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Covenant Sign and Seal

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Early in my twenty years of teaching the Pentateuch I realized that many of my credo-baptist students were still awaiting a credible case for paedobaptism. While the most popular works on paedobaptism argued for inclusion of children in baptism, they tended to do so on the basis of the “household” baptism passages (Acts 16:15, 31) but gave limited or no attention to providing a strong linkage between circumcision and baptism.¹ This tends to send the matter back to one’s hermeneutical *a priori* regarding the household baptism passages. The linking of the two covenant signs, which ought to make the strongest connection, seemed to be the missing link.

Meredith Kline had made that connection, but not as easily accessible as the popular treatments and especially those seeking to understand paedobaptists more fairly.² Therefore the following aspires to offer a credible biblical explanation to the

¹ The primary popular works at that time being John Murray, *Christian Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1980/92); Francis Schaeffer, *Baptism* (Wilmington, DE: TriMark Publishing, 1976); and John P. Sartelle, *What Christians Parents Should Know about Infant Baptism* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1985). This article does not attempt to repeat their reasoning, but to supplement them.

² Principally in his *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968). While certain fundamental aspects of Kline’s understanding of covenants in the Ancient Near East have been reworked, revised, and challenged, the case made in this paper relies upon a limited aspect which is not impacted by these criticisms. This article is written with awareness of the credobaptist critiques such as Duane Garrett’s “Meredith Kline on Suzerainty, Circumcision, and Baptism,” *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright (B&H Academic, 2007): 257-284. Garrett seeks to refute Kline’s connection between circumcision and baptism in three ways: 1) general critiques of Kline’s covenant construct based on developments in ANE covenant studies, 2) specific textual arguments to negate the continuity, and 3) direct analysis of the important Colossians 2:11-12 passage. A lengthy treatment by an esteemed scholar such as Garrett deserves to be fully addressed and not dismissed which is not the intent here, but it can’t be done adequately and still be a straightforward presentation of the subject of this article. My own assessment of Garrett is threefold as well. 1) While some of Kline’s conclusions and constructs have been overturned by subsequent scholarship, the specific matter of the connection made in Colossians 2:11-12 is not ultimately dependent upon them. The same could be said of Garrett’s inability to see the important covenantal context of the biblical wisdom material. 2) While the specific textual arguments need assessed, they generally are the product of hermeneutical approach and at times exegetically overreach. For example, Garrett’s assertion that the “not like” of the New Covenant (Jer 31:32) means something like “completely unlike” eliminates any continuity between the sign, a continuity of some type which Colossians 2:11-12 apparently perceives, as does his “all or nothing”

credo-baptist reader as to why otherwise sound and biblical Reformed Christians would baptize children with such seemingly thin New Testament warrant; and it aspires to do so by appropriating Kline's insights on the meaning of circumcision in its Old Testament context and the nature of the connection between it and baptism under the New Covenant. For many paedobaptist readers this may provide important exegetical support to an assumed practice. For the credo-baptist it will provide a measure of confidence that your paedobaptist brethren truly believe their case is biblical and not merely based on tradition even if in the end it is not convincing to you.

What was the significance of circumcision the Old Testament, particularly in Genesis 17? Extra-biblical literature reveals that circumcision was practiced broadly in the Ancient Near East (e.g. Egypt and Mesopotamia) sometimes as a puberty or prenuptial rite. It exists as early as 3,000 B.C., possibly originating in Mesopotamia, the region from which Abraham came. In Egypt, it was apparently reserved only for high caste individuals. While similar in general respects, these extra-biblical practices differed significantly from the prescribed practice of the Old Testament established in Genesis 17 and regulated through the Mosaic Law. While Egyptian circumcision seemingly involved only a dorsal incision – that is, a cutting of the foreskin along the top – Hebrew circumcision called for the complete removal of the foreskin. While the Egyptian version was administered strictly to high caste males as a puberty rite, Abrahamic circumcision was administered to all males from near infancy, including even proselytes. This background may shed light Josh 5:2, 9.³

At that time the LORD said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time.”

And the LORD said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away (גלל) the reproach of Egypt from you.” And so the name of that place is called Gilgal (גלגל) to this day.

choice between autosoteric sacerdotalism or credobaptism. 3) Garrett's remaining points deserve to be addressed, such as whether scriptures teaches that circumcision is simply “the I.D. card for membership in the community,” (264) especially in light of Romans 4:11 description of it as a “seal of the righteousness he [Abraham] had by faith.” The following discussion implicitly deals with those.

³ Scripture citations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

Verse 9 employs a pun on the place name – the reproach of association with Egypt has been removed or “rolled away” (*galal*), hence the place name *Gilgal*. Many interpreters take verse 2 to mean that the second generation, those entering the land under Joshua, had not been circumcised. Under this approach, the first generation had so accommodated to life in Egypt that they neglected to apply the covenant sign to their children. Verse 9 describes therefore the initial circumcision of the second generation.

But if Joshua 5:2 is read against the background of Egyptian dorsal circumcision, its meaning may be deeper. It may well be that the Israelites had performed circumcision upon their sons in Egypt, but only the partial Egyptian version and not the complete removal of the foreskin as prescribed by God in Genesis 17. In other words, they were not truly circumcised by the “rolling away” of the foreskin.

Joshua makes clear elsewhere that the Israelites observed Egyptian and Mesopotamian worship practices.⁴ Moses testified frequently that they often wished to return to Egypt.⁵ As accommodated to life in Egypt as the first generation had become, it is highly plausible that they adapted Yahweh’s circumcision to Pharaoh’s just as they adapted Yahweh’s image to the bull gods of Egypt (Ex 32). I consider it likely that in Joshua 5:2 God was commanding Israel to perfect the defective Egyptian circumcision by completely removing the foreskin as He had commanded Abraham. The incised though still-present foreskin of the Egyptian circumcision was a reproach (הַרְפָּה, NRSV “disgrace”) upon Israel. It signified the idolatrous disposition of the first generation in light of the need to be wholly consecrated to God upon entering the promised land.

Considering this circumcision sequel in Joshua 5 prepares us not to look more fully at the prescribed circumcision given to Abraham in Genesis 17. Students of covenant theology will be familiar with the common five element of the Hittite suzerainty treaty form which provides the literary/historical context for the covenant with Abraham. These are preamble (identifying the suzerain), historical prologue (recounting the suzerain’s beneficent dealings with the vassal); stipulations (stating the suzerain’s requirements of the vassal); sanctions (blessings for obedience, curses for disobedience) and provision for renewal (how the relationship is to be continued

⁴ Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.” (Josh. 24:14; cf. Ex. 32).

⁵ Ex 16:3; 17:3; Num 11:5, 18; 14:3; 20:5; 21:5

in the face of changing circumstances). In Genesis 17 we find the substance of most of these elements if not the actual treaty form.³ In Genesis 17:1b God identifies himself as “God Almighty” (אֱלֹהִים לְבַד). We find a comprehensive stipulation in 1c (“Walk before me, and be blameless”) as well as the specific stipulation to keep the sign of circumcision (vv. 10b-14). The sanctions appear in blessing (v. 8) and curse form (v. 14). These elements are descriptive of biblical covenants, not prescriptive. I.e., they are not a form to be rigidly imposed upon every biblical instance of covenant-making, but used as a guide to recognize where covenants are ratified in scripture and how the elements of a covenant are involved in divine-human interactions.

Such covenants were typically constituted in a ratification ceremony. In such a ceremony the parties would swear oaths to signify their entrance into the binding, sanctioned relationship. The oaths consisted primarily in reciting the curse portion of the sanctions. While the entirety of the covenant relationship was in view – stipulations, blessings, and all – the oaths were taken as a synecdoche, a part for the whole, and consisted in reciting the covenant curses. A trivial analogy would be the way children might sometimes swear “Cross my heart and hope to die!” or “If I’m lyin’ I’m dyin’.” The still-practiced oaths of court testimony are similar: “So help me God.”

The swearing of the oaths were often accompanied by the bisection of animals, laid out on the ground, between which the parties of the covenant would walk as they took the oaths. Genesis 15 is a clear example. In the ritual killing of the animals beforehand, the parties would identify with the animals so that the death of the animals symbolized what would happen to the parties if they broke covenant.

Kline provides an example from an extra-biblical covenant between Ashnurnirari V and Mati’ilu. As Mati’ilu placed his hands upon the head of a ram before it was slaughtered, he stated

This head is not the head of a ram; it is the head of Mati’ilu, the head of his sons, his nobles, the people of his land. If this named [sin] against this treaty, as the head of this ram is cut off, his leg put in his mouth [...] so may the head of those named be cut off [...] This shoulder is not the shoulder of a ram, it is the shoulder of the one named [etc]⁶

Normally both parties would pass between the pieces to signify the potential covenant curses, though noteworthy in the case of Genesis 15 is that God alone does

⁶ Kline 41.

so. As has been widely noted, this variation from expectation signifies that God accept the potentiality of curse not for himself alone but for Abram as well, but not exempting Abram from the comprehensive stipulation of faith and specific stipulations (see refer to Gen 26:5 below).

Because of the commonness of this practice, the oath/curse became a synecdoche for the covenant. Such is the case in Genesis 17:10 where the circumcision sign is referred to as “my covenant” by God. (See also Deut. 29:12 where “covenant” and “oath” are used as parallel terms.) Thus, the symbol which signified that a descendant of Abraham was part of the covenant God made with Abraham also symbolized the curse sanctions. The point here is significant. To bear the covenant sign and to be regarded as being a member of the covenant community was not an automatic guarantee of blessing. It represented *potential* curse *or* blessing.

For Abraham and the original readers of Genesis, circumcision reminded them of many things, but one thing in particular it signified was responsibility, the indispensable response required of everyone who bore the sign. It is essential to understand that conditionality and grace are not mutually exclusive. The emphatic “Now as for you” (v. 9) is issued notwithstanding the divine promises (vv. 6-8).

This responsibility had two horizons, responsibility toward God, yes, but also responsibility toward the covenant community. To receive this sign made one part of the Abrahamic family, the covenant community, along with all of its attendant social obligations. The special blessings which attached to the covenant were only available to those within the covenant community. To belong to the Lord meant to belong to his people. Thus it was necessary that all under the household covering of Abraham be marked in this way (servants and even livestock). This involved both obligations toward fellow family members as well as risks posed. The blessings of God were not given to those outside this family even though the sign itself was not a guarantor of blessing.

The sign also signified a vertical dimension, that the circumcised person was under divine authority, subject to all God’s commands. To be sure, the promises were graciously offered and their proportion was well in excess of the value of the obedience rendered. But the sign alone was insufficient to effect blessings. It signified God’s reign first and foremost before it signified his grace. And the standard for that reign was God’s revealed will. While the Abrahamic covenant was unilaterally imposed and while God alone swore the self-imprecatory oath of the covenant, it would be incorrect to say that the Abrahamic covenant was unconditional. Gen 17:1 is a condition – “walk before me, and be blameless.” “You shall keep my covenant” by

circumcising every male eight days and older is a condition (vv 9-10). The cutting off of the uncircumcised communicates a condition (v 14). Subsequently we are told that Abraham was given God's "charge" (מִשְׁמֶרֶת), "commandments" (מִצְוֹת), "statutes" (חֻקֹּת), and "laws" (תּוֹרָה). (Gen 26:5) The gracious, monergistic nature of the promises did not preclude conditions as testified to in the potential curse/blessing signification of the covenant sign.

The uncircumcised male was to be "cut off" (כרת) which was to effect what was symbolized in potential by circumcision. If the sign of potential curse/blessing was not administered, then final judgment was to be enacted in the cutting off of that person from the covenant community. Such a non-compliant member of the community was to be treated as reprobate because the presence of covenant non-conformist presented a threat to the rest of the community (as in the case of Ex 4:24-26 and Josh 5:9).

Conversely circumcision signified consecration. While implicit in the act itself, it is explicit in that the removal of the foreskin represents setting apart for a sacred purpose. Leviticus 19:23 is instructive here.

When you come into the land and plant any kind of tree for food, then you shall regard its fruit as forbidden (ערל). Three years it shall be forbidden (ערל) to you; it must not be eaten.

Here the expression used to describe the fruit of the land is literally "uncircumcised." "Forbidden" is the correct semantic equivalent here, but the point is that something uncircumcised is forbidden while its opposite constitutes holiness, as v. 24 makes clear.

And in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy (קֹדֶשׁ), an offering of praise to the LORD

To be circumcised is to be holy in the sense of "set apart." As in the case of the fruit of the land, the circumcised person was dedicated to the Lord. This understanding of circumcision is reflected later in the prophet Jeremiah.

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD;
remove the foreskins of your heart,
O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem;

lest My wrath go forth like fire,
and burn with none to quench it,
because of the evil of your deeds.

—Jer. 4:4

This proves significant in view of the sign representing the oath/curse of the covenant. People and things (e.g. tabernacle vessels) were to be set apart for the Lord, but the setting apart did not spare those things the curses of the covenant if they not did conform to the covenant as in the case of Nadab and Abihu as well as the camp of Israel as a whole. The law, through its divinely-authorized substitutes, provided remedies for covenant-breaking, but the existence of those provisions proves the point – to be in covenant with God is not to be spared divine judgment, but rather to be subject to potential curse or blessing.

Because circumcision was applied to the reproductive organ of the male, it also signified the corporate aspect of God’s covenant. This is true both of the sin factor—circumcision indicates the need for removal of sin—as well as the consecration factor. In other words, both in sin and salvation, God worked through families (see Ex. 34:7). Note that the sign was to be applied to all eight-day-old males (v. 12). This is in contrast to surrounding practices of circumcision as a puberty rite, which was applied at entrance into adulthood, as well as its function as a caste distinction (for in the case of the Abrahamic covenant, it was open to Gentiles ([Gen. 17:12b])). Of course in the New Testament this egalitarianism is advanced further through the elimination of ethnic and gender distinctions for the common life of the church (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).⁷

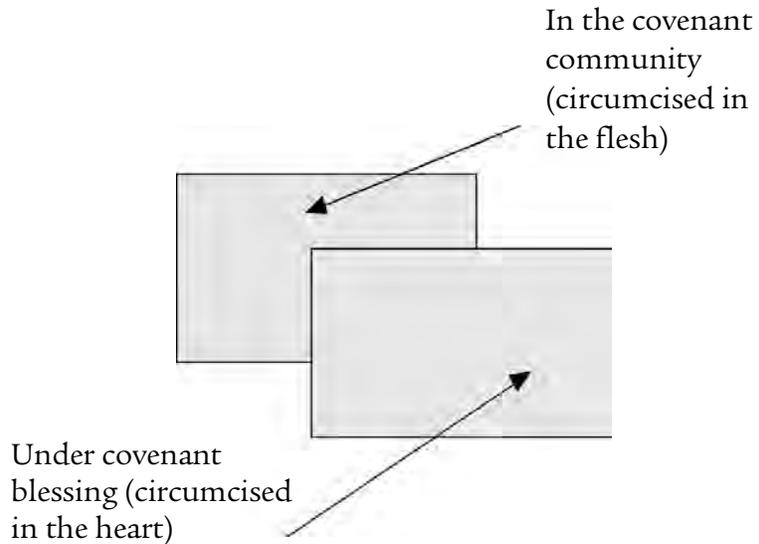
In the Old Testament, circumcision was never to be regarded as a merely physical act. For example, ““Circumcise then the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.” (Dt 10:16) or “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” (Dt 30:6) And “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; / remove the foreskin of your hearts, / O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem.” (Jer 4:4a)

The visible sign was never to be considered apart from an inward reality. Moreover, the visible community was never to be understood as coextensive with

⁷ One cannot extrapolate this automatically to issues of hierarchy within the church. Note that where there *is* a gender issue in dispute, Paul omits the male/female portion of his egalitarian formula so as not to be misunderstood as contradicting himself (1 Cor. 12:13).

those who truly believed (see the diagram). Nevertheless it did not relieve anyone who was identified with the visible community of bearing the external sign. This is precisely because the sign was not a guarantor of blessing, but rather of potential curse or blessing depending upon whether the condition of true faith was met.

This is an important way in which circumcision and baptism correspond. Both are intended as outward signs of an inward reality. Among the baptized there would be the reprobate who, having tasted of covenant privileges and turning away, would be subject to a severer judgment. (Heb 6:4-6). This distinction belongs to the New Covenant as well as the Old. It is the only basis on which we can preach the prophetic warnings of the Old Testament prophets to the New Testament church.



By now it should be clear that though the sign of circumcision was administered according to the command of God, it did not signify only blessedness. It signified potential curse or blessing. And those who possessed the sign of the covenant while remaining covenant breakers would eventually be *cut off* from God's people.⁸ The curse symbolized in the oath sign would become a reality. In instances where circumcision did not signify the actual removal of sin from an individual because they did not act on the promises by faith, circumcision foreshadowed their removal from the presence of God and the people of God.

Having developed the meaning of circumcision in its Old Testament context, we may now consider its correspondence to its New Testament analog baptism. This comparison has its legitimacy in the fact that these two great signs were the signifiers

⁸ Cf. Ex 12:15; 12:19; 30:33; 30:38; 31:14; Lev 7:20; 7:21; 7:25; 7:27; 17:4; 17:9; 17:10; 17:14; 18:29; 19:8; 20:3; 20:5; 20:6; 20:17; 20:18; 22:3; 23:29; Num 4:18; 9:13; 15:30; 15:31; 19:13; 19:20; Judg 21:6; 1 Sam 2:33; Pss 37:9, 22, 28.

of membership in the covenant community. One could not belong to the covenant people without the sign in their respective redemptive epochs. But Paul makes all the more clear the legitimacy of this comparison when he credits baptism as the means of the believer's ultimate circumcision.

¹¹ *In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col 2:11-12)*

How is it that circumcision is fulfilled by baptism? Here it is proper to interject that a journey not well begun is a journey that is difficult to complete. When we come to the question of whether paedobaptism is God's will for the church we must start with the right question. Often it is asked, "Where in the New Testament are we commanded to baptize children?" While there are many ways of answering this question (see the standard works mentioned above which do so), it is the wrong question. If a Reformed hermeneutic sees fundamental continuity between the Old and New Testaments such that the covenant of grace as promised in Genesis 3 is administered through the various epochs of redemptive history until the fullness of time in the coming of Jesus Christ, then the question ought to be "Where does the New Testament command us to stop applying the covenant sign to children of believers?" Unlike the clear teaching of the New Testament regarding the fulfillment of the ceremonial law, there is nothing that remotely suggests that the children of believers are being placed outside the covenant community with the coming of Jesus. Such is a case built on inference.

If baptism was described as a guarantee of divine blessing, then there might be a case based on good and necessary consequence to do so. But the New Testament indicates that the sign of baptism functions in the same way as circumcision – a sign of potential accursedness or blessedness dependent upon whether God's promises are met with faith in its recipient.

An illustration may help. Suppose I invite you to my home for dinner. Since you have never been to my house, you ask for directions. I tell you that there is no way to get off track. Simply take the main road until you come to my house. This is because, when I drive from my house to yours, there is not a single turn in the road. However, what I neglect to tell you, is that in driving from your house to mine there

are forks at which other roads merge into our common road. They just happen to be forks pointed in your direction. When you are driving opposite of the way I would travel, you come to junctures which make the route unclear.

This is what it is like in general trying to read the Old Testament starting from the New Testament. Yes, we are to read the Old in the light of the New, but the New is completion of the Old Testament story. A few years ago I met a formerly renowned Reformed baptist pastor who had changed his view on the baptism of children. When I asked him how that happened, he replied, “I realized I needed to read the Bible like a Jewish mother instead of like a baptist pastor.”

On another occasion I was participating in the theological interview of a couple sensing a call to take the gospel to Yemeni Bedouins. Although they had not given the matter a full study, the husband said his leaning was toward believer’s baptism. I asked whether he had given full missiological consideration to the prospect of telling those Muslim Bedouins that after nearly four thousand years, their children would no longer be administered the sign of God’s covenant. It was that prospect which gave him the opportunity to reconsider. We rightly expect that the New Testament would give us at least one encounter in which Jesus or the apostles would tell Jews to take the children to the proverbial nursery, but we have only the opposite “bring them to me.”

Attempting to prove paedobaptism from the New Testament working back to the Old provides many opportunities for losing one’s way. There are multiple considerations which determines the turns one takes—sacramental theology, ecclesiology, eschatology, beliefs about spiritual formation, and others. All of these affect the extent and nature of the perceived continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments and, as such, constitute interpretive *a priori* which inherently allow and disallow certain conclusions. Those *a priori* are not above examination, but they at minimum demand awareness on our part.

Another interpretive impediment is treating circumcision as the fertile soil in which the legalistic formalism of works righteousness grows. The above references regarding heart circumcision should suffice to show that there is no basis for this prejudice, but so also is remembering that circumcision originates in the gospel soil of the Abrahamic covenant. Yes, Paul speaks of Abraham’s righteousness imputed by faith before he received the sign (Rom 4:11). But every male descendent of Abraham thereafter was to receive this sign “of the righteousness which is by faith” at eight days old. Circumcision was not a legalistic or formalistic overlay of Mosaic origins, but “a seal of the righteousness which is by faith.” Under the gracious arrangement of the

Abrahamic covenant, the application of the sign of faith prior to the evidence of faith was normative. In fact, to wait until faith appeared risked being “cut off” for non-compliance.

Returning to the prior assertion that circumcision signified the curses of the covenant, we can see the same is true of baptism. While baptism does signify washing in some New Testament contexts (e.g. Acts 22:16), it is a polyvalent sign which also signifies a judgment ordeal in other contexts. In drawing the parallel between Noah’s flood, through which Noah’s family “were brought safely through water,” (1 Ptr 3:20) Peter wrote “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...” (v 21) Baptism is not a spiritual bath in that context, but rather a vindication based on union with Christ in his resurrection.

Similarly, the Red Sea through which Israel passed (but not in which they were immersed) refers to that judgment ordeal as “baptism.” (1 Cor 10:2) Perhaps most explicit is Rom 6:3-5.

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Here baptism clearly signifies burial, going down into the grave, the curse of death. No Reformed baptist or paedobaptist would insist that baptism is a guarantee of deliverance from sin and death apart from saving faith. Even the person baptized as a believer must be justified by faith in order to rise with Christ through the judgment waters of baptism. The unbelieving baptized person is no less lost than the unbaptized unbeliever, just more accountable for having said he believed.

In this respect, baptism in the New Testament functions the same way as circumcision in the Old Testament; it signified potential curse or blessing contingent upon whether it is joined with faith. When it is joined with faith, the person is united to Christ both in death and resurrection. When it is not, baptism signifies the destiny of the unbeliever.

