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Some months removed from two holiday rites of American civil religion, namely, the Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular and the Park Avenue Christmas Tree Lighting and Carol Sing, I am still thinking about what I experienced at these two events in New York. The ghost of Christmas past still haunts me in July.

Residing in the New York metropolitan area does not put those of us who live there beyond the occasional need to play the tourist in our own Big Apple. So when a friend suggested we attend the Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular, I welcomed the opportunity. I had seen the show only once before—some thirty years ago—and it seemed like a good way to begin the holiday season.

Radio City Music Hall, part of the Rockefeller Center complex, is a cavernous and opulent theatre seating nearly 6,000 people, a vintage Art Deco masterpiece that opened in 1932. It is furnished with a twin-console “Mighty Wurlitzer” organ of 4,400 pipes, boasts a full orchestra, and features the famous Rockettes with their high-kick dance line.

The annual Christmas Spectacular is not as pricey as Broadway, and many working parents can still afford to come to it with their children and flash cameras in tow. The program is an amalgam of pop-culture Christmas scenes: a high-tech animation sequence that gives the audience, bedecked in 3-D eyeglasses, the exhilarating sensation of flying with Santa Claus over the streets of Manhattan; the incredibly synchronized dancing of the Rockettes; a sampling from Tchaikovsky’s Nutcracker; and a procession of live sheep and camels moving on stage silently and deliberately to Bethlehem. The show builds to a climactic “living nativity” as majestically garbed wise men bow before the Holy Family and offer their gifts to the Christ child. Then the entire audience joins the cast in singing “Joy to the World.” It’s all here American style: a ninety-minute celebration seamlessly combining holiday chutzpah, sexy chorus girls, Santa Claus, and the infant Savior in a nostalgic setting.
recalling a bygone era when attending a show at Radio City was an extraordinary event. Christ and culture, indeed!

Amid all the kitsch, there was a brief interlude in which child actors performed in an onstage living room. The children actually read, in the words of the program notes, “the beautiful and inspiring story of the first Christmas” in “scripture,” taken from the King James Bible, and including both the Matthean and Lucan accounts: “And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. . . . Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem” (Luke 2:8ff.; Matt 2:1ff.) In this way thousands of people once again heard the good news of the birth of Jesus Christ, read with an intentionality and purpose that would instruct many a church lector. I am impressed that the Gospels still get read in public in a setting free of clerical control or trappings. Perhaps, in this way, scandalous to be sure, some of today’s “shepherds” still “have the good news preached to them,” not to mention those who might still pass these days for “wise men.”

Now picture standing with me on the first Sunday night of last December for the 65th Annual Park Avenue Christmas Tree Lighting and Carol Sing. To get there, you have to make your way on foot up Manhattan’s Park Avenue toward 91st Street, through the police lines, and toward the steps of the Brick Presbyterian Church. There a children’s choir is assembled outdoors close to a nearby organ. I was soon enveloped by throngs of New Yorkers, all jockeying to get the best places to stand and with many children hoisted on their dads’ shoulders.

Since 1945, when World War II and the blackout ended, New Yorkers on the Upper East Side have gathered each year on the first Sunday of December to honor those fallen in America’s wars as a trumpeter plays “Taps.” While there are no longer marching military bands and the mayor usually skips the event, some three or four thousand New Yorkers still gather en masse to sing Christmas carols before Pastor Michael Lindvall intones, “Let there be light!” Then to great cheers, the Con Edison crews pull the switches illuminating the Christmas trees on Park Avenue all the way down toward Grand Central Station.

Michael had prepped me before my excursion. “Jim, this is pure civil religion. It’s the one time of year that our Jewish friends in the neighborhood can openly sing Christmas carols—and they love it!” And sure enough, Michael welcomed the crowd by saying, “We gather here together tonight. Some of us are Christians. Some of us are Jews. Some of us are Muslims. Some of us come as believers; some of us as nonbelievers. But all of us come together united in hope for peace on earth.”
What followed was the “congregational” singing of Christmas carols by the throng on Park Avenue. Mind you, as at Radio City, no attempt was made here to alter the carols or make them “politically correct,” and, yes, many folks did not seem to know all the stanzas. But led by the children’s choir of the church and its skilled organist-choirmaster, and helped by a distributed church bulletin giving the texts, voices were raised in song, whether from habit, or in irony, belief, or unbelief. On Park Avenue, a gathering of Jews, Christians, Muslims, and many “others” and many “nothings” publicly caroled and thereby proclaimed the greatest and grandest Nicene and Chalcedonian affirmations of the Christian faith: “Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing”; “Mild he lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die”; “Come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel”; “With the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus, Lord, at thy birth”; “Glorious now behold him arise, King and God and Sacrifice”; and “Come adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord, the newborn King.”

Wherever our July reflections on Christmas might locate these rites of American civil religion on the spectrum of some Christ-and-culture typology, they are yet a reminder of the essentially public character of the gospel of God. Focusing, in this instance, on the birth of Israel’s Messiah and the Incarnation of the divine Word, that gospel is not simply for Christians, for the “religious,” or for the pious. It is for all, as Jesus Christ himself is for all and with all (Emmanuel!), whether they know it or not, believe it or not, or embrace it or not.

American mainline Protestantism might benefit from a new awareness of the public character of the Christian faith. Some of the anemia and atrophy afflicting us is no doubt traceable to certain Enlightenment prejudices. There is our disdain for the “popular” and the “vulgar” (what the fashionably learned in eighteenth-century Edinburgh derisively labeled as “Italianate” when they were confronted by the ardor of the Scottish people for outdoor communion seasons with their processions and lengthy preparations). There is our embarrassed reserve in the face of “enthusiasms” and “superstitions” that always accompany the indigenization of the story of Jesus. But before dismissing Radio City’s Christmas Spectacular for its vulgarity, superficiality, sentimentality, and commerciality (as if our churches are really beyond these highbrow worries), one should at least deign to sing “Joy to the World” with a row of strangers accompanied by the Mighty Wurlitzer. Such might serve as a salutary caution about translating the faith too readily into rarified abstractions far removed from the earthiness of the scriptural narratives of Jesus. The public character of the church, as with the public character of the Incarnation, means
that the vernacular and the vulgar are always with us. If God in the Incarnation employs utterly human means, who are we to despise them?

This is not to deny or excuse the pernicious excesses of civil religion that can tempt churches and even whole countries and civilizations into xenophobia, nationalism, and militarism, by confounding or confusing the gospel with the Fourth of July, or the American flag, or some political movement, or some fashionable ideology. But acknowledging these dangers, should the church of the Incarnate One ever withhold its message—and his—from the world God has elected to love?

As I continue to muse this July about the goings-on last December from the sidewalks of New York, I believe I witnessed a preview or rehearsal of that coming day and time when the blessing of God for everyone will at last be seen and praised by all—in public (cf. Phil 2:5–11). In that hope, I wish all a Merry Christmas. God bless us, everyone!
Abstract: Washington’s Farewell Address (1796) and Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address (1865) occupy positions of extraordinary importance in American political history. Authored by arguably the greatest presidents, these statements arose from critical moments in the nation’s life: its formative coalescence under a new Constitution and its complete dissolution after four years of civil war. Though neither Washington nor Lincoln pretended theological sophistication, analysis of their last great speeches reveals discerning claims about God and humanity, often biblically based, which are at once subtle and stark. Christologically soft yet anthropologically tough, these final pronouncements by Washington and Lincoln still summon their readers to consider “the American experiment” within the framework of an inscrutable, intractable Providence.

The title of this article intends jocularity, although George Washington’s Farewell Address and Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural are among a handful of specimens of American statecraft that have come to be accorded quasi-canonical status. This is an essay in the original sense of an *essai*, or “trial”: an attempt, by a biblical specialist with rudimentary knowledge of American political history, to consider these documents as theological statements and, through that process, to stimulate beneficial conversation.1


1. This article originated in a paper delivered at the April 3, 2009, meeting of the American Theological Society in Princeton, New Jersey. For research assistance I tender my gratitude to Laura C. Sweat, Ph.D. candidate at Princeton Theological Seminary.
Washington’s Farewell Address
(September 19, 1796)

“He was a virtuoso of resignations. He perfected the art of getting power by giving it away.”² Though it’s unlikely that John 10:17–18 or Philippians 2:5–11 were his conscious motivations, George Washington’s modus operandi was curiously Christlike, in effect if not by intention.

News that Washington (1732–1799) had resigned his commission as commander of America’s Continental Army on December 23, 1783, was a second shot heard around the world. He was compared with Cincinnatus, the legendary Roman called from his plow to save Rome, only to return to his plow after the peril had passed.³ On May 10, 1784, John Trumbull, who interpreted the event in paint,⁴ wrote his brother from London: “[Washington’s resignation] excites the astonishment and admiration of this part of the world. ’Tis a Conduct so novel, so inconceivable to People, who, far from giving up powers they possess, are willing to convulse the Empire to acquire more.”⁵

Washington’s second great resignation, from the American presidency, was to have occurred in 1792. At that time he gave James Madison notes for the drafting of a farewell address, the Urtext for the document delivered to the press four years later, after Washington had bowed to popular election for a second term.⁶ Both texts betrayed his great worry for the new republic: that it would collapse under the pressures of sectionalism and partisanship.⁷ The European remedy, monarchy, was for him a cure worse than the disease. Joseph Addison’s Cato: A Tragedy (1713)⁸ taught Washington and other republicans to fear Caesar’s hubris:

⁴. Trumbull’s painting hangs at the United States Historical Society in Washington, D.C.
⁵. Quoted in Wills, Cincinnatus, 13.
⁶. Without formally announcing his intent, Washington was unanimously elected to a second presidential term by the Electoral College on February 13, 1793.
⁷. That fear was well founded: he died amid a mean struggle between Adams’s Federalists and Jefferson’s Republicans.
⁸. By all accounts this play was Washington’s favorite, and he commanded its performance for his troops while encamped at Valley Forge (1777–78). On the influence generally of Greek and Roman ideals on the founders, see Caroline Winterer, The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780–1910 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Carl J. Richard, Greeks and Romans Bearing Gifts: How the Ancients Inspired the Founding Fathers (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).
What is a Roman that is Caesar’s foe?  
Greater than Caesar, he’s the friend of virtue (2.2).

Washington’s hope was that America’s constitutional experiment would offer a young, nonaligned nation leverage among the eighteenth-century superpowers of France, England, and Spain. From that process, as he wrote Patrick Henry, “I want an American character, that the powers of Europe may be convinced we act for ourselves and not for others.”

Washington’s Farewell

Friends and Fellow–Citizens:

[1] The period for a new election of a Citizen to Administer the Executive Government of the United States being not far distant, and the time actually arrived when your thoughts must be employed in designating the person, who is to be clothed with that important trust, it appears to me proper, especially as it may conduce to a more distinct expression of the public voice, that I should now apprise you of the resolution I have formed, to decline being considered among the number of those out of whom a choice is to be made.

[2] I beg you, at the same time, to do me the justice to be assured that this resolution has not been taken without a strict regard to all the considerations appertaining to the relation which binds a dutiful citizen to his country; and that in withdrawing the tender of service, which silence in my situation might imply, I am influenced by no diminution of zeal for your future interest, no deficiency of grateful respect for your past kindness, but am supported by a full conviction that the step is compatible with both.

[3] The acceptance of, and continuance hitherto in, the office to which your Suffrages have twice called me have been a uniform sacrifice of inclination to the opinion of duty and to a deference for what appeared to be your desire. I constantly hoped that it would have been much earlier in my power, consistently with motives which I was not at liberty to disregard, to return to that retirement from which I had been reluctantly


The strength of my inclination to do this, previous to the last Election, had even led to the preparation of an address to declare it to you; but mature reflection on the then perplexed and critical posture of our Affairs with foreign Nations, and the unanimous advice of persons entitled to my confidence, impelled me to abandon the idea.

[4] I rejoice that the state of your concerns, external as well as internal, no longer renders the pursuit of inclination incompatible with the sentiment of duty or propriety, and am persuaded, whatever partiality may be retained for my services, that, in the present circumstances of our country, you will not disapprove my determination to retire.

[5] The impressions, with which I first undertook the arduous trust, were explained on the proper occasion. In the discharge of this trust, I will only say that I have, with good intentions, contributed towards the Organization and Administration of the government the best exertions of which a very fallible judgment was capable. Not unconscious in the outset of the inferiority of my qualifications, experience in my own eyes, perhaps still more in the eyes of others, has strengthened the motives to diffidence of myself; and every day the increasing weight of years admonishes me more and more that the shade of retirement is as necessary to me as it will be welcome. Satisfied that if any circumstances have given peculiar value to my services, they were temporary, I have the consolation to believe that, while choice and prudence invite me to quit the political scene, patriotism does not forbid it.

[6] In looking forward to the moment which is intended to terminate the career of my public life, my feelings do not permit me to suspend the deep acknowledgment of that debt of gratitude which I owe to my beloved country for the many honors it has conferred upon me; still more for the steadfast confidence with which it has supported me; and for the opportunities I have thence enjoyed of manifesting my inviolable attachment, by services faithful and persevering, though in usefulness unequal to my zeal. If benefits have resulted to our country from these services, let it always be remembered to your praise, and as an instructive example in our annals, that under circumstances in which the Passions, agitated in every direction, were liable to mislead, amidst appearances sometimes dubious, vicissitudes of fortune often discouraging, in situations in which not unfrequently want of success has countenanced the spirit of criticism, the constancy of your support was the essential prop of the efforts, and a guarantee of the plans by which they were effected. Profoundly penetrated with this idea, I shall carry it with me to my grave, as a strong
incitement to unceasing vows that Heaven may continue to you the choicest tokens of its beneficence; that your Union and brotherly affection may be perpetual; that the free Constitution, which is the work of your hands, may be sacredly maintained; that its Administration in every department may be stamped with wisdom and Virtue; that, in fine, the happiness of the people of these States, under the auspices of liberty, may be made complete by so careful a preservation and so prudent a use of this blessing as will acquire to them the glory of recommending it to the applause, the affection, and adoption of every nation which is yet a stranger to it.

[7] Here, perhaps, I ought to stop. But a solicitude for your welfare, which cannot end but with my life, and the apprehension of danger, natural to that solicitude, urge me, on an occasion like the present, to offer to your solemn contemplation, and to recommend to your frequent review, some sentiments which are the result of much reflection, of no inconsiderable observation, and which appear to me all-important to the permanency of your felicity as a People. These will be offered to you with the more freedom, as you can only see in them the disinterested warnings of a parting friend, who can possibly have no personal motive to bias his counsel. Nor can I forget, as an encouragement to it, your indulgent reception of my sentiments on a former and not dissimilar occasion.

[8] Interwoven as is the love of liberty with every ligament of your hearts, no recommendation of mine is necessary to fortify or confirm the attachment.

[9] The Unity of Government which constitutes you one people is also now dear to you. It is justly so, for it is a main Pillar in the Edifice of your real independence, the support of your tranquility at home, your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very Liberty which you so highly prize. But as it is easy to foresee that, from different causes and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many artifices employed to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth; as this is the point in your political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) directed, it is of infinite moment that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national Union to your collective and individual happiness; that you should cherish a cordial, habitual, and immovable attachment to it; accustoming yourselves to think and speak of it as of the Palladium of your political safety and prosperity; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion that it can in any event
be abandoned; and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our Country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts.

[10] For this you have every inducement of sympathy and interest. Citizens, by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections. The name of AMERICAN, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of Patriotism more than any appellation derived from local discriminations. With slight shades of difference, you have the same Religion, Manners, Habits, and political Principles. You have in a common cause fought and triumphed together; the independence and liberty you possess are the work of joint counsels, and joint efforts of common dangers, sufferings, and successes.

[11] But these considerations, however powerfully they address themselves to your sensibility, are greatly outweighed by those which apply more immediately to your interest. Here every portion of our country finds the most commanding motives for carefully guarding and preserving the union of the whole.

[12] The North, in an unrestrained intercourse with the South, protected by the equal laws of a common government, finds in the productions of the latter great additional resources of Maritime and commercial enterprise and precious materials of manufacturing industry. The South, in the same intercourse, benefiting by the Agency of the North, sees its agriculture grow and its commerce expand. Turning partly into its own channels the seamen of the North, it finds its particular navigation invigorated; and, while it contributes, in different ways, to nourish and increase the general mass of the national navigation, it looks forward to the protection of a maritime strength, to which itself is unequally adapted. The East, in a like intercourse with the West, already finds, and in the progressive improvement of interior communications by land and water, will more and more find a valuable vent for the commodities which it brings from abroad, or manufactures at home. The West derives from the East supplies requisite to its growth and comfort, and, what is perhaps of still greater consequence, it must of necessity owe the secure enjoyment of indispensable outlets for its own productions to the weight, influence, and the future maritime strength of the Atlantic side of the Union, directed by an indissoluble community of Interest as one Nation. Any other tenure by which the West can hold this essential advantage, whether derived from its own separate strength, or from an apostate and unnatural connection with any foreign Power, must be intrinsically precarious.
While, then, every part of our country thus feels an immediate and particular Interest in Union, all the parts combined cannot fail to find in the united mass of means and efforts greater strength, greater resource, proportionally greater security from external danger, a less frequent interruption of their Peace by foreign Nations; and, what is of inestimable value, they must derive from Union an exemption from those broils and Wars between themselves, which so frequently afflict neighboring countries not tied together by the same governments, which their own rival ships alone would be sufficient to produce, but which opposite foreign alliances, attachments, and intrigues would stimulate and embitter. Hence, likewise, they will avoid the necessity of those overgrown Military establishments which, under any form of Government, are inauspicious to liberty, and which are to be regarded as particularly hostile to Republican Liberty. In this sense it is that your Union ought to be considered as a main prop of your liberty, and that the love of the one ought to endear to you the preservation of the other.

These considerations speak a persuasive language to every reflecting and virtuous mind, and exhibit the continuance of the UNION as a primary object of Patriotic desire. Is there a doubt whether a common government can embrace so large a sphere? Let experience solve it. To listen to mere speculation in such a case were criminal. We are authorized to hope that a proper organization of the whole with the auxiliary agency of governments for the respective subdivisions, will afford a happy issue to the experiment. It is well worth a fair and full experiment. With such powerful and obvious motives to Union, affecting all parts of our country, while experience shall not have demonstrated its impracticability, there will always be reason to distrust the patriotism of those who in any quarter may endeavor to weaken its bands.

In contemplating the causes which may disturb our Union, it occurs as matter of serious concern that any ground should have been furnished for characterizing parties by Geographical discriminations, Northern and Southern, Atlantic and Western; whence designing men may endeavor to excite a belief that there is a real difference of local interests and views. One of the expedients of Party to acquire influence within particular districts is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other Districts. You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heart burnings which spring from these misrepresentations; they tend to render Alien to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection. The Inhabitants of our Western country have lately had a useful lesson
on this head; they have seen, in the Negotiation by the Executive, and in
the unanimous ratification by the Senate, of the Treaty with Spain, and
in the universal satisfaction at that event, throughout the United States,
a decisive proof how unfounded were the suspicions propagated among
them of a policy in the General Government and in the Atlantic States
unfriendly to their interests in regard to the MISSISSIPPI; they have been
witnesses to the formation of two Treaties, that with Great Britain, and
that with Spain, which secure to them everything they could desire, in
respect to our Foreign relations, towards confirming their prosperity. Will
it not be their wisdom to rely for the preservation of these advantages on
the UNION by which they were procured? Will they not henceforth be
deaf to those advisers, if such there are, who would sever them from their
Brethren and connect them with Aliens?

[16] To the efficacy and permanency of Your Union, a Government for
the whole is indispensable. No Alliances, however strict, between the parts
can be an adequate substitute; they must inevitably experience the infrac-
tions and interruptions which all Alliances in all times have experienced.
Sensible of this momentous truth, you have improved upon your first
essay, by the adoption of a Constitution of Government better calculated
than your former for an intimate Union, and for the efficacious manage-
ment of your common concerns. This government, the offspring of our
own choice, uninfluenced and unawed, adopted upon full investigation and
mature deliberation, completely free in its principles, in the distribution
of its powers, uniting security with energy, and containing within itself a
provision for its own amendment, has a just claim to your confidence and
your support. Respect for its authority, compliance with its Laws, acquies-
cence in its measures, are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of
true Liberty. The basis of our political systems is the right of the people to
make and to alter their Constitutions of Government. But the Constitution
which at any time exists, till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the
whole People, is sacredly obligatory upon all. The very idea of the power
and the right of the People to establish Government presupposes the duty
of every Individual to obey the established Government.

[17] All obstructions to the execution of the Laws, all combinations and
Associations, under whatever plausible character, with the real design to
direct, control, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of
the Constituted authorities, are destructive of this fundamental principle,
and of fatal tendency. They serve to organize faction, to give it an artifi-
cial and extraordinary force; to put, in the place of the delegated will of
the Nation the will of a party, often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the Community; and, according to the alternate triumphs of different parties, to make the public administration the Mirror of the ill-concerted and incongruous projects of faction, rather than the organ of consistent and wholesome plans digested by common counsels and modified by mutual interests.

[18] However combinations or Associations of the above description may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the Power of the People and to usurp for themselves the reins of Government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion.

[19] Towards the preservation of your Government, and the permanency of your present happy state, it is requisite, not only that you steadily discountenance irregular oppositions to its acknowledged authority, but also that you resist with care the spirit of innovation upon its principles, however specious the pretexts. One method of assault may be to effect, in the forms of the Constitution, alterations which will impair the energy of the system, and thus to undermine what cannot be directly overthrown. In all the changes to which you may be invited, remember that time and habit are at least as necessary to fix the true character of Governments as of other human institutions; that experience is the surest standard by which to test the real tendency of the existing Constitution of a country; that facility in changes, upon the credit of mere hypothesis and opinion, exposes to perpetual change, from the endless variety of hypothesis and opinion; and remember, especially, that for the efficient management of your common interests, in a country so extensive as ours, a Government of as much vigor as is consistent with the perfect security of Liberty is indispensable. Liberty itself will find in such a Government, with powers properly distributed and adjusted, its surest Guardian. It is, indeed, little else than a name, where the Government is too feeble to withstand the enterprises of faction, to confine each member of the Society within the limits prescribed by the laws, and to maintain all in the secure and tranquil enjoyment of the rights of person and property.

[20] I have already intimated to you the danger of Parties in the State, with particular reference to the founding of them on Geographical discriminations. Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the Spirit of Party generally.
[21] This spirit, unfortunately, is inseparable from our nature, having its root in the strongest passions of the human Mind. It exists under different shapes in all Governments, more or less stifled, controlled, or repressed; but, in those of the popular form, it is seen in its greatest rankness, and is truly their worst enemy.

[22] The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism. But this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries which result gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an Individual; and sooner or later the chief of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty.

[23] Without looking forward to an extremity of this kind (which nevertheless ought not to be entirely out of sight), the common and continual mischiefs of the spirit of Party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise People to discourage and restrain it.

[24] It serves always to distract the Public Councils and enfeeble the Public administration. It agitates the Community with ill founded jealousies and false alarms, kindles the animosity of one part against another, foments occasionally riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which finds a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions. Thus the policy and the will of one country are subjected to the policy and will of another.

[25] There is an opinion that parties in free countries are useful checks upon the Administration of the Government and serve to keep alive the spirit of Liberty. This within certain limits is probably true; and in Governments of a Monarchical cast Patriotism may look with indulgence, if not with favor, upon the spirit of party. But in those of the popular character, in Governments purely elective, it is a spirit not to be encouraged. From their natural tendency, it is certain there will always be enough of that spirit for every salutary purpose. And there being constant danger of excess, the effort ought to be by force of public opinion, to mitigate and assuage it. A fire not to be quenched, it demands a uniform vigilance to prevent its bursting into a flame, lest, instead of warming, it should consume.

[26] It is important, likewise, that the habits of thinking in a free Country should inspire caution in those entrusted with its administration, to con-
fine themselves within their respective Constitutional spheres, avoiding in the exercise of the Powers of one department to encroach upon another. The spirit of encroachment tends to consolidate the powers of all the departments in one, and thus to create, whatever the form of government, a real despotism. A just estimate of that love of power, and proneness to abuse it, which predominates in the human heart, is sufficient to satisfy us of the truth of this position. The necessity of reciprocal checks in the exercise of political power, by dividing and distributing it into different depositaries, and constituting each the Guardian of the Public Weal against invasions by the others, has been evinced by experiments ancient and modern; some of them in our country and under our own eyes. To preserve them must be as necessary as to institute them. If, in the opinion of the People, the distribution or modification of the Constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way which the Constitution designates. But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed. The precedent must always greatly overbalance in permanent evil any partial or transient benefit, which the use can at any time yield.

[27] Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

[28] Tis substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to every species of free Government. Who that is a sincere friend to it can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric?

[29] Promote then, as an object of primary importance, Institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a
government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened.

[30] As a very important source of strength and security, cherish public credit. One method of preserving it is to use it as sparingly as possible, avoiding occasions of expense by cultivating peace, but remembering also that timely disbursements to prepare for danger frequently prevent much greater disbursements to repel it, avoiding likewise the accumulation of debt, not only by shunning occasions of expense, but by vigorous exertion in time of Peace to discharge the Debts which unavoidable wars may have occasioned, not ungenerously throwing upon posterity the burden which we ourselves ought to bear. The execution of these maxims belongs to your Representatives, but it is necessary that public opinion should co-operate. To facilitate to them the performance of their duty, it is essential that you should practically bear in mind that towards the payment of debts there must be Revenue; that to have Revenue there must be taxes; that no taxes can be devised which are not more or less inconvenient and unpleasant; that the intrinsic embarrassment, inseparable from the selection of the proper objects (which is always a choice of difficulties), ought to be a decisive motive for a candid construction of the Conduct of the Government in making it, and for a spirit of acquiescence in the measures for obtaining Revenue, which the public exigencies may at any time dictate.

[31] Observe good faith and justice towards all Nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all. Religion and morality enjoin this conduct; and can it be, that good policy does not equally enjoin it. It will be worthy of a free, enlightened, and at no distant period, a great Nation, to give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a People always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence. Who can doubt that, in the course of time and things, the fruits of such a plan would richly repay any temporary advantages which might be lost by a steady adherence to it? Can it be that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a Nation with its virtue? The experiment, at least, is recommended by every sentiment which ennobles human Nature. Alas! is it rendered impossible by its vices?

[32] In the execution of such a plan, nothing is more essential than that permanent, invertebrate antipathies against particular Nations, and passionate attachments for others, should be excluded; and that, in place of them, just and amicable feelings towards all should be cultivated. The Nation which indulges towards another a habitual hatred or a habitual fondness
is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest. Antipathy in one Nation against another disposes each more readily to offer insult and injury, to lay hold of slight causes of umbrage, and to be haughty and intractable, when accidental or trifling occasions of dispute occur. Hence, frequent collisions, obstinate, envenomed, and bloody contests. The Nation, prompted by ill-will and resentment, sometimes impels to War the Government, contrary to the best calculations of policy. The Government sometimes participates in the national propensity, and adopts through passion what reason would reject; at other times it makes the animosity of the Nation subservient to projects of hostility instigated by pride, ambition, and other sinister and pernicious motives. The peace often, sometimes perhaps the Liberty, of Nations has been the victim.

