

When a husband says he loves his wife, this can be unpacked in the following principal ways: I am unconditionally committed to you/I think of you before myself/I think of you as more important than myself/I love [care for] you as I love [care for] myself/I want to sacrifice myself for you/I want to sacrifice myself for you in the same manner as Christ sacrificed himself for the church. Then there could be many applications of these general principal statements, such as, “I will do house chores so that the full load of housework will not fall upon you” or “I will cook dinner for you tonight.” The point is that any one of the above statements can be unpacked further with added meaning but meaning that is truly part of the meaning of the one original statement.

Or, imagine students asking a teacher to clarify the teacher’s initial interpretation of a biblical passage. There could be several more sentences of interpretation that expand on the original interpretation but were not stated explicitly with the original. Or, what does a teacher (or Paul) mean when the teacher says all believers are “in Christ.” This phrase is used throughout Paul, and he focuses on different aspects of “union with Christ” in different contexts: justification/sanctification/regeneration/adopted sonship/new creation/reconciliation/image of God, and so forth. When Paul focuses, for example, on adopted sonship, does that mean he does not have in mind sanctification secondarily, if you asked him?

The original statements in the above illustrations are what some scholars call “thick descriptive” statements, which can be unpacked layer by layer.\(^2\) This

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\(^1\) Some scholars, such as those who espouse a hermeneutical view known as “relevance theory,” refer to this as “explicatures” and “implicatures” (e.g., see Gene L. Green, “Relevance Theory and Biblical Interpretation,” in The Linguist as Pedagogue: Trends in the Teaching and Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament [ed. Stanley E. Porter and Matthew B. O’Donnell; New Testament Monographs 11; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009], 234). Scholars can also refer to such speech acts as “linguistically underdetermined.”

\(^2\) See, e.g., Kevin Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 264-65, 284-85, 313-14. See also John Frame, The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987), 215-41, for his notion of the “vagueness” of language, which overlaps with Vanhoozer’s idea of “thick description.”
concept of “thick description” goes a long way toward explaining some of the problematic uses of the OT in the NT. But more must be said to “unpack” this notion of “thick description.”

III. The Concept of Cognitive Peripheral Vision

The notion of cognitive peripheral knowledge further explains the reality that human assertions have both explicit and implicit meaning. All humans have eyesight that includes direct vision and peripheral vision. Peripheral vision is typically defined as the ability to see objects and movement outside of the direct line of vision. A typical description of peripheral vision is the following:

Peripheral vision is a part of vision that occurs outside the very center of gaze. There is a broad set of non-central points in the field of view that is included in the notion of peripheral vision. “Far peripheral” vision exists at the edges of the field of view, “mid-peripheral” vision exists in the middle of the field of view, and “near-peripheral,” sometimes referred to as “para-central” vision, exists adjacent to the center of gaze. For example, peripheral vision is practiced by jugglers. Jugglers do not directly follow the paths of individual objects with their eyes; instead they focus on a defined point in mid-air, so almost all of the information necessary for successful catches is perceived in the near-peripheral region.³

All people see and are aware of more than what their eyes are directly focused upon, and this awareness is an ongoing biological default setting. Likewise, there is a similar phenomenon with our mind’s eye. When we make statements about anything, we are focused on our direct meaning, yet that meaning is robust and can be expanded. The expansion is not uncontrolled. In the direct vision of our physical eyes are objects related to objects in our peripheral vision in that they are all part of one whole vision range. So likewise are things that are part of our direct focus of meaning related to things in our wider field of peripheral cognitive vision, since they are all part of one whole cognitive vision range (some scholars refer to this as the “cognitive environment”). It is thus natural to elaborate one’s direct meaning by its wider range of meaning, since they are part of one unified range of meaning. Such a wider range of related meaning is a default setting for our knowledge.

I believe that something like this is going on with OT and NT authors when they make direct statements with an explicit meaning. There is always a related range of meaning that appropriately is an expansion of the explicit meaning. All speakers and writers, including ancient writers, are aware of more than what they are directly saying in their speech act. Thus, cognitive peripheral vision is a theory of knowledge in itself, of which the peripheral vision that we have with our eyes is an illustration. We will delay giving biblical examples of this concept

until we discuss some similar theories of human knowledge, which give a more philosophical grounding to my proposal of cognitive peripheral vision.

But at this point, I want to make a basic comparison between our physical peripheral vision and the cognitive peripheral vision of a NT writer. Have you had the experience of driving and your direct focus is on the road ahead, yet you are aware to some degree of objects in your peripheral vision? All of a sudden, you notice a car in your peripheral vision that is out of place and appears about to hit the right side of your car. You respond and immediately jerk your car to the left. Your direct focus and direction of your car have immediately changed, and you veer temporarily out of your lane. However, someone in the passenger seat who did not see what you saw (like my wife) thinks you are doing something radically wrong and cries out, "What are you doing?" Once they learn what you saw in your peripheral vision, they can understand why you jerked the car to the left instead of going straight. Likewise, a NT author may quote an OT passage that seems obviously to have one meaning, but he gives it a meaning that appears not to be found in that passage. What has happened is that in the author's cognitive peripheral vision, he has seen a passage three or four chapters later that is related to the meaning of the passage that he quotes, and he brings in the meaning from that later passage. In keeping with our car metaphor, the biblical author quotes an OT text but he steers away from its obvious meaning and goes in a different interpretive direction because of the later passage in his peripheral cognitive vision. To a later reader sitting in the interpretive passenger seat, it appears that the NT author has gone in the wrong interpretive direction and given a wrong meaning to the passage he cites. However, once the interpretive passenger understands that the author saw the verse four chapters later out of his cognitive peripheral vision and brought that meaning in, then the passenger understands why the author went in another interpretive direction. This does not distort the meaning of the focus passage but it does, at first, seem to be different.

IV. E. D. Hirsch's Concept of a "Willed Type"

In this regard, Hirsch's notion of a "willed type" as a further explanation of intentional, verbal meaning may be helpful. For Hirsch, a willed type has two characteristics: (1) a cognitive entity with a boundary in which some things belong within the boundary and others are excluded, and it can be represented by only a single instance among the other things which belong within the legitimate boundary; (2) the type as a cognitive entity can be represented by more than a single instance, as long as the other representing instances fall within the boundary. That is an abstract explanation. Let me illustrate and try to make this more concrete.

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Let us say that one of my students visits me for a lemonade on my back porch during the summer. While the student is visiting me, I say to him, "There is nothing I like more on a summer day than sipping lemonade and listening to Bach's Brandenburg concertos." A few days later, my student (student # 1) is visiting with another student (student # 2), and says, "I was over at Greg Beale's house on Tuesday, and we sat out on his back porch, while Bach was playing in the background. Beale said, 'There is nothing I like more on a summer day than sipping lemonade and listening to Bach's Brandenburg concertos.'" And let us say that student # 2 asks, "Does Greg Beale like sipping lemonade and listening to Bach more than taking a walk on a warm summer day?" Student # 2 has misunderstood and taken my words too literally. My intention was to refer only to the fact that no work of musical art pleased me so much as Bach's Brandenburg concertos. I was not speaking of all other possible things that I could enjoy on a summer day. But suppose that student # 2 asks, "Does Greg Beale also like to listen to other compositions by Bach, as well as by Handel, Albinoni, Pachelbel, and Vivaldi?" The answer to the student's question would be "yes." In fact, other Baroque composers could be included and even some classical musicians like Beethoven. Thus, my statement about enjoying Bach's Brandenburg concertos actually included not only all of Bach's works but also all Baroque music. If I had been asked by student # 1 at the time that I made the statement, "In saying that you enjoy Bach's Brandenburg concertos, do you mean to say that you also enjoy all of Bach's works and the general genre of Baroque music?," my answer would have been "yes." If student # 2 asked if my statement about Bach included hard rock music, rap music, or even soft rock, like Elvis Presley's "You Ain't Nothin' But a Hound Dog," the answer would be "no." Some overriding principle in my original meaning about Bach's Brandenburg concertos must have determined that Elvis Presley's "You Ain't Nothin' But a Hound Dog" was not included in my meaning, along with a number of other non-Baroque music compositions. This is the case because my peripheral or tacit vision included a particular type of thing that I enjoy and excluded other possible musical art pieces not belonging within the boundary of the Baroque type. Certainly, my narrowly focused direct or explicit intention did not include all the kinds of musical works that please me, but only Bach's Brandenburg concertos. There was before my mind's eye only this particular work by Bach, but if the student proposed more within the Baroque genre, I would agree that it was within my implicit or peripheral cognitive vision and should be secondarily included in my original meaning. Another way to say this is that the broader musical context gathered from my listening experience must ultimately be taken into consideration in interpreting my single statement about Bach's one musical composition. Such implicit meanings within my "willed type" can be called interpretive "implications" of the explicit verbal meaning.\footnote{This illustration about music has been adapted, with a few changes, from ibid., 48-49.} \footnote{Ibid., 61-67.}
It could be asked, how would Beale’s students be able to figure out the *implicit* representative meaning of the explicit reference to Bach’s Brandenburg concertos? The answer is that the students need to have some knowledge of Beale’s life. If students came to Beale’s house, they would without too much effort find CD’s of many kinds of Baroque music. They might well find such music playing in Beale’s house. They might notice books about Baroque music on the coffee table in the living room. In various conversations with Beale, they would likely hear him express his enjoyment of such music. Such comments might be used as illustrations in class lectures. In other words, some research into the context of Beale’s life would help the students toward appreciating his implicit meaning in his explicit mention of the Brandenburg concertos. So, discovering such implicit meanings is not a shot in the dark. Likewise, research of biblical authors’ lives, their historical contexts, and the full context of their writings should help interpreters toward a better grasp of their implicit meanings.

