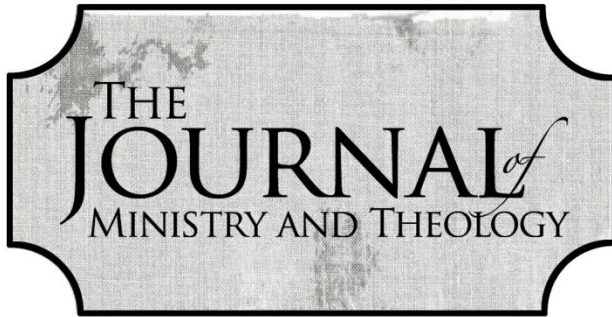


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2 Timothy 2:2

*And the things that you have heard from me
among many witnesses, commit these
to faithful men who will be able
to teach others also.*

Preaching the Book of Revelation

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INTRODUCTION

Friedrich Engels, the nineteenth-century Communist colleague of Karl Marx, once wrote the following about the book of Revelation:

Christianity got hold of the masses, exactly as modern socialism does, under the shape of a variety of sects, and still more of conflicting individual views—some clearer, some more confused, these latter the great majority—but all opposed to the ruling system, to “the powers that be.”

Take, for instance, our Book of Revelation, of which we shall see that, it is the *simplest and clearest book of the whole New Testament*. (emphasis added)¹

In the context of Engels’s statement, the book of Revelation is about class struggle and is the earliest book written in the New Testament. With that lens, he incredibly asserts that the book is the easiest book to understand in all of the New Testament. Thus, he gives us another reason not to trust Communists! Their perception appears to be somewhat lacking.

However, dispensationalists normally do not make the mistake of going to the other extreme—making the book of Revelation so hard to understand that only the technical elite among the scholars can interpret it for the rest of us in the pews of our churches. Instead the dispensational tradition has acknowledged the difficulties of interpreting such a book while at the same time believing that the common man can come to

¹ Friedrich Engels, “The Book of Revelation” in *On Religion* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (reprint; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1964), 206.

many right conclusions with a correct understanding of proper hermeneutics. In this light, what follows is a discussion of many specific issues that should assist in the understanding and preaching of the book of Revelation.

Hermeneutics, Literal Interpretation, and Apocalyptic Genre²

Perhaps the first issue that needs to be examined is the claim that the apocalyptic genre of the book of Revelation makes it impossible to practice a straightforward, literal hermeneutic.³ If this be so, then the preaching of sermons from this book is greatly affected. Sandy represents one approach to how apocalyptic genre should shift the interpreter's eye:

From Revelation 12-13 we learned that an apocalyptic vision may actually be a sermon in disguise. We must not focus on deciphering the bizarre details and miss the underlying message. Reading apocalyptic, then, is best done from a distance. Like ancient hearers, we need to take in the sweep of the narrative. Apocalyptic uses allusions and symbols that may be peculiar but in the larger context combine to depict scenes of unusual vividness

² In this section, I will not deal with the other genres that exist in the book of Revelation. Most commentators acknowledge that the prophetic and epistolary genres are also part of what the interpreter/preacher must skillfully handle; see nondispensationalist G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 37.

³ In my use of the concept of literal hermeneutics here in this context, I do not mean the use of a literal expression as opposed to the use of a figure of speech or symbol. I mean what is normally meant by dispensationalists, the practice of grammatical-historical interpretation where the meaning of the author as conveyed in the text is the aim of interpretation. In this approach, meaning is textually driven. However, in my reference to Brent Sandy below, the perceptive reader will see that Sandy tends to use *literal* to refer to something different than figurative. So we are focusing on different uses of the term.

and emotion. But the message can easily be missed if the strokes of the painter's brush are scrutinized individually. What did the author intend to communicate? What did the audience need to hear? The truth comes through vividly when we view from a distance.

How does the language of apocalyptic work? It tends to be more allusive than precise, more impressionistic than realistic, more fantastic than literal. Consequently we will not understand the parts of the story until we have read the last page.⁴

The elements of Sandy's statement have implications for understanding and preaching. Interpreting the many details is to be avoided. He is worried that the reader will miss the big picture if he concentrates on trying to understand the meaning of the various seals, trumpets, bowls, and other symbols throughout the book. Every dispensationalist will agree that the holistic picture of the book and its various sections is important. However, the details matter and have been given for a reason. The whole is made up of these many parts, each contributing to the overall message. The various specific features have referential content that must be observed so that the text truly says something.

The symbolic woman in Revelation 12 serves as an illustration of Sandy's point. Sandy asserts that the woman could be Israel or it could be the church. There is no singular reference. It is ambiguous.⁵ In his thinking, the identification of the woman as Israel or the church is of no consequence and is an example of trying to interpret bizarre details in the text unnecessarily. An illustration of this can be found in Sandy's

⁴ D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 128.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 125. Sandy's claim here is based partly upon the understanding that Revelation 12:17 cannot apply to the Jews. But it is not unreasonable, in light of the 144,000 Jews who have already been mentioned in chapter seven, to see the offspring of the woman who follow God and Jesus in 12:17 to be Jews who have come to Christ during the tribulation period.

outline of the apocalyptic sermon found in Revelation 12-13 for which the details are of minor importance:

Persecution is a *small part* of a big picture:
a cosmic battle rages between good and evil
Jesus was a victim (Rev. 12:4)
Jesus' followers are victims (Rev. 13:7)

Persecution is a *big part* of our sanctification:
God is preparing his bride for a star-studded wedding
"This calls for patient endurance"
"This calls for faithfulness"

Persecution is a *doomed part* of the future:
God will soon destroy every evil in every corner of the universe
"The accuser of our brothers has been hurled down"
"They overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony."⁶

This summarization comes across like the sermons, dispensational and nondispensational, where the preacher runs to application before he has thoroughly done his exegetical work. Can the interpreter say with certainty that the identity of the woman does not matter? If the woman is a symbol for Israel like most dispensationalists admit, it changes the reading of the text dramatically. Only those who already reject the woman as definitely Israel can say that it does not matter.⁷ If the woman is

⁶ Ibid., 123.

⁷ I am leaving aside here the interpretation that some Roman Catholics give of the woman in Revelation 12 as Mary. One can see how the language of the text (a woman who has the Christ child) could be used for such a conclusion. However, such a reading is not comprehensive of the entire context. For example, Revelation 12:1 asserts that the woman is a symbol, which is difficult to fit into a Marian interpretation. That the Marian view is the official view of the Roman Catholic Church may be surmised by the following statement

Israel, then the role the Jews play in the overall scope of Revelation is affirmed and nationally so. Such a conclusion dovetails nicely with the focus on easily understood details such as Jerusalem and its temple given in the previous chapter.

What are readers to make of such a discussion about apocalyptic genre forcing us to downplay the details? If readers are truly dispensational, they need to avoid the radical nature of this approach. While they can certainly make sure that they understand and preach the big ideas that the intensified prophecies yield, they cannot cast aside exegetical details as of little consequence. Furthermore, in the particular example of the symbolic woman in Revelation 12, proper exegesis shows that she is not a small unnecessary detail after all. The passage shows Satan's deep-seated anti-Semitism, something that does not really come out in Sandy's sermon outline above. Thus, it may be a safe conclusion to say that overdosing on the nature of apocalyptic genre in such texts may lead the interpreter and preacher to miss necessary components that affect the sermon. In the end, preachers should not allow the category of apocalyptic genre to so color their thinking that they undermine the literal interpretation of the text.⁸ In addition, preachers

on the Vatican website: "The feast of the Assumption and the Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary contain a reading from the Book of Revelation (12, 1-6), which describes the threat of the dragon against the woman giving birth"; for the context of this statement, see "Christian Faith and Demonology," <http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19750626_fede-cristiana-demonologia_en.html> (accessed 22 September 2012).

⁸ I often tell my students that literal interpretation of texts logically precedes genre recognition (this is not something original with me). The focus of dispensationalists on literal hermeneutics may make this more important for their tradition. However, the entire issue of genre definition and the meaning of the apocalyptic category are not settled questions in spite of all of the discussions involving them; see dispensationalist Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 23-29. Compare to nondispensationalist Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical

should not let the so-called difficulties of such genre considerations scare them away from preaching such a large and pertinent part of the word of God.

Literary Structure of the Book of Revelation

While there are always debates over the structure and outline of Bible books, the arguments over the book of Revelation in this regard appear at times to be bizarre. At an ETS workshop, I once heard Warren Gage of Knox Seminary argue that interpretation of the book of Revelation was tied significantly to Joshua by means of typology. The number seven was prominent as can be surmised. Beyond that, he argued that the whore of Babylon was the bride of Christ, the church. If I understand him correctly, the way that works out is that Babylon is redeemed and becomes the New Jerusalem. A literal reading of the text would never surface such an outline or development.⁹

Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 12-18. It is probably best to suggest that genre *classifies* the reading of a text rather than *regulates* the reading of a text. David P. Scaer is surely correct when he states the following thesis: “Though in classifying genre, we use secular norms, ultimately a particular genre classification must be determined by how it fits the biblical data and not any outside rigid secular norms” (“A Response to Genre Criticism – Sensus Literalis,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible: Papers from ICBI Summit II*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1984), 212.

⁹ There may be no individual book in the Bible for which its date affects interpretation more than the Apocalypse. This means that the pastor who is giving an expository series on the book of Revelation must do the detailed study in background issues. No doubt, structure is affected. A preterist is not likely to have a similar outline to a dispensational futurist. For a preterist view of the book of Revelation see R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 131-49. Due to space limitations, we will not address the dating question for this article. One can find the preterist arguments for an early date of the book in Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem*

A more sane and familiar opponent to the literal approach is the classical amillennial recapitulation view (sometimes called progressive parallelism) often associated with Augustine.¹⁰ This view is not to be confused with dispensationalists who sometimes see some recapitulation particularly between the trumpets and the bowls. The amillennial recapitulation view sees seven sections in Revelation: 1-3, 4-7, 8-11, 12-14, 15-16, 17-19, and 20-22. Each of these sections essentially starts with the first advent. Thus, in the later sections, there is a return to a discussion of things beginning with the first advent so that the present age is recapitulated in some form. It is convenient for this view that Revelation 19 ends a section and chapter 20 begins a new one. That way the thousand years of Revelation 20 is a discussion of the present age which started when Jesus came the first time.

One should readily recognize that the difference in preaching would be astounding if the recapitulation structure is adopted. Several preliminary reasons suggest that the amillennial recapitulation view is untenable: (1) it does not match the outline given by the book itself in Revelation 1:19; (2) it does not match the Hebraic narrative feel for the book (the Greek word for *and* occurs over 1100 times reminding of the Hebrew Waw-consecutive); (3) it makes it more difficult to correlate with Daniel and the Olivet Discourse; and (4) it does not handle well the binding of Satan in Revelation 20. The dispensationalist will rest assured that his outline based upon 1:19 (within Revelation itself instead of forced upon the text) will yield structure that is much more easily outlined and proclaimed. The *things you have seen, the things which are, and*

Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989). The counter arguments for a late date can be found in Mark L. Hitchcock, "A Defense of the Domitianic Date of the Book of Revelation," (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005).

¹⁰ My first academic exposure to this view was Anthony A. Hoekema, "Amillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 156-59.

the things which shall take place after these things give a rather simple outline. The remainder of the book, as every dispensationalist knows, follows this structure and maintains the futuristic posture of the book. Preaching can flow historically and consecutively as a result.

Nonetheless, this conclusion is not always accepted concerning the structure cited in Revelation 1:19. Beale comments,

Though this chronological perspective is undoubtedly a popular understanding of Rev. 1:19, making chs. 4-22 come alive with tantalizing insight into future world events, there are weighty problems with this understanding of the verse. The main objection is that it interprets Revelation without sufficient sensitivity to its literary form, giving a straightforward, literal reading of the book, rather than using a figurative approach, which would be more appropriate to the book's symbolic genre.¹¹

While there are excellent insights within Beale's commentary on Revelation—especially the encouragement for all interpreters to be steeped in the OT background passages that inform the various passages in the book of Revelation¹²—this casting aside of 1:19 simply because there are a lot of symbols in the book largely misses the point. Even if there are many symbols in the book, the interpreter should still treat those symbols in a straightforward way. In addition, it is not at all an assured truth that symbols would change an outline. The structure of the book of Revelation does not rise or fall based upon any genre designation.

Therefore, when considering the preaching of the book in light of its literary structure, one can see great advantages to the literal approach with its outline found in 1:19:

- (1) The text itself determines the direction the interpreter will take as he moves along;

¹¹ Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 161.

¹² *Ibid.*, xix.

- (2) The overall structure helps to locate the details of the text while the details help to inform the whole;
- (3) There is no necessity to contriving an interpretation – it can all be textually based;
- (4) The actual exposition in this scheme makes absolute sense – there is nothing necessarily foggy about it;
- (5) Exposition is actually possible line by line and text by text.

The last point is quite serious. The dispensational preacher can stand in the pulpit or classroom and exposit with confidence, no matter what the non-literalist scholars say. So, pastors dare not leave out the book of Revelation on their preaching schedules.

Practical Advice for Preaching the Book of Revelation

In this section, several areas will be reviewed to give some pragmatic direction to the preacher of the book of Revelation. These points largely come from ministry experience in teaching the book of Revelation in local church settings and interaction with our current culture.

Negativity and Hope

Years ago, one of my best friends attended an adult Sunday School class I was teaching. He served for a time as the head deacon of the church where I was the lead pastor. We spent several weeks going through the book of Revelation line by line, text by text. I tried to do justice both to the details and the big sweep of the message of the book. We were in the section covering the details of the tribulation, the largest section of the book (Rev 6 to 19). After a few weeks in class slugging away through the seals, trumpets, and judgments, my friend asked me a question: “How long are we going to be in this section?” Then he commented, “We need to get out of here and into something more positive. This is depressing!” I thought about that and about my preaching through some of the OT prophets. These

sections of the Bible could fairly be described as negative in tone. One pagan friend of mine characterized the OT prophets this way: “Woe! Things are going to be bad!”

These kinds of responses forced me to reflect on my own bent to give the negative details. Yet God’s Word as a whole is certainly balanced. There is hope as well as judgment. Lament Psalms usually point to hope in the end. The prophets, although they overwhelmingly give judgment themes, often end up on a theme of hope (e.g., Amos 9). Could it be that my zeal for the judgment details of the book of Revelation was leaving a false impression? Was I communicating that I delighted in God zapping unbelievers? Worse—was I conveying the notion that God sadistically treats the earthdwellers in Revelation like an eight-year-old boy tearing wings off of flies?

Before you go too far in response to what I have just said, I am not trying to get you to follow Rob Bell.¹³ I have already said that the details of the text matter. This means *all* the details matter. Whether the specifics are negative or positive, they are all God’s divine revelation to us. We cannot duck the questions of overwhelming tribulation that brings death or the subject of the lake that burns with fire—forever. These are realities taught in the book of Revelation. Christians believe it is from God; so they believe it is the truth. Yet we must be careful that we do not give the impression that they are ecstatic that the world is someday going to hell. True Christians, whether dispensational or not, must mourn the fate of those who do not share their faith in Christ. True Christians rejoice that God’s will is done to be sure. But their love for people should still shine even when preaching texts like Revelation 6-19.

One way to make sure to do this is to keep the hope of Revelation 21-22 in front of an audience every time preachers stand to speak on the book. Even when they are wading through the judgments, pain, and death of the tribulation, their churches need to hear about the hope at the end, and they need to hear it constantly perhaps by an overview at the beginning or end of sermons on the book. After all, the book was written to

¹³ Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

give first-century Christians hope during the Domitian persecutions. A similar hope is available to every Christian since that time. As Walvoord reminds, “No book of Scripture more specifically sets before the believer in Christ his eternal hope in the new heaven and earth and gives greater assurance of God’s triumph over wickedness, rebellion, and unbelief.”¹⁴ As a result of such considerations, I have made a conscious effort to improve my preaching of the harsh texts by appropriately highlighting future hope along the way.

Apologetics and the Book of Revelation

One of the major themes in the Apocalypse is theodicy, although it is rarely preached in any definitive fashion. This is significant as a matter of apologetics as believers encounter a culture that is increasingly negative toward the harsh things of the Christian faith or the teachings of Jesus. It is also important as a matter of exposition of the text. However, believers sometimes become enamored with the overall progression of the book and forget that the text gives answers to help believers and others reflect on these issues.

Perhaps the best way to proceed is to remember the *New York Times* editorial from several years ago by Nicholas Kristof.¹⁵ In criticizing Tim LaHaye’s Left Behind series, Kristof complains, “The ‘Left Behind’ series, the best-selling novels for adults in the U.S., enthusiastically depict Jesus returning to

¹⁴ John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 33.

¹⁵ Nicholas Kristof, “Apocalypse (Almost) Now,” *New York Times*, 24 November 2004; <<http://donswaim.com/nytimes.apocalypse.html>> (accessed 7 July 2005). Kristof reacts to statements in Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Glorious Appearing* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 2004). I have responded to Kristof in Mike Stallard, “The Tendency to Softness in Postmodern Attitudes about God, War, and Man,” *JMAT* 10 (Spring 2006): 94-101. Some of the language here has been taken from my earlier article.

slaughter everyone who is not a born-again Christian. The world's Hindus, Muslims, Jews and agnostics, along with many Catholics and Unitarians, are heaved into everlasting fire." Kristof goes on sarcastically to note, "Gosh, what an uplifting scene!" Here the harshness of the second coming of Christ is highlighted. This is a truth that preachers cannot avoid in their preaching. It is harsh; when Jesus comes, he will kill people (Rev 19). We should admit it instead of trying to get around it.

One should note at the outset of this discussion that a reasonable person might ask the question, "What gives God the right to pour all this negative judgment upon the world?" or "What gives God the right to kill people?" After all, he does not normally allow humans to kill people when they want to do so. Fortunately, the book of Revelation itself contains some keys to how readers should respond to the negativity of the second coming and of all the tribulation period that precedes it. This provides a basis for how believers defend their faith when unbelievers have such questions for them.

First, the book of Revelation reveals that the people who are judged severely in the book deserve it. Notice the wording found within the third bowl or vial judgment:

And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous art Thou, who art and who wast, O Holy One, because Thou didst judge these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink. They deserve it." (Rev 16:5-6)

This plain declaration is framed by the statement that God's ways are just and true (v. 7). This claim is made elsewhere as well: the song of Moses (15:3) and relative to the judgments upon Babylon (19:2). What gives God the right to do these judgments? People deserve it. God is absolutely right when he judges in the tribulation, at the second coming, and in the lake of fire. This will not necessarily convince unbelievers by itself. But the discussion here opens up issues of sin and guilt that the unsaved need to hear. It also allows believers to learn a concrete answer given by the text itself instead of languishing in a state of not knowing anything to say.

There are two other answers given to this question by the book of Revelation. They are found in Revelation 4-5. These chapters are often preached in terms of worship. There is certainly much in these chapters directly stated about our need to worship God. Preaching should take note of this textual observation. Nonetheless, this is not the main idea of these chapters. These two chapters are the introduction to the details of the tribulation that begins in chapter 6 and ends in chapter 19. In context, they answer the question, "What gives God the right to pour out the tribulation upon the earth?"

The first answer is that God is the Creator. Readers are told by the four living creatures at the throne of God that he is the Holy One who is above all things and who is everlasting (4:8). The crescendo of the chapter ends with the worship statement of the twenty-four elders who are casting their crowns before God's throne. The declaration is something we sing in our churches:

Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created. (4:9)

To be sure, the entire chapter highlights the fact that God is worthy of our worship. However, notice the reason that is given. He is the Creator of all things. It is his will that governs the existence of those on the earth, not their own wills. In the context of the book of Revelation at this point, this chapter is part of the introduction to what Jesus called in Matthew 24:21 the worst time ever (cp. Joel 2:2, Dan 12:1). The placement here of the reminder that God is the superior One who creates by his own will shows that God has a right to pour out his wrath in the manner described in chapters 6-19.

Chapter 5, however, gives a clearer statement of these aspects of theodicy. The scroll sealed with seven seals appears in the right hand of God (v. 1). The question, "Who is worthy to open the book (scroll) and to break its seals?" is proclaimed by a strong angel (v. 2). No one was able to open the scroll or even look at it (v. 3) so that the apostle mourns (v. 4). Readers are

then told that the Lion of the tribe of Judah from David's line has overcome so that he can open the scroll (v. 5).

The following section of chapter 5 gives the well-known portrait of this Davidic personage, not as the Lion, but the Lamb who was slain. This, of course, is Jesus Christ our wonderful Lord. The worship song is given here much like it had been in the previous chapter:

Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth. (vv. 9-10)

What is often missed in preaching is the focus at the beginning of this song. Christ is worthy to take the book and open its seals. In context, just what does this mean? Does it mean he has the right to read what is on the scroll? This would be part of it, but it is much more. Breaking the seals in chapter 6 launches the terrible and awesome content of the scroll. To break a seal is to unleash those particular and horrifying judgments upon the earth. Therefore, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" is a question that could be worded, "What gives God the right to pour out his wrath upon the earth?" Only Christ the Redeemer who shed his blood for humans can do that. But in the book of Revelation, Christ is clearly God. So, chapters 4-5 introduce the tribulation period by reminding us at the outset that God has the right to pour out his judgments because he is the Creator, and through Christ, he redeems. This gives all believers a practical witness since the horrors of the cross are brought into the discussion at this point.

To summarize the theodicy aspect of the teaching of the book of Revelation, God has the right to pour out his wrath upon the earth for three reasons:

- (1) The people on earth deserve it;
- (2) God is the Creator who can do with his creation what he desires;

(3) God through Christ provides redemption by the death of Christ.

This theodicy angle in the book is often forgotten. In light of the postmodern tendency to reject biblical teaching at points where it appears harsh, dispensationalists need to spend a little more time here.

The Deity of Christ

Another matter of apologetics is the doctrine of the deity of Christ which is prominent in the book of Revelation. This is not surprising in light of the Apostle John's involvement in the book of Revelation and the similar focus in his gospel. The Jehovah's Witnesses always compel those who hold to the deity of Christ to deal with Revelation 3:14 where Jesus is called "the beginning of the creation of God."¹⁶ The response is easy enough. The term *beginning* used by the KJV and NASB can also carry the idea of source or ruler.¹⁷ If Jesus is the source of creation, he is the Creator, a credential that moves in the direction of his deity.

Other features in the book of Revelation reinforce the notion of the deity of Christ. The sum total of the references highlights the fact that this theme of Christ's identity is a major point in the Apocalypse. For example, the portrait of Christ in the midst of the seven churches given in the first chapter (1:13-15) correlates to the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7 rather than the picture of the Son of Man from that OT account. Notice the table on the next page.

¹⁶ For an example of Jehovah's Witnesses literature dealing with this passage, see *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn, NY: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), 14.

¹⁷ For the range of evangelical understandings of Revelation 3:14, see Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 138; Osborn, *Revelation*, 204-05; Beale, *Book of Revelation*, 297-301. The same title of "beginning" used in Revelation 21:6 in the overall construction "the beginning and the end" suggests that the deity of Christ is not diminished by the term.

Ancient of Days (Daniel 7)	Son of Man (Revelation 1)
Hair like pure wool (v. 9)	Hair is white like wool (v. 14)
Vesture like white snow (v. 9)	Hair is white like snow (v. 14)
A river of fire was coming was flowing and coming out from him (v. 9)	Eyes like a flame of fire (v. 14)
His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire (v. 9)	Feet like burnished bronze, when it had been caused to glow in a furnace (v. 15)
	Voice like the sound of many waters (v. 15)
	Golden girdle on his breast (v. 13)

One cannot escape the conclusion that the Apocalypse is identifying Jesus Christ as God. Added to this stark comparison, other features exist in the book of Revelation to show the same truth:

The statement by God that he is “the Alpha and the Omega” (1:8) while Jesus also calls himself “the first and the last” (1:17);¹⁸

Christ accepts worship without chastising John (1:17-18), while an angel from God refuses to do so (22:8-9), commanding the worship of God only;

Christ’s name is the Word of God (19:13). Within Johannine theology this implies the deity of Christ (cp. John 1:1);

Jesus, the Lamb of God, appears to sit with the Father on his throne (Rev 3:21; cp. Rev 5:6).¹⁹ This idea would be akin to blasphemy if Jesus were not deity;

¹⁸ There is a textual problem with Revelation 1:11. The TR version adds “I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last.” This would provide an additional reference to be compared to 1:8.

In Revelation 20 there is the continued “closeness” of Christ and God (see v. 6) that reminds of the earlier teaching that the Lamb of God was on the throne of God. This teaching is also seen in the use of temple imagery. Both God and the Lamb constitute the temple in the eternal state (21:22). This makes no sense apart from the full deity of Christ;

Near the end of the book, Jesus once again declares himself to be “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (22:13; cp. 22:16). Since God himself is called the “Almighty” associated with the above descriptions and since he is referred to as the Almighty in the book at least nine times (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), the Alpha and Omega label for Christ cannot escape the thought of deity.

Thus, the dispensational (or any evangelical) preacher must include the accurate identity of the one who is pouring out the events of the tribulation. As Arno Gaebelein once wrote,

It is here where many expositions of Revelation have missed the mark. Occupied chiefly with the symbols of the Book, the mysteries, the judgments and the promised consummation, they have neglected to emphasize sufficiently Him, who throughout this Book is pre-eminently the center of everything. The reader of Revelation does well to read first of all through the entire Book with this object in mind, to see what is said of our Lord, of His Person, His present and His future Glory.²⁰

Focus on the judgments themselves should not divert attention from the one who gives them. While the book’s purpose is to give hope to its readers today in light of tomorrow,

¹⁹ For an excellent discussion of this issue in the book of Revelation, see Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 388-90.