[33] So likewise, a passionate attachment of one Nation for another produces a variety of evils. Sympathy for the favourite nation, facilitating the illusion of an imaginary common interest in cases where no real common interest exists, and infusing into one the enmities of the other, betrays the former into a participation in the quarrels and Wars of the latter without adequate inducement or justification. It leads also to concessions to the favorite Nation of privileges denied to others which is apt doubly to injure the nation making the concessions; by unnecessarily parting with what ought to have been retained, and by exciting jealousy, ill-will, and a disposition to retaliate, in the parties from whom equal privileges are withheld. And it gives to ambitious, corrupted, or deluded citizens (who devote themselves to the favourite Nation), facility to betray or sacrifice the interests of their own country, without odium, sometimes even with popularity; gilding, with the appearances of a virtuous sense of obligation, a commendable deference for public opinion, or a laudable zeal for public good, the base or foolish compliances of ambition, corruption, or infatuation.

[34] As avenues to foreign influence in innumerable ways, such attachments are particularly alarming to the truly enlightened and independent Patriot. How many opportunities do they afford to tamper with domestic factions, to practice the arts of seduction, to mislead public opinion, to influence or awe the public Councils? Such an attachment of a small or weak towards a great and powerful Nation dooms the former to be the satellite of the latter.

[35] Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence (I conjure you to believe me, fellow-citizens) the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake, since history and experience prove that foreign influence is
one of the most baneful foes of Republican Government. But that jealousy to be useful must be impartial; else it becomes the instrument of the very influence to be avoided, instead of a defense against it. Excessive partiality for one foreign nation and excessive dislike of another cause those whom they actuate to see danger only on one side, and serve to veil and even second the arts of influence on the other. Real Patriots who may resist the intrigues of the favorite are liable to become suspected and odious, while its tools and dupes usurp the applause and confidence of the people, to surrender their interests.

[36] The Great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign Nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements, let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop.

[37] Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none; or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.

[38] Our detached and distant situation invites and enables us to pursue a different course. If we remain one People under an efficient government, the period is not far off when we may defy material injury from external annoyance; when we may take such an attitude as will cause the neutrality we may at any time resolve upon to be scrupulously respected; when beligerent nations, under the impossibility of making acquisitions upon us, will not lightly hazard the giving us provocation; when we may choose peace or war, as our interest, guided by justice, shall Counsel.

[39] Why forego the advantages of so peculiar a situation? Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground? Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European Ambition, Rivalship, Interest, Humour or Caprice?

[40] Tis our true policy to steer clear of permanent Alliances with any portion of the foreign world; so far, I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it; for let me not be understood as capable of patronizing infidelity to existing engagements. I hold the maxim no less applicable to public than to private affairs, that honesty is always the best policy. I repeat it, therefore, let those engagements be observed in their genuine sense. But in my opinion, it is unnecessary and would be unwise to extend them.
[41] Taking care always to keep ourselves by suitable establishments on a respectable defensive posture, we may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.

[42] Harmony, liberal intercourse with all Nations, are recommended by policy, humanity, and interest. But even our Commercial policy should hold an equal and impartial hand; neither seeking nor granting exclusive favors or preferences; consulting the natural course of things; diffusing and diversifying by gentle means the streams of Commerce, but forcing nothing; establishing (with Powers so disposed, in order to give trade a stable course, to define the rights of our Merchants, and to enable the Government to support them) conventional rules of intercourse, the best that present circumstances and mutual opinion will permit, but temporary, and liable to be from time to time abandoned or varied, as experience and circumstances shall dictate; constantly keeping in view that tis folly in one Nation to look for disinterested favors from another; that it must pay with a portion of its Independence for whatever it may accept under that character; that, by such acceptance, it may place itself in the condition of having given equivalents for nominal favors, and yet of being reproached with ingratitude for not giving more. There can be no greater error than to expect or calculate upon real favors from Nation to Nation. 'Tis an illusion, which experience must cure, which a just pride ought to discard.

[43] In offering to you, my Countrymen, these counsels of an old and affectionate friend, I dare not hope they will make the strong and lasting impression I could wish; that they will control the usual current of the passions, or prevent our Nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the Destiny of Nations. But, if I may even flatter myself that they may be productive of some partial benefit, some occasional good; that they may now and then recur to moderate the fury of party spirit, to warn against the mischiefs of foreign Intrigue, to guard against the Impositions of pretended patriotism; this hope will be a full recompense for the solicitude for your welfare, by which they have been dictated.

[44] How far in the discharge of my Official duties I have been guided by the principles which have been delineated, the public Records and other evidences of my conduct must Witness to You and to the world. To myself, the assurance of my own conscience is, that I have at least believed myself to be guided by them.

[45] In relation to the still subsisting War in Europe, my Proclamation of the 22d. of April, 1793, is the index of my Plan. Sanctioned by your approving voice, and by that of Your Representatives in both Houses of
Congress, the spirit of that measure has continually governed me, uninfuenced by any attempts to deter or divert me from it.

[46] After deliberate examination, with the aid of the best lights I could obtain, I was well satisfied that our Country, under all the circumstances of the case, had a right to take, and was bound in duty and interest to take, a Neutral position. Having taken it, I determined, as far as should depend upon me, to maintain it, with moderation, perseverance, and firmness.

[47] The considerations which respect the right to hold this conduct, it is not necessary on this occasion to detail. I will only observe that, according to my understanding of the matter, that right, so far from being denied by any of the Belligerent Powers, has been virtually admitted by all.

[48] The duty of holding a Neutral conduct may be inferred, without anything more, from the obligation which justice and humanity impose on every Nation, in cases in which it is free to act, to maintain inviolate the relations of Peace and amity towards other Nations.

[49] The inducements of interest for observing that conduct will best be referred to your own reflections and experience. With me a predominant motive has been to endeavor to gain time to our country to settle and mature its yet recent institutions, and to progress without interruption to that degree of strength and consistency which is necessary to give it, humanly speaking, the command of its own fortunes.

[50] Though, in reviewing the incidents of my Administration, I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beseech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I shall also carry with me the hope that my Country will never cease to view them with indulgence; and that, after forty five years of my life dedicated to its Service with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the Mansions of rest.

[51] Relying on its kindness in this as in other things, and actuated by that fervent love towards it, which is so natural to a Man who views in it the native soil of himself and his progenitors for several Generations, I anticipate with pleasing expectation that retreat in which I promise myself to realize, without alloy, the sweet enjoyment of partaking, in the midst of my fellow Citizens, the benign influence of good Laws under a free Government, the ever-favourite object of my heart, and the happy reward, as I trust, of our mutual cares, labours, and dangers.

Synopsis
Washington begins by announcing his refusal to stand for election to the American presidency for a third term (par. 1), his personal and political reasons for that decision (par. 2–5), and his gratitude to his fellow citizens for their previous support (par. 6). “Here, perhaps, I ought to stop,” he remarks, though immediately he moves to his declaration’s remainder and bulk: “the disinterested warnings of a parting friend” (par. 7). His primary and pervasive exhortation is that his countrymen embrace the unity that their new Constitution has legalized (par. 9–11, 16–17) and to beware all dangers that would divide the Union: sectionalism (par. 12–15), “overgrown Military establishments” (par. 13), factional usurpers (par. 18, 26), novelty that undermines legal precedent (par. 19), partisan strife (par. 20–21, 23–25), the temptation of despotism (par. 22). Essential are “reciprocal checks in the exercise of political power, by dividing and distributing it into different depositaries” (par. 26).

In a more positive vein, Washington enumerates those “dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity” (par. 27). First among these are religion and morality, which undergird public and private happiness (par. 27). Notwithstanding “the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle” (par. 27). “The general diffusion of knowledge” (par. 29) supplements religion in fostering popular government’s requisite virtue or morality (par. 29). Domestic health depends on economic credit and revenue (par. 30). Because “no taxes can be devised which are not more or less inconvenient and unpleasant,” “a spirit of acquiescence” is required of citizens for public exigencies (par. 30). Religion and morality enjoin good faith, justice, and evenhandedness in international affairs (par. 31, 42) and the exclusion of antipathies against particular nations (par. 32). Conversely, the fledgling Union should refrain from international attachments that provoke jealousy and ill will among other nations (par. 33–35). While the United States should honor their existing commitments (par. 36) and on occasion may form “temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies” (par. 41), the nation should beware “the insidious wiles of foreign influence,” which Washington calls “one of the most baneful foes of Republican Government” (par. 34–35). Europe’s intrigues are its own (par. 37, 39); America’s peace and prosperity lie in neutrality (par. 38, 40), “steer[ing] clear of permanent alliances” (par. 40).

Washington concludes by reiterating his principal concerns (par. 43–51). His countrymen should “moderate the fury of party spirit” (par. 43), “guard[ing] against the impostures of pretended patriotism” (par. 43), and the country
should allow itself time “to settle and mature its yet recent institutions” (par. 49). After discharging its commitments to war-riven Europe (par. 45), the United States should adopt “a Neutral position . . . with moderation, perseverance, and firmness” (par. 46), “to maintain inviolate the relations of Peace and amity towards other Nations” (par. 48). With his fellow citizens he anticipates “the benign influence of good Laws under a free Government” (par. 51). Washington retires from forty-five years of public service with “fervent love” for his countrymen (par. 50–51), relying on their continued kindness to “an old and affectionate friend” (par. 43) and beseeching the Almighty’s mitigation of any evils to which his errors have inadvertently tended (par. 50).11

Implicit Theological Affirmations

Washington was neither cleric nor dogmatician; he was a statesman, America’s eldest.12 One would not expect his farewell address to be theologically reflective. Accordingly, whatever theological traces ventured in this statement offer no small interest.

Turning to Washington’s address, it is worth noting the tender notes on which he begins (par. 1–6) and ends (par. 51) and that permeate the address as a whole. Naturally, these commendations evince the captatio benevolentiae common in rhetoric as far back as Cicero (De inventione 1.15.20). Yet Washington’s virtues are not conspicuously Roman.13 Rather, they are more obviously

11. “Taken together, his overlapping themes lend themselves to easy summary: unity at home and independence abroad. It was that simple” (Joseph J. Ellis, Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation [New York: Knopf, 2001], 129).
12. “Being no bigot myself to any mode of worship, I am disposed to indulge the professors of Christianity in the church, that road to Heaven, which to them shall seem the most direct plainest easiest and least liable to exception” (Washington, in a letter to Marquis de LaFayette [August 15, 1787], Writings 29.259).
13. During the Augustan period, the primary virtues were virtus (acquiring personal glory by the commission of great deeds for the Roman state), clementia (moderation to a defeated and compliant enemy), iustitia (legality and just war), and pietas (social responsibility). See Karl Galinsky, Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 80–140.
Christian: friendship (par. 1, 7, 28, 42), joy (par. 19, 51), zeal for beneficence (par. 2, 6, 12, 33, 43, 50), gratitude (par. 2, 6), kindness (par. 2, 50), hope (par. 3, 14, 42, 43, 50), sober reflection and testing based on experience (par. 3, 7, 14, 16, 19, 27, 35, 42, 49), goodness (par. 5, 26, 31, 33, 51), faith (par. 6, 30, 36), (fervent) love (par. 6, 8, 13, 51), steadfast confidence (par. 6, 16, 35), praise for others’ well-doing (par. 6), (brotherly) affection (par. 6, 10, 15, 42), freedom (par. 6, 7, 16, 24, 25, 26, 28, 31, 34, 47, 51), happiness (par. 6, 9, 14, 18, 27, 51), unity (par. 9, 12, 17, 24), growth in knowledge (par. 29), confident assurance (par. 3, 16, 35, 44), forbearance (par. 16, 30), and maturity (par. 3, 16, 49).14

The correlative vices are typically if not in every case uniquely Christian in cast: cunning, ambition, and lack of principle (par. 16–18); foolish novelty (par. 19); divisive and partisan passions (par. 15, 17, 19–24, 45); revenge (par. 22, 33); fury (par. 43); internal dissensions and agitations (par. 6, 22–24); misplaced security (par. 22); jealousy (par. 15, 24, 33); (enslavement to) animosity (par. 24, 31–32); dangerous excess (par. 25, 35); love of abusive power (par. 18, 22, 26); evil (par. 26, 32, 50); pursuit of transitory goods (par. 26); abdication of one’s true character (par. 35, 38–39). Though sprinkled throughout, the virtues Washington commends and the vices he abhors are not far afield from those collected in various New Testament writings: among others, Mark (7:20–23), Galatians (5:19–23), Philippians (4:8), Colossians (3:12–16), 1 Timothy (6:4–12), 2 Timothy (3:2–7), Jude 10–13.15

Washington said, “I hold the maxim no less applicable to public than to private affairs, that honesty is always the best policy” (par. 40). As with truthfulness, so also with other virtues: what applies for persons pertains also in affairs of state (par. 40). Thus, “Observe good faith and justice towards all Nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all” (par. 31). The new republic should exercise magnanimity, impartiality, benevolence, good faith, humanity, liberality, moderation, perseverance, peace, and amity in its international conduct (par. 30–32, 41–42, 44–48). These constitute “the obligation which justice and

14. A more concise summary, circulated to the states (June 8, 1783), exhorts fellow citizens to “a spirit of subordination and obedience to Government, . . . brotherly affection and love for one another, . . . to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristicst of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation” (Writings 26.496).

15. The degree of Washington’s biblical literacy is hard to gauge with confidence. Mary V. Thompson suggests that his phraseology bespeaks intimacy with Scripture (“In the Hands of a Good Providence”: Religion in the Life of George Washington [Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008], 24–29), but many instances she cites (“swords into plough-shares,” “my mite,” “the last Trump”) were expressions in the public domain.
humanity impose on every Nation” (par. 46). In one telling passage (par. 32), Washington seems remotely tuned in to the apostle Paul’s wavelength (Rom 3:9–18; 8:5–8) when he attributes the antipathy that drives a bellicose nation to an enslavement of its own haughtiness and intractability: “The Nation which indulges towards another a habitual hatred or a habitual fondness is in some degree a slave. It is a slave to its animosity or to its affection, either of which is sufficient to lead it astray from its duty and its interest” (par. 32). Moreover, he understands _Realpolitik_: the principal reason for his insistence on America’s neutrality, insofar as possible (par. 38, 46–48), lies in his judgment that “tis folly in one Nation to look for disinterested favors from another” (par. 42). This he underscores: “There can be no greater error than to expect or calculate upon real favors from Nation to Nation. Tis an illusion, which experience must cure, which a just pride ought to discard” (par. 42).

**Explicit Theological Assertions**

Paragraphs 27–28 offer Washington’s express consideration of the role of religion in political affairs: “’Tis substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government” (par. 27). Whence comes morality? Neither from sheer patriotism nor from education as such: “Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle” (par. 27). A sense of religious obligation underwrites oaths taken in courts of justice (par. 28); accordingly, “let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion” (par. 27). “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports” (par. 26–27). Happily, for Washington, such dispositions are indigenous to Americans: “With slight shades of difference, you have the same Religion, Manners, Habits, and political Principles” (par. 10). More pointedly—in one of the very few references to God in this address—Washington rhetorically asks, “Can it be that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a Nation with its virtue? The experiment, at least, is recommended by every sentiment which ennobles human Nature” (par. 31). “The choicest tokens of [heavenly] beneficence” (par. 6) are manifested in what he characterizes as the “experiment” of American republicanism (par. 14, 26, 31). Chief among those “blessing[s]” (par. 6), the protocol for that experiment, is “the free Constitution, which is the work of your hands,” which is to “be sacredly maintained” (par. 6). Until amended by “an explicit and authentic act of the whole
People, [the Constitution] is sacredly obligatory upon all” (par. 16; also par. 26). “The basis of our political systems is the right of the people to make and to alter their Constitutions of Government” (par. 16); to maintain this charter of national unity, constant vigilance is required lest anyone “enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together [our country’s] various parts” (par. 9), especially by constitutional alterations that would “undermine what cannot be directly overthrown” (par. 19). Washington’s persistent concern for maintenance of orderly governance within the fledgling republic is reminiscent of New Testament Haustafeln: conventional structures commended to infant Christian communities as they began settling themselves in a larger sociopolitical world (see Eph 5:21–6:9; Col 3:18–4:6; 1 Tim 3:1–13, 5:1–6:10; Titus 1:5–3:11; Heb 13:1–17; 1 Pet 2:11–3:12).

Assessment

Considered theologically, Washington’s Abschiedsrede is predictably meager and more than somewhat troubling. According sacred significance to the newly minted Constitution—to any political charter—offends, even as we might regard sympathetically the ordeal attending the convention at which it was framed and over which Washington was summoned to preside. Equally fretful is his simplistic reduction of religion to civic morality: a product of the eighteenth century’s commonsense domestication of religious faith as universal moral reasoning. In this address, theology—such as it is—does not so much inform and correct political theory as prop it up, and that by the author’s admission: Religion and morality are “these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens” (par. 27)—twin poles of the sacred canopy that shades the political experiment from the heat that might explode it. Nowhere mentioned are sin and its atonement. “The love of liberty with every ligament of your hearts” (par. 8) tacitly displaces the love of Christ,

16. Apparently, its thinness was by design, not accident. In James Thomas Flexner’s analysis (George Washington: Anguish and Farewell (1793–1799) [Boston: Little, Brown, 1972], 300), Washington softened Alexander Hamilton’s emphasis on religion in an early draft of the 1796 farewell address. His motives in doing so are unclear: Hamilton was cynical about the political utility of religious belief, whereas Washington seems to have been more sincere (John G. West Jr., The Politics of Revelation and Reason: Religion and Civic Life in the New Nation, American Political Thought [Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1996], 45–49).

whom Washington almost never mentioned. Here God does not judge the American experiment; “Providence” underwrites its felicity through seeing the Constitution, “the work of [human] hands” (par. 6), safely into the republican harbor. The materials for a golden calf are ever present (Exod 32:1–35).

Yet this is a thoughtful and scarcely naive statement, especially given the circumstances of its composition. While demonstrating greater reluctance than American presidents of the last forty years to invoke the Almighty in public pronouncements, in private correspondence Washington expressed a seemingly sincere belief that Divine Providence had preserved not only his own life but that of the American republic. Moreover, he shows himself altogether aware of the evils, actual and potential, that jeopardize personal and political projects. “Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder.” After years of war against a religiously sanctioned monarchy, followed by the anarchy produced by America’s stopgap Articles of Confederation and culminating in a contentious convention whose very proceedings some regarded as covertly monarchical, Washington’s greatest fear was a homegrown despotism replacing that so lately overthrown (par. 22–25). If he risks Pelagianism by extolling the Constitution as a man-made achievement, one can understand his motive: to remind his fellow citizens that they themselves were now accountable for their own governance. More than that: repeatedly in his correspondence Washington emphasized that the republic’s prosperity depended on divine Providence “beyond human ken,” sometimes implying that impiety would render Americans subject to divine wrath. With republican responsibility came repeated cautions that human autonomy was not absolute but required constant brinksmanship. Even the angels in heaven are bound to operate within limits and reciprocal checks in their exercise of power (cf. par.

18. A noteworthy exception, though not out of character: In a speech to the chiefs of the Delaware tribes (May 12, 1779), Washington admonished, “You do well to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ. These will make you a greater and happier people than you are. Congress will do every thing they can to assist you in this wise intention” (Writings 15.55).
19. Washington to J. A. Washington (July 18, 1755), Writings 1.152; to Joseph Reed (January 4, 1776), Writings 4.211–12; to the Rev. William Gordon (March 9, 1781), Writings 4.332; to the Rev. Samuel Langdon (September 28, 1789), Writings 4.104; to the Hebrew Congregations of Philadelphia, New York, Charleston, and Richmond (December 1790), Writings 31.185–86; to Attorney General Edmund Randolph (August 26, 1792), Writings 32.136.
22. Washington to David Humphreys (March 23, 1793), Writings 32.398.
23. West, Politics of Revelation and Reason, 227–28, documents numerous instances of these sentiments.
—a theological deduction that Washington himself does not draw but easily could have. One recalls Benjamin Franklin’s observation: “If Men are so wicked as we now see them with Religion what would they be if without it?”

The 1796 address is important also for what it omits to mandate: a state religion. In this regard Washington was as resolute as Franklin that “every person may here worship God according to the dictates of his own heart.” To uneasy Quakers, frightened Baptists, nervous Roman Catholics, fastidious Presbyterians, and meddling Anglicans, Washington returned substantially the same answer: “the Government of the United States, which gives bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effective support.”

As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion,—as it has itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen,—and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by all parties that no pretext arising

25. Washington to the members of the New Jerusalem Church of Baltimore (January 27, 1793), Writings 12.52–53.
27. Address to the General Committee representing the United Baptist Churches in Virginia (May 8–10, 1789), Papers 2.425. Replied Washington, “If I could have entertained the slightest apprehension, that the constitution framed in the convention, where I had the honor to preside, might possibly endanger the religious rights of any ecclesiastical society, certainly I would never have placed my signature to it” (May 10, 1789), Writings 30.321n.
28. The Roman Catholics of America to George Washington (March 15, 1790), Papers 5.299–301.
29. The Presbytery of the Eastward (October 28, 1789) lamented the absence of “some Explicit acknowledgement of the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent inserted somewhere in the Magna Charta of our country” (Papers 4.275n). Answered Washington, “The path of true piety is so plain as to require but little political direction. To this consideration we ought to ascribe the absence of any regulation, respecting religion, from the Magna-Charta of our country. . . . It will be your care to instruct the ignorant, and to reclaim the devious” (Washington to the Presbyterian ministers of Massachusetts and New Hampshire [November 2, 1789]; Papers 4.274).
30. On May 25, 1784, Jonathan Boucher, the Anglican rector who had schooled Washington’s stepson, wrote him from England to encourage the institution of “some permanent national Religion” (Writings 1.405–7, 407n). There is no evidence that Washington ever replied.
from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.\textsuperscript{32}

Washington closed a letter to Congregation Yeshuat Israel in Newport with a benediction: “May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.”\textsuperscript{33}

The most compelling argument for Washington’s case lies in the gentleman’s own life, as exemplified in his farewell address. He knew perfectly well that the new republic was ready to wreath him as its new Caesar, but Cincinnatus would have none of it. He went out of his way to confess his own “very fallible judgment” (par. 5) and “many errors” of his presidential administration (par. 50), to couch his remarks as “the disinterested warnings of a parting friend, who can possibly have no personal motive to bias his counsel” (par. 7), to beg the Almighty to avert his unintended harm to the nation (par. 50), and to hope that “the faults of [my] incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the Mansions of rest” (par. 50). A retiring man relying on indulgent kindness (par. 50–51), he would no more wear a crown than hope to see it worn by any of his successors. To quote Paul—“Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us” (Phil 3:17)—would have been as superfluous as impertinent. Within a consistently political framework, Washington enacted the apostolic precept.

\textbf{Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address (March 4, 1865)}

In many ways the sixteenth president’s second inaugural address is the inverted mirror image of the first’s farewell. The latter is lengthy (6,084 words) and was crafted for publication in the media; the former, a mere 702 words, was delivered orally. Both measured in their assessments, Washington’s is cool and deliberatively directive, while Lincoln’s is a poignant, forensic analysis of the facts and of the contesting values from which those facts had issued. That which Washington emphasized—the imperative of the Union’s maintenance against the buffets of factional strife—was, sixty-nine years later, in manifest shambles. The cause of


\textsuperscript{33} Papers 6.285. John Bell of Maryland wrote in 1779 that Washington was “a total stranger to religious prejudices, which have so often excited Christians of one denomination to cut the throats of those of another” (W. S. Baker, \textit{Character Portraits of Washington as Delineated by Historians, Orators, and Divines} [Philadelphia: Robert M. Lindsay, 1887], 12).
collapse was African American slavery, a topic never mentioned by Washington but placed by Lincoln center stage. Washington’s pleas for neutrality had by now been overtaken by history, and citizens were forced to choose sides in a national suicide. Washington, the nominal Anglican, lightly brushed over religion as an ingredient of the binding he hoped would unite the republic. That cement having crumbled, Lincoln, a member of no church, framed America’s Civil War in relentlessly theological terms. In two respects these addresses proved identical. First, both were attempts by their authors to discern the meaning of the wars of which they were outcomes. Second, both were Abschiedsreden. Washington delivered himself of his farewell before departing for Mount Vernon. Forty-one days after his second inaugural, Lincoln would be dead.

Lincoln’s Second Inaugural

Fellow-Countrymen:

[1] At this second appearing, to take the oath of the Presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat, in detail, of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies [sic] of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

[2] On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil–war. All dreaded it—all sought to avert it. While the inaugural [sic] address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, urgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war—seeking to dissolve [sic] the Union and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

[3] One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war; while the Government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has his own purposes. “Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!” If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether[.]”

[4] With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

Synopsis
Lincoln minimizes the need for his second inaugural address, relative to the “impending civil war” (par. 2) that occasioned his first (par. 1). The progress
of “the great contest” (par. 1) is obvious to all, who should find it “reasonably satisfying and encouraging” (par. 1). The future is hopeful yet unpredictable (par. 1). Four years earlier no one had wanted war; one party, however, was determined to dissolve the Union, and another was equally resolute in its maintenance (par. 2)—“And the war came” (par. 2). Provoking it (par. 3) were contesting claims for “a peculiar and powerful interest”—namely, slavery (par. 3). Southern insurgents35 were committed to extend this interest; the Government, to no right greater than restricting slavery’s territorial enlargement (par. 3). The ensuing war has confounded all contestants by its magnitude, duration, and cessation of *causus belli* (par. 3). In battle, both parties have repaired to identical religious resources, and both have been disappointed (par. 3). American slavery and “this mighty scourge of war” (par. 3) reflect judgments of God that, albeit mysterious and frightening, are “true and righteous altogether” (par. 3). That which remains (par. 4) is to pray for war’s speedy termination (par. 3), lovingly succor all soldiers and their families who have borne its brunt (par. 4), and, insofar as all are able (par. 4), to assist God in the restoration of “a just and lasting peace” within the Union and with all nations (par. 4).