In this respect, such implicit or subsidiary meanings are like icebergs: the greater part may be under the water, but that which is under the water must be organically connected to the part above the surface. The metaphor conveys the notion that the implicit or submerged authorial meaning must be organically connected to the explicit meaning. Even though the explicit visible tip of the iceberg (explicit meaning) is the smaller part of the larger submerged iceberg (implicit meaning), it determines what is a part of the whole and what is not part of the whole (other separately floating ice, debris, or sea life). “Any part of the whole that is not continuous with the mass above the surface cannot be part of the iceberg.”7 While such physical metaphors are sometimes misleading, this one seems relevant, since the identity of a verbal meaning is dependent on coherence that is somewhat comparable to physical connectedness. If there are features in a text that point to implicit meanings, they are a part of the verbal meaning of the text “only if they are coherent with a consciously willed type which defines the meaning as a whole.”8 Other proposed meanings that are incoherent are then not a part of the willed verbal meaning. Therefore, in the words of Hirsch, “it is possible to will an et cetera without in the least being aware of all the individual members that belong to it. The acceptability of any given candidate applying for membership in the et cetera depends entirely on the type of whole meaning I willed.”9

Such subconscious “implications” of explicit meaning fall within the overall pattern of what the author willed.10 An author’s mental acts are not accessible in the way that his willed type of subsidiary sub-meanings are. Jeannine Brown nicely summarizes Hirsch at this point:

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7 Ibid., 54.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 49
Mental acts, in contrast, are authorial motives that are precisely not included in meaning. Mental acts are the inaccessible experiences of the author when writing the text (e.g., an author's hidden feelings and thoughts). Hirsch's distinction between meaning and mental acts provides a way for interpretation to avoid seeking the author's mental state, while still being able to hold to the notion of authorial intention [on both an explicit and implicit level]. . . As N. T. Wright has so vividly put it: "... criticism . . . should [not] attempt to work out, by reading between the lines of a poem, what the author had for breakfast that morning, or whether he had just fallen in love with the housemaid." . . . The goal of interpretation then will be to ascertain the author's communicative intention [explicit and implicit] rather than his or her motives.11

Therefore, the fact that verbal meaning has some boundary to be communicable does not rule out subconscious meaning. What is necessary is that a subsidiary meaning should lie within a boundary that determines the explicit verbal meaning under consideration.12 This means that the principle for accepting or rejecting implicit meanings is the same as that for explicitly conscious meanings.13 Many of these subconscious meanings lie at the "edges" of the boundary of meaning or the author's awareness or what we have called the widest part of cognitive peripheral vision. There is a blurring at these edges.14 Because of this blurring, one can, therefore, only viably propose that an implicit meaning is in mind to one degree or another.15 Such proposals are based on evidence that points to varying degrees of possibility or probability that the subsidiary meaning is really in mind. Nevertheless, Hirsch concludes later in his book, "To say that verbal meaning is determinate is not to exclude complexities of meaning [implicit sub-meanings] but only to insist that a text's meaning is what it is and not a hundred other things."16

11 Ibid., 39-40, brackets inserted. See likewise John Barton, Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 168, on the legitimate distinction between an author's intended meaning and the psychological state of mind that prevailed at the time of writing.
12 See Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation, 99-100, where Hirsch says that the purpose of an utterance is what determines how much emphasis an unconscious implication may have: was the utterance intended as part of a prayer/command, praise, academic essay, warning, etc.?
13 Ibid., 51.
15 There is a similar phenomenon in art, where an artist will intentionally blur figures in the background of a painting that are a continuation of clear figures in the foreground (e.g., groups of trees, humans, angels), so that the observer assumes that the blurred material represents a continuation of the same kind of images that are clear. See, e.g., Gombrich who refers to this blurring technique, especially illustrated by impressionist artists, as the "etc. principle," which is "the assumption we tend to make that to see a few members of a series is to see them all"; the artist relies on the human "faculty to project and to supplement what he has left indistinct" (Ernst H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation [2d ed.; Bollingen 35; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961], 217, 220; see 216-32 for a broader discussion).
16 Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation, 230, brackets inserted. Hirsch's view of a determinant meaning is based on Husserl's epistemological presupposition that the mind can perceive an idea of something experienced and that it can "demarcate" that mental act so that it remains the same idea over a period of time (E. D. Hirsch, Jr., Aims of Interpretation [Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
One negative trait of all implicit meanings is that they are meanings on which the author was not immediately focused. Such a feature is not reassuring, since there are no limits for what a particular author may not have been aware of. Hirsch’s notion of willed type is an approach that offers some guidelines, albeit still broad and not formulaic, for determining such implicit meanings that may be included in an author’s full verbal meaning.17

In this light, a NT writer may quote an OT passage but give it a meaning that is not found explicitly in that passage but a meaning that comes from the wider context of another chapter in the OT book, which has some kind of conceptual connection—it is of the same “type” of idea—to the passage being quoted. In other words, a NT writer may cite an OT passage but interpret it from the peripheral view of later chapters in the OT book, where the cited passage is developed. We will wait before looking at some examples in order to address the epistemology of Michael Polanyi.

V. Michael Polanyi’s Notion of Tacit or Subsidiary Knowledge

Hirsch’s view of a “willed type” and our concept of cognitive peripheral vision can be supplemented by Michael Polanyi’s similar philosophical view, which, though not identical, significantly overlaps with these two above perspectives.18

Some scholars understand that NT writers are respecting OT contexts from which they quote only when they quote the passage in a strictly straightforward and verbally literal way and, above all, use such texts in harmony with their immediately surrounding context and in their explicit historical sense.19 Otherwise, they are not respecting the context.

I believe that the concepts already introduced on peripheral cognitive vision and Hirsch’s “willed type” show this criterion of respecting context to be too

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18 My former doctoral student and research assistant Mitchell Kim has alerted me to the significance of Polanyi with respect to my own developing approach, and, in addition to consulting Polanyi myself, this section on Polanyi is indebted to a significant degree to Kim’s article on this topic, “Respect for Context and Authorial Intention: Setting the Epistemological Bar,” in *Paul and Scripture* (SBL Early Christianity and Its Literature 9; ed. Christopher D. Stanley; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 115-29. I have tried to flesh out Polanyi’s view a bit more, especially with the help of Esther L. Meek, *Longing to Know* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), and her *Loving to Know* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), in which she develops Polanyi’s epistemological approach. Furthermore, I attempt in the conclusion of this article to respond to Steve Moyise’s objection to Kim’s article in his application of Polanyi to the use of the OT in the NT (see Moyise, “Latency and Respect for Context: A Response to Mitchell Kim,” in *Paul and Scripture*, 131-39).
narrow. Before we further evaluate this overly restricted view of some scholars, it will be helpful also to reflect on the insights of Michael Polanyi. Polanyi has given some perspectives to help further define authorial intention. He says that subsidiary or tacit knowledge entails that "we know more than we can tell." Polanyi applies this to all realms of human knowledge. Before we apply his insights to authorial intention and meaning, Polanyi's view needs brief explanation and illustration.

There are two aspects of knowing for Polanyi: tacit (subsidiary) and explicit or focal (Polanyi refers to these as proximal and distal21). In any action or act of knowing one is tacitly aware of one thing that is necessary for the carrying out of another thing, which is the focus of our awareness. Polanyi primarily explains his theory of these two types of knowledge by adducing a number of illustrations. For example, in the doing of any physical skill, one is aware of the various muscular moves that are necessary in carrying out the skill to which explicit attention is directed.22 A blind man finds his way by tapping with a stick. He feels the impact on his palm and fingers. His awareness of the impact on the hand "is transformed into a sense of its point touching the objects" he is exploring, so that the immediate feeling on the hand becomes a secondary focus.23

This is how an interpretive effort transposes meaningless feelings into meaningful ones, and places these at some distance from the original feeling. We become aware of the feelings in our hand in terms of their meaning located at the tip of the probe or stick to which we are attending. This is so also when we use a tool. We are attending to the meaning of its impact on our hands in terms of its effect on the things to which we are applying it. We may call this the semantic aspect of tacit knowing.24

When playing a musical piece, an expert pianist does not focus on the elementary foundations for playing the piano nor does she focus on her hand movements when playing, otherwise she would be paralyzed and could not play the piece. Rather, the foundations of piano playing and her hand movements become secondary in her awareness (tacit or subsidiary knowledge) and her explicit attention is directed toward playing a comprehensible piece of music. When speaking to someone, we do not focus on the motion of our lips and tongue and to the particular sound being made, otherwise our speech would become halted and ultimately gibberish. Rather, we focus on the effect of communicating,25 and the meaning of the vocabulary and English syntax

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20 Michael Polanyi, The Tacit Dimension (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 10. Along the same lines, see his other two works, where he selectively discusses the same notion: Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); and Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, Meaning (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).
21 Polanyi, Tacit Dimension, 10.
22 Ibid., 11.
23 Ibid., 12.
25 Ibid., 18-19.
is subsidiary awareness. Thus, Polanyi also makes a distinction between focal awareness (= explicit/distal awareness) and subsidiary awareness (= tacit or proximate awareness). The tacit is that which is unspoken or not explicitly expressed but is implied or inferred (cf. *Oxford English Dictionary* [OED]). Or, similarly, the subsidiary supplements in a secondary or subordinate manner (cf. *OED*).