As mentioned above, one’s view of baptism is not wholly dependent upon one’s exegesis. Probably the most influential *a priori* influence is one’s view of the church.

The paedobaptist sees the New Testament church as the natural and inevitable development of redemptive history, the fruition and fulfillment of the progress of redemption, in light of the coming of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the two rectangles juxtaposed in the above diagram represent the church in the New Testament just as well as the church of the Old, though with greater efficacy due to the inauguration of the kingdom of God through the work of Christ and the giving of the Spirit. Natural as well as grafted in branches may still be cut off (Rom 11:20-21). The New Testament continues to witness to presence of tares among the wheat, a reality which a faithful credo-baptist will acknowledge alongside his paedobaptist friend as he continues to call for faith and repentance even among the baptized.

However, when the credo-baptist insists that the church consist only of those in possession of saving faith, he is saying that those two rectangles must be identical—that there should be no distinction between those under covenant and those who are blessed. Up to this point we have seen that such a conception of the church goes contrary to the dual signification of both circumcision and baptism. And practically speaking, credobaptism does not effectively prevent unbelievers from receiving the covenant sign of baptism—especially as commonly practiced under revivalistic methods. The Reformed baptist must begrudgingly admit that vast majority of credo-baptists apply baptism as a result of a decision, not of conversion. It is hoped that these decisions represent conversions, but often they do not. Conversion can only be judged by careful examination and sustained observation. Paedobaptists have not cornered the market on nominalism.

Similarly, credo-baptists (like paedobaptists) will encourage their children to call God “Father” and to act “as if” they believe until that time a credible profession is manifested. They do not (with rare exceptions) forbid them from praying the Lord’s Prayer until an age of discretion. They may even encourage their pre-convert children to memorize it.

The church is to view itself as the true circumcision. “For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” (Phil 3:3) Physical circumcision is set aside as a requirement for believers in the New Testament because the Jewish-Gentile, male-female followers of Christ constitute the consummated people of God (Gal 5:6).

But while abrogating circumcision as the external sign of inclusion among God’s people, Paul explicitly connects it to baptism as the new sign specifically in relation to its signification of potential covenant curse and blessing in what may be called “the true circumcision of Jesus.”

It is true that Jesus was circumcised physically on the eighth day according to the stipulations of the Law (Lu 2:21), but Col 2:11 refers to a greater, more significant, circumcision. Paul there explains how followers of Jesus, as the true circumcision, have been circumcised.

¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col 2:11-12)

Our circumcision was achieved by “the circumcision of Christ” which had the effect of uniting us with Christ in baptism. Here the connection is very direct – baptism accomplishes the consummate circumcision.⁹ But to what does “the circumcision of Christ” refer? The two principal options for understanding the genitive “of Christ,” both grammatically possible, are the subjective genitive – Christ has circumcised us – or the objective genitive – Christ himself was circumcised. The correct semantic choice between subjective and objective must be determined by the context and that context is provided by Col 1:21-22.

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him...

What becomes clear through this context is that Christ’s death is what reconciles us to God, makes us holy and blameless, removes our reproach, and presents us before Christ. It makes clear that the genitive of 2:11 is an objective genitive, that Christ was circumcised (i.e. “cut off”). In Christ’s atoning work he was cut off, exiled, purged from among the blessed, subjected to the curses of the covenant. “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” (Gal 3:13) Thus now the curse has been fulfilled for us by him and in him so that we are reconciled to God. If we are united to him by faith, we are also raised with him from death (Col 3:1-3). Jesus Christ

⁹ Not, of course, apart from faith as the condition of union with Christ.

did not merely trim away our reproach (subjective genitive), but he became a reproach. And thus, in his passive obedience, he fulfills what Isaiah wrote:

By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people? (Is 53:8)

The covenant signs of circumcision and baptism, just as the covenants themselves, demonstrate great unity in their purpose. As outward signs they could never be the substance of saving faith, but they, in their respective epochs of redemptive history, serve as aids to faith as, through them, God would signify membership among the people of God. This was so that faith could be learned through the warnings of the curses embodied in them and the prospect of covenant bliss in the blessing offering. If baptism is a sign of faith it has no precursor in redemptive history, but as a sign of membership in the covenant community which holds forth blessedness in believing and being cut off for unbelief, it is a resounding voice in the chorus of covenant witnesses through the ages until “the fullness of time” and until the consummation of the ages.

Psalm 110 Reconsidered: Internal and External Evidence in support of a NT Hermeneutic

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The subject of this article focuses upon the well-known Psalm 110. That this particular poem caught the attention of numerous writers of the New Testament is evident by the generally well recognized fact that it is the most commonly quoted or alluded to psalm within the NT. Of particular interest for these writers was their fascination with David. They referred to his future, royal descendant using the epithet *אֲדֹנָי* “my lord” (v. 1) instead of the more expected title of *בֶּן* “son”—a designation that was commonly used in reference to Judean kings in the line of David. “Son” also best describes the relationship of David with any future progeny of his; in a general sense, they all would be his “sons.” The claim of the NT writers in their understanding of Psalm 110, in particular the opening line “The LORD said to my lord,”¹ is as follows: David’s reference to a future descendant of his as my “lord” (as opposed to “son”) suggests that David saw him as his superior because this future offspring would not be a mere human figure, but rather an embodiment of the divine Yahweh himself (cf. Mark 12:25-27; Acts 2:34-35).

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that this notion that Psalm 110 alludes to a human manifestation of the divine Lord is not an invention of the NT writers, nor is it a forced reading of the text of Psalm 110. Rather, this reading follows a flow of thought that can be discerned internally within Psalm 110 itself as well as within its surrounding poetic context, specifically Psalms 111, 112, and 113. This interpretation of the Davidic king of Psalm 110 also resolves a significant point of dispute in psalms study, namely, the assertion that the figure of David is alive and well in the psalter, particularly in Book V, even after the disastrous depictions of rejection in Psalm 89. In other words, the book of Psalms does not portray the Lord as abandoning His covenantal promise of an eternal kingdom to the sons of David by replacing them as a divine monarch of Israel in post-exilic Israel. Instead, Psalm 110 confirms that the Lord is true to His promise to David by portraying the coming of an ideal and victorious Davidic king. Although it seems highly unlikely that the OT

¹ Translations of Scripture are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

readers would have concluded that the “lord” of David is an embodiment of the divine Yahweh, given the internal-exegetical and external-canonical evidence it was not unreasonable for the NT writers to make the conclusions that they did.

The prophetic nature of this psalm is seen in the opening line, particularly the use of the technical term דָּוִד . It is clear that not only Psalm 110, but also the entire book of Psalms was received by the NT community as prophecy that is fulfilled in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth. After establishing the prophetic nature of Psalm 110 (and the book of Psalms as a whole), I continue by examining the exegetical evidence within Psalm 110 and propose that there is a subtlety to the text that suggests a tight correlation between the Lord Yahweh and the “lord” of David. I then examine the relationship of Psalm 110 to the psalms that follow it. These two prominent figures (Yahweh and the “lord” of David) are given their own individual poetic focus in the subsequent psalms, namely Psalm 111 and Psalm 112 respectively. Whereas Psalm 111 is a hymnic praise of the Lord Yahweh, Psalm 112 is a praise of the human king, specifically David’s “lord.” The near-identical descriptions used of the Lord Yahweh in Psalm 111 and the human king of Psalm 112 give the impression of literary union between the “lord” of David and the divine Yahweh. A similar type of close association between the two can be seen in Psalm 113.

Before a robust analysis can be undertaken, an examination of the structure and content of Psalm 110 must be understood in order to appreciate the internal correlation between Yahweh and the “lord” of David. Although the intent of this article is very specific—to support the divine identity of דָּוִד in verse 1 made by the NT authors—brief and general comments are helpful before digging into the particulars. This is also necessary in order to see the canonical relationship between the psalm and its surrounding context. Thus we begin by making a few preliminary remarks on the psalm.

I. Comments on Psalm 110

The psalm is composed of two units (strophes). 1) Verses 1-3 describe the divine Yahweh’s empowerment of a human, royal descendant of David in his military battles, and 2) verses 5-7 describe his ongoing military success at a universal level. I take verse 4 as a rare isolated poetic line that provides a clarification on the nature of the battle imagery found throughout the psalm (see below). I analyze the poetry as follows:

A Psalm of David. The LORD says to my Lord:²

¹ Sit at my right hand /
Until I make your enemies /
your footstool;³ //

² Your mighty scepter⁴ /
The LORD sends forth from Zion; /
Rule in the midst of your enemies //

³ Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power /
in holy garments;⁵ from the womb of the morning /
the dew of your youth will be yours //

⁴ The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind /
You are a priest forever /
after the order of Melchizedek //

⁵ The Lord is at your right hand /
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath //

⁶ He will execute judgment among the nations, filling them with corpses /
he will shatter chiefs over the wide earth //

⁷ He will drink from the brook by the way /
Therefore he will lift up his head //

² In this article, the slash / is used to represent mid-pauses that separate cola. A double slash // is used to represent the end of a poetic line.

³ Literally, “as a footstool for your feet.”

⁴ The ESV translates, “The LORD sends forth from Zion your mighty scepter,” where “your mighty scepter” is the direct object of the verb “send.” For the sake of the poetic stichometry, the object “your mighty scepter” is placed before the verb and thus the A-colon of a tricolon. This also reflects the word order in the MT.

⁵ By use of the semicolon, the ESV appears to join the phrase “in holy garments” with the previous poetic line, and “from the womb of the morning” as the opening part of the next, which creates two unusually long poetic lines. I suggest removing the semi-colon and see a gapping of the phrase עַמֶּיךָ יְדָבַרְתָּ “your people will offer themselves freely” from the previous colon. See below for more details.

Heading

This is a “psalm of David.” I follow the traditional view of the *lamed* as marking authorship, thus a psalm authored by David. However, the particle **נְאֻם** occurs in this heading, which is commonly used to introduce words of prophecy (see below). This has led many to believe that the writer of the psalm is a prophetic figure, someone other than David, and thus the “lord” referred to in verse 1 is presumably David himself. The NT writers interpret this differently, seeing David as the author, although in part this may be due to the fact that they were following the standard Jewish opinion that the Psalms as a literary work were entirely composed by David.

In further support of Davidic authorship, it is helpful to observe that the particle **נְאֻם** also occurs in 2 Samuel 23:1, which is the “last words of David.” The occurrence of that prophetic particle in that context supports the possibility that it was indeed David who wrote this psalm and did so anticipating a future, ideal king in his line.

Given that David authored this psalm, of particular interest to the NT writers is the phrase that I consider as part of the heading of the psalm, **נְאֻם יְהוָה לְאֵלֵי** “an oracle of Yahweh to my lord.” Many commentators see this prophetic statement analogous to the oath that the Lord takes in verse 4 concerning the priestly identity of the future messianic king. Each divine speech is seen as introducing the large poetic units of verses 1-3 and 4-7.

This interpretation is possible, but the syntactic similarities between this opening verse and other headings within the psalter suggest instead that this is just a heading. This opening line is not a complete sentence. It is merely a statement that seems to introduce the entire psalm as prophetic. A dangling clause like this is consistent with the syntax that is found in other headings throughout the psalms. The similarities between these two halves (as will be demonstrated below) suggests the entirety of the psalm is the prophetic word uttered in the divine throne-room (vv. 1-3), which will be fulfilled on earth (vv. 5-7).

Verse 1

This is a tricolon where the first colon is a divine command by Yahweh. This corresponds with the imperative in verse 2, “rule in the midst of your enemies,” which creates a grammatical inclusio that binds verses 1-2:

Sit at my right hand /

Until I make your enemies /
your footstool; //
Your mighty scepter /
The LORD sends forth from Zion /
Rule in the midst of your enemies //

The phrase “right hand” is most likely metaphorical for a place of prestige and honor. As the Lord is the true king of Israel (Ex 15:18; Ps 93:1; 95:3; 97:1; 99:1), this future descendant of David is given the authority to rule at his side, thus he sits on “the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel” (1 Chr 28:5; cf. 29:23; 2 Chr 9:8). While this earthly king is protected in the security of the throne of the Lord, it is the Lord Himself who will vanquish his enemies and suppress them for David’s future “lord.” However, it appears that the location of the Davidic king does not stay within these safe confines in verse 2.

Verse 2

This verse continues the oracular word. However, whereas in verse 1 Yahweh spoke in the first person (“I will make your enemies a footstool”), in verse 2 he speaks in the third person (“the LORD sends forth from Zion”). Not only is there a change in voice, but there is also a change in the location of the earthly king. Where verse 1 finds the king at the “right hand” of Yahweh, in verse 2 he is presumably sent “from Zion” and ruling “in the midst of your enemies.”

The reference to the king’s “mighty scepter” (מִטְּהָרֵם) alludes to his reign, as the Hebrew word can refer to the rule of a king (cf. Jer 48:17 where the identical phrase מִטְּהָרֵם also occurs). John Goldingay suggests that this may be a metonymy for the king himself.⁶ This is possible. Having been seated at the right-hand of the Lord and thus establishing his authority, he is now sent out to engage in battle with divine blessing and sustenance. It is also possible that this is a figurative reference to a royal army who fights the wars of the king. This view is consistent with the images that follow in verse 3. It would be hard to imagine, however, a depiction of a royal army without their king leading them into battle.

⁶ John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 3, *Psalms 90-150* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; ed. Tremper Longman III; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 294-295.

In either case, this metaphor has the king curiously no longer at the divine right-hand (as in v. 1), but rather in the “midst of your enemies.” This suggests that the Lord will establish the dominion of this human king so that he may vanquish his enemies, and this will be done by divinely empowering his military prowess. Notice that verse 1 says the Lord will conquer the Davidic foes while verse 2 says the earthly king will do the same. The connection between the Lord and the “lord” of David is extremely strong. This common motif is further developed within this psalm.

Verse 3

Verse 3 poses the most difficulties of the entire psalm, both text critically and interpretatively. The numerous textual issues in this verse are reflected in the textual apparatus of *BHS* as well as in the majority of commentaries. Even if one favors any of these variant readings, the primary interest of this article remains unaffected.

I take this poetic line as a tricolon. In the A-colon, the people of the king themselves volunteer their military allegiance in his service on “the day of his power,” referring to his military campaigns. The text says they are a “free-will offering,” meaning they will sacrifice their very lives out of loyalty to his cause (cf. Judg 5:2).

The B-colon is difficult. I take the phrase “holy garments” (ESV) better as “holy splendor” (cf. NASB, KJV, NKJV, NIV) which describes the *glorious* military success of the people.⁷ The adjective “holy” anticipates the priestly image that is found in verse 4 (see below for further details). The phrase “from the womb of the dawn” I take as a metaphorical reference to the very beginning of “the day of your power.” From the very moment that the king begins his military campaigns, these people serve him with undying commitment and obedience to his desires without question.

⁷ The reading of this verse is highly disputed; thus I do not hold to my view dogmatically. For those who also read this line “holy splendor,” see Nancy deClaissé-Walford, *The Book of Psalms* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 834; John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, trans. James Anderson from the original Latin and collated with the author’s French version (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 296, 302. For those who read as “holy mountains” (thus emending the MT), see Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150* (TOTC 16; London: Inver-Varsity Press, 1975), 429; Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101-150* (WBC 21; Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 109; Charles Augustus Briggs, *The Book of Psalms* (ICC 2; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1907, 1976), 373, 377. See Franz Delitzsch, *Psalms*, trans. Francis Bolton (Commentary on the Old Testament; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 696. See Goldingay, *Psalms*, 295-296, whose uncertainty can be seen in the fact that he provides comments on both “holy splendor” and “holy mountain.”

I also suggest that the phrase עֲמִידָה נְדָבָה in the A-colon should be read as gapped in the B-colon. Thus the line reads literally, “Your people will be a free-will offering on the day of your power / in holy splendor (your people will be a free-will offering) from the womb of the morning / the dew of your youth will be yours //.” Whereas the A-colon mentions when the people will offer themselves freely (“on the day of your power”), so the B-colon describes the extent of their service: it will be from the very moment he begins his war (“from the womb of the morning”), presumably until it is completed, that results in glorious victory (“in holy splendor”). The gapping of the phrase “Your people will be a free-will offering” allows for the presence of the phrase “from the womb of the morning,” which could not be included otherwise for poetic reasons.⁸

The C-colon ends this line by describing the type of people who constitute this royal army, meaning they will be “your youth.” The young men of Israel are the people who will dedicate the strength and power of their youth for the cause of the king. The imagery of the “dew” may allude to the imagery of the “dawn” from the B-colon, which is the time of day when dew can be found. The phrase “dew of your youth” appears to be a reversal of images from the B-colon’s “womb of the dawn,” where the “youth” parallels “womb” and “dew” parallels “dawn.” The poetic development in verse 3, therefore, is as follows: the A-colon states who will fight for the king, their loyalty, and when this battle will take place (“in the day of your power”); the B-colon provides their success and the immediacy of their war-like acts; the C-colon describes the youthful strength and exuberance of those who will fight for the Davidic king.

Verse 4

While I do not see that the “oracle” of verse 1 must parallel the “oath” of verse 4 (marking the beginnings of the two halves of Psalm 110), the fact that there is a divine oath in verse 4 is significant. This is similar to the self-maledictory oath that the Lord takes upon himself in Genesis 15 in the covenant with Abraham. In that arrangement, the Lord also made a divine promise that he confirmed with an oath.

⁸ For an explanation on the system of syntactic constraints that limit the length of a poetic line, thus keeping them terse, see Michael O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997); cf. Peter Y. Lee, *Aramaic Poetry in Qumran* (Chico, CA: Scholar’s Press, 2015), 49-61, where a modified form of O’Connor’s system of syntactic constraints is applied to Aramaic poetic texts.

The Lord also “swore an oath to David his servant” in Psalm 89:4 (cf. v. 36, 50; Ps 132:11) where he promised eternal kingship in his family line. He does the same here.

The oath differs in that it is the priestly nature of the royal seed of David that is promised. The sons of David could not be priests in the order of Aaron, so their priesthood comes by way of a divine oath in a different order. This suggests that there was a latent priestly element to the Davidic kings (cf. 2 Sam 8:18) that becomes more explicit as the history of redemption progresses.

This divine oath assures the human king that he will be a priest “in the order of Melchizedek.” The mere mention of Melchizedek alludes back to Genesis 14:18 and his royal office that also possesses a priestly component. This priest-king union is similar to Israel’s covenantal identity as a “kingdom of priests” in Exodus 19:6. It is rare to see these two offices explicitly converge within one person. The priestly role of Israel is significant in light of the divine mandate to purge their homeland of Canaan of all unholiness. Their role as a priestly-nation (“holy nation” in Ex 19:6) is analogous to the priesthood in their service to the tabernacle and, later, to the temple. As the priests are to protect the sanctity of the dwelling of God (for example, the tabernacle and temple), so Israel as a “kingdom of priests” must do the same at the level of the typological land-dwelling of God (Canaan). The conquest of the land in the book of Joshua is less military and more an act of a cultic people who consecrate the land-dwelling of God from anything/anyone that offends his holy character. The military imagery that permeates Psalm 110, therefore, is not surprising given that this “lord” of David is also a “priest.” Verse 4 is not part of either half of the psalm but rather provides the cultic nature of the king’s military campaign.

One cannot ignore the connection of Melchizedek to the city of Jerusalem, which naturally would also associate Psalm 110 with the establishment of an Israelite presence in that city. The biblical data on the settlement of the city of Jerusalem is complex. It was divinely given as an inheritance to the tribe of Benjamin (Josh 18:28), which they failed to conquer (Judg 1:21). However, it is near Judean territory (Josh 15:8). Judah, like Benjamin, also failed to take the city, according to Joshua 15:63, but not according to Judges 1:8-9. Why Judah is called upon to attack a Benjaminite city is not clear. Yet, 2 Samuel 5:5-9 also states that David rid Jerusalem of any Canaanite presence, which adds even further uncertainty to what happened to the city in the Judges era.

Regardless of the obscurity concerning the inter-tribal interests in this city and the historical setting of its settlement, its importance is clear enough. Not only is it centrally located in Canaan, which allows no preference to either northern or

southern interests, it is the urban city of a priestly ruler (perhaps the only such city in Canaan). This allows further development of the union of these two anointed offices into one single individual. The original *Sitz-im-leben* of the psalm may have been to celebrate the ultimate conquering of the city and the enthronement of the Davidic ruler upon its throne as the new capital of Israel. Canonically it establishes and heightens the anticipation that the “lord” of David will also be a “priest.” This priest-king image becomes increasingly explicit as the post-exilic era begins (cf. Jer 33:15-22; Zech 6:9-15). This is also a major theme in the development of OT messianism and the background of the messianic identity of Jesus of Nazareth.

Verses 5-6

The king was seated at the right-hand of the Lord in verse 1, but here it is the Lord who is seated at the right-hand of the king. More will be said regarding the position of the Lord below. Verses 5-6 describe the defeat of “kings,” “nations,” and “chiefs.” The promise of victory given in verses 1-3 is accomplished in verses 5-6 and his victory over earthly rulers occurs “over the wide earth.” Just as we saw in verses 1-2, there is another connection between the Lord and the Davidic king where similar descriptions and images are applied to both. Where verse 2 says the “lord” of David will conquer his enemies and rule within their midst through the use of an undyingly faithful army (verse 3), verses 5-6 say it is the Lord who will defeat these enemies. As the psalm continues, we are given the sense that the two figures are brought into a closer identity with each other.

Verse 7

The victorious king (or the Lord?) can now satisfy his thirst after a well fought war and thus lift his head triumphantly.

II. The Prophetic Nature of the OT Psalms

Having made some preliminary comments concerning Psalm 110, we now move on to examine the prophetic nature of the psalm as well as the entire psalter as a whole. Given that the NT texts refer to Psalm 110 as prophecy that was fulfilled in Christ and that my goal is to demonstrate a continuity between Psalm 110 and its NT usage, this seems an important hermeneutical principle to establish.

As mentioned above, the psalm opens with the use of the particle נִאֻם. The fact that this word has strong prophetic connotations has been well recognized by its countless occurrences within the prophetic literature in reference to divine revelation. This invites readers to understand Psalm 110 less as song and more as prophecy that will be fulfilled in the divine plan of God in the history of redemption.

