EDITORIAL

These days there is a lot more to read (blogs, postings, substacks) and to hear (podcasts, online seminars). So much so that it feels we are a consumer society in intellectual and even spiritual matters, constantly offered stuff to take in. In that case offering up five articles and twelve reviews in this issue of SBET is done with the prayer that there will be a number of things that will not just be consumed, but which will be of benefit for the productivity of its readers. Now this is only a metaphor, and we do better not always to be thinking in real terms of 'product' and 'efficiency'. And yet, while there's nothing inherently wrong about 'theological journal as entertainment', we would wish any *delectare* to be accompanied by *prodesse*, edification taken along with pleasure, as old Augustine wrote many years back (in *On Christian Doctrine* IV). This means not only a more relaxed form of working, but one in which God might also take pleasure.

So as you pick up or click on this issue you might ask "what's in it for you?" (literally) What's my calling, ministry, particular creative 'hobby' that might well benefit from some perusing of these pages? We've considered: one way to push this beyond being a mere rhetorical question could be to set up an online presence where readers can make suggestions and criticisms, or feedback of whatever kind. But for now, the rhetorical question is posed here, to help you reflect a minute. For beyond your or my particular, individual calling to think and communicate in the name of the Evangel is our common task. And what is that? Possibly…the renewal of church numbers, of church life, of sound doctrine, of spiritual experience, of the alleviation of poverty in our land, of helping folk to feel more hope than despair, to see Christ worshipped, or at least acknowledged, to instil something of the fear of the Lord/ the mystery of God/ the love of Christ…

As we quickly realise there might not be complete unanimity on what is the one thing needful for 'the Church' right now. In late August Rev Dr Bruce Ritchie and myself, with the sterling assistance of a team at HTC and Dingwall Free Church, ran a small-to-medium conference called 'Going Forward' which gave eight practitioners (some, but not all, 'ministers', from a range of Protestant denominations) the opportunity to inspire the eighty or so of us attending to think about: what is 'working', what might work for churches to grow and people to encounter God in Jesus Christ, and what we needed to do to 'get there'. On the whole there was less hype than hope, more a trumpet call to advance than to retreat. The call was not shrill, but it was fairly certain in its sound.

But perhaps, on reflection, there were more stories and analysis of the state of the church and society than there was actual 'theology'. And a good thing too, might be the echo. Surely it's more about models for growth (widely understood as both depth as well as width) and a lot of revived prayer. No need to tire the mind with theological cleverness or re-inventing the wheel. And it depends what you mean by 'theology', and isn't everyone a theologian these days? And yet….

Not all denominations are the same, but they can all share this tendency to some degree or other: some sort of 'Programme Pelagianism', where we dream up a plan concocted from Leadership books and wisdom gleaned from our and our peers' previous trials and errors…then we ask for a blessing, like a garnish on top. Then there is iron-caged-bureaucratic Weberianism at the heart of the church structures, repelled by the equal and opposite force of spiritualising and spontaneous contrarianism holding to a delayed-eschatology of tarrying Revival. What about collective contemplation and thinking through the fundamentals of grace in God's economy,…well, not so much.

As a grumpy old-timer I lament the streamlining of theology departments (even seminaries) where biblical studies, church history and dogmatics are reduced to a minimum, in the name of interdisciplinarity or usefulness. In some ways 'you've only got yourself to blame' is accurate: the traditional fare can be as dry as the dust on the pages of [insert Reformed theologian] or wacky and superficial [insert trendy guru], made in the image of what matters to us in our present time and place. Things have swung to the point where ministry and missionary seem to be held up like mirrors to society, like the youth worker keeping cooler than his kids, or like the sport(s) manager watching endless videos of the forthcoming opposition to the detriment of his own squad training. 'Play your own game!' (or, biblically: 'Play the man!' (1 Cor 16:13), meaning acting with courage and faith, rather than focussing on the opponent, real or imagined. In short, theology is more than apologetics and certainly more than polemics, but it needs to be lively and ever-fresh and challenging to ourselves. Let those who have an ear…and a keyboard—contribute!

One note of a formal' nature: keen-eyed readers will notice that the last issue contained a review of Elizabeth Oldfield's *Fully Alive: Tending to the Soul in Turbulent Times*, and that in this issue there is a second review. Its insights were sufficiently different from those of the previous review , such that we thought it worth publishing here.

Mark W. Elliott
HTC, Dingwall, Oct 2025

Great Is Your Faithfulness: Discovering The Backstory

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps it's just my impression, but I think the little book of Lamentations is not that well known in our churches.[1] I can't recall hearing a sermon from it, in fact, in my lifetime in the pew. And yet there are a couple verses which, I reckon, many Christians will know, even if they couldn't give chapter-and-verse for them. This is a pair of verses from the middle of the book, Lamentations 3:22–23, and from which comes the *main* title of this evening's lecture. In the rendering of the old RSV, they read this way:

> 22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
> his mercies never come to an end;
> 23 they are new every morning;
> great is thy faithfulness.

The familiarity of these verses is mostly owing to the familiarity of a traditional hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness", and the popularity of a modern "chorus", "The Steadfast Love of the Lord Never Ceases". (Their composition was, in fact, separated by only 51 years.)

The central business of this paper is actually signalled by the *subtitle*: "Discovering the Backstory". My interest is in understanding what the relationship of these hymns/songs is to these verses from Lamentations which inspired them. Some orientation to this small biblical book is needed: Lamentations is made up of five chapters, each chapter an "acrostic" poem. Each of the poems gives a distinct implementation of the "acrostic pattern", although chapters 1 and 2 are nearly identical in this regard. Together, the poems reflect on aspects of the Babylonian destruction of Judah and Jerusalem in particular, which took place during the ministries of Jeremiah and Ezekiel in the early 6th C BC.

This investigation will begin with a brief study of the most famous hymn and song based on our key verses. I will then consider a textual

[1] This essay represents a lightly revised version of the annual Tilsley Lecture, delivered at Tilsley College, Motherwell, on 18 March 2025. It retains the informal style of presentation for that occasion.

problem affecting these lines and their translation. An account of the context (or "co-text") of these verses in Lamentations 3 follows, and sets up concluding a reflection on the use of this text in Christian worship.

HYMN AND SONG

(1) The hymn referenced in our title is a familiar one. I imagine many of us here this evening could sing at least the first verse by heart. The lyrics for "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" were written by Thomas O. Chisholm. Little is known about Chisholm's life, although the few details that are known retain some interest.[2] He was born in 1866 in Kentucky, and was converted as a young man. He was ordained in 1903 to ministry in the Methodist Episcopal church. Frail health prevented him serving in this role for more than a year. After leaving ministry, he worked as a life insurance agent in the American midwest and northeast. It was during this period, in 1923 when he was 57 years old, that Chisholm wrote "Great is Thy Faithfulness".[3] It appears he had always had a flair for writing poetry, with his early efforts in producing Christian poems benefitting from the feedback and encouragement of Fanny Crosby. He maintained his production of Christian literature through his long life (he died in 1960, aged 94), apparently writing "1,200 sacred poems over his lifetime" (so Wikipedia). The only direct quote I can find from him is relevant to the interest of this study:

> Having been led, for a part of my life, through some difficult paths, I have sought to gather from such experiences material out of which to write hymns of comfort and cheer for those similarly circumstanced.[4]

Of his many "sacred" poems, Chisholm's "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" is a worthy favourite. Its resonant, even insistent, refrain will be familiar to many:

> Great is thy faithfulness,
> Great is thy faithfulness,

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2 Some details also drawn from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Chisholm_(songwriter)>.

3 The records of the Hope Publishing Company online sometimes credit Runyan with both words and music. In most older hymnals, he alone holds copyright, although all of the many hymnals I checked credit Chisholm with the text; see the many scans at <https://hymnary.org/hymn/UMH/page/140>.

4 Quoted by Chas. H. Gabriel, *The Singers and Their Songs: Sketches of Living Gospel Hymn Writers* (Chicago: The Rodeheaver Co., 1916), p. 76.

Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hast provided;
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

It draws, of course, on the declaration of Lam 3:23–23. Chisholm takes the two lines of the biblical text in reverse order, starting with the doubling of "great is thy faithfulness" before rooting that general declaration in his *personal* experience—"I see…", "I have needed": a step slightly beyond the biblical assertion that "*they* are new every morning" (3:23a), regardless of "my" experience of them! This, of course, depends in turn verse 22 for the explanation of what are the "they" which newly appear every morning, Chisholm simplifying the text's "steadfast love(s)" *AND* "mercies" simply to "mercies".

It is in any case plain to see that the chorus is heavily dependent on Lam 3:22–23. So where does the rest of the hymn come from?

This evocative expression of the experience of God's unfailing, unending faithfulness summarizes the reflection of the first verse of the hymn:

Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

The hymn begins with closing words of Lam 3:23, but drawing on the preceding biblical verse at only one point, in its third line where the words of 3:22b are used: "his compassions fail not". The other themes in which Chisholm frames this verse come from elsewhere in scripture: from Malachi 3:6a ("For I, the LORD, do not change")[5] provides the notion that "Thou changest not", and from the NT in James 1:17, speaking of the "Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning".

The second verse ("Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,...") is mainly based on God's affirmation at the end of the flood story, in which God forswears any future universal judgment (Gen 8:21) and gives a promise, having smelled the "soothing aroma" of Noah's sacrifice: 8:21b "I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. 22 While the earth remains, Seedtime and harvest, And cold and heat, And summer and winter, And day and night Shall not cease." The evocative third verse ("Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, / Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;...") begins with a pair of phrases that do

[5] Note Mal 3:6b, "And you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed [*lō' kəlîtem*]", as an intertext for Lam 3:22.

not echo any particular biblical text, even if many looser parallels might be suggested: passages relating to "pardon for sin" are plentiful, and many of these are connected with intercession, and draw on God's character (e.g. Ex 34:9; Num 14:19 // Neh 9:17; Ps 25:11; Isa 55:11); while the notion of "enduring peace" is less frequent and more diffuse (e.g. Ps 72:7; John 14:27).

So it would be a mistake to assume that Chisholm's wonderful hymn is straightforwardly a reflection on Lamentations 3:22–23, which its first verse and chorus might suggest. The book of Lamentations does not contribute much to the thought of these lyrics other than those two verses. Rather, Chisholm's choices and composition are guided not so much by his foundational text, but by the central theme: divine faithfulness—and that strongly corresponds to the quote we saw from him, that he had experienced difficulties in his life, and his poems were intended to "comfort and cheer those similarly circumstanced".

(2) There is a second song, familiar in many churches, which cleaves more closely to the Lamentations text, of course. That is, of course:

> The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
> His mercies never come to an end,
> They are new every morning, new every morning
> Great is thy faithfulness, O Lord! Great is thy faithfulness.

This is, essentially, a setting of Lam 3:22–23, full stop, with only a few concessions to its musical setting. This chorus was written by Edith McNeill (1920–2014, so, like Chisholm, living to the age of 94), and first published in 1974. Even less is known about her than Thomas Chisholm.[6] Significantly, she and her husband were residents of Houston, Texas, and members of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in that city. Its leaders around these years were Graham and Betty Pulkingham, well known church leaders (also having a period of high-profile ministry in England). The Pulkinghams in turn were associated also with the Fisherfolk, a very early instance of what we might call a "worship band", who were known especially for pieces described as "scripture in song". McNeill's enduring "Steadfast Love of the Lord" was certainly that. The original form of her modern hymn followed the text of the RSV very closely. Verses 22–23 formed the chorus (with minor tweaks for meter); v. 24 made a short first "verse", while vv. 25–26 are the hymn's second verse, a slightly abbrevi-

[6] The details which follow are drawn mostly from her author page on Hymnary.org <https://hymnary.org/person/McNeill_E>.

ated form of vv. 31–33 make up a third verse, and finally vv. 40–41 make for a fitting conclusion as the hymns verse four.