This last illustration on speaking is well-illustrated through the experience of one of my former doctoral students, Mitchell Kim. When Mitch first moved to Japan from America in the fourth grade, he was overwhelmed at the squiggles on the signs and the inarticulate garble of syllables in the marketplace. His mother took him to a private tutor to learn Japanese, and the grammar and basic vocabulary of Japanese became the object of his focal attention. After some time, he began to venture out into his neighborhood to play with other Japanese children. At first his attention was focused on recalling the proper words for ball, game, run, and play and on forming coherent sentences in order to communicate. As the words and grammatical structures were internalized and became tacit, the words began to connect more naturally, and he could communicate with fluency and ease. The knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of the Japanese language had moved to the place of secondary, tacit, or subsidiary knowledge, where they were no longer the focus of his attention but were assumed, as his childhood attention was focused on playing and joking with his new friends.

It is important to note that Polanyi does not view tacit awareness as “unconscious” awareness in contrast to the explicitly conscious focal awareness. While, of course, focal awareness is always explicitly conscious, subsidiary or tacit awareness “may vary over all degrees of consciousness” and “can exist at any level of consciousness, ranging from the subliminal to the fully conscious.”

This insight about subsidiary or tacit knowledge from Polanyi is similar to our view of “cognitive peripheral vision” and Hirsch’s “willed type,” and is applicable to the debated issue of authorial intention in biblical studies. Jeannine Brown asserts that NT writers “echo or evoke an Old Testament text or idea without being fully aware that they have done so.” Consequently, Brown contends that authorial intention should be more broadly understood to include “those sub-meanings that an author may not be attending to or fully aware of as he or she writes, yet that fit the overall pattern of meaning the author willed to

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27 A synonym of “subsidiary” or “tacit” knowledge used more rarely by Polanyi is “latent” knowledge (e.g., *Personal Knowledge*, 103, 317), i.e., that which is “hidden, concealed,” or “present or existing, but not manifest, exhibited or developed” (*OED*).
28 Kim, “Respect for Context and Authorial Intention,” 120.
30 Polanyi and Prosch, *Meaning*, 39.
31 Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 108; see also 109-10.
communicate and shared in the text.” Brown asserts that authors mean “more than they are fully [directly] attending to.” This is very similar to my view of cognitive peripheral vision, to Hirsch’s “willed type,” and to Polanyi’s view of tacit knowledge: “we can know more than we can tell.”

In connection to this line of thought, Kim concludes that subsidiary or tacit knowledge helps us to see that inattentive intentionality should not be regarded as some inferior mode of reference; indeed, it is part and parcel of all communicative intentions. We always intend more than what we are fully attending to. In writing these words, I am not fully attending to the grammatical structures of the English language or the acceptable canons of academic discourse or the tapping of my fingers upon the keyboard; my attention is focused on the articulation of a fuller account of authorial intention. Yet it is my latent knowledge of grammar, academic discourse, and typing that make this communication possible. To reduce authorial intention to conscious authorial attention is unnecessarily reductionistic. We always intend more than the focus of our attention.

In a similar manner, biblical authors possess a latent knowledge of Scriptural texts even when their attention is focused elsewhere. The fact that they are not consciously attending to these texts does not make them irrelevant to the interpretation of their writings. Rarely do we focus upon the frameworks by which we make sense of the world, yet they operate just the same. The reader need not share the entirety of the author’s latent knowledge for the author to achieve his or her communicative intent, but such knowledge would obviously add further resonances and nuances that could aid interpretation. An elucidation of this latent knowledge brings about a richer and deeper understanding of the meaning and significance of biblical references.

Therefore, when a NT writer refers to an OT passage, both the explicit and subsidiary understanding of the OT author’s meaning compose what we would call the NT writer’s respect for the OT contextual meaning. In addition to the explicit meaning from the specific text quoted and explicitly attended to by the NT author, this contextual meaning may include ideas from the immediate or nearby OT context that are in mind, as well as ideas from other OT books that are related to the meaning of the focus text.

Another aspect of subsidiary or latent knowledge for Polanyi, only implied in our earlier discussion, involves how discovery is made in any humanistic or scientific enterprise. A person is faced with the particular phenomena of the world that at first appear unconnected. A person puts these particulars together into a meaningful pattern in order to understand the world better (when this

32 Ibid., 108; see also 109-10.
33 Ibid., 108, brackets inserted. The distinction between an author’s intention and attention is drawn from Vanhoozer, who contends that meaning should not be restricted to “the author’s focal awareness” but can also include things of which “the author was only tacitly aware (or unaware) too”; see further Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text?, 259.
34 Polanyi, Tacit Dimension, 4-10.
happens for the first time in human history, it is called a “discovery”). Imagine a person who wants to learn the auto mechanics of a race car engine, but knows nothing about it. He looks at a motor removed from a car and separated into all its smallest parts. The novice sees the parts but does not know how they fit together or how they work in harmony. Over time, after reading about motors and learning as an apprentice with hands-on work, the connectedness of the parts and their harmonious operation become apparent. The novice learns from a race car mechanic who is also a skilled race car driver, and the novice also watches his teacher race his car in various races. As this learner becomes skilled at understanding the engine of a race car, the overall pattern of the motor is revealed, and the learner even makes more sense of each particular part. The unconnected parts are what Polanyi calls *tacit* or *subsidiary awareness* and the overall pattern of how the motor fits together is the *focus*, since that is the goal of what the mechanic is trying to achieve. The former has merged with the latter but is not the main focus. Polanyian followers refer to the subsidiary focus as being “like our peripheral vision,” since “by definition you can’t focus on your peripheral vision! But you rely on it all the time.”

Then our mechanic decides he wants to be a race car driver like his auto mechanic teacher whom he has been watching in races. The mechanic has to learn a new skill set in order to handle a race car. The skill of a race driver cannot be expressed by a mere knowledge of the mechanics of the car motor and its other workings, but by paying direct attention to the various aspects of driving the car: attending to the gear shift, curves of the roadway, speed, brakes, length of the race, and relationship of the other cars in the race. The knowledge of the way the parts of the motor are connected and work together now becomes tacit or subsidiary awareness, and the direct concentration on how all the facets of race car driving fit together into a successful race is the explicit focus. The former has merged with the latter but is not the main focus. Again this subsidiary focus is like our peripheral vision.

Likewise we believe that NT writers looked at an OT book and observed the particulars of the verses (subsidiaries) that compose that book. They then discerned through their skilled reading certain patterns that a group of those verses formed (e.g., a pattern based on and organized by a common theme, which is the explicit focus). They then might cite only one of those verses as their explicit focus in their argument in the NT context and interpret the verse in the light of the whole observed pattern (which itself has now become subsidiary knowledge). If modern readers are without knowledge of the entire pattern, the NT writer’s interpretation or use of the single verse of explicit focus may seem wrong and not connected to the idea of the immediate literary context. But when the broad pattern within which the single verse has been quoted is understood by modern interpreters, then the quoted verse falls into place and makes sense. The challenge is for the contemporary commentator

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36 Meek, *Longing to Know*, 84.
rightly (!) to discern the pattern first recognized by the biblical writer (the subsidiary awareness) in order to understand the goal (the explicit focus) of quoting the single verse.

A Polanyian uses an illustration that is apt for what we have just discussed:

We look at a silver moon and surmise that we’re seeing part of an orb, not all of a crescent. . . . The crucial difference is that we see the empty space as something hidden. . . . In the case of the moon, we trace an outline, and at the point of the gap in the outline, we say the pattern is there, but hidden.37

Similarly, the NT writer’s use of the particular OT verse appears not to make sense in its context—there is a gap in understanding—until the overall pattern throughout the OT book is discerned and the single OT verse takes its place in that pattern and completes it. Therefore, when a NT writer refers to an OT passage, both the explicit and subsidiary understanding of the OT author’s meaning compose what we would call the NT writer’s respect for the OT contextual meaning. In addition to the explicit meaning from the specific text quoted, the wider contextual meaning may include ideas from the immediate or nearby OT context that is in mind, as well as ideas from other chapters of the book or even from other OT books, which are related to the meaning of the focus text.