²⁰ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible* (New York: Publication Office “Our Hope,” n.d.), 4:195.

it does so by elevating the one to whom believers must look for their coming deliverance.

Setting Dates and Sensationalizing the Prophecy of the Book of Revelation

As has already been mentioned, dispensationalists are futurists. This approach to the book of Revelation flowing from a commitment to literal interpretation means that dispensationalists believe that the events described in Revelation 4-22 are in the future from the current historical perspective. The events have not been fulfilled in the past leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 (preterism). Christians today are not living inside the bubble of fulfillment as they experience God's ongoing fulfillment of the seals, trumpets, and bowls in history (historicism). The teachings of 4-19 are not just elaborate expressions of portraits of the battle between good and evil that occurs in every generation (idealism). The book teaches a *future* tribulation, second coming, millennium, and eternal state (futurism). If this be so, then it is paramount that dispensationalists honor who they are. A futurist does not set dates. A futurist does not spend hours upon hours of time trying to fit the details of prophecy into current events or vice versa.

The issue is a sensitive one. The above description is not meant to put a damper on interest in the prophetic word. Dispensationalists should be excited that Jesus is coming again and that it might be soon. Current events like those constantly occurring with in the Middle East have a place in believers' hearts and minds. It is possible that current believers are living in the setup for the end time days. Israel is in the land and must be so for the tribulation (Rev 6-19), second coming (Rev 19), and kingdom (Rev 20-22) to come on the scene of history. Believers should all be filled with hope and excitement that they may soon see their Lord face to face in the pretrib rapture. But if the Lord delays his coming for believers beyond what we desire, we must continue our hard work for his coming kingdom while accepting the divine decision.

The real problem comes from knowing that the people in evangelical churches are reading all kinds of literature and watching all kinds of television preachers. Many of them now have what can be called a “syncretistic prophetic mind.” Their eschatological beliefs are in disarray. Then if pastors who preach to them show the least little bit of hesitation about their conviction in literal interpretation and its consequence of futurism, they will make the problem worse. At best, they will be “a noisy gong or a clanging symbol.”

Terminology Overload

A few years ago as I was teaching a seminary class on the books of Daniel and Revelation, I surveyed several modern evangelical commentaries on how they understood the term “angel” (messenger) in Revelation 1-3 and the expression elder in Revelation 4-5. To my amazement, most of the scholars held that the angels were elders and the elders were angels! Think a minute about how that might come across in an expository series of sermons to those who have not been trained in theology. I have no problem with this interpretation necessarily. I am currently writing a commentary on Revelation. You can buy my book when it is done to find out how I decide!

However, to explain the meaning of these terms in a church sermon, pastors must do their homework. Caution is in order. It is quite easy for parishioners to think they are getting some so-called expert gibberish. The preacher cannot rush to conclusions but must weigh the options. Terms like this as well as others in the book lend themselves to a lack of clarity or confusion even if one preaches them correctly. If the preacher gives too little detail, people will leave scratching their heads. The presence of so many figures of speech and symbols intensifies this problem. Therefore, the dispensational preacher must pay attention to the possible communication problems he will have by the nature of the terminology that is being used.

CONCLUSION

The book of Revelation is a rare treasure that sometimes scares people. Wrestling with its pages in the context of a wrong hermeneutic can lead to the voicing of strange words. A case in point is the historicist understanding of Revelation given in a book titled *I Want To Be Left Behind*.²¹ This is part of the problem with the book. Many preachers have avoided the book of Revelation due to its imagined difficulty and strangeness. The challenge of the book should be acknowledged but not surrendered to. H. A. Ironside opens his lectures on Revelation this way:

It is certainly cause for deep regret that to so many Christians the Book of Revelation seems to be what God never intended it should be – a sealed book . . . it is clearly evident that this portion of Holy Scripture was given for our instruction and edification, but thousands of the Lord's people permit themselves to be robbed of blessing by ignoring it.²²

Perhaps the Lord in his wisdom knew the difficulties readers would have so he pronounced a blessing early on to those who would read, hear, and obey the words of this marvelous book (1:3). It is the Bible book, after all, that contains God's greatest promise: "He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away" (21:4). Why would a preacher not want to preach this book?

²¹ Ted Noel, *I Want To Be Left Behind* (Maitland, FL: BibleOnly, 2003). Noel is a Seventh-Day Adventist.

²² H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (reprint; Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1973), 7.

Self-Defense and the Christian

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AN EXPLANATION

For several years I have been becoming increasingly uneasy regarding the violence in our country that has been expressed in terroristic attacks in public settings, especially in schools and churches.¹ The Virginia Tech shooting was the first specific situation that raised these questions in my mind, and it culminated with the theater shooting in Colorado the summer of 2012.² I began to consider whether it was wise and prudent for Christians to prepare themselves for self-defense in terms of both training and equipment, for their own protection, yes, but also for the protection of family and those with and among whom they might minister and fellowship on a regular basis. The questions that arose were not the sort that are typically bandied about on the web, but rather were theological. Does a

¹ This article was originally written for a Faculty Forum at Baptist Bible Seminary on April 14, 2014.

² More recently, of course, has been the shooting of elementary children and teachers in Sandy Hook, Connecticut on December 14, 2012. Thought that shooting gained the most attention at the time due to the ages of the victims, it was not different in principle from previous mass shootings, though the politicians used the emotional leverage of children being shot to advance their agendas. Such shootings tend to disappear from the public eye not long after the initial excitement dies down and another such shooting occurs. How many people now remember the Amish school children who were murdered in 2006? Or that it was the third such school shooting that week? There were multiple school shootings in 2013.

Christian have the right to carry some means of lethal force and to use such to defend himself or others in the face of an attack?³

I was aware of little discussion at this very personal level. I was familiar with the theological/ethical questions at the national level—the questions revolving around just war versus pacifism—but little dealing with personal self-defense. Kevin Bauder's essay⁴ following the Colorado shooting finally nudged me to decide that I must address these questions for myself. As a result, I began reading whatever I could find in print on the subject. The more I read, the more I realized that there was a wide spectrum of credibility in what has already been written. There was much that was sensational, belligerent, and poorly informed. There was also a substantial gap in credible biblical perspectives. As I continued to read the self-defense literature, I began to identify credible authorities (persons, organizations, books) on the legal and pragmatic issues involved,⁵ but found

³ In this context I am speaking about *American* Christians (since many others are citizens of countries that do not allow them that option). I refer also to a gun (typically a handgun) since that is the most effective and most common choice for self-defense weapons. The principles involved are the same regardless of the specifics, whether a baton or a knife carried by a Christian today or a sword in earlier centuries.

⁴ "Lessons from Colorado," *In the Nick of Time*, 27 July 2012, <<http://www.centalseminary.edu/resources/nick-of-time/in-the-nick-of-time-archive/390-lessons-from-colarado>> (accessed 17 April 2014).

⁵ Two of the key players here are Massad Ayoob and the Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network. The most important of Ayoob's books are *In the Gravest Extreme: The Role of the Firearm in Personal Protection* (Concord, NH: Police Bookshelf, 1980) and *Gun Digest Book of Concealed Carry*, 2nd ed. (Iola, WI: Gun Digest Books, 2012). There are some other reliable writers as well as helpful organizations, but the two cited here appear to me to be the standard by which others are judged. See also the brief bibliography of recommended reading at the end of the article.

nothing substantive of a theological nature.⁶ Although as I initially wrote this long introductory paragraph, I had not yet completed my study (indeed, it had hardly begun), I realized that this was far more complex a subject with far greater ramifications than I had ever suspected. The legal implications alone were sobering in the extreme. Some of my journey I share below.

INTRODUCTION

In which of the following situations, if any, would you consider it acceptable or appropriate for a Christian to exercise lethal force⁷ or to condone such force by a fellow Christian?

- (1) A foreign nation launches an unprovoked military attack on another country for the sole purpose of gaining control of either valuable natural resources or to gain control of a strategic military position. This is not the threat of such an attack, but an actual invasion in which force is being used and people are being killed, both military and civilian. Do the people of the nation under attack have the right to defend themselves with military force even if that means that many of the invaders will

⁶ The best attempt to present a biblical view of the subject that I have found thus far is Richard Seim, "The Bible and Self-Defense," an article in the newsletter of the Armed Citizen Legal Defense Network, 2008, available at <<http://www.armedcitizennetwork.org/the-bible-and-self-defense>> (accessed 19 January 2013). Though the article contains some helpful material, it does not reflect an adequately nuanced view of the relevance of the OT. Similar in this regard is Charl Van Wyk, *Shooting Back: The Right and Duty of Self-Defense* (Torrance, CA: WND Books, 2006).

⁷ By "lethal force" I mean the use of physical resistance in an effort to halt a violent attack which resistance has the potential to (and may) result in the death of another person. The term, of course, could also refer to an aggressor's use of force, but in the present context I am inquiring regarding a Christian's response to such an act.

be killed? May Christians serve in the military and participate in such deadly force?

- (2) A terrorist group not officially sponsored by any national entity is detected in the act of implementing an attack against unarmed civilians by means of large explosive devices, a nuclear device, and/or poison gas, any of which would result in the death of hundreds if not thousands of people.
- (3) Unknown attackers invade a conference center where a large political rally is being held and kill hundreds of people with machine gun fire and grenades.
- (4) A heavily armed gunman opens fire in a public setting, shooting people at random
- (5) An attacker(s) invades a church's building during a worship service and shoots the pastor as well as many congregants, killing or wounding many people.
- (6) A gunman, in the process of an armed robbery, shoots someone and threatens to shoot more people.
- (7) Several people armed with knives enter a church service just as the ushers finish collecting the offering and demand all the money.
- (8) An armed assailant breaks into a home during the night, holds the husband at gunpoint, and proceeds to rape his wife.
- (9) Several husky teenagers surround an older man walking with a cane and demand his wallet.
- (10) Gang members verbally attack a man and his wife on the street, using abusive and graphic language to describe the woman in an obvious attempt to provoke the man into a fight.
- (11) Several men attack, for no obvious reason, another man who is physically fit and active. Using baseball bats they beat him into the ground and appear intent on continuing the attack.
- (12) A pastor who has had a lengthy and sometimes fruitful ministry to gangs in an inner city setting encounters a particularly belligerent gang member who is either drunk or high. In the process of sharing the gospel with

him, the gang member both assaults him verbally, mocking Christianity and cursing Jesus, and deliberately insults the pastor with a backhand slap across the face.

The list could obviously go on nearly indefinitely with a wide range of scenarios in addition to the dozen described above or many variations of these. The examples cited here are all realistic situations in the world, and all could be illustrated with news clippings from recent years. Such news reports raise the question of self-defense in a painfully real way. Most Christian discussions of the general topic of self-defense focus on the first scenario and relate to debates regarding the validity of just war theory in its various permutations. That is not the focus of the present essay, though the questions are inter-related.⁸ Nor is my present concern with the question of the Christian's defense (individually or collectively) against a tyrannical ruler. Here the concern is not the state or matters of warfare. Rather I am interested to probe the more personal questions of an individual's right to defend himself or herself and the related question of a church's right (or responsibility?) to provide for the protection of its members.⁹ In doing so I am primarily interested in Christian aspects of the question— theological, moral, ethical questions. I will not address specific

⁸ "Self-defense against individuals is just war on a small scale" (Chris Bird, *The Concealed Handgun Manual*, 6th ed. [San Antonio: Privateer Publications, 2011], 361). For a theological perspective on just war theory and some helpful bibliography on that subject, see Mike Stallard, "A Biblical Defense of Just War Theory," *JMAT* 10 (2006): 92-114.

⁹ As the current form of this essay has developed, it has become obvious that the corporate ministry issues will have to await further treatment in a separate paper. A short appendix has been included to suggest some of the issues involved, but no sustained argument has been offered along that line.

political questions, though some general observations regarding our cultural setting are inevitable.¹⁰

We live among other depraved sinners in a fallen world where evil is undeniable.¹¹ A consequence of that is the inevitable violence committed by some people upon others. It has been that way from the beginning when Cain murdered Abel. Contemporary technology enables violence on a much greater scale.¹² It does no good to deny the existence of violence (an impossible illusion), nor is it responsible to avoid thinking

¹⁰ Political questions, of course, depend on the laws where one resides. American Christians enjoy the protection of the US Constitution. In regards to self-defense that document states, "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed" (*Bill of Rights*, Amendment 2 to the US Constitution, <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/bill_of_rights_transcript.html>). Most countries do not provide such liberty, especially as it relates to self-defense and "bearing arms." Such legal liberties or limits effect how Christians may implement their decision regarding self-defense, but they do not determine such a decision. Christians living, e.g., in England, have no legal option to carry a handgun for self-defense if they were to decide that self-defense was their Christian responsibility.

¹¹ I assume this without argument in this essay since it is the historic position of Christian orthodoxy. There have, of course, been various aberrant positions among professing Christians (e.g., some have denied original sin and depravity). Likewise some non-Christians, whether secularists or adherents of other religions, assume the inherent goodness of human beings, though this is not a universal conclusion.

¹² The level of technology is not the issue. Yes, semi-automatic weapons can kill more people faster than a muzzle loader. The issue, however, is one of sin, not technology. Those who propose to ban particular forms of technology face the contradictory problem of other technologies such as the Internet that enable just as much social mayhem as modern firearms. The Internet may not be directly lethal, but it can assuredly be used to accomplish deadly ends. One cannot logically be a "gun-Luddite" and not also be an "Internet Luddite."

about how one would respond to a direct, personal encounter with violence, especially when one is the direct object of such viciousness. Christians living in the United States are fortunate not to face routinely the sort of atrocities that are common in some other parts of the world. That security, however, does not excuse negligence of thoughtlessness, for even here, despite a lesser statistical probability, bad things do happen to God's people.

To address these questions I will first examine a series of Bible passages that are either relevant to the questions raised or that have been claimed by some to be relevant.¹³ There are relatively few such texts that address the question of self-defense directly.¹⁴ Following that examination, I will attempt to synthesize a coherent Christian view of the subject, though that

¹³ Though there have not been many discussions of these questions, a number of those which I have read offer untenable treatments of the passages in question. This might be because their authors do not have a substantive biblical-theological foundation (e.g., well-intentioned, but untrained folks) or they fail to distinguish changes in the way God administers his creation, most commonly by the old covenant relationship of God and his people in the OT and the new covenant since the cross. As will be evident in my discussion, I assume that the Law as a legally binding covenant was terminated at the cross. (That does not make the OT irrelevant to Christians nor to the current discussion.) I also assume that today the Christian is related to God on the basis of the new covenant, though even that conclusion is not essential so long as it is recognized that the old covenant reigned only from Moses to Jesus. For a substantive discussion of Jewish views of relevant OT texts, see David B. Kopel, "The Torah and Self-Defense," *Penn State Law Review* 109 (2004): 17–42. Since much of that article discusses later Jewish views, I have not interacted with it extensively here.

¹⁴ Delineating a biblical view of such matters is not contingent upon "finding" (or perhaps "creating") a large number of potential references and making them fit the desired conclusion. Far better to be cautious and have only a few passages which are clear than to make Scripture a "nose of wax."

will require somewhat more abstract theological integration rather than exposition.

Old Testament Texts

In terms of the OT texts discussed here, it is important to realize that many of these texts are part of or under the jurisdiction of the old covenant. Though they may establish general principles in regard to God's view of self-defense, they are not in themselves normative in governing the conduct of anyone who is not under the legal jurisdiction of that OT law.¹⁵

It has been claimed that Genesis 2:15 teaches that "the right of self-defense predates the fall of Adam and as such it is one of the universal rights of man."¹⁶ That text states, "The LORD God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." To deduce the right of self-defense, it is necessary to understand "to take care of" (לְשׂוּרָה) in the sense of "guard" (which it could mean in an appropriate context¹⁷) and to conclude that this authorizes guarding oneself from any and every possible threat. Yet this is found in a description of pre-fall Eden. From what or whom is Adam guarding the garden? The Patrick Henry and John Henry appeal to a defense against Satan and then extend that assumption to any future aggressors post-fall. The presumptions and conclusions seem rather

¹⁵ Many discussions of this topic come from writers who either do not understand the hermeneutical implications of such matters and simply "pick and choose" from Scripture whatever they like, or in some cases they assume a formal hermeneutical system such as covenant theology in which the OT is assumed to apply directly to the NT church. Though this later position is widespread, the present writer rejects such supersessionism.

¹⁶ Patrick Henry and John Henry, "The Bible and Gun Control" (By the authors, n.p.: n.d.), 33. (As of Oct. 2013 there is a copy at <http://diarmani.com/Articles/Th%20Bible%20and%20Gun%20contr ol.pdf>).

¹⁷ HALOT, 4:1581–84.

dubious. How would one defend oneself against the attack of a spirit being? Certainly not by physical means. Nor is there any indication that this general statement can legitimately be transferred to other domains post-fall. It would appear to be more likely that the verb should be understood in the sense of “to take care of” is almost all English translations agree (NASB, NIV, ESV, NET, NRSV, NJB, REB, CEB, etc.) and as the parallel with “work/farm it” (לַעֲבֹד אֹתוֹ) implies.

Genesis 14 has also been used to support personal self-defense.¹⁸ This is the account of Abraham rescuing Lot who has been kidnapped by raiding parties. Though the principles involved might well be relevant at a national level (Abraham was essentially the head of a tribal group at this point that was distinct from other similar political entities at the time), it is a stretch to apply the corporate actions of a tribe to an individual (despite Abraham and Lot being named as individuals). To then appeal to this being a Christian principle of the “resurrection age” since the account is referenced in Hebrews 6–7, where Melchizedek is supposedly identified as Jesus,¹⁹ reflects an odd form of hermeneutics. There may be related principles here, but if they are, they should first be treated at the level of national

¹⁸ Henry and Henry, “Bible and Gun Control,” 39–40. Likewise Nehemiah 4 is used in a similar manner by Richard Seim, “The Bible and Self-Defense,” ch. 3, 2008, <<http://armedcitizennetwork.org/the-bible-and-self-defense>> (accessed 18 April 2014). Proverbs 24:11–12 might be relevant to the defense of others (“Rescue those who are being taken away to death”), but the proverbial nature of the statement and minimal context makes it difficult to use as a basis for any teaching regarding self-defense. Likewise Ecclesiastes 3:3, 8 (“a time to kill ... a time for war”) cannot be pressed into service at this point since there are no specifications given as to when those times may be.

¹⁹ “Whoever Melchizedek is, he is, at least, an extremely close type of Christ, as identical as possible, if not actually identical and his blessing is equal to the blessing of the resurrected Christ himself” (Henry and Henry, “Bible and Gun Control,” 66).

just war theory before a tertiary application to individual self-defense is attempted.

With Exodus 22:2–3 we have a clear reference to self-defense under the old covenant: “If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him, but if the sun has risen on him, there shall be bloodguilt for him” (ESV). In this case law example the thief is said to “break in.” Though we tend to think of an aggressor “breaking and entering” through a door or window, the specific situation in view in Exodus 22 is actually “digging through” (בַּחֲפֹזֵי הַחֵטְאִים) the wall of a mud brick dwelling. Given the historical, cultural setting following the conquest, such a scenario may well have entailed digging into the lower level of a residence where cattle and other possessions were kept,²⁰ the family residing on a second floor above this area.²¹ In such a scenario there may have been a watchman guarding the cattle below, or the homeowner may be aroused from the floor above. In either case, the law assumes an altercation in which the owner kills the invader. There is no statement as to the details of the confrontation. It is enough that there has been a home invasion and the aggressor has been killed—whether intentionally or accidentally is immaterial in this particular case law.²²

²⁰ Note that the context refers explicitly to cattle in verses 1 and 4.

²¹ The legislation was actually given during the wilderness wanderings when the people lived in tents, but the intent was to provide legal guidance for the post-conquest period in the land, thus the assumptions of constructed buildings. Later history evidenced very different home styles and social contexts as Jewish society became more urbanized (NT times, e.g., would have been quite different, whether in major cities such as Jerusalem, or even the smaller towns of Galilee).

²² The syntactical pattern of “case law” is obvious throughout this text with its repeated $\square\aleph$ and $\text{י} \text{ב}$. If this is indeed intended as “case law,” then the intent is to provide a general scenario that is also applicable in other similar situations, e.g., a nighttime thief breaking into a more remote sheep pen guarded by a watchman even if the thief

In this situation the homicide is judged to be a case of justified self-defense so long as it occurred at night.²³ No explanation is given as to the justification for the verdict, only that the homeowner does not have bloodguilt, i.e., he is not subject to being killed by the aggressor's family in retaliation and need not flee to one of the cities of refuge (Num 35). The assumption may be that at night the intentions of the aggressor are not clear (whether only robbery or murder, or robbery which too easily turns to murder on being discovered). It could be assumed that the thief was armed, if only with the tools of "digging through"—certainly adequate to be used for murderous purposes if provoked.²⁴

The situation is different during the day. Though justified at night, there is no such provision "if the sun has risen on him,"

is not actually digging through the mud wall of a residential dwelling, or in an urban setting, breaking into a merchant's shop.

²³ That verse 2 relates specifically to a nighttime attack is only evident in light of the contrast with verse 3; the text does not say that explicitly. NIV makes the implication from verse 3 explicit in verse 2 for clarity ("If a thief is caught breaking in at night and is struck...").

²⁴ Traditional Jewish interpretation of this text may be illustrated from the comments in *The Chumash*: "Verses 1 – 2 teach that, when necessary, one may kill to save his own life, but may not kill if only his property is at risk. The Torah illustrates this law through the case of a thief who is caught tunneling into a home. Since it is obvious that a householder will fight to protect his property, it may be assumed that the thief is ready to overpower him and kill, if need be. Consequently, the householder may act on the principle that . . . , *if someone comes to kill you, act first and kill him*. If the householder kills his presumed pursuer, therefore, he is not guilty of homicide since he is considered to have killed in self-defense. The verse explains this concept by stating that *there is no blood-guilt* for killing the burglar; it is as if he had no 'blood,' for he had already forfeited his life (*Sanhedrin* 72a, *Rashi*)" (Nosson Scherman, *The Torah: Haftaros and Five Megillos with a Commentary Anthologized from the Rabbinic Writings*, in *The Chumash*, The Stone Edition, ed. N. Scherman and M. Zlotowitz, 11th ed., [Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000], 427; Exod 22:2 – 3 *ad loc*).

i.e., on the thief. The specifics are not clear in this case. The limitations of verse 3 may simply forbid killing someone caught in burglary during daylight hours, or it may forbid revenge killing (tracking down the thief and killing him later that day), or it may assume that the night thief did make off with property, but was later apprehended.²⁵ Resolution is not necessary for the present purposes; regardless of the specifics in verse 3, there is a clear basis for justifiable homicide in self-defense in at least one situation in this text.

New Testament Texts

Luke 22:35–36, 38 is the only direct NT statement about self-defense. Jesus had previously sent his followers on various missions with restrictive instructions regarding what provision and equipment they were allowed to take with them. In sending out the 12, no staff, bag, bread, money, or extra shirt was permitted (Luke 9:3). When he sent out the 72, purse, bag, and sandals were disallowed (Luke 10:4). These were not, however, intended as permanent, normative commands for all believers for all time. That is clear since Jesus contrasts (ἀλλά νῦν, v. 36) these earlier restrictions with what would be necessary following the cross. The original instructions had been intended to teach them to trust God for their needs (Luke 22:35). Although faith is still needed, in Luke 22:35–36, 38 Jesus explicitly commands his followers to take the sort of provisions they were previously asked to leave at home: “if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag” (v. 36a). But now a new item is added to the list. They are told to buy a sword (μάχαιρα), even if they have to sell their cloak to do so (v. 36b). This was not a

²⁵ “It might be thought that this refers to the early dawn or early day, when he [the homeowner] might recognize the thief, or frighten him away unrecognized, or with the help of others capture him. But inasmuch as further on it is assumed that the thief has already accomplished his theft, the expression probably means: If some time has elapsed” (J. P. Lange, “Exodus,” in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, 1876; trans. P. Schaff [repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.], 2:91).

butter knife for their bread or a paring knife to peel apples. The μάχαιρα was “a relatively short sword or other instrument, sword, dagger” (BDAG, 622) which is most commonly referenced in the NT as an instrument used for killing, whether actual or potential (e.g., Mark 14:43; Luke 21:24; Acts 12:2; 16:27; Heb 11:37; Rev 13:10).²⁶

Although the specific purpose of the sword is not stated, the implication seems clear: the disciples should be prepared for their ministry as they are once again sent out following Jesus’ death and resurrection whether with money (“purse”), provisions (“bag”), or means of defense (“sword”).²⁷ Though we have no specific incidents recorded in Acts in which we are told that they actually used a sword in self-defense,²⁸ they were to be prepared for such exigencies. As I. Howard Marshall comments, “The saying brings out the extreme plight of the disciples. A

²⁶ The “relatively short” qualifications in BDAG’s definition contrasts the μάχαιρα with a δολιχάορος, the long sword or ῥομφαία, a large, broad sword.

²⁷ Traveling armed was not uncommon in the day and culture. Josephus refers to those who διὰ δέ τῶν ληϊῶν ἐνοπλοὶ (“on account of thieves were armed,” *War* 2.125). Although the Mishnah forbid carrying a sword or other weapons on the Sabbath (*m. Šab.* 6.4), the implication is that they may and were carried otherwise. The same text cites R. Eliezer as referring to such weapons as man’s “adornments,” though others describe them as a reproach—so there were differences of opinion even then! Although it relates to acts of war rather than personal self-defense, it is well attended that many (although not all) the Jews of the Second Temple period would engage in battle on the Sabbath if the choice appeared to be fight or die (see Josephus, *Ant.* 13.12 – 13; 14.63; 18.323 – 24 and 1 Macc 2:39 – 42).