**Implicit Theological Affirmations**

“Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other” (par. 3). As much as any single statement, this noncontroversial observation may be a key to the rhetoric of Lincoln’s second inaugural, the springs for its political and theological claims. This may be witnessed in two substantive, recurring strategies of discourse. To begin with, this is an address to the *entire* Union, including that portion that had seceded. No express distinction is made between the northern Republic and the southern Confederacy. To the contrary, Lincoln begins by addressing his “Fellow-Countrymen” (par. 1) and referring to what is publicly known to everyone (par. 1). His claim that progress to this point is “reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all” (par. 1) assumes the South wants as much as the North an end to hostilities (cf. par. 3). That question may have gone begging, but the language of this speech never degenerates into “us” versus “them.” Instead, in reference to the combatants, virtually all the nouns and pronouns intimate the first-personal plural: “All dreaded [civil war]—all sought to avert it” (par. 2). “All knew that this interest [in slavery] was,}

35. Thomas J. Pressly notes that Lincoln did not hold Southerners responsible in general for events triggering war; rather, he believed them to have been duped and provoked by their leaders, who would be among those least to suffer (*Americans Interpret Their Civil War* [New York: Free Press, 1965], esp. 34–35).
somehow, the cause of the war” (par. 3). “Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away” (par. 3, italics added), “with malice toward none; with charity for all” (par. 4). Though one side urged and the other side accepted, “both parties deprecated war” (par. 2). “The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully” (par. 3). “Each looked for an easier triumph” (par. 3); neither anticipated the war’s length, magnitude, or “astounding” twists (par. 3). All this was not the singular experience of the prevailing forces in the war’s final days; this, Lincoln argued, was the state of the Union in March 1865.

Both read the same Bible—and by my reckoning not fewer than 85 of this inaugural’s 700 words (roughly 12 percent of the whole) are either direct quotations, allusions, or conflations of Scripture that Lincoln’s listeners surely recognized. The most conspicuous instances are these, all from the King James Versions of the Bible:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture Reference</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces” (par. 3)</td>
<td>“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Gen 3:19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“But let us judge not, that we be not judged” (par. 3)</td>
<td>“Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt 7:1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Almighty has his own purposes” (par. 3)</td>
<td>“Therefore hear the counsel of the Lord . . . and his purposes” (Jer 49:20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come: but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!” (par. 3)</td>
<td>“Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!” (Matt 18:7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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36. This modal auxiliary is clear in the original manuscript (April 10, 1865), yet the clause was quoted as “should [not]” in several antiadministration and other newspapers: among them, the Detroit Free Press (March 5, 1865) and the Louisville Daily Democrat (March 7, 1865). The error may have originated in either dictation or telegraphing the text.

37. In June 1863, Vicksburg fell to Grant’s forces; during November and December 1864, Sherman executed his march from Atlanta to Savannah. Lee evacuated Richmond on April 2, 1865; exactly one week later he surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse.

38. James M. McPherson observes that the combatants in America’s Civil War, products of the Second Great Awakening, “were, arguably, the most religious in American history” (For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997], 63). On Lincoln’s “biblical republicanism,” see the well-balanced treatment by Joseph R. Fornieri, Abraham Lincoln’s Political Faith (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 35–69.

39. Note also “the providence of God” (par. 3; cf. Ps 78:20); “woe” (par. 3; cf. Isa 6:5); “charity for all” (par. 4; cf. 1 Pet 4:8); “peace, among ourselves, and with all nations” (par. 4; cf. Luke 2:24; Heb 12:14). Here I claim not that Lincoln deliberately ransacked Scripture for punctuating this address but rather that his rhetoric demonstrates deep awareness of scriptural locutions.
"His appointed time" (par. 3)  "Yet for an appointed time" (Hab 2:3)
"A Living God" (par. 3)  "The living God is among you" (Josh 3:10)
"The bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil" (par. 3)  "Now therefore ye are cursed, and there shall none of you be freed from being bondmen" (Josh 9:23)
"The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" (par. 3)  "The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether" (Ps 19:9)
"To care for . . . his widow and his orphan" (par. 4)  "And the fatherless, and the widow . . . shall . . . be satisfied" (Deut 14:29)

Of course, one might claim that Lincoln was canny enough to appeal to his audience on a basis that all would regard unimpeachable: scriptural allusion as a rhetorical strategy.40 While possible, I consider this unlikely. If one compares this address with his first inaugural (March 4, 1861), two things immediately stand out.41 First, the earlier speech is roughly five times as long as its successor. Second, its preoccupation, namely, preservation of the federal union, is argued from almost every angle—constitutional legality, national experience, political practicality—except the religious. The sole exceptions are revealing. Six paragraphs from the end: “If the Almighty Ruler of nations, with his eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth, and that justice, will sure prevail, by the government of this great tribunal, the American people.” And nearer the conclusion: “Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him, who has never forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust, in the best way, all our present difficulty.” Put differently, the citizens of “this favored land” would decide, and God would tacitly ratify the rightness of their decision—a blasé affirmation of civil religion. On March 4, 1865, Lincoln would offer up a very different analysis of divine affairs amid human activities.

A second reason to accept at face value the theological language in Lincoln’s Second Inaugural is evidence that suggests he had been mulling the nation’s self-slaughter during the intervening years. After the president’s death, his secretary, John Hay, discovered a private rumination in Lincoln’s hand, which

Hay named “Meditation on the Divine Will” and dated to September 1862.\textsuperscript{42} It reads as a rough draft of the Second Inaugural:

The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both \textit{may} be, and one \textit{must} be wrong. God cannot be \textit{for}, and \textit{against} the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party—and yet human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect His purpose. I am almost ready to say this is probably true—that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By his mere quiet power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either \textit{saved} or \textit{destroyed} the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And having begun He could give the final victory to either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds.\textsuperscript{43}

There is another important difference between Lincoln’s two inaugural addresses. The first offers a lawyerly and equivocal analysis of rendition of fugitive slaves:

Shall fugitives from labor be surrendered by national or by State authority? The Constitution does not expressly say. \textit{May} Congress prohibit slavery in the territories? The Constitution does not expressly say. \textit{Must} Congress protect slavery in the territories? The Constitution does not expressly say.\textsuperscript{44}

Four years later Lincoln articulated his thinking on the subject in very different terms:

If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? (par. 3).

In other words, African American slavery was no longer a legal question but, evidently, a moral offense against God, who had allowed its perpetuation

\textsuperscript{42} The editors of \textit{The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln} (1861–1862) 5.404 hypothesize that this paragraph was written around September 2, 1862, after Lincoln had learned of the Union’s debacle at the Second Battle of Bull Run.

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Collected Works}, 5.403–5.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Collected Works} 4.267.
“through His appointed time . . . [but] now wills to remove” (par. 3). This too appears not to have been a judgment wrought only for expediency’s sake on March 4, 1865. Three months previously (around December 6, 1864) Lincoln had replied to a Tennessee woman’s request for her husband’s release from prison on Johnson’s Island on the grounds he was a religious man:

You say your husband is a religious man; tell him when you meet him, that I say I am not much of a judge of religion, but that, in my opinion, the religion that sets men to rebel and fight against their government, because, as they think, that government does not sufficiently help some men to eat their bread in the sweat of other men’s faces, is not the sort of religion upon which people can get to heaven!45

That is another dress rehearsal for what would issue from the Capitol’s portico and further evidence that the theological substructure of Lincoln’s last address had been built after much deliberation.

Explicit Theological Assertions

The Second Inaugural ventures at least four forthright theological claims.

1. The Almighty God lives and justly governs political and military affairs on the historical stage, every bit as much now as was the case “three thousand years ago” (par. 3). This may be the address’s principal assertion; its clearest, most sobering expressions lie in the second half of paragraph 3.46 For Lincoln, it appears that the Almighty allowed slavery, the cause and curse of civil war, to exist, yet “now wills to remove” (par. 3). To this Lincoln ascribes no divine capriciousness or any “departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him” (par. 3; cf. Rom 9:14–29). “The judgments of the Lord [remain] true and righteous altogether” (par. 3)—even if that Lord should ultimately demand a balance, in the scales of justice, of theretofore perceived benefit from “the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil” (par. 3), with the cost that “all the wealth . . . shall be sunk” (par. 3), the equity of “every drop of blood drawn with the lash” with “another

46. No more than Washington (see above, n. 29), however, did Lincoln rise to the bait of incorporating into the Constitution recognition of “the rulership of Jesus Christ and the supremacy of the divine law,” as exhorted in 1864 by the National Association for the Amendment of the Constitution: While “cordially approv[ing]” the organization’s “general aspect, . . . [in regard to particulars] I must take time to deliberate, as the work of amending the Constitution should not be done hastily” (Herndon’s Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln, ed. Douglas Wilson and Rodney O. Davis [Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998], 497). This amendment’s time never came.
drawn with the sword” (par. 3). This, for Lincoln, is the underside of “the
providence of God” (par. 3) that those who believe in such would prefer not
to contemplate. “And though with our limited understandings we may not be
able to comprehend it, yet we cannot but believe, that he who made the world
still governs it.”

2. **Errant human beings are responsible for their corrupted actions, which, having been effected, are held accountable by a righteous God.** Commenta-
tors then and since have accused Lincoln of trumpeting God’s vindictiveness,
a crude and heinous curse invoked on the American people for the institution
of slavery. This I consider a misinterpretation of its author’s intent. The clue
to Lincoln’s reasoning lies, I believe, in his citation of Matthew 18:7: “Woe unto the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come;
but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh!” Lincoln is not accusing
God of offenses; far less does he suggest that Union and Confederate soldiers
have somehow atoned for slavery by the expiatory sacrifice of their lives. Instead, he squarely—and, I judge, on exegetically defensible grounds—lays
blame for offenses on all those, both in the North and in the South, who were
directly responsible for, or complicit in, African American slavery, namely,
the American people themselves, who were neither as wise nor as virtuous as
they may have reckoned themselves: “This terrible war,” “give[n] to both North
and South” (par. 3), is the awful recompense inevitably entailed by human-
ity’s offensive decisions (cf. Rom 1:18–31), nevertheless overseen by a God
who had been gracious to America throughout the war’s conduct (cf. Rom

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47. Lincoln to Eliza P. Gurney (October 26, 1862; *Collected Works*, 5.478).
48. Such a belief ultimately differentiates Lincoln’s view of providence from that fatalism too
hastily attributed to him. See Ronald C. White, *Lincoln’s Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural*
49. Thus, the *True Democrat*, from Lewiston, Pennsylvania (March 8, 1865): “Mr. Lincoln,
it will be seen, accepts, substantially, the theory of the semi-religious fanatics, namely, that the
Almighty brought this war upon us as a means of abolishing slavery, and consequently it must go
on until that end is accomplished!” Comparable interpretations were published in the *New York
World* (March 6, 1865: “This inaugural . . . substitut[es] . . . a type of piety about as rational and
enlightened as that which ascribes the melancholy caused by a fit of indigestion to ‘the hiding
of the Divine countenance’”) and the *Manchester (N.H.) Daily Union* (March 6, 1865: “The
Address is conspicuous for its cold-blooded barbarism”). More recently this view is exemplified
in William J. Woolf, “Abraham Lincoln and Calvinism,” in *Calvinism and the Political Order*,
(Wakefield, MA: Parameter, 1977); it is rebutted in David Hein, “Abraham Lincoln’s Theological
50. This was the position of Horace Bushnell, “Our Obligations to the Dead,” in *Building
Eras in Religion* (New York: Scribner’s, 1881), 319–55. Contrast Lincoln: “War, at the best, is
terrible, and this war of ours, in its magnitude and its duration, is one of the most terrible” (*Col-
lected Works* 7.394).
March 1865 afforded Lincoln occasion not for the victor’s triumphalist self-righteousness but for a nation’s cry of woe and its reason for hope.52

3. From this it follows that the prayerful aspirations of those who beseech divine aid are incommensurate with the purposes of the Almighty himself (par. 3). “The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully” (par. 3). Ultimately, the basis for this conclusion lies in the character of God, whose purposes are in no way tantamount to our own (par. 3; cf. Isa. 55:8–9), who—notwithstanding our best theological reasoning—permitted so terrible a war “for some wise purpose of his own, mysterious and unknown to us.”53

4. Given these premises, Lincoln draws two entwined conclusions: one conceptual, the other practical. First, human participants in this “great contest” (par. 1) do well to proceed with considerable modesty, of the sort that punctuates this address. Thus, Lincoln holds “high hope for the future,” even if “no prediction in regard to it is ventured” (par. 1). Though perplexed by petitions that God maintain slavery, “let us judge not, that we be not judged” (par. 3). By prefacing his theological analysis with the tentative qualification “If we shall suppose” (par. 3), Lincoln pretends no assurance that his own assessment is correct. To do otherwise would flout his previous affirmation that “the Almighty has his own purposes” (par. 3), incommensurate with those who would attempt to descry them. Utter passivity is not counseled: “Let us strive on to finish the work we are in” (par. 4). “Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away” (par. 3), Lincoln remarks, while acknowledging that such may not come to pass as speedily as one might wish. The president’s peroration—“to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations” (par. 4)—recognizes that fellow citizens continue to pursue, domestically and internationally, “a just and lasting peace,” even as their firm dedication to justice is limited by human myopia that can be corrected only by “God [who]...
gives us to see the right” (par. 4). Lincoln’s final conclusion entails a practical responsibility before all: “to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan” (par. 4, italics added)—again with no discrimination between those who have suffered on both sides. To the contrary: all repairs must be executed “with malice toward none; with charity for all” (par. 4).

Assessment
After a political opponent accused him of mocking Christianity, Lincoln, son of a hard-shell Baptist layman, wrote in reply (1846):

That I am no member of any Christian Church, is true; but I have never denied the truth of the Scriptures; and I have never spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular. It is true that in early life I was inclined to believe in what is called the “Doctrine of Necessity”—that is, that human mind is impelled to action, or held in rest by some power, over which the mind itself has no control; and I have sometimes (with one, two or three, but never publicly) tried to maintain this opinion in argument. The habit of arguing thus however, I have, entirely left off more than five years. And I add here, I have always understood the same opinion to be held by several of the Christian denominations. The foregoing, is the whole truth, briefly stated, in relation to myself, upon the subject.54

Mark Noll is justly puzzled by the fact that “none of America’s respected religious leaders” of Lincoln’s day “probed so profoundly the ways of God or the response of humans to the divine constitution of the world” or “penetrated as deeply into the nature of providence” with the economy and sagacity expressed in Lincoln’s second inaugural.55 Citing excerpts from the speeches and sermons

54. Collected Works 1.382. In all of Lincoln’s writings, political scientist Hans J. Morgenthau could find only a solitary reference to Christ: “When Columbus first sought this continent—when Christ suffered on the cross—when Moses led Israel through the Red Sea—nay, even, when Adam first came from the hand of his Maker—then as now, Niagara [Falls] was roaring here” (Collected Works 2.10); quoted in “The Mind of Abraham Lincoln,” Essays on Lincoln’s Faith and Politics (ed. Thompson; 1983), 8.

55. Noll, America’s God, 426. Moreover, contemporary journalists commenting on Lincoln’s Second Inaugural were so sharply divided in their estimates, particularly of its theological assertions, that it is hard to believe they were evaluating the same statement: “The inaugural is honest, simple, unaffected, truthful, patriotic, reverent, great” (Jersey City Times, March 7, 1865). “We could not conceive it possible that even Mr. Lincoln could produce a paper so slip shod, so loose-jointed, so puerile, not alone in literary construction, but in its ideas, its sentiments, its grasp. He has outdone himself. . . . By the side of it, mediocrity is superb” (Chicago Times, March 11, 1865). “The leading characteristic of the address is its devout recognition of the moral and religious elements involved in the contest” (Chicago Tribune, March 5, 1865). “[This] hypocritical production is . . . sickening to the minds of conservative honest men—fanatical in its cant,
of William Patton, Henry Ward Beecher, Horace Bushnell, Robert Lewis Dabney, John Adger, and Charles Hodge, Noll documents in all their reflections on the war varying degrees of vengeance, self-righteousness, moral casuistry, and an “unshakeable confidence in America’s unique destiny as a divinely chosen people” that supported their Christian certainty in the transparency of Divine Providence. Representative is Beecher, “the Billy Graham of his era,” who pronounced fanatical judgment upon an audience at Fort Sumter, South Carolina, four years after the bombardment that had ignited the war. Here are but a few of the oratorical thunderbolts he let fly on April 14, 1865:

I charge the whole guilt of this war upon the ambitious, educated, plotting, political leaders of the South. . . . A day will come when God will reveal judgment, and arraign at his bar these mighty miscreants. . . . And, then, . . . these most accused and detested of all criminals, that have drenched a continent in needless blood, and moved the foundations of their times with hideous crimes and cruelty, caught up in black clouds full of voices of vengeance and lurid with punishment, shall be whirled aloft and plunged downward forever and forever in an endless retribution; while God shall say, “Thus shall it be to all who betray their country”; and all heaven and upon the earth will say, “Amen!”

Forty-one days earlier, the president of the United States had counseled, “Let us judge not, that we be not judged.”

Journalist Charles Dana, who worked in Lincoln’s administration during the war, wrote, “Lincoln was a supreme politician. He understood politics because he understood human nature. . . . There was no flabby philanthropy about Abraham Lincoln. He was all solid, hard, keen intelligence combined with goodness.” Perhaps what Dana said of the man’s politics could as well be said of his theology: Lincoln possessed to an unusual degree peculiar qualities of

and the quintessence of political demagoguery” (Chatfield [Minnesota] Democrat, March 11, 1865). “[That American slavery is a sin against God] is what tens of thousands have thought, many editors have expressed, but which a President of a Republic has never dared to utter to the people” (Evening [Milwaukee] Wisconsin, March 6, 1865). “It is not a President who speaks, but a nasal, fanatic and deceitful Puritan from New England” (Das Neuer Anzeiger Des Westens [St. Louis], March 5, 1865). For these and other examples of the speech’s editorial reception, consult Benjamin Barondess, Three Lincoln Masterpieces: Cooper Institute Speech, Gettysburg Address, Second Inaugural (Charleston, WV: Education Foundation of West Virginia, 1954), 74–108.

57. Ibid., 427.
mind and character that evidently shaped his statecraft and molded his theological outlook. He exhibited a humility that freed him to admit his mistakes and occasionally spilled into self-deprecation. Memorably he maintained, “I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me.” In personal affairs he tended not to nurse grudges and, as we have seen, possessed the rare ability to reconsider his opinions. He tended toward compassionate leniency in military cases presented to him for clemency and pondered the effect of penalties invoked on transgressors. Far from propounding an imperial presidency, Lincoln insisted on tight circumscription of executive powers. In this matter he was adamant:

Allow the President to invade a neighboring nation, whenever he shall deem it necessary to repel an invasion, and you allow him to do so, whenever he may choose to say he deems it necessary for such purpose—and you allow him to make war at his pleasure. Study to see if you can fix any limit to his power in this respect, after you have given him so much as you propose.

60. During the war’s conduct he freely admitted to General Joseph Hooker, commander of the Army of the Potomac, “Quite possibly I was wrong both then and now” (Collected Works 6.281).

61. Two among many instances are illustrative: In a letter to Norman B. Judd (December 14, 1859), he wrote, “I shall attend to [a task] as well as I know how, which, God knows, will not be very well” (Collected Works 3.509). Later, speaking in Poughkeepsie on February 19, 1861, six weeks before his first inauguration as president: “I do not think they have chosen the best man to conduct their affairs, now—I am sure they did not” (Collected Works 4.228).

62. Collected Works 7.282. He continues: “Now, at the end of three years struggle the nation’s condition is not what either party, or any man devised, or expected. God alone can claim it.”

63. “You have more of that feeling of personal resentment than I. Perhaps I have too little of it, but I never thought it paid. A man has no time to spend half his life in quarrels. If any man ceases to attack me I never remember the past against him” (quoted in M. L. Houser, Lincoln’s Education, and Other Essays, ed. Louis A. R. Yates [New York: Bookman, 1957], 31).

64. “The case of Andrews [a Union soldier sentenced to be executed] is really a very bad one, as appears by the record already before me. Yet before receiving this I had ordered his punishment commuted to imprisonment for during the war at hard labor, and had so telegraphed. I did this, not on any merit in the case, but because I am trying to evade the butchering business lately” (Collected Works 7.111).

65. In a letter (October 26, 1863) to Captain James Madison Cutts Jr., sentenced to dismissal from service and whom Lincoln gently reprimanded: “Yield larger things to which you can show no more than equal right; and yield lesser ones, though clearly your own. Better give your path to a dog, than be bitten by him in contesting for the right. Even killing the dog would not cure the bite” (Collected Works 6.538).

66. From his first inaugural (March 4, 1861): “The Chief Magistrate derives all his authority from the people, and they have conferred none upon him to fix terms for the separation of the States. The people themselves can do this also if they choose; but the executive, as such, has nothing to do with it” (Collected Works 4.270). To the president’s discredit this statement proved more honored in the breach than the observance: Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney ruled that Lincoln exceeded constitutional bounds by imprisoning Baltimore’s Lieutenant John Merryman in suspension of habeas corpus (Ex parte Merryman 1861).

67. Lincoln to his junior law partner William H. Herndon (Collected Works 1.451).
In a speech in the House of Representatives (June 20, 1848), he declared his political principles in Niebuhrian terms *avant la lettre*:

> The true rule, in determining to embrace, or reject any thing, is not whether it have *any* evil in it; but whether it have more of evil, than of good. There are few things *wholly* evil, or *wholly* good. Almost everything, especially of governmental policy, is an inseparable compound of the two; so that our best judgment of the preponderance between them is continually demanded. On this principle the president, his friends, and the world generally, act on most subjects. Why not apply it, then, upon this question? Why, as to improvements, magnify the *evil*, and stoutly refuse to see any *good* in them?68

When speaking of America’s unique polity, Lincoln identified the principle of liberty to all as the enduring “apple of gold” around which the Union and its Constitution subsequently framed a “picture of silver.”69 Unlike Philip Schaff, who in the summer of 1865 beheld “[a] country . . . where God’s hand so visibly and wonderfully guided events to a happy end . . . and a great future,”70 even in 1861 a more naïve Lincoln expressed hope that he might be “an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his *almost* chosen people.”71

As I read it, Lincoln’s Second Inaugural stands as testimony to a radical monotheism that properly elicits both awe before the Almighty’s inscrutable purposes and compassion for the thousands who died in the sincere yet mistaken belief that God was on their side:

> The purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance. . . . We shall yet acknowledge His wisdom and our own error therein. Meanwhile we must work earnestly in the best light He gives us, trusting that so working still conduces to the great ends He ordains. Surely He intends some great good to follow this mighty convulsion, which no mortal could make, and no mortal could stay.72

68. *Collected Works* 1.484–85. The approach evinced here approximates that of another Niebuhr, H. Richard: “Relying on the ultimate source of being and the ultimate power that conserves beings, men [in a democratic society] will accept the relativity of all their judgments and continue in their striving to make political decisions that express their universal faith” (*Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* [New York: Harper & Row, 1960], 77).


70. *Der Bürgerkrieg und das christliche Leben in Nord-Amerika* (Berlin: Wiegandt und Grieben, 1866), 16–17; my translation. Schaff goes even further: “[America] has undergone the trial by fire and is only now entering the age of virile power and self-reliance.”

71. *Collected Works* 4.236; italics added.

72. Lincoln to Eliza P. Gurney (September 4, 1864; *Collected Works* 7.535).
So we return to Noll’s riddle:

Abraham Lincoln, a layman with no standing in the church and no formal training as a theologian, propounded a thick, complex view of God’s rule over the world and a morally nuanced picture of America’s destiny. The country’s best theologians, by contrast, presented a thin, simple view of God’s providence and a morally juvenile view of the nation and its fate. . . . For the theologians the end of the war only tightened the bond between God and his American chosen people; for Lincoln the course of the war injected a doubt whether America was the people of God.73

The last word on Lincoln’s Second Inaugural I shall leave to its author:

I expect [it] to wear as well as—perhaps better than—any thing I have produced; but I believe it is not immediately popular. Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them. To deny it, however, in this case, is to deny that there is a God governing the world. It is a truth which I thought needed to be told.74

73. Noll, America’s God, 434–35. Among the many Lincoln studies published during the bicentennial of his birth, Ronald C. White Jr.’s A. Lincoln: A Biography (New York: Random House, 2009) ponders anew the importance of Phineas Densmore Gurley (1816–1868): graduate of Princeton Seminary (class of 1840), disciple of Charles Hodge (standard-bearer of nineteenth-century Old School Presbyterianism), and pastor of the predominantly Republican and abolitionist New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. (which Lincoln did not join but occasionally attended, occupying a rented pew selected by his wife [Frank E. Edgington, A History of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, 1803–1961 (Washington, DC: New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, 1962), 234–57]). It is a matter of record that on February 24, 1862, Gurley conducted the funeral service for the third of Lincoln’s sons, William Wallace (“Willie”; 1850–1862), in the East Room of the White House. Far more difficult to document is Gurley’s influence on Lincoln’s thought. Exactly what Lincoln heard at New York Avenue is largely conjectural, because few of Gurley’s sermons survive (most famously “Faith in God,” delivered April 19, 1865, at Lincoln’s own funeral [Philadelphia: Department of History of the Office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., 1940]). Lincoln was present at New York Avenue on August 6, 1863, to hear Gurley preach “Man’s Projects and God’s Results,” a paradoxical correlation that Lincoln would have as easily appreciated from reading Proverbs (16:9; 19:21) and Shakespeare (Hamlet 5.2.10–11). Gurley claimed to have enjoyed private theological conversations with the president at the executive mansion and reported that Lincoln expressed “great comfort” from some of the clergyman’s prayer meetings (Michael Burkheimer, Lincoln’s Christianity [Yardley, PA: Westholme, 2007], 118–20), but so far as I am aware we lack Lincoln’s own appraisal of these events. David Rankin Barbee’s study, “President Lincoln and Doctor Gurley” (The Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 5 [1948]: 3–24), analyzes Gurley’s various petitions for Lincoln’s political intercessions but no petitions by Lincoln for Gurley’s pastoral counsel. White (A. Lincoln, 665) suggests a direct connection between Hodge’s lectures on systematic theology, mediated by Gurley, and the Second Inaugural’s reference to “those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him” (par. 3). Though possible, so firm a connection remains speculative. Even Lincoln’s folksy characterization of the pastor is a matter of postmortem hearsay: “I like Gurley. The Doctor is a good man[,] . . . a pretty fair, tolerable, sort of a bill” (New York World, October 1, 1868; quoted in Barbee, “Lincoln and Gurley,” 24).

74. Lincoln to Mr. Thurlow Weed of New York (March 15, 1865; Collected Works 8.356).
Some Closing Reflections

Democratic government and its driveshaft, politics, rely on assumptions about human nature. The nuances of the theological *anthropologies* in Washington’s Farewell Address and Lincoln’s Second Inaugural are curiously resonant. In their authors’ self-references and assumptions of their audiences, both exhibit clear-eyed realism of human frailty and error. Human creatures are inclined to self-aggrandizement and self-delusion yet are capable of sober reasoning, charitable nobility, and moments of self-transcendence. On different occasions of national peril in American history, both Washington and Lincoln—Federalists to the core—struggled to encourage their fractious citizens to recognize and fortify the bands joining them while diluting the acids that dissolved them. This is obvious in Lincoln’s case; it was no less true for Washington, confronting separate colonies conditioned to regard federalism and collective interest as an enemy instead of an ally. In other words, for both presidents there was finally no “us” versus “them”; there was only “us,” in all our selfish sameness. Both acknowledged—Washington more tacitly, Lincoln very openly—the reality of corporate sin, whose roughest edges were, however, amenable to being smoothed. The nuances in that perception need reclamation in America of 2010, when partisanship again steams at fever pitch while the nation’s governors and those whom they govern often appear crippled by mean self-righteousness.