VI. Some Old Testament in the New Testament Examples of Subsidiary (Tacit) Knowledge, Willed Type, or Cognitive Peripheral Vision

So far we have looked at my own view of “cognitive peripheral vision,” the theory of Hirsch’s “willed type,” and Polanyi’s “tacit knowledge,” and we have seen illustrations of them. I believe that these three perspectives are significantly overlapping. That is, they all have in common the notion that we know more than we intend to tell. Now I want to apply these concepts to some actual uses of the OT in the NT.

1. The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15

Matthew 2:15 says, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.” How can Matthew say that a historical statement by Hosea about Israel’s exodus could be a prophecy fulfilled in Jesus entering and returning from Egypt? On the surface, this seems like wrongly reading a prophecy into a text that is only historical. A fuller study reveals that Hosea himself in ch. 11 and elsewhere in the book already had a view of Israel’s first exodus as a typological foreshadowing of an end-time exodus, with the Messiah leading it.

In this respect, mention of a first exodus from Egypt outside of 11:1 occurs elsewhere in Hosea, and a future return from Egypt would appear to be implied

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37 Ibid., 121.
by repeated prophecies of Israel returning to Egypt in the future, though Hos 1:10-11 (on which see below) and 11:11 are the only texts explicitly affirming a future return from Egypt (though there are several texts in Isaiah that are also explicit about this):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Exodus out of Egypt</th>
<th>Future Return to Egypt (Implying a Future Return from Egypt)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hos 2:15b</strong> And she will sing there as in the days of her youth, As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt [though this passage also compares the first exodus with a future exodus].</td>
<td><strong>Hos 7:11</strong> So Ephraim has become like a silly dove, without sense; They call to Egypt, they go to Assyria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hos 12:13</strong> But by a prophet the Lord brought Israel from Egypt, And by a prophet he was kept.</td>
<td><strong>Hos 7:16b</strong> Their princes will fall by the sword Because of the insolence of their tongue. This will be their derision in the land of Egypt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cf. <strong>Hos 12:9</strong> But I have been the Lord your God since the land of Egypt.</td>
<td><strong>Hos 8:13b</strong> Now he will remember their iniquity, And punish them for their sins; They will return to Egypt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cf. <strong>Hos 13:4</strong> Yet I have been the Lord your God since the land of Egypt, and you were not to know any god except me, for there is no savior besides me.</td>
<td><strong>Hos 9:3</strong> They will not remain in the Lord’s land, But Ephraim will return to Egypt, And in Assyria they will eat unclean food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hos 9:6</strong> For behold, they will go because of destruction; Egypt will gather them up, Memphis will bury them. Weeds will take over their treasures of silver; Thorns will be in their tents.</td>
<td><strong>See also Hos 1:11</strong> And they [Israel] will go up from the land [of Egypt].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hos 11:5</strong> He [Israel] assuredly will return to the land of Egypt.</td>
<td>[Note the implication of a future exodus from Egypt in <strong>Hos 2:15</strong> above.]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, by extending Hosea’s peripheral vision to the end of the chapter and to other parts of the book, we can see that he understood that the first exodus was a pattern foreshadowing a second, end-time exodus. So Matthew is just following Hosea’s own wider, peripheral, typological hermeneutic, which he sees beginning to be fulfilled in Jesus.
But how can Matthew say that Jesus fulfills Hos 11:1, when it is about the corporate nation Israel and not about an individual? Note that Hos 1:11 sees that the Messiah will lead this future exodus. That Jesus, the individual, can be corporately identified with the “many” of Israel in Hos 11:1 shows that Matthew was assuming a presupposition of corporate solidarity between Christ and Israel: Christ sums up true Israel in himself. Kings represented Israel in the OT, so that what could be said about the king was true of the nation, and vice-versa. Hosea 1:11 shows that Israel’s end-time king will lead them out of Egypt again. Matthew sees Jesus as that king, so the king can appropriately be said to be Israel. This corporate identification is further apparent from Matthew’s later recording of Jesus’ name as “Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16), which itself is an allusion to Hos 1:9, where the nation Israel is called “sons of the living God.” By extending Matthew’s peripheral vision from Hos 11 back to Hos 1:9-10 and to ch. 16 of his own book, we see justification for his understanding that Jesus was Israel. We shall see further later why Matthew can use this corporate hermeneutic.\(^{38}\)

2. The Use of Hosea 1:19 and 2:23 in Romans 9:25-26

The comparison of the texts is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hos 2:23 and I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy. And I will say to Not My People, “You are my people”; and he shall say, “You are my God.”</th>
<th>Rom 9:25 As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people, I will call my people, and her who was not beloved, I will call ‘beloved.'” Rom 9:26 “AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, ‘YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,’ THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hos 1:10 And in the place where it is said to them, “You are not My people,” It will be said to them, “You are the sons of the living God.”</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As with the previous example of Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15, my purpose here is not to cite scholars on various aspects of the issues and debate,\(^{39}\) but merely to try to point out another example of a “willed type” or “tacit understanding,” which helps us understand better the way NT writers use the OT. Some scholars would say that Paul is merely using the Hosea texts as illustrations of salvation,


which would pose no interpretive problem: Israel's prophesied salvation is now taken as an illustration of Gentile salvation. However, the majority of scholars more correctly understand that Paul is indicating the beginning fulfillment of the Hosea prophecies.\(^{40}\) This would mean that what was prophesied for Israel's salvation is fulfilled not only among a remnant of Jews but also among Gentiles. This is why some scholars contend that Paul has not respected the original meaning and context of Hosea.

However, some have pointed out that the position of Israel as "not my people" before they become "my people" is really a Gentile position. Unbelieving Gentiles are also "not my people." Seen in this way, Hosea is prophesying that Israel would be in an unbelieving Gentile status before they would come to faith. Thus, it is a natural extension to see that the prophecy would be applied to ethnic Gentiles who were in the same position as unbelieving Jews.\(^{41}\)

This identification of unbelieving Israel with unbelieving Gentiles is strikingly underscored in Hos 11:8-9:

8 How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboim? My heart is turned over within Me, all My compassions are kindled.

9 I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

In v. 8 God asks the question of how he could judge Israel "like" Admah and Zeboim. Verse 9 then says that he will not judge them that way. But why? Part of the explanation is that he "will not destroy Ephraim again." Apparently, Ephraim, which had not formerly been destroyed as a tribe, in some way was corporately identified with Admah and Zeboim, which were cities destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah. In some, indeed mysterious way, Ephraim, therefore, was considered to have been destroyed already with these other Gentile cities. So God says in v. 9 that he "will not destroy Ephraim again." This is more than an analogical comparison of the destruction of these Gentile cities with that of Ephraim.\(^{42}\) Rather, this is an actual corporate identification of these Gentile cities with Ephraim,\(^{43}\) much like the preceding kingdoms of Babylon,

\(^{40}\) This is in line with the connection of Rom 9:24-26 with the immediately following OT prophecies cited in Rom 9:27-29, which are clearly viewed as inaugurated prophetic fulfillments among a remnant of Israelites.


\(^{42}\) Note that often the prophets compare the sin of Israel to the sin or destruction of Sodom (Isa 1:9-10; 3:9; Jer 23:14; Lam 4:6; Ezek 16:46, 48, 55-56; Amos 4:11). However, these appear to be mere comparisons, not any kind of corporate identification.

\(^{43}\) On the corporate identification of Ephraim with these cities associated with Sodom, see Derek Drummond Bass, "Hosea's Use of Scripture: An Analysis of His Hermeneutics" (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 222-26.
Medo-Persia, and Greece were corporately identified with the fourth and last world kingdom’s destruction in Dan 2:31-45 (as also suggested by Dan 7:1-12). One of the implications of Hos 11:8-9 is that Ephraim was not merely like these Gentile cities but was actually in some way a corporate part of them! Perhaps Hos 7:8 alludes to the same thing: “Ephraim mixes himself with the nations.” This enhances much more the notion that when Israel was said to be “not my people,” they really were, in fact, in the position of unbelieving Gentiles and not merely “like” the Gentiles.

What impact does all this have on Paul affirming that not only Jews but Gentiles could fulfill the Hosea prophecy? It shows that the prophecy really was about people being saved out from an unbelieving Gentile location. Hosea had direct focus on Israel coming out from that position, but, from what we have said above, it is viable that Hosea himself would have “tacitly understood” (in light of, e.g., Hos 11:8-9) that his prophecy could just as well apply to Gentiles, who would also be saved out of an unbelieving Gentile position. Paul would be developing both Hosea’s direct meaning and his “tacit meaning” or “willed type” or what was in Hosea’s broader cognitive peripheral vision.

Part of Paul’s rationale may well also have been his latent understanding that Christ was true Israel, and that anyone, whether Jew or Greek, who identified with Christ was corporately understood to be also true Israel. This rationale would have made it relatively easy for Paul to see Gentiles also fulfilling the Hosea prophecy about Israel’s salvation.