²⁸ This is a reason sometimes cited for taking the reference metaphorically (David Garland, *Luke*, ZECNT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 871), but arguments from silence are indecisive.

garment for wear at night was an utter necessity; to give it up for a sword implies that dire circumstances are at hand."²⁹

Despite the seeming force of the context and the parallel and very nonmetaphorical instructions to take purse and bag, many commentators insist that the statement regarding the sword must be taken metaphorically. This appears to be based, not on the context, but on a precommitment to a pacifist position. Once one assumes that Jesus "eschews all violence,"³⁰ then any contrary conclusions must be "adjusted" to fit the preconceived conclusion. Among the major commentators who chose this option, there is no substantive defense given beyond a statement of pacifism.³¹ At times the argument becomes a diatribe filled with loaded, emotional terms that take the place of evidence. Garland is perhaps the most extreme example of this. He portrays the interpretation of Jesus' statement about taking two swords to be a choice between a metaphorical statement that the disciples "will need every resource they have" (except, of course, a sword!) and those who would "live by the sword ... become expert in war" (871), of whom "it is laughable to think Jesus pronounces them combat ready" with two swords (872), who are "armed to the teeth ... in case God lets them down" as they are "engaged in an arms race and counterviolence ... via strong-arm tactics ... with brass knuckles" (875). Such purple prose will sway anyone who thinks the choice is between pacifism and militaristic description, but that

²⁹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 825.

³⁰ Garland, *Luke*, 876.

³¹ In addition to Garland, see also Marshall, *Luke*, 825 ("the saying is a call to be ready for hardship and self-sacrifice"); Darrell Bock, *Luke*, 2 vols., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994 - 96), 2:1747 ("a symbol of preparation for pressure"); and Norval Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), 571 ("they must be thoroughly equipped and armed at whatever cost with an unbreakable courage and determination, so that they will not relinquish the struggle").

is a false dichotomy. Certainly Jesus is not advocating violence or a pugnacious approach to ministry. There is an alternate understanding that fits the context and social setting that makes much better sense of the text: Jesus may well be preparing his followers to travel some dangerous roads as they carry the gospel message across the Roman Empire. In doing so, Christians have just as much right to defend themselves against highway robbers as anyone else. As Nolland puts it, “The sword is thought of as part of the equipment required for self-sufficiency of any traveler in the Roman world. Nothing more than protection of one’s person is in view.”³² This is not a covert, violence-oriented mission, but one that assumes that if violently assaulted, one has the right to protect himself.

The disciples apparently understood the need for these items since they promptly produced two such weapons (v. 38) without the need first to go and sell a cloak to buy them. Carrying a self-defense weapon was not a new concept to these men. Jesus does not rebuke them for having these swords, but he does indicate that two were apparently adequate for the group of twelve (Ἰκανόν ἐοῖν, “it is enough,” v. 38b); not everyone need be armed, but some should be.³³

It is sometimes objected that later that night when his disciples offered to put their swords into play and Peter did draw his sword and clip off an ear, they were rebuked by Jesus (Luke 22:49–51): “Put your sword back in its place ... for all who draw the sword will die by the sword” (Matt 26:52). The

³² John Nolland, *Luke*, 3 vols. WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989–93), 3:1076.

³³ Some try to deflect the force of the statement “it is enough” by making it a reprimand, “Drop it,” calling an end to a misunderstood conversation (So Garland, *Luke*, 872; see also Marshall, *Luke*, 827), but BDAG gives no basis for any such idiom, and TDNT bluntly says that “the only difficulty is that we lack the necessary linguistic support for this view” (K. Rengstorf, s.v., ἰκανός, TDNT 3:295); the supposed parallels that are often cited are neither exact nor do they have similar meaning.

conclusion is drawn that Jesus was now forbidding self-defense. The point is poorly taken. First, interpreters should not assume that Jesus is so fickle as to have changed his mind about the utility of carrying a sword within the space of a few hours. He did not tell Peter to get rid of his sword, but to put it back in its place, i.e., keep it. Second, the specific context is Jesus' imminent substitutionary death in fulfillment of OT prophecy and God's plan—something that Jesus has just indicated to them in the middle of the earlier discussion about swords (Luke 22:37) and of which he subsequently reminds them (Matt 26:53–54). Jesus never intended that his disciples defend him with swords from going to the cross. That was a necessary part of redemption. He could have easily escaped death by calling on the angels (Matt 26:53) or exercising his own power, but that was not his purpose. This particular setting, however, says nothing about the original point of their being adequately prepared for their coming ministry. Third, that Jesus' destiny to die for the sins of the world precluded his avoiding the awful events about to unfold says nothing about the experience of his followers whose death would not be redemptive for others. Theoretically, were Jesus to have chosen not to die, God's plan would have failed, but for his followers to avoid death has no such consequences. If they fled persecution (as they did in Acts 8), the gospel was spread elsewhere. Were they to defend themselves against unprovoked, violent aggressors, they would be able to continue to share the gospel.³⁴ Fourth, even the seemingly broad statement about drawing and dying by the sword does not relate to the purpose for which Jesus intended for them to obtain a sword. Yes, those who would live this way, drawing a sword unnecessarily, must be prepared to die by the sword.³⁵

³⁴ Kopel draws another parallel from Jesus' experience. Jesus did not defend himself in the Jewish or Roman trials, yet Paul did just that on numerous occasions. Kopel's point is well taken: Jesus' example was not normative in this regard for his followers ("Is the Best Defense a Good Book?" *America's 1st Freedom*, Feb. 2007, 56–57).

³⁵ The parallel sentiment in *Tg. Isa.* 50.11 is similar: "Behold, all you that kindle a fire, that take a sword, go, fall into the fire you have

Peter had been unwise in this regard, thinking he was defending his Lord against aggression, yet in doing so was contravening God's purpose.³⁶ Initiating violence is not condoned³⁷ and those who do so risk the loss of their life if they attack someone armed with a sword and greater skilled in its use; that is the point of Jesus' statement. Carrying a weapon capable of providing such a deterrent (in this instance, a sword) discourages such attacks.³⁸ Defending oneself against life-threatening aggression is not in view here.³⁹

kindled and on the sword you have taken. From my memra you have this: you shall return to your destruction."

³⁶ Were not *Jesus* the one in charge in the garden, Peter would surely have been arrested for his action. Jesus, however, heals the man's ear and instructs the armed mob to let the disciples leave.

³⁷ This is a generalization that "violence everywhere reproduces itself" (W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., ICC [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997], 512). Jesus' statement does not, however, condemn all violence, only the initiation of unprovoked aggression.

³⁸ This conclusion may be verified in our contemporary American culture. A survey of criminals has shown that "60% of convicted felons admitted that they avoided committing crimes when they *knew* the victim was armed. 40% of convicted felons admitted that they avoided committing crimes when they *thought* the victim was armed" (Smith, *Gun Facts*, 29, citing statistics from James Wright and Peter Rossi, "Armed and Considered Dangerous: A Survey of Felons and Their Firearms" [Aldine, 1986]).

³⁹ Kopel comments that this text is "a warning against violence as a way of life, rather than as a flat-out ban on defensive violence in all situations" ("Is the Best Defense a Good Book?" 56).

Objections

Much of the discussion regarding the Christian and self-defense is couched in negative terms by those opposed to any such use of force. That is, the positive argument for such action is countered by proposing general principles that are thought to oppose it. There are several common objections along this line.⁴⁰ Some appeal to the prohibition, “Thou shalt not kill” (Exod 20:13). Were this a blanket prohibition of all killing, the argument would have force, but the intent is clearly to prohibit murder since other killing is explicitly commanded by God (e.g., Gen 9:6, Exod 21:12-17, 28-32). The NT command to “love your neighbor” (Matt 22:36-40) is sometimes cited as if this precluded any form of self-defense. But which is the more loving act? To defend one’s family (or any group of people) by killing a depraved person intent on killing the entire group? Or by “loving” the aggressor and allowing him to kill unchecked, thus taking the life of many people? No, in such cases the most loving thing to do is to stop the attack by any means possible or necessary, even if that means taking the life of the perpetrator.⁴¹

⁴⁰ I have not attempted to document many of the suggestions noted here. Though that is likely possible in printed literature, my selection comes from wide browsing on the Internet and reading the most common objections that are found on many sites where these matters are debated vigorously. Most do not deserve the distinction of being quoted, but the arguments are repeated continuously.

⁴¹ Kevin Bauder makes this point powerfully in his essay following one of the Colorado shootings: “Some have suggested that a believer should willingly exchange his life for the life of an assailant. They reason that the believer, if killed, goes straight to heaven, but if the assailant is killed he loses every opportunity for salvation. . . . No, the theory is terribly myopic, in part because it takes no account of further harm that the assailant will do, both to believers and unbelievers. Granted, application of the means of self defense within the Century 16 Theater may have ended the assailant’s opportunity for salvation. Not being able to apply that means, however, ended the opportunities of many more people. Given a choice, it would be better to see the

In connection with his statement of the Golden Rule, Jesus commands his followers, “Do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also” (Matt 5:38-39; Luke 6:29). Though the particulars can be read one of two ways (this is either a back-handed slap or a left-handed slap, in either case a calculated insult), this is not a matter of self-defense. One’s life is not in danger. In such situations Jesus tells us not to retaliate. Interestingly, in the only such instance recorded in the Gospels (John 18:22-23),⁴² Jesus is so slapped and he *rebukes* the one who struck him rather than turning the other cheek! That would seem to imply that this is not an all-inclusive statement that covers every possible scenario. It is sometimes appropriate and sometimes not.⁴³ No statement is made here as to the appropriate response to aggression intended to take one’s life.

Romans 12:17-22 is also sometimes used to justify a pacifist position: “Do not repay anyone evil for evil. . . . If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” The assumption appears to be that self-defense is evil; thus if one is violently attacked and one defends oneself, one has repaid the evil doer with evil. That

perpetrator being carried out and a dozen others granted the chance to repent” (“Lessons from Colorado”).

⁴² Kopel points this out (“Is the Best Defense a Good Book?” 43). One might object technically that John 18 does not specify that Jesus was struck on the right cheek, but those appealing pacifistically to Matthew 5:38 would typically object to any retaliation regardless of the specific nature of the slap, so the point is moot.

⁴³ This should not be read as “situation ethics,” but as the application of biblical wisdom in judging various situations just as a fool is to be answered or not depending on the situation (Prov 26:4-5).

assumes, however, that all such defense is, indeed, evil. If, however, God allows the defense of life, the argument is facile. The tone of the passage is not one of legitimate defense, but one of revenge and repayment. That is quite different from defending one's life. God promises to handle the punishment end of such situations and has ordained human government as part of the means of accomplishing that end (Rom 13:1-7). To live peaceably with others is certainly commanded *so far as it depends on you*, but it does not always work that way. At times an aggressor intrudes his evil intent into one's life in such a way that peace is not possible. It may at times be possible to minister to an "enemy" by feeding him or giving him a drink to show him the love of Christ, but that is not feasible when he has a knife at your throat—or the throat of your wife.

Other Considerations

One might wish for more clear texts in the NT that are addressed explicitly to the question of self-defense, texts that address specific situations such as are found in the Law (see the discussion of Lev 22 above). Since we do not have such data without forcing texts to discuss matters they are not intended to address, a Christian perspective of the question of self-defense must, of necessity, be more indirect. Rather than an exegetical basis in biblical theology, we must shift to the questions of theological integration asked by systematic theology and ethics. These must be tied, as much as possible, to biblical texts and principles, but they cannot claim the level of warrant as questions of, e.g., the deity of Christ. These questions also come embedded in particular social contexts. That is, the sort of questions and answers considered will vary widely from an American setting with Second Amendment considerations to a totalitarian setting where believers live and minister with no such legal protections. That does not make the conclusions reached invalid, though it will suggest that some of them will be limited in applicability.

The explicit biblical warrant noted thus far includes one specific text in the law which allowed for self-defense against an

intruder in a home invasion as well as an implicit NT text that appears to justify believers carrying defensive weapons. The two texts together would seem to warrant the conclusion that NT principles have not contravened the principle of self-defense found in the Law, but have rather validated it for the post-Law period.⁴⁴ Other texts considered were either not relevant or taught principles quite different from pacifist concerns often based on them.

Contemporary Social and Pragmatic Concerns

We will first address some of the concerns of contemporary American society and note implications of American social setting. These issues are today discussed almost entirely in terms of defensive weapons, most commonly handguns, though any lethal weapons (knives, long guns, etc.) are relevant. Consequently that terminology may appear below in place of swords or self-defense in general. The principles are the same for all such scenarios. (The following discussion of social concerns reflects the author's personal opinions; not all are provided with specific warrant since a defense would extend the essay to undue length.)

First, as Americans (whether Christian or non-Christian) we have inherited a legal protection to "keep and bear arms" under

⁴⁴ This raises, of course, the question of the relevancy of the Mosaic Law, both outside Israel in OT times and in the NT. The issues cannot be explored here in any detail. Suffice it to say that there is some continuity in the regulations of the Mosaic Law and in the Law of Christ (i.e., the new covenant). Some provisions have been changed (e.g., a restricted place for worship, the sacrificial system, etc.) and others remain constant (e.g., the need for worship, prayer, holiness, etc.), though not due to continuity of the Mosaic/old covenant. If we are not to muzzle the ox based on parallel commands under the old and new covenants (Deut 25:4; 1 Tim 5:18), then there may well be continuity in individual standards or requirements. The point here is that a clear provision for self-defense under the Law is apparently continued under the Law of Christ.

the Second Amendment.⁴⁵ Though I will not discuss the historical origins of that amendment for the sake of space, it deserves to be cited in full: “A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed.” Though frequently treated in modern discussions as if the reference were to the National Guard or the military, the intent of the amendment is individual (“the people”), the militia being understood, not as a government entity, but as the collective citizenry who would take up arms in defense of the security of a free state.⁴⁶ This perspective is not intuitive for twenty-first century America where there has been a standing army for

⁴⁵ Erler points out that “In the *District of Columbia v. Heller* [2008], the Supreme Court handed down a decision that for the first time held unambiguously that the Second Amendment guaranteed an individual the right to keep and bear arms for purposes of self-defense. Writing for the majority, Justice Scalia quoted Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, a work well known to the Founders. Blackstone referred to “the natural right of resistance and self-preservation,” which necessarily entailed “the right of having and using arms for self-preservation and defense” (Edward J. Erler, “The Second Amendment as an Expression of First Principles,” *Imprimis*, 42.3 [March 2013], 5, (accessed 19 May 2014) <http://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/file/archives/pdf/2013_03_Imprimis.pdf>). (Snyder argues that “the Bill of Rights does not grant rights to the people, such that its repeal would legitimately confer upon government the powers otherwise proscribed. The Bill of Rights is the list of the fundamental, inalienable rights, endowed in man by his Creator, that define what it means to be free and independent people, the rights which must exist to ensure that government governs only with the consent of the people” (Jeffrey R. Snyder, “A Nation of Cowards,” *The Public Interest*, Fall 1993, 12; also available at <http://rkba.org/comment/cowards/html>).

⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion on these conclusions, see “The Right to Keep and Bear Arms: Report of the Subcommittee on the Constitution of the Committee on the Judiciary,” United States Senate, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., February 1982, US Government Printing Office 88-6180 Washington: Washington, DC.

many years and the pre-military days of the colonial militia have been long forgotten, but this does not change the meaning of the Second Amendment.⁴⁷

Second, there is no doubt that our culture is undergoing massive social change.⁴⁸ Until the middle of the twentieth

⁴⁷ The more recent activist approach to reinterpreting the Constitution and the Bill of Rights has clear parallels with similar moves in biblical hermeneutics, yet there is no basis for meaning apart from the meaning expressed in writing by the original author, whether of Scripture or any other document. As Erler well says, “The notion of collective rights is wholly the invention of the Progressive founders of the administrative state, who were engaged in self-conscious effort to supplant the principles of limited government embodied in the Constitution. For these Progressives, what Madison and other Founders called the ‘rights of human nature’ were merely a delusion characteristic of the eighteenth century. Science, they held, has proven that there is no permanent human nature—that there are only evolving social conditions. As a result, they regarded what the Founders called the “rights of human nature” as an enemy of collective welfare, which should always take precedence over the rights of individuals. For Progressives then and now, the welfare of the people—not liberty—is the primary object of government, and government should always be in the hands of experts. This is the real origin of today’s gun control hysteria—the idea that professional police forces and the military have rendered the armed citizen superfluous; that no individual should be responsible for the defense of himself and his family, but should leave it to the experts. The idea of individual responsibilities, along with that of individual rights, is in fact incompatible with the Progressive vision of the common welfare” (Erler, “The Second Amendment,” 3).

⁴⁸ For a recent assessment of this social change, see Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White in America, 1960-2010* (New York: Crown Forum/Random House, 2012). The focus on “white America” is intended to demonstrate that this is not a racial problem, i.e., white versus black versus Hispanic, etc. For an older assessment that it still relevant, see Robert H. Bork, *Slouching toward Gomorrah: Modern Liberalism and American Decline* (New York: ReganBooks/Harper Collins, 1996).

century, social discourse in America assumed a Judeo-Christian ethos and values (though the United States was never a “Christian nation”). That consensus has disintegrated and our culture continues to wander ethically, politically, and socially with no moral compass. As a result violence has increased both internally and externally. Americans face not only terrorist threat, but also periodic mayhem at the hands of evil people within. In one sense, there has always been internal violence as murderers have wrecked their hate on others. Due to the mobility and increased technical sophistication of our society along with increased population (particularly in urban areas), the opportunity for mass violence has increased considerably. Whether that results in terrorists flying airplanes into skyscrapers or the murder of multiple people in a public setting, the resulting fear has greatly affected our society. There are, so far as I know, only two reactions possible (other than wringing one’s hands and doing nothing). Either the people demand that government attempt to protect them from all possible calamities and accept the resulting loss of liberty that entails, or the people must take greater responsibility for their own protection. Unfortunately, government cannot protect the people from everything. There is no way that evil can be prevented. Government may administer justice after the fact (which hopefully discourages the repetition of evil acts), but it can rarely prevent tragedies. Though many people like to believe otherwise, the police have no legal responsibility to protect anyone and are rarely able to stop a crime for the simple reason that they are not omnipresent.⁴⁹ Nor can they respond

⁴⁹ The Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals (*Bowers v. DeVito*, 1082) ruled that here is no Constitutional right to be protected by the state against being murdered by criminals or madmen” (cited by Robert H. Boatman, “The Constitutional Right and Social Obligation to Carry a Gun,” <<http://www.ironwordranch.com/>> [accessed 19 May 2014]). “Most people readily believe that the existence of the police relieves them of the responsibility to take full measures to protect themselves. The police, however, are not personal bodyguards. Rather, they act as a general deterrent to crime, both by their presence and by apprehending criminals after the fact. As numerous courts have held,

rapidly enough in most instances to arrive before evil acts are committed, not even in cities, to say nothing of rural areas where it may take considerable time just to drive to the scene.

Third, legislation and control of lethal weapons are often counterproductive. In an attempt to stem violence, politicians frequently ban particular weapons. The favorite target in recent years has been the attempt to ban handguns, large capacity magazines, and “assault weapons.”⁵⁰ The rationale for such actions is that these are the weapons often used in crime.⁵¹ Unfortunately, passing such laws rarely has a positive impact on

they have no legal obligation to protect anyone in particular. You cannot sue them for failing to prevent you from being the victim of a crime. Insofar as the police deter by their presence, they are very, very good. Criminals take great pains not to commit a crime in front of them. Unfortunately, the corollary is that you can pretty much bet your life (and you are) that they won't be there at the moment you actually need them” (Snyder, “A Nation of Cowards,” 2-3).

⁵⁰ The category of “assault weapon” is mythical. There is no standard definition, and most laws proposed using the term end up making a wide range of standard hunting and sporting guns illegal—guns that have rarely if ever been used to commit the types of crimes the law is attempting to address. “‘Assault weapon’ is an invented term. In the firearm lexicon, there is no such thing as an ‘assault weapon.’ The closest relative is the ‘assault rifle,’ which is a machine gun or ‘select fire’ rifle that fires rifle cartridges. In most cases, ‘assault weapons’ are functionally identical though less powerful than hunting rifles, but they are cosmetically similar to military guns” (Guy Smith, *Gun Facts*, 6.2, 2013 ed., pdf, 1 <www.gunfacts.info> [accessed 19 May 2014]).

⁵¹ The facts here are disputable. More violent crimes are committed without guns or with smaller handguns than those with large capacity magazines and certainly more than those which use long guns. “90% of all violent crimes in the U.S. do not involve firearms of any type” (Smith, *Gun Facts*, 30, citing statistics from Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, 1998). “Criminals are over five times more likely to carry a single shot handguns as they are to carry ‘assault weapons’” (Smith, *Gun Facts*, 3, citing “Firearm Use by Offenders,” Bureau of Justice Statistics, November 2001).

crime rates since criminals do not abide by the laws.⁵² The only people affected are law-abiding citizens who are negatively affected in their access to the ability to defend themselves against the criminals.⁵³

Fourth, although the particulars differ somewhat by state, there are clear legal guidelines in the United States as to what constitutes lawful self-defense.⁵⁴ The American citizen is

⁵² What *has* made the a significant difference in the crime rates in some states is passing legislation allowing for concealed carry of handguns (most states now allow this, though some are extremely restrictive in their policies). In some states this has resulted in dramatic drops in the number of homicides in subsequent years. “Thirty-nine states, comprising the majority of the American population, are “right-to-carry” states. Statistics show that in these states the crime rate fell (or did not rise) after the right-to-carry law became active (as of July, 2006)” (Smith, *Gun Facts*, 21). In Florida after passing a concealed carry law, “the homicide rate fell from 36% above the national average to 4% below” and “in Texas, murder rates fell 59% faster than the national average in the year after their concealed carry law passed. Rape rates fell 93% faster in the first year after enactment, and 500% faster in the second. Assaults fell 250% faster in the second year” (ibid., 22).

⁵³ Thomas Jefferson said, “Laws that forbid the carrying of arms. . . disarm only those who are neither inclined nor determined to commit crimes. . . . Such laws make things worse for the assaulted and better for the assailants; they serve rather to encourage than to prevent homicides, for an unarmed man may be attacked with greater confidence than an armed man” (cited by Henry, “The Bible and Gun Control, pt. 2, The Bible and Guns in America,” 68).

⁵⁴ On the particulars, see Andrew F. Branca, *The Law of Self Defense*. 2nd ed. (Maynard, MA: By the Author, 2013) or in abbreviated form, “When is Deadly Force Justified?” ch 2. of *What Every Gun Owner Needs to Know about Self-Defense Law* by Marty Hayes (Onalaska, WA: Armed Citizens’ Legal Defense Network, 2012); pdf available at <http://www.armedcitizensnetwork.org/images/stories/Hayes-SDLaw.pdf>. (Both Branca and Hayes are attorneys.) This is true whether a citizen is within or outside his home, but only when his life is in danger. There is no legal justification for using lethal force for the

allowed to legally defend himself against attempts to take his life. This is not unique to the United States but is the extension of a long legal history that goes back to the English Common Law⁵⁵ as well as European and Reformation⁵⁶ legal precedent

defense of property (e.g., car theft, pickpockets, etc.) in most states. There is greater latitude in the home due to the “castle doctrine” than outside it, but even on the street lethal force may be used if an individual is, e.g., attacked by a gang wielding baseball bats or chains. In each case their must be “ability, opportunity, and jeopardy” of an attacker to inflict death or grave bodily harm.

⁵⁵ English Common Law may be seen in Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England*: “Homicide in *self-defense*. . . upon a sudden affray, is also excusable rather than justifiable, by the English law. This species of self-defense must be distinguished from that just now mentioned, as calculated to hinder the perpetration of a capital crime; which is not only a matter of excuse, but of justification. But the self-defense, which we are now speaking of, is that whereby a man may protect himself from an assault or the like, in the course of a sudden brawl or quarrel, by killing him who assaults him. . . . This right of natural defense does not imply a right of attacking: for, instead of attacking one another for injuries past or impending, men need only have recourse to the proper tribunals of justice. They cannot therefore legally exercise this right of preventative defense, but in sudden and violent cases when certain and immediate suffering would be the consequence of waiting for the assistance of the law. Wherefore, to excuse homicide by the plea of self-defense, it must appear that the slayer had no other possible (or, at least, probable) means of escaping from his assailant” (4 vols. [London: Strahan, 1825], 4:183-84, book 4, “Of Public Wrongs,” ch. 14, “Of Homicide”).

⁵⁶ “The man who meets with highway robbers, by whom no one is murdered without the consent of the will of God, has the power in accordance with the authority of the laws to resist them in self-defense which incurs no blame because no one forsooth has (received) a special command from God that he meekly allow himself to be slain by robbers” (Theodore Beza, “*De jure magistratum*: On the Right of Magistrates over Their Subjects and the Duty of Subjects Towards their Rulers,” 1574, Ch. 5, Q7, Answers, f.; trans. Henry-Louis Gonin, ed. Patrick S. Poole <<http://www.constitution.org/cmt/beza/magistrates.htm>> (accessed 19 May 2014); may also be found in *The*

and further back to Roman law in the Code of Justin and even earlier Roman law.⁵⁷ As Bauder points out, “When governments cannot protect their citizens, it becomes prudent and even necessary for citizens to attend to their own protection. People have no obligation to permit themselves to be struck down by predators and evil men. On the contrary, they have a right to defend their lives, limbs, and property.”⁵⁸

Right of Magistrates over Their Subjects [repr., Fig Books, 2012], Q7, Kindle loc. 904/1094). See also the summary of Luther’s views of self-defense in David Kopel, “Luther and the Christian Duty to Defend Innocents,” 17 November 2005, <http://davekopel.com/corner/corner-archive2005.htm#Luther_and_the_Christian_Duty_to_Defend_Innocents> (accessed 23 April 2014).