For mortals the first step forward, as Lincoln learned from the Sermon on the Mount, was contrite abjuration of any pretense of moral purity: “Judge not, lest ye be judged.” Both, I suspect, would have agreed with Reinhold Niebuhr: “If the providence of God does not enter the affairs of men to bring good out of evil, the evil in our good may easily destroy our most ambitious efforts and frustrate our highest hopes.”

For neither Washington nor Lincoln was democratic utopia a defensible hope. Amateur sleuth though I be, I know of no evidence that either president envisioned, as fact or by potential, American government as the kingdom of God on earth. For both, the corruption of human motives would have precluded such a

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75. Would Washington have been appalled by the epigram popularized by Ronald Reagan: “The most terrifying words in the English language are ‘I’m from the government and I’m here to help’”?  
77. Likewise, Hans J. Morgenthau: “I think it was John Quincy Adams who made the point forcefully that it was not for the United States to impose its own principles of government upon the rest of mankind, but, rather, to attract the rest of mankind through the example of the United States” (“Human Rights and Foreign Policy,” in Herbert Butterfield: *The Ethics of History and Politics*, ed. Kenneth W. Thompson [Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980], 103).
thing. Certainly they resisted provocations by Christians to write such language into the nation’s Constitution.  

78. Again, it is Washington who persistently defended “the absence of any regulation, respecting religion, from the Magna-Charta of our country” (Papers 4.274). Presumably this would come as news to that fifty-five percent of modern Americans who have told pollsters they believed the Constitution established the country as a Christian nation (Russell Shorto, “How Christian Were the Founders?” The New York Times Magazine [February 11, 2010]).

79. Thus, Washington’s Farewell Address (par. 14, 31; cf. Lincoln, “Our popular government has often been called an experiment” (“Message to Congress in Special Session” [July 4, 1861], Collected Works 4.439).

80. “Among all the statesmen of ancient and modern periods, Lincoln alone had a sense of historical meaning so high as to cast doubt on the intentions of both sides and to place the enemy into the same category of ambiguity as the nation to which his life was committed” (Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Religion of Abraham Lincoln,” in Lincoln and the Gettysburg Address: Commemorative Papers, ed. Allan Nevins [Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1964], 75).

81. “We—even we here—hold the power, and bear the responsibility. In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last, best hope of earth” (“Annual Message to Congress” [December 1, 1862], Collected Works 5.537. “I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel. And yet I have never understood that the Presidency conferred upon me an unrestricted right to act officially upon this judgment and feeling” (Lincoln to A. G. Hodges [April 4, 1864], Collected Works 7.281).

82. “I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. . . . My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and
Washington’s silence on the subject in 1796 was strategic, “believing as he did that slavery was a cancer on the body politic of America that could not at present be removed without killing the patient.”\footnote{83} Returning to Mount Vernon, he kept his own counsel on that incendiary subject, though he never endorsed arguments for black inferiority or their transport elsewhere after emancipation. His last will and testament provided not only for the freeing of his own slaves upon his wife’s death but also for a portion of the proceeds of his estate’s sale to support the emancipated and their children.\footnote{84} In different, unpredictable ways both Washington and Lincoln opened the door to the Constitution’s thirteenth (1865) and fifteenth amendments (1870), the Civil Rights Act (1964), and the presidential election of Barack Obama (2008); neither did so with immaculate hands. Given their implicit anthropologies, they would not, I suspect, have been much surprised by that.

Christology seems by far the weakest link in these figures’ theological chains. Neither seems to have known quite what to do with Jesus, or to have cared much about their incompetence. Their insistence on the Union’s integrity reads as a political version of the Pauline body of Christ (Rom 12:3–15:33; 1 Cor 12:1–14:40; cf. Eph 4:1–16; Col 2:16–19). Both Washington and Lincoln yearned for release from the contradictions embedded within the political or personal soul, yet something prevented them from connecting the dots to the gospel’s pledge of a divine mercy capable of accomplishing that. Again, however, the matter is complicated: Both presidents acted and counseled action—compassion, forgiveness, self-sacrifice—consistent with the Christ they seem never fully to have embraced, to a degree greater than many American politicos less reticent in pontificating their commitments to Christ. Even—perhaps especially—an orthodox Christian may recognize that christological litmus tests are as susceptible to mislead as all others (Matt 7:21–23). “If Christ were here now,” Mark Twain observed, “there is one thing he would not be—a Christian.”\footnote{85} The easily forgotten fact is that Christ wasn’t a Christian back then, either.

To my mind these speeches’ most striking aspect is their implication or expression of \textit{radical providence}, the theological correlate of their conflicted anthropologies. God is beneficent though intractably mysterious; the ways of

\footnote{83. Ellis, \textit{Founding Brothers}, 158.}
God firm yet impossible to predict. In their best moments both Washington and Lincoln hoped that the Union they loved might live in alignment with Divine Providence, while sidestepping the error of identifying Providence with the political and theological causes to which a religious citizen is committed. They demonstrate a disarming modesty, a considered reserve from claiming greater knowledge of the Almighty than any human can properly know. In that may lie a humbling lesson for us all, not least readers of journals like *Theology Today*. 
Christian Spirituality in a Time of Ecological Awareness

Abstract: Faced with our ecological crisis, Christian thinkers are making clear that ecological spirituality is not a passing trend but the lived expression of faith in divine creation, the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the reign of God. Not only must ecological spirituality motivate all Christians to act on behalf of our imperiled planet, but it requires reformulation of key convictions about the relationship between the inner and outer life, the imagination’s role in conversion, and what it means to be a human who is called to contemplation. Exploring these themes reveals how fully embodied and social Christian spirituality is meant to be.

During the last half-century, Christian thinkers have issued ever more urgent appeals for a transformed relationship between human beings and nature. When process theologian John Cobb developed his theology of ecology in 1972, he was already asking, “Is it too late?” By 1988, the cultural historian Thomas Berry had named our ecological situation a crisis of spirit, and Rosemary Ruether was developing an ecofeminist theology of earth healing.¹ We would expect this growing awareness to prompt fundamental shifts in the lived expression of faith that is Christian spirituality. To a certain extent, it has. Thanks to the retrieval of creation-affirming sources in the Bible, and in Franciscan, Benedictine, and other traditions, fresh themes are being highlighted. Beginning with the early 1990s, Christians of all persuasions have become increasingly involved in caring for the earth.

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Yet if they are aware of it at all, many Christians continue to regard ecological spirituality as a new fad or special interest. Actually, it belongs at the center of Christian life, not its edges. The sacramental, mystical, and prophetic traditions all demand it. Heightened ecological awareness is not just an appropriate response to the present crisis, but an opportunity to reexamine several perennial issues. It underscores Christian spirituality’s need to correct the heavy emphasis on the human person that puts the rest of creation at risk, to broaden the meaning of mysticism and encourage its realization in all Christians, to link the interior life more fundamentally to social concerns, and fully to engage the religious imagination in bringing about conversion. In each of these areas, an ecological framework advances a thoroughly embodied, social spirituality.

A Christian Spirituality That Embraces the Entire Cosmos

Fundamental to any spirituality is an understanding of what it means to be human. When we pray or create liturgy, seek spiritual direction or offer pastoral care, serve at a soup kitchen or restore a habitat, we assume a certain view of human persons, including how they relate to the divine and to the rest of creation. Though this conception of human nature may remain implicit and unexamined, it nonetheless strongly influences the way we image our growth into the likeness of Christ.

The ecological crisis has revealed a problematic aspect of how we see the human person, shining the spotlight on how anthropocentric, or human centered, theology has become. Recognizing the many instances in the Christian tradition where this approach has favored human beings at the expense of other creatures, theologians are exploring what it might mean to be human in an expansive cosmos where all creatures have intrinsic value and are inescapably interrelated. This implies an anthropology that embraces every living being (biocentric) and the entire cosmos (cosmocentric).

Such a reformulation does not simply revamp our spirituality on the basis of modern cosmology. Inclusion of the natural world, rather than being a departure from Christian tradition, restores a concern with nature found in biblical, patristic, and medieval writings. The theological foundations for the sanctity of all matter lie deep in the tradition. Biblical authors find all creation to be enlivened by the Spirit of God, who summons into existence a landscape of diverse and beautiful creatures; the Genesis account judges this divine creation to be “very good” (1:31). John’s Gospel declares that in the person of Jesus, the Word was made flesh, or sarx (1:14), and entered the matter of our universe.
The second-century theologian Irenaeus of Lyon depicts the visible cosmos as the creation and revelation of the Word and Spirit of God. In *Scivias*, her reflections on Christian doctrine, Hildegard of Bingen sees the whole universe as filled with the love of Christ, who bears “the brilliance of burning charity of such great glory that every creature is illumined by the brightness of this light.”

How did we lose sight of this tradition? Attempts to reformulate theological anthropology in light of the ecological crisis entail a critique of what has been termed the “turn to the subject”—that cluster of convictions that solidified by the nineteenth century into a shared system of beliefs regarding the human person. This view emphasized human self-consciousness, freedom, and historicity. It moved away from those classic understandings of the human that included a cosmic context, and in practice it fostered the cultivation of self-awareness, individuality, and self-actualization. As responsible subjects, human persons are free to shape their own nature and the rest of creation as well. This contributed in its own way, as liberation spiritualities have pointed out, to a kind of spirituality available only to those whose economic and social resources provided the leisure to pursue it. Further, as centers of inwardness, persons take part in the public sphere only secondarily to interior and private self-development; little interest is shown in the natural world. In these and other ways, this notion of the person failed to fully honor the material dimensions of human personhood and overemphasized the subjective aspects of faith.

In addition to developments in theology, Christian spirituality has been shaped by its interaction with psychology. By definition interdisciplinary, spirituality engages many dialogue partners—history, the social and physical sciences, the arts—but a major conversation in the twentieth century has been with psychology. This has intensified interest in our inner universe, with its hidden thoughts and feelings, dreams, and affective states. The result has been a preoccupation with internal and interpersonal experiences of grace, a concentration on areas such as stages of growth, autonomy, and fulfillment.

Reflection on a pervasive metaphor in contemporary spirituality—seeking the true self—illustrates how spiritual experience changes when we expand our underlying anthropology to cosmic scope. The contrast between the true

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and false self was one of Thomas Merton’s most influential contributions to the spiritual lexicon. The terms occur throughout his works, shifting their meaning when framed in different contexts. In his later writings, Merton describes the movement from a false to a true self as the journey from an externally imposed identity, one often neurotic and self-deceptive, to that grounded in the ultimate reality that is God. One of his favorite Pauline quotations, “I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me,” defines this true self; Merton draws from the Christian symbols of death and resurrection to describe its loss and recovery. Though he never quite finished his quest for the self before his untimely death in Asia, it remained for him a symbol of a mature contemporary spirituality.

As a metaphor for Christian identity, the true self must include the history and texture of the cosmos. The flesh that the Word became was indeed human, but we now understand human persons as inescapably part of a larger network of living beings on our planet, a planet that is part of a solar system reaching back to the first galaxies of stars. Contemporary cosmology reveals creation to be a single life system. Within this cosmos, the meaning of the true self expands to an intrinsically connected self, and the false self connotes not simply cultural distortions, but disconnection from the rest of creation and disregard for its welfare. Living from the false self involves a stance too small to embrace God’s compassion for all living beings and the cosmic sweep of Christ’s love. Seeking the true self takes us to ancient galaxies of stars and to distant seas, to the common ancestors who are the source of every atom in our bodies. In our age of ecological awareness, a mature Christian spirituality extends our reach to that collective transformation reflective of our interdependence with all other beings.

Mysticism and Contemplation: Not Just for the Select Few

The question of who is called to be a mystic—the few or the many—is not new. Yet today we address this problem within a fresh context: the emerging consensus that without a sense of the sacredness of the earth, we cannot sustain the changes required to save it. The destruction of our planet and its species results from a utilitarian approach to the natural world. Within this perspective, all other creatures are here primarily to serve human needs. Mountains, oceans, and forests serve as larders to be raided as we master and manage them according to

our purposes. Conversion from this attitude requires receptivity to the holiness of the universe, that openness to the divine presence in all creation that defines the contemplative or mystic. The wonder and gratitude that flow from this recognition of the earth’s sacred dimension subvert the objectifying of its bounty.

Ecological writings often include a mystical element, a strong sense of the numinous dimensions of nature. The American scientist Barbara McClintock, who was the first person to map maize genetically, read the book of nature simultaneously with her body and her mind. The eyes of the body became the eyes of her mind through an act of creative imagination. For this to happen, she believed, we must have the time to look and the patience to hear what any aspect of nature is saying to us. For example, we tend to underestimate how flexible plants are. While animals can move about, plants do the same things while staying still. A casual observer considers them a beautiful but stationary area to look at while passing by, forgetting that they are alive: “In the summertime, when you walk down the road, you’ll see that the tulip leaves, if it’s a little warm, turn themselves around so that their backs are toward the sun.” McClintock found plants extraordinary in ways that exceed “our wildest expectations,” and she sensed the strong connection of all life forms. This is a contemplative mode of awareness, and she was proud to be called a mystic.

The ecological crisis offers an opportunity to restore mysticism and contemplation to their rightful place in Christian experience. Though the vocabulary used for these forms of knowing is fluid and eludes precision, the two terms are often used interchangeably to refer to the experience of the divine presence. The eminent scholar of mysticism, Bernard McGinn, defines the mystical element in Christianity as those beliefs and practices that enable us to prepare for, become conscious of, and respond to the direct presence of God. McGinn believes mysticism should not be confined to special experiences that only a handful of people can enjoy. Mystics did not think they were practicing mysticism, a term only coined in the seventeenth century. They were simply trying to live the fullness of the spiritual life envisioned by their religious traditions. Influenced by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century vocabulary, and accounts of visions and voices in the classic writings of mystics, many people believe that immediate experiences of the divine are characterized by the paranormal and are the lot of the elite. They shun the term “mystic” itself.

Nevertheless, the twentieth-century theologian Karl Rahner famously remarked that the Christian of the future would be a mystic or no Christian at all. He based his conviction on the doctrines of grace and the Incarnation. Humans are by nature oriented at all times and in everyday ways to absolute mystery, the depth and richness of God that opens out to us everywhere. The Word made flesh reveals the nature of this holy mystery. Before the mystery, all language breaks and fails. Therefore, the *apophatic* (negative) stream of Christian experience always exists in tandem with the *kataphatic* (affirmative). Ecological contemplation leads not only to wonder and gratitude but to impasse and darkness, to unknowing and not saying. Mystics, aware of how much is incomprehensible, approach the sacredness of creation realizing that they do not know.

Because of our profound connection to all creation, it is here that we encounter the divine mystery in both darkness and light; what is required is that we remain available to it. As the poet Denise Levertov says in “Flickering Mind,”

Not you, it is I am absent.
You are the stream, the fish, the light, the pulsing shadow,
you the unchanging presence, in whom all moves and changes.
How can I focus my flickering, perceive at the fountain’s heart
the sapphire I know is there?

More than simply a prayer practice, contemplation is a mode of knowing, an initial receptivity to God’s love freely given. It provides a desperately needed human disposition, one prepared for union rather than dominance, grounded in acknowledgment of our profound connection with all planetary life forms. Freed from their esoteric formulations, the traditions of contemplation and mysticism belong, in varying forms and degrees of actualization, to all Christians.

The Interior Life in a Relational Universe

In today’s burgeoning spirituality market, books and sermons often prove popular if they offer comfort and encouragement but refrain from asking too much of us. Spirituality can seem to be a separate inner sphere—the care of the soul—exempt from the messy work of preparing God’s coming reign. This narrow perspective becomes especially problematic in a time of ecological anguish that requires both restraint and bold action on behalf of our planet.

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In order to take seriously our planetary concerns, we must be convinced of the essential place of social and political realities in Christian life. Support for such a conviction can be found in the relational understanding of the person now echoing more vibrantly from several quarters. Its sources include the revival in recent decades of trinitarian images of God, as well as current scientific descriptions of an interconnected universe. This relational self calls for a new look at the role of *inner and outer* in Christian spirituality.

Since at least the time of Augustine, a widespread term for the spiritual dimension of Christian existence has been “the inner life.” Influenced by Augustine’s metaphor of entering into one’s self, or one’s soul, in order to find God, the spiritual realm came to denote a private inner space secluded from the outer world. Augustine saw the path to God as a turn inward: “I have learned to love you late! You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself.” In Augustine’s Platonic worldview, this inner turn frees us from the outer bodily and material world and takes us to the immutable and immortal.

Augustine’s conception of the interior life strongly influenced the Christian spiritual tradition. It appears in the powerful metaphor of the interior castle used by the sixteenth-century mystic Teresa of Avila. She suggests “that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms.” At this castle’s center, secret things pass between God and the soul, but concern with the outer wall of the castle, that is, our bodies and everything surrounding them, leads us to neglect the soul’s beauty. Teresa’s writings express a fundamental truth of the spiritual life: that the human person is the dwelling place of the divine. And in the hands of as wise a spiritual guide as Teresa, a focus on the inner life does not include permission to remain within, comfortably at rest. An eminently practical woman and a vigorous reformer, she found the touchstone of holiness in ordinary daily events. Yet the tension between inner and outer, and the privileging of the interior life, remained dominant in the tradition.

Other spiritual writers share Teresa’s efforts to balance private and public, contemplation and action, prayer and politics. Teresa’s twentieth-century Carmelite sister, Edith Stein, stressed the relationship of interior prayer to the Eucharist and the public prayer of the church. Pointing to the example of Jesus, she noted that although he did pull away from the crowds for prayer, and withdrew into the mountains and deserts for solitude, he also participated in

pilgrimages to Jerusalem and shared in the Passover as well as other liturgical practices.\textsuperscript{11}

An ecological worldview removes some of the problematic divisions between the inner and outer. By offering us a relational self fully rooted in matter, it provides a context for Jesus’ mission of bringing about right relationships and extends his concern to all created beings. From the current biological sciences we learn that we are embodied creatures, intrinsically linked to all other living beings. We are shaped by social forces in an essentially communal universe. No cell, no species, no neighbor exists as an isolated entity. As John Cobb says, “We influence each other by entering into each other.”\textsuperscript{12} We do not first become related when we love; rather, Christian love only changes \textit{how} we exist in relationship.

Faith in the Trinity also reinforces this view of the self as essentially social, constituted by its relationships. We are created in the image of a trinitarian God; as relationship is the heart of the divine, so is it the defining mode of humans made in the divine image.\textsuperscript{13} The religious and political institutions to which we belong, the communities with whom we worship, the dolphins that swim in our waters, the bees that pollinate our flowers—all these enter into us as we grasp and are grasped by other beings in the biosphere. We exist in a stream of mutually graced action enlivened by the Spirit. This knowing and being known is the mystery revealed to us in the Trinity as the divine communal life, an intimate communion into which we enter through the power of the Spirit (Eph 1:18). At the deepest level, the Spirit—breath, wind, dove, mother, unifying divine power—heals and unites us.

Many of the more intractable problems in Christian spirituality arise because reality has been falsely divided. Depictions of a relational self attempt to move beyond notions of theological anthropology that rely on substance dualisms, such as the division and hierarchical pattern imposed on the connection between body and soul.\textsuperscript{14} Opposition to such dualism is well documented in spiritual literature, not least in the efforts of ecofeminists to challenge Christianity’s


\textsuperscript{14} On the relational self, see, for example, F. LeRon Shults, \textit{Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); and Catherine Keller, \textit{From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self} (Boston: Beacon, 1986).
elevation of spirit as superior to the earthly realities of nature. The rise of neuroscience and its understanding of the functioning of the human brain have also led to the demise of the hard dichotomy drawn in some anthropological models between soul and body, as well as the classification of separate faculties of the soul such as emotion and reason.

Along with this critique of substance dualism, more holistic models of Christian spirituality have been emerging. These paradigms of connectivity illumine the meaning of the terms inner and outer. Rather than separate and competing spheres that we must struggle to somehow bring together, inner and outer can now be seen to describe the whole person under diverse aspects of embodiment and relationship. In a similar way, the New Testament refers to the whole person, under different perspectives, as spirit, soul, heart, or body. When seen as moments in the process of graced self-creation, our inner and outer lives flow into and out of one another in a rhythm of mutual influence. The planet’s entire swirling, groaning life process exists within us, but we can choose how we will influence the becoming of other beings, as well as how we will incorporate their influence into our own becoming. God’s presence sustains this complex relationality in our beginnings as well as our depths.

Spirituality cannot concern itself simply with private prayer or personal fulfillment; its scope is as wide as that reign of God which encompasses all creation. Yet in a connected universe, the importance of the interior life is amplified rather than eclipsed. Solitary prayer increases the intensity and quality of our relating—without it, these relationships become trivial, falling far short of the possibilities God is offering us. We then risk a kind of connectivity that consists mainly of being wired without relief to cell phones, e-mails, Facebook, and Twitter. The interior life does not describe an empty space inside us where alone we discover the face of God. It does, however, signify those moments of creative freedom during which we open to the depths of our existence in God, and to the divine vision of who we might become, when we weigh our responsibilities to God, ourselves, and others and choose the shape of the love we will bring to the world. Jesus shows us the fullest possible extent of such receptivity to God’s love, and we are to abide in him as we allow his presence to center us and define our relating: “I am the vine, you are the branches” (John 15:5).

The Power of the Imagination to Convert Us

A central question occupying those who advocate for our imperiled planet is how to change destructive human mindsets and behavior, and to do so quickly enough to offset the more dire consequences of global climate change and species extinction. Because present problems trump future dangers, it is often difficult to find motivation for the profound conversion our ecological situation requires. However, when its meaning and place in Christian life is fully appreciated, the imagination provides a powerful stimulus for so major a spiritual shift. A dichotomous understanding of the human person has dissociated reason not only from emotion but also from imagination, portraying it as an unreliable generator of fantasy. In contrast to its popular association with illusion and unreality, the imagination is in fact a fundamental and holistic way of knowing, one that captures reality in terms of its pervasive mystery. It gives rise to new ways of viewing the world and our place in it.16

In announcing the imminent coming of the reign of God, and in describing a state of readiness for its arrival, Jesus invoked almost exclusively the language of the imagination. He aimed for radical conversion, a transformation of the entire way life is conceived. In depicting this reign of God, the Synoptic Gospels use the world we know—seeds, bushes, day laborers, leaven—to envision the world God wants to bring about. It is part of the genius of the Gospels to recognize that new visions are generated by the creative imagination when it is on fire with the Spirit and therefore filled with hope.

“Tell all the Truth, but tell it slant—,” the poet Emily Dickinson advises.17 The truth of the imagination is indirect and can therefore often slip past the barriers we erect against change. Although it speaks in terms of individual and unique realities, it always suggests more than it actually perceives and describes directly. We have an experience of this kind of truth when we listen to a story, a symphony, or a poem. The truth does not reach us directly; it approaches from all sides. A story told of Albert Einstein illustrates this point. Einstein was once asked to describe the theory of relativity in simple enough language that the listener might capture something of its meaning. Einstein


replied, “I cannot do what you request, but if you will call on me at Princeton, I will play it for you on my violin.”\textsuperscript{18}

Biblical writings, whose aim is not information but transformation, contain a rich array of such indirect and multileveled truth: the imagery of the psalms, the poetry of Israel’s prophets, and the parables and paradoxical sayings of Jesus.\textsuperscript{19} Contemporary scholars focused on the future of our planet enlist such imaginative language as they probe traditional images and suggest fresh metaphors: The world as God’s body. The cosmos as home. The dream of the universe. Stewards of creation. Kinship among all creatures. Such metaphors derive their power not primarily from discussion and analysis but from incorporation into prayer, ritual, and action. Metaphors are language on the move, ready to break open accustomed ways of viewing the universe and our place in it. For this to happen, we must dwell in imagination’s sphere, walking around in it until we experience reality from a new and graced vantage point.

Something of this shift has already occurred with the image of human domination of nature drawn from the biblical story of creation in Genesis 1. Recognizing the negative consequences of this view of the human vocation, Christians have invoked instead the metaphor of stewardship as responsible and creative caretaking. The notion of dominion as stewardship is now itself being transformed into visions of kinship with all created beings. This process was apparent in a grade school student who undertook a service project by working with my husband and me on habitat restoration. A bright and religious young man, his previous experience of the outdoors was stepping outside for recess. He had never seen a red-winged blackbird, and spotting one was the highlight of his first work session. He listened to its song and received its gift. Now it matters to him if red-winged blackbirds should become extinct. He realizes that extinction means that its song is gone forever. Through the emotion of wonder, our young helper knows what he values and what he must do. While embarking on what he saw as a stewardship project, he has been converted to a sense of kinship with, and responsibility for, the earth’s creatures—land snails, dragonflies, and wild roses.


As God’s entry into the ordinary, the Incarnation grounds the significance of the imagination in Christian life. Faith in the Incarnation is belief that the particulars of life are vessels of grace. The imagination provides a way of perceiving reality that includes concepts and information, but more than these; it also encompasses the concrete daily details of existence. It is on the level of the imagination that we first encounter the divine in the world, for revelation is always given through the material; it is always symbolic, pointing to the ultimate through the finite. The imagination knows things in their individual uniqueness. It leads us not to the essence of birds or persons or emotions but to this blue heron soaring over the treetops, to this child gingerly touching her toe to the ocean’s edge, to this moment of fear that we might lose the rivers and meadows we love. Consequently, the imagination makes it impossible for us to bypass the cosmos. It captures the interlacing relationships of our lives along with the Mystery that creates and sustains them.

Through the imagination we also formulate our initial response to encountering the divine—myth, ritual, sacrament, symbol, image, story. Only later do we create dogma and theory. Eucharistic celebrations can be powerful occasions for shaping an ecological imagination. Each makes present a universe of communion and connection in Christ—bread, wine, water, and fire are all sacraments of the risen Christ present in creation. Moreover, in the Eucharist we are offered a vision of what the earth would be like if we lived in accord with the trinitarian communion in which we are made. Destruction of the planet goes against all that this eucharistic vision symbolizes.

In the realm of knowledge and experience, the imagination lies closest to the emotions. We experience this, for example, in the way music evokes and expresses love and grief. And scholars from a variety of fields—feminists, neuroscientists, psychologists, ethicists—are currently reclaiming the fundamental role of emotions in intelligent decision making. Since the 1990s they have challenged the association of affectivity with feminine experience and its subsequent devaluing. The neuroscientist Anthony Damasio has shown, for example, that emotions are forms of intelligent awareness; they supply the kind of engagement with our surroundings that enables us to set priorities and make decisions. They tell us what is of value and importance and thereby guide

our discernment.\textsuperscript{22} Whereas emotions have been considered a barrier to truth and reason, it is in and through the emotional tone itself that we come to know the truth of events in their concrete totality. For ecological conversion we therefore need the singular images of the universe created by poets and painters, photographers and nature writers. Their images stir our grief at the destruction of coral reefs and salmon, polar bears and sparrows. They evoke wonder at old-growth forests and mountain glaciers. Through these emotions we are moved to gratitude and simplicity and to a commitment to save what we love.