When regarding the psalms as a whole, we must focus our thoughts on the most significant individual associated with them, namely David. His prophetic function has been largely overshadowed by his more obvious and prominent royal function. However, his role as a prophet does have strong support within OT texts. For example, consider 2 Samuel 23:1–7, which records the last words of David. This poem identifies him for what he was well known as, namely the “anointed of the God of Israel” (king) and “the sweet singer of Israel” (psalmist). Nevertheless, these final words are said to be נִאֻם דָּוִד בֶּן־יִשׂי וְנִאֻם הַגִּבּוֹר הַקָּמַם עַל יֵשׁוּעַ “an oracle of David the son of Jesse, an oracle of the man who was established on high.” As in Psalm 110, so also in 2 Samuel 23 the prophetic particle נִאֻם occurs (twice in this passage). These final words of David, therefore, are to be understood as prophetic utterances.

David’s prophetic function has further support in Nehemiah 12:24, 36 and 2 Chronicles 8:14, where David is called “man of God.” This title is commonly used for those who hold the office of prophet (Josh 14:6; Judg 13:6, 8; 1 Sam 2:27; 9:6; 1 Kg 12:22; 13:1, 4-31; 17:18; 20:18; 2 Kg 4:7; 2 Chr 25:7; Ps 90:1). In the context of these passages, the title “man of God” seems to refer to David (re)establishing the priestly cult of the temple service. This is analogous to Moses who functioned similarly in the original cultic worship of the tabernacle. Moses also is called a “man of God” (Deut 33:1), thus the prophetic designation in these post-exilic texts may allude to David as a second Moses. Moses, however, is also the great prophet of Israel (Deut 18:15-22; cf. Num 12:6-8; Deut 34:8-12) and it is easy to see a prophetic overtone to this title as applied to David, especially since it has a strong prophetic connection throughout the OT.

This prophetic function of David (and thus the Davidic psalms at the very least) is also the view of the ancient community of Jews in Qumran. The great psalm scroll discovered in Qumran has a line that states as follows: “All these he [David] spoke through prophecy which was given to him by the Most-High God” (11QPs^a 27.11).⁹ The Qumran community must have also been impressed by these OT texts

⁹ See Sue Gillingham, “From Liturgy to Prophecy: The Use of Psalmody in Second Temple Judaism,” *CBQ* 64 (2002): 483–84. Gillingham demonstrates that this prophetic understanding of the Qumran

that highlighted David's prophetic role and thus identified his most well-known literary work (the book of Psalms) as prophetic.

The OT precedence of David as prophet is also the background to several NT passages that further support the messianic-prophetic hermeneutic of the psalms. Consider the passage from Acts 2:30 in which the Apostle Peter cites Psalm 16 and states in reference to David, "Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of Christ." For Peter, David was a prophet who wrote in eager anticipation of the events in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, something that Peter witnessed firsthand.

Acts 1:16 is also helpful for illuminating the prophetic function of David: "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus." Notice that the text specifies that the betrayal of Judas was anticipated by David. This was in fulfillment of Scripture. In fact, this passage states the prophetic function of David very vividly by saying the "Holy Spirit spoke" through him.

The connection between the Spirit and the OT prophets is significant since they were the divinely appointed emissaries of the Lord and were thus required to be "inspired" by the Spirit in order to speak His authoritative word. One of three prerequisites required in the formation of an Israelite prophet was to be empowered by the Spirit of God—the other two being a divine call (Isa 6:1-13) and entrance into the heavenly council (Jer 23:18).¹⁰ Various verbs are used to communicate this Spirit-empowerment: נפל "fell" in Ezekiel 11:5; נשא "lifted" in Ezekiel 3:12, 14; 8:3; 11:1; 43:5; נחה "rested" in Numbers 11:25; בוא "entered into" in Ezekiel 2:2; 3:24; צלה "rushed upon" in 1 Samuel 10:10; 11:6; cf. 1 Samuel 16:13 David; לבש "clothed" in 1 Chronicles 12:18-19; 2 Chronicles 24:20; cf. Judges 6:34. This relationship between the Spirit and the prophet led the prophet Hosea to be known as a "man of the Spirit" (Hos 9:7). In fact, for the Lord to speak "by the Spirit" is to speak "through the prophets" (Neh 9:30; Zech 9:7; 2 Pet 1:21).

According to Acts 1:16, David was inspired by the Holy Spirit like the OT prophets. For that reason, the passage specifies that the Spirit spoke "by the mouth of

community was not limited to within the psalm scrolls but was also in numerous other sectarian texts within the Qumran texts.

¹⁰ See Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 57–59.

David.” The is unmistakably an allusion to Deuteronomy 18:18, where the Lord says He will place His divine words into the “mouth” of Moses and the subsequent prophetic office-bearers, is unmistakable; see also Numbers 12:8 where the Lord speaks with Moses “mouth to mouth”; cf. Exodus 4:12, 15; Deuteronomy 8:3; Jeremiah 1:9; 2 Chronicles 36:12. All this demonstrates that David served a prophetic function that was not only reminiscent of the ancient prophets, but also specifically the paradigm-prophet Moses.

Another relevant (and more well-known) passage concerning the prophetic nature of the Psalms (and thus David) is from the gospel of Luke 24:44, where Jesus on the day of His glorious resurrection said to His disciples, “all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” The point here is clear—Jesus understands the Psalter to be speaking prophetically about Himself. The majority of translations, however, mistranslate this passage by including a definite article before “psalms” when in fact there is none in the original Greek text.¹¹

Luke 24:44 should be understood then as follows: “all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and *the Prophets and Psalms* must be fulfilled.” Thus the strong impression that Luke 24:44 gives the reader is that the book of Psalms is to be understood as either prophetic in nature or possibly even an extension of “the prophets.” Luke 24 is also helpful in establishing another hermeneutical principle. The psalms are not only prophetic, they are messianic. Another way of stating this is to say that the psalms are prophetic *because* they are messianic.

III. Internal Evidence

We established above why it is reasonable to interpret Psalm 110 (and the entirety of the OT psalter) prophetically. In addition to the particle וְ in verse 1, which we established as commonly used in the OT as introducing divine revelation in both prophetic literature and in David, the prophetic-messianic nature of the psalm can also be discerned by comparing similarities between the two halves, verses 1-3 and

¹¹ The suggestion that Luke 24:44 alludes to an early tripartite OT canon dated to the days of Jesus and the first generation of apostles is inconclusive. When this lone reference to an alleged tripartite OT canon is compared to the enormous amount of biblical references to “the Law of Moses and the Prophets”—that is, a two-fold canon as witnessed in Matt 5:17; 7:12; Luke 16:16, 29; Acts 13:15; Rom 3:21 to name only a few—the notion of an *early* three-fold canon division grows increasingly dubious.

5-7. It is important to observe these similarities as it demonstrates that the NT writers were heading in the proper prophetic direction in seeing a union between Yahweh and this royal Davidic figure. We move on to examine these internal-exegetical evidences regarding the identity of the “lord” of David.

Within the superscript of verse 1—יְהוָה לְאֲדֹנָי “an oracle of Yahweh to my lord”—the psalmist makes a distinction between the divine Yahweh and a future descendant of David, who is referred to by the royal epithet “lord.” The following verses, specifically verses 2-3, go on to describe the “lord” of David by referring to his place of prestige and authority—that is, he is seated at the right hand of Yahweh in verse 1; he is successful as a champion in his military campaigns in verse 2; and the people of Israel volunteer their services as a freewill offering to this royal monarch, nullifying the need to issue conscriptions (v. 3).

After introducing the royal descendant also as a high priest in the ancient order of Melchizedek (v. 4), the second half of the psalm begins. However, unlike the first half, the primary subject in the second half is a bit elusive. Verses 5-7 recapitulate the same motif as found earlier in verses 1-3, that being the military success of the priest-lord of David. Therefore, it would be understandable to identify the same human-descendant of David from verses 1-3 as the primary subject in verses 5-7. In essence, Yahweh promised success to this “lord” of David (vv. 1-3), so the “lord” of David succeeds and prospers (vv. 5-7).

However, the subject of verse 5 (and thus the center of attention in the second half of the psalm) is referred to as אֲדֹנָי, in which the final vowel in the MT is *qāmeš*. This specific vocalization of the title אֲדֹנָי (that is, אָדֹנָי with final *qāmeš*) is consistent with references to the Divine *Adon*, that being the LORD Yahweh Himself and not to a human king; see Genesis 18:3, 27, 31; 20:4; Exodus 4:10, 13; 5:22; 34:9; Numbers 14:17; Joshua 7:8; Judges 6:15; 1 Kings 3:10, 15; 22:6; 2 Kings 19:23; Ezra 3:10; Nehemiah 1:11; 4:8; Job 28:28. There are over fifty occurrences of this divine use of the title אָדֹנָי in the psalter. It is frequently found in apposition to the divine name (יְהוָה) throughout the OT; see Genesis 15:2, 8; Deuteronomy 3:24; 9:26; Joshua 7:7; Judges 6:22, 16:28; 1 Kings 2:26; 8:53; Psalm 30:9; Isaiah 30:15; 50:4; 52:4; 61:1; 65:13, 15; Jeremiah 1:6; 4:10; 7:20; 32:17, 25; 50:31; Lamentations 1:14; 2:1; numerous occurrences in the book of Ezekiel. It also occurs frequently in 2 Samuel 7 (vv. 18, 19, 20, 22, 28, 29). It is tempting to think that the use of the epithet אָדֹנָי in Psalm 110 was triggered by its common use in this quintessential passage on the eternal promise made to David that one of his sons would always be on the throne of Israel (2 Sam 7:16).

The use of the title יהוה in verse 5 invites confusion. If *Yahweh* is envisioned as the agent of the activities in verses 5-7, then it raises the question why the psalmist uses the equivocal epithet יהוה—the same title that is used in reference to the human-descendant of David in verse 1. Why not continue using the Divine Name *Yahweh* (יהוה), which he does comfortably in verses 1, 2, and 5? Alternatively, he could have used the term בן “son” in verse 1 when speaking of the royal descendant of David, which would have been appropriate, even expected, in light of the language in 2 Samuel 7:14 (“I will be to him a father, and he will be to me a *son*”) and Psalm 2:7 (“You are my *son*”).

Adding further ambiguity is the fact that the human “lord” of verses 1-3 shares similar characteristics with the divine “Lord” in verses 5-7. There are five areas of shared traits. First, both figures are described as successful in their military conquests. In fact, the military success of the royal “lord” of David in verses 1-3 is accomplished due to the divine blessing of Yahweh. Second, there is an anthropomorphism in verse 7. Due to the “divine” vocalization of the epithet יהוה in verse 5, the majority of commentators presume that the subject of verses 5-6 is the divine Yahweh. However, they also say that the subject in verse 7 abruptly shifts to the human king.¹² The reason for this is due to the obvious description of drinking from “the brook by the way” and his lifting “up his head”—activities that best fit those of an earthly, human king. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the focus of the psalmist has shifted from the human “lord” to the divine “Lord.” In light of this, John Goldingay comments concerning verse 7, “the language might seem much more appropriate to a human king than a divine King...yet there is no indication that the subject has changed, so the line likely continues to refer to the divine King, the divine warrior; pictured in light of the way the human king acted.”¹³ Third, the reference to the “right-hand” side occurs for both. Whereas the “lord” of David is seated at the “right hand” of Yahweh in verses 1-3, it is the Divine *Adon* who is at the “right hand” in verses 5-7. Fourth, the day of victory for the “lord” of David is called “the day of your [the king’s] power” (v. 3), which corresponds in the second half of the psalm with the “day of his [the Lord’s] wrath” (v. 5). Fifth is the ambiguous use of the title יהוה mentioned earlier.

¹² For example, see Allen, *Psalm 101-150*, 118; Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (2d ed.; Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 1955), 132.

¹³ Goldingay, *Psalms*, 298-299.

The combination of the five factors above makes identifying the primary subject of the actions in verses 5-7 difficult since both Yahweh and the royal scion of David are described in nearly the same manner. (1) Both are victorious in their military conquests in verses 1-3. (2) The Davidic figure is obviously an “anthropos” while the Lord seems to be described in anthropomorphic terms (v. 7). (3) Both are seated at the right-hand side. (4) The “day of your [the king’s] power” is a clear parallel to “the day of his [the Lord’s] wrath.” (5) Both are referred to by the title יְהוָה . Verses 1-3 is the divine word that promises military success to David’s “lord.” He will “make your enemies your footstool” (verse 1); he “will send forth from Zion your mighty scepter”; therefore, “your people will offer themselves freely” (verse 3). Verses 5-7 describe the realization of those promises. Yahweh instructs David’s lord to “sit at my right hand” (v. 1), therefore, he is “at your right hand” (v. 5). He promised victory over his enemies (v. 1b, 2), therefore, “kings” and “chiefs” will be “shattered” (v. 5, 6). According to Derek Kidner, the movement from verses 1-3 to 4-7 is a scene-change “from throne to battlefield.”¹⁴ However, who is receiving these blessings? In other words, who is at the center of this psalm? Who is Psalm 110 really about? Commentators do not agree.

As mentioned above, John Goldingay believes it is the divine King who is the subject throughout the entire psalm. Derek Kidner also views it similarly.¹⁵ Contrary to Goldingay are the comments of Charles Briggs. He attempts to solve this lack of clarity by emending the MT vocalization of יְהוָה (with a final *qāmeṣ*) in verse 5 to יְהוֹה (with a final *hîreq*, the same as verse 1) and says “this makes the [human] king the subject of all following verbs and removes all difficulties.”¹⁶ Scholars have been guilty of emending the MT so that the text can fit within their preconceived notions of the text or concepts of poetry. That appears to be what Briggs is doing here. Granting his suggested emendation only solves the last of the five parallels between the Lord and the human king, as enumerated above. We are still left with the sense of a unity between these two figures.

¹⁴ Kidner, *Psalms*, 431.

¹⁵ Ibid., 427, “So King David speaks in the psalm as the prophet who declaims the enthronement oracle to the Messianic King, corresponding to the oracle given to other kings at their anointing or crowning.”

¹⁶ Briggs, *The Book of Psalms*, 378. See also Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms III, 101-150* (AB 17A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1970), 118–119.

It is doubtful that the readers of this psalm would have imagined what Christian theologians understand as the incarnation—God manifest in the flesh. It seems more likely that the close association between the human descendant of David and the divine Yahweh was the way in which the idealism of the future, earthly king was articulated. By the time of the collapse of both the northern and southern kingdoms, it was clear that the kings of the past brought about their sociopolitical demise. The promise of a coming son of David, however, was good and there arose an anticipation that an ideal Davidic son would come to restore them to their homeland.

It is possible that in the mind of the ancient poet the future Davidic monarch would not only be *representative* of Yahweh, but he would also be *representational* of Yahweh. David Mitchell makes a similar comment when he states that “there seems to be a conflation of Yahweh and the king.....to stress their oneness of will and purpose.”¹⁷ Consequently, Psalm 110 is an exaltation of a future “lord” of David whose idealism is expressed by utilizing divine attributes. This explains why the descriptions of the two are similar, nearly identical.

IV. External (Canonical) Evidence

Having established that the internal-exegetical evidence within Psalm 110 anticipates a Yahweh-like messiah (“lord”) of David, we now move on to consider the external-canonical evidence that supports the rise of the same figure.

Ever since the publication of Gerald H. Wilson’s doctoral dissertation, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*¹⁸ in 1985, the discussion on the canonical location of any given psalm (or psalm collection) within the OT psalter has dominated the field in psalms research.¹⁹ Whereas the previous generation of psalms scholarship focused upon the literary genre (*Gattung*) and usage (*Sitz-im-leben*) of individual psalms within

¹⁷ David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (JSOT Sup 252; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 263.

¹⁸ Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBL Dissertation Series 26; Chico, CA: Scholar’s Press, 1985). Brevard Childs served as Wilson’s advisor to his dissertation and thus the canonical-critical methodology of his teacher had a clear impact upon his work in the psalms.

¹⁹ For a brief introduction on this growing field of study, see Jamie E. Grant, “Editorial Criticism,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (eds. Tremper Longman and Peter Enns; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2008), 149-156.

the religious life of ancient Israel, current discussion is more interested in the editorial arrangement of the 150 psalms and the final form of the psalter. According to Wilson, the book of Psalms should not be read as a randomly ordered collection of individual Israelite poems. Rather, the canonical location of each psalm was intentionally and strategically positioned in the post-exilic era by editors who also linked neighboring psalms by using various literary and poetic devices available to them. While this remains a nascent area of study, some of the preliminary findings have yielded encouraging results.²⁰ Regarding the manner in which these psalms are interlinked together, the work of David Howard is most impressive.²¹ He says there are three ways in which adjacent psalms are joined together: 1) key-word links; 2) thematic connections; and 3) structure/genre similarities.

When these three methods are applied to the psalms in Book V, a case can be made for the literary integrity of Psalms 110-113 as a unit. The result of this canonical analysis shows that the similarities seen between the Lord Yahweh and the “lord” of David internally within Psalm 110 also occur at the external-canonical level.

1. *Regarding key-word links:* There are three examples of word-links that bind Psalms 110-113. First, there is a noticeable and significant distribution of the key words *הוֹדָה* and *עוֹלָם*. Michael Snearly makes a compelling case that Book V can be divided into smaller poetic groups: Psalms 107-118, 119 as a unit of its own, 120-137, and 138-145. One of the arguments that he uses to group Psalms 107-118 is the consistent occurrence of the words *הוֹדָה* and *עוֹלָם*. Within these psalms, however, the

²⁰ Although Wilson’s work persuaded many to accept that the psalter was a purposefully edited book, this canonical approach has its dissenters. For a critique of this canonical/editorial view of the psalter, see Erhard S. Gerstenberger, “Der Psalter als Buch und als Sammlung,” in *Neue Wege der Psalmenforschung* (eds. Klaus Seybold and Erich Zenger; HBS 1; Freiburg: Herder, 1994), 3-13; Roland E. Murphy, “Reflections on Contextual Interpretation of the Psalms,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clinton McCann, Jr.; JSOT Sup 159; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 21-28; Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book* (JSOT Sup 222; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Goldingay, *Psalms*, 36.

²¹ David M. Howard Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93-100* (UCSD Biblical and Judaic Studies 5; Winona Lake, IN; Eisenbrauns, 1997).

word עולם is concentrated within Psalms 110-113.²² To illustrate this distribution, Snearly provides the following chart:²³

107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114/115	116	117	118
חסד	חסד	חסד					חסד	חסד	חסד	חסד
עולם			עולם	עולם	עולם	עולם	עולם		עולם	עולם

The absence of חסד in Psalms 110-113 is glaring, especially when compared to its consistent occurrence in the rest of the psalms within this collection. On the other hand, עולם has a strong, unifying presence.²⁴ From a key-word analysis, this suggests that Psalms 110-113 can also be seen as a subgroup within the larger collection of Psalms 107-118.

A second example of key-word links is seen specifically between Psalms 111 and 112. Outside of the word עולם, there are limited key-word links that bind Psalms 110-113. There are other thematic descriptions that add to their poetic unity (see below). There are, however, numerous word-links between Psalms 111 and 112 that strengthen an obvious correlation between these two poems. The descriptions of the figures within each psalm share a striking and profound parallelism, where images of the divine Yahweh of Psalm 111 are remarkably applied to the wise man of Psalm 112, who presumably is to be identified with the “lord” of David from Psalm 110.²⁵ This is not surprising since we saw the same method applied earlier within Psalm 110 itself. Consider the following:

²² Michael K. Snearly, *The Return of the King: Messianic Expectation in Book V of the Psalter* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 624; London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 120-127.

²³ Ibid., 126.

²⁴ For further comments on the structural significance of the word עולם for Psalms 111-112, see Pierre Auffret, “Essai sur la structure littéraire des Psaumes CXI et CXII,” *VT* 30 (1980): 257-279.

²⁵ A case will be made for the royal identity of the wise man of Ps. 112 below.

	Psalm 111 Hymn of Yahweh	Psalm 112 Wise King
1	“Great are the <i>works of the LORD</i> ; Studied by all who <i>delight in them</i> ” (v. 2)	“How blessed is the man who <i>fears the LORD</i> , who greatly <i>delights in His commandments</i> ” (v. 1)
2	“ <i>His righteousness endures forever</i> ” (v. 3b)	“ <i>His righteousness endures forever</i> ” (v. 3b)
3	“He has caused his wondrous works to be <i>remembered</i> ” (v. 4a)	“The righteous will be <i>remembered forever</i> ” (v. 6)
4	“the LORD is <i>gracious and merciful</i> ” (v. 4b)	“he is <i>gracious, merciful, and righteous</i> ” (v. 4)
5	“He provides [gives] food for those who fear him” (v. 5)	“He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor” (v. 9)
6	“The works of his hands are <i>faithful and just</i> ” (v. 7)	“[He] conducts his affairs with <i>justice</i> ” (v. 5)

1. Psalm 111:2 says לְגִדְלוֹת מַעֲשֵׂי יְהוָה דְּרוּשִׁים לְכָל-הַפְּצִיָּהם “Great are the works of the LORD; studied by all who *delight in them*.” Much of the same vocabulary is found in the opening of Psalm 112:1, אִשְׁרֵי-אִישׁ יִרְא אֶת-יְהוָה בְּמִצּוֹתָיו חָפֵץ מְאֹד “How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, Who greatly *delights in His commandments*.”
2. Psalm 111:3b states הוֹדוּ-וְהִדְר פְּעָלוֹ וְצַדִּיקְתּוֹ עֹמֶדֶת לְעַד “Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and *his righteousness endures forever*.” Psalm 112:3b ends with the same exact phrase הוֹן-וְעוֹשֶׁר בְּבֵיתוֹ וְצַדִּיקְתּוֹ עֹמֶדֶת לְעַד “Wealth and riches are in his house, and *his righteousness endures forever*,” where the third person masculine possessive pronouns refer to the God-fearing and obedient man of verse 1. Given that it is Yahweh who is described in Psalm 111, the poet of Psalm 111 may have meant this literally. However, it clearly has a figurative sense in Psalm 112.