⁵⁷ Though predating the Code of Justin, the Roman constitutionalist and senator Cicero said, “There exists a law, not written down anywhere but inborn in our hearts; a law which comes to us not by training or custom or reading but by derivation and absorption and adoption from nature itself; a law which has come to us not from theory but from practice, not by instruction but by natural intuition. I refer to the law which lays it down that, if our lives are endangered by plots or violence or armed robbers or enemies, any and every method of protecting ourselves is morally right. When weapons reduce themselves to silence, the laws no longer expect one to await their pronouncements. For people who decide to wait for those will have to wait for justice too—and meanwhile they must suffer injustice first. Indeed, even the wisdom of the law itself, by a sort of tacit implication, permits self defence. Because it does not actually forbid men to kill; what it does, instead, is forbid the bearing of a weapon with the intention to kill. When, therefore, an inquiry passes beyond the mere question of the weapon and starts to consider the motive, a man who has used arms in self defence is not regarded as having carried them with a homicidal aim” (Marcus Tullius Cicero, “In Defence of Titus Annius Milo,” in *Selected Political Speeches of Cicero*, trans. Michael Grant, 215–78, 3rd, Penguin Classics [New York: Penguin, 1989], 222). See also Bruce W. Frier and Thomas A. J. McGinn, *A Casebook on Roman Family Law* (New York: Oxford UP, 2004).

⁵⁸ Bauder, “Lessons from Colorado.”

Fifth, U.S. citizens have the privilege of participating in the political process. Those who choose to do so may endeavor to influence the legal standards of their country. This right belongs as much to Christians with their (typically) more conservative social values as it does to non-Christians, whether conservative or liberal in their views. Whether an individual chooses to exercise this right or not, it is an option available in this country to an extent perhaps greater than in any other country in the world. Although we currently have many freedoms, that may not always be the case since a majority of our fellow citizens may decide that the desire for security is more desirable than the desire for freedom. Should this situation change, then the Christian must submit to government and live under the law. There are two alternatives. First, declare a specific law unjust, thus choosing to disobey it (recognizing that one would pay the penalty for doing so if caught). Second would be outright rebellion should a government prove to be a tyrant, but that is an extraordinarily serious matter and would require very widespread agreement in a population to bring about change.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ “The Declaration specifies that when government becomes destructive of the ends for which it is established—the ‘Safety and Happiness’ of the people—then ‘it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.’ This is what has become known as the right of revolution, an essential ingredient of the social compact and right which is always reserved to the people. The people can never cede or delegate this ultimate expression of sovereign power” (Erler, “The Second Amendment,” 4). And again, “The Declaration also contains an important prudential lesson with respect to the right to revolution: ‘Prudence . . . will dictate,’ it cautions, ‘that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes.’ It is only after ‘a long train of abuses and usurpations pursuing invariably the same Object,’ and when that object ‘evinces a design to reduce [the People] to absolute Despotism,’ that ‘it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.’ Here the Declaration identifies the right of revolution, not only as a right of the people, but as a duty as well—indeed, it is the only duty mentioned in the Declaration. The prudential lessons of the Declaration are no less important than its assertion of natural rights. The prospect of the

Should, in future years, our country face that dilemma, Christians would need to decide, as they did at the time of the American Revolution, if the issues involved justified their participation.

Theological and Ethical Concerns

Evil and violence are real in our world. Since the sin of our first parents, humankind has lived in rebellion against God. The ethical portrait of our world in Romans 1:18-32 is an ugly one. Despite the truth of God being plain, humans have consistently disobeyed. That is only “natural” to a totally depraved sinner—it reflects his nature which is “only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). Despite the biblical description, the attitude of most of our fellow citizens is that people are basically good and that they act badly as a result of being forced into bad circumstances. Yet Bauder acknowledges, “In a fallen world, the existence of evil must be taken into account. Christians should allow no naïve utopianism to stand unchallenged. Evil is alive and well on planet earth.”⁶⁰ This is not the mindless evil of naturalism, “red in tooth and claw,”⁶¹ but culpable evil that is answerable to God’s justice.

dissolution of government is almost too horrible to contemplate, and must be approached with the utmost circumspection. As long as the courts are operating, free and fair elections are proceeding, and the ordinary processes of government hold out the prospect that whatever momentary inconveniences or dislocations the people experience can be corrected, they do not represent a long train of abuses and usurpations and should be tolerated. But we cannot remind ourselves too often of the oft-repeated refrain of the Founders: Rights and liberties are best secured when there is a ‘frequent recurrence to first principles’” (ibid.,5).

⁶⁰ Bauder, “Lessons from Colorado.”

⁶¹ “Who trusted God was love indeed / And love Creation’s final law / Tho’ Nature, red in tooth and claw / With ravine, shriek’d against his creed” (Alfred Lord Tennyson, “In Memoriam A. H. H.,” 1850, canto

As a result of this evil, there is violence in the world; there has been since Genesis 4 and there will be so long as sinful people exist. This is more readily apparent at some times and in some societies than in others. It is particularly graphic in our modern world, though that is due in part to modern media which capitalizes on the sensational—and violence is much more sensational than peaceful matters. Though we may idealize some periods of past history, violence has always been present. Even with such qualification, however, it does appear that we live in one of the more violent periods in history. The scale of violence has been increased geometrically due to modern technology which has the potential to obliterate entire populations in very short order. Humans are not more evil than before; they just have more “convenient” means of demonstrating their malice.

The solution to violence is not “peace” or nonresistance, for that simply makes greater space for the evil doer to do evil. At times it is necessary to use violence to stop or prevent violence. This may be more obvious at the national/international level,⁶² but it is also true at the personal level. Bauder comments,

Sometimes the restraint of violence calls for violence. The cliché that violence always begets violence is an affectation of navel-gazing mystics and the Woodstock generation. Sometimes violence, when it is rightly administered, brings an end to violence. Sometimes the just exercise of violence is the only way to end unjust violence. Sometimes peace is achieved through strength. No qualitative difference exists between calling on someone else (such as the police) to exert force in one’s behalf and exerting force for one’s self. If they were consistent, people who object to using violence against

56). Tennyson’s question is how humans can believe in God’s love and also in the violence that they see in the world around us.

⁶² On this see Stallard, “A Biblical Defense of Just War Theory.”

violence would never call for the police when they were being assaulted.⁶³

At the level of self-defense this use of violence may be necessary to preserve life: one's own or that of others. The failure to act violently to stop violent aggression will, in some cases, perpetrate greater violence as the aggressor is allowed to continue a violent killing spree. A Christian does not relish the thought of taking a life, nor do many, perhaps most, non-Christians.⁶⁴ Only the violent aggressor scoffs at the life of others. Though life should not be viewed as "sacred" (that places too high a value on it; it is not on the level of divine/sacred things), human beings have been created in the image of God and all life is precious. That life, however, may be forfeited if employed in evil and violence against one's fellow.⁶⁵ The

⁶³ Bauder, "Lessons from Colorado." See also Snyder, "A Nation of Cowards": "Is your life worth protecting? If so, whose responsibility is it to protect it? If you believe that it is the police's, not only are you wrong—since the courts universally rule that they have no legal obligation to do so—but you face some difficult moral quandaries. How can you rightfully ask another human being to risk his life to protect yours, when you will assume no responsibility yourself? Because that is his job and we pay him to do it? Because your life is of incalculable value, but his is only worth the \$30,000 salary we pay him? If you believe it reprehensible to possess the means and will to use lethal force to repel a criminal assault, how can you call upon another to do so for you?" (3).

⁶⁴ Writing as a police officer and shooting expert/trainer, Ayoob acknowledges that "those of us who have seen violent death up close, who have seen what high-powered bullets can do to living human tissue, have a horror of inflicting that nightmarish, never forgotten damage on a human being. Perhaps the only more terrifying prospect is that such a fate befall us or our loved ones. This is why we, a representative cross-section of America's population, keep deadly weapons for personal defense" (*In the Gravest Extreme*, 129).

⁶⁵ Ayoob contends that "the citizen has the right to kill in defense of innocent life; the dead attacker waived his own right to live when he threatened to wrongfully deprive a victim of his" (*ibid.*, 1). He does not

clearest such statement involves the judgment of capital punishment by government (Gen 9:6; Rom 13:1-5, etc.), but in dire circumstances the individual is also permitted to take life.⁶⁶ This was clearly encoded in the Mosaic Law and implied in Jesus' instructions to carry defensive weapons on at least some occasions. If that may be "easier" in mechanical terms today, it is no less dreaded by someone who seeks to obey God. Pulling the trigger is sometimes legitimate, but the use of deadly force should never be easy and should never be taken lightly or done without full realization of the consequences, both morally and legally.⁶⁷

We must accept the fact that we do not live in a perfect world and will not do so until Jesus returns and establishes his kingdom. In the meanwhile we must live as God commands and

write from a biblical/theological perspective, but his moral claim is consistent with that outlook.

⁶⁶ Ayoub explains that in his classic book "the emphasis is not so much on the taking of a life as the relieving of threat to life. Far from encouraging the reader to take life, [this book] advises great practical and moral restraint in the use of the lethal power the reader already possesses. I believe that the taking of one citizen's life by another is an unnatural act, justified only as a last desperate escape from grave criminal danger" (ibid., 3). Legally, "American laws universally condone homicide *only when undertaken to escape immanent and unavoidable danger of death or grave bodily harm*" (ibid., 10; italics are all caps in original).

⁶⁷ These statements assume that a particular situation escalates to the ultimate point of killing an aggressor. The ultimate decision to take a life must be accepted as potentially inevitable before any such confrontation begins, but it should be realized that often this is not necessary. It is not uncommon that the visible threat of force by someone defending himself will deter the criminal from carrying through his threats. To be confronted by an armed citizen is rarely the goal of the aggressor who typically presumes that his prey will be unarmed and helpless. As Bauder points out in his response to the Century 16 shooting, "The predator . . . did not plan to shoot up a police station. He planned his assault for a location filled with disarmed, defenseless victims" ("Lessons from Colorado").

be prepared to face the realities of an imperfect society. Though we or others may strive for an improved social and political environment—and may achieve some measures of success at times—our hope must not be in an earthly utopia brought about by our efforts. No political party will ever solve the world's problems nor right the injustices and instances of violence that mar our world today. Postmillennialism is far too optimistic of human nature. Premillennialism, though not negative toward social involvement at several levels, is the only view of history and eschatology that offers a realistic, ultimate hope of a perfect society within history, and that will come only when Jesus comes. Until then, “while evildoers ... go from bad to worse” (2 Tim 3:13), we may well need to sell our cloak and buy a sword.

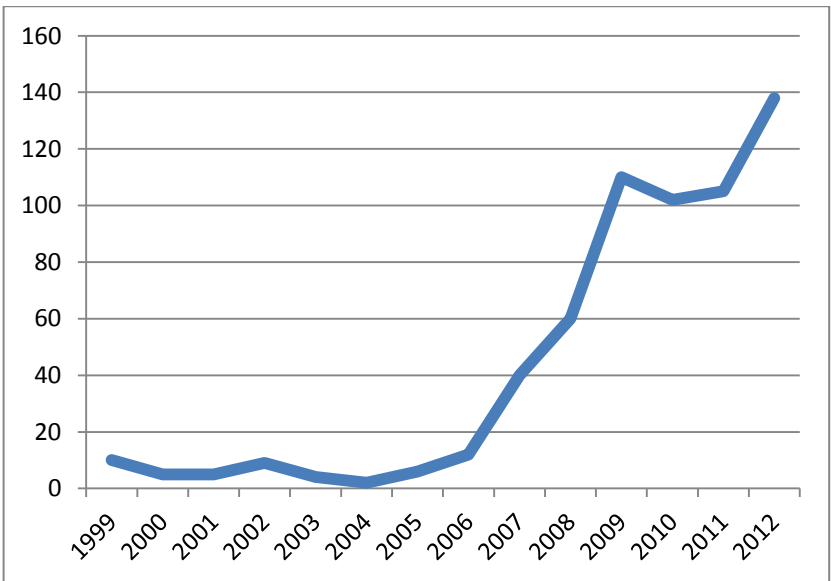
APPENDIX

Should a Local Church Provide Armed Security at Services?

This section, originally intended to be an integral part of this essay, is only an introduction to a related topic, but it has turned out to be one which demands a full-length paper in its own right. In such a paper, I would argue that in our current cultural situation the church not only may, but *should* make active preparations for the eventuality of violence entering the assembly.⁶⁸ In the last 15 years there have been 696 “Deadly Force Incidents at Faith-Based Organizations in the United States” from 1999 through July 2013. Of these, 39% resulted in fatalities of those other than the attacker (a total of 817 people

⁶⁸ At present the only good discussion of such issues of which I am aware is Carl Chinn, *Evil Invades Sanctuary: The Case for Security in Faith-Based Organizations* (by the author, 2012). This is neither a “how to do it” book nor a biblical/theological study; rather, it addresses the question of why a church or other Christian organization ought to take the matter of self-defense seriously. The statistics cited in this appendix are either from the book or from updated figures on Chinn's website (<<http://carlchinn.com>>).

were killed or injured and 355 died) and in 60% of the cases guns were used by the aggressor/s. Of these, 228 occurred inside the ministry's building; the remaining 459, on property outside the building or at the location of a ministry event.⁶⁹ Those statistics should be enough to sober the church member most skeptical of providing church security. When these incidents are plotted chronologically, the increase in such violence is alarming (only the 14 complete years from 1999-2012 are plotted here):



Nor can we Baptists assume that it is “the others” who are caught up in such events, for the listing by denomination shows that Baptist ministries have the highest such number: 157 (22%) of the total. These trends are relatively recent. Chinn observes,

⁶⁹ The statistics are compiled by Carl Chinn, <http://www.carlchinn.com/Church_Security_Concepts.html>. Specifics of each event (place, date, details, etc.) may be found at http://www.carlchinn.com/Deadly_Force_Incidents.html.

Historically, the majority of violent aggression has been directed at individuals or small groups of people known to the attacker. Over the past four decades, however, America has seen an increasing frequency of attacks aimed at larger groups of people unknown to the attacker. One of the first of these random attacks was the August 1, 1966 University of Texas shooting when Charles Whitman shot forty-five people (killing fourteen and wounding thirty-one). Between 1966 and October 16, 1991 when George Hennard gunned down forty-five (twenty-three of whom died) in a Luby's Cafeteria in Killeen, Texas, there were few other such instances. Since 1991 there has been a significant increase in the frequency of such violence against crowds; occurring in malls, office buildings, schools, open roads, open spaces, and churches.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, homicides involving *groups of victims* increased (as a ration of total homicides) by 42% from 1976 to 2005 (homicides by *groups of offenders* in the same analysis increased by 76.5% in the same time period). Many *spree killers* such as Eric Harris (Columbine) and Seung-Hui Cho (Virginia Tech) shared a driving hatred of the faith which is contagious to group or individual extremists. It is just a matter of time before we see another mass attack in a religious setting.⁷⁰

To appeal to “trust God” in such situations is inconsistent. We install fire alarms in church buildings to warn people of imminent danger.⁷¹ We wear seatbelts when we drive to church—or take teens to a sponsored event. Both are precautions against danger that we take despite the fact that we

⁷⁰ Chinn, *Evil Invades Sanctuary*, 5.

⁷¹ Fire may well be caused by arson or a bombing while a church service is in session; this has happened multiple times in American history. In 2008 there were 1,890 structure fires of religious property of which 15% were arson contrasted with only 5.57% of all structure fires in the same period. The problem is of sufficient magnitude that there is a National Church Arson Task Force that was established by Congress in 1996. (See Chinn, *ibid.*, 18–21).

trust God in both situations. We establish policy to guard against abuse in our ministries (and hopefully run background checks) and obtain liability insurance for unforeseen events or unexpected lawsuits. Making provisions for a response to a medical emergency or a violent intrusion of a church service is no different. Yes, we trust God, but we are also responsible to prepare wisely to potential situations that may bring harm to the people gathered for worship.

This does not mean that ushers should wear handguns or that we install metal detectors at the entrances. It does mean that we ought to be cautious and observant and think in advance about how we would handle a potential nightmare situation—even if we think the likelihood of such an event is relatively remote. As our society continues to increase security and “harden” targets with more aggressive protection, whether with armed guards or by adding various preventive measures to make the location less attractive to criminal activity, the “soft” targets that have not taken any such measures are more vulnerable and more attractive to violent aggressors who rarely plan their attacks on places where they know there is security present.⁷² Chinn observes, “Religious organizations have lagged behind by discounting security, luring more criminal activity toward churches and other religious groups. It is time to harden faith-based targets in measured steps.”⁷³

What Should I Do as an Individual?

If you come to the conviction that you should consider some form of self-defense for yourself, your family, or your ministry, what should you do? The first step is to study carefully the

⁷² At times our society’s attempts to “harden” targets is counterproductive. Some think it is prudent to ban handguns in certain public places and thus they post signs indicating that guns are not allowed (as if a criminal will obey such a sign!). The net effect of such actions is to advertise to an aggressor that the location is a “soft” target that will provide no resistance to his nefarious intent.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8.

biblical basis for such a decision. You must be convinced that it is a step that is biblically authorized. Do not assume that this is the case simply because this paper suggests that to be so. This is not an easy question, and explicit texts are not abundant. You may decide that my arguments are unpersuasive. I have tried to use only clear texts and have avoided a large number of others that have often been marshaled (especially on various Internet sites), but I do not claim a definitive conclusion.

Having reached such a consensus, you then need to decide what form of self-defense you consider most appropriate. Some will choose some form of manual combat (karate, judo, etc.), a baton, pepper spray, or others, a firearm. Regardless of one's choice, it is essential that you get high quality training. There is nothing more dangerous than a sincere, but untrained or poorly trained person attempting to "do some good." This is just as true of what might seem to be the simplest tool: pepper spray. There are good training courses that will make a substantive difference in all such methods. The further up the technology scale you go, the more important is such training.

Especially if you consider carrying a firearm, it is not only practically desirable, it is legally essential that you undergo multiple training sessions at several levels on an ongoing basis and this by recognized experts in the area, both experts in the use of such force and also legal experts. Much of this training needs to be "hands on" and include extensive training on a firing range. It is not adequate to have a friend "teach you how to shoot" or even to read a good book. Reading is a good start, and if you read the right books (see the recommendations below), you will tremble at the legal implications of having to use deadly force. It is not a pretty picture. You should retain a lawyer who specializes in self-defense issues and who will agree in advance to represent you in the event of a shooting. That will require a preliminary interview with the attorney (and perhaps a legal fee) and will probably result in the recommendation that you take specific training. That would be worth whatever fee is charged. Initially avoid almost all Internet sites on the subject. There is a wide variety of such material, but the value and reliability is mixed. Reading several of the books recommended

below first will enable you to identify less reliable advice that could result in legal complications.

Recommended Beginning Reading (Individual)

- Ayoob, Massad. *In the Gravest Extreme: The Role of the Firearm in Personal Protection*. Concord, NH: Police Bookshelf, 1980 (ISBN: 0936279001). This is a classic, though some details regarding specific firearms and loads are not dated. Ayoob is one of the most highly respected authorities in these areas and an expert witness in the field. His advice (in both books listed here) is no nonsense, very practical, and based on years of experience in both police work and in the court system.
- . *Gun Digest Book of Concealed Carry*, 2nd ed. Iola, WI.: Gun Digest Books, 2012 (ISBN: 9781440232671).
- Bird, Chris. *The Concealed Handgun Manual: How to Choose, Carry, and Shoot a Gun in Self Defense*. 6th ed. San Antonio: Privateer, 2011 (ISBN: 9780965678483). Over 500 pgs. of helpful advice written by a former crime reporter.
- Branca, Andrew F. *The Law of Self Defense*. 2nd ed. Maynard, MA: By the author, 2013 (available on Amazon; ISBN 9780988867703). As the title implies, this attorney-written book addresses the legal issues involved in self-defense.
- *Hayes, Gila. *Personal Defense for Women*. Iola, WI: Krause Books/Gun Digest Books, 2009 (ISBN: 9781440203909).
- *Jackson, Kathy. *The Cornered Cat: A Woman's Guide to Concealed Carry*. Hamilton, MI: White Feather Press, 2010 (ISBN: 978-0982248799).
- Martin, Michael. *Concealed Carry and Home Defense Fundamentals*. Woodbury, MN: Key House Press, 2012 (ISBN: 9781515482388). This is not as technical as Ayoob's works, but it is heavily illustrated with full color photos and provides an accessible introduction that may be helpful for those who are less familiar with such matters (a woman's perspective and illustrations are also included).
- Walters, Mark, and Kathy Jackson. *Lessons from Armed America*. Foreward by Masaad Ayoob. Hamilton, MI: White Feather P, 2009. (ISBN: 9781453685556).
- See also the Armed Citizens' Legal Defense Network for additional resources at <http://www.armedcitizensnetwork.org/>.

*Note: I have not read the two books marked with an asterisk (other than the excerpts available on Amazon.com), but base the listing on the reputation of the authors and reviews of these books. They both address the issue of self-defense from a woman's perspective.

How to Think about and Practice Theology

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INTRODUCTION

The Bible is the single most important book ever written since it is God's word through human penmen, not simply a word about God. God has taken the initiative to intelligently and verbally disclose himself and his will to humanity. The epithet describing believers as "people of the book" is well known as is the famous statement by Patrick Henry who mused that the Bible is worth more than all the other books ever printed.

Conservative evangelical believers (or historical fundamentalists) adhere to verbal inspiration, factual inerrancy, and sufficiency of Scripture and to a conservative framework of hermeneutics (theory of interpretation). The Bible possesses the authority and clarity to tell mankind what to believe and how to live. Believers are responsible to live day-to-day seeking to understand and appropriate God's grace and truth into their lives so as to walk humbly and blamelessly before God. This article overviews how each believer can interpret the Bible and practice theology. In light of inroads of pluralism, the current theological haze, and relentless attacks on the nature, knowability, and authority, of God's word each believer needs to carefully interpret the Scripture and practice theology.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT SCRIPTURE AND TRUTH

The Scripture attests to its own identity and truthfulness as God's word and to its own knowability.¹ This identity is a form of Scriptural foundationalism. Scriptural foundationalism should not be confused with enlightenment foundationalism that allegedly leads to a complete neutral, comprehensive, indubitable, objective knowledge, resulting in the impossibility of doubt (i.e., what is alleged as Cartesian foundationalism). Rather, Scriptural foundationalism asserts the presence of objective truth grounded in Scripture, which is the most basic foundation for a belief system. Scriptural foundationalism recognizes that while truth is ultimately personal since it is sourced in the Triune God himself, God nonetheless reveals his truth in Scripture in clear propositional revelation. A proposition is generally understood as the meaning of what is true or false as expressed in a declarative type statement. Propositional revelation asserts that revelation discloses truth in a cognitive manner that is not reducible to personal experience or personal perspective. In other words, propositional revelation is timeless and not limited, reducible, nor defined or affected by personal experience.

The Scripture directly and explicitly identifies itself as God's self-expression. Scripture is divine revelation and not simply a witness or history of divine revelation. To deny the clarity and authoritative verbal element of God's dealing with his people is to deny God's ability to speak and thus deny God himself. Both Jesus and the writers of the New Testament spoke in terms of

¹ For further review see the following by David A. Mappes: "A New Kind of Christian: A Review," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (July–September, 2004): 289–303; "The Nobility and Knowability of Truth: Part 1," (Spring 2009), 64–105; "The Nobility and Knowability of Scripture: Part 2," *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 13 (fall 2009): 1–22; "Current Trends in Hermeneutics and Theology: Certainty and Simplicity," *Paraklesis: A Ministry of Encouragement from Baptist Bible Seminary* (Clarks Summit, PA.), Summer 2010; "Love Wins by Rob Bell: A Biblical and Theological Critique," *The Journal of Ministry and Theology*, (Spring 2012), 87–121.

absolute, authoritative certainty. The phrase “thus saith the Lord” appears over 400 times in the Old Testament. This edict served to incite absolute obedience as the words of the prophet were to be absolutely, authoritatively obeyed. Elijah’s words in 1 Kings 21:19 are referred to as the Lord’s oracle in 2 Kings 9:25-26. Many times the prophet spoke for God in the first person (2 Sam 7:4-16; 2 Kgs 17:13); hence to disbelieve or question a prophet was to disbelieve or question God himself (1 Kgs 20:35-36). Paul referred to the Scriptures as the oracles of God (Rom 3:2) and referred to his own words as conveying the Spirit’s words (1 Cor 2:13). For this reason Paul can write, “The things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandments” (1 Cor 14:37). In Acts 1:16, Luke writes, “Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas.” Notice that the Holy Spirit (who is God) is the author of the Scripture through the human agency of David; the human agency of David did not detract or distort the nature of Scripture as God’s word. God providentially prepared mankind (Gal 1:15; Jer 1:5) to write the Scriptures as the human authors were superintended by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21). The authors recorded God’s intended word through their own words and personalities (Mark 12:36; 1 Cor 14:37) so that their writings indeed were God’s words.