The strong emotions that set conversion in motion often result from imaginative shock. Jesus’ stories and sayings suggest intuitive and unconventional answers, and his audience is forced to consider new possibilities. The imagination loosens and dissolves past images in order to recombine them in new forms for the future; it uses the familiar to create the unfamiliar. The Jesuit mystic and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin understood this. Though criticized by both scientists and religious thinkers, his vision of point Omega was an attempt to translate the Pauline texts on the cosmic Christ into our scientific age. Teilhard pictured an evolving universe ascending toward a final point, or Omega, which was at the same time its animating center. He was convinced that this was the role Christian faith ascribes to the cosmic Christ. Teilhard wanted to depict the future unity of all creation in Christ and unleash the human energy necessary to help create that future.\textsuperscript{23} Similar imaginative visions continue to generate hope by capturing the enthusiasm for the reign of God and a new creation found in traditional biblical symbols. They draw us toward a nurturing relationship with each other and the earth.

Care of creation may well be the overarching Christian vocation of our time. During the last decades, awareness of our planet’s peril has deepened reflection on central aspects of faith—Incarnation, Trinity, the Spirit’s role in creation, the reign of God—and fueled action on the earth’s behalf. In light of this ecological awareness, Christian spirituality needs to likewise undergo a reconfiguration, extending its horizons from a narrow human focus to a cosmic sweep, and strengthening the bodily and social foundations for a truly holistic faith. This transformation, and the spiritual imperative driving it, must engage not only specialist groups but each and every Christian.

Theology Today

PHILIP HARROLD

The “New Monasticism”
as Ancient-Future Belonging

Abstract: Self-consciously postmodern Christians in the postevangelical, emerging church, or so-called “emergent conversation” in North America and the United Kingdom, are redefining the Christian community in monastic terms and reimagining it using premodern forms. Rediscovering how to exhibit the Christian faith as a way of life has prompted a variety of historical retrievals of ancient patterns and practices that seem to make their originative faith communities more authentic and compelling to postmodern sociocultural contexts. These “ancient-future” pursuits inspire not only an eclectic array of historical inquiries but also a distinctive historical consciousness that stresses the importance of imaginative reconstruction and “indwelling” of ancient Christian praxis. After a brief survey of the New Monasticism, the theological promises and perils of this diverse movement will be considered.

“More substantial than a trend but less organized than a movement.” That’s how a recent cover story in U.S. News & World Report described the “return to tradition” in contemporary North American religions.1 In Protestant Christian circles, the “new interest in old ways” has been around since Robert Webber published Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail in 1985. His “ancient-future” project shifted from description to prescription, showing amnesia-prone evangelicals how the future led to, or at least through, the past.2 Meanwhile, Colleen Carroll traced similar impulses among younger Catholics in her book The

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New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy (2002). Sociologist of religion Roger Finke has observed an “innovative return to tradition,” while social psychologist Philip Wexler documents “cultural changes toward the sacred” that renew “esoteric traditions” and “mystical practice and theory.” In the wake of the New Age, Madonna’s dabblings in Kabala caused skeptics—from inside and outside the traditions themselves—to question the seriousness or scope of the phenomenon. Yet despite the occasional hype and celebrity, there are persistent signs of a growing historical consciousness or, better yet, imagination directed at the roots of religious traditions and the ancient wisdom that has shaped beliefs, inspired practices, and sustained communities over the centuries.

Nowhere is this engagement with the past more evident than in the self-styled “emerging” and “emergent” movements of contemporary Christianity. Here is expressed not only a yearning for the supposed integrities of ancient ways, but an imaginative participation in those practices and patterns of life that provide what Wexler calls a “reselfing,” or redefinition of boundaries between the self and the social. I refer to it as “ancient-future belonging” because the expressed desire for new forms of common life is not only synchronic but diachronic—which is to say that it has to do with the textures, complexity, and embodied and spatial aspects of relational being and action even as it fuses horizons over time, exercising a kind of memory that recovers, reconstructs, or at least reckons with a past way of life “within-time-ness” (Heidegger). For example, emergent writer Tony Jones’s book on lectio divina is a guide to the “interior space” in which the Holy Spirit continues to

4. Recent descriptions of emerging, emergent, and various dissenting movements, especially in contemporary evangelical Christianity, are found in Scott Bader-Saye, “The Emergent Matrix,” Christian Century, November 30, 2004, 20–27; Scot McKnight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church,” Christianity Today, February 2007, 35–39; and Phyllis Tickle, “The Great Emergence,” Sojourners, August 2008, 28–31. McKnight makes a distinction between emergent, as represented in Emergent Village and its leaders Brian McLaren, Tony Jones, and Doug Pagitt, and emerging, which is a “mix of orthodox, missional, evangelical, church-centered and social justice leaders and lay folk.” Tickle uses emergence in a broad historical sense for those movements within Christianity that, about every 500 years, break through the institutional “carapace” of the church “in order that renewal and new growth may occur.” Included here is a diverse assortment of “young evangelicals,” postevangelicals, and dissenting Catholics—all seeking “a new, more vital form of Christianity.”
5. The expression “ancient-future” was coined by Robert E. Webber, as noted above; see especially Ancient Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999). My use of Heidegger’s term is based on Paul Ricoeur’s understanding of the “temporal” aspect of the first moment (“Mimesis-1”) in narrative composition. See Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 52–87.
work through a monastic reading practice. In learning how the saints “prayed the Bible,” one is better equipped to experience the “feeling, noticing, and absorbing” of God’s presence in personal as well as communal settings today. Meanwhile, in his novel *Chasing Francis*, Ian Morgan Cron hopes his fictional encounter with the “postmodern saint” Francis of Assisi will help the reader discover a long-lost transcendence, community, beauty, dignity, and meaning to the Christian life. The “spiritual energy” released by plunging into “the heart of Francis” prompted the main character of Cron’s story—an evangelical pastor—to “dive” into his own heart and then reemerge with a new vision of the church as a “genuine kingdom community.” In identifying with this character, the reader will hear Francis telling her that “our church community relies too much on words to tell others about our faith”—it’s about “how we live together” that “attracts people to faith.”

What we see here and in much of contemporary emergent writing is not just the recovery of a past that seems usable; rather, it is existentially compelling in terms of a whole new “way of life,” especially a way of life together. Let us consider how this sense of a livable past gives rise to a distinctive historical consciousness in the imagination and memory of the so-called New Monasticism. Here, in particular, a way of connecting oneself or one’s immediate relational setting to historical forms of spiritual community is deeply associated with the idea of “wisdom”—the traditional term most often used for the kind of participatory knowledge that is received and passed on in such richly textured communal contexts. Four quite different expressions of the New Monasticism—here understood in the broadest sense of Jonathan R. Wilson’s “twelve marks”—will show the central role that wisdom plays, explicitly or otherwise, in the thought and praxis of this diverse movement. And it all reveals just how far “beyond MacIntyre” the New Monastics have come in their quest for a new way of life.

Four Expressions of the New Monasticism

Michael Casey, oscio, a Cistercian monk at Tarrawarra Abbey in Australia, has written a popular invitation to Benedictine monasticism entitled *Strangers to*
The City: Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict (2005). Like countless other mediators of Benedictine monasticism today, he endeavors to make the practice of the rule comprehensible to an audience that he imagines to be receptive to a “reorientation of life.” This conversion is likely to have begun stirring deep within the seekers well before they arrived at the monastery, “working its magic and underground” such that they gradually see things differently. Most especially, they begin to “glimpse something of the reality underlying human affairs.” Then at some point, they make a radical choice in submission to a “secret summons,” and all this occurs against the backdrop of an ambient culture “that espouses so very few of the values that characterize our seeking God” and its attendant way of life. The goals and assumptions of this culture recede in importance as the seeker is “impelled toward a different future” and, most immediately, a “different lifestyle.”

Upon arrival at the monastery, a “fusion of horizons” then occurs with the “life-enriching vision of St. Benedict” and “greater access to the evangelical wisdom that he taught through his Rule and through the form of monastic living that he established.” This way of life and its attendant wisdom are communicated in what seems like a mostly “wordless process of transmission,” with the chief lessons “learned through living.” Doctrina (theoretical knowledge) and disciplina (spiritual disciplines) work together in the day-to-day “network of supportive practices”—“interior and exterior, individual and communal, spontaneous and routine.” Virtues and progress toward the goal of communion with Christ are then acquired almost unwittingly in an atmosphere of “antecedent willingness,” omnidirectional “mutuality,” and “generativity.”

Not everyone who arrives at the monastery doorstep will, of course, enter into the full life of the community and take the requisite vows—especially given the more accommodating options of the occasional monastic retreat or the secular oblation within traditional monasticism. Nevertheless, the ideal of traditional monastic life still manages to assert a powerful magnetic response in the spiritual compass of this more transient population. Borrowing from Esther de Wall, Benet Tvedten, osb, describes the “calling to oblation” as a “returning home” to a familiar place: “Sometimes one finds a place, a landscape, which is new and yet the forms, the shapes, the shadows seem already

10. Ibid., xiii. Casey neither makes explicit reference to Hans-Georg Gadamer, who coined the phrase “fusion of horizons,” nor uses the phrase in Gadamer’s formal sense.
11. Ibid., 162.
familiar. So it was with the Rule. It was neither remote nor past nor cerebral but immediate and relevant, speaking of things that I already half knew or was struggling to make sense of.” Not unlike the “secret summons” referred to previously by Michael Casey, Tvedten recalls from the prologue to the Benedictine Rule that the “voice of the Lord calling to us” may deeply resonate with a longing that predisposes the seeker to recognize something strangely familiar in the 1,500-year-old spirituality of Benedictine life.12

One of Brother Benet’s oblates, Dennis Okholm, has written of his own experience of this inner calling. He recalls his first monastic retreat from the demands of ministry in an evangelical church as a “profound” experience. In reflecting back on the initial basis for his deep attraction to the monastery, he highlights the practicality of the rule—as a “guide for living the Christian gospel and for cultivating Christian virtue. It is less like the Law and more like the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. . . . It passed on a tradition of wisdom from the lived experience of monastic life.” As such, the rule operates “as a kind of flexible hermeneutical device to translate the gospel into daily communal Christian living” in any time or place.13 While an oblate is unable to participate in this communal life in a day-to-day residential capacity, he or she will put the “balance and realism” of its wisdom to work in the pursuit of God—personally as well as in the local church. In this way, the rule reminds one that the Christian community’s ultimate function is “to shape individuals who, as disciples of Christ, are being formed into his image.” This is the “test of any religious community,” Okholm observes.14 And so his director adds that monastic spirituality is not a “series of ascetical exercises” but a “listening commitment to the human community” and a “way of relating that takes [one] out of [oneself] into the mind of God for humanity.” In short, it is not a “program” but a “way of life.”15

The capacity of an ancient way of life to speak to an inner longing, a homing instinct, or a secret summons in late modernity is a cause of tremendous intellectual curiosity to Aaron Milavec. He has produced the most detailed scholarly examination yet of the first-century church document known as The Didache. Formerly associated with the Athenaeum of Ohio, and more recently, Catherine of Siena Virtual College, his project combines detailed textual,
source, and redactive criticism with an imaginative participation in the “altered social reality” of the ancient Didache community. At the beginning of his commentary on the “life-transforming training program,” Milavec observes:

Any community that cannot artfully and effectively pass on its cherished way of life as a program for divine wisdom and graced existence cannot long endure. Any way of life that cannot be clearly specified, exhibited, and differentiated from the alternative modes operative within the surrounding culture is doomed to growing insignificance and gradual assimilation.

Accordingly, Milavec’s 984-page study of The Didache reveals a pathway of spiritual training designed to form a distinctive way of life, with new “habits of perception and standards of judgment” that have contemporary significance.16 This becomes readily apparent when Milavec’s massive project concludes with a “spirituality” of the Didache community—already a source of inspiration to groups like the Sonoma Didache Community in Sonoma, California.17

What is most interesting is the way Milavec consciously situates this ancient text within his own postmodern world and, in the process, engages in an imaginative reconstruction of its practical theology. He reads the text of The Didache with an expectation that it will convey a coherent agenda, with its own “logic” and “its own passionate concerns.” From his introductory autobiography he recalls how in graduate school he had been trained to dissect and manipulate the text instead of address questions raised internally by its own structure and content. In his epilogue, we learn that he also inherited the proverbial “God-in-the-box” Christianity of his parochial Catholic youth, not at all like the “grace-filled relationships” he has since discovered in The Didache. Milavec found the “religious system” and much-anticipated “voice” that is internal to the text with the help of philosopher Michael Polanyi’s theory of tacit knowledge as well as a wide array of close-reading techniques. He has reached a point where he can listen to his spiritual “companions” in The Didache, immersing himself in their world. In the larger of his two books on the subject, he hopes readers will do the same:

You, the reader of this volume, can be compared to a shipmate signing on for . . . a second voyage. You are spared the terror and the uncertainty that accompanied the first passage. I faced them practically alone and

returned alive to tell about it. Strange stories, strange experiences, and strange people returned with me. Now you, my reader, are signed on to retrace the route back in time whereby I discovered the “new world” of the Didache.  

Inevitably, Milavec hopes his “leaps of the imagination” will connect to the reality of Christian readers today—“in a situation only marginally removed from those encountered by the Didache communities.” He admits that he may “overdo these parallels and project some of them quite uncritically,” but it is all for the purpose of allowing the reader to experience the joys and pains that lay at the heart of the Didache community.

Finally, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, a leading exponent of the New Monasticism and cofounder of the Rutba House in Durham, North Carolina, does his own retracing of routes by acquainting himself and his growing readership with the long history—or “river of faithfulness”—of intentional Christian communities. He considers not only ancient texts like the Rule of Benedict, but more recent movements like the Catholic Workers, Clarence Jordan’s Koinonia Farm, and Shane Claiborne’s Simple Way community. Initially, Wilson-Hartgrove was “looking for a way to live that would make it easier for [him] to do the things that Jesus taught and practiced.” The search began with the feeling that his evangelical context was compromised by consumerism and was intensified by contact with the Simple Way’s “unassuming but authentic ways.” Here he began to realize that living the Sermon on the Mount on the margins of church and society was not really such a “new” thing. It was merely one expression among countless others over the course of history of Christians recovering something vital—something the Christian faith “had in its period of beginnings.” At the “New Monasticism Gathering” in 2004, Wilson-Hartgrove recalls his father-in-law, Jonathan R. Wilson, following through on Alasdair MacIntyre’s “after Benedict” call—everyone imagining, in response, “new forms of faithfulness for American Christianity.” What was happening, as the younger Jonathan reflects, was that “God is always doing a new thing, always breathing new life into the church. If we have eyes to see, there are signs of something new right alongside the signs of the time.”

19. Ibid., 842.
21. Ibid., 29.
22. Ibid., 38.
In response to the need to “hear the gospel again,” Wilson-Hartgrove sought out stories of monastic or semimonastic life, ranging from St. Antony of Egypt to Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dorothy Day, and began to realize they were all part of his own story, yet “a vision so old it looks like new,” he observed.23 When he examined older texts like the Rule of Benedict, he felt a “deep intuition” that Benedict and other practitioners of intentional Christian community had done something right.24 This “lively convergence” was most apparent in the four characteristics that Jonathan Sr. had proposed as definitive of the New Monasticism: (1) a recovered gospel telos that views all of life—including modern distinctions between sacred and secular spheres—as under the lordship of Christ; (2) a commitment to building up the whole people of God without division into “religious” and “secular” vocations; (3) a disciplined life, but only as “a means to an end—the faithful life and witness of the church”; and (4) “deep theological reflection and commitment” such that the New Monasticism can recover both “right belief and right practice.”25 The latter—“right belief and right practice”—are especially critical to the attainment of ancient “wisdom.” In the Rule of Benedict, for example, there are both interior and exterior dynamics that constitute the sought-after way of life. There is the inner condition of one’s soul, with particular emphasis on cultivating the mind of Christ, and there is a wider participation in the external forms of communal life that cultivate the body of Christ. The relationship between the two is at the crux of Benedictine wisdom. This is the key to the Rule’s accounting for “ordinary” or “trivial” life redeemed. It is also the wisdom revealed in Christ—seeing with the “inner eyes the kingdom that we hope for.”26

Wisdom: The Way to Live

Despite the major differences one would expect to find between a traditional Benedictine, a Protestant oblate, a dissenting Catholic scholar, and an emergent evangelical community organizer, there are some striking similarities among the four in their exercises of imagination and memory. It is as if history itself becomes a form of consciousness that involves not only rational thought and

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23. Ibid., 55.
26. Stock, Otto, and Wilson-Hartgrove, Inhabiting the Church, 42.
action, but a sense of real participation through “re-enactment” and its attendant
emotions, desires, motives, and other “nonrational” aspects of human life—individ-
ually and communally.\(^{27}\) The late Cambridge theologian Daniel W. Hardy
spoke of this consciousness as a discourse of “intimate identification,” a “kin-
ship,” constituted by a diverse array of epistemic practices and ethical structures
and norms. “Time thickens” amid the contingencies and dynamic interchanges
between the self and the social, the present thick description of life and an imag-
ined community that is as richly textured and complex as any way of life experi-
enced in the here and now.\(^{28}\) Similarly, Wayne Meeks writes of a “hermeneuti-
cs of social embodiment” over time made possible by “participation at least in the
imagination, an empathy with the kind of communal life which ‘fits’ the text.”
The “fit” is discerned by “tuning” to the way the text worked in its original con-
text before considering how it might work or be applied today.\(^{29}\)

One of the more helpful ways to understand this complex operation is in
terms of a theory of practice. According to Craig Dykstra, practice is how the
memory, as just described, is most effectively constituted—remembering not
only as one “seek[s] understanding,” but as one seeks a “way to live.”\(^{30}\) When
traditional monastic Michael Casey explains how doctrina and disciplina work
together in the daily “network of supportive practices” of Benedictine life, new
monastic Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove might immediately recognize something
familiar. He sees a dual means of achieving the interior reconditioning of the
soul and external realization of the body of Christ—the practiced necessities of
a way of life that makes it “easier” to follow Jesus. In his study of Scripture and
in his deepening acquaintance with historic monasticism, Wilson-Hartgrove
comes to realize that practices are not made up at all but rather are received as
a form of activity and life that are part of a complex tradition of interactions.

\(^{27}\) R. G. Collingwood is especially helpful in his discussion of historical consciousness. See
Louis O. Mink, “Collingwood’s Historicism: A Dialectic of Process,” in Critical Essays on the

\(^{28}\) Daniel W. Hardy, “Sociality, Rationality, and Culture: Faith Embedded in the Particular-
ities of History,” in Papers of the Nineteenth-Century Theology Working Group, ed. Claude Welch
his ideas on the “healing of history” into his later work on scriptural reasoning. See “The Rules of
edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume2/number1/ssr02-01-r01.html.

\(^{29}\) Wayne Meeks, “A Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment,” in In Search of the Early Chris-

\(^{30}\) Craig Dykstra, “Reconceiving Practice in Theological Inquiry and Education,” in Virtues
and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after Machtrey, ed. Nancey Murphy,
Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press,
2003), 170–71.
“The past is embedded in the practice[s],” Dykstra observes, and as such they awaken the imagination to a “vision” that is strangely familiar—“a vision so old it looks like new” (Wilson-Hartgrove).

If we look hard enough, we see within all of the case studies I have presented—even in the “traditional” monasticism of Michael Casey—a deepening, extending, or adapting of historic practices and patterns of life to a late-modern social-cultural milieu. Casey himself admits that Benedictine life must maintain a balance between “distinctiveness and porosity,” between adhering to the tradition and responding to the world “outside.” After all, he observes, “the sixth century has no more claim on us than our own.”31 So it is not surprising that the shape and direction of particular practices may, in fact, be considerably altered in the process of transmission. Yet a peculiar quality (and quantity?) of value is consistently associated with the practices, a value apprehended in the deeper intuitions. This value is the good “internal” to the practice, realized only through actual participation in that practice. Moral standards and ethical norms, as well as doctrina and, as Wilson-Hartgrove suggests, a more immediate awareness of the mind of Christ, are the particular goods that attract new monastics to the strangely familiar ancient way of life.

But let us not forget that this dual pattern is constitutive of wisdom, as traditionally understood. As I have just noted, there is more than simply a moral-ethical dimension to this ancient-future belonging; there is a critical epistemological dimension as well. The imagination, and its reconstituted memory, recognize more than just goods and values; they also recognize certain realities, or at least understandings, beyond the practices themselves. At this point, we could plunge into the growing scholarship on what Dykstra calls “somatic knowledge” or, perhaps, explore the various forms of cognition associated with Michael Polanyi’s “tacit knowledge.”32 For present purposes, however, I would like to suggest that the dual pattern reveals “more subtle realms of insight or perceptiveness into various regions of reality.”33 In most new monastic writing there is an urgent sense that talk about the Christian faith is only meaningful when it is properly conditioned by actual practice. This is what Milavec has in mind when he refers to his Didache project as the recovery of a whole new way of life, with new “habits of perception and standards of

32. For example, Aaron Milavec applies Polanyi’s theory of tacit knowledge as he shifts his attention from thick description of the Didache community to advocating its postmodern renewal.
judgment.” Similarly, the wisdom attained as participatory knowledge inclines one to hear the “voice of the Lord calling,” as suggested by Brother Benet, or perhaps takes one out of oneself all the way “into the mind of God,” as his oblate Dennis Okholm prefers.

Conclusion

The epistemological dimension I have just described in the historical consciousness of new monasticism has moved well beyond the moral concerns of Alasdair MacIntyre’s original “new Benedict” proposal. We are seeing, in fact, how epistemology, not just ethics, follows ontology, or as Thomas F. Torrance suggested, “The means to understanding must be in accordance with the substance of what is sought; . . . just as form and being are inseparable in what is known.”34 This assumes a “unitary view of truth” and a critical realism wherein the discovery of the “active truth” of God, especially in the domain of history, shows itself again and again.35 But this requires that the recipients be conformed to the mode of rationality afforded by the reality of this truth—and this is, at the least, the postfoundational ontology we see in the likes of the New Monasticism.36 The intelligibility and deep plausibility of this truth are realized in the wisdom of a practiced way of life such that what one knows is indwelled or inhabited even as it is received and passed on through ancient-future belonging.

Might the New Monastic preference for past over present discovery lead to a more robust identification with the rich canonical heritage of the church? Or is this rather sturdy world-orienting view of things likely to impede the “river of faithfulness” envisioned by Jonathan Hartgrove-Wilson? I would answer “yes” and “no,” respectively, but only as the movement carefully tends to the practices of reading, testimony, and, most of all, prayer and worship that safeguard the integrity and porosity of the Christian tradition’s comprehensiveness, unsurpassability, and centrality.37 This will require not only a


35. Ibid., 168.


more anthropologically nuanced way of doing theology, but also a historical consciousness that is attentive to the rich complexity and detail of an entire way of life—the *old* but very *active* wisdom that is, in fact, crucial to any faithful transmission over time and space. Indeed, this promises to make the New Monasticism—set against its transient context of “emerging” and “emergence”—far more substantial than a trend.
Sexuality as Sacrament

An Evangelical Reads Andrew Greeley

Abstract: Andrew M. Greeley, a noted sociologist and Catholic priest, has also established a reputation as a writer of racy novels. In these stories, he portrays sexuality as sacrament, a means of grace whereby the love of God is experienced via physical and emotional intimacy between the sexes. While there are some weaknesses to his approach, his emphasis on strong female characters and a sacralizing sexuality are ultimately a positive contribution to our culture’s struggles with love, sex, and intimacy.

To appreciate the work of Father Andrew Greeley, it helps to be Irish, Catholic, a native of Chicago, and a Democrat, perhaps in that order. As it turns out, I fit none of those descriptions, which may explain why the extensive body of work of this octogenarian priest-sociologist-novelist has escaped my attention until recently. I had heard of Greeley, of course, and was even remotely familiar with the scandal he had created as a priest writing racy popular literature for the past three decades. But I did not read my first Greeley novel until the summer of 2007. Scrounging through my local library, wanting something “lite” for my vacation reading, I discovered a murder mystery in which the main character was a Catholic bishop. It sounded interesting enough to try; nevertheless, I opened it with low expectations. By the end of the first chapter I was hooked.

Since then I have not read everything that Greeley has written (over 100 volumes in multiple genres, the work of a polymath writing over a long lifetime), but I have read quite a few. It helps that his writing can be grouped into clusters or series.

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The Greeley Oeuvre

First, there is the Blackie Ryan series of murder mysteries, featuring the aforementioned Catholic bishop, who first shows up in the Greeley oeuvre as a priest, then an auxiliary bishop, and more recently as archbishop of Chicago. And there is little doubt that our episcopal sleuth is in line for a cardinal’s hat, should Greeley deign to give him one. Readers may find some of Greeley’s personal aspirations in this character, for the fictional bishop holds a Ph.D. in philosophy, has written books on Greeley’s own favorite theologian and novelist, teaches on occasion at the University of Chicago, is an admirer of radical Catholic theologian Hans Küng, and has through the years had very little good to say about Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now, undoubtedly to Greeley’s chagrin, Pope Benedict XVI). This series is identified by “The Bishop . . .” in the title—for example, *The Bishop and the Beggar Girl of St. Germain* (the volume that first captured my attention), *The Bishop and the Missing L Train*, *The Bishop in the West Wing*, *The Bishop at the Lake*, and, most recently, *The Archbishop in Andalusia*—and features the insightful bishop as a first-person narrator.

A second series of Blackie Ryan mysteries uses the voices of others but features the detective bishop as a main character. Each is cleverly designed around one of the qualities of the beatitudes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and is titled appropriately (e.g., *Happy Are the Peacemakers*, *Happy Are Those Who Thirst for Justice*, *Happy Are the Merciful*).

The Nuala Anne series of historical mysteries features the wonderfully named Marie Fionnuala Anne McGrail (Nuala Anne for short), fey Irish mystic, sometime accountant, internationally heralded folk-gospel singer, mother of four, Celtic goddess, and inerrant solver of historical whodunits, all based, of course, in either Chicago or Ireland. Nuala Anne is supported in her efforts by the series narrator, her fictional husband Dermot McCoyne, who, like his beloved, plays multiple roles—college dropout, retired stock trader, historian, bodyguard, award-winning poet and novelist, manager and “spear carrier” for his wife. If this sounds unbelievable, well, it is. But the series is also strangely and shamefully addictive. These books are identified by “Irish . . .” in the title (e.g., *Irish Gold*, *Irish Whiskey*, *Irish Stew*, *Irish Mist*, *Irish Eyes*).