3. Psalm 111:4 says זָכַר עֲשָׂה לְנִפְלְאוֹתָיו “He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered.” Psalm 112:6 says לְזָכַר עוֹלָם יְהִי צְדִיק “The righteous will be remembered forever.” The Hebrew word זָכַר occurs in both psalms. In Psalm 111, the “wondrous works” refer to the redemptive accomplishments of Yahweh as seen in the history of Israel. So verse 5 alludes to Yahweh’s provisions for Israel during their wilderness journeys, verse 6 to the conquest of the land of Canaan through the ministry of Joshua, and verses 7-8 to the instituting of the covenant at Sinai. According to Psalm 112:6, it is the “righteous” who will be remembered. This may refer to the Israelite community as those redeemed by Yahweh, or more likely the royal man who is the subject of the psalm. Where Psalm 111 focuses upon the redemptive activities of God as a memorial, so Psalm 112 focuses upon the redeemed people/king as a memorial.
4. In Psalm 111:4, the LORD is described as חַנוּן וְרַחוּם “gracious and compassionate.” In Psalm 112:4, the “lord” of David is also described as חַנוּן וְרַחוּם “gracious and compassionate.” Psalm 112 also adds צְדִיק “righteous.”
5. Psalm 111:5 describes Yahweh as providing material needs, טָרַף נָתַן לִירְאָיו “He provides food for those who fear him.” Psalm 112:9 describes the “lord” of David fulfilling a similar task, פָּזַר נָתַן לְאַבְיוֹנִים “He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor.” The verb נָתַן “give” occurs in both psalms. Where in Psalm 111:5 it is translated above as “provides,” in Psalm 112:9 it is analyzed as the second half of a quasi-verbal-hendiadys with פָּזַר, thus meaning “distributed [literally, give] freely.”
6. Psalm 111:7 says the work of the Lord’s hand is “faithfulness and justice” אֱמֶת וּמִשְׁפָּט while Psalm 112:5 says the “lord” of David will sustain his affairs בְּמִשְׁפָּט “in/with justice.”

As mentioned earlier, the method of “paralleling” the Lord Yahweh with David’s “lord” within Psalm 110 is mimicked at the canonical level. In the same way that Yahweh and the “lord” of David share similar features within Psalm 110, so Yahweh of Psalm 111 and the wise/royal man of Psalm 112 also share similar traits.

A third example of key-word links is seen in the heading “Praise the Lord,” which is found in the opening of Psalms 111–113. The use of that phrase is highly concentrated in the beginning of Psalm 113. Many consider Psalm 113 to be part of

the following subgroup, the so-called “Egyptian Hallel” psalms of 113–118, where the phrase “Praise the Lord” regularly recurs, although not consistently as a heading as in Psalms 111-113.²⁶ It is possible that Psalm 113 serves as a literary transition from one group to the next, analogous to the way in which the book of Deuteronomy transitions from the Pentateuch to both the Former and Latter Prophets respectively.

The ways in which the individual psalms within the psalter are interconnected to each other is a point of current debate. Some reject that there is a shape to the psalter because the means by which scholars explain these interlinks between the psalms differs from psalm to psalm. Such skeptics say that if one begins their study by presuming that there is an order to the psalms, then they will perceive a correspondence, even if one does not truly exist. Thus the entire question of the shape of the psalter appears gratuitous and becomes more a reflection of the creative imaginations of the scholar than a true objective literary phenomenon. In support of this critique, Roland Murphy states, “one can associate freely between one psalm and another in the context of a book. The associations hardly justify a solid context from which to draw conclusions.”²⁷

This criticism is not without warrant. After all, if indeed one is fluctuating between various means and criteria in order to connect one psalm to another, one must ask if there is a true connection there at all. Perhaps another way of stating this is to ask, “does an interconnection between a group of psalms require that only one criteria be used?” Consider, for example, the phenomenon of parallelism, which is generally considered the most outstanding feature that marks a literary work as poetic. Scholars of Hebrew poetry have been critical of any theory on parallelism that sees it as one dimensional (i.e. semantic parallelism only). Newer approaches to Hebrew parallelism have properly recognized that there are also grammatical, syntactic, and even phonological means by which two/three cola can be conjoined together.

If indeed parallelism uses various philological and literary devices to create a poetic unity between two independent units, then by analogy could not the same thing happen at the level of entire poems? In other words, both parallelism and

²⁶ It should be noted that in the LXX the heading “Praise the Lord” occurs at the beginning of Psalms 113-119. In the MT, Psalms 113, 115, 116 end with “Praise the Lord.” The LXX interprets this not as the final line of the psalm, but rather as the introduction to the following one. LXX also seems to take Psalms 114 and 115 as one poem; for support to this unity, see Snearly, *Return of the King*, 197-200.

²⁷ Murphy, “Reflections,” 23.

psalmodic shaping are multi-dimensional phenomena.²⁸ Some of these literary methods available to the ancient editors can be seen in the ways in which Psalms 110–113 are interwoven together.²⁹

2. *Regarding thematic connections:* There is an obvious correlation between the Lord of Psalm 110 with the Lord of Psalm 111, thus both psalms describe the same divine being. There is not as strong and obvious connection between the royal “lord” of David of Psalm 110 with the human figure of Psalm 112. Although the royal identity of the man of Psalm 112 is not explicitly stated, allusions within the psalm do support such a conclusion. Psalm 112 opens with blessing placed upon “the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commandments” (v. 1). Both themes of the fear of the Lord and obedience to the law are characteristics that have strong allusions with Israelite kings. The theme of “the fear of the Lord” has resonances with wisdom traditions, specifically with the book of Proverbs, and Proverbs has direct correlations with a well-known “lord” of David, namely King Solomon (1 Kgs 4). Obedience to the law of God is the outstanding characteristic of the ideal Deuteronomic king as Deuteronomy 17:18-19 stresses so clearly: “he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law; and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them.” The image of a “dawning light” found in Psalm 112:4 is similar to the description of David and the royal kings who will follow him according to 2 Samuel 23:4, “he [David] dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning.” The man of Psalm 112 is triumphant over his

²⁸ As there are skeptics of the “parallelism” between poems, so there are skeptics who reject parallelism in Hebrew poetry. After the days of Robert Lowth, early scholars disparaged his initial three-fold categories of synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic as too simplistic. However, this was replaced with an undisciplined approach to parallelism that produced endless categories of proposed correspondences. In reaction to this, some, like Michael O’Connor who rightfully criticized the undisciplined approach of these scholars, rejected parallelism altogether and saw it as nothing more than a “congeries of phenomenon”; see O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 5. The work of Adele Berlin is helpful in salvaging parallelism as a genuine poetic device; see Adele Berlin, *Dynamics of Hebrew Parallelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985). A case still remains to be made that a similar kind of correspondence occurs between psalms. Until this is established, academic skepticism is not only understandable but even appreciated and welcomed.

²⁹ See Snearly, *Return of the King*, 46-49, 187-188, where he makes the same observation regarding the analogy of parallelism with the editorial process of linking neighboring psalms with one another.

enemies (v. 10) and even trains his offspring to be the same (v. 2); these images of warfare are consistent with the royal-military images found throughout Psalm 110. The man of Psalm 112 is considered wealthy, which is another trait of kings. Psalm 112:9 refers to “his horn” (a royal image) being exalted in honor; cf. 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalm 89:17, 24; 132: 17.

The similar thematic motifs between the two human figures of Psalm 110 and 112 are significant and suggest that the man of Psalm 112 is to be identified with the “lord” of David of Psalm 110. The near vicinity of Psalm 112 to 110 adds further contextual support that they are indeed the same figure.

3. *Regarding structure/genre similarities:* We saw above how the Lord and the human king within Psalm 110 are described using the same images, so much so that we are left with the impression that there is a very strong correlation, possibly even union, between the two. We also saw that the same kind of correlation/union occurs in the two following psalms, 111 and 112. Just as the Lord Yahweh and the “lord” of David correspond to each other in Psalm 110, so also do the Lord Yahweh in Psalm 111 and the human figure in Psalm 112. It is difficult to avoid concluding that the canonical/editorial location of Psalms 111 and 112 was not influenced by the internal mirroring that occurs in Psalm 110.³⁰

Whereas the two figures are portrayed in a near-literary union in Psalm 110, the two are separated and each given a separate, poetic homily in the subsequent psalms. However, the close association between them continues and this is manifest in the organizational structures that the two psalms have in common. In other words, the bipartite structure of Psalm 110 is mirrored in the bipartite organization of Psalms 111-112. Consider the following. (1) Both Psalm 111 and Psalm 112 are composed of ten poetic lines each, where the last line is a tricolon. (2) Each final tricolon diverges abruptly from the psalm's main theme. The hymn of Psalm 111 ends on the theme of wisdom, which was not present anywhere else in the psalm. The wisdom instruction of Psalm 112 ends with a description of the wicked, who are not mentioned previously. (3) Both psalms are acrostically structured, where the first

³⁰ See Snearly, *Return of the King*, 127, where he comments “Psalms 111-112 could also be added in support of the re-emergence of David because they pick up lexemes and themes from Psalm 110. Could they be intended as a type of commentary on Psalm 110?” The uncertainty of his claim can be seen in the fact that he states this in the form of a question and also in that it is found in a footnote. I carry forward his canonical intuition by demonstrating that there is a correlation between Psalm 110 and Psalms 111-112.

consonant in each half-line follows the successive order of the Hebrew alphabet. (4) There is a linkage of the two poems, in that Psalm 111 ends with the same motif that Psalm 112 begins, namely the wisdom theme of the “fear of the Lord” and a praise unto the Lord. So the final line in Psalm 111, verse 10, states “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” and “His praise endures forever!” The opening line of Psalm 112, verse 1, opens with “Praise the LORD!” and “Blessed is the man who fears the LORD!” Given that the final line of Psalm 111 obviously does not fit the content of the rest of the psalm, it is tempting to conclude that this line was not part of the original composition of the psalm, but added by the compiler(s)/editor(s) of the psalter to create a literary bond between the two.

Whereas the two figures of Yahweh and the “lord” of David are conjoined within Psalm 110 then separated with each having their own poetic focus in Psalms 111 and 112, they are brought back into a literary union once again in Psalm 113. The close association between the divine Yahweh and the human royal descendant of David in Psalm 110 is also mirrored in Psalm 113. Psalm 110 has a bipartite structure, where verses 1–3 place emphasis on the “lord” of David as the victorious military warrior and verses 5–7 on the divine Yahweh. Psalm 113 reflects a similar bipartite division, but in reverse order—it starts with the Lord Yahweh and subtly transitions to the human king. The immediate subject of Psalm 113, a hymnic praise, is stated in verse 1, “Praise the LORD.” Thus, it is the divine Lord Yahweh, who receives praise from the psalmist. In fact, the first half of this hymn (vv. 1–4) stresses the divine center of the poem in epic exaltation, which climaxes with Yahweh enthroned among His angelic council in divine glory.

¹ *“Praise the LORD! Praise /
O servants of the LORD /
praise the name of the LORD! //*
² *Blessed be the name of the LORD /
from this time forth and forevermore //*
³ *From the rising of the sun to its setting /
the name of the LORD is to be praised! //*
⁴ *The LORD is high above all nations /
and his glory above the heavens! //*

The second half of the psalm (vv. 7-9) transitions the reader from the majesty of the eternal throne-room to the vision of the work that the divine Lord does upon the earth.

*7 He raises the poor from the dust /
And lifts the needy from the ash heap //
8 to make them sit with princes /
With the princes of his people //
9 He gives the barren woman a home /
Making her the joyous mother of children //
Praise the LORD!*

He is described as the one who provides for the needs of the poor and needy (v. 7). He raises them to be seated with royalty (v. 8). He provides shelter for expecting mothers, thus caring for their social/material needs (v. 9). We must ask, however, how the divine Yahweh provides these earthly needs for the people. Simply put, he does so through the means of his divinely anointed representative, the earthly king—who is implicitly present within the second half of the psalm as the instrument through whom Yahweh governs his created realm, although that earthly king is not explicitly mentioned.

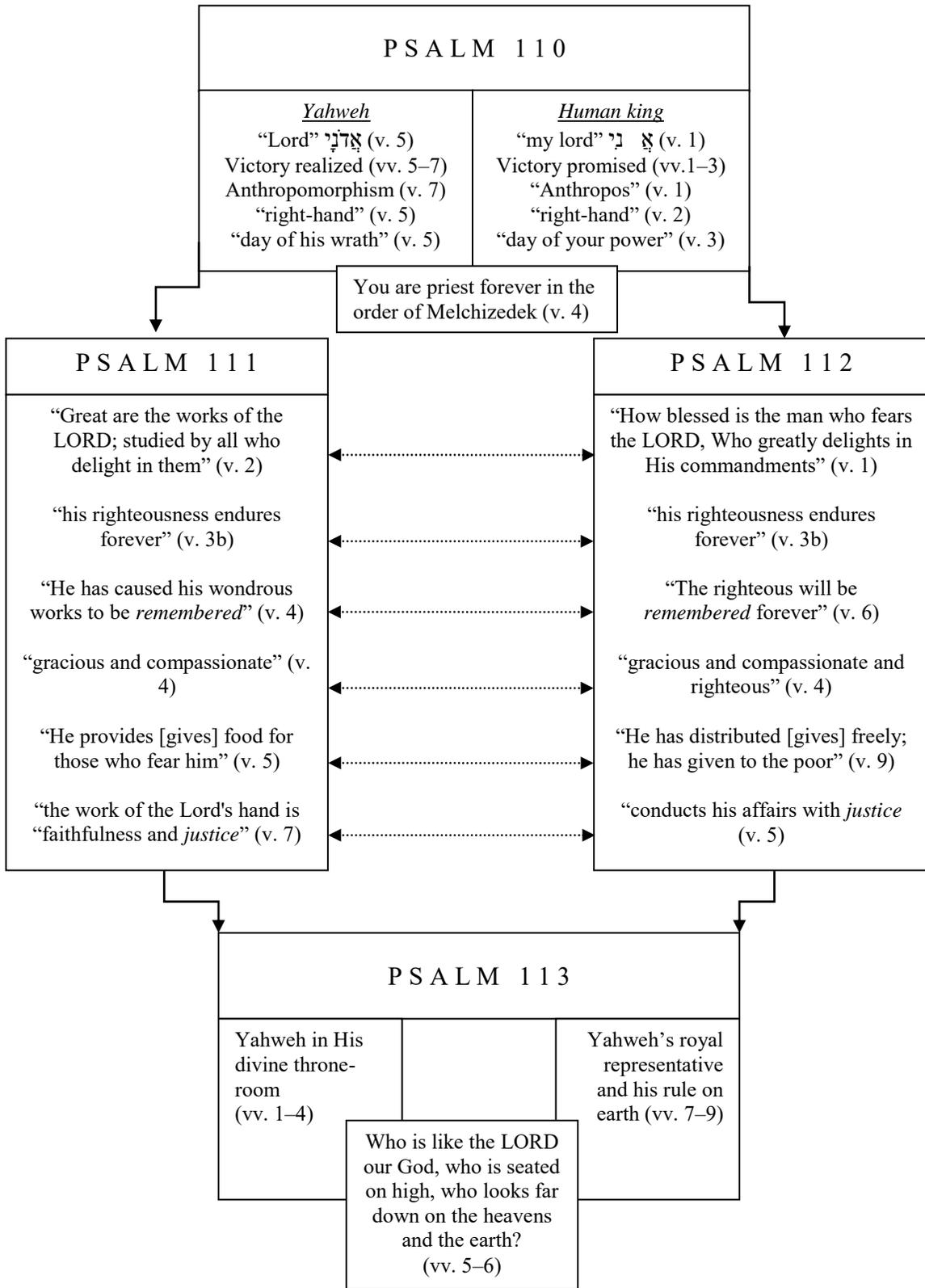
In fact, when one considers the actions described in both Psalm 110 and the latter half of Psalm 113, they capture two significant tasks that are required of the kings of Israel, namely serving as the lord protector of the realm (Ps. 110:1-3, 5-6) and tending to the provisions for the weak and needy (Ps. 113:7-9). Recall that this theme of providing for those in need was also found in Psalm 112:5, 9.

A third attribute can be added to the guardianship and care-provider motifs mentioned above, further demonstrating that the divine Lord of Psalm 110 is closely associated with the royal figure of Psalm 113:7-9. At the very center of this canonical cluster of Psalms 110-113 are two verses, Psalm 111:10 and Psalm 112:1. We saw above that these verses focus upon the wisdom motif of fearing the Lord that leads to having a “good understanding” (Ps. 111:10) and delighting in His “commandments” (Ps. 112:1). As a result, the portrait of the “lord” of David within this canonical collection describes him as an ideal king with Yahweh-like qualities who also conforms perfectly to Deuteronomic standards. He is a victorious warrior who graciously provides for the material needs of his people. He is also one who copies, studies, and meditates on the

law of the Lord so that his heart may not be lifted up above his brethren but rather so that he might provide for their earthly needs—see Deuteronomy 17:18:20.

As in Psalm 110, there is a poetic line at the core of Psalm 113 which does not seem to fit in either half. The two-part structure of Psalm 113 pivots at the hinge point of verses 5-6, which ask, “Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth?” This passage takes the reader from the wonders of the divine heavenly council of verses 1-4 to the activities of Yahweh upon the earth through his appointed royal servant in verses 7-9. This question is not uncommon; it is asked in other places within the OT canon; cf. Exodus 15:11; Job 36:22; Psalm 35:10; 71:19; 89:6; Micah 7:18. The question is restated as a propositional statement in Deuteronomy 33:26; 1 Kings 8:23=2 Chronicles 6:14; Jeremiah 10:7, 16. It is a major theme within the psalter also (cf. Ps. 77).

This is a rhetorical question implying an obvious answer, “there is none like the Lord.” However, is this really true? According to Psalm 110 and 113 and according to the canonical ordering of Psalm 110 in relation to Psalms 111 and 112, there is one person who is like the divine Yahweh. It is the “lord” of David of Psalm 110, who is the ideal, wise/royal man of Psalm 112. The following diagram summarizes the correlation between these two figures and the literary movement within Psalm 110 and its canonical counterparts.



V. Interpretative Implications

The interpretative conclusions made above lead to two implications. The first concerns a proper understanding of the Davidic covenant and the promised messiah within the psalter itself. Gerald Wilson suggested that Books I-III retrace the demise and collapse of the Davidic monarchs and thus the termination of the Davidic covenant. In that regard, Psalm 89, the final psalm of Book III (Psalms 73-89), is a poetic lament that mourns the failure of the house of David and appears to nullify the Davidic promise in favor of a divine monarch. According to Wilson, Books IV-V point to the future life for Israel without a Davidic monarch, where Yahweh himself is their king since the “Davidic covenant introduced in Ps. 2 had come to nothing.”³¹

This is a rather odd conclusion to reach in light of the strong and powerful portraits of the “lord” of David in Psalm 110-113. There is also a large collection of Davidic psalms (דָּוִדִּים) within Book V (Psalms 138-145).³² The impression, therefore, in Book V, especially due to psalms like Psalm 110, is not the end and failure of the Davidic promise, but rather the renewal of the Davidic promise. In response to Wilson, David Mitchell comments,

Yahweh does indeed appear to be king in Book IV, as Wilson suggests, but it seems that, by Book V, David is unmistakably back on the throne. Psalms 110, 132, and 144 depict a Davidic king. Moreover, if the house of David has come to nothing at the end of Book III, why do these later Davidic psalms represent him not conquered, but conquering?...He wakens the dawn with praise, and receives a divine oracle promising success in battle (108). He curses his enemy (109). He will rule from

³¹ Wilson, *Editing*, 213.

³² Many deviated from Wilson on this point, which caused him to adjust his position; for a summary of this newly revised position, see Gerald H. Wilson, “King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (eds. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller; Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), 391-406. He would come to regard Books I-III not as a recollection of the failure of the house of David, but as a poetic collection intended “to foster hope for the restoration of the Davidic kingdom.” He says Books IV and V were later additions “to redirect the hopes of the reader away from an earthly Davidic kingdom to the kingship of Yahweh...to trust in Yahweh as king rather than in fragile and failing human princes.” For a response of this adjusted view of Wilson, see David C. Mitchell, “Lord, Remember David: G. H. Wilson and the Message of the Psalter,” *VT* 56 (2006): 526-534.

Zion, crushing the head of the wide earth and filling it with corpses (110)...The old Davidic and Zion theology is reasserted in the strongest terms (122; 125; 128:5-6; 132:11-18). David is rescued from the sword and sings a new song (144:9-10). The David of Books IV and V may not be doing as badly as Wilson suggests.³³

Michael Snearly approaches the issue similarly when he summarizes the message of Psalms 107-118 as, “David is back! Psalms 107-118 appear, then, to be a response to Psalm 89. They complement Book IV’s dominant theme—Yahweh’s kingship—by bearing witness to the re-emergence of Yahweh’s vice-regent. Yahweh has not jettisoned his covenant with David because his covenant loyalty is eternal.”³⁴

It is true that the exile was in part caused by the earthly sons of David; the key purpose of the book of Kings is to demonstrate this. Indeed, the portrait of David in Samuel is that of a weak and depraved leader. After his ascension to the throne of Israel, David succumbs to fleshly lusts that led to the violation of Bathsheba, the premeditative murder of his faithful military captain Uriah, and the rebellion of his own son Absalom (2 Sam 11-19). In fact, more of the book of Samuel is spent describing this dark time of his life than any of his greatest accomplishments. By the end of the Deuteronomistic History, Israel is in a state of despair. They have been exiled from their homeland and are without any godly leadership. However, the promise that the Lord made to David—that a descendant of his would always be on the throne—was good (2 Sam 7:14), and He would be faithful and true to that promise. It would take a son of David to bring about the Lord’s kingdom, an ideal son of David, a “lord” of David, a Yahweh-like son of David. That is the message of Psalm 110 and its surrounding psalms. The book of Psalms does not portray life without a Davidic monarchy; it eschatologizes the Davidic monarch.

The second implication of this interpretation of Psalm 110 has a direct impact upon its usage in the NT. Recall that the main goal of this article was to show that the interpretative conclusion made by the NT authors regarding the supernatural identity of the future descendant of David was not based upon an inappropriate use of Psalm 110, nor was it a vain attempt to forcibly see Jesus of Nazareth as the *telos* of this psalm (and by effect Psalms 111-113 also) in a way that was unwarranted or violated

³³ Mitchell, *Message of the Psalter*, 79.

³⁴ Snearly, *Return of the King*, 127.

the integrity of the psalm itself. They were not forcing a Christological “square peg” into an ancient-poetic “round hole.” As demonstrated above, there is evidence within Psalm 110—both internally within the psalm and externally within its canonical context—to suggest that there is something significant going on when the psalmist refers to the future Davidic king as “lord.”

What is this significant thing? According to the synoptic gospels in Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, and Luke 20:42-43, the expected term for David to use when speaking of his future kin was “son” because he would in fact be a son/descendant of David. However, he calls him “lord,” which suggests this future son is David’s superior. The ancient readers of Psalm 110-113 perhaps noticed the representational motif of the messianic son of David, which would explain the reason why the psalm portrays Yahweh and the “lord” of David in identification with each other. However, the NT writers take this representational idea a step further by identifying the “lord” of David as the divine Yahweh.