These examples of certainty and authority suggest nothing less than absolute certainty and absolute authority. Jesus continually affirmed the absolute authority of the Scripture. He used Scripture to rebuke Satan (Matt 4:4-10), He used the authority of Scripture to rebuke the pharisaical traditions (Matt 15:3, 4), and he used Scriptural authority to cleanse the temple (Mark 11:17). He said one could build their life upon the rock of truth (Matt 7:24) and that not the smallest letter or stroke of the law would pass away until its fulfillment (Matt 5:17). Paul commanded the church leaders to speak with such authority and certainty so as to silence false teachers (Titus 1:9-16). Peter refers to Paul’s writing as accurate and in accordance with truth and understands Paul’s writings as Scripture (2 Pet 3:16). Luke says that he used detailed research to present an accurate

account of Jesus and the early church (Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1), and Paul cites Luke's writing as Scripture (1 Tim 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7).

Scriptural foundationalism also affirms that Scripture provides its own sufficient primary interpretative context and presents some doctrines with such clarity and repetition that these doctrines are fundamental and foundational to Christianity and to living the Christian life. These doctrines should be embraced with interpretative certainty. This interpretative certainty then presides as the final arbiter over religious traditions, personal intuition, and mystical encounters and even over personal doubt. God gives humankind an awareness of certain truths in Scripture regarding himself and his plan that corresponds to God's mind. Truth then is defined as correspondence to what is real and not just what one perceives to be real. Scriptural foundationalism denies that truth and doctrine are simply subjective experiences of a faith community or particular culture.

The Triune God is a God of reality and he has disclosed himself to us through his Son and his revelation. In spite of humanity's fallenness, sinfulness, and presuppositions, these truths have a primary and privileged claim on forming our views of life and God. Not all our knowledge of truth and doctrines has this kind of Scriptural, foundational clarity, and objectivity. Some doctrines require a synthesis from multiple passages given in different periods which may contain many interpretative nuances. These doctrines are held at interpretative levels of confidence.

HOW THINK ABOUT AND PRACTICE THEOLOGY

Scriptural Priority

What is God like? Why did he create me? How can I know God's will for my life? How could the changeless Son of God become a man? Will Jesus really return to this world and what will his return look like? Why does God allow evil? Could Jesus have sinned like I sin? What happens after death? Answering these questions is called theology. However, answering these

and similar questions requires a very careful, thorough systematic study of the entire Bible. Answering these questions with the full weight of all Scripture is called systematic theology.

Any orthodox theology begins with serious reflection and interpretation of the Scripture. Serious reflection requires using a legitimate theological method that guides the reader to understand the author's meaning as revealed in his writing. The biblical authors presumed that their intended meaning would be discernible and knowable through reading their text. They repeatedly directed believers to focus on what was revealed and to avoid speculation or worse, divination, to acquire what was not revealed. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." Israel was to view God's revealed word as the supreme and ultimate authority. The OT law itself contains provision in Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and Deuteronomy 18:15-22 to examine and evaluate truth claims by comparing any truth claim to the written law of Moses. This command of comparing truth claims to the law demonstrates that the law was sufficiently clear and knowable to test other truth assertions. Even if supernatural manifestations accompanied false truth assertions, the law of Moses would serve as the final arbiter in testing a truth assertion. Thus, the written, knowable law of God would have supreme authority over Israel in all matters.

Similarly, the Apostle Paul says he (and a unique group of other apostles and prophets) received God's truth through divine disclosure which he discusses in his letter to the Ephesians (Eph 2:20-12). Paul indicated that his intended meaning could be understood by reading his letter. Further, he assumes that the Ephesian believers could read and understand this verbal revelation through the literary conventions of their day and that his writings would serve as foundational instruction for God's people.

Paul summarizes that when the Ephesians read his letter they would understand his insight into the divinely disclosed mystery of Christ, and this authoritative written revelation would govern their lives and community (Eph 3:3-4). The

authors of Scripture present truth as a knowable, truthful, and trustworthy portrayal of the reality of God. In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20). All that Jesus commanded entails both what Jesus himself taught while on earth as well as what Jesus continued to teach to his apostles through the Spirit after the ascension (since the apostles were agents of the Scripture; John 14:16; 1 Cor 14:37; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Pet 3:2).

The task then of the Great Commission actually necessities that believers collect, properly interpret, and synthesize Scripture so as to bring the full weight of Scripture to bear on any given subject that the Scripture addresses. Systematic theology entails this comprehensive process of collecting, interpreting, synthesizing, and defending all biblical revelation to portray the total picture of God's revelation on a particular matter. Systematic theology, however, is always measured by an exegetical based theology. Exegesis means to draw the author's affirmed meaning out his text; hence the priority of authorial intention. The goal is to determine the meaning of what the author intends and affirms by his writing. Rather than asking "what does the passage mean to me," priority is always placed on the biblical author's conscious intended meaning as revealed in the context of his book. The question of how the meaning relates to the reader is called significance (or application). While significance is very important, the meaning of the biblical author always controls it. One noted scholar has recently re-emphasized that Christians need to look for the one single objective meaning of what the author affirms by his text, and not why he affirms his meaning or even worse to look for the author's meaning beyond the text.²

² Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 290-93.

Theologians use different sub-disciplines of theology to help discern, define, and defend the Christian faith. Systematic theology should be practiced within the context of other theological disciplines such as biblical theology, historical theology, etc., as illustrated:

Exegetical Theology	The process of studying of a single portion of Scripture using an historical, grammatical hermeneutic without any necessary organization of doctrines.
Biblical Theology	The process of discovering the particular viewpoint of a biblical author (e.g., Pauline theology) or the study of revelation in particular historical time period (e.g., theology of wisdom literature).
Systematic Theology	A cumulative and comprehensive answer and defense to what the Bible in entirety teaches on a given subject.
Historical Theology	The study of how the church throughout history has understood various doctrines and how those doctrines were developed.
Practical Theology	The process of taking truths primarily from systematic theology and integrating them into ministries of the church such as preaching, counseling, evangelism, worship, Christian education, etc.
Apologetics	The process of studying and presenting theology to defend the teaching of Christianity and Scripture against critics, cults, and cynics while providing evidence of credibility.

Understanding and Practicing a Biblical Theological Method

A correct (and self-correcting) model for how to theologize (theological method) is necessary since the Scripture is progressively revealed, and no one topic is fully addressed by any one author in any one time era. Rather, Scripture comprises

66 separate books in the Bible written over a 3900-year time span. Many times interpreters ask the wrong questions or ask the right question in the wrong way about a particular subject matter or text, which then creates difficult interpretive issues. A correct theological method is crucial in the interpretative and application process.

A theological method exhibiting the following characteristics will help ensure a biblically balanced and self-correcting approach:

1. Canonical. First priority and authority is always given to the canonical books of Scripture (*canon* refers to all 66 books of the Bible) over personal experiences, personal sensibilities, other writings, background studies, speculation, etc. In sum, Scripture is used to interpret Scripture in its proper context. Scripture possesses a kind of inherent clarity to allow its central message and truths to be self-evident. Rather than this maxim being circular reasoning, this principle of the self-authentication of Scripture simply provides the right for Scripture to speak first and provide a context for understanding. Background information and knowledge gained through general revelation can be helpful, though priority should always be placed upon Scripture interpreting Scripture. Theologians refer to this as the perspicuity (or clarity) of Scripture. Critics of perspicuity of Scripture assert that since everyone has pre-understanding, then there can be no valid authoritative interpretation of Scripture—only views based upon one's pre-understanding. This assertion, however, is patently false and self-contradictory. These critics claim that non-objectivity is universal; thus they themselves affirm an alleged universal truth of non-objectivity. Furthermore, they expect their readers who may have different pre-understanding and presuppositions to fully understand, alter, and even embrace their own arguments.

Everyone has pre-understanding and assumptions which should be honestly acknowledged and brought into submission to the Scripture. Pre-understanding is simply a personally acquired knowledge that either consciously or unconsciously influences one's view of life, including interpretation. Scholars have identified three categories of presuppositions for the

interpreter to examine: (a) theological presuppositions, doctrinal beliefs that affect interpretation of individual passages of Scripture; (b) philosophical presuppositions, beliefs about reality, about the nature of truth, the nature and direction of history, etc.; (c) methodological presuppositions, the use of logic, deduction, inferences, etc. A valid theological model will promote examination and alteration of these presuppositions by the full canon of Scripture. Unfortunately, some interpreters either ignore pre-understanding to their own peril or exaggerate pre-understanding well above the knowability of the text of Scripture which leads to mere perspectivism. A wise interpreter of Scripture will reflect and actually write down and critically examine previous significant experiences and views related to a passage being studied. This examination process can help to adjust pre-understanding with the meaning in the Scripture text. Wise interpreters ask themselves if the specific passage supports their views and experience. They work through a process of evaluating and understanding their own pre-understanding. Then they adjust their pre-understanding to the text of Scripture.

Many times interaction with others is helpful in this process of identifying pre-understanding. It is helpful to balance one's study of Scripture to include more than a powerful and dominate personality by reading good, balanced material. The careful interpreter must learn the plot line of the entire Bible. This general plot line is referred to as the meta-narrative, the grand overarching story line in Bible of how God is glorifying himself. Another phrase often and more correctly used to describe this overarching story is the unfolding drama. The unfolding drama begins in Genesis 1 with God glorifying himself through creating the earth, and the drama is completed in Revelation 21 with his creation finally acknowledging and fully glorifying him as Creator God. The drama includes five principal parts: (a) the Creator God, (b) the creation (primarily mankind), (c) the corruption and chaos resulting from sinful rebellion, (d) Christ and promise of redemption, and (e) the final consummation or completion of the drama. These five aspects of the drama are intertwined much like a rope is intertwined with

cords and they are progressively revealed throughout Scripture. These overarching themes appear repeatedly in the various books throughout the Bible. Careful interpreters learn how each book further advances the Bible's plotline. Many times it is helpful to evaluate and validate an interpretation within this overall plotline of the Bible. Many believers will read the Bible through each year and at the same time focus on a more detailed monthly reading in a specific Bible book or topic. Attending a good church with a commitment to an expositional teaching ministry will help one to understand the meta-narrative of the Bible and practice valid interpretation of Scripture.

2. Comprehensive. All biblical teaching on a topic must be examined with greater weight given to the clearest and most definitive passages rather than selective or vague passages. This comprehensive process helps avoid mere proof-texting. Proverbs 18:17 says, "The first to plead his case seems just, until another comes and examines him." Thus any theological model must entail extensive examination and interaction with all Scripture. Partial and fragmented knowledge will lead only to a distorted view and shallow ministry and life. Some passages require extensive examination of nuanced interpretative views from those who agree with a view as well as with those who disagree. In other words, wise interpreters seriously interact with both detractors and with supporters of a position as long as both groups share a similar high view of the inspiration of Scripture. Wise interpreters continue to examine both primary literature (the Bible) and secondary literature (commentaries, theology books, etc.). Further reading and interaction helps to unpack the issues and surface a number of sub-related themes and questions related to the initial question. Careful students are sure to restate and refine the initial question as they study. Many times properly defining the issue or question provides a path for healthy resolution. The overall goal is to become more sensitive to the literary features of these passages and allow a comprehensive view of a truth to shape one's understanding and life with God.

3. Consistent hermeneutical approach. Hermeneutics comes from the Greek term *hermeneuo* which carries the idea of

explaining, interpreting, or translating the sense of one language to another. It is the science and art of interpretation. The interpretive philosophy must be consistently used rather than allowing a shifting hermeneutical philosophy to vary from topic-to-topic, or passage-to-passage, or even from the Old Testament to New Testament. The goal is to always understand and validate the author's affirmed meaning by examining the historical-cultural meaning of the passage within the context of the author's book. God did not give all his revelation in one exhaustive act. Rather, he provided revelation through distinguishable stages in many literary styles or genres of writing. Each text of Scripture must be read in light of its own historical setting rather than simply superimposing later revelation onto earlier revelation. While the entire Bible is for Christians, it is not all directly addressed to Christians. The grammatical-historical-cultural-literal interpretation allows for figures of speech (hyperbole, similes, metaphors, etc.) as well as various forms or genres of writing (poetry, wisdom literature, narrative, etc.). These various genres, however, do not negate the historical accuracy of an event nor do they deny the factuality and truthfulness of Scripture. The interpreter should seek to determine and validate the original authors' intended meaning by examining the writing within its own historical context and literary genre. Believers should seek to understand the literal meaning of a text by its immediate historical-textual parameters. This interpretative method allows the immediate historical context of a passage to define and limit textual meaning.

4. Congruency. The method of study must allow for harmony, complexity, and tension of Scripture without creating direct contradictions or forced harmonization. Valid interpretation does not minimize or worse, deny, one truth while holding firmly to another truth. Some truths simply exist side-by-side which the biblical authors never try to resolve. As an example, it is disingenuous to claim that God is love while then ignoring that God is also holy or wrathful. Scripture teaches that God's nature entails both holiness and love. Interpretative questions should come from the text of Scripture rather than

create a false dichotomy between two polar choices. The statement that “if God loves me, then why did He allow this event in my life” is a classic example of not allowing the complexity and tension in Scripture. The Scriptures clearly teach that God does love us and that he is sovereignly orchestrating events in our lives; thus this question denies both these central truths. A theological method does not create false contradictions.

5. Coherence. Any theological method must demonstrate a logical, clear ordering of investigation which provides the greatest weight of direct teaching material to address a topic. Some practices are described in the Bible (e.g., betrothal in marriage or washing feet before entering a home) while other truths are prescribed (e.g., how a husband should treat his wife). A coherent approach recognizes this “prescriptive vs. descriptive” or the “is vs. ought” differences and allows the weightiest, clearest passages to address a topic. Descriptive truths describe things that simply existed while prescriptive truths prescribe a higher moral and ethical standard of what life ought to be.

6. Call of Response/Application. The call for personal response(s) must relate to the verbal meaning of the Scriptural truth/passage that is being considered. The authorial meaning of Scripture always controls this specificity for personal response (or the significance of Scripture). The extent to which a truth can be applied to the contemporary reader is measured by the degree of transfer.³ The degree of transfer is the extent to which the current reader is similar to or different from the originally intended recipients. If the passage is specifically addressing Christian husbands, is it legitimate to then apply and transfer that meaning to wives or to children? If a passage does not have a high degree of transfer, then broader Scriptural principles from the passage may apply. However, these Scriptural principles should always be measured by other Scripture that directly address the topic. Principles should not

³ See Daniel Estes, *Learning and Living God's Word* (Schamburg, IL: Regular Baptist P, 1993) for further discussion.

serve as the final weight of a truth or an application but rather be used to illustrate a truth taught elsewhere in Scripture. Most importantly, careful interpreters must pray that God would illumine their minds to personally apply the truth they are studying. Illuminating insight from the Holy Spirit is directly linked to the interpreter's appetite for following the Lord. A prayerful attitude of obedience to the truths being studied indicates a reverence and adoration of the truth giver, God himself.

As the interpreter forms tentative conclusions about a topic, those conclusions should be tested through time and careful interaction with the Christian community. Careful interpreters continue to evaluate the amount of literary evidence in the Scripture that supports their conclusions. In particular, they look for multiple, larger blocks of Scripture which might support their conclusions. They also look for other biblical texts which address similar issues that support their interpretation and application of Scripture. The Bible is always its own interpreter.

Spiritual Growth and Biblical Convictions

Doctrinal Taxonomy

A valid theological model will allow for growth and maturity in theological development as well as the affirmation of first-order knowable truths. First-order knowable truths refer to core, essential doctrinal truths of Christianity that define Christianity (and living as a Christ follower). This growth and maturity involves cognitively understanding the Scriptures as well as applying these truths through faith. Oftentimes doubt (lack of faith) in appropriating or believing the truth is confused with cognitively understanding the truth. A valid theological model allows for growth in both the cognitive developmental understanding of Scripture as well as maturing in faith-obedience to the truth. God has revealed himself through unique special revelation, though mankind is both finite and sinful; hence humans do not always fully understand or consistently apply that revelation to their lives. A valid theological model will

acknowledge that differences exist between interpretative certainty (lack of doubt), legitimate interpretative probabilities (degrees of interpretative confidence on some doctrines), and lack of application of these truths.

The NT writers present that the true gospel and true gospel living is discernible from counterfeit, false gospels. The gospel and gospel living have doctrinal parameters and boundaries. While some may not fully understand or be able to fully affirm and articulate those boundaries, they could not intelligently deny them without denying the gospel itself. Throughout the book of Acts, the gospel truth is presented in contrast to false teaching from both Judaism and paganism. Examining the actual content of apostolic preaching, their refutation of false teaching, and their own comments referring to first-order doctrinal truth helps interpreters to discern core, essential doctrinal components which should be held in an absolutist (though not triumphalistic) fashion. In Acts 2, Luke emphasizes that Peter's first sermon to the church contains such core, essential truths as the crucified, risen, and ascended Lord and that salvation is only in his name; Peter also mentioned the work of the triune God as he reveals the person and salvific work of Christ and that individuals can appropriate this salvation only through conscious, personal faith in Christ alone. The following chart partially summarizes some of these core essential issues of the apostolic message in the book of Acts⁴.

Passage	God's nature	Person of Jesus Christ	Work of Christ	Salvation by grace alone through faith alone	The truth needs to be proclaimed as essential doctrine
Acts 2	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Acts 3	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Acts 4-5	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

⁴ Chart modified from "Core Christianity" by Charles J. Colton, May 2006 (D.Min dissertation at Baptist Bible Seminary), 70.

Acts 10	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Acts 13	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes

When Paul addresses churches in Galatia, he immediately presents core, defining, non-compromising, and non-provisional aspects of the gospel message and gospel living. In Galatians 1:6-12, Paul asserts he received divine disclosure directly from God (neither from man nor through man) for his teaching and establishes this divine disclosure as objective criteria for all other gospels. There is no sense of provisionality here in his letter but rather essential core components which could be known with objectivity and certainty. This sense of objective certainty in Galatians 1:6-24 is so objective and so knowable that these truths can even preside over and adjudicate angelic messengers and even Paul's future teachings.

Scripture repeatedly commends to its readers a basic framework of doctrinal truths and apostolic traditions that entails doctrinal content of this first-order. The term tradition (2 Thess 2:15) focuses on such content as handed down from the apostles to the churches. Sound doctrine denotes a fixed body of doctrine—a fixed, orthodox confession of faith that believers have received and that believers are responsible to preserve against heresy. If these truths are violated or simply re-interpreted to mean something less than their original intent, then apostasy would ensue. Believers are instructed to guard this faith (2 Tim 1:13-14; 4:3; Titus 1:9), defend it (Jude 3) and not drift, thereby passing it on to succeeding generations.

Believers are commanded to compare and contrast teachers and their message with the revealed truth of the Scriptures (Matt 24:24-25; 2 Thess 2:1-5; 1 John 4:1-6; 2 John 9-11). This revealed truth in Scripture is objective truth that is knowable and that can adjudicate counter assertions. Paul admonishes Titus about “men who turn away from the truth” (Titus 1:14). In each case the apostolic deposit of truth is to serve as the measurement for error. Paul warns that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light and deceive others through false apostles and deceitful workers (2 Cor 11:13-14). The Scripture presents truth with such objectivity, knowability, certainty, and

authority that false teachers are to be silenced and removed from the assembly if they do not repent (1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 2:14-19).

Even promises of future events such as the universal judgment and the visible return of Christ are presented as divine future certainties. These promises of God (that could/can be known) were to carry more authority than the reality early Christians found themselves situated in; they were to allow God's word to create a framework to interpret and judge their cultural events rather than allowing their cultural situation to interpret Scripture. Even what appeared as incredible evidence by the false teaches in 2 Peter 2 in discounting God's promises was summarily dismissed in light of the clarity and certainty of the verbal promises of Scripture—thus no amount of evidence could be marshaled against the promise of Scripture so as to disregard the promise or obfuscate the meaning of the promise. This speaks of non-provisional, absolute, authoritative core doctrinal values of Christianity.

In his second epistle, Peter addresses false teachers who denied the second coming of Christ. Peter's description in chapter two portrays an historical overview of God's past acts of judgment that transcends any human ability to access and validate the truthfulness of these past judgments apart from OT Scripture. Peter refers to such past acts of judgment as the imprisonment of angels, the flood and preservation of Noah, judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, preservation of Lot, and judgment of Balaam. Peter then argues that these past acts of God's judgment become the basis for the guarantee of future judgment of the false teachers at the return of Christ. Peter's recipients could not validate these facts of past judgment nor prove future judgment. Nevertheless readers were (and are) to allow the verbal promises of God to interpret and adjudicate the false teachers as well as their own lives. The Scripture authors present their writing as the authoritative divinely inspired Word of God.

While Bible-centered Christians do agree on essential, core theological issues related to Christianity, they also disagree on a number of interpretative nuances surrounding these essential

components. As an example, Bible-centered Christians all affirm the absolute certainty of Christ's visible second coming to earth, though they disagree on specific events related to his return. Believers must discern the relative degrees of importance of theological beliefs. What beliefs are essential, secondary, peripheral, or simply incredulous? What doctrinal truths are indispensable to Christianity and to Christian living and what beliefs should be held in a less essential manner? Theologians refer to this prioritizing of doctrines as doctrinal taxonomy.

How to think about Essential and Non-essential Doctrines

Determining these essential and non-essential nuances cannot simply be formulated around simplistic statements as "Jesus died for me" or worse a generic comment such as "God loves us" as comprising the essential category. This method many times creates a skewed, truncated, and even false gospel. Each of these simplistic phrases carries incredible critical biblical nuances that require further explanation. Even some of the more serious attempts to categorize the essential doctrines as being restricted to the grace-gospel-salvation category many times can fall short or be misapplied.

The method of creating a grace-gospel-salvation essential category vs. all other issues can create a false comparison. Who would disagree that the salvation is an essential category and eternally important? However, some essential truths of Christianity are not explicitly stated in the gospel message though they are nonetheless essential truths.

The essential vs. non-essential question should be framed by asking what the biblical authors disclosed as being essential to each specific subject they are addressing. In respect to personal conversion, the grace gospel through faith alone is essential; otherwise the gospel is perverted. When addressing issues of eschatology (study of end time events), the second visible return of Christ to judge the living and the dead is an essential component as is the notion of general resurrection, God's sovereign control over history, God's recreating the fallen creation, and removal of the curse, etc. When addressing

Christian life issues such as having a truly Christian marriage or being a Christian citizen in a hostile government atmosphere, then other essential non-negotiable components surface. It is far better to compile all the biblical evidence addressing any particular subject matter and then wrestle with specific interpretative nuances of refined views. The next step is to create the essential vs. non-essential categories under each topic rather than just comparing all topics to the grace-gospel-conversion essential category. Some doctrines relate to the gospel message while other doctrines relate more to Christian living and areas of discipleship, though both are essential.

Determining Doctrinal Weight

Determining the weight of each doctrine or doctrinal nuance entails a number of considerations: (1) Biblical clarity and repetition of the truth. Direct, repetitious Scripture addressing the same subject always carries the greatest weight in determining the degree of importance and authority; (2) The weight the Scripture author associates with the truth is also crucial. What are the textually stated or implied consequences of misunderstanding or denying the truth as well as obeying the truth? (3) The relevance of the truth to the character of God. Will confusing or minimizing the truth minimize or distort the character of God? (4) The relevance of the truth to the character of the gospel; (5) The relationship of the truth to other doctrines as well as to orthodox Christianity itself; (6) The degree of consensus of other Christians (including both past and present); (7) The current as well as past cultural pressures to deny or accept the truth.⁵ While the full weight of all these criteria is important, the first two criteria provide the priority in determining doctrinal taxonomy.

⁵ Modified from Erik Thoennes, *Life's Biggest Questions: What the Bible Says About the Things that Matter Most* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 34-37.

One popular paradigm suggests believers can help envision these essential and less essential issues in the following manner:

- (1) What biblical truths believers should legitimately die for regarding Christianity (and living Christianly). Many times these beliefs are referred to as first-level, foundational, fundamental, absolute, or core beliefs that are essential to Christianity; they define Christianity (and the Christian life) and if altered then Christianity and the Christian life will ultimately cease to be Christian. A few examples of these foundational truths would include the virgin birth of Christ; the full humanity of Christ; the deity of Christ; Christ's sacrificial death; the physical resurrection; the second coming of Christ; The personhood of God; salvation by grace alone through conscious personal faith alone. Denials or depreciations of these foundational, fundamental truths (and implications of these truths) could lead to either apostasy or to a tragic shipwrecked life. The interpretative evidence is so strong with such clarity that believers should be willing to die for these truths or they would deny the Christian faith. Throughout church history, heretics and false teachers have attacked these foundational beliefs resulting in the formation of long lasting church creeds. Many of the early Christian creeds and early councils reveal the essential nature of these fundamental doctrines as well as notion of interpretative certainty and biblical authority. As the church faces new cultural and spiritual challenges, the church will need to study and refocus the Scripture to address other topics. As an example, Christians are now focusing the Scripture on the nature of marriage to correctly demonstrate that marriage is a one-man to one-woman union so as to exclude same sex marriage and polygamy. Hence, one of many essential aspects of marriage then is a one-man to one-woman union. Christians are also refocusing the Scripture on the

nature of humanity to emphasize the intrinsic worth of all life including the unborn.