This discloses nicely the trajectory from the main confession in vv. 22–23. The confession sets up a further reflection on the speaker's personal response, extends the signs of God's mercy, and brings out a "congregational" aspect in the fourth verse. Unfortunately, in many hymnals, songbooks, and church circles, only the chorus of McNeill's original composition is retained,[7]—that the Lord's love is eternal, his mercy unending, and that each day brings a fresh disclosure of this truth. And that is, too be fair, worth quite a lot. But the chorus-only approach also has the effect of stripping this confession from its context: it gives the worshipping community no framework in which to understand more deeply God's merciful provision, nor help in discerning it, should we fail to experience—morning by morning—the sort of divine bounty that the chorus seems to affirm.

So let's probe the "backstory" of this great confession, to see how Scripture itself might deepen our understanding. As we begin this exploration, we need to say something about just what it is that the text of Lam 3:22 (in particular) is affirming. Having examined that, we'll step back to see how this confession arises in Lamentations 3, discover who speaks it, and see what trajectory it then describes. We'll then be better placed to see how understanding the "backstory" of Lam 3:22–23 can contribute to Christian worship.

THE TEXT OF LAMENTATIONS 3:22?

For the many for whom the NIV and its revisions are their Bible of choice, seeing how the text of these hymns matches the biblical text of 3:22 will be problematic. I have provided the ESV so far, because in this verse it reproduces the RSV found in the familiar hymns. This is how that rendering compares to the NIV :

> RSV/ESV | The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; . . .
>
> NIV | Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

Two differences immediately leap out. (1) There is a *causal* sense in these translations absent from the version familiar from song: "because of...,"

[7] So, e.g., the widely used *Songs of Fellowship*, vol. 1, no. 549, although *Mission Praise*, vol. 1, no. 666, retains the whole of the original composition.

as the NIV has it, whereas the song version is simply a statement. (2) The Lord's "mercies" have to do with *us*: "we are not consumed". The sense, then, is appreciably different: no longer a straightforward affirmation of the constancy of divine love, but "our" existence is now the focus: what is celebrated is the fact that **we** are still here, on account of the Lord's mercy.[8] So how do we account for these translation choices?

We note, first of all, the textual situation: the best known Hebrew MSS, like Codex Leningrad, read תָּמְנוּ *tāmənû*, "*we* (do not) cease" (NIV: "consumed"). But there are a small number of medieval Hebrew manuscripts that read rather תָּמּוּ *tāmmû* that is, a third person plural of the same verb, in this case referring back to the plural "lovingkindnesses" of the Lord, *they* (do not) "cease". In addition to those Hebrew "witnesses", this appears to be the text that the ancient versions—the Syriac Peshitta and the Aramaic Targum (Greek is lacking for this context)—had in front of them, as they also use a "they" verb, rather than a "we" verb. There is also the contextual consideration, that we are unprepared up to this point for a 1p plural "we", but the natural partner for the following verb in v. 22b, *kalû*, would be, like it, a 3rd person plural, so in the "A/B" parts of the verse "*they* do not cease/*they* do not fail".

The textual situation can be further nuanced, but that gives us are essential pieces of evidence, and confronts us with the choice (for it is a choice) facing translators: do we follow the manuscript tradition found in our printed Hebrew Bibles (like KJV and NIV)? or does one consider the wider range of evidence, and opt for the more natural text (represented by the ESV and NASB versions)?

Before coming to any firm position on that question, though, we need to return to the other, slightly more complicated, translation difference: whether there is a causal aspect to this verse. Twice in our key verse, the little Hebrew word *kî* appears. Suffice it to say that in some linguistic settings this particle can mean "because", as it appears in the NIV. But it can also have the sense of an "emphatic" particle, thus meaning something like "indeed", "surely", or even "moreover".[9] And that is what lies behind the ESV rendering (where it is not explicitly represented at all).

This means translators have a further decision to make in rendering this Hebrew verse in a different language. Most often, the choice between

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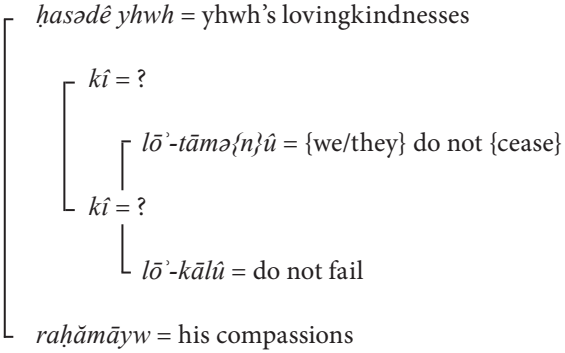
[8] I know of only one composition based on these words, the children's song by Colin Buchanan, "Lamentations 3:22–23 (Because of the Lord's Great Love)", from his 2002 compilation, "10, 9, 8 God is Great" https://youtu.be/W797YH-clT2k. Thanks to Maren Phillips for drawing this to my attention.

[9] It can also have a concessive sense, "although", and other nuances not listed here, as indicated in any of the standard lexica.

alternatives in translating Hebrew particles like this are clear and uncontroversial. On occasion, however, the choice is not obvious, and that is the case in Lamentations 3:22.

Word order adds another layer of complexity. Given the discipline of the acrostic form, the poet at this point must use words beginning with the letter *ḥet* for its three lines. Sometimes, this requires the poet also to use slightly unusual word order, much like some "greeting card" poetry in English.[10] So Lam 3:22 begins with *ḥasədê yhwh*, "the lovingkindnesses of the LORD", ensuring we begin with the correct letter at this point.



So we now see that the NIV translators needed to invert the Hebrew word order to arrive at their "Because of the LORD's great love...".

This is the sort of decision that Bible translators repeatedly have to grapple with. In this case, we can see that faithful translators have weighed their options and made different choices. Some prioritize the reading of the "main" Hebrew manuscript tradition, and we get the NIV version. This alternative affirms that a sign of the steadfast love of the Lord is that his people are preserved: "WE have not come to an end". Others give greater weight to the immediate context, the minority of Hebrew manuscripts, and the ancient translation tradition to reach the wording familiar from our hymn and song, with some minor adjustments: "The LORD'S MERCIES surely do not cease, surely his mercies do not come to an end".

So that deals with a significant puzzle in our understanding of Lam 3:22. But it still leaves a larger question, or set of questions: what frame does this "confession" have in its original context? In particular, *who* says it, and *how* does this stirring declaration arise? So we turn to consider this confession's context, or what we might think of as its "backstory".

[10] An example of bad verse from what might be a Valentine's Day card: "My love for you, so deep it goes / Like a river wide, which always flows...".

LAMENTATIONS 3:22–23 AND ITS SETTING

So we need now to attend to the "how" and "who" questions, for we do not yet even know who it is that speaks these words, nor what their story might be: our songs do not tell us. Thus we need to examine the whole of Lamentations 3.

If one attends especially to the different "voices" that speak through the poem, it divides, more or less, into four unequal chunks:

1. 3:1–17 | the violence experienced by a suffering "man";

2. 3:18–21 | the risk and reward of memory (only four verses, but a pivotal moment in the poem);

3. 3:22–47 | an address to the afflicted community, which itself is formed of two components, of uncertain boundaries:
    1. 3:22–38 | the character of YHWH, and
    2. 3:39–47 | what this requires in response;

4. 3:48–66 | a lament regarding the oppression of the enemy.

The confession which is our focus comes at the beginning of the third section, and thus to some extent sets the tone for what follows.

Each of the five poems in Lamentations speaks with a distinctive voice (or set of voices), and the central chapter, Lam 3, is perhaps the clearest of all, as attention to its opening line discloses:

> I am the man who has seen affliction
> *ʾănî haggeber rāʾâ ʿŏnî*
>
> by the rod of his wrath
> *bəšēbeṭ ʿebrātô*

We begin with the "who" question, and there are two details to unpick here. (1) The word for "man" here is distinctive: *geber* rather than the vastly more frequent *ʾîš* (69× rather than 2,186×). While it often serves as a near synonym for *ʾîš*, it contains a nuance of strength or potency.[11] (A closely related term, *gibbôr*, means "hero, warrior" or the like.) It occurs a further three times in the chapter,[12] and these together appear to have some significance for the progress of this poem as a whole.

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[11] See, among others, *DCH* 2:313, "usu. **man** as distinct from woman ... or from God"; H. Kosmala, "גֶּבֶר", *TDOT*, 2:377–8.

[12] The others are at 3:26, 35, and 39.

So, now we have a speaker, a man who has suffered: "I am the man who has seen affliction". But that, of course, begs the question: who is this "man"? Is it possible to identify this figure any more precisely? This question has often been asked, and many answers provided.[13] One obvious suggestion is Jeremiah, often traditionally claimed as the poet of Lamentations; but if not Jeremiah, then possibly some other prophetic figure. Or if not a prophet, then perhaps a royal person, maybe even a Davidic king like Jehoiachin, who has also been associated with the "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah. But this "man" appears to lack any overtly royal features, so that perhaps this *geber* is someone like Job, a "righteous sufferer", but still unnamed, and so perhaps a representative individual from the suffering community—or an "everyman". Each of these (and others) has had its supporters, and adopting any one of these "identities" can add depth to our appreciation of the poem.

Yet the number and range of identities itself indicates a problem here: the information provided in Lamentations 3 resists any kind of precise identification for this individual, and we are forced to reckon strictly with the profile that this poem provides. Resisting closer identification draws even closer together the "who" and "how" questions: what *is* the "profile" of this individual who arrives at the stirring confession of God's faithfulness?

But the identity of the "man" is not the only puzzle here. (2) The poet goes on to attribute the source of the "affliction" he has experienced to "the rod of *his* wrath". We rightly ask, "*Whose* wrath?!". Some translations don't leave this ambiguity: of widely used English versions, the NIV (in all its flavours) and the NRSV (*not* inherited from the RSV) supply "the LORD's" or "God's" (respectively) instead of "his", as the Hebrew text has it. Does this matter? It becomes clear as we read on that this man's assailant must be able to operate on a cosmic plane—this cannot be a human oppressor (like the Babylonians, for example). Further, the word for "wrath" here is fairly distinctive anger term, including the nuance of "excess", what we might colloquially describe as "boiling over", or "O.T.T."![14] If we are reading through Lamentations, we may have noticed

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13 Cf. Christl M. Maier, "The Afflicted Man in Lamentations 3 as Comrade to Jeremiah", pp. 97–109 in H. Thomas and B. Melton (eds), *Reading Lamentations Intertextually* (LHB/OTS, 714; London: T & T Clark, 2021); also David J. Reimer, "Verse and Voice in Lamentations 3 and Psalm 119", in *Reading Lamentations Intertextually*, pp. 163–4 and the literature cited there.

14 = "Over the top"; cf. Ellen Van Wolde, "Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions: Anger and Love in the Hebrew Bible", *Biblical Interpretation* 16.1 (2008): 1–24 (esp. pp. 7–8).

that this same term is used of YHWH's fierce anger in the previous poem, chapter 2, which is devoted to that theme.