3. The Use of Exodus 12:46 in John 19:36

This passage is perhaps the most difficult so far, since the historical narrative about the exodus Passover lamb is taken by John and seen to be a prophecy of Jesus’ death. After narrating that the Roman soldiers did not break Jesus’ bones at the crucifixion, John 19:36 says, “For these things came to pass that the Scripture might be fulfilled, ‘not a bone of him shall be broken.’”

Likewise, another example of Israel not merely being like the Gentiles but actually corporately identified with Gentiles is Matt 21:43-45, where v. 44b is an allusion to Dan 2:34-35: “And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.” This is startling since the statue that is broken in Dan 2 represents the evil Gentile kingdoms, but now Jesus applies the Daniel passage to the Jews, and they realized it (“they understood that he was speaking about them”). Thus, in this passage Jesus sees the Jewish leaders as corporately identified with the Gentiles.

That this latent idea may be in mind is pointed to by the phrase “sons of the living God” in Rom 9:26 (quoting from Hos 1:10) and the statement that Christ was “the Son of God” (Rom 1:4) and the repeated abbreviated references to him as God’s “Son” (Rom 1:3, 9; 8:3, 29, 32). The three references to “Son” in Rom 8 are not far from the context of Rom 9:25-26. The corporate identification with Jesus as God’s son is also enhanced by the mention of “adoption as sons,” referring both to believing Jews and Gentiles in Rom 8:15, 23, and the reference to Israelites in the older epoch, “to whom belongs the adoption as sons” (Rom 9:4).
To be specific, this use would be prophetic in the sense that Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15 was prophetic. It would be an event that pointed forward implicitly to what John is narrating about Jesus’ death. The statement “not a bone of him shall be broken” comes most likely from Exod 12:46 (or Num 12:9, which repeats the Exodus statement).46 Certainly, Moses’ statements in the Exodus and Numbers texts refer to the historical event of the Passover lamb’s slaying and the requirements about how it was to be slain, which following generations of Israelites were to obey. These statements in Exodus and Numbers are mere historical descriptions and not prophecies. But how can John 19:36 say that not breaking Jesus’ bones at the crucifixion was a fulfillment of prophecy from these Exodus and Numbers texts? Many if not most scholars would say that Moses had no prophetic intent in these texts. As a result, some would merely say that John misinterpreted these OT texts or read completely new ideas into the texts.47 Still others would contend that John was given this insight retrospectively, after the ascension and bestowal of the Spirit. Accordingly, the prophetic sense was not in Moses’ mind but in God’s wider intention, which was then revealed later to John.

How can the notion of cognitive peripheral vision, together with Hirsch’s and Polanyi’s ideas, help in this case? These overlapping notions may well illuminate why John sees a mere historically narrated event as pointing forward. It is true that Moses was focused on making a historical description about the Passover lamb, which was to be prescriptive for all succeeding generations of Israelites. This was the direct focus of meaning in his mind’s eye. However, can we not legitimately ask the question of how Moses would have related his statement in Exod 12:46 to other parts of his own writings in the Pentateuch? Some would say that to ask such a question could lead only to pure speculation. But what we are really asking is whether or not the rest of his writings that are related significantly to the exodus event were in his cognitive peripheral vision or in his subsidiary understanding when he wrote about the Passover lamb. We cannot ask uncontrolled questions about what would have been in his wider understanding (e.g., about what he had for breakfast or did he have a family quarrel), but can ask only those questions that are related to and prompted by his direct focus concerning the Passover lamb and its relation to the exodus event. We have only what he has written in Exod 12 and elsewhere in the Pentateuch. Thus, we are not trying to enter into the mind of the author to discover all of his encyclopedic knowledge about redemptive history, which has not been written down elsewhere in his writings.

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46 It is possible that Ps 34:20 could be included, which applies the Exodus/Numbers statement to God’s protection of the righteous; see G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 59-60.

47 In this respect, some would flatly say that John was wrong, while others would say that his flawed exegetical method should not be followed, but what he wrote was nevertheless inspired. Others would say that John’s exegetical approach could be construed as wrong, but that on the other hand modern scholars should be cautious in judging ancient writers by modern exegetical standards.
For example, we could ask if Moses would have related this event to other similar redemptive-historical events that he narrated in his own writings. While the exodus event was the greatest event in the history of God's people up until that time, Moses had earlier written about an even greater redemptive-historical event in Gen 3:15 in which the seed of the woman was to deal a fatal blow to the satanic serpent.  

Yet Gen 3:15 says that the seed of the woman will be "bruised" by the serpent. So there is the idea of this end-time conqueror winning a battle over an eschatological adversary yet suffering in the midst of that battle. If we asked Moses, "Moses, is the slain Passover lamb (which leads to Israel's victory over Egypt and their deliverance) related to the even greater historical deliverance of a conqueror who will suffer yet still win a decisive victory over Satan (Gen 3:15)?" I think Moses' most likely answer would be that there was an analogical relation between the exodus event and Gen 3:15, and that this was a divinely intended analogy.

Thus, I am saying that the similar but greater event of Gen 3:15 was in Moses' subsidiary understanding or within his "willed type," or what I have called his cognitive peripheral vision. If so, John may have understood the same thing, and this may be the reason that John sees the slain lamb of the exodus as an analogical pointer to the slain lamb at the cross, which was a greater redemptive-historical event than the exodus. Thus, the messianic lamb could be understood as "fulfilling" what was implicitly related to the exodus lamb.

But that is not all. Moses writes in Gen 49:1, 9-12 that in "the latter days" Judah would rule over all Israel and all the "peoples," as well as win a decisive battle. Similarly, Num 24:14-19 says "in the latter days" a leader from Jacob would defeat nations that are likely representative of Gentile enemies in general. Part of the description is that this leader will "crush through the forehead of Moab" (24:17), which is likely a reflection back to the "bruising of the head" of the serpent.

These latter two texts plausibly develop Gen 3:15 in a conceptual way, and the latter may even be an inner biblical exegesis of that text. These passages, since they are related developments to Gen 3:15, are also good candidates for passages that would have been in Moses' latent understanding when he wrote about the Passover lamb. The eschatological nature of Gen 49 and Num 24

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48 I take this in the traditional sense that it refers to the Messiah who will decisively defeat the devil. I do not think this is limited to humans judging serpents by stepping on them, as some scholars think, which is a very thin and unlikely description of the Gen 3 narrative (see G. K. Beale, A New Testament Biblical Theology [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011], 29-58).

49 For the idea that Gen 1–5 contains eschatological implications, see ibid., 29-63.

50 See Jim Hamilton, "The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15," Southern Baptist Journal of Theology 10 (2006): 34, 49-50, who makes this connection and also traces other later inner-biblical OT allusions (and allusions by Judaism) to Gen 3:15 and understands many of them to be related to the coming Messiah's defeat of evil (see ibid., 30-54), though readers might question some of his allusive connections.

51 On these Genesis and Numbers texts and their eschatological and messianic development of Gen 1–3, see Beale, New Testament Biblical Theology, 92-101.
would have facilitated all the more John’s prophetic understanding of the exodus Passover lamb, if he had some insight into Moses’ subsidiary knowledge. Hebrews 11:25-26 may be but the “tip of the iceberg” in revealing that, indeed, Moses did have such a tacit knowledge or cognitive peripheral vision, which we have just explained. Moses chose

25 rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

And then on the heels of this statement, only two verses later there is reference to Moses who “kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn might not touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea” (Heb 11:28-29). This is striking, since the reference to Moses considering the suffering of the “Christ,” which is related to Moses receiving an eschatological “reward” (Heb 11:26), is closely tied to the Passover lamb’s slaying and the exodus deliverance from Egypt (Heb 11:28-29), the very connection we were earlier suggesting may have been latent in Moses’ and John’s mind. Some would say that Heb 11:26 is a good example of illegitimately reading Christ into the OT. On the other hand, in the light of what we have said so far about the possibilities of Moses’ subsidiary knowledge, the Hebrews text may just as plausibly be an example that our analysis is on the right track.

Up until now we have not tried to appeal to God’s understanding which was wider than that of the human prophet, though this is applicable. I certainly do not want to affirm that we are only concerned with purely human intentions in the Bible, since biblical writers wrote under the inspiration of God and were probably conscious of writing under such inspiration. When there is a divine understanding that transcends the conscious intention of the human author, the divine understanding is still organically related to the human author’s understanding or “willed type.” What God more fully knew than the prophet consciously knew would be an interpretive implication that would fit within the human author’s “willed type,” and, if asked later, the prophet would say, “Yes, I see how that is the wider, thicker meaning of what I intended originally to say.” We must say that in every case God had a more exhaustive understanding than biblical authors had of what they wrote.