- (2) The second level weighting doctrine refers to what believers, who hold to essential truths, might legitimately and lovingly divide over. Many times this category is referred to as second-level doctrines or convictions. One example of this dividing occurred when Paul and Barnabas separated over the issue of John Mark (Acts 15:36-40). Some examples might include charismatic issues or some issues of baptism, etc. The notion of dividing need not imply divisiveness or belligerence, nor does it imply mere indifference. It does, however, imply the issue is so important that doctrinal boundaries are formed. While discussion on the non-essential issues is important and should continue, that single discussion cannot be allowed to consume all of one's time and effort. Otherwise the more essential truths might be marginalized or distorted. Many times denominations and fellowships are created on this notion of dividing while still holding to essential truths.
- (3) The third category refers to what should believers legitimately debate over in a church or fellowship? This category many times is referred to as third-level doctrines which might include such theologically refined issues as the possibility if Jesus could have sinned while affirming He did not sin or perhaps some refined aspects of eschatology, etc. Spirited debate is good and healthy amongst believers as long as the debate occurs with an irenic spirit and desire to further understand and resolve the interpretative issues.
- (4) The fourth category entails what should believers personally decide based upon personal conscience and conviction? Some NT examples include gray areas such as eating meat, worship styles, etc.
- (5) And lastly, the fifth category revolves around what believers simply dismiss as word wrangling and pure

speculation.⁶ The central controlling motif in doctrinal taxonomy is always the clarity and authorial meaning of the Scripture.

CONCLUSION

The Bible reveals everything believers need to know to live according to God's pleasure. Believers must approach the Scripture with reverence and with a correct, theological method to properly discern and apply the authors meaning in Scripture. Proper interpretation with legitimate application is critical in Bible study, yet it is often neglected. Ezra set an example of being one who studied and practiced the law of the Lord (Ezra 7:10). Christ warned of the inevitable defeat of the those who fail to act upon the truth of God's word (Matt 7:24-27). James commands believers to be "doers" of the word and not "forgetful hearers," for it is the "doer" of the word that is blessed (James 1:22-25).

⁶ See Gerry Breshears, "Learning to Distinguish Between Degrees of Certainty" in *Lessons in Leadership*, ed. Randy Roberts (Grand Rapids: Kregal, 1999), 48-53.

The Relevance of Biblical Creationism in Christian Apologetics

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INTRODUCTION: THE DISPUTED RELEVANCE OF BIBLICAL CREATIONISM IN APOLOGETICS

Several recent publications have argued that dogmatism over biblical creationism is either irrelevant or detrimental to the apologetic task. More specifically, they posit that insistence upon interpreting Genesis 1 as a *literal* record of creation occurring by the direct working of God over the course of six *normal* days only thousands of years ago is likely to undermine the broader apologetic case for Christianity and dissuade many would-be converts from embracing the gospel. It is deemed a disservice to the Christian faith to place the allegedly pseudo-scientific claims of “young-earth” creationism on the same plane with a robust apologetic defense for such things as the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the reliability of New Testament. How unfortunate it would be if those convinced of the truth of the latter were shaken in that belief by insistence upon the truth of the former. Consequently, it is argued that it is not imperative or desirable to consider biblical teaching on creation within the scope of Christian apologetics.

Objections to the inclusion of biblical creationism within the scope of an apologetic defense of Christianity typically take one of three main forms. First, it is argued that biblical creationism is inconsequential to the doctrine of biblical authority. This argument claims that the truth and accuracy, and thus the ultimate meaning and authority, of the biblical record is not tied directly with any particular interpretation of the creation record in Genesis. Thus, what a person believes about creation need not deter from the acceptance of Scripture’s overarching message as

authoritative truth. Second, it is argued that biblical creationism is peripheral to biblical theology. As such, what one believes about God's means of creating the world, the length of the days in Genesis 1, or the age of the earth, has no impact on the development of crucial theological themes. Doctrines related to theology proper, Christology, pneumatology, anthropology, soteriology, bibliology, etc., are allegedly unaffected by whatever perspective one takes on the creation record. Third, as alluded to above, it is argued that biblical creationism is detrimental to the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Biblical creationism, when viewed as being packaged together with the truth concerning salvation through Jesus Christ, supposedly poses a deterrent to those otherwise favorably inclined to the gospel. These three charges are indeed weighty, and if they are true, they constitute a solid case against the inclusion of any discussion of biblical creationism within the apologetic defense of the Christian faith.

However, there is another side to the coin. The case for biblical creationism has been unjustifiably minimized within the broader apologetic task. Regardless of the rhetorical weight ascribed to the preceding objections, it is necessary to thoroughly examine the biblical text and trace out its theological ramifications in order to determine just how vital insistence upon a literal understanding of the early chapters of Genesis is or is not when it comes to establishing biblical authority, synthesizing biblical theology, and proclaiming the biblical gospel. Contrary to the objections advanced, this author maintains that biblical creationism, including a literal reading of the early chapters of Genesis, is uniquely central to the doctrine of biblical authority. A correct perspective on creation is incredibly relevant to the unfolding of significant themes in biblical theology and, more specifically, that it is foundational to the proclamation of the truth of the biblical gospel.

OBJECTIONS TO BIBLICAL CREATIONISM IN APOLOGETICS

Objections to the discussion of biblical creationism in apologetics are not all alike. Some simply view the discussion as

unnecessary; others consider it genuinely harmful to the apologetic task. The following section details these objections, looking specifically at the relevance, or lack thereof, of biblical creationism (including a literal reading of the early chapters of Genesis) to biblical authority, biblical theology, and the biblical gospel.

Biblical Creationism Is Allegedly Inconsequential to Biblical Authority

Arguments for biblical creationism and the interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis being inconsequential to biblical authority are often made implicitly rather than explicitly. It should be noted that proponents of modified outlooks on the creation record, such as the gap theory, the day-age view, the revelatory-day view, the framework hypothesis, theistic evolutionism, etc., do not advocate that their views can facilitate the promotion of biblical authority better than young-earth creation can. By contrast, they contend that their views in no way disservice or denigrate the doctrine of biblical authority. To be fair, certain young-earth theologians have argued for this point as well. John Frame notes, “The figurative views [namely the day-age view and the framework hypothesis] . . . do not imperil our confession of biblical inerrancy or the historicity of Genesis, for they claim to be derived precisely from the text.”¹ Consequently, if inerrancy and historicity are not called into question, neither should biblical authority be doubted.

Wayne Grudem, who advocates the day-age perspective on creation, arrives at a similar conclusion. He suggests there is room for continued discussion on the early chapters of Genesis

¹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), 306. Frame’s stance on young-earth creationism is exegetically based, but is markedly weak. He states, “I myself see no reason to suppose that the creation week was longer than a normal week. But I see no reason either to require the view as a test of orthodoxy.” Frame does, however, flatly reject evolution (theistic or otherwise) as exegetically, theologically, and scientifically untenable (310–12).

because neither the literal nor the figurative view threatens the truthfulness of Scripture.² He also urges that the question of origins and its relationship to a proper reading of Genesis do not simply come down to a matter of “‘believing the Bible’ or ‘not believing the Bible,’ nor is it a question of ‘giving into modern science’ or ‘rejecting the clear conclusions of modern science.’”³ As such, it may be concluded that Grudem does not view the subject of origins as it relates to the days of the creation week or the age of the earth to be a matter of biblical authority.

Robert Culver’s outlook is similar, though certainly more aggressive. His perspective, although somewhat vague, suggests that linking any particular interpretation of the creation account with the broader subject of biblical authority may indeed prove hazardous. He writes, “Readers are well advised to commit themselves without reserve only to the clear theological truths of Scripture revelation, likewise to the truthfulness of the chapters of Genesis and other scriptural passages on creation,” and, “Those who insist that we simply must agree with them or else be somewhat sub-Christian or of questionable loyalty to biblical revelation are shouting too loudly to be obeyed.”⁴ He thus concludes, “It will be wise to commit ourselves irrevocably to none of the theories. Creation was supernaturally brought to pass. As such it is a divine mystery. We may never penetrate it,

² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 308. Like Frame, Grudem rejects evolution in both its naturalistic and theistic forms as a viable option for an orthodox view of origins (275–87).

³ *Ibid.*, 297. Grudem also notes, “Even for those who believe in the complete truthfulness of Scripture (such as the present author), and who retain some doubt about the exceptionally long periods of time scientists propose for the age of the earth (such as the present author), the question does not seem to be easy to decide” (297).

⁴ Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Geanies House, Fern, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2005), 163.

though we may trust all that God has said about it.”⁵ Oddly, it is questionable how the biblical text may be so greatly trusted in what it says on origins if it really is as unclear as Culver would make it out to be with respect to the days of creation and the age of the earth. However, it is plain that he does not believe that old-earth perspectives on the creation record bring into question Scripture’s authority.

This opinion is echoed even by those who have decidedly less reserved views on the interpretation of the creation account. For instance, theistic evolutionist Howard Van Till argues for a more expansive understanding of inerrancy. He questions, “Has a commitment to biblical inerrancy and the accompanying concept of episodic creationism led [advocates of the view] to hold low views regarding the formational capabilities of the creation?”⁶ Denis Lamoureux, likewise an advocate of theistic evolution, concurs, arguing that “most Christians conflate the concept of biblical inerrancy with a strict literal interpretation of Scripture. They often assume that statements in the Bible about the structure, operation, and origin of the world are completely factual and in alignment with physical reality.”⁷ In the foregoing statements, regardless of the seemingly strained logic, it is evident that neither Van Till nor Lamoureux view non-literal interpretations of the creation account as an infringement on biblical inerrancy. Since they

⁵ Ibid. This rings true to a remark that has sometimes been made by those with no desire to study the issues in question: “It does not matter how God did it; what matters is that he did it.”

⁶ Howard J. Van Till, “A Partnership Response,” in *Science and Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Richard F. Carlson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 62–63.

⁷ Denis O. Lamoureux, *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 64. Lamoureux clarifies that the seemingly inaccurate language in the text is not the result of intentional misrepresentation, but rather the result of God’s efforts to accommodate lofty concepts to human language: “He lowered Himself and met [biblical authors] and their readers at their level” (65).

maintain that Scripture is without error, it may therefore be logically assumed that they do not regard their view to be in any way at odds with biblical authority either.

If, as it has been argued, the doctrine of creation has no bearing as to whether the authority of the biblical text may be trusted, then the direct implication is that the discussion and defense of the biblical account of creation is not germane to the apologetic task.

Biblical Creationism Is Allegedly Peripheral to Biblical Theology

The question of whether different beliefs on the creation account and origins impact biblical theology is decidedly broader than that of whether they impact biblical authority. It deserves to be noted that even if a theory of origins does not outright deny biblical authority, it does not necessarily follow that it remains concordant with all other biblical doctrines. Naturally, any position that obstructs the theological message of either the creation account or other passages cannot be biblically permissible. However, generally speaking, few if any supporters of the alternative models of creation tend to find incongruences between their respective positions and any major theological doctrines.

Notably, Frame finds within the creation account advocacy for God's lordship and authority over all the earth. Since God made all things, he has the right of ownership, the right to do as he wishes with what he has made.⁸ Frame does not view this truth as impacted in any way by *how* God made the earth or *how long* it took him to do so. Frame remarks, "It is not clear to me that any other doctrines rest logically upon a literal view of the days of Genesis."⁹ Similarly, Millard Erickson, though finding critical theological problems with the notion of evolutionary

⁸ John M. Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 291–92.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 305–06.

development, nevertheless highlights four major theological implications of the creation account that are largely unaffected by what view one takes on the age of the earth.¹⁰ Culver is more biting in his remarks, suggesting that not only is old-earth creationism within the realm of theological orthodoxy, but that proponents of young-earth creationism have basically hijacked the definition of orthodoxy, saying, “At present, however, we are afflicted by some writers and promoters who seem to think their view of the Creative week (of twenty-four hour days) . . . is the only view consistent with orthodoxy [*sic*] and possible to an honest reading of the text of . . . Genesis.”¹¹

Grudem is the only old-earth proponent consulted who seems to wrestle with honest doubts about the theological viability of his position, noting that the subject of animal death prior to the fall is a necessary issue for old-earth advocates to deal with.¹² Even so, Grudem seems disinclined to find any theological challenges because, as he observes, the matter of the days of Genesis and the age of the earth ranks well below the

¹⁰ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 410–11. These four implications are as follows: (1) “Everything that is has value, because while it is not God, it has been made by him”; (2) “God’s creative activity includes not only the initial creative activity, but also his later indirect workings. Creation does not preclude development in the world; it includes it”; (3) “There is justification for scientifically investigating the creation”; and (4) “Nothing other than God is self-sufficient or eternal.”

¹¹ Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical*, 142. Culver justifies his position by implying that young-earth creationists assume too much of the scientific exactness of the creation account.

¹² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 292–93. Ironically, Grudem only addresses how animal death squares with the fall and the curse in Genesis 3, and Romans 5 and 8. He does not consider the implications of animal death in a “very good” world (cf. Gen 1:31). Francis Schaeffer in his classic *Genesis in Space and Time* addresses the issue, but does not come to any definitive conclusions (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1972, 62).

more important truths that can be observed in the creation account: (1) that God created the universe out of nothing; (2) that creation is distinct from God and yet always dependent on God; (3) that God created the universe to display His glory; (4) that the universe was originally created as “very good”; (5) that there is no ultimate conflict between science and the Scripture; and (6) that secular theories of origins that deny God as the creator are incompatible with belief in the Bible.¹³ Thus, in Grudem’s perspective, it does not appear that the final conclusion on the proper interpretation of Genesis is of *no* theological consequence at all; however, it is surely of *minimal* theological consequence, so minimal that it should not be any deterrent to believing in old-earth creationism. Consequently, from a theological perspective, it would appear that there is no reason for including a defense of biblical creation within the broader scope of Christian apologetics.

Biblical Creationism Is Allegedly Detrimental to the Biblical Gospel

One of the most serious challenges leveled against the young-earth creationist position is that young-earth creationism, by means of its alleged anti-scientific outlook on origins, presents an encumbrance to those who would otherwise be inclined to accept Christianity, but are unable to come to grips with the literal reading of the creation account. This charge is markedly different from the two previously discussed because, whereas proponents of various old-earth positions maintain that their views are *equally* tenable as young-earth creation with respect to biblical authority and biblical theology, they claim that their view is *superior* to young-earth

¹³ Ibid., 289. Grudem also points out that the doctrines specifically related to the creation of angels and the creation of man are more important than the question of the days of Genesis and the age of the earth. What is particularly confusing, however, is how Grudem is able to place such stress on the doctrine of the goodness of creation while knowing that his view of the means of creation involves death prior to sin.

creationism with respect to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Hugh Ross, president of *Reasons to Believe*, an apologetic ministry that promotes progressive creationism, is one of the most vocal advocates of this point. He claims that in an attempt to avoid the seeming conflict between the current scientific consensus and a literal view of the Bible, many Christians have avoided the topic of science altogether, thus rendering themselves ineffective witnesses for biblical truth when questioned on the subject. Perhaps more importantly, however, he notes that because of the “anti-scientific” claims of young-earth creationists, “skeptics who need solid evidence to resolve their doubts remain untouched by the claims of Christ.”¹⁴ Elsewhere, Ross maintains that because of a “failure to withstand rigorous testing, young-earth creationism has become a frequent excuse for rejecting the Christian gospel and worldview.”¹⁵ Perhaps even more significantly, Ross argues that opponents of the gospel rely on young-earth creationism in an effort to “poison the well”: “[T]hey believe that by discrediting Genesis, they can demonstrate a flawed Bible. They can use this ‘faulty creation message’ to discredit Christ’s deity, the inerrancy of Scripture, the sanctity of life, the second coming, doctrines on heaven and hell, etc.”¹⁶

¹⁴ Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 16.

¹⁵ Hugh Ross and Gleason L. Archer, “The Day Age View,” in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. David G. Hagopian (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux, 2001), 157. Ross also notes that on the *Reasons to Believe* telephone hotline, “This is by far the most frequently expressed objection by secularists for accepting the Bible as the inspired word of God” (163).

¹⁶ Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1994), 13. Significantly, Ross notes that “many Bible authors and Jesus Himself strongly endorsed the message of the Genesis creation account. If they could be so wrong on creation, what basis is there to believe anything else they declared?” Ross makes this conjectural

Ross is not the only one to make this point. Conrad Hyers writes, "It may be true that scientism and evolutionism . . . are among the causes of atheism and materialism. It is at least equally true that biblical literalism, from its earlier flat-earth and geocentric forms to its recent young-earth and flood-geology forms, is one of the major causes of atheism and materialism."¹⁷ Moreover, he argues that the young-earth position with its literal reading of the creation account "misses the symbolic richness and spiritual power of what *is* there, and it subjects the biblical materials and the theology of creation to a pointless and futile controversy."¹⁸ This perspective is echoed by old-earth geologist Davis Young, who maintains that advocacy for an old earth and a non-literal reading of the days of the creation record is only damaging to the faith of those who have forged in their minds an "unnecessary connection between the antiquity of the Earth and the possibility of error in the Bible."¹⁹ Young continues, however, saying, "What is much more likely to undermine Christian faith is the dogmatic and persistent effort of creationists to present their theory before the public . . . as in accord with Scripture and nature, especially when the evidence to the contrary has been presented again and again by competent Christian scientists."²⁰ He concludes, somewhat pejoratively, "'Proving' the Bible or Christianity with a spurious scientific hypothesis can only be injurious to the

statement, however, without taking account of what Christ and the NT authors actually said concerning the doctrine of creation or the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis—subjects to be addressed later in this article.

¹⁷ Conrad Hyers, *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984), 26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁹ Davis A. Young, "Christianity and the Age of the Earth," in *Is God a Creationist? The Religious Case Against Creation-Science*, ed. Roland Mushat Frye (New York: Scribners, 1983), 85.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

cause of Christ. We do not defend truth by arguing error in its behalf.”²¹

Theistic evolutionists have put forth comparable arguments. Van Till writes, “Creation . . . has come to be packaged with young-earth episodic creationism. So if the growing prestige of the natural sciences can be exploited to discredit the recent episodic creationist portrait, then it can be made to appear as if the whole of Christian theism has been defeated.”²² Lamoureux presents what is perhaps the most powerful argument: “If the Lord created the world through an evolutionary process, and unbelieving scientists see evidence for this theory in their laboratories every day, then is there any doubt that a stumbling block has been placed between them and the Lord Jesus by young-earth creationists (2 Cor 6:2–3)?”²³

²¹ Ibid. Young’s argument is, in principle, logically sound. The problem is that he does not, in setting forth geological evidences which he interprets to indicate that the earth is very old, ever actually put forth a satisfactory literary, exegetical, or theological case as to how the *text* might indicate that the earth is old. After all, as John Frame rightly states, “It is an exegetical issue” (*Doctrine of God*, 303).

²² Howard J. Van Till, “Science and Christian Theology as Partners in Theorizing,” in *Science and Christianity: Four Views*, ed. Richard F. Carlson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 223.

²³ Denis O. Lamoureux, *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution*, 22. This, of course, begs the question as to whether evolutionary theory is scientifically defensible. The current author believes that it is not. Arguments for intelligent design advocated by such individuals as Michael J. Behe in *Darwin’s Black Box* (New York: Free, 1996) and *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism* (New York: Free, 2007), and William A. Dembski in *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 1999) and *The Design Revolution: Answering the Toughest Questions about Intelligent Design* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2004) suggest evolution is not tenable. Although arguments for intelligent design are insufficient to demonstrate the truth of the Christian faith or of creationism in the biblical sense, they do in many respects undermine the scientific validity of Darwinian evolution.

This charge is a serious one, and, in light of the fact that the objection all too often is accompanied by very real examples, it might seem a difficult one to defeat. Clearly, if a defense of Genesis 1 as a literal record of creation occurring by the direct working of God over the course of six normal days thousands of years ago is an obstruction to the gospel, such would not only be counterproductive to the Great Commission of making disciples (Matt 28:19–20), it would ultimately detract from the chief goal of the apologetic task, that of magnifying the glory of God by proclaiming and upholding his revealed truth.

To summarize, critics of biblical (young-earth) creationism maintain that biblical creationism is inconsequential to upholding biblical authority, peripheral to outlining biblical theology, and ultimately detrimental to defending the biblical gospel. If these arguments can be sustained, it must therefore be concluded that the discussion of biblical creationism in relation to Christian apologetics should be avoided. Rather than attempting to defend a biblical perspective on origins, Christian apologists should defer questions on the subject to proponents of the current academic consensus, and instead focus on the “more important” aspects of the apologetic task, however those are defined. If inquirers find biblical creationism acceptable, so be it; but if they do not, there is no reason either to insist upon it as the orthodox position or to show how it is integral to the framework of a proper Christian worldview.

NECESSITY OF ESTABLISHING THE TRUTH OF BIBLICAL CREATION IN APOLOGETICS

On the surface, there would seem to be wisdom in the foregoing conclusion. However, the ramifications of such a position are serious. Despite the claims outlined in the preceding sections, it is demonstrable that biblical creationism is distinctly tied to the defense of biblical authority, the delineation of biblical theology, and the declaration of the biblical gospel. Thus, biblical creationism must be accorded a place within the purview of Christian apologetics.

Biblical Creationism Is Central to the Discussion of Biblical Authority

It is indeed possible to overlook how biblical creationism, accompanied by a literal reading of the early chapters of Genesis, connects with biblical authority. That does not mean, however, that such a connection does not exist. John MacArthur, an ardent young-earth creationist, notes that those who seek to harmonize the early chapters of Genesis with theories of modern naturalism often presume to do so without doing any violence to biblical authority. After all, “They affirm evangelical statements of faith. They teach in evangelical institutions. They insist they believe the Bible is inerrant and authoritative.”²⁴ However, their denial of biblical authority is implicit rather than explicit: “They express shock and surprise that anyone would question their approach to Scripture. And they sometimes employ the same sort of ridicule and intimidation that religious liberals and atheistic skeptics have always leveled against believers: ‘You don’t *seriously* think the universe is less than a billion years old, do you?’”²⁵ MacArthur likewise notes the increasing popularity of old-earth interpretations of Genesis, including theistic evolution, pointing out that such positions blend “some of the principles of biblical creationism with naturalistic and evolutionary theories, seeking to reconcile two opposing worldviews.” He concludes, however, that in order to accomplish this, proponents of such positions “end up explaining away rather than honestly exegeting the biblical creation account.”²⁶

²⁴ John MacArthur, “Comprehending Creation,” in *Think Biblically: Recovering a Christian Worldview*, ed. John MacArthur, Richard L. Mayhue, and John A. Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), 60.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 60–61.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 61. This point is confirmed in Terry Mortenson’s analysis of popular works on systematic theology, “Systematic Theology Texts and the Age of the Earth: A Response to the Views of Erickson, Grudem, and Lewis and Demarest,” *Answers Research Journal* 2 (2009), 175-200.

Certainly, MacArthur is correct that advocates for old-earth views would never have arrived at such positions due to reading the text alone; rather, they adopt such views in order to accommodate the supposed incontrovertible findings of secular scientists. Grudem represents this point well: “Scripture seems to *suggest* . . . a young earth view, while the observable facts of creation seem increasingly to favor an old earth view.”²⁷ Grudem conflates “observable facts” with the interpretation of those facts, but his point is still evident. MacArthur rightly observes, “Those who embrace such a view have in effect made science an authority *over* Scripture. They are permitting scientific hypotheses—mere human opinions that have no divine authority whatsoever—to be the hermeneutical rule by which Scripture is interpreted.”²⁸ Inevitably, therefore, the authority of Scripture is minimized, with scientific knowledge (or conjecture) being placed in a magisterial, rather than ministerial, capacity.

Terry Mortenson shares this perspective, noting that most old-earth proponents would protest that the issue in question is not one of biblical authority, but one of biblical interpretation. However, he demonstrates in his analysis of three notable works on systematic theology (authored by Erickson, Grudem, and Lewis and Demarest, respectively) that “the final arbiter in their interpretation of the Scriptures which deal with the age of the earth is evolutionist claims about the age of the universe and the earth.”²⁹ He therefore concludes that “if secular scientific theories are allowed to override the plain meaning of the text, then those theories have become the final authority.”³⁰ Most

²⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 307. Grudem’s statement is tentative, as he is constrained by reliance on the scientific expertise of others. He is not a firsthand observer.

²⁸ John MacArthur, “Comprehending Creation,” 65.

²⁹ Terry Mortenson, “Systematic Theology Texts and the Age of the Earth,” 195.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

old-earth proponents would probably deny that this is their intention, but some have shamelessly adopted this outlook. For instance, Wolfhart Pannenberg has argued, “The theological doctrine of creation should take the biblical narrative as a model in that it uses the best available knowledge of nature in its own time in order to describe the creative activity of God.”³¹ Surely, most conservative evangelical theologians would distance themselves from Pannenberg’s argument in principle, but many embrace it in practice.

The matter is not simply a question of how to read Genesis 1–2, or even Genesis 1–11, but all texts that relate to the subject of origins. Robert Reymond rightly notes that a considerable number of biblical texts look back upon the creation account in Genesis, assuming that it is historically reliable and building upon it to establish theological truth.³² Surely, not all later texts which draw upon the creation account are consequential to a proper outlook on the days of Genesis 1 or of the age of the earth. However, with some of them, such as Exodus 31:17 and Matthew 19:4–5, a straightforward reading of the creation account—inclusive of normal days and a recent creation—is assumed, if not strongly advocated. Reymond rightly concludes, “To call into question the historical reliability of Genesis 1 and 2, then, is to call into question the trustworthiness of the entirety

³¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Doctrine of Creation and Modern Science,” *Zygon* 23, no. 1 (March 1988): 19. Pannenberg specifically relates his point to Genesis 1:14–19 but his broadly-intended application is evident.