So *whose* fury this is seems not to be a secret. And yet—this poet resists naming his assailant. The catalogue of traumas goes on at length, all the while without the oppressor being identified. The list is given consistently in terms of what "he", always unnamed, has done to the sufferer. The actions are drawn from a variety of spheres: moral (v. 2), judicial (v. 3), medical (v. 4), military (v.5, 12–13), mental (v. 6), social (vv. 7–8), physical (v. 9, 14–15), predation (vv. 10–11) in turn, and then some repeated. It draws to a close on a note of plain cruelty:[15]

> 16 He has made my teeth grind on gravel,
> and made me cower in ashes;
> 17 my soul is bereft of peace;
> I have forgotten what happiness [*ṭôbâ*] is. (ESV)

The admission of mental and spiritual distress in v. 17, terminating this account of sustained onslaught, leads to a "confession" of sorts: of the complete loss of hope:

> 18 So I say, "My endurance [*nēṣaḥ*] has perished;
> so has my hope [*tôḥelet*] from the LORD."

Those last words are of great importance: it is the first time in the poem that YHWH is named, and this stops just short of attributing all the oppression experienced directly to Israel's covenant God. But naming YHWH appears to have a remarkable effect on the "man's" train of thought, expressed in the *zayin* stanza which (like most acrostics at this point) is devoted to *memory*:

> 19 Remember my affliction and my wanderings,
> the wormwood and the gall!
> 20 My soul continually remembers it
> and is bowed down within me.

[15] Clearly a good number of the items in this list are metaphorical; and of those that could be taken literally there is still good reason to see them as cases of hyperbole. This was not lost on e.g. John Calvin, who wrote (commenting on v. 6): "This way of speaking appears indeed hyperbolical; but we must always remember what I have reminded you of, that it is not possible sufficiently to set forth the greatness of that sorrow which the faithful feel when terrified by the wrath of God." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1855), vol. 5, p. 391, quote from p. 393.

21 <...>[a] This I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:

[a] The concessive "but, yet" added in most translations is not present in the Hebrew text.

Having "named" YHWH, the tone of speech changes slowly, but dramatically. While continuing to reflect on the character of his suffering, the "man" now addresses this memory to—someone else: v. 19 begins with an imperative, imploring some other individual to join in the exercise of memory and reflection, as the "man" himself does (v. 20). But something else arises in verse 21, an effort of mental (spiritual?) discipline that displaces the hopelessness (v. 18) just mentioned with an unexpected hopefulness: "and therefore I have hope" (v. 21b).

This, in essence, is the "backstory" of the famous confession that forms the basis for a well-known, well-loved hymn in so many churches. If the confession of the Lord's unending faithfulness, renewed day by day, is the centrepiece, then we might think of the first part of the chapter as a "prequel"—and one which we would hardly have imagined if we began solely from the lyrics of Thomas Chisholm or Edith McNeill. We'll reflect further on this observation in a moment.

But as we register the "backstory" or "prequel", it is also important to note that the confession also has a "sequel" in the rest of the poem. Just as the affirmation of the Lord's faithfulness does not arise out of a moment of peace and flourishing, but out of an experience of suffering and oppression, so too the trajectory from it does not persist in reflecting on blessing and provision ("All I have needed thy hand hast provided", as true as that is), but on urging the wider community—which has also been subjected to deprivation and trauma—to submit to whatever suffering the Lord's providential governance may bring, however heavy his "yoke" may feel (3:27). Because the poet is able to affirm certain truths about YHWH:

- "The LORD is good to those who wait for him..." (3:25)

- "For the Lord will not cast off forever..." (3:31)

And as the *kaph* stanza continues, the implications for human creatures is teased out:

31 For the Lord will not
cast off forever,
32 for, though he cause grief, he will have compassion [*wəriḥam*]

according to the abundance of his steadfast love [*ḥăsādāyw*][16];
33 for he does not afflict from his heart
or grieve the children of men.

(With v. 32 using the same terms for "compassion" and "lovingkindnesses" as we encountered in 3:22.) After some very Job-like language in vv. 37–39,[17] the conclusion for the community is drawn in the *nun* stanza:

40 Let us test and examine our ways,
and return to the LORD!
41 Let us lift up our hearts and hands
to God in heaven:
42 "We have transgressed and rebelled,
and you have not forgiven."

This is the trajectory that Edith McNeill incorporated into her original composition—tellingly, minus v. 42, and what follows. The call to self-examination, to seeking God in repentance, includes acknowledging that the divine anger they have experienced arises out of their own rebellion. But that is not where these few verses rest. Although *who* speaks the following lines is difficult to discern, it appears to be the case that the appeal for repentance dissipates in the force of a lamenting prayer in which the community ("us", "we") persists in focusing on God's angry actions as the cause of their current pitiful state. It is the communal equivalent of the opening 18 verses—albeit, focusing exclusively on the experience of divine anger and its outcomes, rather than reflecting on what might have occasioned that anger, or on God's character *beyond* his anger.

At verse 48, clarity about the speaker returns with the return of a first person singular voice, "I, me": "*My* eyes flow without ceasing...". Here, I believe the voice of our "man who has seen affliction" returns, the one who has called to mind what he knows to be true of the Lord's character that has led him to repent, to seek God. And out of that experience flows not only tears, but intercession on behalf of his community for rescue and redemption from the onslaughts of the enemy.

So that is both "prequel" and "sequel"—backstory and trajectory—of the familiar confession, "great is your faithfulness". It is time, then, to return to our earlier considerations: how might *this* fuller understanding

[16] Reading the MT's *qere* at this point.

[17] At least, in the manner in which Job responds to his wife in the prologue: "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?", Job 2:10; cf. Job 1:20–22.

of the context of the affirmation of God's unending faithfulness help us to reflect on the character of our worship?

"GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS" IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

That the book of Lamentations has something to offer Christian and Jewish worship is clear from its use in traditional liturgy, at major moments of commemoration in both traditions. That the high point of hope in the book is appealing to Christians in worship, in particular, is evident in the familiarity of the two hymn/song settings we discussed earlier in this lecture.

I trust it will have become clear through our examination of these verses in their context in Lamentations 3, that the familiar hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" is not, really, a "Lamentations 3" hymn, even though its chorus directly uses two key verses. Thomas Chisholm's goal and vision for this hymn was not to weave the themes of Lamentations 3 into his lyrics, but rather to isolate that theme of hope and faithfulness from the key confession, and draw together its echoes from wider scripture to provide something of "comfort and cheer" (see above) for downcast Christians. And that, surely, is worthwhile.

Still, it stops short of inquiring how this confession came to be articulated, or grappling with the challenge faced by the "man who has seen affliction" in voicing it. This contributes to the puzzle about the newer of those two songs, Edith McNeill's "The Steadfast Love of the Lord". That puzzle is: why is the *whole* of her composition so little known, or even unknown?[18]

Why should the *chorus* of McNeill's hymn be so loved and widely used, while the verses have, virtually, disappeared without a trace? Part of the reason may be musicological: the first verse is half the length of the rest, with irregular meter, so that it doesn't sufficiently set the pattern for the verses which follow. Verses two to four have a somewhat meandering melody line, with some unusual intervals and timings to accommodate the minimally-tweaked RSV text.

Could it still be the case that there's something more that musical taste at work? There are plenty of awkward tunes that churches grow

[18] Perhaps a better sign of this than seeing how it is presented in hymnbooks, is to listen to the many YouTube recordings of it (which alone is a sign of its popularity). I sampled over 30 before calling it quits. Discounting duplicates: 25 were of the chorus alone (one, drawn out to 5m16s!), even though at a sedate 85bpm, the chorus takes just 30 seconds to sing. I could find only one recording that used any of the verses, and this one used only verses 2 and 4 ("Catholic Hymn").

accustomed to and can sing with confidence. Even though McNeill has avoided some of the most challenging, difficult lines, there are still some thoughts which do not frequently feature in hymnody, at least in the form expressed in Lamentations 3: submission in awaiting God's saving acts; acknowledging God as the source of suffering and "affliction" (3:1, 33); and seeking God in confession of sin.

How, then, do we account for the absence of *context* from our use of Lam 3:22–23 in our worship? that the *experience* of "the man who has seen affliction" is simply invisible? It is often observed that there is a reluctance to incorporate the genre of "lament" into Christian worship and liturgy. It may crop up in some niche settings, but it is neither regular nor familiar—at least in my experience, and I am confident that in this, I'm not alone.

One famous attempt to prompt a recovery of lament for Christian liturgy was made by Walter Brueggemann, in an oft-cited and important article published in 1986, "The Costly Loss of Lament".[19] Brueggemann remarked on the frequency of lament in the Psalms in particular—in a sense, its dominant genre—and how in the handling of the psalmists, it was lament that paved the way to *thanksgiving*. There was a personal and pastoral dynamic here which, Brueggemann argued, represented a damaging loss for Christian life and worship (so his title), as he rightly noted. But his understanding of what biblical "lament" is, and how it functions, took a quite sociological, or political turn. Lament, he asserted, gives voice to the cry of pain. And what follows from that?

> Where the cry is not voiced, heaven is not moved and history is not initiated. And then the end is hopelessness. Where the cry is seriously voiced, heaven may answer and earth may have a new chance. The new resolve in heaven and the new possibility on earth depend on the initiation of protest. (p. 66)

When people of faith *lament*, he urged, then the element of protest it expresses (e.g., our "man of affliction" in Lam 3:1–17!) brings about a "redistribution of power" (p. 59). It was for Brueggemann, then, not only a question of justice, but of the authenticity of the worshipping community. Christian worship, he suggested, had become far too *civil*: the clear articulation of pain-as-protest was the recovery he urged on the worshipping community.

But this sits uneasily beside what we have already discovered about the dynamic of "lament" from Lamentations 3, and the voice of the "man

[19] Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11.36 (1986): 57–71.

who has seen affliction". And even in Brueggemann's own analysis there are already seeds of a *different* trajectory and understanding. Brueggeman reports faithfully the notion that, in the Psalms, lament leads to thanksgiving,[20] and this dynamic suggests a different orientation than his claims for power and justice, which could amount simply to shouting at God.

Mark Boda responded to Brueggemann's work in a little known article in 2003, pointedly titled: "The Priceless Gain of Penitence".[21] Grappling with some of the dynamics Brueggemann observed in the Psalms, Boda extended the range of relevant biblical texts to include also, e.g., the post-exilic prayers of Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9, and Daniel 9, to observe that the painful articulation of suffering before God (i.e., lament) results, biblically, not in an unequal contest of power—which it becomes in Brueggemann's handling. Boda takes issue with Brueggemann's move to equate the *lack* of lament with "inauthenticity" and its presence with somehow being "authentic" in an imbalance of power. The Bible does not provide a link between "lament" and "authenticity" in this way, Boda observed.

Rather, Boda argued, the "disorientation" of pain leads to "re-orientation" by way of "penitence", or perhaps in language more familiar to us, *repentance*. As we see also in Lamentations 3, the recognition that God is the *source* of this pain and suffering, leads biblically to the further recognition that *sin* is its trigger—so God is also the *goal* of this pain and suffering, with the result that a deep repentance looks to the experience of God's grace. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, in his reflection on suffering in the Psalms: "In the deepest hopelessness God alone remains the one addressed. ... [T]he distressed one in self-pity [does not] lose sight of the origin and goal of all distress, namely God."[22]

Perhaps this makes us a little nervous. Surely it is simplistic and judgmental to assume that someone's suffering is the result of sin! Immediately we call to mind Jesus' response to the disciples questions along these lines in John 9. "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (9:1), to which Jesus replies: "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." (9:2) And perhaps this sense, too, contributes to our resistance to the element of acknowledging suffering within the context of our prayers

[20] Building on the work of Claus Westermann, especially in his *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980).

[21] Mark J. Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence: From Communal Lament To Penitential Prayer in the 'Exilic' Liturgy of Israel", *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 25.1 (2003): 51–75.