The Apostle Peter does the same in his Pentecost sermon in Acts 2. According to Peter in Acts 2:34-35, the resurrection of Jesus was an eschatological declaration that the person of Jesus of Nazareth was not only the messianic son of David but also the embodiment of Yahweh Himself. This is what made the execution of Jesus so heinous. To support his claim, Peter cites Psalm 110:1, “The Lord [*Yahweh*] said to my lord [*Messiah*, that is *Christ*].” There is a distinction between the two. However, in Acts 2:36 Peter interprets this by saying, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord [“Yahweh”] and Christ [“my lord”], this Jesus whom you crucified.” The inter-connection (or “parallelism”) that was demonstrated above between the two figures of Psalm 110:1 suggests that there is a close association between them—so much so that the identity of the subject of the two halves of Psalm 110 does not have to be between *either* the divine Yahweh *or* the “lord” of David, but rather *both* the divine Yahweh *and* the “lord” of David. In other words, the “lord” of Psalm 110:1-3 (יְהוָה) is the “LORD” of Psalm 110:5-7 (יְהוָה). This is further supported by its canonical surroundings.

Thus within this single person of Jesus of Nazareth is an axis point where the divine king and his anointed royal servant no longer remain separate figures. However, there is a vertical convergence where the two are brought into union together.³⁵ The portrait, therefore, of the human king alluded to in Psalms 110-113 is

³⁵ As mentioned above, another union that interested the New Testament writers involved the reference to the priesthood in the order of Melchizedek in Psalm 110:4. This “lord” of David would also be a high priest in the order of Melchizedek, not from the order of the Levites in the line of Aaron. The book of

not merely the portrait of a godly man, nor is it merely the portrait of a god-like man (representational motif). According to the NT, the truest meaning of the psalm is the portrait of the God-Man. Or, to put it in the language of the Apostle Peter in Acts 2:36, the Lord's Christ (distinction) is Christ the Lord (union).

This convergence of the two figures of Psalm 110 was not mere wishful thinking on the part of the NT writers. Their hermeneutical conclusion was similar to an ancient conclusion. Although the true nature of the "lord" of David may have remained a mystery to the OT readers (cf. 1 Pet 1:10-12), it was not to the writers of the NT. In fact, one could say that they were following the canonical momentum of Psalm 110 and took the next, logical step—one perhaps that could only have been made in the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4). I submit this article as a proposal to support such a case.

Hebrews is outstanding in this regard and in fact is the only place in the NT that not only cites this ancient priesthood (Heb 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:1, 10, 11, 15, 17) but also explicitly calls Jesus as "high priest." The union of these two anointed offices in the person of Jesus Christ is remarkable for two reasons. First, discoveries of the sectarian texts in Qumran suggests that the expectation within Second Temple Judaism was for numerous "messiahs"; see 1QS 9:11 which mentions the coming of the "messiahs [plural] of Aaron and Israel." Therefore, it seems that the messianic hermeneutic for Judaism was to keep distinct these two messianic offices, while the Christian hermeneutic was to see a union. The natural presumption is to believe that the OT also anticipated separate messiahs—one in the line of Aaron and one from David. However, if it can be demonstrated that the OT Scriptures envisioned a union of these two messianic offices in one single individual, then this would support the NT claims of messianic fulfillment in the one Person of Jesus Christ as a legitimate understanding of these ancient texts and does not violate their "Jewishness." Psalm 110 would be one example of this. A second significant factor in the priest-king union in Psalm 110 is to recognize the extraordinary convergence of both a horizontal (priest-king) and vertical (divine-human) line of messianic fulfillment. This centripetal motion within this single psalm makes it truly outstanding and perhaps the reason why it was so favored by the NT writers.

Reflections on a Teaching Career: “What a Great Savior!”¹

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The Chief Academic Officer of RTS, Dr. Bob Cara, asked me to speak on the topic, “what is the one thing you would tell a new, young faculty member starting one’s career at RTS?” I just finished my 23rd year at RTS, and I taught at Grove City College for 13 years before that. With 36 years of teaching experience, I suppose Bob thought I might have something to say. But as I prayed and thought about that question, I was somewhat stumped. What is the one thing I would advise Mike McKelvey or Blair Smith or other new professors here today? I suppose I could tell you a thousand things . . . but what is the one thing? What is the big kahuna? What is the grand salami? What is the big cheese? A passage from Paul gets to the heart of what I want to say.

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God (1 Cor 2:1-5).

I was recently reading about a group of American pastors who decided to travel to London in the 1880’s to hear and learn from some of the great English pastors of the day. On their first Sunday in London they went to hear a famous preacher who pastored a large church of 3,000-4,000 members. The Americans listened to his preaching, and as they left the church they marveled and proclaimed, “What a great preacher! What a great preacher!” The next Sunday the group decided to attend the Metropolitan Tabernacle in central London to hear Charles Spurgeon preach. They listened to him, and as they left the church they marveled again . . . but this time they proclaimed, “What a great Savior! Hallelujah! What a great Savior!”

¹ The following is adapted from remarks made at an RTS faculty retreat.

That illustration underscores my charge to you young scholars today, and it comes from the passage we just read: your duty as a minister of the gospel and as a seminary professor is to direct and point people to “Jesus Christ and him crucified”! You must draw the students’ eyes to Jesus . . . both of their eyes!

I have learned in 36 years of teaching that it is so easy and alluring to make other things the center of one’s ministry in the seminary. I would argue that perhaps the greatest seduction is that we would make ourselves the subject of ministry. See what I have published . . . see how students love my classes . . . see the influence I have at RTS or in the church or in evangelicalism. In this day of narcissism and celebrity professors and pastors, this is dangerous and harmful. It is the siren’s call.

A few years ago, some of you will remember, a well-known writer and churchman spoke at the Evangelical Theological Society meetings. He presented his lecture in a large room with a stage, and behind him was a huge screen projecting his image and presentation. And there were hundreds of scholars and others attending that session. At the close of the session, much to my surprise and chagrin, people rushed the stage to take iPhone photos of the speaker and to have selfies made with him. It was like a rock concert. It reminded me of the time a few years ago that my wife and I went to see da Vinci’s masterpiece the Mona Lisa in the Louvre. We could barely see it, no matter admire it, because of the hordes of people snapping iPhone pictures and selfies with the painting.

Men, we must resist self-promotion and being self-centered in our ministries. Now we can say to ourselves, “well I’m not like that,” but the reality is we are all like that. Calvin said in the *Institutes* that “there is no one who does not cherish within himself some opinion of his own pre-eminence.” We ought to be honest with ourselves, and have a heart to heart with ourselves. We must be like Paul, that monumental exegete, who called himself “a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, set apart for the gospel of God.” A bond-servant! There is no room for hubris and petty pride. Our ministry as seminary professors is about “Jesus Christ and him crucified!”

We need to have the attitude once displayed by Charles Spurgeon. After he had finished preaching one Sunday morning, a man came up to him, and gushingly said, “That was the greatest sermon that has ever been preached!” Spurgeon looked at the man, and said, “Yes, the Devil told me that five minutes ago!”

I have made it a habit in every class that I teach that I present the gospel message; I assume nothing, and I learned that early in my seminary-teaching career. One day I was sitting in my office, and David Jussley, Professor of Preaching at RTS-Jackson, knocked on my door and he had a student in tow. The student was one I

knew well; he was a third year student who had taken a number of classes from me, and he served as an intern in the church where I was an assistant pastor. He was one of those students for whom I had great expectations as he would go into the pastorate. He had all the pedigree: he was brought up in a PCA church, he was part of RUF in college, and was a bright and knowledgeable seminarian. David told me that the student had something to tell me. The student looked at me with tears in his eyes and said, "I have just been converted." He had been listening to another student preach in preaching class, and as he heard the gospel preached plainly he realized that he did not know Christ. During my time at RTS, similar conversions have taken place a number of times. There are lost souls in our midst, and so, even when I am parsing a hithpael verb pattern . . . intensive, reflexive . . . I try not to forget the souls I am dealing with.

Many years ago when I was a young biblical studies instructor, an Orthodox Presbyterian named Bob Atwell sat me down to talk with me. He was one to listen to: he was one of the first students at Westminster Theological Seminary, he had witnessed first-hand the trials of J. Gresham Machen, and he had been in the ministry well over forty years. Rev. Atwell said to me the one thing he tried to remember all the days of his ministry was this saying, "when I look to myself I am discouraged, but when I look to Christ I am encouraged." I know that is not a novel thought, but I think it gets to the heart of what I wanted to say. So, men, my prayer for you is that when students leave your classrooms they will not say "What a great teacher!" but they will say "What a great Savior!"

Transgenderism: A Christian Assessment¹

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Allow me to introduce my topic by way of three short stories. First, the story of Bill—or rather *a* bill, namely, House Bill 2. On February 22, 2016, the Charlotte City Council passed by a 7-4 vote Ordinance 7056, the stated purpose of which was to prohibit discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity in public accommodations, include public bathrooms. This provoked a vigorous debate because the ordinance would have given a biological male who claims to have a female gender identity the legal right to use a public bathroom designated for women (and contrariwise for a biological female who claims to be male). The following month, the North Carolina Senate and House of Representatives passed the Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act—popularly known as House Bill 2 (HB2)—which legislated that in government buildings people may only use bathrooms that correspond to the sex on their birth certificates.

HB2 ignited a firestorm of debate across the nation. It was widely and vehemently criticized for discriminating against transgender people and thereby violating their civil rights. Some opponents characterized it as the most anti-LGBT legislation in the United States to date. Prominent celebrities, businesses, and sports associations vowed to cancel events and withdraw investment from North Carolina because of HB2. In addition, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that it would be suing North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory, the North Carolina Department of Public Safety, and the University of North Carolina, on the grounds that HB2 violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and the Violence Against Women Act.

¹ The following is adapted from the second of two lectures—the Fifth Annual B. B. Warfield Lectures—delivered in October 2016 at the invitation of Erskine Seminary and First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, SC.

The second story comes courtesy of the New York Times. On September 16, 2016, the newspaper published an article in its “Modern Love” series with the title “From He to She in First Grade.”² The article began thus:

When our son turned 6, my husband and I bought him a puppet theater and a chest of dress-up clothes because he liked to put on plays. We filled the chest with 20 items from Goodwill, mostly grown-man attire: ties, button-down shirts, a gray pageboy cap and a suit vest.

But we didn’t want his or his castmates’ creative output to be curtailed by a lack of costume choices, so we also included high heels, a pink straw hat, a dazzling fairy skirt and a sparkly green halter dress.

He was thrilled with these presents. He put on the sparkly green dress right away. In a sense, he never really took it off.

The author recounted how her son continued to wear dresses and other girls’ clothing right up until the day he started school. His mother and father discussed with him whether he wanted to wear those clothes to school, knowing that he would probably be ridiculed and bullied, but he insisted that he wanted to do that—and that’s exactly what he did.

At the end of the first week of school, the boy was quite upset at bedtime, so his mother told him that he could go back to wearing boys’ clothes if he wanted. Her son replied, “No, Mama. I already decided about that. I never think about that anymore.” The author concluded:

He had already decided. He didn’t think about that anymore. And he—she—never looked back. She grew out her hair. She stopped telling people she was a boy in a skirt and started being a girl in a skirt instead.

And we, as a family, decided to be open and honest about it, too, celebrating her story instead of hiding it.

² Laurie Frankel, “From He to She in First Grade,” *The New York Times*, September 19, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/18/fashion/modern-love-transgender-child-identity-parenting.html>.

Two years later, our daughter still sometimes wears the green dress, for dress-up and to put on plays, as we imagined her doing in the first place. Now that she can be who she is on the inside and on the outside, on weekdays as well as on weekends, at home and everywhere else, the sparkly green dress has once again become just a costume.

The third story comes from a 2008 article in the *Christian Research Journal* by Joe Dallas.³

Kim was the most handsome client ever to step into my office. As a pastoral counselor, I work with men wanting to overcome sexual sins, many who, as a first impression, present themselves as self-absorbed, male model types, so an attractive man asking for help wasn't unusual. But tall, muscular, and square jawed Kim immediately stood apart.

"Since this is your first appointment," I said, while Kim completed an intake form, "let's talk about the problem that brought you here."

My new counselee signed the form, fixed a steady gaze on me and dropped the bomb.

"The problem is my chromosomes. I was born female."

I was astonished, and after two decades of counseling porn addicts, homosexuals, prostitutes, and an occasional sex offender, I don't shock easily.

"I've lived most of my life as a man," she continued, "and it's worked! I finally had sex change surgery three years ago, and I've been living with a woman since then. But two weeks ago I got saved at a Harvest Crusade. I'm a new Christian, so... now what?"

Clearly these three stories share a common theme: the rise of transgenderism, both as a social phenomenon and as a cultural movement. But they present very

³ Joe Dallas, "The Transsexual Dilemma," *Christian Research Journal* 31, no. 1 (2008), <http://www.equipt.org/article/the-transsexual-dilemma/>.

different perspectives on that common theme, and they invite different kinds of responses from Christians. The first story is primarily political in nature. The second story is more broadly cultural and raises issues about parenting. The third highlights the pastoral challenges presented by transgenderism. Together they underscore what a complex and challenging cluster of issues we find before us as Christians.

Why is transgenderism an issue all of a sudden? Where did it come from?

In many respects, it isn't a new issue at all. The first documented male-to-female sex reassignment surgery took place in 1930.⁴ Cases of gender confusion—the perception that one's gender doesn't align with one's biological sex—go back even further in history. The practice of transvestitism traces back at least to the time of Moses.⁵ What's new at this point in human history is the mainstreaming—the *normalization*—of transgenderism, driven not only by the power of popular culture (the media, Hollywood, etc.) but increasingly with the force of government as well.

Evidently this is a subject that Christians cannot ignore or evade. We need to evaluate and respond to the issue—or rather the *issues*—very carefully. What's more, we need to do so in a consistently Christian fashion. In this lecture, I offer an introductory assessment of transgenderism from a Christian perspective.⁶ I will begin with some **important definitions and distinctions**, before reviewing some **basic facts** about transgenderism that will set the stage for later analysis. After a brief discussion of the role that **worldviews** play in shaping people's views on transgenderism, I will sketch out (drawing on John Frame's analytical scheme) a **triperspectival assessment**. Finally, I offer some brief remarks on **Christian responses** to the challenges presented by transgenderism.

I. Definitions

Clear definitions are essential for responsible discussions of controversial topics, but we should note that definitions are never entirely *neutral*. They inevitably frame the issues in a particular way, and sometimes in a prejudicial way that nudges

⁴ Horatia Harrod, "The Tragic True Story behind The Danish Girl," *The Telegraph*, February 28, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/2016/04/14/the-tragic-true-story-behind-the-danish-girl/>.

⁵ Deuteronomy 22:5

⁶ I wish to underscore that this is just an introduction to a highly complex issue with many overlapping dimensions, only some of which can be addressed here.

us into conceding questionable assumptions or value judgments. If I were to define Presbyterianism as “that form of Protestant Christianity which seeks to model its ecclesiology and sacramentology on the Bible,” I suspect my Baptist brethren would take issue with that definition—and rightly so—because a prior theological evaluation has been built into the definition.

That caveat aside, I hope here to provide some definitions of key terms that are consistent with a biblical perspective but also avoid prejudging the issues by begging the question or “rigging the deck” when it comes to a Christian assessment.⁷

Ontological sex—a (human) person’s basic sexual identity as either *male* or *female*. When you are invited to complete a form by checking one of two boxes—‘M’ or ‘F’—you are being asked, in essence, to indicate your ontological sex.

Biological sex—male or female according to chromosomes (XX/XY) and physiology (both internal and external, e.g., genitalia and reproductive organs).⁸ Throughout human history, biological sex has been the *primary indicator* of ontological sex; that’s to say, we identify a person as male or female based on his or her physiology. Nevertheless, it’s important to distinguish the concepts of ontological sex and biological sex for the simple reason that we are more than just biological organisms; there’s more to us than our physiology.

Gender—the psychological, social, and cultural manifestations of maleness and femaleness. This is obviously a much broader category than biological sex. For example, our notion of *motherhood* goes beyond the merely biological notion of being a female progenitor. It includes other non-biological features such as maternal attitudes and social roles. Some aspects of gender may be culture-relative (e.g., wearing make-up is considered feminine in many but not all cultures) while other aspects are transcultural (e.g., military leadership as a characteristically masculine trait).⁹

Gender identity—how one *perceives and experiences* oneself as male or female. This is a highly loaded term in contemporary discussions, so we need to be very

⁷ A number of these definitions are adapted from Mark A. Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015). I recommend Yarhouse’s book as a reliable guide on the clinical issues, although I have disagreements with way he approaches the broader theological and moral questions.

⁸ Biological sex is often now referred to as ‘birth sex’, although that’s a loaded term, implying as it does the possibility of a *change* of sex at some time after birth.

⁹ I realize that some may dispute my specific examples here, in which case I invite them to substitute their own! The distinction itself I assume most readers will grant.

careful about how we define and deploy it. Arguably the term was coined with the specific purpose of advancing an ideological agenda (cf. ‘sexual orientation’). The use of the word *identity* here is especially problematic, since it suggests that one’s core identity as a human person is defined in terms of one’s gender.

Nevertheless, such concerns aside, the basic idea behind the term ‘gender identity’ can be grasped by posing this question: *Do you feel male or female?* Your ‘gender identity’ is your answer to that question. Whether or not we accept the terminology, it seems to me that this is a question most people are able to answer in a meaningful fashion regardless of their views on transgenderism. Indeed, gender dysphoria and transgenderism wouldn’t even exist as topics of discussion were it not for the fact that some people answer that question in ways other than their biology would indicate.¹⁰

With these four definitions in place, we’re now in a position to define three further terms: *gender dysphoria*, *transgender*, and *transsexual*.

Gender dysphoria—the (typically distressing) experience of incongruence between one’s biological sex and one’s gender identity. In other words, a man who feels that he is a woman, or a woman who feels that she is a man, has gender dysphoria. Moreover, this internal sense of incongruence can vary in degree: there can be mild, moderate, and severe cases of gender dysphoria.¹¹

Transgender—a broad umbrella term used to describe a person who experiences or expresses a gender identity other than his or her biological sex.

Transsexual—a person who is living as a member of the opposite sex (with respect to his or her biological sex). Such a person may or may not have pursued so-called ‘sex change’ or ‘sex reassignment’ treatment (typically involving hormone therapy and plastic surgery).

¹⁰ In my view it would be more accurate to speak of ‘gender experience’ or ‘gender self-perception’, but for simplicity’s sake I adopt here what has become the standard terminology.

¹¹ It’s worth noting that the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*—the standard reference manual used by psychiatrists—not only replaced the earlier label ‘gender identity disorder’ with ‘gender dysphoria’ but also added the criterion of *distress* to its definition. Thus, in the most recent edition, the experience of incongruence between one’s biological sex and one’s gender identity is counted as a mental disorder *only if that experience is deemed to be distressing*. This definitional shift has been controversial, because the newer definition tacitly assumes there’s nothing clinically abnormal about the experience of incongruence *as such*. This underscores my earlier remarks about loaded definitions.

II. Facts

Let's now review some basic facts which a Christian assessment of transgenderism ought to take into account. Just as there are no neutral definitions, there are also no neutral facts. All 'factual' claims have been subjected to some degree of interpretation. All 'facts' have presuppositions. What I describe here are simply some widely agreed upon claims.

1. According to one recent estimate, about 0.6% of American adults identify with a gender other than their biological sex (i.e., 6 in 1000).¹² These people would be categorized as 'transgender' according to the definition given above.

2. The numbers of adults *clinically diagnosed* with gender dysphoria is markedly lower, because the criteria for that diagnosis are much stricter. According to one estimate, fewer than 1 in 10,000 adult males and fewer than 1 in 30,000 adult females suffer from gender dysphoria.¹³ (Estimates vary widely, partly because the criteria for diagnosis are not consistently understood and applied.)

3. Among pre-pubescent children who experience gender confusion, the majority discover that it decreases over time as they enter and pass through adolescence.¹⁴ Nevertheless, a significant proportion of them go on to identify as either homosexual or bisexual in adulthood.

4. The *causes* of gender dysphoria are basically unknown.¹⁵ As one might expect, there is a vigorous debate over whether the condition is primarily a matter of nature or nurture, but there is nothing close to a scientific consensus on the issue. It remains an open question. Consequently, there's an equally vigorous debate over how gender dysphoria ought to be treated.

¹² Lawrence S. Mayer and Paul R. McHugh, "Sexuality and Gender: Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences," *The New Atlantis*, no. 50 (Fall 2016): 4-143.

¹³ Kenneth J. Zucker, Anne A. Lawrence, and Baudewijntje P. C. Kreukels, "Gender Dysphoria in Adults," *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 12 (2016): 217-47; Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 92.

¹⁴ Mayer and McHugh, "Sexuality and Gender."

¹⁵ Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 61; Mayer and McHugh, "Sexuality and Gender."

5. People who identify as transgender are at a significantly higher risk of mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse.¹⁶ That is an established statistical fact, although the *explanation* of that fact is debated. Furthermore, suicide rates among transgender people are significantly higher than for the U.S. population in general.

6. Shifting focus to the cultural and political spheres, here is another fact: there is a growing movement within our culture and within the government to include ‘transgender rights’ under the umbrella of civil rights, alongside racial equality and sexual equality. One prominent illustration comes from a briefing report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights published in September 2016. I quote here from the “Letter of Transmittal” contained within the report (emphasis added):

The United States Commission on Civil Rights (‘the Commission’) is pleased to transmit our briefing report, *Peaceful Coexistence: Reconciling Nondiscrimination Principles with Civil Liberties*.

The report examined the balance struck by federal courts, foremost among them the U.S. Supreme Court, in adjudicating claims for religious exemptions from otherwise applicable nondiscrimination law.

The Commission heard testimony from experts and scholars in the field and a majority of the Commission made findings and recommendations. Some of those findings were that:

1. Civil rights protections ensuring nondiscrimination, as embodied in the Constitution, laws, and policies, are of preeminent importance in American jurisprudence.
2. Religious exemptions to the protections of civil rights based upon classifications *such as race, color, national origin, sex, disability status, sexual*

¹⁶ Mayer and McHugh, “Sexuality and Gender.”

*orientation, and gender identity, when they are permissible, significantly infringe upon these civil rights.*¹⁷

The point is this: there is a significant political movement pushing for so-called transgender rights, and these rights are understood to conflict at points with religious freedom and exemptions to protect the consciences of religious believers. This is openly acknowledged by people on *both* sides of the debate.

III. Worldviews

How you think about transgenderism will depend largely on your *anthropology*, that is, your view of human nature—what we are and what we’re supposed to be. Furthermore, your anthropology will depend in turn on your broader *worldview*: your view of God, ultimate reality, truth, meaning, value, and so forth. Having discussed at length the relationship between anthropology and worldview in my previous lecture, I want now to apply that broader framework to the specific issue of transgenderism.¹⁸ So let’s consider briefly how worldviews have shaped thinking about this issue among both non-Christians and Christians.