³² Robert L. Reymond, “The Theological Significance of the Biblical Doctrine of Creationism,” *Presbyterion* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1989): 17. Of these texts, Reymond highlights Exodus 31:17; Deuteronomy 4:32; Psalms 33:6; 90:2; 136:5–9; 148:2–5; Isaiah 40:25–26; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 48:13; 51:13; Jeremiah 10:12; Amos 4:13; Zechariah 12:1; Matthew 19:4–5; John 1:2–3; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; 1 Timothy 2:13; Hebrew 1:2; 11:3; Revelation 4:11; and 10:6–7. He notes, “In every instance the Genesis account of creation lies behind these later references and is assumed by them to be a reliable record of what God did ‘in the beginning.’”

of Scripture testimony on the issue of origins.”³³ This would, of course, be a major blow to biblical authority, as it would set a precedent to allow the theologian and layman alike to dismiss (or, at the very least, reinterpret) any passage that did not match with their scientific (or historical, or sociological) sensitivities.

If in order to gain a correct understanding of origins, the Bible must be drastically reinterpreted in Genesis, there is no reason to suspect that it need not be reinterpreted elsewhere. In a sense, therefore, biblical truth stands or falls on the reliability of the Genesis account of creation. Consequently, the interpretation of the creation account does impinge upon the issue of biblical authority. As such, in the apologetic defense of biblical truth, biblical creationism must not be sidelined or dismissed from the discussion.

Biblical Creationism Is Incredibly Relevant to Themes in Biblical Theology

Not only is biblical creationism integral to the defense of biblical authority, it is remarkably important to the development of biblical theology. The foregoing overview of statements by Frame, Culver, and Grudem would strongly suggest that whatever role biblical creationism (with the accompanying literal approach to Genesis) has within the construction of biblical theology is a peripheral one. However, this conclusion is based on a selective view of the evidence. A brief study of the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament reveals the centrality of the creation account. As John Whitcomb notes, “With a few exceptions, all New Testament books refer to Genesis 1–11. Also, *every chapter* of Genesis 1–11 is referred to somewhere in the New Testament. Furthermore, *every New Testament writer* refers to Genesis 1–11. And finally, *the Lord*

³³ Ibid; cf. Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1999), 214.

Jesus Christ referred to each of the first seven chapters of Genesis.”³⁴

That said, it is true that certain doctrines do not appear to hinge (at least not directly) on the literary genre of Genesis 1 and 2, or on whether creation took place in six literal days or over vast expanses of time, whether the earth is relatively young or incredibly old.³⁵ Such theological themes include, for example, the absolute supremacy of the Lord, the distinction between God and his creation, and the unique place and dignity of humanity in creation.³⁶ Additionally, Albert Baylis traces out the theological strands present in Genesis 1–3 as they relate to relationships and shows that man’s relationship to the sovereign Creator, as well as to the created world is, at least on a basic level, left intact regardless of how one reads the creation account.³⁷

³⁴ John C. Whitcomb, *The World that Perished: An Introduction to Biblical Catastrophism*, 3rd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 2009), 96.

³⁵ Cf. John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 570–73.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 571–73; cf. Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 63. Both authors show how these themes present in Genesis 1–2 intersect with later passages, particularly in the books of Exodus and Isaiah.

³⁷ Albert H. Baylis, *From Creation to the Cross: Understanding the First Half of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 47–48, 51. For an overview of other theological connections between the creation account and later Scripture, see also T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 141–42; Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998) 63–64; Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 37–41; Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 101–9; and Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 203–8. In addition, Henry Morris has set forth a brief survey of biblical passages which mention creation and the

However, not all doctrines—not even the “major” ones—are left unaffected by a reinterpretation of the creation account. The interconnectedness of Scripture means that the ramifications of old-earth interpretations (in whatever form they appear) cannot be confined to the early chapters of Genesis. For example, as Kurt Wise demonstrates, old-earth positions are almost invariably accompanied by a belief in a local flood because of the necessity of leaving the geologic strata deposited over the countless millions of years undisturbed. However, this affects the eschatological teaching of Matthew 24:38–39, which compares the judgment of the flood with the judgment at the coming of Christ. If the flood were a local event, so must the coming of Christ be, though that is an unacceptable option.³⁸ Charles Ryrie agrees with this conclusion, saying,

That [the Flood] was worldwide is attested to . . . in 2 Peter 2:5 and 3:6. The Lord confirmed the actuality of the Flood in Matthew 24:38–39 and Luke 17:26–27. So again, if the truth of the Flood is rejected or the extent of it shrunk to something local, then one will have to reject the Lord’s testimony and Peter’s (see also Heb 11:7).³⁹

Another theological connection is present in Romans 1:20: “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are

Flood in order to trace the development of significant doctrines present in the early chapters of Genesis (*Biblical Creationism: What Each Book of the Bible Teaches About Creation and the Flood* [Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2000]).

³⁸ Kurt P. Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time: What the Bible Teaches and Science Confirms About Creation and the Age of the Universe* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 55.

³⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 214. Ryrie also notes, “The record of the Flood, like that of creation, cannot be said to be an exaggeration or falsification due to the ‘primitive’ revelation of Genesis” (Ibid.).

without excuse” (NASB). In contrast to old-earth views of Genesis 1 and 2 that place the formation of the world many billions of years before man, “Paul’s wording indicates that man is as old as the creation itself, and that people have been able to observe God’s witness to himself in creation right from the very beginning of creation.”⁴⁰ Most English versions opt to interpret the phrase ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου as a temporal genitive (i.e., “since the creation of the world”) though some translations take it as a genitive of means (i.e., “from [or, by] looking at the present created world”). However, this alternative is both contextually and theologically challenging, and is not to be preferred.⁴¹ As a result, it must be understood that the

⁴⁰ Ron Minton, “Apostolic Witness to Genesis Creation and the Flood,” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 352.

⁴¹ Minton argues,

“First, Paul surely would have had in mind passages such as Job 12:7–10, Psalm 19:1, and Psalm 97:6. Writing about a thousand years before Paul, the Psalmist declares that the heavens show forth God’s glory and righteousness. A thousand years before that, Job said that the beast, birds, fish, and earth itself tell us of the Creator and His life-giving power. So this witness of creation was seen by men long before Paul. Second, if Paul was only referring to the present witness of creation in his day, then most of mankind in history would be exempt from his condemnation here. But that would be inconsistent with the whole tenor of his argument through the first five chapters of Romans. Paul is speaking about the whole human race throughout history. Furthermore, Paul says here that since that time, God’s invisible attributes have always been clearly seen and they are understood continuously (present tense). . . . Furthermore, Paul indicates in his statements in Lystra (Acts 14:15–17) and Athens (Acts 17:18–31) that God has throughout history revealed his existence and goodness by sending rain and giving food to people and establishing the boundaries of their habitation.” Minton continues, “It is unlikely that Paul’s words ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου mean merely ‘from the present creation’ or ‘by looking at the present creation,’ as seen in Paul’s day, for in this case most people who have ever lived would not be held accountable to God for suppressing the truth of the creation’s witness to Him. Also, if Paul is only speaking of the creation visible in his day, he could have said ἀπὸ νῦν κόσμου (‘from the present world’) or ἀπὸ νῦν κτίσεως (‘from the present creation’). The aorist verbs in this section (verses 18–32), which in English translations are translated with past tense, further support the conclusion that

theological argument Paul advances in Romans 1 is in some manner tied to his understanding of a recent creation as demanded by a straightforward reading of Genesis 1. Genesis 1 cannot be reinterpreted without affecting the theology in Romans 1.

The last theological connection that deserves to be pointed out relates to the doctrine of the goodness of creation. In Genesis 1:31, God surveys the whole of his creation and pronounces it “very good.” However, all old-earth views on origins require death to have preceded the fall of man, thereby being a part of what God had declared “very good.” However, this record of death is grossly inconsistent with both what Scripture teaches about the character of God himself and what it teaches about God’s design for heaven. What kind of a God could truly affirm that death (even if only the death of animals but not humans) is a “very good” thing? Such a God is a monster. If God created over millions of years and allowed animal suffering and death to remain unchecked while he prepared ultimately to create man (as affirmed by proponents of day-age creation and the framework hypothesis) or, worse still, if God *used* death and extinction as tools to shape the evolutionary development of life on earth (as theistic evolutionists contend), he is either weak, uncaring, or amoral. The words “very good” would be hollow. Furthermore, if death had already been present in the world, what consequence would the curse have been? Both Genesis 3:17–19 and Romans 8:19–21 strongly imply that the fall and the curse marked the beginning of death, suffering, and corruption in the world. Why else would the whole world and not just mankind await being “set free from its slavery to corruption” (Rom 8:21)? In the old-earth view, the curse is robbed of much of its significance if death and suffering had

ἀπὸ κτίσεως κόσμου is a temporal phrase. Most commentaries agree on the temporal aspect. Therefore, Paul is referring to unrighteous people throughout history who have seen this witness of Creation to God and have rejected it” (“Apostolic Witness,” 353–54).

been a part of the world beforehand. The curse would have had essentially no effect on the nonhuman creation.⁴²

Likewise, if death were in fact “very good,” what meaning is there in the anticipation of God’s eventually doing away with death in the new heavens and new earth to come, as described in Revelation 21:4 (cf. 22:3)? The only plausible reason that death ought to be put to an end is if it was not supposed to be a part of the creation originally. Wise observes, “Heaven is thought to be perfect, in part reflective of the pre-Fall, pre-Curse world Acceptance of old-age chronology would deny that there was any period of creation’s history where perfection reigned. This in turn would challenge the traditional understanding of heaven.”⁴³ Death before the fall thus destroys everything that the Bible teaches about the goodness of God, the goodness of the original creation, and the prospect of goodness in the future creation.

Accordingly, it cannot be maintained that the acceptance or rejection of biblical creationism, inclusive of a proper understanding of the days of Genesis and the age of the earth, is theologically inconsequential. Indeed, it impacts significant doctrines throughout the text. As Herman Bavink writes, a correct understanding of the biblical doctrine of creation has major theological import and is “one of the foundational building blocks of a biblical and Christian worldview.”⁴⁴ Thus, it

⁴² Terry Mortenson, “Systematic Theology Texts and the Age of the Earth,” 181.

⁴³ Kurt P. Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time*, 55.

⁴⁴ Herman Bavink, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Christian Theology*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 23. Douglas F. Kelly seconds this point, writing, “[T]he doctrine of creation with which God’s word begins must be foundational because God starts here. It teaches that since God is the fountain of all reality, then His word applies to our everyday life. To assume that the early chapters of Genesis are just ‘religious’ (and thus take the viewpoint of the origins of the world from unbelieving varieties of philosophy) is to relegate the Bible and ‘religion’ to the realm of the unimportant and the unreal, and eventually to empty churches since they are no longer thought to deal with

is folly to ignore creation within the scope of Christian apologetics. If a particular theological truth is tied to creation, and the biblical teaching on creation is ignored, there remains no way to adequately and comprehensively defend that point of theology.

Biblical Creationism is Indispensable as a Foundation for the Biblical Gospel

The relevance of biblical creationism to tracing out biblical theology flows over into the discussion of the relevance of biblical creationism to the gospel of Jesus Christ. As it has been demonstrated, biblical creationism, including a literal reading of the Genesis record, intersects with many vital doctrines. Does it also intersect with doctrines directly tied with the gospel of Jesus Christ? The answer to this question, as it will be argued momentarily, is an unqualified yes. However, prior to defending this conclusion, it is necessary to consider briefly the logic of the charge leveled against young-earth proponents that insisting upon the truth of a plain reading of the text and of a recent creation is a detriment to the cause of Christ.

There is little doubt that some have been deterred from the truth of Christianity on account of Genesis. In fact, apologist Alex McFarland has placed biblical creationism as one of the top ten commonly stated objections to the Christian faith.⁴⁵ McFarland intentionally avoids taking sides on the age of the earth, so it does not appear that his point is clouded by an agenda, whether old-earth or otherwise. However, just because some element of biblical truth may be viewed as a deterrent to faith does not mean that element of biblical truth should not be taught or defended. Notably, the doctrine of the virgin birth, because it runs contrary to everything that is known about human biology,

actual truth (*Creation and Change*, 17–18). Clearly then, to minimize creation is actually counterproductive to the Christian's apologetic witness.

⁴⁵ Alex McFarland, *The Ten Most Common Objections to Christianity* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2007), 51–73.

might also be viewed as a deterrent to faith: To the nonbeliever, it seems downright unreasonable, an unnecessary appeal to the miraculous. The fact that the virgin birth might be a stumbling block to nonbelievers does not, however, make it any less relevant to biblical truth or any less necessary to defend. So it is with biblical creationism.⁴⁶

Returning now to the original point, it is necessary to show just how crucial biblical creationism is to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In addressing this point, however, it is necessary to avoid treating all old-earth perspectives the same way. Some are far more detrimental to the gospel of Christ than others. Theistic evolution, for example, teaches that there was no historical Adam, at least not in the sense conveyed in Genesis 1–5.⁴⁷ If there were no literal Adam in the biblical sense, there could have been no literal fall in the biblical sense either, which would make the redemptive work of Christ either unnecessary or ineffective. Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 both look back to Adam as the head of the human race and as the one who brought sin into the world. It is because of humanity's connection with Adam that Christ, the "Second Adam" is able to

⁴⁶ Cf. Andy McIntosh, *Genesis for Today: The Relevance of the Creation/Evolution Debate to Today's Society*, 4th ed. (Leominster, England: Day One Publications, 2010), 119.

⁴⁷ This position has been recently advanced in the works of C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006) and *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist? Who They Were and Why You Should Care* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); and Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) and *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say About Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012). Notably, Enns proposes a new understanding of Paul's references to Adam, maintaining that Paul adopted the pervading view of the historicity of Adam prevalent in his own day irrespective of whether Adam was actually an historical figure. For a refutation of Enns's position, see the present author's work, "A Response to Peter Enns's Attack on Biblical Creationism," *Answers Research Journal* 6 (2013): 117–35.

offer a sacrifice capable of redeeming the human race. Andy McIntosh summarizes this point very well, saying, “The argument of Romans 5:14–21 stands on the historicity of Adam and the Fall. Verse 14 explicitly refers to Adam. Verses 17, 18, and 19 repeat a direct comparison between Adam’s sin in producing death and Christ’s obedience in producing righteousness.”⁴⁸ The reasoning advanced in 1 Corinthians 15:22 is very similar: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (NASB). Both Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 are made out to be nonsense if in fact the biblical account of Adam is not true history but is only a story designed to convey a theological message. McIntosh continues, “The theology of headship of the human race (Adam) and the head of those redeemed (Christ) has no firm foundation if the progenitor of the human race is in fact a sub-human brute.”⁴⁹ He rightly concludes, “The arguments of Romans 5:12–19 and 1 Corinthians 15:21–47 both rely on a *single* [literal not mythological] progenitor compared to the *only* Redeemer, Christ.”⁵⁰

Peter Enns, perhaps the most vocal of recent advocates for theistic evolution, has maintained the value of these passages even if they do not actually identify the origin of man’s sin, writing, “Even without the first man, death and sin are still the universal realities that mark the human condition.”⁵¹ This is true; but if humanity does not have a corporate head ultimately responsible for humanity’s pervasive sin nature, then logically there can be no deliverance from sin through Christ, who is the corporate head of all the redeemed.⁵² Enns gives lip service to

⁴⁸ Andy McIntosh, *Genesis for Today*, 108; cf. John MacArthur, “Comprehending Creation,” 66.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Peter Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 124.

⁵² Lee Anderson, “Response to Peter Enns’s Attack on Biblical Creationism,” 134.

original sin, being content to have no historical explanation for why humans are “born in sin.”⁵³ However, as it is been argued elsewhere, “It is insufficient to be content with the ambiguity of the cause, for the nature of the cause provides the basis for why the form of the solution in Christ’s substitutionary, atoning death was sufficient.”⁵⁴ Enns’s argument for theistic evolution hinges on the acceptability of his point that “Paul pressed Adam into new service [irrespective of his historicity] in view of the reality of the empty tomb.”⁵⁵ Assuming, though, the validity of human evolution and a non-literal explanation of the biblical accounts of creation and the fall, this means that Paul, in essence, used a lie to buttress his case for the truth of the gospel and a myth to explain the significance of the present (and historical) reality of human sin.⁵⁶ This is theologically unacceptable, as it utterly undercuts the gospel message.⁵⁷

⁵³ Peter Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 125.

⁵⁴ Lee Anderson, “A Response to Peter Enns’s Attack on Biblical Creationism,” 134.

⁵⁵ Peter Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 132.

⁵⁶ Lee Anderson, “Response to Peter Enns’s Attack on Biblical Creationism,” 134.

⁵⁷ Theistic evolutionists also undercut the gospel by allegorizing or mythologizing the historical record containing the first promise of a “seed” who would eventually crush the head of the serpent, the non-human agent through whom temptation and, by derivation, sin entered into the creation (Gen. 3:15). The theology of the “seed” developed in later passages has distinctive messianic overtones and is vital to the developing biblical theology of a coming redeemer. Eugene Merrill is correct that though “the specificity of the woman’s offspring cannot be established in this text alone,” the “messianic character of this promise is almost universally recognized” (“A Theology of the Pentateuch,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck and Eugene H. Merrill [Chicago, IL: Moody, 1991], 20; cf. “Covenant and the Kingdom: Genesis 1–3 as Foundation for Biblical Theology,” *Criswell Theological Review* 1.2 [1987]: 302; *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament*, 509–511). James M. Hamilton notes that “this announcement of judgment

What about old-earth perspectives that do not reject the historicity of Genesis 3 but only adopt reinterpretations of Genesis 1–2? While views like progressive creationism, the framework hypothesis, the revelatory-day view, and the gap theory do not *directly* undermine the gospel of Christ, they do *indirectly* undermine the gospel by implicitly casting aspersions on the reliability and trustworthiness of Christ. For instance, in Mark 10:6, Christ states, “But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.” Similarly, in Luke 11:50–51, Jesus speaks of the “blood of the prophets” that had been “shed since the foundation of the earth.” Jesus specifically acknowledges Abel as the first man murdered in earliest antiquity. Aside from the theological points that Christ was making in each of these two passages, what is readily apparent is that he viewed man as existing essentially as long as the rest of the cosmos.⁵⁸ Old-earth perspectives on Genesis 1 and 2 invariably require vast expanses of time (some fourteen billion years) from the beginning of God’s creative activity until the advent of man on the earth. This clearly conflicts with the perspective that Jesus espouses in these passages. And, while it may be granted that the central point of the passages in question is not to teach about the age of the earth, it remains a

on the serpent provides foundational imagery that is reused and interpreted throughout the rest of the Old Testament” (*God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010], 76–77; cf. Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God*, 43). If Genesis 3 be not literal history, the development of the divine promise of a “seed” with its accompanying development of the hope of redemption, has no grounding whatsoever. The theological strands present in later texts link only to a mythological hope, and the theological significance of the gospel as the culmination of God’s plan for the redemption of humanity is sorely compromised.

⁵⁸ Terry Mortenson, “Jesus, Evangelical Scholars, and the Age of the Earth,” *MSJ* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 79. Mortenson also addresses Mark 13:19, which likewise conveys Christ’s perspective on the age of the earth.

fact that the statements must be viewed as representing Christ's outlook on the subject, and thus authoritative for believers.⁵⁹

Mortenson writes that Jesus could have just as easily avoided the issue altogether. On Luke 11:50–51, he observes, “Jesus could have said merely that ‘the blood of all the prophets will be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel . . .’ and left out the words ‘shed from the foundation of the world.’ This latter phrase is unnecessary to warn people of judgment, but its presence reveals an aspect of Jesus’ worldview.”⁶⁰ Similarly, in Mark 10:6, Jesus could have just as easily left out the words “of creation,” thus leaving the sentence to imply “the beginning (of the human race)”; there is no reason for the inclusion of the words “of creation” unless Jesus actually meant that mankind was roughly as old as the rest of the created world. Notably, if Christ's statements are inaccurate with respect to history, how can they be trusted in their theological and moral teaching? It is arbitrary to force a wedge between Christ's reliability in historical or scientific matters and his trustworthiness and authority in theological and moral matters. Furthermore, if Christ's reliability on historical matters is questionable, what does that imply concerning salvation in Christ?

Consequently, it is virtually impossible to reject the theological connections between creation and the gospel. As such, the subject of creation cannot be left out of the apologetic discussion without potentially compromising the Christian's witness to the truth of the gospel. Although it is *possible* for a person to trust in Jesus Christ and maintain a belief in any one of the old-earth positions on origins (including even theistic evolution), holding both in tandem is theologically inconsistent, and the Christian apologist ought never to encourage it.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 91–92.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 92.

EXEGETICAL AND THEOLOGICAL DEFENSES FOR BIBLICAL CREATIONISM IN APOLOGETICS

To this point, in arguing for the relevance of biblical creationism within the broader scope of Christian apologetics, it has been assumed that young-earth creationism is, in fact, the necessary extension of a proper, natural reading of the early chapters of Genesis. Indeed, even old-earth proponents frequently admit that a plain reading of the text divorced from any scientific preconceptions implies a young-earth and a creation week of six consecutive twenty-four-hour days. However, it is necessary to outline a number of biblical arguments in favor of young-earth creationism in order to demonstrate that the view is exegetically and theologically robust.

First, verbal analysis renders it statistically indefensible to argue that the creation account in Genesis 1–2 is any form of literature other than prose narrative.⁶¹ Moreover, the creation narrative is linked both lexically and semantically to other historical narrative texts. These two facts demand that the creation account in Genesis should be read as all other historical narrative texts are read: as a straightforward, realistic portrayal of actual events.⁶² It is only plausible, therefore, to take the days in Genesis 1 and 2 as a literal sequence of regular days.

Second, the lexeme יום (“day”) in the OT generally refers to a normal day. With rare exception (Hos 6:2; cf. possibly 2 Chr 21:19), when יום is accompanied by a numerical adjective (either a cardinal or ordinal number), it refers to a normal day. Similarly, with rare exception (Zech 14:7), when יום appears

⁶¹ Steven W. Boyd, “Statistical Determination of Genre in Biblical Hebrew: Evidence for an Historical Reading of Genesis 1:1–2:3,” in *Radioisotopes and the Age of the Earth, Volume 2: Results of a Young-Earth Creationist Research Initiative*, ed. Larry Vardiman, Andrew A. Snelling, and Eugene Chaffin (El Cajon, CA: Institute for Creation Research, 2005), 676.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 690–91.

with the words “morning,” “evening,” or “night,” it refers to a normal day. The frequent occurrence of יום with these qualifiers in the creation account strongly suggests that the days there are literal twenty-four hour days. Likewise, Genesis 1:5 uses יום with a cardinal number (“one day” rather than “first day”), which serves in the creation account to define a day as being marked by morning and evening.⁶³ If the days in Genesis 1–2 are literal, there is no basis for the insertion of long expanses of time.

Third, Genesis indicates that the creation of both inanimate and animate things was a supernatural and virtually instantaneous affair. The text repeatedly uses the same formula: “And God said, ‘Let there be . . .’ and there was.” Later texts, such as Psalm 33:6–9, present creation as coming about in immediate response to the word of the Lord. Accordingly, God did not have to wait millions or billions of years for material things to come into existence after uttering the command “Let there be” Such is simply not indicated by the text.⁶⁴

Fourth, the order of events described in Genesis 1 and 2 is completely at odds with the order of events proposed by virtually all old-earth accounts of origins. Invariably, old-earth accounts of origins demand such things as the creation of the sun before the earth, the existence of land-dwelling reptiles and dinosaurs before birds, and the presence of death prior to the fall of man. However, the Genesis record presents a very different order, with the earth created before any of the other celestial bodies, birds created before any land-dwelling animals, and death not entering God’s “very good” world until after Adam’s sin.⁶⁵

⁶³ Andrew E. Steinmann, “יום as an Ordinal Number and the Meaning of Genesis 1:5,” *JETS* 45, no. 4 (December 2002): 577–84. Note also the observations of inconsistent exegesis noted by Frederic R. Howe, “The Age of the Earth: An Appraisal of Some Current Evangelical Positions, Part 2,” *BSac* 142, no. 566 (April–June 1985): 122–24.

⁶⁴ Terry Mortenson, “Systematic Theology Texts and the Age of the Earth,” 176; cf. Kurt P. Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time*, 56.

⁶⁵ Trevor Craigen, “Can Deep Time be Embedded in Genesis?” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*,

Fifth, in commanding Israel to observe the Sabbath, Exodus 20:8–11 and 31:12–17 both make direct comparisons between the days of creation and the days of the common work week. In both cases, the construction demands complete parallelism between the days of the creation week and the days of the work week. The analogy is not that the Israelites were to work for six days and rest for one day because God worked for six indeterminate periods of time and then rested for a period of time, but rather because he worked for six literal, sequential days and then rested for one day.⁶⁶ Exodus 20:11 singlehandedly rules out all old-earth creation views (including the framework hypothesis, the day-age view, the gap theory, the revelatory-day view, and theistic evolution) because it explicitly states that in the course of six days, God created not only the heavens and the earth, but also “all that is in them.”

Sixth, as noted previously, Jesus Christ affirms a young-earth perspective on creation, demonstrable from such texts as Mark 10:6 and 13:19, and Luke 11:50–51. Similarly, when the apostles and other NT writers address the subject of creation, they uniformly support the young-earth position, with no texts that imply in any way that the days of Genesis 1:1–2:3 may be taken as anything other than normal days. While they do not often address the issue at length, they never contradict a young-earth viewpoint.⁶⁷ Accordingly, to adopt any of the old-earth views is to reject the teaching of those on whom the Christian church was founded.

Seventh, as Mortenson observes, for the first eighteen centuries of the Christian church, the almost universally held

ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 195–97.