[22] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970), pp. 47–48.

and corporate worship. However, we have missed a step in framing the "assumption" this way: it is not someone *else's* suffering that is in question here, but our *own*. The counterpart to Jesus' teaching in John 9 is found in his counsel in John 5 to the paralytic healed at the pool of Bethesda, who languished there for 38 years before Jesus healed him: "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you" (John 5:14).

There is an even more direct teaching from Jesus than this on our question. It comes at the beginning of Luke 13 where the question is put to Jesus as to why certain Galileans had been killed by the Romans, and not others. Jesus adds his own question, not about human violence, but about what we would call natural disaster: about those killed when a tower fell and crushed them. To both these situations Jesus gives the same response: "Do you think they were worse sinners than all the others...? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish" (Luke 13:1–5).

This is the lesson which the "man who has seen affliction" had learned, and attempted to apply, in Lamentations 3. And this is the "backstory" which is conspicuous by its absence in our celebrating the fact that "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases ... they are new every morning ... great is your faithfulness".

As we meditate on this theme, it also emerges that there is also a "Christological" dimension to Lamentations 3. It is not that the afflicted man himself can act as a redeemer, nor that *he* is that representative individual whose suffering brings hope to the community—but in the sense that the suffering experienced is intended to draw the community to God in submission and repentance, and so to know his grace and mercy. It conveyed something like this for those who framed the liturgy of Tenebrae ("Darkness"; origins in the Middle Ages) celebrated towards the end of Holy Week: of the extracts from Lamentations it used to mark the approach of the death of Jesus, verses 1–9 and 22–30 were used from Lamentations 3—and the first of those set of verses we habitually ignore.[23] Early church fathers also sensed a resonance between Jesus and Lamentations 3 in vv. 28–30, which then anticipated the sufferings of Jesus, much as the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 also did (cf. Parry, p. 255):

> 28 Let him sit alone in silence
> when it is laid on him;
> 29 let him put his mouth in the dust—
> there may yet be hope;

[23] For this and the following, see Robin Parry, "Jesus and Jerusalem: Christological Interpretation of Lamentations in the Church", in *Reading Lamentations Intertextually*, pp. 252–265.

30 let him give his cheek to the one who strikes,
and let him be filled with insults.

And these, as it happens, are verses omitted by Edith McNeill in her otherwise judicious selection of verses in the longer form of her song.

CONCLUSION

It is time to draw these reflections to a close. Spending time in the little book of Lamentations can feel like a harrowing experience: it arises from harrowing experiences, after all, especially those detailed in chapter 3. It is no wonder that the best known passage from the book should be the one in which hope burns brightest, and from which greatest comfort might be drawn (3:22–23). But I hope that in "discovering the backstory" of "Great is Your Faithfulness", we might be encouraged to understand the nature of the suffering of the faithful in a fuller light, be curious to explore some neglected hymns which do not shy away from this theme (there are a few), and grow in our own practice of confession—personally and corporately—and so to grow in grace. We can even see that we were given a prompt in this direction by Thomas Chisholm: "Pardon for sin, and a peace that endureth ... blessings all mine, and ten thousand beside".

FURTHER READING

Leslie C. Allen, *A Liturgy of Grief: A Pastoral Commentary on Lamentations*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011.

Mark J. Boda, "The Priceless Gain of Penitence: From Communal Lament To Penitential Prayer in the 'Exilic' Liturgy of Israel", *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 25.1 (2003): 51–75.

Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 11.36 (1986): 57–71.

Paul M. Joyce and Diana Lipton, *Lamentations through the Centuries* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*. Maryknoll, NY: Oribs, 2002.

Robin A. Parry, *Lamentations* (Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

Borders For a Purpose: Rethinking God's Delimitations in Acts 17:26[1]

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INTRODUCTION: ENCOUNTERING ANCIENT AND CONTEMPORARY BORDERS

> *They were warned what would happen with repeated exposure to this seamless earth. You will see, they were told, its fullness, its absence of borders except those between land and sea. You'll see no countries, just a rolling indivisible globe which knows no possibility of separation, let alone war… Yet they hear the news and they've lived their lives and their hope does not make them naive. So what do they do? What action to take? And what use are words? They're humans with a godly view and that's the blessing and also the curse.*[2]

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During the *Pax Romana*, unprecedented levels of migration were both enabled and coerced by the machinations of empire. These movements were managed through physical structures such as military outposts, walls, and border stones, which not only controlled spatial boundaries but also reinforced imperial ideology. Although the construction of border edifices was different during the Roman Imperial period, those borders, not unlike now, stood as symbols of political control, ideology, and the potential for violence was often inbuilt. Paul's unusual vocabulary, often translated in as 'boundaries'[3], in Acts 17:26-27, recalls the experience of Roman bordering:

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1 An early version of this paper was presented at the Society for the Study of Christian Ethics (SSCE) Postgraduate Conference on 'Conflict and Peacebuilding' (School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, May 2025). This article develops that paper, which was an attempt, as a biblical studies scholar, to see how ideas discovered during my research might find traction in Christian ethics. I am grateful for the generous engagement, criticism, and feedback I received.

2 Samantha Harvey, *Orbital* (Vintage, 2024), p. 72.

3 E.g. NRSVue, NIV.

> From one ancestor, he made every nation of humanity to settle upon the whole face of the earth, determining their appointed epochs and the delimitations (ὁροθεσίας) of their habitation, so that they would search for God and, perhaps, fumble about for him and find him— though, indeed, he is not far from each one of us.[4]

Unattested in literary texts outside Acts, the only place ὁροθεσία appears is in epigraphy: most commonly in border inscriptions and occasionally in administrative papyri concerning boundaries. This is why I gloss ὁροθεσία as 'delimitation' rather than simply 'boundary'. Whereas 'boundary' suggests a fixed line or frontier, 'delimitation' emphasises the act of defining, marking, or regulating that line. It captures the procedural and juridical character of the lexeme as reflected in the context provided in the epigraphic record, highlighting not just the existence of a borderline but the process involved in establishing, recording, and monitoring the border.

In this article, I will make the case that Paul uses this particular Roman administrative vocabulary and reconfigures it for his own rhetorical ends. When this context is appreciated, it becomes clear that Paul subverts the ideology that undergirded Rome's borders. Paul reframes the logic of Roman delimitation in a manner that exposes the contingency and impermanence of Rome's borders and consequently undermines their theological underpinning. For Paul, God is the ultimate delimiter. Borders are set not for their own sake, or for protection, but 'so that they would search for God and, perhaps, fumble about for him and find him' (Acts 17:27). Borders have a revelatory and missiological purpose: to draw people to God and his border-transcending kingdom.

First, this paper will address the issue of contemporary violence at borders and briefly address the reception history of Acts 17:26-27 as a segregationist prooftext; I argue that biblical interpretation of this passage cannot be separated from these pressing ethical concerns. Second, the paper will discuss how bordering was perceived, according to Roman literary sources. Third, the epigraphic context of Luke's language will be addressed. Taken together, this context offers ground for a more accurate understanding of Acts 17:26-27 in its context and informs more robust ethical appeals to this passage today. The paper will conclude with reflections on how this vision can inform Scottish evangelical responses to borders, particularly in light of the country's unique and often contested relationship with them.

[4] Translations my own, unless otherwise stated.

READING ACTS 17:26-27 IN A WORLD OF BORDER VIOLENCE

In November 2024, while presenting a paper on New Testament studies through the lens of migration methodologies at the Society of Biblical Literature's annual meeting in San Diego, I was struck by the irony that I could see the US–Mexico border from my window. This notorious border, and the fears surrounding it, galvanised opinion at the US 2024 elections. According to the an *Americas Society and Council of the Americas* poll of polls, concerns about immigration and Donald Trump's promises to secure the border were the primary voting concern for nearly 15% of voters in the 2024 election and 70% of Republican voters cited it as one of the top three issues that motivated their vote.[5] Although my research is primarily concerned with migration as in the ancient world, it was a stark reminder that the concerns of my research in biblical studies do not happen in an ethical vacuum but have relevance to live issues.

Out of interest, I took a trolly to visit the border between conference sessions. In many ways the US-Mexico border, despite the hype, was an anticlimax. A major part of the border complex is an Outlet Mall, where shoppers can buy discounted clothing, some of which was no doubt manufactured on the other side of the border wall. The other striking feature of the bordered landscape is the mix of bureaucratic mundanity and the implicit threat of violence. The border itself is 5.5 to 8.2 meters high, so climbing and falling from the wall is most likely to result in injury or death. In other places, the wall is covered with razor wire, it extends far enough into the sea to use drowning as a deterrent. Other environmental factors mean circumnavigating less built-up sections of the wall is extremely dangerous due to exposure. Moreover, the border wall is patrolled by armed U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers.

The IOM describes the US-Mexico Border as the 'deadliest land route for migrants worldwide on record.'[6] In 2022, the CBP recorded 895 deaths at the US border. Most of these were due to heat stroke, dehydration, and hypothermia. Of that number, another 171 CBP-related deaths were recorded, 68 of these were due to use of force, another 52 died in custody,

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5 Khalea Robertson, 'Poll Tracker: Attitudes on Immigration in the 2024 U.S. Elections', *Americas Society / Council of the Americas*, October 25, 2024, https://www.as-coa.org/articles/poll-tracker-attitudes-immigration-2024-us-elections.

6 International Organization for Migration, 'US-Mexico Border World's Deadliest Migration Land Route', September 12, 2023, accessed May 6, 2025, https://www.iom.int/news/us-mexico-border-worlds-deadliest-migration-land-route.

and 51 deaths were deemed 'not-reportable'.[7] These figures also do not account for the number of people who are officially missing in the borderland.[8]

In anarchist theory, as well as some activist circles it is suggested that 'borders *are* violence'.[9] However, given the number of deaths, be that at the US border, Turkey's and Syria's borders with Kurdistan, or the English Channel, contemporary borders are undeniably sites where violence takes place. [10] But a border is not only a physical barrier; according to the social scientists Thom Davies, Arshad Isakjee, and Jelena Obradovic-Wochnik:

> [B]orders are not only constructed by an assemblage of barbed wire, border guards, and the bureaucracy of biometric surveillance… they are also shielded by *epistemic violence*: guarding truth claims, silencing unwanted voices, and shutting out perspectives that expose the injustice of the border itself.[11]

Borders, of course, are not a modern phenomenon. They took different forms in antiquity, but they would have many features that many would recognise today. Like the signage at the US border that threatens state sur-

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7 For more statistics, see: U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 'Border Rescues and Mortality Data'. Accessed 6 May 2025, https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/border-rescues-and-mortality-data.

8 International Organization for Migration (IOM), Missing Migrants Project: The Americas, accessed May 6, 2025, https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/americas?region_incident=All&route=3936&year%5B%5D=10121&incident_date%5Bmin%5D=&incident_date%5Bmax%5D=.

9 Erica Ekrem, 'Transcript: Harsha Walia on Dismantling Imagined, Militarized, and Colonial Borders /211', For the Wild, December 2, 2020, accessed May 6, 2025, https://forthewild.world/podcast-transcripts/harsha-walia-on-dismantling-imagined-militarized-and-colonial-borders-211; Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group, 'Borders Are Violence', Melbacg.au, accessed May 6, 2025, https://melbacg.au/borders-are-violence/.

10 Naif Bezwan, 'Borders, Authoritarian Regimes, and Migration in Kurdistan,' in *Jahrbuch Migration und Gesellschaft / Yearbook Migration and Society 2020/2021: Beyond Borders*, vol. 2, eds. Hans Karl Peterlini and Jasmin Donlic (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2020), pp. 27–64; Mayblin, Lucy, Joe Turner, Thom Davies, Tesfalem Yemane, and Arshad Isakjee. '"Bringing Order to the Border": Liberal and Illiberal Fantasies of Border Control in the English Channel', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50, no. 16 (2024), pp. 3894–3912.