Here’s a summary of what we might call the “mainstream narrative” on transgenderism—the narrative we find represented in most mainstream media outlets, in popular movies and TV shows, and by progressive politicians and celebrities. In the past, people took for granted that gender and sexuality were simple matters: you were either born a man or a woman, and that was the end of it. *But now we know better*: we understand that gender and sexuality are more complex than previous generations understood.¹⁹ There’s a difference between *biological sex* (or ‘birth sex’) and *gender identity*. Some people have a gender identity other than their biological sex, and thus we have cases of “a man born in a woman’s body” and “a woman born in a man’s body.” In fact, gender identity is itself complex: it’s a *continuum* rather than a binary.

¹⁷ “Peaceful Coexistence: Reconciling Nondiscrimination Principles with Civil Liberties,” Briefing Report by U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, September 2016, <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/Peaceful-Coexistence-09-07-16.PDF>.

¹⁸ James N. Anderson, “What Are We? Three Views on Human Nature,” *Reformed Faith & Practice* 2, no. 1 (May 2017), <http://journal.rts.edu/article/three-views-human-nature/>.

¹⁹ Exactly *how* we came to ‘know’ this is less than obvious.

Some people are just more male than female and vice versa. Indeed, some people are *neither* male *nor* female; they don't identify with either gender. Thus, we need new categories such as 'genderqueer' and 'genderfluid'.²⁰

Amidst all this complexity and fluidity, however, there is one central axiom: *gender identity reflects a person's true identity*. It represents "who they really are." Consequently, they should be able to express that gender identity as they see fit, without fear of judgment or disapproval or discrimination. It's a *basic human right* for a person to live according to their gender identity.

This means that gender identity must trump everything else: biological sex, physiology, birth certificate, and so on. And if a person is *unhappy* with their biological sex, physiology, etc., they have the right to pursue whatever means are available to 'correct' it. What's more, everyone else must respect and support their right to do so.

The most recent chapter in this narrative pertains to *parenting*. Parents now need to be aware that they might have a transgender child, and those who do have an obligation to affirm and accommodate their child's gender identity.

Such is the mainstream narrative, and we can identify some key themes that drive this narrative:

- Gender identity (understood as a *core* identity, defining "who I am")
- Sexual diversity and liberty
- Civil rights (the LGBTQ movement being understood as the latest front)
- Tolerance and non-discrimination
- Science and technology (the main hope for solutions to human problems)

The mainstream narrative on transgenderism is just one among many interrelated cultural narratives that are being promoted in our day. We need to recognize, however, that cultural narratives aren't self-sustaining or free-floating. They need to be situated within a worldview that makes them meaningful, intelligible, and plausible. Simplifying somewhat, we can identify two secular worldviews that have shaped and supported the mainstream narrative outlined above.²¹

²⁰ By 2014, the social media website Facebook was offering its users more than 50 gender options, including a 'custom' option for those who couldn't identify with any of the predefined options.

²¹ For more discussion of these two worldviews and their respective anthropologies, see Anderson, "What Are We?"

Naturalism

Naturalism is the view that *nature is all there is*, where ‘nature’ is basically understood as whatever can be studied scientifically. For the Naturalist, the natural universe—the physical cosmos—is the only reality that exists (or at least the only reality that matters). According to Naturalism, everything has (ultimately) a *scientific* explanation, and that must include *human nature* and *human experiences*.

According to the standard origins story of Naturalism, we are the products of undirected naturalistic evolutionary processes. We’re highly evolved animals with some unique abilities. On this view, there is no transcendent purpose or meaning to human life. If there is any meaning to human life, it is one that we create for ourselves.

It’s no secret that Naturalism has a hard time accounting for objective moral laws²² On what basis can a Naturalist argue that some human behaviors are *objectively morally right* while others are *objectively morally wrong*? If Naturalism were true, why would there be laws of morality that stand over us? How *could* there be?

In the absence of any better moral theories, Naturalists will commonly adopt some version of *utilitarianism*, according to which morality is defined in terms of whatever maximizes pleasure and minimizes pain—“the greatest happiness for the greatest number,” as Jeremy Bentham famously expressed it.

How then would a Naturalist view of transgenderism? A Naturalist will typically want to say that gender identity is a *psychological phenomenon rooted in the physical brain*. For the Naturalist, all human experiences reduce to brain science. And so there have been various scientific studies seeking to demonstrate some correlation between gender identity and brain structure or brain chemistry.

Furthermore, a Naturalist will be inclined to say that transgenderism is just one facet of human biological diversity, of natural variation within a species. There’s no right or wrong about it. Transgenderism isn’t a disorder or dysfunction because, on the Naturalist view, there’s simply no right way or a wrong way for a human being to be. We are what naturalistic evolutionary processes have made us—end of story.

If anything can be said to be ‘wrong’ it’s that some people are unhappy with their bodies. They have a *male body* and a *female brain*, or vice versa, and that

²² James N. Anderson, *Why Should I Believe Christianity?* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 106–15.

incongruity causes them pain; it causes emotional suffering. Thus, if they're going to be happy, one or other—the body or the brain—needs to be changed.

So which must change? For the Naturalist, it's the body that will have to change, for two basic reasons: first, it's generally easier (and safer) to modify the body than to tinker with the brain; secondly, our *personal identity* is more closely associated with our brain, because the brain is the seat of consciousness (and thus of self-consciousness). From the Naturalist's perspective, then, it makes sense for a transgender person to pursue 'sex reassignment' treatments.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism—to simplify matters to an almost criminal extent—can be characterized as the view that *there are no absolute norms* and *there is no objective reality*. According to this worldview, reality isn't something objective "out there" to be discovered. It isn't something that exists independently of our thoughts and our language. Reality is something we *create* or *construct* by the way we think about and speak about our subjective experiences. That means, of course, that truth is always relative; it is relativized either to the individual subject or to groups of subjects (communities or societies).

Consequently, the Postmodernist will have quite a different take on transgenderism than the Naturalist. For the Postmodernist, 'gender' is a fluid social construction that isn't anchored to any objective biological categories. It isn't a category imposed on us by nature; rather, it's a category we invented and which we impose on our ourselves. So gender identity isn't rooted in brain physiology (as the Naturalist holds) but is entirely a matter of personal preferences and self-perceptions.

Put simply: what you are is what you *perceive* yourself to be. In fact, more strongly: what you are is what you *conceive* yourself to be. For self-conception is more powerful than mere self-perception. On this radical view, you have the freedom and the right to define yourself, indeed to *redefine* yourself, without limit. And if your physical appearance doesn't currently align with your self-defined identity, then your physical appearance needs to get in line.

Thus, we have before us two secular worldviews which, in quite different ways, provide a broader framework for the mainstream narrative on transgenderism. The great irony is that *these two worldviews aren't consistent with each other*. They make some fundamentally incompatible claims. On the Naturalist view, gender identity is a kind of biological fact; it's an objective truth about a human being that can be scientifically

explained and justified. On the Postmodernist view, however, gender isn't a biological fact but rather a social construction; it's something *we created* rather than something *nature gave us*. Gender identity, to adapt a phrase, is "created, not begotten."

Despite these fundamental disagreements, however, we find that these two worldviews frequently get mixed up together whenever the mainstream narrative on transgenderism is defended. What's more, we should recognize that these two worldviews—Naturalism and Postmodernism—do have one tenet in common: *an axiomatic commitment to human autonomy*. Both proceed from an absolute denial of any transcendent divine norms.

What then is the overarching lesson to draw from these observations? Simply this: when we approach the issue of transgenderism, we need to be aware of how the issues and the overarching narrative have been supported and shaped by secular worldviews that are committed to human autonomy. We must not look at the issue through those warped lenses. Rather, we must view the issue through the lens of a Christian worldview: a worldview that represents a biblical perspective on God, creation, revelation, human nature, moral laws, the fallenness of this world, and what God has done and is doing to redeem this fallen world.

IV. A Triperspectival Assessment

Let us turn now to what I trust is a distinctively and faithfully Christian assessment of transgenderism, both as a condition (i.e., gender dysphoria and its treatment) and as a cultural movement. As a guiding schema for that assessment, I propose to make use of John Frame's triperspectival approach to ethics, which is developed in greatest detail in his book *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*.²³ Frame contends that any issue in Christian ethics can be considered from three complementary perspectives: the *normative*, the *situational*, and the *existential*. Let us consider then the issue of transgenderism through these three conceptual portals.

Normative Perspective

The normative perspective invites us to ask, "What are the *norms* or *standards* that apply here?" Perhaps the first and most general thing to say is that *God himself* is

²³ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008).

our ultimate norm.²⁴ God himself is the final standard of what is true, good, and beautiful. That entails an utter repudiation of the kind of human autonomy reflected in the two secular worldviews outlined above.

God, as the author of creation, *defines* his creation. God, as the creator of humankind, *defines* what it means to be human. We simply do not get to define what we are or who we are!

In matters of Christian ethics, God's norms are expressed to us primarily in his laws. God's laws are what we might call our *proximate norms*. In the first place, we have what Reformed theologians have called *creation ordinances*: moral laws grounded in the order and design of creation.²⁵ The most immediately relevant creation ordinance is that of human sexuality and family relationships:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it..." (Genesis 1:27–28)

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

It could hardly be clearer from the creation account that God did not intend sexuality and gender to be fluid and expressed on a continuum. Indeed, the assumption throughout the Bible is that there are two sexes, male and female, and the primary determiner of a person's sex is *physiology*. We're embodied beings and our sexuality is expressed through our bodies. The creation account thus establishes some foundational norms of human sexuality.

Secondly, we have the Decalogue—the Ten Commandments—which the Reformed tradition has consistently taken as a summary of God's moral law. A number of these commandments are directly relevant to transgenderism.

The First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me." Once again, we find here an implicit repudiation of human autonomy, which is a form of idolatry—treating the creature as though it were the Creator. We should recognize that

²⁴ Ibid., 133–35.

²⁵ John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 27–44.

the LGBT movement represents a form of *idolatry*: treating human sexual experiences as a greater authority than the Word of God. Whatever our response to transgenderism, gender dysphoria, and so forth, it must be a response that seeks to interpret human experiences in light of God's Word rather than the reverse.

The Fifth Commandment: "Honor your father and your mother." This commandment presupposes parental authority and leadership. It stands firmly against the idea that a child should set the agenda regarding his or her 'gender identity'. The commandment also implies *parental oversight and care for children*, and thus the protection of children within a proper family structure. This clearly has major implications for 'transgender parents' (especially the cases of 'transgender men' who conceive and give birth, cases which we should expect to increase in number as transgenderism becomes even more mainstreamed).²⁶

The Sixth Commandment: "You shall not murder." This commandment enjoins the preservation and protection of human life, and thus has implications for (among other things) 'sex reassignment' treatments, many of which carry significant health risks.

The Seventh Commandment: "You shall not commit adultery." This commandment presupposes the biblical understanding of marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman, which in turn presupposes the basic binary of sexual differentiation established in Genesis 1 and 2.

The Ninth Commandment: "You shall not bear false witness." According to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, "The ninth commandment requireth the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbor's good name, especially in witness-bearing." This has obvious implications for 'sex reassignment' treatments: if biological sex is indeed the primary indicator of ontological sex, then such treatments are a form of deception—an elaborate charade—in which people attempt to present themselves falsely as members of the opposite sex.

We can see, then, that from a normative perspective the Bible has much to say about how we should understand and evaluate these issues.

²⁶ Jessi Hempel, "My Brother's Pregnancy and the Making of a New American Family," *Time*, September 12, 2016, <http://time.com/4475634/trans-man-pregnancy-ewan/>; Olivia Crellin, "The Transgender Family Where the Father Gave Birth," *BBC News*, September 23, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-37408298>.

Situational Perspective

The situational perspective invites us to ask, “How does our *situation* bear on the issue?” Our situation typically includes our environment, facts about nature, our cultural circumstances, and so forth. Ethically relevant information about our situation can come not only from the Bible but also from sources outside the Bible, such as responsible scientific research.

A great deal could be said about transgenderism from the situational perspective, so I must be very selective here. Perhaps the most fundamental thing to say about our situation is that *we live in a fallen world*. The human race is a fallen race. We are broken people: morally, physically, emotionally, psychologically. Furthermore, the natural world in general is under a curse.²⁷

One crucial implication is that in a fallen world we need to draw a distinction between what is *natural* and what is *normal*. That something occurs ‘naturally’ does not imply that it is right or good. (This stands in direct contradiction to the “born this way” narrative promoted by many LGBT campaigners.) This basic fact about the world also means that human experiences must not be treated as normative. Our experiences, feelings, and perceptions are all corrupted by sin, and thus they always need to be interpreted and critically evaluated in the light of God’s revelation.

The situational perspective also encourages us to incorporate relevant scientific information into our assessment, such as the following:

- The causes of gender dysphoria are presently unknown, although the evidence indicates that it is a genuine psychological condition, that it can vary in degree, and that it’s typically something people find themselves with (rather than something chosen or self-imposed).²⁸
- The majority of childhood cases of gender dysphoria resolve naturally over time.²⁹

²⁷ Genesis 3:17–19; Romans 8:18–21.

²⁸ Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, 61.

²⁹ Mayer and McHugh, “Sexuality and Gender.”

- While a number of studies have been conducted, there is no solid scientific evidence that sex reassignment treatment is an effective solution to gender dysphoria.³⁰ Sex reassignment surgery is a major undertaking and has significant health risks associated with it.³¹ It is very far from being risk-free or harm-free. We must not overlook the central fact that many advocates of such treatment want us to overlook: *it involves the surgical alteration of an otherwise healthy human body*. It doesn't correct a physical deformity, but rather deforms what is otherwise physically correct.

- From a scientific perspective, it is *impossible* to change one's biological sex (a fact underscored in the most excruciating way by the cases of 'transgender men' becoming pregnant).

One last point to note under the situational perspective: that something is *scientifically possible* doesn't mean it is *ethically permissible*.³² This ought to be too obvious to state, but unfortunately we are faced with a major problem today inasmuch as public ethics and public policy, rather than constraining scientific research and technological developments, are being dragged along in their wake.

Existential Perspective

The existential perspective in Christian ethics places the spotlight on the *individual person* involved in moral decisions and actions; that person's character, motives, emotions, experiences, and internal faculties. The existential perspective focuses especially on what the Bible calls *the heart*: the inner core from which all thoughts, words, and actions proceed.

As with the other two perspectives, numerous points could be raised and discussed under this heading; I will restrict myself here to two particularly pertinent ones.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Craig Kline and David Schrock, "What Is Gender Reassignment Surgery? A Medical Assessment with a Biblical Appraisal," *Journal for Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2015), <http://cbmw.org/uncategorized/studies-what-is-gender-reassignment-surgery-a-medical-assessment-with-a-biblical-appraisal/>.

³² To think otherwise would be to commit the so-called naturalistic fallacy. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 60-61.

First, we must acknowledge that the human heart in its natural state is *fallen and corrupt*. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”³³ All of us ought therefore to be very skeptical about what our hearts are telling us about who we are, what is right for us, how we should find fulfilment, and so on. Spurgeon hit the nail on the head when he quipped, “The most difficult book you will ever read is your own heart.” We ought to have a natural distrust of our self-perception. This obviously has implications for how we think about ‘gender identity’ and thus how we evaluate gender dysphoria.

Secondly, the existential perspective draws our attention to issues of *self-identity*. What defines us? What makes us who we are? In what should we locate our identity? I believe we can see two closely related errors in the transgender movement:

- the idea that we should locate our identity *in our gender or sexuality*
- the idea (and the deeper error) that *we ourselves define our identity*

Both are expressions of autonomy and idolatry. The biblical view is that *God* defines us and we find our identity *in him*—more specifically, if we are believers, we find our identity *in Christ*.³⁴

Summary Conclusions

Tying together the threads of this triperspectival analysis, I draw the following conclusions:

- Gender dysphoria is a real condition and is best understood as a *psychological* disorder or dysfunction (and perhaps more deeply as a spiritual disorder).
- Sex reassignment treatment is not the way to address gender dysphoria. If anything, it exacerbates the root problem rather than alleviating it.

³³ Jeremiah 17:9

³⁴ For some insightful reflections on questions of identity, see Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered: Further Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert on Sexual Identity and Union with Christ* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2015).

- The transgender movement is merely the latest phase of a moral and cultural revolution which is grounded in secular worldviews committed to human autonomy and thus to a wholesale repudiation of the God of the Bible.
- While we must hold fast to the biblical truth that every human being is made in the image of God and precious in God's sight, we must also affirm that every human being—every last one of us—is fallen in sin and sexually broken. Gender dysphoria and other forms of gender confusion are but one manifestation of that sexual brokenness.
- While the biblical worldview provides the only solid foundation for human rights, we must reject the idea that those human rights include what are now called 'transgender rights' (the right to live in accordance with one's gender identity and the right to have that gender identity affirmed by others).

V. Christian Responses

In this final section, I will make some brief remarks on Christian responses to transgenderism based to the foregoing assessment. I say 'responses' rather than 'response' because the various challenges posed by transgenderism invite different *kinds* of response. We should distinguish, for example, between a *cultural* response (to the transgender movement) and a *pastoral* response (to individuals who suffer from gender dysphoria or self-identify as transgender). Recall the three stories I recounted in the introduction: each one calls for a different kind of response from Christians, even though each response will be directed by shared principles grounded in a Christian worldview. It's important to avoid letting one kind of response drive the other kinds. In the current political climate, there's a particular danger of allowing the 'culture wars' to shape our pastoral response. In any case, I offer the following thoughts on the two kinds of response I distinguish above, recognizing that a great deal more needs to be said.

Cultural Response

It's imperative that Christians—and especially church leaders—adopt a prophetic stance in the face of these challenges to God's design for human sexuality. We need to speak clearly and consistently about biblical norms. The title of Dr. Albert Mohler's most recent book has it exactly right: *We Cannot Be Silent*.³⁵ This means we

³⁵ R. Albert Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015).

need to ready and willing to engage in public debate and dialogue. We also need to present a *compelling counter-narrative*. If we fail to do that, the mainstream narrative will win by default; theirs will be seen as the only plausible position to take.

There are two good reasons why there needs to be a strong cultural response from the church. First, there is our responsibility as Christians to *promote the public good*, especially when it comes to protecting children from damaging parental practices and destructive ideologies. Like the Jewish exiles, we should seek the welfare of the cities (and towns and villages) in which God has placed us.³⁶ Secondly, there is the need to preserve religious freedom—above all the freedom to preach the Bible and proclaim the gospel—which is increasingly threatened by the demand for LGBT rights (a demand that invariably translates into the suppression of those who continue to stand firm on biblical norms).

I strongly suspect that we're not yet at the end of the road (or perhaps the end of the rope) in this cultural battlefield. There is more to come, and it will be even more shocking to us. Just consider, for example, what the category of 'genderfluid'—rejecting the binary of male and female—implies with respect to the kinds of reconstructive surgery that will be demanded in the future.

Pastoral Response

Pastoral responses will be as multifarious as the pastoral cases that give rise to them. Some pastors are going to have to deal with some very messy and heartbreaking situations in the wake of the transgender revolution that will require the wisdom of Solomon to disentangle. We can, however, broadly outline two categories of response:

To those who suffer from gender dysphoria and gender confusion in general. We need to cultivate in our churches the kind of Christian communities where people can share their struggles and confusions without fear of being rejected or ostracized. We must openly acknowledge that we are all broken people. The challenge for the church is walk the tightrope between, on the one hand, modeling healthy gender norms, and, on the other hand, not alienating people who struggle to align with those norms. I suggest it's also important for us to distinguish between *universal* and *cultural* gender norms. We shouldn't uncritically assume that what is regarded as normal for a man or a woman in our own culture signifies something *essential* to manhood and

³⁶ Jeremiah 29:6

womanhood, lest we find ourselves making biblically unwarranted judgments about how people present themselves.

Concerning treatments for gender dysphoria, whatever we recommend (and there are various kinds of treatments available) should be consistent with our view that *ontological sex* rather than *gender identity* is normative for a person. That rules out attempts to change a person's physiology to align with their psychology; the change should be in the opposite direction.³⁷

To those who have actively pursued a transgender lifestyle. These present the most challenging scenarios, especially when irreversible surgical procedures have been utilized. The first line of response should be to call for confession and repentance—indeed, from a gospel perspective, we might say that's the only *essential* response. Beyond that, our general counsel should be to correct or reverse any steps that have been taken in the wrong direction (whether hormone treatment or reconstructive surgery) to the extent that is possible *without causing further harm*. While transgenderism undoubtedly presents new and vexing challenges for Christian pastors and counselors, I suggest that the governing principles for dealing with such scenarios have already been recognized and applied to other kinds of situations in which it proves impossible to 'undo' what has been done without causing further harm and suffering to the people entangled in those situations.³⁸

In any event, we may take encouragement from the fact that the transgender revolution did not take God by surprise. He foresaw it even as he fashioned the first man and the first woman. Thus, we can be confident that God's Word will be a sure and sufficient guide as we navigate these stormy seas, that our heavenly Father will grant wisdom and comfort to those who seek his face in humility and faith, and that the atoning work of Christ will prove sufficient to cleanse and restore those called to be conformed to his image.

³⁷ I am not speaking here to the complex issue of intersex cases, those rare instances where, due to a congenital abnormality, a person develops a combination of male and female sex characteristics.

³⁸ Two examples: (1) cases of remarriage after an unbiblical divorce; (2) cases of polygamists (e.g., African tribesmen) who are converted to Christ.

“Retrieval for the Sake of Renewal”

Timothy George
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It was fitting for Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando to invite Dr. Timothy George, Dean and Professor of Divinity at the Beeson Divinity School of Samford University to deliver the 2017 Kistemaker Lectures last March, because Dr. George has devoted his life to highlighting the significance of the Protestant Reformation for the church today. As his four lectures reflected on the reforming witness of Erasmus, Luther, Calvin, and Tyndale, his guiding perspective was to understand the Reformation as “retrieval for the sake of renewal.” Dr. George began his presentation by explaining what he meant by that phrase.

What is the Reformation after all? To ask the question that way is to put a rather ferocious cat in the midst of some very skittish pigeons, because the Reformation is a very debatable term these days. If you are familiar with this field, you know that word is put in the plural. Several books published in recent years describe “Reformations,” underscoring the great diversity in the Reformation. So we speak about the Lutheran Reformation or the Calvinist Reformation, or the English Reformation or even the Catholic Reformation. It does not make any sense to speak of *the* Reformation.