There is not space here to discuss how this relates to so-called “new” meanings or “creative” meanings developed by NT writers, especially in those places where “mystery” is applied to NT understandings of OT texts. This will receive elaboration in a forthcoming work.\(^{52}\) Suffice it to say, the upshot of this

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forthcoming work is that such meanings still fit within the OT human author’s ultimate “willed type” or “latent knowledge,” yet they are also a hidden mystery revealed. There is certainly a tension here, but perhaps Eph 3:4-5 is somewhat of a key to the other “mystery” texts in the NT: “the mystery of Christ which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” This text affirms that the mystery was known partially (note the “as” in Eph 3:5) but not fully. My contention is that the full development of such OT mysteries in the NT are not inconsistent with and ultimately fit into the human author’s “willed type” or potential “tacit understanding.” Would the OT author be surprised?—yes, but he would on further reflection see how it all ultimately fit as progressive revelation into his latent understanding. This is a tricky tension, which shall have to wait to be unpacked further in my forthcoming book.35

Coming back to the example of Exod 12 in John 19, one does not have to affirm that when the laws respecting the Passover lamb were written Moses (or his readers) explicitly understood that they were foreshadowing the messianic slain lamb. My explanation of Exod 12 in John 19 is what I would consider only a possible explanation, and will likely not be persuasive to some. Nevertheless, the examples of Hos 11:1 and Hos 1–2 in the NT, I believe, are more probable or persuasive case studies.34 On the other hand, this possible explanation of Exod 12 in John 19 should still be considered among the options for understanding this difficult OT in the NT passage. The upshot of these three examples is to suggest that, contrary to the consensus opinion both inside and outside of evangelical scholarship, OT authors may have had some inkling of how the meaning of their texts would be later interpreted in what would appear to us as surprising interpretations.

With reference to the Passover lamb and its relation to Christ, D. A. Carson says,

It would be fair to say that such notions were still hidden—hidden in plain view, so to speak, because genuinely there in the text (once one perceives the trajectory of the typology), but not yet revealed. And that perhaps is why a “mystery” must be revealed, but also why it may be revealed through the prophetic writings.35

The above analysis of Exod 12 in John 19 is an attempt to flesh out Carson’s reference to the NT revelation about the messianic lamb being “hidden” yet at

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35 I have also tried to elaborate on this tension throughout my *New Testament Biblical Theology*, e.g., see my discussion of the temple (ch. 19), the church as true end-time Israel (chs. 20 and 21), Israel’s land promises (ch. 22), and the role of the Law in the OT and NT (ch. 29).

34 Another probable case study that cannot be included here because of space constraints is the use of Isa 22:22 in Rev 3:7, which is another good illustration of cognitive peripheral vision on the part of John and Isaiah, as well as a good example of prophetic typology being recognized both by the OT and NT authors. See Beale, *Handbook*, 133-47.

the same time "in plain view . . . once one perceives the trajectory of the typology." I have tried to unpack the idea that this trajectory of typology is not purely something revealed only in the NT but had its roots tacitly in the relation of the Passover lamb to other greater redemptive-historical events that had already been written about by Moses himself. Yet, when what was foreshadowed by the Passover lamb occurred in Christ there was a fuller revelation of the antecedent latent typology. For example, at the least, crucifixion by Romans in Jerusalem, which was instigated by Jews, would certainly not have been in Moses' immediate subsidiary understanding, but it would still fit into the broad contours of his "willed type," and would flesh out in detail how the fulfillment occurred.56

VII. The Subsidiary Presuppositional Perspectives of the New Testament Writers in Their Use of the Old Testament

The argument throughout this article dovetails with Tom Wright's discussion of authorial meaning. He contends that any theory of reading must

do justice . . . to the fact that the author intended certain things, and that the text may well contain in addition other things—echoes, evocations, structures, and the like—which were not [explicitly] present to the author's mind, and of course may well not be present to the reader's mind. . . . Similarly, we need a theory which will do justice . . . both to the fact that texts . . . do not normally represent the whole of the author's mind, even that bit to which they come closest, and to the fact that they nevertheless do normally tell us, and in principle tell truly, quite a bit about him or her. Finally, we need to recognize . . . both that authors do not write without a point of view (they are humans, and look at things in particular ways and from particular angles) and that they really can speak and write about events and objects . . . which are not reducible to terms of their own state of mind.57

This last point about authors expressing a "point of view" when they write about events (or develop ideas) relates to one more dimension of subsidiary or peripheral knowledge not yet addressed in this article. Wright later elaborates

56 As Wright says, Paul "claims to offer a historical reading in which the 'prefigurations' are part of the story [of Israel] that has now come to its climax," and I would add that this climax fleshes out in new ways the preceding prefigurations, though with coherence with those prefigurations (see N. T. Wright, The Climax of the Covenant [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 265; see also 264). Wright, however, seems to play down a bit too much the new progressive revelatory notion by saying that Paul "appeals" to arguments from these prefigurations "in the public domain and not by means of an esoteric secret which other contemporary Jews could not share" (ibid., 265). While there is truth to this, since the prefigurations really are observable in the OT texts (1), it does not seem to leave enough room for Paul's view of the revealed mystery, which he often speaks about (following the critique of Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment," 430-31). However, my suspicion is that Wright has somewhere in his voluminous writings qualified his statement appropriately (e.g., see the following statement by Wright cited directly below from his New Testament and the People of God [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992], 62-63).

57 Wright, New Testament and the People of God, 62-63, brackets inserted. Instead of "state of mind" at the end of the quotation, I would substitute "directly focused thought."
on this comment by saying that "human writing is best conceived as the articulation of worldviews, or better still, the telling of stories which bring worldviews into articulation."58

I hope that the gist of this article fleshes out a bit more thoroughly the kind of hermeneutical and epistemological theory that Wright wants to see developed in more detail than he had space to do. Indeed, this article is only a limited exploration of an approach that needs much more development and articulation. Though Wright has broader issues in mind in his last comment above about "worldviews" (e.g., the entire story of Israel in the OT and Judaism and its component parts), I believe that his statement would include the theological presuppositions of OT and NT writers that undergird their statements and interpretations. Thus, when a NT writer cites and interprets an OT text, he may not explicitly state the presupposition that underlies his interpretation, but it is nevertheless present in his subsidiary or tacit understanding and is, indeed, crucial for understanding how the author formulated his interpretation. In fact, without understanding the underlying presupposition, the interpretation may seem far-fetched and wrongheaded. For example, I have written elsewhere that the NT writers sometimes, perhaps often, interpret OT texts through presuppositional lenses, of which they may be explicitly conscious or such lenses may be tacit to the writers. These presuppositions are all rooted in the OT itself, so that they are part of what Wright would call the OT story of Israel. These presuppositions are the following:59

1. There is the assumption of corporate solidarity or representation.
2. Following from the first presupposition, Christ is viewed as representing the true Israel of the OT and true Israel, the church, in the NT.
3. History is unified by a wise and sovereign plan so that the earlier parts are designed to correspond with and point to the latter parts (cf. Matt 11:13-14).
4. The age of eschatological fulfillment has been launched in Christ.
5. As a consequence of the preceding presupposition, it follows that the latter parts of biblical history function as the broader context for interpreting earlier parts because they all have the same, ultimate divine author who inspires the various human authors. One deduction from this premise is that Christ, as the goal toward which the OT pointed and the end-time center of redemptive history, is the key to interpreting the earlier portions of the OT and its promises.

58 Ibid., 65.
59 Explanation of these presuppositions can be found in my "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine From the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of the Apostles' Exegetical Method," Them 14 (1989): 89-96; and my Handbook, 52-53, 95-102. There is debate about some of these presuppositions, which we do not have space to elaborate on here. To the above presuppositions we could also add two others: (1) the OT is the inspired word of God; (2) the Holy Spirit must open a person's eyes to understand the saving truth of the OT (see Beale, Handbook, 95-96).
These presuppositions help us understand why the NT interpretively applies OT texts to apparently different realities than what the OT had in mind. For example, presupposition # 3 above explains why OT historical events can be understood as typological prophetic pointers, as we attempted to show above with Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:15, and Exod 12:46 in John 19:36.

In addition, changed applications of the OT in general, whether or not typology is involved, do not necessitate the conclusion that these passages have been misinterpreted. For example, Matthew applies to Jesus what the OT intended for Israel (e.g., Hos 11:1 in Matt 2:14-15). Or, prophecies about Jesus are applied to the church because the church is corporately identified with Jesus (e.g., Isa 49:6 in Acts 13:47), so that often what Jesus fulfills, the church is seen as taking part in. Or, as we discussed earlier, Paul applies to the predominately Gentile church what was intended for Israel (e.g., Rom 9:24-26). What should be challenged in these kinds of apparently different applications is not the NT writers' interpretation of the OT but the validity of the above-mentioned framework through which they interpreted the OT: in the above cases not only the typological presupposition # 3 is in mind (i.e., in the Matt 2:15 and John 19:36 texts), but also presuppositions # 1 and # 2 (i.e., in the Matt 2:15 and Rom 9:24-26 texts), that Christ corporately represented true Israel and that all who identify with him by faith are considered part of true Israel. Furthermore, if Israel was corporately identified with unbelieving Gentiles (presupposition # 1) in Hosea, then it makes sense that Paul could legitimately see Gentiles themselves coming to faith, together with ethnic Jews, in fulfillment of the Hosea prophecies appealed to in Rom 9:24-26.