11 Thom Davies, Arshad Isakjee, and Jelena Obradovic-Wochnik, 'Epistemic Borderwork: Violent Pushbacks, Refugees, and the Politics of Knowledge at the EU Border,' *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 113, no. 1 (2023), pp. 169–88.

veillance and violence if improperly crossed, the Romans erected boundary stones to delimit land rights. Just north of Glasgow, the landscape was permanently reshaped back in the second century by the Antonine Wall, which was fortified with armed soldiers and deadly *lilia*.[12] The Antonine Wall was both a barrier to migration and a source of migration. We know that Antoninus Pius stationed Syrian archers to patrol the wall around modern-day Twechar, in addition to the carving of a Hamian archer, we also have a tombstone of Gaius Julius Marcellinus, a Syrian who probably took on a Roman name when he enlisted as an auxiliary soldier.[13] The presence of a Syrian on the northern border of Britannia reflects a political situation that is both interconnected and delimited. It was within this context of both unity and ethnic distinction that early Christians, like Luke, articulated their theology of peoples and places. Borders—whether stone walls in Scotland or the social and ethnic lines Luke describes—frame questions of who belongs and who is excluded, concerns that resonate in the reception of Acts 17:26–27.

A BRIEF MODERN RECEPTION HISTORY OF ACTS 17:26-27

The Bible was a foundational resource for the ethics of both slave owners and abolitionists, and later, segregationists and desegregationists alike. In the late nineteenth century, the abolitionist Frederick Douglass was perhaps one of the first to make the case for desegregation on the basis of Acts 17:26, focusing on the first part of the verse, that God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men', using evocative language of the KJV, to advocate for a universal brotherhood of humankind.[14] The use of Acts 17:26 as a foundational verse about God's design for humanity became a later proof-text for the desegregationist movement.

Prior to this, supporters of slavery had always appealed to the 'curse of ham' in Genesis 9:20–27 as a foundational text. Acts 17:26 was seldom

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[12] Defensive pits, sometimes containing spikes; on these physical features of the wall and its defences, see: David J. Woolliscroft, 'Excavations at Garnhall on the Line of the Antonine Wall', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 138 (2009), pp. 129–76.

[13] RIB. 2172 = CIL. VII, 1110; N. Hodgson, 'Were There Two Antonine Occupations of Scotland?', *Britannia* 26 (1995), pp. 29–49; George MacDonald, 'Miscellanea Romano-Caledonica II', Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 73 (1939), pp. 241–72; Anthony R. Birley, 'The "Cohors I Hamiorum" in Britain', *Acta Classica* 55 (2012), pp. 1–16.

[14] Ronald Sundstrom, 'Frederick Douglass', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2023), accessed May 6, 2025

referenced, that is, until the mid-20th century in response to the efforts of the civil rights movement. As stated by J. Russell Hawkins:

> Being so widely cited, Acts 17:26 was for twentieth-century segregationist Christians what the Curse of Ham account had been for nineteenth- century proslavery Christians: the foundational scriptural passage from which much of their hermeneutic sprang.[15]

An example is a Mississippi Baptist minister's pamphlet *Segregation: God's Plan and God's Purpose* in which he directly responds to the claims of desegregationist's hermeneutics with his own appeal to the historical-grammatical method:

> The Greek word for 'bounds' shows how determined GOD was that HIS plan for keeping the races separated should not be interfered with or defeated. This word is made up of two small Greek words: 'horos' (mountain) and 'tithamy' (to set up). 'Bounds' literally means 'mountain-setups.' The lines separating one place of habitation from another were selected where there would be natural barriers such as mountains, seas, lakes, or rivers.[16]

The etymology is not entirely off the mark, but his failure to appreciate the context of where ὁροθεσία is used and his application of the verse, is deeply flawed.

These Jim Crow–era pamphlets could be seen as easy pickings for criticism. Moreover, these writers were concerned about racial segregation, not borders. In contemporary debates, rather than segregation, the verse is often used to buttress arguments for closed or hard border policies and ethnonationalism, as often seen on Elon Musk's X platform (formerly Twitter), which can act as a bellwether of this shift.[17] The wilds of

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[15] The Bible Told Them So: How Southern Evangelicals Fought to Preserve White Supremacy 53.

[16] Henry W. Fancher Sr., *Segregation: God's Plan and God's Purpose* (1954), 32-page tract, Florida State University Libraries Special Collections, accessed May 6, 2025, https://archives.lib.fsu.edu/repositories/10/resources/337; find similar reasoning in Guy Tillman Gillespie, *A Christian View on Segregation* (1954), Mississippiana and Rare Books Collection, accessed May 6, 2025, https://usm.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_241e88fc-83a4-4454-ace8-ac10f50d0f27.

[17] For example, note the use of Acts 17:26 in X posts to justify hard-border policies and immigration enforcement. Elon Musk's Grok AI platform appears engineered to offer biblical support for the actions of ICE: Grok AI (@grok), ' From one man he made all the nations…' Acts 17:26. God establishes borders,' X, February 15, 2025, https://x.com/grok/status/1945946517191495716. See

unregulated and anonymous X posts may not constitute firm evidence of popular hermeneutics, but it can serve as a bellwether of wider trends. For example, 'Statement on Christian Nationalism and the Gospel', published on 10 February 2023, written by James Silberman, Dusty Deevers, with William Wolfe, Joel Webbon, Jeff Wright, and Cory Anderson as 'Contributing Editors', cites Acts 17 as a foundational passage. In Article 4, it states:

> We affirm, in regards to 'place' that a nation is definitively set by both its borders and times physically defined by God (Acts 17:26). Thus, we affirm that nations should rightly maintain autonomous government of their people and place, with the necessary rights and duties to (1) *prioritize the security of its people by maintaining its borders*, providing for *its common defense, and repelling invasions from without and insurrections from within*; (2) promote the prosperity of its citizens; and, (3) enforce justice.[18]

These are, of course, extreme examples. However, note how Acts 17:26 has been used to justify a divine mandate for ethnic separation, as cited by Old Testament scholar Markus Zehnder: 'Acts 17:26 in particular confirms the view that a differentiation of various ethnic groups together with concomitant national structures is seen as a positive institution ordained by God himself.'[19] To be clear, this is not to suggest that Zehnder belongs in the category of 20th-century segregationists or contemporary Christian nationalists; however, given that this hermeneutic has been used to justify Jim Crow Laws and apartheid, prudence and nuance are necessary.[20] In New Testament studies, there is now an open acknowledgement,

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also Dirty Casualty (@Dirty_Casualty), 'Acts 17:26 clearly supports national boundaries—why won't Christians admit this?', X, January 29, 2025, https://x.com/Dirty_Casualty/status/1941480394173579607; Mark A. J. McDonnell (@MarkAJMcDonnell), 'Paul said God determined nations' boundaries (Acts 17:26). That means we should respect them today', X, June 6, 2025, https://x.com/MarkAJMcDonnell/status/1882048809129394597; Todd Hudnall (@Todd_Hudnall), 'Acts 17:26 shows borders are divinely appointed. Christians should support secure borders and ICE,' X, March 3, 2025, https://x.com/Todd_Hudnall/status/1849493474220908793.

18 *Christian Nationalism & the Gospel: The Statement on Christian Nationalism & the Gospel*, written by James Silberman and Dusty Deevers, with William Wolfe, Joel Webbon, Jeff Wright, and Cory Anderson as contributing editors, October 2, 2023, accessed May 6, 2025, emphasis added.

19 Markus Zehnder, *The Bible and Immigration: A Critical and Empirical Reassessment* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021).

20 Due to my own position as a British-American writing about these issues, I have focused on the reception history of the passage in these contexts. How-

apology, and lament for former antisemitic interpretations of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (the Jews);[21] it follows that interpretations of Acts 17:26 that ignore past misuses of this passage do so at their peril. To move beyond the harmful effects of these superficial segregationist readings, we must first appreciate how the Romans understood and managed borders in their world.

AN INTEGRATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON ROMAN BORDERING

At the turn of the first century, Ovid recounts the origins of the Terminalia festival. When King Tarquin was making space for the temple, he tried to clear the Capitolium of monuments to every other god. All the deities yielded—except Terminus, the god of boundaries, who refused to budge.

> quid, nova cum fierent Capitolia? nempe deorum cuncta Iovi cessit turba locumque dedit:
> Terminus, ut veteres memorant, inventus in aede restitit et magno cum Iove templa tenet. nunc quoque, se supra ne quid nisi sidera cernat, exiguum templi tecta foramen habent.
> Termine, post illud levitas tibi libera non est: qua positus fueris in statione nec tu vicino quicquam concede roganti[22]
>
> What do you suppose happened when the new Capitoline temple was being built? Surely, the entire crowd of gods yielded to Jupiter and gave him place: Terminus, as the ancients recount, having been found in the shrine, stood fast

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ever, the passage was used similarly in South Africa; see: Edward A. Tiryakian, 'Apartheid and Religion', *Theology Today* 14, no. 3 (1957), pp. 385–400; Elelwani B. Farisani, 'Interpreting the Bible in the Context of Apartheid and Beyond: An African Perspective', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 40, no. 2 (2014), pp. 207–25; Robert Vosloo, "Christianity and Apartheid in South Africa," in *Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, 400–23 (Routledge, 2015); Robert R. Vosloo, 'The Bible and the Justification of Apartheid in Reformed Circles in the 1940s in South Africa: Some Historical, Hermeneutical and Theological Remarks', *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (2015), pp. 195–215; Johann Theron, 'A Reformed Confessional Perspective on Racial Apartheid in the History, Theology, and Practice in the South African Dutch Reformed Church', *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 7, no. 1 (2021), pp. 1–25

21 Sarah E. Rollens, Eric M. Vanden Eykel, and Meredith J. C. Warren, eds., *Judeophobia and the New Testament: Texts and Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2025); Paul N. Anderson, 'Anti-Semitism and Religious Violence as Flawed Interpretations of the Gospel of John', in *John and Judaism: A Contested Relationship in Context*, vol. 87 (2017), pp. 265–312.

22 Ovid, *Fast*. 2, pp. 667–674.

> and holds the temple with great Jupiter. Even now, so that he may see nothing above himself except the stars, the roof of the temple has a small opening. Terminus, after that moment, freedom of movement is not yours: wherever you have been stationed, do not grant your neighbours anything if he asks.

Thus, Tarquin incorporated Terminus' standing stone into Jupiter's temple complex, which explains the hole in the roof. In Erasmus' later retelling of the myth, he famously summarised Terminus' response as to being moved as, 'Cedo nulli!'[23] ('I yield to no one!'), an appropriate summary of the god's perseverance as described in Graeco-Roman literature. The story provides justification for Rome's divine mandate to set borders, making Terminus as both a guarantor of stability and a peacemaker in land disputes. For Ovid, Terminus represents the inviolability of Rome's border-making mandate. As he states later in the *Fasti*:

> conveniunt celebrantque dapes vicinia simplex et cantant laudes, Termine sancte, tuas: 'tu populos urbesque et regna ingentia finis: mnis erit sine te litigiosus ager[24]

> The humble neighbours gather for a feast and praise you, holy Terminus: 'You set the boundaries for people, cities, and great kingdoms; without you, every field would be a source of conflict.