The O’Malley chronicles follow an Irish-Catholic family in Chicago (where else?) as they encounter the opportunities and challenges of the twentieth century. This series is identified primarily by the seasonal references in the titles (e.g., *A Midwinter’s Tale*, *Younger Than Springtime*, *A Christmas Wedding*, *September Song*).
The “Catholic stories” are primarily novels exposing and exploring the essential humanity, foibles, and virtues of those in leadership of the Roman church in America. These include the best-selling *Cardinal Sins*, a commercial success that established Greeley’s reputation in 1981, along with *Cardinal Virtues*, *Priestly Sins* (one of my favorite volumes), *White Smoke*, and *The Senator and the Priest*.

The Passover Trilogy, consisting of *Thy Brother’s Wife*, *Ascent into Hell*, and *Lord of the Dance*, was written in the early 1980s and features most of Greeley’s common themes.

Greeley’s nonfiction work, which is extensive, includes many volumes in sociology (his academic discipline) largely focused on Catholic trends and several volumes of ecclesiastical or political commentary. Greeley’s opinions on the Roman Curia, the Bush administration, and the war in Iraq are barbed and lacking in the nuance that occasionally characterizes his fiction. For instance, the title of *A Stupid, Unjust, and Criminal War: Iraq, 2001–2007* is quite sufficient to judge the interior content.

Even this list is not exhaustive. It includes neither his fantasy “angel novels” (e.g., *Contract with an Angel*, *Angel Light*), nor his book-length musings on the topics of sexuality, love, and intimacy.¹ Still, it gives some idea of the breadth of Greeley’s writings as well as his persistent themes.²

### Stock Characters

My overview also suggests the limitations of Greeley as a writer. His pantheon of characters is strikingly small, since so many of his characters show up in multiple books. He has even maneuvered the Nuala Anne series from Ireland to Chicago and located the characters in the same neighborhood as Blackie Ryan and his large and influential clan, probably so Greeley could tap into his stock characters. (Blackie himself, Sean Cardinal Cronin, Blackie’s sister Mary Kate and her husband Joe, Mike Casey the cop and his wife Annie, Cindasue McCloud, and others all show up in the Nuala Anne series.) When Greeley introduces a new character, even the casual reader will feel a sense of déjà vu. This was not always true. Some of Greeley’s work from the 1980s

¹. His most relevant works on these topics are the following: *Jesus: A Meditation on His Stories and His Relationship with Women* (New York: Forge, 2008); *Love Affair: A Prayer Journal* (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad, 1993); *Sex: The Catholic Experience* (Chicago: Thomas More Association, 1994); *Sexual Intimacy: Love and Play* (New York: Grand Central, 1988).

reveals particular character depth, especially among his women. It is difficult to match his Catherine Curran from *The Virgin and Martyr*, for instance, for pathos, mystery, and depth of feminine character.

Whether intentionally or not, Greeley’s characters are almost always upper class—rich if not famous. If they are not there already, Greeley is sure to get them there as soon as possible, sometimes with absurd speed and circumstance. Dermot McCoyne is a college dropout who nonetheless earns $3 million by accident on the Chicago Board of Trade and then retires to become a bestselling poet and novelist. Nuala Anne is a peasant from the west of Ireland who earns a scholarship to Trinity College, Dublin, and then is picked up by Arthur Andersen (still regarded at the time as an elite accounting firm), where she prospers. But she gives it up! Why? Because she also sings folk songs in nightclubs and, in Greeley’s world, that means that she must become an internationally renowned recording artist. Mike Casey the cop is not only Blackie Ryan’s cousin; he is also the former superintendent of the Chicago Police Department and an award-winning artist. Blackie Ryan’s sister Mary Kate is not only a psychiatrist; she is also past president of the American Psychological Association. Sean Cronin’s sister-in-law Nora is not only his one-time paramour but also a United States senator.

Again and again we see this attraction to the rich and famous. Characters introduced for a single book are almost always Irish, Chicagoan, filthy rich, and very well connected. One wonders if this is simply a literary device for Greeley—if he finds it easier to write stories about rich and connected people because he can transport them from place to place more easily or introduce other character types with greater ease—or whether this reflects his own bias as a person and writer. Perhaps he assumes readers will want to read about people living lives different from their own? Or does this simply reflect the world that he inhabits, or even the world of his most fertile imagination? In his mind, do good people always prosper? Had he been hanging out with Norman Vincent Peale or Oral Roberts in an earlier life?

Given his on-the-sleeve political proclivities (all his good characters are Democrats; the evil ones tend to be Republican) and his frequent demands for justice for the poor, this emphasis on the rich and powerful may strike the reader as hypocritical at times. At the very least, it does get boring. I find his west-Ireland Nuala Anne more interesting than the rich and famous Nuala Anne. His portrayal of the non-Irish, West Virginia hillbilly Cindasue McCloud is refreshing, if eventually overdone. My favorite character may be Herman Hugo Hoffman, a Russian-German priest caught up in a child-abuse
scandal in Greeley’s 2004 novel Priests Sins. While Blackie Ryan makes an appearance (of course!), and Greeley cannot help turning Hoffman into an academic wunderkind (a common pattern for this professor-turned-novelist), the rare and sympathetic portrayal of a non-Irish Catholic priest is occasionally nuanced and appreciative.

Evangelicals and other non-Catholics will find that Greeley has not really expected them to read him. His is an insider’s world in which Catholic language, theology, and behaviors are assumed rather than explained, and the occasional references to evangelicalism are either ironic or barbed. Such readers will wonder at the notion of “once a Catholic, always a Catholic” and be startled at times at the behavior in which even Greeley’s faithful Catholics sometimes participate. His Catholicism is occasionally rich in theology and meaning (more on that later) but more often an expression of cultural or ethnic (usually Irish, of course) identity, and his priests are remarkably tolerant about the loose attachment that many of their parishioners evidence toward their faith. One must remember, however, that Greeley is a sociologist of religion, a discipline in which religious behaviors are far more interesting than religious beliefs. Greeley’s characters are (occasionally, at least) curious case studies for the sociologist who observes social interactions in times of crisis or stress.

The Novelist as Theologian

But Greeley is not only a novelist; he is also a priest and theologian. His theology is framed by his notion of “the Catholic imagination,” drawn, at least in part, from the theology of analogy developed by his fellow Catholic David Tracy (of the University of Chicago, of course!), whom Greeley inserts into his books on occasion as Blackie Ryan’s favorite theologian. (Archbishop Ryan, who holds a Ph.D. in philosophy, is also an internationally recognized expert on William James and has proclivities for the very Irish James Joyce.) For Greeley, as for Tracy, the Catholic imagination is steeped in the immanence of God, whose created world discloses his character.3 Greeley distinguishes this view with a somewhat inaccurate portrayal of “the Protestant imagination,” in which God breaks through into the created world—a world substantively different from him—only occasionally. This view seems to rest on a misunderstanding of Luther’s “two kingdoms” theology and misses the

rich Reformation and Wesleyan traditions that seek to sacralize the totality of the believer’s life.4

As a result, while Greeley’s characters frequently achieve redemption, it is certainly not redemption from any notion of original sin or even redemption worked through the direct intervention of Jesus Christ (who rarely appears in his stories) into their lives; rather, it is a calling back to that which one already is or has been created to be. That redemptive work can be accomplished through participation in the rituals of the church—he would not be a good Catholic priest if he did not believe that salvation is mediated through the church—but in Greeley’s work redemption is most effectively accomplished by the giving of one’s self in love relationships. This is where God is most directly and intimately encountered. His is a love mysticism in which the love is almost always human in its initial form and only then assumes a vertical dimension.5

This is why Greeley writes racy love stories. It would be inappropriate to call them pornographic, as lovemaking is usually hinted at or otherwise obscured in metaphor. But there are depictions of female anatomy and foreplay, almost always above the waist. (Through his bishop character, Greeley reveals and defends an appreciation of, even fascination with, well-formed female breasts, which he describes with some detail.) Some of Greeley’s most sympathetic characters either wait for marriage to enjoy full sexual intimacy or live lives of celibacy. However, he takes it easy on those who engage in premarital or extramarital sex and even on priests who break their vows. Greeley seems to be saying not only that he knows how difficult it is to resist the attraction of sexual intimacy but also—and this is significant in his work—that sexuality is one of the primary ways in which God makes herself known to humans.

The feminine pronoun is intentional, of course. Most of Greeley’s characters refer to God in the feminine. While the usage is doubtless striking to readers from a conservative evangelical background, I find it neither inappropriate nor gratuitous, as Greeley is endeavoring to call attention to what our culture would regard as the more feminine aspects of God’s character. He thus makes it easier—maybe even makes it possible—for men in our culture to express a love relationship with God in language that does not make them uncomfortable.


So much theological love language—as expressed in our prayers and hymns—has hints of romance or eroticism that have created discomfort for more than one casual heterosexual male worshiper. (This is what one wag has called the “Jesus is my boyfriend” language.) Greeley gives them a female Creator with whom to fall in love while hinting at a relationship that transcends our notions of gender-based reality.

For Greeley, sex is sacramental. And this is one of the reasons I keep coming back to him, cockeyed plots and stock characters and all. He has recovered (not discovered) something that few Catholics or Protestants in history have understood or dared to claim: that in our most intimate physical relationships God is present, perhaps more present and more real than at most other times; that when we desire each other with that deepest of longings of both soul and body, we desire God; that when we gaze upon our beloved with tremendous delight, we can glimpse something—just a bit—of God’s loving gaze upon us. God delights in us, longs for us, desires to be united with us. And there is something inherent, created within each one of us, that when stoked and brought to the surface recognizes that we, too, desire to be united with God. Andrew Greeley, a man committed to celibacy, understands this in ways that millions of married couples, even faithful Christian couples, do not.6

He understands, of course, that these ideas are not new with him, and he even gives appropriate recognition (or is it justification of his work?) to Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI for articulating these ideas for our generation.7 In The Archbishop in Andalusia, Bishop Ryan finds himself at a dinner table with a beautiful, sensual middle-aged woman who distracts him terribly from his meal and observes, “If erotic passion between a man and a woman is an image of God, as the present pope asserts (in fidelity to Saint Paul), then God was hovering over our table.”8 And yet Greeley recognizes that such an approach to sexuality is not perceived to be integral to the Catholic tradition, with its Augustinian distaste for sexual expression, with its continued insistence on celibacy for its priests (a matter on which Greeley, by the way, appears to be in perfect agreement), and with its continued withholding of the

6. For a recent evangelical treatment of sexuality and spirituality, see Rob Bell, Sex God: Exploring the Endless Connections between Sexuality and Spirituality (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).
priestly order from women (a matter on which Greeley is emphatically in disagreement with his church). He is a novelist on a mission: to redeem his church from its image, among both its external observers and its own parishioners, as somehow antisexual.

A Sacramental Sexuality

Does he go too far? For many evangelicals and Catholics alike, absolutely. In Andalusia, Archbishop Ryan eventually has the opportunity to speak pastorally with the woman who had so distracted him, a widow who is engaged in a secret love affair with her attorney. She asks him:

“Is it not sinful to feel that way?”
“No.”
“Every day?”
“Most would consider that a very great blessing.”
“I can’t help myself, Padrecito Negro. I know that Don Leandro cannot have respect for me.”
“He may not know the theology, but then again he might. Yet he understands that you’re a sacrament of God’s love.”
“A woman is a sacrament of God?”
“One of the most ingenious God has ever designed. Lovers don’t pay any attention to that truth, even though the last two popes have written about it.”
“I feel so dirty . . .”
“Only afterward and on reflection. A voice tells you that you are a slut. You yourself feel proud and grateful . . . whose voice?”
“Doña Inez, of course . . .”
“Tune her out . . . After you and Don Leando commit yourself to one another publicly in the presence of the Church, she will continue to whisper. She speaks for the devil, as you well know. Turn her off before she ruins your love.”
“I must think about these matters. I fear that reflection on them will drive me to find Don Leandro and play the whore again.” 9

Sex as sacrament, even before marriage? This is what Greeley seems to be proposing through his fictional spokesman. It should be noted that he does not promote any kind of promiscuity; his characters who engage in premarital sex do so always in a relationship of respect and commitment that leads eventually

9. Ibid., 84.
to a public acknowledgment and the blessing of the church. Nevertheless, here is where many evangelicals would part ways with Greeley, asserting that the coupling of sexual intimacy with the public commitment of marriage is one of the gifts God has given us in this world. But I understand his point. In a culture in which it is commonly accepted that couples on their wedding day will have already slept together, if not lived together openly for some time, can the sacramental nature of human sexuality yet be reclaimed? Is there a redemptive option for a sex-obsessed but intimacy-deprived society? Greeley believes so.

Several months after I began reading Greeley—and found myself, almost against my will, compulsively consuming one of his books after another—a ministry colleague (who is female) suggested that we do a sermon series on the Song of Songs. We would do each message in two voices—one male and one female—and somehow attempt to persuade our conservative evangelical congregation that their sexuality, expressed or latent, was a means of grace. It turned out to be a fairly popular series, albeit one for which my contributions were largely (but not solely) informed by what I had learned at the feet of Andrew Greeley. We apparently tapped into something latent and beautiful in our people, as they responded to the invitation to sacralize that which they had too often considered at odds with their devotion. Even single adults, who struggle with their twin and competing desires for intimacy and holiness, are discovering that desire itself is a token of God’s love. And their willing response to him can kindle a spiritual intimacy that goes beyond our culture’s pale and vapid notions of love.

For that I am grateful to Andrew Greeley. I am also grateful that this aging priest-scholar is able to paint portraits of female characters that are breathtaking in beauty, strong in character, and winsome in personality. Greeley makes it clear that he would prefer that his church adopt gender equality as policy and principle. As an evangelical who believes and practices biblical equality at home and in my ministry, I applaud this. And I appreciate how Greeley makes his case primarily by creating vivid and vibrant female characters (even if they are by now primarily stock characters who roam from one novel to another) who are more than worthy of equal roles within the church.

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10. See Lauren Winner, Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity (Grand Rapids: Baker/Brazos, 2006).
11. Another book I found influential in studying the Song of Songs was Philip Sheldrake, Befriending Our Desires, 2nd ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd), 2002.
Irish Goddesses

My other concern is that in his desire to create strong, beautiful, wise women of all generations (another Greeley contribution—his beautiful women are not all young), he overlooks the vast majority of beautiful women who will never match his descriptions of physical attractiveness or will not likely be as successful professionally as his characters. Far too many of Greeley’s women are described as “Irish goddesses,” turn every eye when they walk in the room, look good no matter what they are wearing, excel at everything they try, and are sought out for their wisdom and expertise. There are very few overweight women of average intelligence or middle-class standing in Greeley’s world, which is a shame. These, too, need a voice, lest even a Christian feminism confine opportunities for equality to that 1 percent who are capable ofwowong both males and females with extraordinary prowess or physical attractiveness.

Why does Greeley idealize his women characters? Perhaps because he’s never lived in intimate relations with a woman. But I suspect it’s more than that. Catholic (and to a lesser extent, Protestant) images of femininity have too often fallen into female stereotyping, the primary three of which might be called “Madonna,” “mother,” and “madame.” The first of these is asexual, the second postsexual, and the third oversexualized. In reaction to these inadequate images of the sexual Christian woman, Greeley may be unconsciously attempting to create his own typology, which we might call “Maeve,” after one of Greeley’s favorite mythical characters. Maeve (or “Mebd”) was the great Irish warrior queen of Connacht, a goddess whose name means “intoxicating,” as in “she who makes men drunk,” a strong woman who ran faster than horses, a desired woman who slept with kings and then tossed them aside as she wished.13

Greeley’s female characters are certainly reminiscent of Maeve, and he even describes them as such on occasion. It is a powerful, feminist image, but one that has its own traps, particularly for women who are not nearly so strong, so desired, or so goddess-like but whose other qualities are worth treasuring nonetheless. Perhaps both he and we would do better to eliminate the typologies altogether and permit the unique individuality of each of the world’s women to stand on its own merits, to appreciate a female as a person, and not merely as a representative of a type. Greeley does this a tad better with his male characters, which not only illustrates his gender problem but also gives us hope that we can imagine feminine personas with the same depth and breadth.

The Art of Love

We can forgive Father Greeley for his literary sins, for he has mentored so many in the theology of love. If the coach is an elderly, celibate Catholic priest, so be it. He has encouraged readers to discover a capacity for greater intimacy than previously imagined and has given glimpses of territories yet to be explored. He has shown through his characters that love is first and foremost a giving over, an emptying, an abandonment of one’s self in and for the other, and only in such surrender is there possibility of the deepest intimacy, greatest release, and most intense joy. In a culture that views sexuality as an act of the self, Greeley tells us the opposite—that divinely conceived paradox: that letting go of the self is a necessary prerequisite for the happiness the self seeks.

Perhaps more importantly, he liberates us to love God more deeply, more fully, more joyfully, and more expressively than we may ever have believed possible. For, after all, is that not the ultimate aim of all the human loves? To reveal the immeasurable, unfathomable, indescribable love of God?14 Does God not inhabit the moments of human passion? And does not that habitation give us glimpses of the ineffable union to which God calls each beloved? You and I are beloved by him, and we know something of how to love God in response. Greeley reminds us of that and shows us how it can be possible. A novelist could aspire to far less than this. So could a priest.

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John Calvin is a controversial figure, even in Reformed circles. But for me, as a student of politics who also happens to be a member of a Reformed church, Calvin is a hero. I do not regard myself as a Calvinist because my thinking is too eclectic to warrant any such claim. Nor am I persuaded by everything Calvin espoused theologically. But I very much value the contribution he made to the development of Christian thought, and I find it difficult to imagine how anyone could claim to be a Reformed thinker without having learned a great deal from him.

It is not Calvin’s thought that is the primary source of my admiration for him, however. He was such a gifted thinker and prolific author that it is difficult to avoid thinking of him primarily as a man of ideas, especially if one is an intellectual. But he was much more than that. Though he was indeed an intellectual and would very much have liked to have the life of a scholar, he was drawn inexorably into playing a number of other roles as well. He was drawn so far away from his original intentions by his involvement in the struggle to reform the church, in fact, that it is not inappropriate to characterize him as a man of action. And he was so effective in performing that role that it is even appropriate, I submit, to conclude that it was above all in that capacity that he made his real contribution to the Protestant Reformation.

The distinction I am drawing here is admittedly to some extent artificial. Most of the ideas and writings for which Calvin is famous were written for a practical purpose, and it was not to get tenure at some educational institution! He was a man with a mission, and he clearly wrote most of what he published to serve a cause. But still, all that writing (and all the preaching, teaching,
debating, and negotiating that went with it) was intellectual work. Nevertheless, my contention is that if that were all he did, he would have had nowhere near the impact he ultimately had on the course of events. I am not alone in thinking that he deserves to be treated as a world-historical figure, and I would submit that the reason he can even be considered in that league is not just—or even primarily—that he wrote some important treatises. It is something else.

In characterizing that something else as “action,” I mean to evoke an image that is most commonly associated with politics. A man or woman of action is a figure who devotes much of his or her time and energy to mobilizing people to act in ways that enable them to work together in the pursuit of some reasonably well-defined objective. The point of the efforts of such figures is to make things happen, and we remember the accomplishments of the more notable ones (I think here in particular of the leaders of successful social movements) because they were able to achieve results that made a real difference in history. Calvin deserves to be seen this way because of the role he played in forging a movement that not only was able to achieve significant change (on a variety of different fronts) but did so in a manner that profoundly affected the character of the Protestant Reformation. The effect was so profound, in fact, that it is no exaggeration to say that the Reformation is unlikely to have turned out as it did (much less to have had the wide-ranging impact it did) if it had not been for the success Calvin had in this regard, and a good part of my purpose in this paper is to explain why I believe that was the case. What was it that Calvin did that enabled him to achieve such permanent effects? And why did his actions turn out to be so significant? What exactly was the difference they made in influencing the course of history?

After Luther

No discussion of Calvin’s significance can proceed very far without taking Luther into account. So let me begin my analysis there. I take it for granted that Martin Luther was the great pioneer in bringing about the Reformation. It begs too many unanswerable questions to say that the Reformation would not have happened if there had been no Luther, but one can surely say without fear of contradiction that he quickly came to be regarded as the leader of the Reformation because his contemporaries saw him that way. Others who followed Luther’s lead, including many who wound up holding views that differed significantly from his on certain issues, saw themselves building on the foundation Luther had laid.
In focusing attention on Calvin, therefore, I am not for a moment challenging the proposition that it was Luther above all who was responsible for setting the Reformation in motion. Nor am I questioning the claim that the key theological ideas of the Protestant movement—grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone—came from Luther. But I do want to suggest that once the process was in motion, it was given a certain turn by such figures as Zwingli, Bucer, and Calvin that made it take a different course than it would otherwise probably have done. The appearance of a “Reformed” version of Protestant Christianity altered the trajectory of the events in question, and it did so in a manner that made it considerably more radical.

By that I mean in the first instance exactly what the “Reformed” camp boasted: that they were prepared to go considerably farther than Luther and his followers in departing from Roman Catholic teaching and practice. But I also mean that they embraced the need for social change in a way that Luther did not (especially after the Peasants’ Revolt) and, equally importantly, that they tended to be uncompromising about the issues at stake, arguing that the changes they sought were essential if the Christian religion was to be properly reformed. So they were less inclined to be satisfied with half-measures. And the impact of all this was intensified by the fact that unlike the Anabaptists, Reformed Christians had no qualms about using civil as well as ecclesiastical power to achieve their aims. Indeed, they actively sought such power whenever it was within reach, and they soon became quite adept at using it.

It took a while, to be sure, for the practical difference this made to make itself felt. In the beginning (the 1520s and 1530s), all it meant was that the “Protestant” movement was divided. But by the 1540s, when Luther died and Calvin was starting his ministry in Geneva in earnest, it began to become apparent that the emergence of the “Reformed” alternative to Lutheranism might have a wider significance.

I put the matter this way as a reminder of just how uncertain the outcome of the story was in Calvin’s day. Knowing as we now do how events unfolded in the years after his death, we are inclined to assume that the Reformation had to succeed in something like the form with which we are familiar. But at the time it was an act of faith to believe any such thing. Keep in mind that the actions taken by the Reformers set in motion a vigorous countermovement in the Roman church that was designed, among other things, to wean people away from the cause of the Reformation and bring them back into the fold. The Roman church had had a long history of success in such efforts, so it was
not at all unreasonable to think that it would again, especially after Luther had passed from the scene.

Moreover, even if the Roman Catholic effort to defeat the Reformation had not succeeded, the Reformation almost certainly would have turned out to be a quite different affair—with significantly different consequences—if there had not been a vigorous force prepared to counteract the steps taken by the Roman church. At the very least the break with Roman doctrines and practices the Reformation brought would have been milder, and it is not inconceivable that the Roman church would ultimately have found a way of accommodating the challenges posed by Protestants.

All this is hypothetical, of course, because there was in fact such a counterforce—in the form of the vibrant Reformed movement. Not only was that movement strong, but it was expanding as well, reaching out from its original base of operations in the Rhine valley into such faraway places as England, Scotland, Hungary, and Poland. The more success it had in expanding its sphere of influence, the more the geopolitics of the Reformation changed. From the point of view of the Roman church, the threat posed by Lutheranism faded in significance, and the real enemy became Calvin and the aggressively expansionist movement of which he increasingly was seen to be the leader.

The Turning Point

The resulting struggle was not resolved in Calvin’s lifetime. It lasted for better than a century after his death, and as late as the latter part of the next century it was still not altogether certain which countries would end up in which camps. But the period in which Calvin conducted his ministry in Geneva (1541–1564) was a crucial turning point in this process, and the actions he took in that period played a critical role in determining the course events took not just in his day but long thereafter as well.

What do I mean by that? When the Reformation first came to Geneva in the late 1520s, it did so because a part of the civic leadership had decided to break with Rome and embrace the cause of reform. In retrospect, it is not only clear that these leaders lacked a good understanding of what they were asking for when they invited the fiery French evangelist Guillaume Farel to oversee the process of reform, but that they were actively opposed by other forces in Geneva as well. So not surprisingly, the initial reform efforts led to conflict as well as disorder—and before long, to the expulsion of the outsiders, including
the young John Calvin. It was a chaotic situation that was ripe for restoration of the old order, and it became even more so in the period after the departure of Farel and Calvin.\textsuperscript{15}

Calvin knew all that when he was invited back to Geneva in 1541. So he responded to the invitation by making a move I believe to be inspired. In the intervening years he had been ministering in Strasbourg under the tutelage of Martin Bucer, and during those years he appears to have given some serious thought to the strategic issues raised by his recent experience in Geneva. In replying to the invitation, therefore, he laid down certain conditions that had to be met if he was to return. In particular, he insisted on being given the authority (and the means) necessary to create the kind of church that genuine reform entailed. If the cause of reform was to be effectively pursued in Geneva, he said, those charged with the responsibility of overseeing that project needed to be authorized (and empowered) to create a \textit{disciplined} church that was relatively autonomous, had a well-defined mission, and had rules of procedure that were consistently observed. Once he got to Geneva, he then laid out exactly what this meant in a set of “ecclesiastical ordinances” that have been the basis of Reformed thinking about the church and its polity ever since. Moreover, he made the acceptance of those precepts a condition of his return to the city.\textsuperscript{16}

The acceptance of this scheme by the city fathers was by no means unqualified, however, and it did not make Calvin “the dictator” of Geneva. That allegation, which has been so widely disseminated by his enemies that it is often now taken as fact, is a myth that is not supported by the relevant evidence. As any reputable biography will show, Geneva in Calvin’s day continued to be governed by a set of town councils that were composed of diverse forces, some of which were actively opposed to Calvin’s ideas. And it was not at all

\textsuperscript{15} In his excellent analysis of the political dynamics of the Genevan reformation, William G. Naphy observes that the city was famous for its factionalism well before Calvin’s appearance there, and he suggests that part of Calvin’s achievement was to create effective tools for dealing with that “disease.” It should also be noted that the embrace of the cause of ecclesiastical reform in Geneva coincided with the achievement of independence—a development that created much more opportunity for the factionalist tendencies of the city’s civic leadership to manifest themselves than had previously existed. See Naphy, \textit{Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).

\textsuperscript{16} The substance of these ordinances would not have been unfamiliar to the city fathers. They had been asked to adopt something similar in 1537, during Calvin’s initial stay in Geneva. Even though he was only acting as an aide to Farel at that time, it is reasonable to infer that Calvin had played a role in the drafting of that earlier document. His approach to the issues at stake reflected an ongoing conversation that had been developing among Reformed leaders ever since they first began trying to get their ideas embodied in institutional form.
uncommon for his opponents to get their way.\textsuperscript{17} Even his allies quarreled with him at times. But it is undeniable that he still acquired substantial power—power that grew over the years as many of his enemies departed and others, who admired him, were attracted to the city—in the life of the church, and it was through the exercise of that power that he was able to influence the life of the wider community.

It is no exaggeration to say that Geneva was transformed—and put on the map—by the changes Calvin was able to achieve in the religious life of the city. Even though there were already a number of other cities where Reformed movements had been able to prevail (including Strasbourg), it was not long before Geneva came to be seen as the model of what a “truly Reformed” city looked like.\textsuperscript{18} Refugees flocked there from near and far, and the thing above all that drew them was the opportunity to observe—and take part in—the remarkable experiment in institution building that was unfolding in Geneva.