If the validity of these presuppositions be granted, then the viability of their interpretation of the OT in the above categories of usage must also be viewed as plausible. Therefore, changes of application need not mean a disregard for OT context, since this is not a logically necessary deduction. It seems likely that some confuse disregard for context with change of application. Assuming the viability of the presuppositions, although the new applications are technically different, they nevertheless stay within the conceptual bounds (the "willed type" or subsidiary meaning) of the OT contextual meaning, so that what results often is an extended reference to or application of a principle which is inherent to the OT text.

Some suspect that whenever there is a difficult OT in the NT use any new presupposition can be created by a willing exegete to solve the problem, so that such a position becomes unfalsifiable. However, these presuppositions were not created ex nihilo by the early Christian community, but are themselves rooted in

the OT and its telling of the redemptive-historical story of Israel.\(^{61}\) We may say that these presuppositions were part of the subsidiary mindset or tacit default setting of the later OT prophets\(^{62}\) and early Christians in interpreting the OT. These presuppositions were not chosen willy-nilly by the early church nor can modern interpreters create their own new presuppositions to explain OT uses in the NT. It is within the framework of these five presuppositions that the whole OT was perceived as pointing to the new covenant eschatological age, both via direct prophecy and the indirect prophetic adumbration of Israel’s history. Accordingly, the broad redemptive-historical perspective of these assumptions was the dominant framework within which Jesus and his followers thought, serving as an ever-present heuristic guide to the OT. Therefore, the matrix of these five perspectives, especially the last four, is the direct or peripheral lenses through which the NT authors looked at (i.e., interpreted) OT passages.

In this respect, the NT writers (like the car mechanic) learned the "mechanics" of these presuppositions from Jesus (what they are, how they work, how they relate to one another, etc.). They strove to understand them during Jesus' earthly ministry, as they also watched Jesus run the race of that ministry. Then as they later "ran the race" of their ministries to various churches (like the mechanic turned into a race car driver), their explicit focus changed to pastoral concerns, and the mechanics of these presuppositions were still operative, but were not always front and center in their focus but often implicit and subsidiary.

VIII. Conclusion

I have argued in this article that when OT or even NT authors make direct statements with an explicit meaning, there is always a related secondary range of meaning that appropriately is an expansion of the explicit meaning. All speakers and writers, including ancient writers, are aware of more than what they are directly saying in their speech act. New Testament authors may interpret OT speech acts not directly in line with their explicit meaning but may draw meaning from their cognitive peripheral vision. It may seem like speculation to try to formulate what that latent peripheral meaning was, but, at the least, we can try to show the viable possibility that there was a wider meaning and that the NT writer may have well been aware of that meaning in interpreting the OT passage. We have tried to show that searching for the peripheral sense is not a matter of pure speculation that is uncontrolled. There

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\(^{61}\) On the OT roots of these presuppositions, see Beale, *Handbook*, 96-102. Consequently, this blunts the contention of some postmodern scholars who believe that the NT writers' presuppositions distorted their interpretation of the OT, since they see these presuppositions as newly created by the early Christian community in the light of the coming of Christ. Accordingly, such scholars believe that the NT was reading these foreign presuppositions into the OT, which skewed the original meaning of the OT.

\(^{62}\) In the case of the later OT writers, the language of "Christ" in presuppositions # 2, # 4, and # 5 would be changed to "Messiah" or final eschatological king.
is what we may call an "organic" connection between the direct and the tacit meaning. Both Hirsch and Polanyi have sketched how these two dimensions of meaning are related and how, for example, the broader "willed type" of one statement and its meaning can be determined to some degree. The concept of cognitive peripheral vision expresses something very similar.

Probably the most viable objections to this view are twofold. First, it only explains how complicated interpretation is, and it explains the diversity of interpretations among commentators.63 Second, and more significantly, it does not propose specific criteria for determining what is the content of the tacit meanings of OT authors and which tacit meanings a NT author might have picked up on, in addition to the explicit meaning when the latter is, in fact, referred to. In other words, the subsidiary theory approach is unable to offer guidelines for deciding which among all the diverse possibilities of subsidiary meanings might be in mind.64 For example, Steve Moyise says with respect to the Hosea reference in Rom 9 example given above,

if one could show that Rom 9:26 is drawing on a latent meaning of Hos 1:10 and 2:23 [about] jws being in the position of Gentiles, which extends the promise to Gentiles]
and if one could produce an expert that could demonstrate that Rom 9:26 is the genuine fruit of Hos 1:10 and 2:23, then we could conclude that Paul respects the context of his quotations. The problem is that we cannot do either of these things.65

Moyise concludes that if "respect for OT context" means accuracy of verbal quotation, awareness of the historical situation, and referring carefully to immediately surrounding verses of the OT quotation, then NT writers (e.g., Paul) do not always or, indeed, often respect the OT contexts of quotations. But he says if "respect for context" indicates recognizing the meaning of a quotation by relating it to a larger portion of the OT (as in my proposal about Exod 12 in John 19) or to even broader immediate contexts of OT books from which quotes are drawn (as my proposals for the OT in Rev 3:7 and Rom 9:25-26), the NT writers (e.g., Paul) sometimes or even often can be judged to respect the context of OT references.66 But Moyise rejects this as the most unlikely option. If the criteria for contextual respect are drawn so broadly, way beyond the immediate context of the verse quoted, then it is hard to see how NT writers

63 So see, e.g., Moyise, "Latency and Respect for Context," 136-38.
64 Ibid., 137-38. This Moyise finds to be probably the most substantial objection to Kim's article and approach, and thus to my own approach. The majority of the remainder of my present article is a response to Moyise's objection, which apparently Kim did not have an opportunity to offer.
65 Ibid., 137, brackets inserted.
66 Moyise, "Does Paul Respect the Context of His Quotations?," 112-13. He cites, among others, the broad contextual approaches of Hays and Watson; the former argues that the context of a whole OT book helps the reader to see how one quotation from that book renders it a contextual interpretation, while the latter extends contextual considerations to whole portions of the OT. Moyise proposes another criterion, which is essentially a reader-response criterion, that is not as relevant to evaluate here (see ibid., 99-111).
could ever cross it, so the assertion of 'respect' becomes meaningless" and unfalsifiable.\(^{67}\) That is, if a NT writer seems to misunderstand a specific OT verse and even the immediate context of that verse, then one should keep expanding the context if necessary, even unto the scope of the whole OT canon, until the verse finally makes sense.\(^{68}\) Moyise contends that this often involves elaborate and complicated inner-biblical exegesis, which likely would never have been followed by the readers.\(^{69}\) Accordingly, this would tell us more about the imagination of these scholars than the biblical writers' actual intentions.\(^{70}\)

But is it correct to say that there are no criteria for determining what are the subsidiary meanings of OT authors and which subsidiary meanings a NT author might have been aware of? It is true that just as different people connect dots on a paper in different ways to form different shapes, likewise, interpreters connect different scriptural passages in different ways to formulate different interpretations, and they focus on different subsidiary meanings of a scriptural passage than other commentators focus on. But not all these interpretations are necessarily equally viable. There is an approach by which to validate which of the OT inner-texts or latent meanings should be focused on in the NT reference and which of a text's (or texts') interpretations was more probably in mind than the others. One would want to focus on all of the possible inner-texts or latent meanings related to the OT quotation, especially keeping in mind Hirsch's concept of "willed type" in which subsequent "new interpretations" and applications of the meaning of a primary text can be seen as legitimately falling within the pattern of the "willed type" of the original meaning, and hence a legitimate extension of it. This could be referred to as "thick description," which includes an account of an author's threefold communicative act (involving locution, elocution, and perlocution).\(^{71}\)

This practical literary approach then would be to study closely all the possible OT inner-texts related to the OT verse cited by the NT author,\(^{72}\) as well as other possible subsidiary meanings that can be gleaned from the immediate and broad context of the quotation.\(^{73}\) Perhaps many of these may be in the NT writer's mind, so that he is developing the original meaning of the OT citation robustly. Alternatively, a NT writer may only have one or two inner-OT texts or subsidiary meanings in mind.

\(^{67}\) Ibid., 99.

\(^{68}\) E.g., Moyise says that "those who advocate 'respect' usually begin with the assumption that there must be an innerbiblical explanation and then go to great lengths to find one" (ibid., 101).

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 103.

\(^{70}\) Ibid.

\(^{71}\) See Vanhoozer, Is There a Meaning in This Text?, e.g., 282-85, 291-92, 331-32.

\(^{72}\) E.g., in the case of Exod 12 in John 16, such inner-texts would have been, at least possibly, Gen 3:15, Gen 49:1, 8-12, and Num 24:14-19, which we proposed above.