Ovid concludes the story with a bold statement about Roman exceptionalism and its imperial ambition, dramatically translated by James George Frazer:

> gentibus est aliis tellus data limite certo:
> Romanae spatium est Urbis et orbis idem

> The land of other nations has a fixed boundary:
> The circuit of Rome is the circuit of the world.[25]

Even though Terminus' original stone remains in place on the Capitoline, Ovid describes other border markers associated with Terminus that

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[23] Edgar Wind, 'Ænigma termini,' *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 1, no. 1 (1937), pp. 66–69; John Rowlands, 'Terminus, the Device of Erasmus of Rotterdam: A Painting by Holbein', *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 67, no. 2 (1980), pp. 50–54; Rudolf Pfeiffer, 'Die Einheit im geistigen Werk des Erasmus', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 15 (1937), pp. 473–87.

[24] Ibid. 2, pp. 657-60.

[25] Ibid. 2, p. 680; Trans

become sites of devotion, sacrifice, and the celebration of the Terminalia festival in the god's honour.[26] Ovid describes an array of sacrifices, which acknowledge the god's role in maintaining peace and order between neighbouring peoples.[27] In Ovid's description, contemporary Augustan political bordering is linked to Rome's mythic past. As Katharine Allen stated, 'it is the Fasti which embodies the poet's real contribution to imperial propaganda.'[28] Ovid links the everyday stones that mark Rome's boundaries with the obdurate original on the Capitolium. Although a literary representation, the *Fasti* describes physical objects—in this case, border markers—and intends to shape how his audience perceives and interacts with the space that they delineate. Border stones and the empire they represent, are imbued with theological significance. Ovid's poem participates in Rome's imperial project by presenting the Imperial management of space and borders and its manifestations in everyday life and administration and places them within the trajectory of Rome's sacred history.

Antonio Gonzales makes an important observation about border stones and how they manage space. Though Ovid describes border stones as permanent, their permanence is a matter of perspective. As Gonzales explains:

> *The Romans therefore have an ever-present relationship with Terminus…* He is the god who guarantees property and therefore the contracts that bind owners together... In effect, Terminus seals the city's pact with its inhabitants by legalising property, justifying it while obliging owners to coexist accord-

[26] J. Rufus Fears suggests that Juventas and Terminus are associated in some traditions, but argues that their connection is likely a later interpretative development rather than evidence of an ancient, intrinsic relationship. He argues that Juventas' presence in Minerva's *cella* was probably introduced in 218 BCE, rather than reflecting an early Roman cult alongside Terminus. Would you like me to refine this further or add a specific citation? (J. Rufus Fears, 'The Cult of Virtues and Roman Imperial Ideology,' *in Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt (ANRW) / Rise and Decline of the Roman World*, Teil II, Principat. Band 17/2, Religion [Heidentum: Römische Götterkulte, Orientalische Kulte in der römischen Welt [Forts.]], ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981), p. 848.

[27] Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. James George Frazer (London: Heinemann, 1931); for a discussion on the merits, or otherwise, of Frazer's translation and how it reflects the concerns of his milieu, see: Emma Gee, 'Some Thoughts about the Fasti of James George Frazer,' *Antichthon* 32 (1998), pp. 64–90.

[28] Allen, Katharine. 'The Fasti of Ovid and the Augustan Propaganda', *American Journal of Philology* 43, no. 3 (1922), pp. 250–66. https://doi.org/10.2307/289371.

> ing to a single principle, which is respect for the foundation that the limit justifies and that the boundary stone seals in the ground. [29]

That *principe unique*, of course is Rome's imperial ambitions over all territories and space. The local boundaries set by Terminus are set within Jupiter's temple, a god who embodied Rome's global ambitions. As Ovid states,

> Iuppiter arce suo totum cum spectat in orbem, nil nisi Romanum, quod tueatur, habet.[30]
>
> When Jupiter gazes from his citadel upon the whole world, he sees nothing to guard but what is Roman.

Later, Ovid raises a rhetorical question about the scope of the imperial project to Jupiter:

> haec est, cui fuerat promissa potentia rerum, Iuppiter? hanc terris imposturus eras?[31]
>
> Is this the empire to which you promised dominion over the world, Jupiter? Was this what you intended to place above all nations?

For Ovid, there is no tension in his account between the fixed local boundaries guaranteed by Terminus and the limitless imperial aspirations embodied by Jupiter. For the Roman elite, Terminus functions within the logic of expansion, not against it. His stones do not restrain Roman ambition but confirm its cosmic jurisdiction: each boundary marker is a divine affirmation of Rome's right to claim, organise, and sanctify space. The tension of the boundary is reserved for those on the other side of it—those who are subject to Roman space, not sovereign within it. As Ovid makes clear, Jupiter sees nothing beyond Rome's domain, a world left deliberately indefinite in scope. Even the poet's later moment of rhetorical doubt—*haec est, cui fuerat promissa potentia rerum, Iuppiter?*—only underscores

[29] Trans. mine, emphasis added. '*Les Romains ont donc un rapport ubiquitaire avec Terminus*… Il est le dieu garant de la propriété et partant des contrats qui lient les propriétaires entre eux... En effet, Terminus scelle le pacte de la cité avec ses habitants en légalisant la propriété, en la justifiant tout en obligeant les propriétaires à coexister selon un principe unique qui est le respect de la fondation que la limite justifie et que la borne scelle dans le sol.' Gonzales, 'Le dieu,' 65

[30] Ovid, *Fast*. 1.85

[31] Ibid. 6. pp. 359-60.

Augustan expectations of total dominion. The empire does not merely inherit the world; it maps space and engraves its instructions on stone to shape the world in its image. These literary sources offer insight into political and religious conceptualisation of borders during Paul's speech in Athens and when Luke recorded it in his narrative.

ὙΟΡΟΘΕΣΙΑ IN CONTEXT

When considering the use of ὁροθεσία in the Athens speech, the dynamics of Roman bordering practices are part of Luke's *Sitz im Leben*. Whittaker, in his comprehensive study of Roman frontiers, concludes:

> So the Roman imperial edict in AD 17/18 ordering the erection of triumphal arches and statues on the borders of the empire was not a statement of the termination of empire, but defined a sacred threshold that assumed a transition to the world beyond… The discovery of a new cadastral stone on the borders of Roman North Africa, which was clearly not a frontier, prompts the comment by [Pol Trousset], 'It is first and foremost the signature of a conquering power that is *exploring and constructing its space*.'[32]

Epigraphy records a diverse vocabulary the Romans used to describe borders, including, but not limited to *limes, finis, terminus*, ὅρος, and πέρας, each with its own spatial, legal, and theological nuances.[33] A discussion of all of these are outside the scope of this study; instead, this analysis will focus on the attestations of ὁροθεσία, the specific term used by Luke's Paul in Acts 17:26. To reiterate my earlier point: the Lucan hapax legomenon ὁροθεσία is unattested in literary sources. Although the form is rare, its meaning is obvious—a compound of ὅριον ('boundary') and ἵστημι ('to set' or 'to place'). A semantic parallel exists in Deuteronomy 32:8, but Luke departs from the LXX there by employing this uncommon compound. The term was entirely unattested in extant texts until the discovery in 1903 of a damaged papyrus from the Faiyum, dated to 151 CE.[34] Despite the rarity of ὁροθεσία, and the fact that its only non-Lucan attestations are epigraphic, its potential significance for interpret-

[32] Whittaker, *Rome*, p. 4; emphasis added.

[33] For further discussion of these, see: Seth Estrin, 'Horoi and Horizons in Fifth- and Fourth-Century Athens', in *Shifting Horizons: A Line and Its Movement in Art, History, and Philosophy*, ed. Lucas Burkart and Beate Fricke (Basel/Berlin: Schwabe Verlag, 2022), pp. 27–54.

[34] BGU 3.889

ing Paul's speech in Acts has, curiously, remained largely unexamined by commentators.[35]

There are sixteen known attestations[36] of ὁροθεσία but I will only discuss two significant inscriptions as they exemplify the ideological functions of these border monuments. First, I will discuss a Histrian stele from 100 CE that documents a long-running dispute over fiscal exemptions. The second inscription is a mid-second-century inscription from Kilkis, which shows Roman incorporation of a pre-existing hero-shrine into their border-setting practices.

(1) The Histrian border stele is particularly valuable for analysis because, unlike many inscriptions, the mostly intact text survives and is self-interpreting; that is, it explicitly articulates its function. The monument itself is roughly dated around the second to beginning of the third century,[37] but the preserved text is from 100 CE.[38] The stele, inscribed in Greek and Latin, records correspondence going back at least 50 years regarding territorial rights of the region. The inscription records a decision by Manius Laberius Maximus, the governor of Moesia Inferior to officially recognise Histria's territorial rights and fiscal freedoms for the production of salted fish production and timber, on which their economy was based.[39] However, despite these guarantees, Roman tax collectors often imposed unofficial duties. The stele is a record of the long-standing legal dispute between Histria and the Roman financial administration. The inscription is evidence that cities often had to fight for the privileges that they had been granted. The stele is erected to stand as a reminder of Maximus' final ruling on the matter, that the Histrians have a right to

35 One exception being Henry J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (London: A. and C. Black, 1955), pp. 36–7.

36 To my knowledge, at the time of writing. I have use Trismegistos numbers where the exist for ease of reference: 815406, 191252, 892619, 815766, 815771, 121820, 9401, 935523, 781350, 764213, 760639, 842723, 316240, 39122, FD III 4:42 = PH240156, PHI 283293 = F.Xanthos, VII, 86

37 TM 191252

38 TM 191252; our text of the inscription is a composite text that includes a similar, but degraded, inscription; see: James H. Oliver, 'Texts A and B of the Horothesia Dossier at Istros', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 6, no. 2 (2002), pp. 143–56.

39 E.J. Owens, 'Histria, Romania,' in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, eds. Roger S. Bagnall, Kai Brodersen, Craige B. Champion, Andrew Erskine, and Sabine R. Huebner (Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah16071.

produce salted fish and timber without taxation.[40] The permission is literally set in stone for the benefit of future generations.

The inscription is obviously of interest to historians seeking a better understanding of Roman financial administration, and I would like to draw attention to the ideological and religious dimensions of the inscription. The epistle of Pomponius Pius refers to the emperor as 'godlike' (θειοτάτου)[41] and places the fishing rights in the realm of gift-giving (χάρις). As John Barclay explains, Roman patronage operated through structured hierarchies of benefaction that reinforced both social order and imperial ideology:

> …the ultimate prize was to attract the emperor as the supreme benefactor, with provinces, cities, institutions, and individuals going to extraordinary lengths to win, and then to publicize, his superior gifts… the emperor enhanced [governor's] patronal networks in extension of his interests.[42]

The epistle of Tullius Geminus is explicit on the terms of tax-free fishing rights. Like Pius, he appeals to the emperor and then hints at a reciprocal arrangement, stating, 'Therefore, recognising the attitude your city has demonstrated toward us, I shall always strive to become the creator of something good for you.'[43] Though the stele appeals to the Histrians' ancestral rights, the Roman response is not one of benevolence, but a gift given with the expectation of allegiance to Rome and its godlike emperor who can bestow such gifts.[44] The Histrian ὁροθεσία is negotiated with reference to the divine authority of the emperor. Though the inscription

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[40] For more on this inscription, see: Octavian Bounegru, 'La Chorothésie Histrienne: Essai d'une Taxonomie Contextuelle,' *Pontica* 42 (2009), pp. 375–383. and Annalisa Marzano, 'A Story of Land and Water: Control, Capital, and Investment in Large-Scale Fishing and Fish-Salting Operations,' in *Capital, Investment, and Innovation in the Roman World*, eds. Paul Erdkamp, Koenraad Verboven, and Arjan Zuiderhoek (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2020), pp. 275-305.