As in so many respects as you may discover during these lectures, I am a bit old fashioned, and I have not accepted that new twist. Yes, of course, there was great diversity, not only among these major branches but also within each of them. However, it is my belief that there is an overarching unity that holds together this era in the history of God’s people that allows us to speak of Reformation in the singular sense.

And what is that unity? The Reformation was a movement of spiritual, ecclesial, and theological retrieval – retrieval of an older, wiser, and deeper expression of the apostolic tradition – for the sake of renewal. That is, the renewal of the church of Jesus Christ, based on the Word of God. The Reformation was not the spawning of a whole new church. It was the renewal of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. To the day they died, the two great figures of the Reformation, Martin Luther and John Calvin, both understood themselves their calling to be nothing more or less than

faithful and obedient servants of Jesus Christ within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

I say it is a movement of retrieval. What is retrieval? It is not just refurbishment. It is not just going back and finding something or someone famous four or five hundred years ago and dusting them off and letting them shine again in all of their glory. There is nothing wrong with that, but more is involved in retrieval. Retrieval is more of a rescue operation. It recognizes that there a great deal of our Christian past that has become obscure, that we just don't know about anymore. Retrieval looks at these figures as our fellow sojourners in the life of faith. We are one with them in Jesus Christ. They are guiding lights for the people of God throughout the ages. That sometimes means we have to ask new and different questions of them, different from what they were asking in their own day. We have the right, and even the responsibility, to do just that.

Readers can find an audio link to Dr. George's Kistemaker Lectures here:
http://rts.edu/site/rtsnearyou/orlando/kals/kals_2017.aspx

— Book Reviews —

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babel: Retrieving the Solas in the Spirit of Mere Protestant Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016. pp. xii + 269. \$21.99, cloth.

While many will look back to the Protestant Reformation on this 500th anniversary of its beginning, backward glances are not easy. The issues of the Reformation are perennial, each in their own way, as they connect to ongoing facets of life before God and amongst one another in the church: answering questions like “How am I right with God?” or “How does God exercise authority in the life of the Christian and the church?” But the perennial questions are now experienced amidst new, complicating contextual realities. Whereas the sixteenth century reformers had to challenge a nominalism that had marked late medieval piety, now we increasingly face a radically post-Christian environment where much more basic catechesis demands our attention. We cannot simply respond to legalisms of varying sorts with words of grace and good news, but we must also attend to elementary matters of identifying God, humanity, and our true plight. In many ways, this is to say that we can look back at the Reformation only through the haze of a world marked by secularization outside and (sadly) inside many congregations.

A number of voices have suggested that this modern disenchantment or secularization not only has followed the rise of Protestantism but has flowed from its very own roots. Brad Gregory has spoken of the “unintended Reformation” in this regard, wherein naturalization has sped up from Luther’s project. Christian Smith has argued that “pervasive interpretive pluralism” marks the experience of those who cry “Sola Scriptura!” and undercuts any genuine ecclesial authority. Hans Boersma suggests not that the Reformation began the godless framing of the world and human experience within it, but that it failed to respond to that festering medieval problem and only exacerbated its growth. For these and other reasons, many are marking this

anniversary with calls for lament as opposed to celebration, for sorrow rather than happy remembrance.

Kevin J. Vanhoozer argues in *Biblical Authority After Babel* that the project of Protestantism ought not be treated in such ways but deserves our assent and our gratitude. More specifically, he commends the reality and necessity of what he deems “mere Protestant Christianity” over against these criticisms, and he does so by returning to the root principles of reformational theology: the famous *five solas*. To commend the project of “mere Protestant Christianity,” the volume offers twenty theses for consideration. The author clearly relates each *sola* to the perennial challenges thrown at Protestantism:

“*Sola gratia* addresses the charge of secularization by locating biblical interpreters and interpretation in the all-encompassing economy of triune communicative activity. *Sola fide* and *sola scriptura* address the charge of skepticism by focusing on the principle and pattern respectively of what I will describe as the economy of theological authority. *Solus Christus* addresses the charge of schism by focusing on the royal priesthood of all believers, and that is the proper context for understanding the *sola ecclesia*. Finally, *solī Deo gloria* returns to the scene of the crime—Protestant division over the Lord’s Supper—in order to address the challenge of hyperplurality and interpretative disagreement in the church” (61).

Readers with some familiarity in Reformation theology will recognize that Vanhoozer is putting old slogans to use in significantly new ways. It is helpful to catch that he is redeploying the *solas* to inform discussion of more recent debates regarding the legacy of Protestantism itself. Perhaps this redeployment can be seen most overtly in the way that he speaks of a “formal principle” and “material principle” of “mere Protestant Christianity.” Whereas those terms normally apply to the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* and to justification by faith alone, respectively, he uses the terminology in a very different vein. “Retrieving the *solas* yields the material principle of mere Protestant Christianity: the triune economy of the gospel ... The *solas* summarize what the Father is doing in Christ through the Spirit to form a holy nation, and this summary—a rule of faith, hope, and love—functions as a hermeneutical tool with which to arbitrate the conflict of interpretations” (28, 29). “[W]e also need to recover a hitherto-underappreciated element in the pattern of Protestant interpretative authority: the principle of the priesthood of all believers. I call this the formal

principle of mere Protestant Christianity” (29). In so doing, Vanhoozer points toward the vivid description of biblical interpretation in a world enchanted with God’s presence and activity (over against the void of secularization) and locates such scriptural reading and theological judgment within the communion of the saints (contrary to the purportedly individualistic legacy of Luther).

Each chapter moves through a sequence whereby Vanhoozer describes the *sola*, locates it amidst its own initial context, and then applies it to the questions of interpretive individualism and pluralism. Readers need to note that the primary focus of the work is not excavatory but applicatory: Vanhoozer is primarily serving here to show the way in which these five *solas* shed light upon questions of interpretative activity, either individually or corporately but always theologically. While he does reference and quote primary and secondary sources on each *sola* with skill, this book is neither aimed at nor best for doing that kind of historical backward glance. Where it is uniquely beneficial, however, is asking after the impact these “mere Protestant” tenets have upon our thoughts about theological and exegetical work.

In a sense, then, this is a book that could very easily be received with false expectations. If one is looking for an academic exposition of the reformational debates in their nuance, you had best look elsewhere. But this book actually does something far more notable, for my money, in that it asks how retrieval of those insights might help us confront much later questions that demand an equally courageous protest. Identifying secularism and individualism is hard enough, responding to them each with truly theological and evangelical resources doubly so. Vanhoozer’s focus upon the triune economy of the gospel and the churchly character of the *solas* proves remarkably promising in this regard.

Perhaps an example proves helpful. The chapter on *sola fide* focuses upon the way in which this reformation-era principle attunes us to the way the “Spirit uses words to effect faith” (79). In other words, we must catch the link between pneumatology and philology. Modern subjectivism provides one lush trap we must avoid this side of the Reformation, whether in the forms of philosophical rationalism or later romanticism. And perhaps the most common rebuke of those subjectivisms has been the recent turn to community and tradition-based rationality (as in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, and others). Vanhoozer rightly shows that we actually need a much more fundamental appreciation of the church as creature of the Word (102) so as to appreciate the finitude and dependence of the church, the ongoing agency of the Word, the inscripturated form of the Word’s work now by the Spirit, and the distinctiveness of the church over against other social forms. Tradition-

based sociology will not keep us from falling into individual subjectivism (83, 94); we demand an appreciation of the society of Christ and the communion of the saints that is rooted ultimately in the unique action of God here and now. We also need to tend appropriate virtues as the “epistemic fruits of faith” and ward off luring vices regarding theological labor, commending confidence and diligence rather than undue pride and bitter sloth (106). Like many in the recent theological interpretation of Scripture conversation (especially Scott Swain, Todd Billings, and John Webster) as well as some late modern theologians in the Reformed world (such as Herman Bavinck), Vanhoozer seeks to deploy fundamental evangelical principles not only to frame our understanding of salvation but also of theological exploration, not only for our eschatological destiny but also our epistemic practice. In light of the dominance of Enlightenment-era scientific method and the screed of critical theory and identity politics in shaping the pursuit of knowledge now, such a distinctly Christian and theological approach is much needed.

The book is useful not only for putting basic Protestant convictions to good epistemic work but also for drawing out some easily overlooked tenets of reformational faith and practice for more careful examination. As mentioned earlier, the Reformation demands our attention precisely because it had to do with God, before whom we are always summoned. Yet Vanhoozer helps us appreciate the way in which some of the assumptions of the Reformation can no longer simply be assumed. Drawing on the work of RTS’s own Michael Glodo, Vanhoozer suggests a sixth *sola* apart from which the others do not make sense: *sola ecclesia* (29; see esp. fn. 120). “The church alone is the place where Christ rules over his kingdom and gives certain gifts for the building of his living temple” (29). Vanhoozer suggests elsewhere that we need to attend to the significance of epistemic “means of grace” in describing the theological journey (115, 175). Such did not need to be said with the same gusto in the 1510s or 1520s, not until the Radical Reformation, on the one hand, and modern individualism, on the other hand, would eat away parasitically at the churchly character of Christianity in their varied ways.

I do wonder about certain judgments scattered throughout the course of the book that seem overly polemical, in my judgment, as in the precise manner and rather total contrast presented between Vanhoozer’s communicative ontology and Hans Boersma’s sacramental ontology (55-57). Whereas Vanhoozer rightly presses the covenantal and Christological concern that we do not merely participate in being but specifically participate also in Christ (55), I nevertheless wonder if we also need to speak then of an epistemic feedback loop wherein union and communion with Christ

provides a set of spectacles for seeing the saturated character of all reality (albeit while sharing his concern for speaking of such participation as being itself “sacramental” when looking more broadly than the two ordinances). Perhaps Boersma’s account of creational participation is more serviceable in that second register, though only then and there. I also wonder about the way he concludes with a contrast between the ascended Christ and the church, arguing that Christians all have a “relation to the ascended Christ independently of church organization” (163). Is that not a more dichotomous phrasing than is needed to affirm the personal character of union with Christ and does it not at least risk underselling the social character of evangelical formation?

I also have reservations of a different sort about the success of his argument regarding Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council and the interplay of ecclesial judgment and scriptural authority when he does not address the most common objection to classic evangelical methodology, namely, the argument (from Luke Timothy Johnson, Sylvia Keesmat, and Stephen Fowl) that interpreting the movement of the Holy Spirit has somehow trumped earlier Scriptural claims in the judgment of that ecclesiastical assembly (130-132). I agree with what Vanhoozer says regarding the council, but I think tackling the skepticism lurking in the waters today demands facing that counter-reading of Acts 10-15 head on. Finally, one wonders in what ways “mere Protestant Christianity” can affirm these five (or six) *solas* together and wherein ecclesiological differences will lead to notably distinct witnesses (whether Lutheran or Reformed, Anglican or Baptist). Such worries about overstatement or underargument are minor, however, and largely fall into the realm of rhetorical and pedagogical rather than substantive and principial judgments.

I commend the volume as a helpful retrieval of early Protestant principles, a useful engagement of lingering criticisms of the project of Reformation theology, and a promising sketch of how fundamental evangelical tenets inform very significant questions of epistemology and ecclesiology.

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Nabeel Qureshi, *No God but One: Allah or Jesus? A Former Muslim Investigates the Evidence for Islam and Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016. 320 pp. \$17.99, paper.

Stories of converts from Islam to Christianity are plentiful. Indeed, according to some reports unprecedented numbers of Muslims are coming to Christ across the world. Notably less common, however, are testimonies of former Muslims that ascribe a significant role to Christian apologetics. Nabeel Qureshi represents one such case—perhaps the best-known case given the success of his first book, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, in which he recounted his personal journey from Islam (specifically the Ahmadi tradition) to Christianity. His conversion was driven not only by increasing unease with traditional Islamic teachings but also by historical arguments against major Islamic claims. A significant component of Qureshi’s story involves his friendship with David Wood and his encounters with Christian apologists Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, whose arguments eventually persuaded him that Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection were historical events.

Qureshi’s first book served as an apologetic as well as a testimony, but it didn’t directly and systematically address the historical and theological issues at stake between Christianity and Islam. Qureshi’s most recent book, *No God but One*, does precisely that. As Qureshi puts it, his first book reflects “the heart” of his story, while this one represents “the mind” of his story. His stated goal is to defend two basic theses: “that the differences between Islam and Christianity have great implications, and that the evidence of history strongly supports the Christian claims” (13). The wording of his second thesis already hints at the methodology he adopts for establishing the truth of Christianity.

The book is thus structured into two halves addressing two crucial questions: (1) *What are the differences between Islam and Christianity?* (2) *Can we know whether Islam or Christianity is true?* The second question somewhat understates Qureshi’s goal, which is not merely to argue that we *can* know whether one of the two religions is true, but that examining the historical evidence shows us precisely *which* one is true. Each half of the book is further divided into five parts, and each of these into four short chapters, resulting in a book with 40 easily digestible chapters. In the remainder of

this review, I will briefly summarize the main issues addressed in the book before offering an assessment of its content and approach to those issues.

Part 1 (“Sharia or the Gospel?”) contrasts the Islamic and Christian views of salvation: law-keeping versus grace-receiving. The two faiths present very different diagnoses of the human condition, and thus offer very different solutions. To put matters bluntly: Islam teaches that we can (and must) save ourselves, whereas Christianity teaches that only God can save us.

Part 2 (“*Tawhid* or the Trinity?”) examines the different views of God represented by each faith. While both are monotheistic—each can affirm the biblical *shema*—the God of the Quran is “a monad” with no internal interpersonal relations (the Quran states emphatically that Allah has no son) but the God of the New Testament is triune. The last of these four chapters raises the vexed question of whether Muslims and Christians “worship the same God.” Readers in search of an unambiguous answer to the question will not find one here (although to be fair, that’s partly because the question itself is ambiguous and thus susceptible to different answers depending on how it is interpreted). Nevertheless, we are left in no doubt that the Islamic and Christian views of God are diametrically opposed at significant points. The two religions cannot be reconciled.

Part 3 (“Muhammad or Jesus?”) contrasts the two founders of Islam and Christianity, although much of the material focuses on Muhammad’s view of Jesus (a merely human prophet) versus Jesus’s own view of himself (the incarnate Son of God). Along the way, Qureshi seeks to defuse some of the common objections Muslims have raised against the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Part 4 (“The Quran or the Bible?”) compares the two holy books of Islam and Christianity, laying out not only the major differences between the Islamic and Christian understandings of divine inspiration but also traditional Muslim views on the corruption of the Bible. Qureshi closes this section of the book with a personal testimony of how the Bible penetrated his heart in a way that the Quran never did, speaking words of deep comfort in a time of sorrow.

Part 5 (“Jihad or the Crusades?”) surveys “two different holy wars”: the wars of Islamic *jihad* and the wars of the Christian crusades. The material here is basically a condensation of Qureshi’s 2016 book *Answering Jihad*. Without attempting to exculpate the Crusaders—atrocities were committed by armies on both sides—Qureshi argues that their actions need to be understood in their historical context as, at least initially, a justified defensive reaction to “the Muslim conquest of fully two-thirds of the Christian world” (quoting Thomas Madden). More importantly, he contends, the

Crusaders were not following the example of Christ in the way that the Muslim conquerors were seeking to follow the example of Muhammad.

Having established these fundamental points of difference between Christianity and Islam, Qureshi proceeds in the second half of the book to focus on the question of *truth*. While the two faiths could both be false, they cannot both be true: “*The central claims of Christianity are explicitly rejected by Islam. Islamic doctrine is antithetical to the core message of Christianity.*” (154, author’s emphasis) Thus, if the central teachings of Christianity are vindicated, Islam is falsified—and *vice versa*.

With this axiom in place, Qureshi revisits five crucial questions that he committed to studying when challenged by David Wood and his fellow Christians apologists:

1. Did Jesus die on the cross?
2. Did Jesus rise from the dead?
3. Did Jesus claim to be God?
4. Is Muhammad a prophet of God?
5. Is the Quran the Word of God?

These questions are dealt with in parts 6 through 10 of the book, each consisting of four chapters: the first laying out the “positive case” made by Christians (questions 1 through 3) or by Muslims (questions 4 and 5), the second summarizing the typical response by the other side to the positive case, the third assessing that response, and the fourth drawing an overall conclusion in answer to the original question.

Qureshi’s conclusions will surprise no one, but he does lay out the arguments in a responsible fashion, showing that Christianity stands on firm historical ground in a way that Islam simply does not. Readers familiar with Christian-Muslim apologetics will not find much new or surprising in these chapters, but Qureshi does a fine job of cutting through tangential issues to get to the heart of the debate. Any Muslim who has yet to engage in a serious study of the historical origins of Christianity and Islam will find enough material to dislodge his unexamined assumptions.

There is much to admire about this book, and I expect it will have a significant positive impact. Given his personal story of coming to faith in Christ, Qureshi possesses a credibility that few Christian apologists can match. The book is well arranged, with a clear logical structure, and written in a respectful, conversational

style with plenty of engaging illustrations and anecdotes. In my view, Qureshi succeeds in his main goals of demonstrating the fundamental opposition between Christianity and Islam, and exposing the glaring disparity between the two with respect to historical credentials.

While I can recommend it as a useful resource, I must also register several serious reservations. In the first place, there are some theological concerns. In the chapter on grace, Qureshi suggests that “Muslims and Christians do not disagree on much” when it comes to human sinfulness, since both basically agree that everyone sins and that sin invites divine judgment. Qureshi notes that Islam lacks Christianity’s doctrine of original sin, but implies that this is a secondary issue; furthermore, he forwards the view that Adam’s progeny inherit only his corruption and not his guilt, such that we bear guilt only for the sins we ourselves have committed. Reformed readers will no doubt find this troublesome, along with the later (perhaps inadvertent) implication that Christ in his death bore merely “the consequence of our sins.” The notion of imputation, whether in Adam’s fall or in Christ’s atonement, is absent from Qureshi’s account of sin and salvation.

Another concern pertains to Qureshi’s defense of the deity of Christ. The arguments he offers are unobjectionable for the most part, but he shares in the practice—common in popular evangelical apologetics—of expressing the Christian doctrine simply as “Jesus is God.” If that statement is taken as a loose way of affirming the fully deity of Christ (the Nicene *homoousios*) then, of course, it’s a true and orthodox statement. However, its imprecision can easily invite modalistic distortions of the doctrine of the Trinity, which serve to aggravate Muslim confusions rather than alleviate them. In the context of engaging Muslims it would be safer to characterize the Christian view as “Jesus is the divine Son of God,” or something similar. That would still present a direct challenge to the Quran’s denials, while more closely tracking Christ’s self-descriptions and the language of the New Testament generally.

Turning to matters of methodology, Qureshi’s evidentialist approach also invites criticism at points. He apparently holds that conflicting truth-claims between worldviews can be settled by examining historical evidences, presumably from some sort of worldview-neutral standpoint. But this is misguided: there is no worldview-neutral approach to historical investigation, and how one interprets and weighs evidences will depend on one’s presuppositions (i.e., worldview). This is not to suggest that historical evidences are impotent or unimportant when it comes to worldview-level disputes, but only that we must recognize the two-way relationship between worldviews and the evidences we take to support them.

Furthermore, Qureshi repeatedly suggests that Christians and Muslims should approach the historical questions raised in the book as “objective observers” and “objective investigators” (151, 157, 174-176, 181-182, 194-195, 209, 214, etc.). If this is meant only as a plea to set aside personal feelings, cultural prejudices, and the like, then all well and good. But I suspect it is intended more strongly as an invitation to take a worldview-neutral or worldview-indifferent stance with respect to the evidence. (Tellingly, Qureshi remarks in a footnote that “an objective observer must allow for the existence of God without asserting it”—in other words, adopt a neutral stance with respect to God’s existence.) This ideal of objectivity is not only epistemologically and psychologically naïve, but also theologically misguided given what Scripture teaches about the noetic effects of sin. It’s understandable that a Muslim led to Christ through an evidentialist apologetic would adopt the same approach in his own ministry to Muslims, but the fact that God can draw straight lines with crooked sticks doesn’t legitimize crooked sticks.

A second methodological issue, closely related to the first, arises in the way Qureshi frames the debate over whether Islam or Christianity is true. In identifying the hinges of the truth question, Qureshi contends that while the truth of Islam hangs on the divine inspiration of the Quran, the truth of Christianity does not similarly depend on the divine inspiration of the Bible:

Although David [Wood] and I had investigated the Bible, and its inspiration was very important for Christian doctrine, we both realized that it constituted the “what” of the Christian faith, not the “why.” Wanting to focus on the minimal requirements for Christianity, we had to exclude many matters that were very important but not central to the case, and the inspiration of the Bible was one such matter. Theoretically, even if the Bible had never been written, Jesus could still have died on the cross for our sins and risen from the dead, making the Christian message true. The inspiration of the Bible is not central to the case for Christianity. ... [T]he Quran forms a central pillar in the case for Islam, whereas Jesus forms the pillar in the case for Christianity. (155)

This minimalist approach has become a common if not ubiquitous theme in contemporary evangelical evidentialist apologetics: we must set aside the inspiration (never mind the inerrancy) of the Bible as a non-essential secondary doctrine, treating the New Testament merely as a collection of generally reliable historical documents,

and on that basis argue that (very probably) Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, was crucified, buried, and rose again. If we can show that much, we can claim victory.

I take issue with this approach in many respects, but here I will mention only one: I do not believe that such an approach honors Christ. One of the defining teachings of Christ—indeed, one of the defining *presuppositions* of his teachings—was the inspiration of Scripture. Following Jesus means following Jesus’ doctrine of Scripture. To put it bluntly: we dare not separate the Christ of Scripture from Scripture of Christ. The conviction that Scripture is God’s Word wasn’t a secondary issue to Jesus, and it shouldn’t be treated as a secondary issue by Christians who seek to lead Muslims to Jesus. (On a purely practical level, one wonders how efforts by Christians to play down the significance of their scriptures must appear to Muslims who are so proud of their own.)

Despite these shortcomings, Qureshi’s book is undoubtedly one of the better resources available today for apologetics to Muslims. Christian readers will find it most valuable as it makes clear the foundational differences between Christianity and Islam, boosts their confidence in the historical foundations of their faith, and provides them with useful material for engaging in discussions with Muslims.