⁶⁶ Robert V. McCabe, “A Critique of the Framework Interpretation of the Creation Week,” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, Arkansas: Master Books, 2008), 244.

⁶⁷ Ron Minton, “Apostolic Witness to Genesis Creation and the Flood,” 369–70.

belief was that the creation of the world was a recent event occurring only thousands (rather than millions or billions) before Christ.⁶⁸ It is presumptuous to suggest (and impossible to prove) that had the earlier exegetes who favored a young earth lived in the modern era, they would have favored old-earth views. As it has been demonstrated already, the defense of a recent creation is very much a textual matter, and there is no reason to think that the earlier exegetes would have compromised their views with scientific conjecture.

In addition to these arguments, a considerable number of scientific arguments corroborate the biblical testimony to a young earth. These scientific arguments are beyond the scope of this article, but the point remains that a defense of biblical (young-earth) creationism is not only a necessity within the broader scope of Christian apologetics, it is exegetically and theologically justifiable. There is thus no reason to suppose that it cannot stand alongside other defenses for biblical truth in the apologist's broader case for the Christian faith.

CONCLUSION: SUMMARY THOUGHTS ON BIBLICAL CREATIONISM AND APOLOGETICS

This article has demonstrated that the doctrine of creation as well as a correct understanding of the early chapters of Genesis is incredibly vital to a proper outlook on biblical authority, biblical theology, and, ultimately, the biblical gospel. Accordingly, it is necessary that arguments for the truth of biblical creation be given a place in Christian apologetics. Any apologetic that presumes to be comprehensive, and yet does not have appreciation for the relevance of biblical creationism to the subjects of biblical authority, biblical theology, and the biblical gospel is an apologetic that is underprepared to address the challenges that are currently being advanced against the truth of the Christian faith. Although advocates of young-earth

⁶⁸ Terry Mortenson, "Systematic Theology Texts and the Age of the Earth," 177.

creationism have repeatedly been accused of undermining the case for Christianity, the real culprits that weaken the case for the truth of Christianity are the various deviant old-earth views of origins. They undermine the apologetic witness to the truth by attempting to disconnect the subject of creation from the very relevant matter of biblical authority and minimizing its importance to biblical theology.

How should arguments in favor of biblical creationism be implemented in the broader apologetic case for the Christian faith? The answer to that question almost surely varies based upon the precise situation. The question of creation will not always be central to every discussion in which apologetic arguments for Christianity are offered. However, that does not detract from the fact that the Christian apologist needs to be ready to defend the truth of creation alongside all other biblical doctrines and to uphold the authority of Genesis alongside all other Scripture. As 1 Peter 3:15 states, the apologist must be ready to “give an answer,” and, insofar as the questions asked concern origins, the apologist must be prepared to show how the biblical account of creation intersects with and undergirds the bigger picture of biblical authority, biblical theology, and the biblical gospel. An inability to demonstrate these connections and, thus, to demonstrate the robustness of the case for biblical creationism, serves in the end only to weaken the overall case for Christian truth. Consequently, Christian apologists individually (and the church broadly) must seek to reengage with the subject of origins and strive to understand what the text actually teaches. Only then will it be possible to present a biblically consistent case for creation rather than falling prey to aberrant views of origins that denigrate biblical authority, decapitate biblical theology, and devastate the biblical gospel.

Reasons for Our Hope: An Introduction to Christian Apologetics. H. Wayne House and Dennis W. Jowers. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011. 464 pages. \$39.99.

During the former fundamentalist liberal controversies, the renowned Princeton theologian, J Gresham Machen cautioned conservatives of his day that “False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel [because Christianity is portrayed as nothing] more than a harmless delusion.” (J Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture” in the *Princeton Theological Review* 11 [1913], 7). He warned that ministry leaders must not retreat to anti-intellectualism, sheer pragmatism or philosophical intellectualism. The term *apologetics* is derived from the Greek noun *apologia* and verb *apologeomai* which emphasize the sense of defending or vindicating oneself and/or truth claim. This text, *Reasons for Our Hope* is fine example of the biblical meaning and practice of apologetics in today’s ministry environment.

The text embodies a balanced approach to defending the truth of Christianity without retreating to mean spirited rhetoric, pragmatism or philosophical intellectualism. In part one of the book, the authors profile current approaches to apologetic methods and various systems. They address such topics as “how do we know truth” or “how to distinguish the differences between faith and reason.” They also address “natural theology” and discuss “categories of apologetics.” Part two of this fine text surveys how the authors of Scripture utilized apologetics. They also provide a balanced historical discussion of how the early church fathers, medieval theologians (middle age), the Reformers, and contemporary theologians utilize apologetics. Part three of the book addresses more specific issues such as “skepticism and its cure” and “the problem of evil” and “the uniqueness of Christianity” and “physical resurrection of Christ,” etc. Part four of the book contains a refreshing reminder of how to use apologetics today. In this section, the authors provide five separate chapters describing how to engage five different non-Christian groups

today. These chapters entail engaging the “cultist, the secularist, the Postmodernist, the Muslim, and New Age Mysticism.

The book is written by two very fine evangelical, conservative Christian leading scholars in non-technical language and is very readable. It is well indexed with both subjects and scripture references. I highly recommend the book for pastors, ministry leaders, and believers who desire to articulate their belief system in sharing Christ.

*Reviewed by Dr. David Mappes
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Four Views on the Historical Adam. Denis Lamoureux, et al. Counterpoints: Bible and Theology. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013. 288 pages. \$19.99.

A recent addition to Zondervan's Counterpoints Series, *Four Views on the Historical Adam*,¹ features the perspectives of four evangelicals on the importance of a historical Adam to the Christian faith. Each presentation is followed by a response from the other three contributors as well as a "rejoinder" to their responses from the presenter. At the conclusion two pastors offer additional perspective.

According to the series editors, the real debate behind the question of whether or not Adam ever existed is the on-going debate over human origins and the age of the universe (20). Specifically, they cite the establishment of the BioLogos Foundation by Francis Collins in 2006 as the spark for the latest controversy over the issue of human origins and its impact upon traditional views of Adam (25). More recently, this debate was featured prominently in a June 2011 cover article of *Christianity Today*.

From the plethora of views on this issue, the editors chose four they consider to be broadly representative of the evangelical community. Space does not permit a discussion of every argument, but this reviewer strongly agrees that a historical Adam is essential to the very foundation of the Christian faith, and it is upon this basis that I offer the following critique.

Denis Lamoureux, Associate Professor of Science and Religion at St. Joseph's College in the University of Alberta, presents what is termed the Evolutionary *Creation View*. The holder of earned doctorates in both science and theology, Lamoureux insists that "overwhelming" evidence for evolution obviates the existence of a historical Adam (40). Instead, he argues that in Genesis God accommodated himself to the primitive (and erroneous) scientific beliefs of the ancient

¹ Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday, eds. *Four Views on the Historical Adam*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013.

Hebrews in order to communicate “inerrant spiritual truths” about Himself and humanity (41). In this manner, he declares that the foundations of the Christian faith are in no way undermined by a less than historical view of Adam (38). He qualifies his view of evolution as “teleological evolution” or a “purpose-driven natural process” (43), likening the evolutionary process used to create humanity to the “embryological mechanisms” the Lord uses now to bring a baby into the world (37, 44). Nevertheless, he believes humans originated from pre-human ancestors such that at some point in time² “the Image of God and human sin were mysteriously manifested” (43).

However, while not questioning the reality of his faith in or love for Jesus Christ,³ I would seriously question his mostly blithe treatment of key texts in both Testaments⁴ that refer to both the circumstances of Adam’s origin as well as the consequences of his sin. That is, contrary to Lamoureux’s assertion of the “mysterious” origin of both the image of God in man and the origin of sin, Scripture is quite clear and consistent on the origins of both (Genesis 1–3, Romans 5, 1 Corinthians 15, etc.).

Lamoureux is particularly vexed by what he terms the “scientific concordism” of many evangelicals.⁵ He defines this as “the *assumption* that the facts of science align with the Bible”

² He states modern humans “descended from a group of about 10,000 individuals ... about 50,000 years ago” (64).

³ Lamoureux shares an intriguing testimony of his spiritual journey that took him from nominal Christian to committed young-earth creationist to evangelical evolutionist. Unfortunately, Barrick seems to question the genuineness of Lamoureux’s faith (80, 85), to which Lamoureux rightly expresses his offense (88).

⁴ Like the preponderance of scholarship, Lamoureux sees Genesis 1–11 as a “unique type of literature” that is ahistorical (44). Real history, he says, begins at Genesis 12.

⁵ He cites a 2004 ICR survey that indicated at that time that 87% of American evangelicals believed in a literal six day creation and global flood.

such that “God revealed scientific facts to the biblical writers thousands of years before their discovery by modern scientists” (45; emphasis original). Yet, what discoveries he is referring to is not clear, since at least young-earth creationists are not insisting that the purported discoveries or theories of modern scientists are found in Genesis 1–3.

Lamoureux acknowledges the Bible’s use of phenomenological language to describe, for example, the rising or setting of the sun (Eccl 1:5), but he insists that such language also represents the true beliefs of the biblical authors, what he terms “an ancient phenomenological perspective” (46). In this regard, he argues extensively (47–49) that Paul believed in the ancient cosmology of a “three tier universe,” based upon Paul’s reference to beings “under the earth” someday bowing the knee to Jesus (Phil 2:10–11). In my view, Lamoureux places inordinate weight upon this one exegetical detail, not only in his essay but also in his rejoinder, especially since this is his sole example. Nor does he consider alternative explanations.⁶

In place of scientific concordism, Lamoureux proposes the “Message-Incident Principle” by which he argues that Scripture uses “incidental ancient science” to convey important spiritual truths and principles. Thus, even though the truths of Scripture may be expressed through the instrumentality of errant perceptions of the universe, they are nevertheless inerrant and trustworthy. Thus, the message remains infallible, even if the messenger is not.

Applying this principle to Genesis 1, he argues that God accommodated himself to the incidental ancient Hebrew conception of the universe to express the inerrant spiritual truth that God created all that we see. As result he can affirm without hesitation that “Holy Scripture makes statements about how God created ... that in fact never happened” (54, 56). In the same manner, he argues that the Genesis genealogies represent the Hebrews’ understanding of their origin from an ancient

⁶ For example, Collins understands Paul’s language as having “poetic,” as opposed to strictly scientific, expression, consistent with the hymn-like structure of the passage (74).

phenomenological perspective.⁷ In fact, he says the reason there are so few names used in the genealogies is because of the “the limits of human memory” (59). Yet, somehow that poor memory did not prevent the recording of specific lifespans and the timeline of the moments of the births of specific descendants! Also, as Walton notes in his rebuttal, “in an oral culture memory is enhanced, not corrupted” (70).

Beside his use of this general principle to dismiss large swaths of the Genesis record, Lamoureux also uses it to deal with certain, pesky NT texts that appear to affirm the historical nature of the Genesis accounts. For example, he argues that Jesus, in his teaching on divorce (Matt 19:4–6), accommodated himself to the erroneous Jewish belief that Adam really existed (60). Likewise, despite the fact that Paul erroneously believed that Adam really existed and brought death upon the world of mankind (Romans 5, 1 Corinthians 15), we can nevertheless trust confidently in the inerrant spiritual truths conveyed in these same passages, namely, that we are sinners and can be saved by trusting in Jesus (61–63).

Lamoureux admits that “this is a very counterintuitive way to read Scripture” (63). What he fails to acknowledge, however, is how utterly damaging such a reading is to confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture, not to mention the fact that his understanding of origins essentially makes God the author of sin and evil in the world, no matter how shrouded in “mystery” those origins may be.

John Walton, Professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, believes Adam was a historical person. However, based upon evidence from ancient Near Eastern literature as well as the text of Genesis itself, Walton argues for the *Archetypal Creation View*, which vests less importance in the *circumstances* of Adam’s origin and actions than in the archetypal *significance* scripture attaches to them (89–90). Also, while neither endorsing nor rejecting evolutionary science, he certainly allows

⁷ He never addresses the fact that Adam is linked genealogically to the person of Christ (Luke 3:23–38). Presumably, this genealogy represents an additional example of the mistaken beliefs of the biblical authors.

for it, since in his estimation Adam and Eve may not have been our first parents.

Actually, his view is the result a more general perspective of Genesis 1–2 that regards these chapters as accounts not of actual *origins* but rather of *functions*.⁸ For example, the statement in Genesis 2:7 that “God formed man of the dust of the ground” should be “understood as role/function rather than as a statement of material origins of humanity.”⁹ Accordingly, he argues that Eve’s origin is not described in Genesis 2, despite the explicit detail that “God closed up the flesh” of Adam at the place from which he took a rib. Rather, Adam’s “deep sleep” was the pretext for imparting to him a “vision” (like Abraham experienced in Genesis 15) through which Eve’s “archetypal significance” was communicated to Adam in order to show him “how he should think about the helper that he is about to provide” (97).¹⁰

Besides these textual arguments Walton also points to the fact that “nowhere in the ancient [Near Eastern] texts are human origins depicted in terms of a single couple being created as progenitors of the entire human race” (99) nor do they have any “concern for materiality or material origins” (100).¹¹ Rather these ancient documents “show us a proclivity to think in archetypal terms” (100). Though he admits that these facts “would not demand that we read Genesis archetypally,” his conclusion is that this would have been the most “natural” way of understanding the text in the ancient world (102).

⁸ His *The Lost World of Genesis One* (2009) lays out for laypersons this novel interpretation of Genesis 1–2.

⁹ According to Walton, the verbs in 2:15, traditionally understood as referring to agricultural work in the garden, in other contexts refer to the priestly functions or roles of “guarding sacred space” (95).

¹⁰ In this regard, Walton asserts that “Genesis 1–3 shows no sign of patriarchy” (104).

¹¹ According to Collins, not everyone agrees with this assertion (126, note 57).

With regard to the NT references to Adam, he acknowledges that the NT authors readily assume Adam and Eve's historicity. However, he insists "the theological use that is made of them is [strictly] archetypal" (105). So, for example, Paul's statement in Acts 17:26 that God "made [*poieo*] from one man every nation [*ethnos*] of mankind" should not be understood as a reference to Adam "as the genetic/forebear of all humanity" (105). Rather, he sees Paul paraphrasing the Greek text of Genesis 10:32, namely "from these [the sons of Noah] the nations [*ethnos*] spread out over the earth after the flood" (105). Yet, v. 26 is preceded by the statement in v. 24 that God "made [*poieo*] the world and all things in it." Clearly, Paul has Genesis 1 in mind, rather than Genesis 10.

In his treatment of Romans 5:12–14, Walton maintains that the text "does not claim that humans were created immortal, only that humans are now subject to death because of sin" and that "sin doomed us to death" because of our natural mortality (105–106). That is, in Walton's view death is not a punishment for sin (contra Romans 6:23) but rather part and parcel of our creatureliness. Furthermore, he insists that this "text does not comment on how or when sin came to all and all sinned" (106). At the same time he proposes that Adam and Eve were "elect individuals drawn out of the human population and given a particular representative role in sacred space" (109).

But it is difficult to conceive how sin and death "entered the world" (Romans 5:12) and then subsequently "death spread to all men" in this scenario. Were these other human companions without sin prior to this event? Did none of them die until after Adam sinned? Apparently, the answer is "yes" to both questions, according to Walton (114). Indeed, basing himself upon Paul's statement in Romans 5:13 that "sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law," Walton asserts they would have been "in a state of original innocence (wrong not held against them or punished)" up to the time of Adam's sin "rather than a state of original righteousness (no wrong being committed)" (114).

His definitions aside, what this scenario does to the doctrine of total depravity is difficult to assess. Apparently, humankind

“sinned” prior to the Fall, yet it had not yet experienced the catastrophic consequences of sin that Paul describes in passages such as Romans 1:18–32, Ephesians 2:1–3, 11–12, and 4:17–19. It is also difficult to avoid blaming God for such consequences, since humans were created as mortal “sinners” in Walton’s view.¹² In addition, since “perhaps tens of thousands of years” passed before God selected Adam and Eve to represent humanity in the Garden, what are we to make of these pre-Adamic mortal, sinners, who Walton states were given the “image of God” by a special act of creation (114)? Were they “saved” or “lost”? And can such categories have any meaning prior to the Fall?

All of these exegetical and theological assertions supposedly derive from a “close” and contextually sensitive reading of the text.¹³ Yet, it seems obvious that Walton’s ultimate motivation—despite his insistence otherwise—is to accommodate the theory of naturalistic evolution concerning the origins of the human race, without also jettisoning the very basis of the Christian faith.¹⁴ Perhaps this explains his apparent unwillingness to

¹² Collins makes the same point in his response to Walton (130). The contradiction this scenario presents with the statement in Genesis 1:31 of the “goodness” of the original creation is a bullet Walton attempts to dodge by interpreting that statement to mean everything was “ready to function as sacred space ... ‘good’ is not indicative of perfection (either moral or design), but of order” (115).

¹³ Walton urges “the clearest reading” (89), “the easiest reading” (94), and “the most natural interpretation of the text” (110). Yet, his approach to Genesis 1–3 seems anything but this!

¹⁴ As Lamoureux notes in his response to Walton, Walton’s approach “sidesteps the chronic conflict between modern science and Christian faith” (119). Walton opines that “evolution is not inherently godless,” even though “godless people are going to choose evolution as their origins model,” because he believes that the “process of evolution could be guided purposefully by an infinitely powerful and sovereign God” (116). What he fails to mention is that the scientific community brooks absolutely no place for such purposeful guidance, and in fact insists categorically that none is necessary for evolution to be true!

consider the much more likely possibility that Genesis deals with *both* material and functional origins,¹⁵ even as Lamoureux observes (120). To my mind, this unwillingness betrays his true agenda.

C. John Collins, Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, represents the *Old-Earth Creationist View*. Collins affirms a historical Adam who was created supernaturally by God and whose sin plunged the entire human race into the present state of condemnation and death. He also places Adam “at the genetic headwaters of humankind” (195), and he rightly recognizes the crucial and foundational nature of a historical Adam to “the biblical story line” (160). But like Walton he is open to the idea that Adam and Eve were part of a larger original human population (171).¹⁶ He also allows for a very old universe and the possibility of evolution. Not surprisingly, the days of creation are “God’s workdays,” but “not necessarily the first six days of the whole universe” (145). He also opines that “*human* death is what the biblical authors have in view in places like Romans 5:12; animal death as such is not a theological problem and *not* a consequence of the fall” (172–173; emphasis original).

While there is much with which I can agree in Collins’ presentation—including the consistency of the Biblical narrative with a very old universe, as I have suggested elsewhere¹⁷—his openness to evolution, as well as his view that animal death is not a consequence of the Fall, fails to adequately

¹⁵ As Collins observes: “The things in the world do indeed have their divinely assigned functions, and these functions depend at least partly on the physical properties of the things” (126).

¹⁶ Walton observes: “[I]t is difficult to see how his view is very different from mine” (187). I agree!

¹⁷ See Douglas C. Bozung, “An Evaluation of the Biosphere Model of Genesis 1.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (October-December 2005): 406–23. Though I am sympathetic to the young-earth creationist position, I incline to an old earth but young biosphere, such that life is not more than a few thousand years old.

address the implications of the Fall in Genesis 3. Nor does his explanation adequately address Paul's more explicit commentary on Genesis 3 in Romans 8:18–23, as Barrick also points out in his response to Collins (190).¹⁸

Finally, William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament at the Master's Seminary, defends the *Young-Earth Creation View*. Barrick believes a young earth is not only the clear teaching of Scripture but also the only perspective that can truly do justice to the significance of Adam as found in the biblical record. He also believes it provides the only hermeneutically sound reading of Genesis 1–11 without resorting to “allegorical interpretations” (198; i.e. Walton),¹⁹ accommodation to an evolutionary timeframe (199; i.e., Collins), or the alleged adoption of ancient, erroneous conceptions of the universe to communicate inspired truth (202; i.e., Lamoureux).

Like Collins, Barrick argues that Adam was supernaturally created as the first human being and fell as recorded in Genesis 3 and confirmed by Paul in Romans 5:12–19. In this regard, he stresses the foundational nature of Adam's historic fall to many key Christian doctrines, including the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. Accordingly, “numerous New Testament texts demonstrate again and again the New Testament writers' theological dependence” upon the historical reality of the events of Genesis 1–11 (218).

¹⁸ Smith provides an incisive analysis of this passage and its devastating implications for any who seek to maintain a theistic evolutionary viewpoint (Henry B. Smith, “Cosmic Death in Romans 8: Affirming a Recent Creation,” *Bible and Spade* 26.1 [Winter 2013]: 8–14).

¹⁹ In his response to Barrack, Walton contends that to equate “archetypal” with “allegorical” is “a significant misrepresentation,” since, according to Walton, “[a]llegorical interpretation intentionally neglects what the *human* author of Scripture intended in favor of what the interpreter's imagination says about what *God* intended,” while the “archetypal approach only has validity if this is how the biblical author understood it,” which Walton believes he does (237).

Somewhat surprisingly, none of the respondents take Barrick to task for his young earth position. Rather they react more to his insistence that one cannot be a true inerrantist without also adopting his particular perspective. On this point I would agree with them, though Lamoureux's view stretches the boundaries of the definition of inerrancy to an uncomfortable extreme.

The two pastoral essays present contrasting views on the importance of this issue to the integrity of the Christian faith. Gregory Boyd argues that though he is "currently inclined" to view Adam as a historical person, he does not regard such a perspective "as central to the orthodox Christian faith" (255). He points to C. S. Lewis as helping him to both recover the faith of his youth as well as convince him that whether or not there was a historical Fall as described in Genesis is not important. Rather what is important is that "we accept the *meaning* of this historical fall is expressed in the God-inspired myth found in Scripture" (259; emphasis original). In this manner, Boyd insists we are able to "embrace Scripture without needing to deny evolution or affirm a literal Adam" (260).

However, Philip Ryken, in what I would regard as the most cogent presentation of this entire volume, argues that to "deny the historical Adam is to stand against the teaching of Moses, Luke, Jesus and Paul" (268). While the denial of a historical Adam is not "tantamount to denying the Christian faith," nevertheless "our view of Adam inevitably influences our whole theology" (270), precisely because the person of Adam "serves an integrating function in Christian theology" (278). Therefore, the events of Genesis 2–3 are "much more than an illustration of the human condition" (268). Specifically, they provide critical, foundational explanations for the origin of sin and human depravity, the origin of moral and natural evil, and the Christian view of "sexual identity and family relationships" (273). Most importantly, a historical Adam assures believers of their present

justification (Romans 5:12–21)²⁰ as well as their future resurrection and glorification (1 Corinthians 15).²¹

In summary, the Bible consistently attributes real effects to Adam's actions as recorded in Genesis in 2–3, and these effects have profound consequences for our lives and our theology. As Barrick notes, the principal issue at stake in this debate is “one of *primary* authority” (223, note 84; emphasis original). From his perspective (and mine) the fundamental question is whether or not Scripture is to be given priority: “When the reader of the Bible accepts extrabiblical evidence (whether from ancient Near Eastern documentation or from modern scientists' interpretation of circumstantial evidence) over the biblical record, that denigrates the biblical record and treats it with skepticism rather than as *prima facie* evidence” (226).

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²⁰ “Our soteriological connection to Christ is grounded in our anthropological connection to Adam” (275).

²¹ “... to have confidence that God has promised us a real body in our resurrection—the reality of Adam's body must be maintained. Ontology is connected to eschatology” (278).

“Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal. Paul Kjos Helseth. Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R publishing, 2010. 304 pages. \$21.99.

Addressing complex issues such as the nature of truth and its knowability along with the nature of Scripture is an explosive minefield today. One reform group known as the post-conservatives insist that doctrines such as factual inerrancy, verbal plenary inspiration, and hermeneutical theories of authorial intention were constructed by the early conservative Princetonian theologians such as B.B. Warfield, Charles Hodge, Gresham Machen and others who were overly influenced by modernism.

These post-conservative scholars allege that since these early Princetonians were so heavily influenced by the philosophical rationalism of their day, the aforementioned doctrines are in-part a product of modernity and rationalism rather than from the biblical text and therefore must be redefined. Indeed the consensus among historians and post-conservative scholars is that the Old Princeton theologians grounded their ideas of how to know truth (epistemology) in what is referred to as “Scottish Common Sense Realism.” In today’s nomenclature, post-conservatives alleged that the Princetonians and thus early Fundamentalist were simply modernists in their approach to doctrine and hermeneutics and consequently their modernistic doctrines today are antiquated and ineffective in today’s postmodern environment.

Helseth is a world-class scholar with his PhD from Marquette University, and serves as the Professor of Christian Thought at Northwestern College in Minneapolis, MN. His book, *Right Reason* is a stinging defense that the Princetonians shared in the theological and biblical epistemological assumptions of the Reformers rather than accommodating the Enlightenment Rationalism of Scottish Sense Realism of their day. The book is the most comprehensive work available today to demonstrate that the Princetonians were not Enlightenment rationalists. Consequently, Helseth demonstrates the current debate between conservatives and post-conservatives over the role and

purpose of doctrine is actually a debate about the very nature of Scripture. Helseth has given the church an incredible gift. *Right Reason* is an outstanding achievement marked by thoroughness and fair scholarship all in a readable albeit scholarly presentation.

The book is designed for scholars and well-read pastors though other Christian leaders would benefit from the book. In the first section of the book, Helseth correctly describes the moral context of the early Princetonians and how they critiqued the theological liberalism of their day. In the second section of the book, Helseth interacts more with today's theological climate and theological issues. He champions conservative theological values of inerrancy and inspiration along with the knowability of truth.

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