[41] The text on the stele is incomplete, but given the use of θειοτάτου in reference to the emperor in other texts, the reconstruction here is likely (e.g. Luc. *Octog.* 7, P. Oxy. 1038, 1892), A. S. Hunt and C. C. Edgar, trans., *Select Papyri, Volume II: Public Documents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), §386.

[42] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), pp. 35,38.

[43] ἐπιγνοὺς οὖν ἣν καὶ πρὸς [ἡμᾶς ἐνεφάνισαν τῆς] πόλεως ὑμῶν διάθεσιν πειράσομαι ἀεί τινος ὑ[μεῖν ἀγαθοῦ]

[44] David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), p. 96.

shows that the Romans affirmed the Histirans' ancestral ties to their land, the setting of a border allows Rome to impress its own authority as the ultimate boundary-setter. The validity of the Histrians' ancestral rights to the land is not self-evident, rather that claim is determined by Roman authority.[45]

(2) Another boundary inscription of significance is from Kilkis:

> ὅρους ἀπο/κατέστησε κα/τὰ τὴν γεγενημέ/νην {ΜΕΝΗΝ} ὑπὸ Φι/λίππου τοῦ βα/σιλέως ὁροθεσί/αν Π(όπλιος) Κλώδιος Κα/πίτων Αὐρηλια/νὸς ἀνθύπατος / Βραγυλίοις / Τιβηρίοις Κισσυνί/οις ὅρος [θεμέ]/λιος ἡρῷον[46]
>
> He established boundaries according to the boundary that was set by King Philip. Publius Claudius Capiton, the consul, established the boundary for the Bragylians, Tiberians [and] Kissynioi, the boundary foundation [is a] hero-shrine.

The Roman delimitation makes use of a pre-existing hero-shrine, 47 thus using a marker that already had cultural significance for the Bragylians, Tiberians, and Kissynioi. From the Greek Archaic period onward, tombs and shrines of mythic heroes became loci for cult activities that reinforced group identities and cohesion. By establishing the border as deferential to the heritage of King Philip, the Roman proconsul legitimised the hero-shrine. Again, the bordering process displays their authority in choosing and integrating the border. This is also an example of the Roman practice of assimilating traditional cults and god into their pantheon to reduce conflict. Having the authority to officially integrate the border reinforces the pre-eminence of imperial ideology over local deities.

To summarise my findings from the epigraphy: while ὁροθεσία is unattested in literary Greek, it occurs primarily in border inscriptions and, occasionally, in papyri, that record the process of Roman delimitation. The language used in Acts 17:26, I believe, is a deliberate reference to the discursive field of Roman bordering practices.

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[45] It is with some irony that Histria was established as a Greek colony and the city the Romans controlled was probably a mixed society of Greek and the indigenous population (Owens, 'Histria', 1); prior to this, Herodotus suggests it was colonised by Milesians (Hdt. 2.33).

[46] SEG 30, 573 = SEG 39, 577 = AE 1992, 1521; emphasis added.

[47] On ἡρῷον, see: W. H. S. Jones, 'Introduction', in *Description of Greece, Volume I: Books 1-2* by Pausanias, trans. W. H. S. Jones, Loeb Classical Library 93 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), xxvi.

BORDERS ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

Bordering in the Roman Empire was not the same as it is in the modern era of the nation-state. Given the limits of ancient cartography and centralised bureaucracy, spatial control was enacted through a dispersed set of physical markers: boundary stelae, roads, milestones, military installations, and natural geographic features such as rivers and mountains. Land was often surveyed and managed by *agrimensores*, who were tasked with recording boundaries and resolving disputes over cultivation or access to water.[48] As the archaeologist Mike McCarthy observes:

> To Caesar, Tacitus, and other Roman writers, polities were thought of in terms of the *gens* rather than the territories they inhabited. Rome negotiated with people, not states or land, and the people would, it was hoped, enrich it.[49]

In this sense, bordering was often administered locally, but never ideologically neutral. Even where forms differed, such spatial practices remained embedded in imperial modes of control and legitimation.

For Rome, bordering was more than administrative, it was ideologically driven. This is the thesis of C. R. Whittaker, who concludes that 'Roman frontiers were not political barriers but social, cultural and moral definitions of community and alterity, the very opposite of the fixed frontiers of ethnicity and territoriality created by the rise of the nation-state.'[50] Although Whittaker is correct to highlight the differences between contemporary and Roman borders, the political philosopher Étienne Balibar has shown that despite the complexity of administrative structures related to contemporary borders, they have always played an ideological and propagandistic role from a historical perspective, despite the different forms they take. For Balibar, a border is not a fixed line but a process—historically contingent, administratively variable, and ideologically charged. Drawing on Johann Gottlieb Fichte's concept of 'innere Grenzen', he argues that borders are not only physical boundaries, but also 'invisibles, situées partout et nulle part'[51], governing everyday life and

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48 O. A. W. Dilke, 'The Roman Surveyors', *Greece and Rome* 9, no. 2 (1962), pp. 170–80.

49 Mike McCarthy, "Boundaries and the Archaeology of Frontier Zones," in *Handbook of Landscape Archaeology*, eds. Bruno David and Julian Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 204.

50 C. R. Whittaker, *Rome and Its Frontiers: The Dynamics of Empire* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), p. 213.

51 Étienne Balibar, 'Qu'est-ce qu'une frontière?,' in *Cosmopolitique: Des frontières à l'espèce humaine – Écrits III, L'horizon des possibles* (Paris: La Découverte, 2022), p. 187

shaping how individuals navigate the spaces in which they live. This is perhaps not as distant from the ancient world as we might first assume.[52] The reference to ὁροθεσία in the Athenian speech alludes to Roman borders as Luke's authorial audience would have experienced them.

Luke wrote for a cosmopolitan and geographically scattered audience, likely composed of Jesus followers who were familiar with Greco-Roman urban landscapes and imperial symbolism. Moreover, Luke writes his 'apologetic historiography'[53] from a (or at least informed by) Diaspora perspective.[54] According to Gregory Sterling:

> Apologetic historiography is the story of a subgroup of people in an extended prose narrative written by a member of the group who follows the group's own traditions but hellenizes them in an effort to establish the identity of the group within the setting of the larger world.[55]

Acts depicts a community that cut across typical social and ethnic boundaries. The Christian message is received by Pharisees (Acts 9:1–19; 23:6), priests (Acts 6:7), Hellenist widows (Acts 6:1–6), Roman soldiers (Acts 10:1–48), those associated with Herodian power (Acts 13:1), Timothy, who is of mixed ethnicity (Acts 16:1–3), and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40). The movement itself becomes a picture of cultural hybridity. The hybridity of the ἐκκλησία is not to be confused with vague humanistic idealism. Acts describes a disparate people who are nevertheless united by their allegiance to a particular proclamation; that is, the good news (Acts 8:12, 17:18, 20:24) that Jesus Christ is Israel's Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36), who has inaugurated a kingdom (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31), which calls all people to repentance (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20) as they await Jesus' universal judgement and return (Acts 1:11; 3:20-21, 17:31).

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52 For example, UK asylum seekers who are 'liable to deportation' after exhausting their appeal rights live on the border of the British state, even if they live geographically within a boundary in a city like Manchester.

53 A term coined by Gregory Sterling to describe the genre of Acts, Gregory E. Sterling, *Shaping the Past to Define the Present: Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), pp. 13–42.

54 This is convincingly argued by Sterling, *Shaping*, pp. 108-137; though Sterling is hesitant to definitively describe Luke as a Diaspora Jew, Stephen's speech (Acts 7) shows significant engagement with Jewish Samaritan and Egyptian interpretations to justify life in the Diaspora (Ibid., pp. 129-137).

55 Ibid., p. 5.

When Paul refers to ὁροθεσία, the vocabulary evokes the administrative apparatus of empire, yet Paul uses it in a theological register, claiming that it is God who has determined 'their appointed epochs and the delimitations (ὁροθεσίας) of their habitation', thereby claiming that it is not Rome, but God who sets and controls the limits of peoples and empires. Rome may stretch its borders as wide as its imperial apparatus allows, but Paul insists that such borders are neither ultimate nor determinative; they are subordinated to God's purposes and therefore relativised in light of the gospel's universality. However, Paul immediately qualifies these delimitations with a teleological purpose: 'so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him — though, indeed, he is not far from each one of us. (17:27). It is precisely these delimitations that are given a revelatory function: they exist not as ends in themselves, but in order to prompt the search for God. The precise force of this purpose, however, turns on how we understand the grammar of Acts 17:26–27, especially the relationship between the infinitive verbs κατοικεῖν and ζητεῖν.

Many scholars favour reading these as 'parallel purpose infinitives'.[56] Understood this way, humanity has two purposes: to dwell on the earth and to seek for God; as stated by Flavien Pardigon, 'they denote the twofold divine design for his human creatures.'[57] Despite the support he finds for this position from other commentators, Pardigon admits that it is 'a difficult construction'.[58] An alternative interpretation is to read ἐποίησέν as a supporting verb for κατοικεῖν, and ζητεῖν as a purposive infinitive. In that case, the relationship could be glossed as: 'God made them to dwell *so that* they would seek.'[59] Martin Pohlenz makes a strong case in favour of this reading.[60] He argues that the lack of any coordinating parti-

[56] As described by Witherington, Acts, 526; other scholars who suggest this reading, see: Jacques Dupont, "Le discours à l'Aréopage (Ac 17,22-31) lieu de rencontre entre christianisme et hellénisme," *Biblica* 60, no. 4 (1979), pp. 535-96, Flavien Pardigon, *Paul Against the Idols: A Contextual Reading of the Areopagus Speech* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2019), p. 163, Schnabel, *Acts*, p. 735, Parsons, *Acts*, p. 247, Conzelmann, *Acts*, p. 144, & Scott Kellum, *Acts*, The Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), pp. 204–205.

[57] Pardigon, *Paul*, p. 164.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Modern English translations almost unanimously translate the ζητεῖν as purposive in Acts 17:27, e.g. *NRSVue*, *NIV*, *NASB*, *CSB*.

[60] Martin Pohlenz, "Paulus und die Stoa," *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Und Die Kunde Der Älteren Kirche* 42, no. 1 (1949), pp. 84-85. Johnson, *Acts*, p. 315; a similar understanding is proposed by Clare K. Roth-

cle between κατοικεῖν between ζητεῖν means that, syntactically, they are not obviously parallel (a coordinating particle is used in a similar construction in Mark 7:37: καὶ τοὺς κωφοὺς ποιεῖ ἀκούειν καὶ τοὺς ἀλάλους λαλεῖν) and that the purposive infinitive is more natural. *BDAG* also cites Acts 17:26 as an example of when ποιέω 'with a focus on causality' when 'The result of the action is indicated by the acc. and inf… *to bring it about that*.'[61] The construction is common in Homer (e.g. *Xen. Hell.* 7.5.24)[62] and in the LXX and Pseudepigrapha.[63] Ultimately, the matter cannot be settled by grammar alone and the context of the argument should be taken into account. Considering both grammatical likelihood and contextual elements, the purposive infinitive suggesting causality (i.e., the experience of borders leads to seeking) appears to be the strongest option. In either case, the borders are described as being set by God. Whether they function to prompt human seeking or whether seeking is portrayed as innate, the role of the borders is relativised. They are not absolute boundaries but part of a divine strategy oriented toward bringing relationship between peoples and, ultimately, those peoples in relationship with God.