These people learned many lessons, but the thing above all they learned, I believe, was how to constitute the church as a disciplined community with a well-defined mission. And that was a lesson that served them well in the struggles to which so many of them eventually returned in their homelands. For when they went back, they had in their pockets, so to speak, a proven formula for turning the key theological ideas of the Reformation into living institutional embodiment. These were clearly people of great courage and conviction, but it is difficult to imagine any of their movements surviving—much less triumphing, as some of them did—without the inspiration and guidance they derived from the example to which they had been exposed in Geneva.

John Knox, who is a prime example of this phenomenon, characterized Geneva in terms that suggested what he experienced during his stay there was reminiscent of the early church.\textsuperscript{19} The parallel is not exact, to be sure,

\textsuperscript{17} Even though the town councils had agreed in principle to Calvin’s conditions, once he was back in Geneva it was clear that they were not going to give him everything he had asked for. On matters no less consequential than the frequency of Holy Communion, the appointment of pastors and elders, and excommunication they continued to insist on a role for themselves, thus compromising significantly Calvin’s attempt to achieve autonomy for the church. For a good summary of the relevant details, including the story of Calvin’s ongoing effort to fulfill his original intent, see Bruce Gordon’s new biography, \textit{Calvin} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{18} Philip Benedict observes that Geneva came to be regarded this way by Reformed Christians because it was in Geneva above all that the Reformed hope of a collaboration between church and state to achieve a “reformation of manners” was successfully realized. See Benedict, \textit{Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed} (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 77.

\textsuperscript{19} The specific claim Knox made was that the Geneva to which he had been exposed was, to his knowledge, the “maist perfft schoole of Chryst” that had existed since the days of the early church. See David Laing, ed., \textit{The Works of John Knox}, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Bannatye Club, 1856), 240.
and critics have had fun with this claim. But in one respect, I think, the point he was trying to make is indisputable. The church in Geneva recovered under Calvin’s leadership the transformative power as a cultural force the church in its early years had shown the gospel to have. The reason it was able to do this is because it recovered a clear sense of how the church could once again be a disciplined community without adhering to the familiar Roman Catholic formula.

Militance

None of this is meant to whitewash the process by which the Reformed movement went about pursuing its project of reform under Calvin’s influence. Since I have made a point of being faithful to the historical record, I can hardly ignore (much less deny) that this was often a bloody process that was accompanied by no small amount of brutality and intolerance. Calvin himself was not a violent person, and he appears to have been uneasy about the willingness of his followers in such places as Scotland and France to take up arms in the waning years of his life. But still, the fact is that the movement he inspired was tailor-made for militance, and it attracted people who were experienced in wielding power and doing what it took to defend themselves. So it was hardly an accident that this movement soon came to be known for its willingness to use force in pursuing its objectives.20

It was hardly alone in this, to be sure. Most of the forces that were unleashed by the Reformation did end up engaging in large-scale violence. So the responsibility for the resulting wars of religion was a shared one. But it is undeniable that part of the reason those wars happened and had the character they did was that Calvin’s followers were so committed to advancing aggressively the cause of the Reformation.

Today, that militance makes many of us (including many of us in Reformed churches) uneasy with the story I have been telling.21 I share some of that

20. Philip Benedict observes that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Reformed groups embraced and acted on political views justifying rebellion more than any other group. Benedict, Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed, 535. That may be true, but I do not think the ethic these groups adopted was the only (or perhaps even the primary) source of the violence that so often accompanied their struggles. The ethic made it possible for them to use force with a good conscience, to be sure, but the reasons they believed called to act in the manner they did came more from the factors I have already mentioned—namely, their radicalism, their reluctance to compromise, and their desire to expand the reach of their movement as widely as possible.

21. As a student of contemporary political philosophy I am struck by how often it is simply taken for granted by influential authors (John Rawls is a good example) these days that the wars of religion were nothing but a mistake.
unease, but I am unwilling to go where it often takes people these days. I am not willing to condemn the violence unequivocally, nor am I prepared to say that the outcomes would have been better, historically speaking, if the wars of religion had never happened. I wish they had not been necessary. But I do not think that was the case. I believe some of them, at least, were unavoidable, given the conditions that prevailed at the time.

Looking back at these events from the situation in which we now find ourselves, it is easy to stand in judgment on the willingness of our spiritual forebears to take up arms in defense of their faith. But would it really have been better if they had refused to do so? And if so, better for whom? And for what? Their cause would almost certainly have been crushed, and it is conceivable that the Reformation itself would have been crushed. As I have already indicated, it would surely have taken a different—and more moderate—trajectory. And many of the things we take for granted today (including the liberties we so prize) would have been less likely to be achieved.

For example, take the English Puritans, to whom we in this nation in particular owe so much. I concede it would have been better if they had not had to raise an army and do battle against the Stuart monarchy. It might have been better for their own cause, in fact, if they had been able to persuade Queen Elizabeth and the Stuart kings to preside over (if not actively promote) a more complete reformation of the English church. But by the time they took up arms, they had been attempting to do that for a long time, without much success. And the result was that they found themselves being subjected to ever more vigorous repression. Charles I, against whom they took up arms, was trying to “root them out,” after all. So they felt they had to fight back if their cause was not to be destroyed altogether.

There were debates then (among the Puritans themselves, among others), and there continue to be debates now among historians about whether they were right about that matter. But no informed person doubts that the course of history was altered profoundly by the decisions they took in England during that fateful period. I find it hard to imagine how things could have turned out better if they had not chosen the course of action they did.

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22. The story of the English Puritans is ably told by Michael Walzer in *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (New York: Atheneum, 1972) in terms that explain well how they came to believe that recourse to violence was necessary—and theologically justified.
Consequences

My reason for holding this view is not, however, what you might expect. It is not because I think the consequences of the events I have been discussing have all been good. I believe some of them have been positive, to be sure. But the full package has not been anywhere near as unambiguously beneficial as has sometimes been suggested—especially by Protestants who have been intent on refuting Roman Catholic criticisms of the Reformation.²³

I am glad that I was born in the twentieth century rather than, say, the thirteenth. I am glad, in other words, that I have been able to live my life under modern conditions, and I am convinced that I owe that blessing in no small measure to the Reformation. And it is not just the Reformation to which we owe that benefit but the radicalization of it that took place under Reformed auspices. I feel this especially as an American because of the role the English Puritans and other Reformed Christians played in laying the foundations of that country that eventually became the United States of America.

But I do not accept the proposition that modernity—or the state of being modern—is anything near an unambiguously good thing. If one focuses attention just on the good parts of the modernization story—or those features of modern life that even critics are hard put not to interpret as genuine improvements of the human condition—it is easy to come away thinking that the invention of the modern world was providential in some sort of simple, straightforward sense. Even some theologians have embraced that idea. But surely it is naive. You have to ignore—and explain away—a great deal in order to hold any view of that sort. Keep in mind that modern history is littered with examples of human depravity, and virtually every advance we have made in this period has had its dark side.

This is true even in the realm of religion. Even in that domain the process of modernization has done much good, but it has also done considerable harm. Roman Catholics may overstate the extent to which the Reformation has given rise to crazy and at times even dangerous behavior on the part of Christians, and it is hardly possible to dispute that claim entirely. I think it is interesting that Alister McGrath, the distinguished Anglican historian who has done so much to help people in our day understand the Reformation and its legacy,

²³. I refer here in particular to what has come to be known as the Whig view of modern Western history. For the classic critique of that view, which is still very much worth reading, see Herbert Butterfield, The Whig Interpretation of History (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1930).
titled a recent book on this subject *Christianity’s Dangerous Idea*. What he had in mind in using that phrase was the practice of translating the Bible into vernacular languages and then making it available to laypeople to read for themselves. I would be the first to praise that part of our tradition, but it seems to me that only a fool would say that it has had nothing but good results.

An argument can also be made that the negative impact of the Reformation might have been mitigated if it had not been allowed to go as far as it did in departing from Roman Catholic beliefs and practice. This has long been the official Roman view, and it has often been embraced by less-radical Protestants (e.g., Anglicans) as well. It too is a claim I find difficult to dispute. Whenever one says, as I want to do, that the radicalization of the Reformation that took place under Reformed auspices created an environment that was conducive to other changes taking place besides the ones that were specifically intended by Calvin and his followers, that applies, presumably, to *everything* that was made possible—the bad as well as the good.

But if all this is true, the obvious question is: What possible reason can there be for endorsing—and even giving thanks for—the developments I have been discussing in these pages? In my case, the reason is theological, and it is not very complicated. It is part of what makes me a Protestant in the Reformed sense, and I would put the matter this way: Something precious was recovered at the time of Reformation, and it was recovered in a manner that gave it fresh vitality and efficacy in human affairs. I believe in divine providence strongly enough not to propose that the thing I have in mind—which is nothing less than the core of the Christian gospel, as revealed in the New Testament—was in danger of literally being lost. But I do believe that it had been eclipsed by the time of the Reformation and that if the matter had been left up to the Roman church, the renewal that took place in Western Christendom in the sixteenth century would not have been anywhere near as robust as it turned out to be once the Reformers did their work.

To me, the value of what those people accomplished is independent of the merits of anything else that may have occurred as a result of the changes that were set in motion by their actions. It is the light the Reformers were empowered to bring back into the world that is the important thing, not what others did in later years in responding to the situation that had been created by this new development. It should not surprise anyone who has seriously studied

the Bible that the results have been so mixed. Is not that what always happens when human beings take what God gives us and use it for our own purposes? Is that not exactly what the idea of original sin implies?

John Calvin would not have been in the least surprised that the results of the Reformation have been so mixed, and neither, I suspect, would it have deterred him. Even if he could have anticipated all the moral and spiritual ambiguity of the consequences of the Reformation, he still is likely to have said that we must do what we believe is right in light of the Word of God and place our hope in God’s providential purpose.25

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25. The author acknowledges with appreciation the comments on an earlier draft of this paper he received from Wayne Boulton, James Reichley, and Ann White.
Thomas Friedman has recently written that the Israeli-Palestinian peace process has become a bad play. It is obvious that all the parties are just acting out the same old scenes, with the same old clichés—and that no one believes any of it anymore. There is no romance, no sex, no excitement, no urgency—not even a sense of importance anymore. The only thing driving the peace process today is inertia and diplomatic habit.


Braverman is the grandson of a fifth-generation Palestinian Jew whose grandfather was born in the Jewish quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem and who later came to the United States, where his grandson, the author, was born in 1948, the year of the declaration of the State of Israel. Braverman was raised on the amalgam of rabbinic Judaism and political Zionism, held to the Zionist narrative, and lived a year on a kibbutz.

Then, according to his own telling, he went to the West Bank and witnessed Israel’s brutal occupation of Palestinian land. He learned of an alternative to the Zionist narrative, in which the Israeli “War of Liberation” in 1948 accomplished the dispossession and expulsion of three-quarters of the Palestinians from the territories that became the state of Israel. Since then, Braverman has continued to observe more of the intensely oppressive and abusive policies...
and practices of the state of Israel perpetrated against the Palestinian population. Now he has written his summons to new thinking that requires a radical departure from all the old assumptions. His book belongs front and center amid the emerging literature of Jewish critics of the state of Israel, as he moves from what he has seen and knows to the requirements for a fresh approach to the prospect for security, peace, and justice in the region.

The title of the book refers to the ways in which well-meaning Christians have embraced (fatally, he believes) the entitlements of Jewish exceptionalism that are deeply rooted in tradition and financially supported today by the memory of the ovens of the Holocaust. Braverman expends no energy against the Christian right, with its mathematical calculations of the need for the state of Israel in order that the Christian Messiah may come again. Rather, his target is liberal Christians who, out of a well-grounded fear of anti-Semitism, are muted in their critique of the violent fearfulfulness of Zionist ideology. Braverman’s imperative to such Christians is to see that a thoughtful and sustained critique of that ideology is a legitimate and responsible component of Christian faith that needs to be unhinged from the lingering issue of anti-Semitism. He credits Christian faith, in decisions made in the earliest decades of the church, with breaking from Jewish tribalism in its inclusion of Gentiles, and therefore in its capacity to imagine and practice a political inclusiveness as the only way toward peace and justice.

Conversely, Braverman parses the Judaism that feeds Zionism as being trapped in “a tribal paradigm” that trades on the Holocaust but more foundationally assumes the exceptionalism of being God’s chosen people in the world who, in their self-perception, are entitled to the exclusionary defense of a Jewish state. Braverman believes that Judaism made a crucial error in the time of the appearance of Jesus when it refused the inclusionary move of the Jesus movement and so is locked in a hopeless scenario of exclusionism that can never produce security or justice. While Braverman is concerned with the contemporary struggle in the Holy Land, this theological point, as he presents it, goes much further to the entire claim of exceptionalism that precludes neighborliness in its privileged claim to the land. Quoting Alex Sinclair, a Jewish Israeli academic, Braverman offers a succinct summary of the root causes of the intractable conflict: “Israel is like an alcoholic, except we are addicted to territory, not to tequila” (270). And then he says, “The question must be asked: do Jews want to live in a Jewish state or a secure and prosperous one?” (282).

It is not Braverman’s purpose to describe or advocate for any particular political solution to the conflict. However, he offers a discussion of the
so-called “one-state solution” that has gained currency in recent years among both Jewish and Palestinian political thinkers—a bicultural liberal democracy that abandons the Zionist vision of a Jewish state, yielding instead “a country for all its citizens” (282). He concludes that the inherently expansionist aims of the state of Israel, supported by the policies of the United States that are, in turn, supported by many well-meaning Christians, are a dead end—especially when it is cast as a “two-state solution.” He speaks harsh words, naming names, of the Israeli leaders who, in the end, always play the card of the “Iranian nuclear threat,” which brings any serious initiative to a halt.

Braverman’s book is clearly a reasoned argument wrought through much anguish. But it is also a manifesto in which Braverman makes claims that will undoubtedly be disputed on all sides yet ones that merit close and sustained attention. He quite clearly sees that his urgent tone of manifesto is congruent with the long tradition of “prophetic imagination” that dares to utter the unutterable, unthinkable truth that is grounded out beyond ideological control. In the ancient world of the Israelite prophets, the urban elites who gathered in Jerusalem counted on the exceptionalism of the Jerusalem temple and the Davidic dynasty. And then came the shrill harbingers of an alternative who imagined a society based on human, neighborly rights and social justice and who saw that, in the end, self-deceiving ideology could not resist the holy force of justice and compassion.

The point of the prophetic, as I experience the hard summons of Braverman, suggests that a two-step maturation in Christian sensibility is urgent, a two-step that is evident, for example, in the movement of the thought of Rosemary Ruether (and of this reviewer). Many of us have struggled over time against the deep anti-Semitism of Christian tradition and culture and have arrived at a full appreciation of and support for Jewish claims, including those of the state of Israel. But now, says Braverman, surely correctly, in the interest of justice, which is the only path to peace, it is time for a second move out beyond that appreciation and support to a deeper awareness of what is required beyond the ideology of exceptionalism. The state of Israel, out of its exceptionalism, justifies its “redemptive violence” and imagines itself to be excused for it because of the long, real victimization of Jews. This second step has not been taken by many of us, but the first step, by itself, is no longer enough. Now a second step is required: the relinquishment of the claim of a superior Jewish right to the land. We must, submits Braverman, heed the call of the ancient prophets for a relinquishment of privileged exceptionalism, even though that requires Jews to accept and tolerate the unavoidable experience of immense vulnerability.
In the end, Braverman calls for a new “shared covenant” of Jews, Christians, and Muslims that moves beyond every particular privileged claim. It is a summons to forego a backward look to the archaic and pain-filled past, and to turn to the day when justice will prevail. I finished the book sad for whom we have, all of us together, become but hopeful for what may yet be done. Thomas Friedman is perhaps right as far as he goes, but he counsels only withdrawal and the hard, disciplined readiness to wait. By contrast, Mark Braverman rightly pushes beyond that counsel in a demanding act of hope that outruns all business as usual.
The Ten Commandments

Patrick Miller

This is a magisterial book destined to become the authoritative account on which any future studies of the Decalogue must build. Only someone like Patrick Miller, the editor of the *Interpretation* series in which this book appears, could have written a work that is at once a contribution to scholarship and yet a wise book that this reviewer hopes will be read by many who do not think of themselves as academics. Miller, who has never let disciplinary divisions limit his work, has not only given us an account of the Decalogue in Exodus and Deuteronomy, but he shows how those accounts are illumined by other settings in the Old and New Testaments. Drawing on the resources of the Christian tradition—in particular Luther, Calvin, and Barth—Miller confirms Luther’s judgment that “anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scripture.”

Miller’s account of the commandments is, happily, not theory driven. In the closing chapter of his book, he suggests the commandments exemplify a living command theory of ethics, but in effect, his account of the commandments is so rich in detail that no “theory” can do justice to what he has provided in this work. Indeed, in the same chapter he also stresses the necessity of the “shaping narrative” that makes the commandments intelligible. Accordingly, he rightly argues that the commandments’ rationality may be rooted in a universal sense of obligation, but the force of such obligation comes from the covenantal relationship contained in the prologue: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt.”

Miller organizes his book by treating the commandments in the order they have been given. Of course, “the order they have been given” can be misleading, as they can be and have been divided and numbered in different ways by Jews, Catholics, and Protestants. Miller simply acknowledges the impossibility of settling such questions on textual grounds and stresses instead the interrelated character of the commandments. One of the strongest features of his
Caring for Creation
Fifty Timely Tips

“Real world, practical tips and encouragement for putting faith into action as responsible stewards of God’s creation.”
-Publishers Weekly

“If one takes small steps, adding to one’s commitment to the environment, this book will prove life changing. This book can be used in study groups and by individual Christians wanting to make a difference.”
-Sharing the Practice

Rebecca Barnes-Davies, a consultant for Environmental and Social Justice Ministries, offers this user-friendly guide outlining a variety of ways in which you, your congregation, and your community can help fight global climate change and enjoy participation in a vital part of Christian discipleship.

50 Ways to Help Save the Earth

How You and Your Church Can Make a Difference

Rebecca Barnes-Davies
book is how he shows that if the commandments are to be rightly understood, they must be understood as dependent on one another.

Because of Miller’s emphasis on the interrelation of the commandments, it is only with his exposition of the third commandment that the reader begins to see the significance of the account he is giving. His exegesis of the first and second commandments is exemplary, illuminating, for example, how theology as an enterprise always teeters on the brink of idolatry by making God serve our well-being or “system.” But it is in his exposition of the prohibition against taking God’s name in vain that Miller’s method of showing the interrelation of the commandments proves so fruitful. He helps us see that the right use of God’s name is essential for our ability as a people to speak truthfully to one another. Therefore, all the commandments are constituted by the gift of God’s name.

Miller’s account of the third commandment becomes the template for his exposition of the rest of the Decalogue. I found his use of the Psalms to illumine how each of the commandments require attention to the care of the “least of these” to be particularly compelling. Miller’s use of the prophets and such stories as David and Bathsheba to help us see why the commandment against adultery, for example, cannot be isolated from the commandments against theft and lying is exemplary. He rightly insists throughout his account of the individual commandments that each in its own way is a reminder that the poor must never be forgotten if we are to be a people shaped by the commandments.

Consistent with this view, Miller refuses to limit his account of the Decalogue to the Old Testament. He sensitively shows how the Ten Commandments continue to be essential in the New Testament. He argues, for example, that there is no outright contradiction between the command to obey parents and what seems to be Jesus’ strong qualification of the status of the family. Miller may well be right about that, but I am less convinced by his attempt to show that the Christian transformation of the Sabbath is not in contradiction to the Jewish Sabbath; I do not think the two can be as easily reconciled as he suggests.

Miller’s exposition of the command not to covet anything belonging to one’s neighbor should be required reading for all of us who are trapped in social orders constituted by practices that train us to think there are or should be no limits to our desires. He rightly suggests, for example, that the enjoyment of excessive riches is not only a violation of the last commandment but also an indication of in what and in whom we actually place our trust. To see our lives illumined by the commandments is a painful process, but as Miller observes
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in the opening to his book, it is not accidental that the commandments found a place at the beginning of the liturgy in *The Book of Common Prayer*. I can only hope that if this book is read as widely as it deserves, that practice might be recovered.

Stanley Hauerwas
Duke Divinity School
Durham, North Carolina

An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts

D. C. Parker

David Parker’s introduction to New Testament textual criticism is an impressive and important work that no doubt will quickly ascend to a place of prominence in the field. Not only is the book beautifully written and executed, but it also provides a helpful orientation to New Testament textual criticism while providing a wealth of innovative and creative new ways to conceive of the task of textual criticism. It is a rare book that can serve as both primer and manifesto. Parker has written just such a book.

The book is divided into three sections, the first of which deals with manuscripts. In addition to an excellent overview of important manuscripts and textual traditions, Parker provides practical guidance for the major tools and resources that one must employ in order to study ancient manuscripts. He even includes a section on visiting a manuscript library, which one is hard pressed to find in any comparable work. Parker’s conviction that New Testament textual criticism must begin with the study of the manuscripts themselves, not transcriptions of manuscripts, comes through very clearly. This emphatic assertion is a most needed and welcome corrective to scholars in the field who have increasingly been working several steps removed from the actual textual artifacts.

The second section of the book offers an overview of, and introduction to, the rise of textual criticism and its principle methods and goals. The treatment of the history of the discipline and its major reference tools and editions is clear, succinct, and helpful. Parker’s discussion of the nature and purposes of textual criticism is tantalizingly brief (he has written about this topic more fully in some of his other works) but theologically quite provocative and inter-
esting. Parker does not regard New Testament textual criticism as merely the process of determining the earliest possible text of the New Testament. Rather, he articulates a much more sophisticated position that entails first and foremost thinking of the relationship between text and communities—whether one is thinking of ancient texts and the communities who copied and preserved them or modern communities (both academic and ecclesial) who produce critical textual editions. The theological implications of Parker’s way of conceiving of the task of textual criticism warrant careful consideration and reflection.

The third and final section of the book covers the textual history of various parts of the New Testament: Revelation, Paul’s epistles, Acts and the Catholic Epistles, and the Gospels. This way of organizing the final section takes seriously the fact that each of these groups of New Testament texts requires its own independent treatment when considering questions of textual transmission. One cannot assume that what is true of the textual history and transmission of the Gospels, for example, is true for the Pauline letters. This section, like the previous two, is impressive in its breadth, brevity, and lucidity.

Parker’s introduction will serve well both students and scholars in the field of New Testament textual criticism, and it should become a primary reference for students and scholars in studies of the New Testament and of ancient Christianity.

Shane Berg
Princeton Theological Seminary
Princeton, New Jersey

Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ

Thomas F. Torrance, edited by Robert T. Walker

This book is a veritable theological gold mine. It comprises T. F. Torrance’s lectures on christology and soteriology given at the University of Edinburgh from 1952 to 1978. Published posthumously and ably edited with a lengthy and very helpful introduction by Robert T. Walker, Torrance’s nephew, this work should be required reading for all who seriously would engage in the study of theology today. Instead of attempting a christology from above or from below, Torrance simply begins by asserting that “we cannot compare the fact of Christ with other facts, nor can we deduce the “fact of Christ” from our
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knowledge of other facts.” What Torrance means by the fact of Christ unfolds as the book develops. He means to refer to the historical Jesus, but not in the usual sense—namely, not a historical Jesus who is anyone other than the Word of God incarnate. Torrance believes this unique object of our knowledge “gives itself to us to be apprehended” within human history, but because “we encounter God in Jesus Christ, the truth comes to us in its own authority and self-sufficiency.” Therefore, “we cannot earn knowledge of Christ, we cannot achieve it, or build up to it.” Genuine knowledge of Christ comes to us through the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit so that when we really know him, we do so in faith, which also knows that we have no capacity for him but that such capacity comes only from his own power to reveal himself to us through the biblical witness.

We cannot say, therefore, how we know Christ, but we must begin by acknowledging the mystery of the object of our reflection. Nor can we say how God can be present to us as this man Jesus without surrendering his divinity as in false “kenotic theories.” That mystery is the fact of Christ, namely, “the mysterious duality in unity of Jesus Christ, God without reserve, man without reserve, the eternal truth in time, the Word of God made flesh.” This is a mystery that the New Testament does not attempt to explain but rather places before us as “the miracle of the Holy Spirit” and as “the direct act of the eternal God.” That is the point of the virgin birth—in this history “God is creatively at work in a new way.” All of this leads Torrance to maintain that (1) the hypostatic union is “entirely without parallel or analogy” so that it can be understood only “in terms of itself”; (2) Jesus’ human existence has no reality apart from the action of the Word (anhypostasis); (3) his humanity definitely has reality because of the Word assuming our sinful flesh from the virgin Mary (enhypostasis) without sinning himself; and yet (4) that reality is to be understood strictly as a union of natures in the one person of the Son so that his human acts actually are the actions of the divine person. Any separation of Jesus’ humanity and divinity would not only sunder the crucial connection between who God is as triune in himself (as one who loves and is merciful and who he is for us in Christ), but it would turn “the cross into the bottomless pit of darkness,” since we would have only a man abandoned on the cross and a God who is “monstrously unconcerned with our life. Torrance continues: “But put God on the cross, and the cross becomes the world’s salvation.” For him, God is present to us in Jesus as man and not simply in or through him, so that in Jesus there is “one action which is at once manward and Godward.”
Those who have criticized Torrance for not providing enough scriptural exegesis will be amazed to see the amount of scriptural material offered in this book in support of his understanding of Jesus Christ. What they will find is a form of exegesis that takes very seriously both Jesus’ history and also the theology of the New Testament that is grounded in that very history. There are large sections of the book that demonstrate Torrance’s belief that when we think about the Incarnation we “must wrestle” with “God in time, God as man, God active in history” and that “apart from that historical act of God in history, there is neither knowledge of God nor no real experience of God’s help and redemption.” A redemption that is not actually real within our history, for Torrance, is no redemption at all. Jesus’ human history is absolutely essential to Torrance because in that human history God actually seeks out sinners, exposes the depth of their sin by even causing them to react against Jesus’ own preaching and activity on their behalf, and reconciles them to himself (enabling not only knowledge of God but also participation in the “new creation” that is inaugurated by the kingdom of God made present in and by Jesus himself through his cross and resurrection).
The book contains seven chapters, one each on christology, the incarnation, the once and for all union of God and man, the continuous union in the life of Jesus, the mystery of Christ, the hypostatic union, and the kingdom of Christ and evil. This is followed by forty pages of endnotes to chapter 1, which are must reading because they provide important discussion of how Reformed and Roman Catholic theology are seen by Torrance to differ and to converge. These notes also provide detailed analysis of theologians such as Albert Schweitzer and Rudolf Bultmann, among many others. Rejecting both idealism and liberalism, Torrance asserts, “If you start off on a purely historical level, then the only honest inference is a purely historical one, made on a purely historical level. If you ask only historical questions, you will only get historical answers. Faith is then held to be some kind of moral appreciation of historical facts.” Torrance rejects such thinking because it would have to imply that it is our faith that confers meaning on the fact of Christ, and this is precisely what he opposes as unscientific theology! While this procedure was presumed to be scientific and honest by Herrmann and Bultmann, it was really neither, because it began “by refusing to behave in terms of the nature of the object” (that is, that nature of the historical Jesus presented to us in the Gospels in the mystery of his being as the Word incarnate).