No God but One ends on a sobering note as it concludes the moving story introduced in the book’s prologue: the story of Sara Fatima, a young Saudi woman who was brutally murdered by her brother following her conversion to Christ in 2008. As Qureshi observes, “Leaving Islam can cost you everything: family, friends, job, everything you have ever known, and maybe even life itself. Is it really worth sacrificing everything for the truth?” The author himself has suffered painful losses because of his conversion (and I suspect his life has also been threatened). Even so, he presses upon the reader his conviction that any earthly suffering or sacrifice is worth the eternal peace and joy of knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection (cf. Phil. 3:7-11).

To that one can only say, “Amen.”

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R. David Cox, *The Religious Life of Robert E. Lee*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017. 336 pp. \$26.00, paper.

The Religious Life of Robert E. Lee offers an analysis of the religious beliefs and experiences of the Confederate General. Lee is typically studied as a military figure, and conventional wisdom holds that his religious views are relatively unimportant in any historical assessment of him. Cox argues that one cannot understand Lee without reckoning with the crucial role that that religion played in his life. Simply put, Lee was an Episcopalian, but the strength of Cox's book lies in his fleshing out what that meant in Lee's family. Cox carefully describes Episcopalian life in general and as it was practiced by Lee's parents, his wife, and Lee himself. Lee's wife and mother were "evangelical" Episcopalians while his father held to a more deistic faith. Cox is careful to describe both traditions within the Episcopalian church and makes sure that his readers do not confuse modern evangelicalism with that practiced by Lee and his contemporaries. Lee himself seems to have moved from the deism of his father into a more "evangelical" faith after the death of his mother-in-law which affected him greatly. Cox, an Episcopalian priest, is at his best when he describes the Episcopalian world of 19th century Virginia. He avoids the trap of trying to pigeonhole Lee into one of today's religious categories and instead examines Lee's religious life within its context.

In describing Lee's pilgrimage from the faith of his father to the faith of his wife and her family, Cox proceeds to make the case that his political and professional decisions need to be understood in the context of that faith transformation. According to Cox, Lee's evolving perception of providence helped him to make his decision to seek reconciliation after the war. Most biographers view Lee as a stoic and emphasize his early education which included a heavy dose of Greek and Roman philosophy, but Cox focuses on the influence of the bishops and priests who pastored Lee as well as the religious materials his family would have used in private worship. Cox may overemphasize the role that Lee's church experience played in his professional life (and it is debatable whether Lee fully embraced the evangelical convictions of his wife). But just as surely other biographers have neglected this aspect of Lee.

In spite of these strengths, there are some glaring weaknesses in the book. First, the book does not address the role that religion played in Lee's views on slavery. If Bishop Meade's sermons on providence played a role in how Lee viewed his own role in military and political affairs, then surely those sermons also affected Lee's perception of slavery and his treatment of slaves. What were the priests and bishops who pastored Lee saying about slavery in their sermons? Cox provides little beyond a few statements from Lee's pastors that owners should treat their "servants" justly and provide for their spiritual welfare.

One of the more controversial episodes from Lee's life concerns the treatment of the slaves belonging to his wife's family. Lee had relatively little interaction with his own slaves because his own family had largely been bankrupted by his irresponsible father. However, he was named executor of his father-in-law's estate and thus had responsibility for dozens of slaves included in that estate. Custis's will included large provisions for family members as well as provisions for the emancipation of his slaves. Lee chose to prioritize the family legacies over emancipation and attempted to extract more productive labor out of the slaves by hiring them out and demanding more work. Cox emphasizes benign aspects of slavery in the Lee household such as his wife's instruction of slaves in defiance of Virginia law and Lee's care for one of his aging slaves. It certainly is fair to mention such acts of kindness that Lee claimed to have performed for his slaves, but Cox did not provide complete analysis of the darker aspects Lee's experiences as a slave-owner.

Closely related to the issue of slavery is the issue of racism. It is one thing to justify the institution of slavery from the Bible. After all, the Bible assumes the existence of slavery, does not explicitly call for the abolition of slavery and instructs slaves to be obedient. It is another thing to justify racism and white supremacy. Cox is content to give Lee a pass by saying he was "a man of his times." But this explanation only begs important questions. Why were most white men in 19th century America racist? Were they racist in spite of their professed religion? Did their religion encourage racism? Or was Lee's Episcopalian faith just silent on the question and we must look to other sources for his racism? Cox leaves these questions unanswered.

For Cox, the religious views of Lee can be most clearly seen in his acceptance of defeat and his willingness to accept reconstruction. For many, Lee became a patriotic and moral hero by declining to lead his army into asymmetrical/guerilla warfare after his defeat to Grant. Instead, Lee led a quiet life as the president of a small college and did his best to reunite the country. Cox seems to accept this interpretation and does

not mention an important caveat: Lee accepted reconstruction but only on terms of white supremacy.

Finally, Cox hardly mentions the largest theological controversy of Lee's time, the formation of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Confederate States of America in 1861 and its reintegration into the Episcopal Church in the United States at the conclusion of the war. Cox takes pains to portray Lee as a very dedicated and involved churchman and yet does not discuss at all his role in this temporary denominational split. Lee was at best very hesitantly reconstructed. How did he feel about the reconstruction of his church? This omission is especially odd given the precarious situation many priests found themselves in, being arrested for refusing to offer prayers for the civic leaders of the reunited nation. Lee as an elected and active member of his church's vestry would have been involved in these issues of reunion.

Ever since the Charleston shootings in 2015, local governments in the old confederacy have struggled with how to interpret their history especially as it relates to the confederate battle flag, monuments, and government buildings named for confederate leaders. For some, these relics from history are testimonies to a certain vision of federalism. They are testimonies of military genius, sacrifice, and honor. For others these symbols are about honoring and preserving a legacy of slavery and white supremacy. It would be too much to ask a book about the religious life of one confederate general to try to resolve that tension. However, for the book to address it in so brief a manner is a missed opportunity. As a book describing the religious life of Virginia Episcopalians, this is an excellent read. For a closer look at Lee's personal views I would recommend Elizabeth Brown Pryor's book, *Reading the Man: A Portrait of Robert E. Lee through His Private Letters*. For a more complete picture on Lee's views on reconstruction, readers should consult Elizabeth Varon's *Appomattox: Victory, Defeat, and Freedom at the End of the Civil War*.

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Meredith G. Kline, *Genesis: A New Commentary*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016. pp. xx + 154. paper.

Genesis: A New Commentary was written in the mid-1990s by Meredith G. Kline, sometime after he had finished his *Kingdom Prologue*. In the year 2008 the typed manuscript of this commentary was discovered among Meredith's papers by Jonathan G. Kline, grandson of Meredith. A number of years later, Jonathan edited the manuscript and Hendrickson has now served the church well by publishing it. The editorial work goes beyond the typical and in particular includes footnotes that cross reference the concise discussions of key ideas in the commentary to more nuanced discussions in Kline's larger works, thus dividing a true entrance into the thought of Meredith G. Kline. *Genesis: A New Commentary* provides a concise and clear window into Kline's understanding of the first book of the Bible and to his hermeneutic and theology. A seven-page introduction is followed by one hundred and thirty-three pages of commentary.

In the introduction Kline touches on four key areas. One, the book of Genesis, as a revelation of God the Creator-Redeemer, serves as a treaty preamble and historical prologue to the old covenant canon in particular and to the whole Bible in general. The broad function of the book of Genesis is, therefore, to tell us who God is and what he is done as our Great King and thereby to ingratiate us to serve him well in the covenant of grace.

Two, there are eleven sections in the book of Genesis. Genesis 1:1-2:3 serves as the prologue and is followed by ten divisions each of which begins with "This is the account of" or the like. These divisions are grouped into two matching sets: divisions one through three are mirrored by divisions four through six, and divisions seven through eight are mirrored by divisions nine through ten.

Three, the book of Genesis tells the story of foundational beginnings in Genesis 1-11 and the Abraham covenant in Genesis 12-50. "Creation, fall, and redemption with its prospect of consummation – that is the basic outline of the theological story" (5).

Four, based on the testimony of the Old Testament, Jewish tradition, Jesus' endorsement and the New Testament, Kline affirms the Mosaic authorship of the book of Genesis.

In the commentary proper, readers are introduced to some of Kline's key ideas, including but obviously not limited to the following. Kline understands the literary structure of Genesis 1:1-2:3 to be comprised of two parallel strands, God's creation of the earthly kingdoms in days one through three and the earthly kings in days four through six. These two strands are followed by God's royal session in his cosmic

temple-palace on the seventh day. Kline's interpretation of the "sons of God" as tyrannical kings in Genesis 6, who presume the prerogatives of deity, is set forth concisely. The important concept of the common grace covenant in the days of Noah is spelled out, as is the covenant with Abraham as a covenant of promise.

Given the concise nature of this work, readers will not find Kline's argumentation for why he thinks what he thinks. They will, however, find a refreshingly clear and simple summary of his interpretation of this foundational book in the Bible. There is no getting lost in the forest for the trees in this work. (For a similarly concise read of Kline's interpretation of the book of Deuteronomy, see his "Deuteronomy," in *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962), 155–204.)

Interpreters will no doubt take issue with various views expressed. I for one do not track with Kline's understanding of Genesis 1:1-2, either in terms of the way those two verses relate to each other or to their role in the first creation account. Of course, there are a variety of opinions on the interpretation of these two opening verses in the Bible, and that in the Reformed community not to speak of the interpretation of these verses in the broader Christian tradition. So a read of this commentary is also a reminder of the humility needed in approaching the word of God. In a similar way, I would take issue with Kline's understanding of the structure of the book. I too see Genesis 1:1-2 as the prologue to the book, but I take the first five divisions as a unit that is clearly mirrored by the second unit, which is comprised of the second five divisions.

Those of us who have had the privilege of studying under Meredith G. Kline will find pleasure in reading this commentary, as the words on the page evoke the words in his lectures that taught us so much about our covenant God and our relationship to him. Those who are just starting out in the world of biblical studies would do well to enter into the world of Meredith G. Kline, and there is no better way that I can think of doing so than by reading this brief commentary and following the footnotes into the deep thought of one of God's gracious gifts to the church.

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Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016. 256 pp. \$24.99, paper.

This is a fresh, accurate and compelling study of the doctrine of the Trinity, and should be commended as a text for seminary and university classes, as well as for ministers and other members of the Christian public. Indeed, it should be read by those who do not like the doctrine, as it may well disabuse the minds of at least some of them, who have not heard a clear presentation of why the Church has always professed the Holy Trinity.

Dr. Sanders appropriately states this truth in the context of worship, with the Augustinian injunction to seek the face of the Lord above all else. While it is not unlike any orthodox presentation of the biblical, ecclesiastical Trinitarian study, it may well be unique in how it goes to the heart of what has made the teaching of this doctrine problematic for well over a hundred years: it closely considers the relationship of the concept of divine revelation and Trinitarian truth. In particular, it discusses the onslaught of much 'higher criticism' of Scripture, which flowed from the European Enlightenment in general, and Socinianism in particular.

Even otherwise orthodox Christian scholars by the late 19th century were very hesitant to affirm the greatest basis of Trinitarian doctrine: the verbal propositional truths given us in the Scriptures of Old and New Testaments. Dr. Sanders of course accepts, and explicates coherently, the significance of God's actions within the world of space and time, but constantly shows that without the propositional teachings of Holy Scripture, we cannot really lucidly set forth this doctrine.

To that end, he does a remarkable job in looking not only at the sixty-six books of Scripture, but also at the canonical unity of Scripture, its intertextuality, and the inclination of many modern interpretative communities to cut off one part of Scripture from another. Along those lines, he discusses the larger unity of the twelve prophets, the coherent unity of the Psalter and Wisdom literature, and the underlying relatedness of the General Epistles and the four Gospels.

Echoing both Gore and Warfield, Sanders sees that much of Trinitarian doctrine is more 'overheard' in the Scriptures than specifically stated: "Paul never intentionally frames a discussion about the nature of God, or the relation of Father, Son, and Spirit. He is always in pursuit of one of his characteristic themes...when his

speech falls into a three-beat rhythm or a Trinitarian cadence...A Trinitarian subplot or baseline seems to underline everything Paul does" (p. 206).

He rightly notes that while the proof of the Trinity must be "piecemeal" in the sense of gathering together the increasingly clear revelation in the history of redemption that God makes of Himself as the One God in three Persons, from a mass of texts throughout the biblical canon, yet another concern is necessary at the same time. "Anybody making use of the piecemeal proof ought to be vigilant about communicating the larger relational structures that bind together the individual theses of Trinitarianism" (p. 176).

While honoring the Church Fathers, and sharing their Trinitarian faith, Sanders rightly insists that the Church's Trinitarian teaching finally rests on Scripture, and follows the Fathers because of their submissive insight into the sacred text. What he writes about 'prosoponic exegesis' opens the right conceptual doors here. According to Michael Slusser, it is "a practice of discerning the speakers or *prosopa* in reading Scripture" (quoted in Sanders, p. 227). Sanders adds that "Prosoponic exegesis has been almost the exclusive property of patristic scholars for decades...But the church fathers did not invent it; they took it from Scripture" (p. 230). It "...has its ultimate foundations in the New Testament's use of the Old" (p. 232). He shows how this works in Psalm 110 and others, and (quoting Rondeau) "...the fact that Jesus prayed the Psalms, and New Testament authors put psalms on his lips at several crucial points, concludes: 'In light of these indications, the exegete, extrapolating from the isolated verse to the entire poem, imputes to Christ the entire Psalm in question'" (Sanders, p. 235).

Referring to Ephesians 1:8-9, he states: "It is not an accident that a passage rehearsing the unified narrative arc of salvation history in this way falls naturally into Trinitarian cadences: God the Father has blessed, chosen, and adopted a people who have redemption through the blood of the beloved Son and are sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise for a future redemption" (p. 105).

With scholarly care, Sanders shows how the Trinity is adumbrated in the Old Testament, though not yet clearly revealed before the Incarnation and Pentecost. One of the strongest points of this book is the way he brings to light the all-important connection of the historical missions of Son and Spirit with the eternal inner life of the Triune God: "The judgment that these two missions are the manifestations of two eternal relations of origin is as central to Trinitarian doctrine as it is fundamental to Trinitarian exegesis... The most holistic interpretive move in the history of biblical theology took place when the early church discerned that these missions reveal divine

processions, and that in this way, the identity of the triune God of the gospel is made known" (p. 113).

Aquinas had seen this long before: "Mission includes an eternal procession, but also adds something else, namely an effect in time; for the relationship of the divine person to a principle is eternal. We speak, therefore, of a twofold procession - the one during eternity, the other during time - in view of the doubling, not of relation to principle, but of the terminations - one in eternity, the other in time (from ST I, q. 43, a. 2)" (p. 125). Or, as Augustine had pointed out much earlier: "missions reveal processions" (Sanders, p. 124).

In this context, he points out a weakness in the epoch-making essay of the great B. B. Warfield's "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity", which teaching he and I both gladly follow. I had not noticed before he mentioned it, that for all Warfield's massive insight here, he did not adequately consider "the idea of the relations of origin..." and thus gives "...a weak treatment of the processions, driven by a fear of subordinationism..." (p. 175).

Sanders frequently refers to one of the early Church Fathers, Athanasius, whose writings countered any and all sorts of subordinationism. For instance, he relates the twofold reason shown by Athanasius as to why the Son was sent to be incarnate, rather than the Father or the Son: first, he showed that it was appropriate to redeem creation through the agent of Creation (Christ), and secondly, that "the second person stands in an eternal relation to the first person, which is signified by calling him Son of, Word of, image of, offspring of, wisdom of, or radiance of (*Against the Arians* 1.28)" (p. 115). "Why was the coessential Son the one who was sent? Because his coessentiality was that of one who stood in a relationship of fromness with regard to the one he is eternally from" (p. 116).

As Augustine said: "Some statements of Scripture about the Father and the Son ... indicate their unity and equality of substance. And there are others... which mark the Son as lesser because of the form of a servant, that is because of the created and changeable human substance he too... Lastly, there are others which mark him neither as less nor as equal, but only intimate that he is from the Father (*De Trinitate* 2.1.2, 98)" (p. 117).

This is altogether a satisfying exposition of the biblical doctrine of the Triune God, and one that I found personally edifying. It might have been interesting to see someone of Dr. Sanders' theological acuity address more fully *perichoresis*, and perhaps to have done a bit more exegesis of crucial Trinitarian texts, but then again, that might have made his book too large, and kept it from being the sharp conceptual

instrument it is. As it is, it has the twofold advantages of being economic in its size, and utterly clear in its language and concepts.

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Barry Hankins, *Woodrow Wilson: Ruling Elder, Spiritual President*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 235 pp. \$35.00, cloth.

“Spiritual Lives,” a promising new series from Oxford University Press, offers brief biographies of public figures with a focus on the bearing of their religious convictions on their life and thought. In this inaugural volume, Barry Hankins, Professor of History at Baylor University and author of a prize-winning biography of Francis Schaeffer, examines the encounter of Calvinistic orthodoxy with public policy in a scholar who served as President of Princeton University, Governor of New Jersey, and the 28th President of the United States. While the biography is brief, the research of the author was extensive, including working through the massive 64-volume *Papers of Woodrow Wilson* by Princeton University Press.

Hankins’s life of Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924) invites comparison with the story of another prominent son of the Presbyterian south who does not appear in the narrative, J. Gresham Machen (1881-1936). Though Machen was 24 years younger, he and Wilson were acquaintances: Wilson was a prominent guest of the Machen family in their Baltimore home, and he returned the favor by entertaining Machen from time to time at Princeton.

The many Presbyterian pastors in Wilson’s family included his uncle, James Woodrow, a professor at Columbia Seminary whose views on theistic evolution became controversial in the southern Presbyterian Church. Dr. Woodrow was supported by the Machen family during the Baltimore General Assembly when he was disciplined by the church in 1881 (also the year of John Gresham Machen’s birth). While the evolution controversy cost Woodrow his post at Columbia, it was instrumental in the ways in which his nephew came “quickly and easily” to embrace the views of biblical higher criticism (20).

Both Wilson and Machen were brilliant scholars, each trained at Johns Hopkins in that innovative university's early history. As a Princeton Seminary student, Machen sat in on university lectures by Professor Wilson on American constitutional history. There Wilson described John Calvin as "the great reforming Christian statesman" (45), his teaching on church polity serving as the foundation for modern democracy. Hankins makes clear that Wilson's Whig view of history allowed him to see the Reformation and the Enlightenment, far from opposed, as working together as progressive forces in history.

Finally, both southern Christian gentlemen found their vocations in the north and declined tempting opportunities to return home. Wilson was offered the Presidency of the University of Virginia, and Union Seminary in Virginia had sought to recruit Machen in New Testament.

Despite all these similarities, the two would set out on different paths. Wilson rejected covenant theology as unscientific and eschewed Calvinistic orthodoxy for progressive views of Scripture. "Unorthodox in my reading of the standards of the faith," he wrote in his journal as a 32 year old, "I am nevertheless orthodox in my faith" (52). Specifically, a Calvinistic anthropology based on total depravity would yield to an Enlightenment-informed optimism about human nature. Under his presidential administration Hankins notes how quickly Princeton University secularized: "Presbyterian orthodoxy disappeared altogether, becoming something of an embarrassment" (98) and the school "ceased to be Christian in any meaningful sense" (86).

Wilson embraced the modernist impulse whereby "darkness was associated with what was old" (213). Pedagogically, the options before the University were progress or sectarianism. Princeton Seminary, however, did not keep pace (that would wait its reorganization in 1929). Thus there was little interaction with the Seminary during his Presidency. Wilson himself did not attend Seminary centennial events in 1912.

After leaving the University in 1910, Wilson successfully ran for governor of New Jersey. Two years later, he won the Presidency a three-way contest with Theodore Roosevelt and incumbent William Taft, securing an electoral landslide with only 43% of the popular vote. As President, Wilson's progressivism blossomed into civil religion, expressed with a zeal that left the *New York Times* to wonder whether Wilson's rhetoric implied that Americans "had become regenerate" (123). In Hankins's words, "Social Gospel became redeemer nation" (138), though as he goes on to explain, Wilson's progressivism would not extend to race relations.

When Wilson altered his attitude toward World War I, it became America's righteous cause, Wilson growing ever more confident in America's providential role in history. Indeed, Hankins notes that his rhetoric resembled holy war more than just war: American entered the conflict, Wilson insisted, "for the salvation of all" (157). For his part, though Machen supported Wilson's election as Governor of New Jersey and President, his enthusiasm for Wilson waned especially as he grew to lament what he called the "patriotic enthusiasm and military ardor" that characterized Princeton during the Great War.

One disappointing feature of Hankins's book is that, despite its subtitle, the book offers no reference to Wilson's service as a Presbyterian ruling elder (the dustjacket notes his election to the office in 1897, at the age of 40). However his Presbyterian convictions evolved, Wilson maintained the regular practice of the Reformed piety of his youth. He was a faithful church-goer throughout his life, occupying the third pew at Central Presbyterian Church during his White House years. His daughters memorized the Westminster Shorter Catechism and he faithfully maintained family devotions.

In Hankins's narrative Wilson emerges as the prototype of the modernist that Machen describes in his manifesto, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923), clinging to a Christian faith that was "gutted of its content." Hankins elaborates: "Wilson's optimism concerning the power of humankind to do good hailed not from his Reformed heritage but from liberal theology, the Social Gospel, progressivism, and, ultimately, the romantic spiritualization of religion to the point that it existed everywhere and therefore nowhere" (213). This left the Presbyterian ruling elder flummoxed about the mission of the church. "Wilson loved the church, and he wanted to make it central to all of life, but he always fumbled around when trying to figure out what the church actually was" (137). The social gospel, in effect, rendered the church redundant. "Once everything is God's work ... Wilson ... struggled to find something unique for the church to do" (138). What ultimately counted for Wilson, "whether in politics or religion, was doing good" (105). This is precisely the moralistic counterfeit of Christianity that Machen would go on to portray in his book. Wilson's life is the odyssey of a Southern old school Presbyterian into a Northern Presbyterian modernist.

This brief biography is especially rewarding as a reminder for confessional Presbyterians of recurring temptation to place one's hope in electoral politics. If columnist H. L. Mencken went too far in dismissing Wilson as a "self-bamboozled Presbyterian," we would do well to guard ourselves against the naiveté of his

moralism. This raises one more commonality between Wilson and Machen – both lives ended tragically. After the war, Wilson’s idealism took a new cause, the League of Nations, which he promoted with the zeal of a revivalist. In the end his “secularized eschatology” would not sell any more in Congress than among European allies. Wilson left the White House a broken and bitter man; “Defeated Prophet” is the apt title of the final chapter.

Machen experienced a humiliating defeat at the end of his life as well, when he failed to drive modernism out of the Northern Presbyterian church. But unlike Wilson, his hope was firmly fixed on the life to come.

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