\(^{73}\) E.g., in the case of our above study of Hosea in Rom 9, we think of the latent meaning of what it means for Jews to be "not my people" like Gentiles, and the idea that Israel was corporately identified with Gentiles (Hos 11:8-9).
Is it mere subjective choice that guides readers to know which of the prior OT inner-texts or peripheral contextual meanings are in mind or uppermost in mind or whether all could be included? I do not think so. Those other inner-texts or contextually tacit ideas that have specific notions that correspond in some approximate way with the original meaning are live candidates, together with the original, for inner-texts or tacit ideas on which the NT author may have focused. The more "organic" or specifically related correspondences one can muster between the OT text, its contextual subsidiary ideas, its OT inner-texts, and its use in the NT will build up a "probability case" that one or more of these contexts is actually in mind in the text under consideration.\(^\text{74}\) To put it another way, "the success of any interpretation depends on its explanatory power, on its ability to make more complex, coherent, and natural sense of textual data than other interpretations do."\(^\text{75}\) Accordingly, the interpretation or interpretive framework that has more explanatory power—that makes the most sense of the text’s details—than alternative interpretations is the more probable interpretation.\(^\text{76}\) If one interpretive framework makes the particular traits of a passage more meaningfully functional than another interpretive framework, then the former interpretation is more probable than the latter, as difficult as it is sometimes to decide such things.\(^\text{77}\) Hirsch has three chapters in his *Validity in Interpretation* (chs. 3–5) that discuss the criteria for how inductively to validate interpretations, not in a purely subjective manner nor solely objectively, but in a way that can be discussed or adjudicated in the public domain.\(^\text{78}\) Competing interpretations have degrees of possibility and probability, depending on the number of fundamental correspondences that can be drawn between a NT’s interpretive use of the OT and its OT source text and its inner-texts and contextual subsidiary ideas.

Tom Wright gives a good example of the kind of probability judgments about competing interpretations that are involved in Hirsch’s approach. Wright adduces the example of a paleontologist who has the task of fitting a dinosaur skeleton together from some scattered bones.\(^\text{79}\) If he creates a simple structure of a known dinosaur which still omits some significantly large bones that do not fit in, then others may accuse him of satisfying the criterion of “simplicity” at the expense of the “data.” The paleontologist responds by saying that the extra

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\(^{74}\) For examples of my own attempted applications of Hirsch’s criteria for validation, see G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2010); *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (JSNTSup 166; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999).


\(^{76}\) Remembering here the reality that even conservative and Reformed exegetes often offer alternate interpretations of the same passages.

\(^{77}\) Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 190-96.

\(^{78}\) Including the possibility of discussing presuppositions without adopting a neutral stance in the Reformed tradition of Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

bones belong to another animal who was eaten by or ate the one now being con-
structed. If a second paleontologist produces another skeleton from the same
bones and is able to use all the bones, but there are seven toes on one foot and
eighteen on the other, then the opposite problem is posed: "simplicity" has been
abandoned for the sake of including all the "data," and the first paleontologist
will not be persuaded by an unconventional evolutionary explanation. Which
of the competing theories will be accepted? The first is more plausible, since it
is easier to think that some scattered bones from another animal intruded into
the pile of the other than it is to believe that the strange mutated creature in the
second scenario ever existed in some weird evolutionary form.

Alternative interpretive perspectives are comparable to the dinosaur hy-
potheses, which illustrate that usually no two hypotheses are without problems,
but the one with the least problems is the more likely. Ultimately, in judg-
ing among competing interpretive perspectives, Wright is probably correct
in placing more weight on the "simplicity of perspective" criterion than on
the criterion of "inclusion of data." The same criteria applied by Wright to
verifying alternative interpretive perspectives is very similar to the approach of
Hirsch. Hirsch's three chapters on criteria for discerning probable interpreta-
tions over possible interpretations is very important. I have tried to summarize
the most salient parts of his argument, but limits of space prevent further
elaboration. Nevertheless, readers should consult this very significant section
of Hirsch for further explanation.

And we must always remember we are dealing not with scientific or math-
ematical formulas but with literary art, so that the personal experience and be-
liefs (which might call "subjectivity") of the interpreter are never erased.
We are not dealing with a mechanistic, airtight method by which to come to
complete objective certainty or "perfect knowledge" about a proposed inter-
pretation. But this does not mean that we cannot reach probability judgments
among alternatively proposed interpretations in a practical manner, which can
be discussed in the public domain. This also does not mean that, though we
favor one interpretive alternative over another, there are no viable objections
to our preferred alternative or, indeed, that other interpretive alternatives do
not have significant viability. In fact, at times we may barely favor our preference
over other alternatives.

Thus, I think it an overstatement to say that the approach of this article
is unfalsifiable or unprovable one way or another. To think my argument is
unfalsifiable is a radical reader-response view that is relativistic about truth or
even probability statements and thus is overly pessimistic about an ability to

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80 Ibid.
81 Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, 299-324.
82 Ibid., 306.
83 Ibid., 312.
discover that one interpretation is more probable than another. In the real world, alternate interpretations of life situations involve degrees of probability and possibility, and people personally commit themselves to such interpretive frameworks with varying levels of tentativeness, and it is the same with alternate interpretations of biblical passages. We must judge cautiously and carefully. Each difficult OT in the NT passage must be considered on a case by case basis, and some will be harder to determine with confidence than others. We have tried above to give three such case examples with varying degrees of confidence or "belief" about the results. Some interpretations may, indeed, be complex and hard for many readers to follow. Nevertheless, if it can be shown that such interpretations were likely in the mind of the author, then we must try to follow them, and realize that some among the first readers (e.g., Jewish Christians) would have been able to follow sufficiently many of these more complex interpretations (and others under discipleship would begin to learn them subsequently). Nevertheless, such interpretive proposals remain "alleged facts," still possessing a degree of tentativeness.

Thus, Old and NT writers knew more than what they were explicitly intending to say (as Polanyi would put it). If so, there was an explicit intention and implicit wider understanding related to that intention. Though this approach does not offer a solution for all difficult uses of the OT in the NT, I believe that this notion can go some way to understanding better what some consider to be a number of "strange" uses of the OT by the NT. And, in some cases, there may be no reasonable interpretive alternative for some of these thorny texts—we just have to leave it and trust God’s inerrant word. The thrust of this article is that the NT ‘writers’ grasp of the OT writers’ peripheral vision is

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84 A view which my dialogue partner Moyise seems still to hold, though perhaps with some exceptions, after many years of interaction between us.


86 In response to Moyise ("The Old Testament in the New: A Reply to Greg Beale,” *IBS* 21 [1999]: 54-68), a number of years ago, I presented something similar to the above explanation of the practical process of validating a competing interpretation over another (G. K. Beale, "Questions of Authorial Intent, Epistemology, and Presuppositions and Their Bearing on the Study of the Old Testament in the New: A Rejoinder to Steve Moyise,” *IBS* 21 [1999]: 1-26), but, even though he made a rejoinder to some aspects of my response, he never responded to the criteria of validation that I offered (see in this respect, e.g., Moyise, “Seeing the Old Testament Through a Lens,” *IBS* 23 [2001]: 36-41; and "Does the Author of Revelation Misappropriate the Scriptures?,” *AUS* 40 [2002]: 3-21). As far as I am aware, he has never specifically responded to this matter (the closest he comes to doing so is a brief concluding paragraph to his article "Authorial Intention and the Book of Revelation," *AUS* 39 [2001]: 35-40). Yet years later, in response to Mitch Kim’s view of the OT in the NT, Moyise continues to ask for criteria in deciding between alternative interpretations of the OT in the NT. So, I have felt compelled to offer again and expand on this criteria in response to Moyise’s response ("Latency and Respect for Context") to Kim (“Respect for Context and Authorial Intention”), where Moyise asks for such criteria.


88 In some ways the present article is a development of my earlier hermeneutical essay, "Questions of Authorial Intent."
validated through observing their use of OT quotations and allusions. Some NT authors repeatedly refer to verses from throughout a large OT segment, which shows that they have an awareness of not just the single verses to which they refer but the wider contextual “vision” of the segment. C. H. Dodd has demonstrated this phenomenon with numerous NT examples.⁹⁸

In this article I have attempted to expand upon what J. Gresham Machen said in 1936 concerning the NT writers’ use of the OT:

The writers of the Bible did know what they were doing when they wrote. I do not believe that they always knew all that they were doing. I believe that there are mysterious words of prophecy in the Prophets and the Psalms, for example, which had far richer and more glorious fulfillment than the inspired writers knew when they wrote. Yet even in the case of those mysterious words I do not think that the sacred writers were mere automata. They did not know the full meaning of what they wrote, but they did know part of the meaning, and the full meaning was in no contradiction with the partial meaning but was its glorious unfolding.⁹⁹

Machen is referring to meanings of OT authors that lie at the “edges” of the widest part of their cognitive peripheral vision. There is a blurring at these edges,⁹¹ just as there is with the peripheral vision of our literal eyes. Because of this blurring, one can say therefore that these authors may not have been much aware of these meanings, but God, who inspired them, was fully aware; and when this meaning becomes explicit in the NT, it is truly something that is organically “unfolded” from the OT author’s original meaning.

B. B. Warfield gives a most fitting illustration of what Machen is getting at:

The Old Testament may be likened to a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted; the introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before; but it brings out into clear view much of what is in it but was only dimly or even not at all perceived before. . . . Thus the Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the fuller revelation [of the NT] which follows it, but only perfected, extended and enlarged.

It is an old saying that what becomes patent in the New Testament was latent in the Old Testament. And it is important that the continuity of the revelation of God contained in the two Testaments should not be overlooked or obscured.⁹²

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