There is also an illuminating forty-seven-page “Addendum on Eschatology” that explains why theology and Christian living must take place by recognizing the eschatological tension inherent in the kingdom realized in Christ’s own history but not yet fully realized in history until his return. Torrance demonstrates how and why an idealist or existentialist misunderstanding of New Testament eschatology leads to “totalitarian” eschatologies that confuse the kingdom with some set of present historical realities (leading people mistakenly to search for this-worldly utopias) or with some future ideal (leading people to miss the fact that the kingdom is veiled but also unveiled in Christ’s own death and resurrection). Perhaps most importantly, those who speak of a “delayed parousia” as a mistake eliminate the need for a second coming or present it in a merely symbolical way. This undermines the true meaning of baptism and the Eucharist as sacraments through which Christ deliberately enables us here and now to participate in the new creation—in a manner that respects the fact that his real presence is his very own presence that cannot be conjured or evaded but can only be acknowledged as the power of his kingdom, which he alone makes present, giving us time to repent, until redemption is complete at his second coming.

Torrance advocates a Chalcedonian christology that is in harmony with the councils of Nicaea, Ephesus, and Constantinople. Yet he wants to present a christology that is dynamic and in accord with Old and New Testament perspec-
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Transforming Conversion
RETHINKING THE LANGUAGE AND CONTOURS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION
Gordon T. Smith
9780801032479 • 224 pp. • $19.99p
This volume offers much-needed contemporary theological reflection on the phenomenon of conversion and transformation. Smith contends we must rethink the nature of the church in light of how people actually come to faith in Christ. After drawing on ancient and pre-revivalist wisdom about conversion, Smith delineates the contours of conversion and Christian initiation for today’s church.
tives and that corrects Greek thinking for which any real incarnation of God in
time and space is an anomaly and impossibility. He also wants to “go a step
beyond Chalcedon” in applying a Chalcedonian view of the Incarnation to his
own view of the relation of time and eternity by understanding the hypostatic
union dynamically (rather than statically) “through the cross to its perfection
in the resurrection.” Christ’s kingdom has entered our sinful and alienated world
of fallen time and “perfected itself through the cross and resurrection” in a way
that “consummates the original purposes of creation and crowns it with glory.”
Torrance rejects Bultmann’s demythologizing as an approach to Scripture that
was already in evidence among the Gnostics in the second and third centu-
ries. Interestingly, he traces Bultmann’s erroneous thinking to the philosophy
of Martin Heidegger. Torrance believes that we must advance beyond the early
church fathers (who had difficulty explaining that God himself suffered and
died for us on the cross without ceasing to be God but disclosed the actual
meaning of evil and sin and overcame them precisely in the particular history of
Jesus of Nazareth). Anyone studying this book will find many of the answers to
today’s most troubling christological questions.

Paul D. Molnar
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Religion after Postmodernism:
Retheorizing Myth and Literature
Victor E. Taylor

A most unsettling abyss faces the theologically educated class (who have under-
gone the severities of historical and linguistic turns): whether anything stable is
left in which to ground Christianity, its Scripture, and its faith. The preoccupa-
tion, even anxiety, about origins has been a hallmark of most serious theology
in the last several decades. In reply, the postmodern theologies that developed
in the 1980s were ways of arguing that one did not need the presumed certain-
ties of origin in order to theologize rigorously—and even faithfully.

Taylor’s book brings the state of this postmodern theological art to a highly
refined, tightly argued, continually illuminating place. He shows the intricate and
unrelievable intercourse between religious-theological and mythological-literary
thinking, or between “religion” and “literature.” With a theoretical frame built intensively and discerningly on the work of Slavoj Žižek and Charles Winquist, this book persuasively instructs readers about the tendency toward hegemonic readings of religious texts. In such readings, theological language is made theologically meaningful by tying it back, without remainder, to a purported transcendent extra-linguistic reality. The slippage between religious language and what it represents is the space continually examined for the incomplete or arbitrary connectors religious thought constantly erects that function to domesticate the mythical-scriptural text—therefore, ironically, limiting the religious character of its possibilities.

Taylor helps his readers think seriously about the literary character of the narratives that constitute religion. As literary, they resist the closure that theological readings want to force. They provoke possibilities for thinking. Theology does not need to appeal to a fantastic “outside” to the narrative in order to ground the right interpretation. It does not need to interpret at all, if by that term one means something like “to stand back in a modified objectivity in a non-literarily-construed space and to find the essential kernel of religious truth that is true for all people.” Nor does it need to interpret if that means to adjudicate possible meanings of the text for the present. Theology needs to read its texts as the literary significations they are. It needs to “re-mark” theological narratives from within themselves, showing how the texts keep themselves from totalizing renderings. Close readings of what theology thinks of as its founding literature—aided by concepts to help theological reading, like “extimacy” (a paradoxical other within that checks systematizing readings)—will restore the beguiling literary character that is all but lost once theology typically tries to take over and make the texts God’s. Further, Taylor assists readers in appreciating the theological character of the narratives that constitute literature. Myths, poems, novels, and even movies and museum exhibits exemplify the kind of “thinking” that literature undertakes: making its own closure impossible and continually opening onto new possibility. The old metaphysical securitizing of religious texts now gives way to a dispersal of divinity away from metaphysics into the wildness of signification.

The book’s focused and illuminating discussions of Lévi-Strauss, Eliade, and Ricoeur, its presentations of the importance of Žižek as resource for and exemplification of counter-hegemonic theology, and its development of the terrain first set out by Winquist, provide not only an outstanding “brief summa” on the ways postmodern theology has wrestled with its hermeneutical forebears, but also a very learned treatise on a remarkable concatenation of
“Hermeneutics, although now recognized to be indispensable to biblical and theological study, has hitherto lacked an introductory textbook that is simultaneously lucid, comprehensive, and authoritative. This, at last, is it.”

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“This is that rare book which is simply a pleasure to read. An ideal textbook, it is provocative, wise, astonishingly informed, scrupulously even-handed in its handling of material. Elephants may swim here and children may safely paddle. It is truly Tony Thiselton’s legacy and the uncluttered distillation of a lifetime’s study of hermeneutics. I cannot praise this book sufficiently highly.”

— IAIN TORRANCE

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texts that bear on his theme. It also offers much on the rich co-implications of literary and religious discourse seen through postmodern lenses.

Without saying it in so many words, Taylor gives us an alternative to the ways that standard appeals in theology to the “narrative” character of Christian life in contemporary theology actually can work. Taylor models rigorous care for religious texts, giving theology ways to move refreshingly and forthrightly beyond the romance of “founding stories” in which much of theology, progressive to conservative, still takes its bearings. Theologians are in great debt for Taylor’s work, even and especially if it makes us, in Taylor’s felicitous phrase, “apostles of mourning.”

Tom Beaudoin
Fordham University
New York, NY

Practical Theology: An Introduction

Richard R. Osmer


It is no small task to create an introductory text for a field like practical theology. Practical theology is undergoing rapid development and redefinition in the academy, evidenced in part by the rebirth of its guilds in the United States and internationally, by the development of new academic programs in practical theology in universities and seminaries, and by a plethora of new writings by its scholars. Practical theology is inherently interdisciplinary, meaning that any introductory text must find a way to introduce the engagement of multiple disciplines as part of its method without overwhelming those who seek a first introduction to the field. Add to this interdisciplinarity the fact that practical theologians count among the constituencies we address with our writing a rather broad audience inclusive of scholar-researcher-educators in the academy, seminary students across diverse degree programs and levels of study, and ministry practitioners in search of thoughtful and usable resources. Osmer’s latest work aptly addresses this complexity.

Osmer offers his book as a theology of congregational leadership, centered both in the spirituality of church leaders and in a method of practical theological work. Among his key claims, Osmer asserts that the method of practical theological interpretation is structurally common among academic practical
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Theologians and practitioners of ministry in churches. Focused on the metaphor of ministers as “interpretive guides” and congregations as “communities of interpretation,” he explores congregational leadership as spiritual leadership grounded in the threefold office of Christ as priest, ruler, and prophet.

Osmer names four core tasks of practical theology: the descriptive-empirical, the interpretive, the normative, and the pragmatic. The book's organization follows this outline, with an introductory overview of the model grounding it in hermeneutical philosophy and the pastoral hermeneutics of Charles Gerkin. Subsequent chapters explore each core task. To each task, Osmer provides a guiding question that names the work of that task and a metaphor for the spirituality of leadership found therein.

The descriptive-empirical task concerns an exploration of the question “What is going on?” Drawing on images of priestly mediation in which a priest's deep attentiveness to the people permits her to present the people to God in intercessory prayer, Osmer frames the spirituality of the descriptive-empirical task as that of “priestly listening.” The chapter explores various approaches a priestly listener might utilize in efforts to learn about and describe a ministry situation, from observation and interviewing to gathering census data. It goes on to name different research strategies—grounded theory, case study, narrative research, phenomenological inquiry—all with an eye to suggesting various ways congregational leaders might gather information enabling them to describe their encounters in ministry on multiple levels. The chapter begins with a narrative sketch of a fairly complex situation—a pastor approached by Olivia, a woman in crisis—that Osmer uses to illustrate his approach to practical theology throughout the book.

In chapter 2, Osmer explores the interpretive task of practical theology. It focuses on the ways congregational leaders might utilize multiple theoretical frames to better understand a situation, as they seek in this task to respond to the guiding question “Why is this going on?” Osmer picks up here an important thread from his ministry anecdote—the possibility of Olivia’s alcoholism—to illustrate that there exist diverse theoretical models of alcoholism from which a pastor might draw to understand the ministry situation unfolding. For this task, Osmer advocates a spirituality of leadership grounded in “sagely wisdom.” This approach is situated in Israel’s wisdom tradition and culminates in the christological claim of Jesus as the revelation of God’s wisdom. The chapter provides an excellent brief survey of both concepts. The goal of church leaders exercising sagely wisdom is “the art of steering,” or the thoughtful use of knowledge to guide God’s people.
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Osmer’s chapter on the normative task in practical theology identifies three kinds of theological reflection that participate in responding to the guiding question “What ought to be happening?” The first of these, theological interpretation, is the process of using theological concepts and biblical stories to interpret ministry events. The second concerns the addressing of ethical norms to guide judgments and ministry practice. The third type concerns looking for examples of good practice from which to derive norms that can serve as guides to reflection and practice. In the normative task of practical theology, the spirituality of leadership retrieves the office of Christ as prophet to name its chief activity as the work of prophetic discernment. Prophetic discernment involves leaders in sympathetic participation in the divine pathos for the whole of creation, seeking the guidance of God amid the complexities of life.

Osmer defines the fourth task of practical theological interpretation, the pragmatic task, as “the task of forming and enacting strategies of action that influence events in ways that are desirable.” The guiding question for this task asks, “What might we do?” The chapter explores three forms of leadership: task competence, transactional leadership, and transforming leadership. Servant leadership is the metaphor for the spirituality of leadership in this
task, and Osmer explores this image first in its Hebrew Bible expressions and then in its New Testament dimensions, where Jesus the servant leader provides “witness to God’s royal rule in the form of a servant.” The chapter offers a systems-theory perspective on organizational change applied to a congregational case study. The servant leader image operates as the point of integration for the previous three metaphors of spiritual leadership of congregations.

Practical Theology ends with an unusual epilogue titled “Teaching Practical Theology in Schools of Theology.” Some might consider this addition an awkward insertion, out of keeping with the central project of the book. Osmer argues, though, for an understanding of education and a set of pedagogical strategies that can foster the kind of cross-categorical, cross-situational, and cross-disciplinary thinking essential to practical theologians in the academy and to reflective practitioners of ministry in churches today. He thereby raises the suggestion that practical theology offers a pathway for integrative theological thought and action to overcome the fragmented Enlightenment legacy of segmented, specialized disciplines in which theological education remains mired today. Like a teacher offering students a detailed rubric that is the basis for their grade, Osmer’s epilogue is a sneak peak into the educational logic behind the book. It may also provide a glimpse into the hopeful future of practical theology influenced by this book.

Osmer’s passion for ministry and good practice comes through in many anecdotes and examples in this book. So too does his delight in the life of the mind. There are moments in what is unarguably a dense but generally accessible work in which the author’s love for theory and conviction of its ultimate usefulness threatens to overwhelm the book (and perhaps also the introductory-level reader). In an introductory course in practical theology for seminary students, for example, I would find it necessary to skip over some of the pages surveying research methodologies that doctor of ministry students find quite helpful. In spite of this, or perhaps because of this, I benefit from the opportunity to engage Osmer’s book as a resource for teaching. In terms of the current complex context for writing such a book, Osmer’s contribution to the field of practical theology and to those of us teaching and working in the field is credible, useful, and substantive.

Joyce Ann Mercer
Virginia Theological Seminary
Alexandria, Virginia
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Boundless Faith: The Global Outreach of American Churches

Robert Wuthnow

Not long into Bob Wuthnow’s latest sociological masterpiece, I realized that I had been wrong in thinking of the nineteenth century in Latourettean terms as the “great century” of American missions. A former missionary, I felt that the wave I was on had been a ripple compared to the tsunami of initiatives that my forebears had unleashed. Jaffna College, a venerable institution in the north of Sri Lanka, was founded in 1824 by American Presbyterian and Congregationalist missionaries, including one from Princeton. Not only that, but Jaffna’s first graduates had had their tuitions generously paid by Princeton Seminary students, many ordinary farm boys from New Jersey.

By the 1980s when I was there, hardly anyone here had ever heard of Jaffna, although the Jaffnese remained financially dependent on the United States. A sizeable Wall Street trust fund, administered by a board in Boston, generously funded everything. The “great century,” it seemed, had given way to one that hardly seemed great at all, except in dispensing charity at a distance.

That perception was way off. Wuthnow argues the opposite: “The half century after World War II could equally be described as a time of major expansion and innovation.” More than ever, he says, American churches have become “transcultural.” I am doubtful of this and will explain why in a moment, but Wuthnow marshals an array of hard data in evidence of it—on everything from full-time missionary personnel to the hosts of short-term volunteers who go abroad, not to mention the staggering amounts of money spent on humanitarian efforts.

As a sociologist, Wuthnow has a natural interest in organizations. Chapter 2, “The Evolution of Transnational Ties,” is one of the most detailed historical overviews now available. It describes how denominational boards (for example, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, which sent the first Americans to Jaffna) were followed by independent agencies, such as the domestic branch of the China Inland Mission, and then by faith-based NGOs (e.g., Catholic Relief Services, World Vision). Today, the three models are so prolifically hybridized that even Wuthnow cannot catalog all the variations.

This book abounds in hard empirical data. Much of the book, however, digests several thousand interviews conducted in 2005 by Wuthnow’s regulars,
the veritable army of assistants whose conversations with church members and pastors around the country lie at the heart of this endeavor. The chapter titled “The Global Role of Congregations” invalidates commonplace misunderstandings about American churches and their “transcultural” involvements. One such misunderstanding is my own—acknowledged above—that, as Wuthnow describes it, “American Christianity has withdrawn from the wider world, leaving global Christianity to flourish largely on its own.” Another is that “local congregations have imploded, serving as self-help societies for their own members, and doing little to help people outside their communities, let alone the United States.”

While such findings may seem self-evident to some, Wuthnow believes that he is arguing counterintuitively. He has a low threshold for measuring what it takes for America’s Christians and their churches to qualify as “transcultural”: “Transcultural means being involved in or interested in activities [having to do with Christianity] outside of the United States.” That’s putting the bar awfully low, and the student of global Christianity in me is hardly reassured later when Wuthnow writes that being “transcultural” does not mean that “a person from the United States incorporates an African interpretation of the trinity into his or her theology or a Latin American appreciation of the Holy Spirit.” Perhaps not, but outside of America how can this pass off as much of an achievement?

The hardest reading in this book for anyone like myself whose horizon has been expanded by Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and even Philip Jenkins may also be the most rewarding. I refer to the chapter deconstructing the “global Christianity paradigm.” There, Wuthnow agrees that a shift has occurred in Christianity’s center of gravity to Latin America, Africa, and Asia. He also argues that any narrative that uses this demographic fact to diminish the influence of American Christians on the world at large has to be rejected as “a huge conceptual obstacle.” Walls and the others argue something to that effect too. Still, one cannot but be amused at how Wuthnow, who claims to be “methodologically indifferent” to the objective state of affairs that he describes, also feels that his “reformulation of the narrative about global Christianity . . . would be truer to the Christian story itself.”

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The grandson of John A. Mackay has written a significant biography of his grandfather. He has set the story within the historical context in which Mackay lived out his life on three continents and within two cultures: the Anglo-Saxon and the Hispanic. The author tapped into family archives and made good use of two extensive bibliographies.

The broad brushstrokes of the portrait of Mackay have been sketched before by several writers, but this biography presents a much fuller picture of the man and his times. The title of the book was chosen by Mackay himself for an autobiography that he never found the leisure to write. The biography is divided into specific periods of his life in Scotland, Latin America, and the United States. The author has compressed into more than five hundred pages an amazing amount of detail.

As an adolescent in the Scottish Highlands, caught up in the warmth of Scottish evangelicalism, Mackay felt a loving “Hand” on his shoulder that guided him down a road of faithful service. He wrote to Aulden D. Coble on June 9, 1978, “You inquire about The Hand and the Road. I am working quietly at this tome and I hope the text will be completed for publication early next year. In this volume, I hope to enshrine what God has meant to me since He first gripped me in my boyhood years in Northern Scotland and has been my Guide and Guardian for my life’s pilgrimage since then.” In addition to such insights as this, Metzger has also contributed to understanding the life and work of Mackay by providing extensive excerpts from the devotional diaries of Mackay as a secondary and college student, which document his early intellectual and spiritual formation.

Metzger sheds light on Mackay’s life and ministry with an account of the latter’s travels to Madrid to learn Spanish at the age of twenty-five. Mackay said that he was determined “to get the Scotishness [sic] out of me!” He not only learned to speak the language impeccably and embraced a new culture, but he did so to such a degree that he is lovingly remembered by Latin Americans as El escoces con alma latina (“that Scot with a Latin soul”).

Metzger might have given more attention in this biography to certain definitive influences on Mackay’s life, such as the impact of Miguel de Unamuno on...
the young missionary’s “dialogue between religion and culture.” Don Miguel agreed with Mackay that Jesus had the answers but reminded him that he must first listen to hear the questions the culture poses to religion before a true dialogue can be fruitful. Mackay found lodgings in Madrid at La Casa de Residencia, a mission institution of the America Congregationalists for university students who came from the Spanish provinces and Latin America to study in Madrid. Mackay’s friendships with several of the future leaders in Latin America, which he cemented during the brief year in Madrid, served him well as he moved in university circles in the 1920s as the secretary for evangelism of the International Committee of the YMCA.

Metzger makes clear that the success of Mackay as an educational missionary and evangelist among university students (1916–1930) was greatly enhanced by his understanding of Hispanic culture. Mackay often said, “The time in Spain was the definitive cultural experience of my life.” He used la conferencia sin culto, that is, teaching without worship, to get in touch with the spiritual quest of university students. He defined this method as “the delivery of a religious message without the ordinary trappings of a religious service.”
Theological Perspectives on Human Sexuality

“Loader’s aim is to educate and not preach.”
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Loader, a noted researcher on sexuality and religion, looks at New Testament passages on sexuality. He offers a balanced treatment of what scholars say about them, why interpreters say what they say, and how the texts may be interpreted specifically to support a preformed opinion.

“Explores human sexuality as [a part of life as] fundamental as our very breathing.”
— Emilie Townes, Yale Divinity School

“Timely and important. It will become a crucial resource.”
— Ellen T. Armour, Vanderbilt Divinity School

This anthology of essential readings has been revitalized with more than thirty new essays on issues related to sexuality, spirituality, social justice, the intersection of race/racism and sexuality, transgender identity, same-sex marriage, and reproductive health and justice.
Metzger might have given more attention to the great impact of the publication of Mackay’s magnum opus, *The Other Spanish Christ* (1933). It was that book that gave further and unquestioned legitimacy to the presence of Protestantism in the Iberian world. A leading Spanish literary figure, Ortega y Gasset, wrote in his review of the book, “Mackay sets markers and defines relationships of which many other authors were unaware.” Mackay also pointed out the dangers of presenting “a culture-coated Christ with an Anglo-Saxon face!”

The months in 1930 that Mackay spent in Bonn as a student of Karl Barth left a deep impact on the young missionary. It was Barth who helped Mackay transition back to the institutional church after his sojourn with the paraecclesial YMCA. The months in Bonn helped Mackay develop a missiology that became intimately bound to the organized church.

Parts of the biography deepen one’s understanding of some of the unique theological and missiological contributions of Mackay to modern understandings of mission. For example, Mackay took an important and critical stand on the controversial “Laymen’s Inquiry,” a project funded by John D. Rockefeller in the 1930s. Rockefeller’s project addressed the question of how to interpret and conduct mission work in the coming generation. Two liberal thinkers, Ernest Hocking and Pearl Buck, supported the report of the “fact finders,” who inspected missions in India, Burma, China, and Japan. They felt that the day of “foreign missions” was over. Mackay, then a member of the staff of the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions, replied that these evaluations were based on ignorance of theological developments, an inadequate understanding of Christianity, and a superficial interpretation of missionary objectives.

Metzger points to another example of Mackay’s leadership in relation to Mackay’s “A Letter to Presbyterians” (November 1953). This public letter prophetically addressed the accusations made by Sen. Joseph McCarthy and others that some church leaders were “tools of the Communists.” Church historians praised the letter, which Mackay had authored on behalf of the General Council of the Presbyterian Church, as “theologically sound, socially relevant . . . historically correct.” Metzger correctly notes that “the letter was anything but gentle!” Mackay’s letter pointed to the need for a constructive program of action, which presently was being filled by fascist tyranny.

Metzger also helpfully discusses the fact that Mackay weathered a great deal of criticism because of his challenge to Cardinal Spellman about certain aspects of Roman Catholic “clericalism,” of which Mackay was convinced were designed to undercut the constitutional guarantees of the separation of church and state.
Mackay’s enthusiastic support of “The Friends of Spain” committee, which he chaired, brought him a great deal of criticism, since it was reported that the Spanish Loyalists “were infiltrated with Communists.” Despite such accusations, Mackay never wavered in his support of the new Spanish Republic.

Mackay experienced many challenges in his long tenure as president of Princeton Theological Seminary. Metzger does a good job of lifting up the many advances made during his administration. This reader, however, would like to know more of the administrative problems Mackay faced beyond the challenge of giving the seminary a fresh theological orientation. In relation to the Princeton years, Metzger also demonstrates how Mackay’s deep pastoral concern was always evident in the graciousness he showed toward his neighbors, particularly toward the families of Albert Einstein and Robert Oppenheimer. The Oppenheimers were shunned by the Princeton community because of Oppenheimer’s role in the development of the atomic bomb and because of his political affiliations. The Mackays hosted a welcoming event on campus for him and his family.

Metzger also helpfully portrays Mackay in his retirement years as he continued to serve the world church in many ways. One example of Mackay’s later service is his visit to the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba in the early 1960s. He helped that small but influential denomination navigate successfully the dangerous shoals of church-state relations amid profound revolutionary change.

This biography of the founder and first editor of Theology Today should stand the test of time. Metzger has painted an abiding portrait of his grandfather, one of the spiritual giants of the missionary and ecumenical movements of the twentieth century.

John H. Sinclair

The Child in the Bible

Marcia J. Bunge, general editor; Terence E. Fretheim and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, coeditors


Like its predecessor (The Child in Christian Thought), The Child in the Bible offers readers a fascinating overview of religious thinking about children and childhood. The essays in parts 1 and 2 primarily focus on how children are portrayed or used metaphorically in specific books of the Bible. Claire McGin-
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Anthony C. Thielston

“This is that rare book which it is simply a pleasure to read. An ideal textbook, it is provocative, wise, astonishingly informed, scrupulously evenhanded in its handling of material. Elephants may swim here and children may safely paddle. It is truly Tony Thielston’s legacy and the uncluttered distillation of a lifetime’s study of hermeneutics. I cannot praise this book sufficiently highly.”
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nis borrows Phyllis Trible’s “texts of terror” approach in exploring the messages of Exodus for and about children. Bill Brown distinguishes traditional folk sayings about child rearing from the actual texts on the topic in Proverbs. John Carroll highlights the ways in which the Gospel of Luke both underscores and challenges the commandment that children honor their parents. Margaret MacDonald explores early Christian parenting practices as represented in Colossians and Ephesians. Part 3 takes a more thematic approach, addressing issues such as adoption, the imago Dei, and the kingdom of God in relation to children. All of the essays demonstrate careful attention to both the historical context in which the focus texts were written and the contemporary context in which we as readers hear Scripture speak today.

While each essay clearly stands on its own as a credible interpretation of biblical material, Marcia Bunge’s introduction to the volume alerts the reader to six common themes that emerge when the essays are considered as a whole. Some of these themes are predictable given the vast historical time span represented by the Scriptures. For example, the terms “child” and “childhood” are employed in a wide variety of ways depending on the biblical authors’ rhetorical needs, and the views of children are complex and multifaceted. Others pick up on ideas that make sense intuitively but have been obscured by folk wisdom or previous oversimplified interpretations of the Bible (e.g., that child rearing is a complex and multilayered process and that adults have a variety of obligations with regard to children). Another highlights the complexity of children’s identities and social roles. Perhaps most importantly, Bunge observes that the essays demonstrate how “children and childhood are integrally connected to other central biblical themes,” which underscores the importance of continued theological reflection on children in the church.

One essay especially likely to intrigue readers is Reidar Aasgaard’s discussion of Pauline childhood rhetoric. Aasgaard acknowledges the complex and sometimes seemingly contradictory theological meanings that Paul associates with issues like parent-child relations, being a child, fetal status, and infancy. He suggests that the reader consider Paul’s teachings in terms of “semantic fields” associated with “kinship, social position, formation, and belonging,” which helpfully situates Paul’s rhetoric within the teaching context and goals of each statement. Readers may want to begin their exploration of part 2 with this essay as an orientation to the historical period of the New Testament writings, rather than with the commentaries on the Gospel texts.

Be forewarned that this text assumes at least some familiarity with the technical vocabulary of critical interpretation methods. The authors clearly antici-
pate an audience of seminarians and divinity school graduates. Nevertheless, most essays are accessible to the curious lay leader. Greek and Hebrew references are either parenthetical or explained in the text, and the authors place extended technical discussions in footnotes. The subject and scriptural indices are a bonus for readers who want to find commentary on particular issues or Bible verses quickly.

Karen-Marie Yust
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