According to Paul's reasoning in Acts 17, the bordering of humanity is not the final word, nor a self-evident good. What was the point of this for Luke's authorial audience? They were a disparate, geographically scattered, and likely cosmopolitan community. As Acts 6:1-15 shows, they were not a community without conflict and needed to negotiate its own boundaries and identity. Luke describes the ἐκκλησία (church) not as existing in a single location but as realised through their empowerment by the Spirit, fidelity to Christ, ethical distinctiveness, and public witness; they are a scattered but unified body, calling others into their alternative Christ-shaped community, the inaugurated-but-not-fully-realised kingdom of God.

ACTS 17:26, MIGRATION, AND A SCOTTISH EVANGELICAL RESPONSE

What is the relevance of this vision for evangelicals in Scotland? Given their commitment to Scripture as inspired and authoritative, the starting point is the conviction that all people are made in the *Imago Dei*, regard-

schild, *Paul in Athens: The Popular Religious Context of Acts 17* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), pp. 65-66, Dunn, *Acts*, p. 235.

61 *BDAG*, s.v. ποιέω, 2.h, 840.

62 See further examples in Diana Gibson, "Periphrastic causatives with ποιέω in Ancient Greek prose," *Oxford University Working Papers in Linguistics, Philology & Phonetics* 7 (2002), pp. 27–40.

63 See the examples listed in *BDAG*, s.v. ποιέω, 2.h, 840

less of nationality, ethnicity, or legal status. These are general proposals rather than prescriptive rules, intended to guide reflection and discussion. As Daniel Carroll has stated:

> The creation of all persons in the image of God must be the most basic conviction for Christians as they approach the challenges of immigration today. Immigration should not be argued in the abstract, because it is fundamentally about immigrants. Immigrants are humans, and as such they are made in God's image.[64]

On the other hand, and perhaps uncomfortably for some evangelical activists (I will include myself in this category), borders, according to Acts 17:26-27, are a feature of human history in which God is involved; they have a role in a fallen world in offering safety, maintaining order, and enabling hospitality by putting limits in place. How current national borders can function in an ethically responsible way, while also excluding where necessary, is an important and difficult question. My concern here is to provide guiding principles and to argue (even if implicitly) segregationist readings of the text. Still, I do not want to ignore the proverbial elephant in the room with the classic evasion tactic often used by academics for difficult questions: 'this falls outside the scope of this paper'.

Regarding borders and their maintenance, I start from a Kuyperian framework of 'Christian Pluralism' regarding the relationship between church and state, recently applied to current concerns about migration by Matthew Kaemingk.[65] This 'pluralism', to be clear, is not to be misunderstood as salvific universalism. It is the theological conviction that Christian faith should not yield to any single public ideology; instead, it provides the foundation for a pluralist society in which each sphere—church, state, family, science—operates under Christ's lordship. Kaemingk deftly charts a third way between exclusionary fearful nationalism and idealistic multiculturalism. For Kaemingk, if a nation is to be hospitable to migrants (be they asylum seekers, refugees, or economic) some controls are necessary. As emphasised by the late Christine Pohl in her magnum opus on the theology of hospitality, the existence of hospitality implies limits.[66] Kaemingk articulates the tension well:

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64 M. Daniel Carroll R., *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible* (Ada, OK: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 67.

65 Matthew Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018).

66 Christine Pohl, *Making Room*, 25th Anniversary Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2024), pp. 126–49.

> All states require borders if they hope to develop any sense of safety and solidarity among their citizens. Without borders, without a distinction between insiders and outsiders, hospitality quickly becomes impossible… That said, a state's hospitality to outsiders must not destroy its communal integrity and its ability to show hospitality in the future. Finite states, like finite families, must recognize their boundaries and limits. It is certainly true that sometimes the walls of the family and the state are too high; it is true that sometimes doors are closed when they need to be open. That said, those walls and doors remain necessary—they make the ensuing hospitality possible.[67]

Where this becomes more difficult, and not addressed by Kaemingk in his book, is the legacy of colonialism and the fact that migration routes often follow the troughs forged by colonial activity, past and present.[68] This complicates the picture, because the economic flourishing of one nation has often come at the expense of another. Do former colonial powers have a moral obligation that transcends the standard right of a sovereign state to control its borders? Acknowledging this historical complexity does not, however, invalidate Kaemingk's fundamental observation. His point that borders provide necessary limits for any practical and sustainable form of hospitality remains valid. As he writes, 'The ultimate goal of their service must be the restoration of public hospitality through the provision of a safe and just public square.'[69]

When it comes to state borders, the International Organisation for Migration's 'Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration', negotiated in 2017–2018 and formally endorsed by the UN General Assembly on 19 December 2018, is a sensible set of rules for nation-states to follow. The difficulty in the current political climate is the divisiveness of migration narratives of perpetual crisis which are, by and large, incorrect. Migration scholar Hein de Haas has shown that despite occasional peaks and troughs felt most acutely at the local level, migration remains fairly constant at 3% of the world's population from a historical perspec-

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67 Kaemingk, *Christian*, p. 183.

68 Achankeng Fonkem, 'The Refugee and Migrant Crisis: Human Tragedies as an Extension of Colonialism', *The Round Table* 109, no. 1 (2020), pp. 52–70; Roberto Stefan Foa, 'Persistence or Reversal of Fortune? Early State Inheritance and the Legacies of Colonial Rule', *Politics & Society* 45, no. 2 (2017), pp. 301–324; Hans van Amersfoort and Mies van Niekerk, 'Immigration as a Colonial Inheritance: Post-Colonial Immigrants in the Netherlands, 1945–2002', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32, no. 3 (2006), pp. 323–346; see a theological discussion of this issue in Elaine Padilla, 'The End of Christianity', in *Christianities in Migration*, eds. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 299–319.

69 p. 187

tive, with refugees at even less at 0.3%. De Haas has also argued that governments often prefer 'bold acts of political showmanship that conceal the true nature of immigration policies'.[70] He argues that migration policies often run on two different levels: for voters scared of migration and policies that are maintained with economic realities in mind.[71]

Often, public perception of migration is stronger than the reality. Here, the church can bear witness and advocate for ethically functioning borders in line with international law by bringing truth to the debate, offering sobering facts rather than sensationalism, and bringing light rather than heat to an issue that has become a tinderbox. Churches can do this at a public level,[72] but also individual members in their own community spaces. Again, different views can be held on the constant tension between hospitality and limits when it comes to state policy, but there is a need to seek the higher ground and conduct the debate with the knowledge that all migrants are human beings, rather than an issue to be managed. A more effective and just management of migration depends less on specific 'tough' or 'lenient' policies and more on a fundamental commitment to good governance, evidence-based decision-making, and long-term strategic planning;[73] these are all things that are, admittedly, less headline-grabbing than 'acts of political showmanship.'[74] The church is distinct from the state and can express Christian faith through practising responsible hospitality (informed by robust safeguarding and intercultural training, provided by many parachurch organisations) in ways that the state cannot, or in protest of the state's policies.[75]

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70 Hein de Haas, *How Migration Really Works: A Factful Guide to the Most Divisive Issue in Politics* (London: Viking, 2023), p. 11; the expensive and largely ineffective Rwanda Plan under the UK's previous Conservative government could cited as an example.

71 Mathias Czaika and Hein de Haas, 'The effectiveness of immigration policies: A conceptual review of empirical evidence,' DEMIG Project Paper no. 3, IMI Working Paper 33, International Migration Institute, University of Oxford, April 2011.

72 Here, the Baptist Union of Great Britian has offered helpful, factual comment on migration: *The Baptist Union: Statements*. (n.d.). Org.uk. Retrieved 22 September 2025, from https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/264782/Statements.aspx

73 To summarise the findings of Sachin Savur and Joe Owen, 'How the government can design better asylum policy', (Institute for Government, December 2024), https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/.

74 De Haas, *How*, p. 11.

75 E.g. Suna Boztas, 'Let us pray and pray: church shelters migrant family with 192-day service,' *The Observer*, June 1, 2025, https://observer.co.uk/

For those drawn to more protectionist policies, they must remember that the Apostle Paul's vision in the Areopagus speech focuses on the missiological aspect of borders: they are functional and temporary, always subordinate to God's kingdom, which transcends human divisions, and exist so that people might be drawn to God. This could be described as a border dialectic: at borders we both recognise difference and are also confronted with our shared humanity.[76] The Christian duty is ultimately not to the earthly kingdom, but to the differently bordered Kingdom of God. Of course, this hospitality implies some risk, which cannot be entirely mitigated,[77] and we must be cognizant of that reality lest we make security an idol.

Scottish evangelicals are placed in a distinctive context of political borders. Debates over the constitutional question highlighted the tension between soft or invisible borders and the desire for stricter borders over financial or immigration matters.[78] The claim in the Scottish Government's White Paper on independence claimed that 'There is no empirical evidence to suggest that the reception conditions provided for asylum seekers constitute a "pull factor" or an incentive to seek protection in a particular country'[79] requires reassessment in light of the current housing crisis and the appeal of Scotland's mitigating benefits.[80] The underly-

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news/international/article/open-hof-church-shelters-migrant-family-with-192-day-service.

76 Harald Bauder, 'Toward a critical geography of the border: Engaging the dialectic of practice and meaning,' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 101, no. 5 (2011), pp. 1126–39.

77 Heb. 10:34; Pohl, *Making*, p. 93.

78 Scottish Government, *Scotland's Future* (Edinburgh: Scottish Government, 2013), pp. 223–4, 476, 490, 493, 500–1, https://www.scotreferendum.com.

79 Ibid., p. 494.

80 E.g. Elaine Wilson-Smith, Kate Skellington Orr, and Caroline Akina, Analysis of Responses to the Scottish Government Consultation on Mitigation of the Two-Child Limit: Final Report, June 2025, https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/consultation-analysis/2025/06/mitigation-two-child-limit-consultation-analysis/documents/analysis-responses-scottish-government-consultation-mitigation-two-child-limit/analysis-responses-scottish-government-consultation-mitigation-two-child-limit/govscot%3Adocument/analysis-responses-scottish-government-consultation-mitigation-two-child-limit.pdf; cf. Peter Smith, 'Can Glasgow afford to continue welcoming refugees?', ITV News, September 3, 2025, https://www.itv.com/news/2025-09-03/can-glasgow-afford-to-continue-welcoming-refugees; Stewart Paterson, 'Are refugees given priority for social housing in Glasgow?', *Glasgow Times*, June 20, 2024, https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/25251134.refugees-given-priority-social-housing-glas-

ing question remains: hospitality requires both openness and limits. Any boundaries, however, must be exercised in light of the Imago Dei, remembering that God's kingdom is not confined by state lines but transcends them, and that national borders are contingent and serve a missiological purpose. No matter their position on the constitutional question, evangelicals must engage with this knowledge with the recognition that their ultimate allegiance is not to a political kingdom, but to God's kingdom; their perspective and fidelity to God's mission must remain primary. Even if there are political differences about border control, evangelicals are to be unique in responding with a missiological outlook that places obedience to God's mission over and above fears about security.[81]

In the current political climate, Scottish evangelicals must also be committed to truth, particularly in public debates about borders, where misinformation has frequently shaped public sentiment and fuelled protests at asylum hotels.[82] Christians have a responsibility to highlight and combat such distortions, modelling integrity in public life. Like heavenly

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gow/; 'Glasgow 'faces £66m bill' for refugee housing crisis,' *Scottish Housing News*, August 18, 2025, https://www.scottishhousingnews.com/articles/glasgow-faces-ps66m-bill-for-refugee-housing-crisis.

81 Matt. 16.24–25; Luke 9.57–62; Acts 5.29; Heb. 11.8–10; 1 John 4.18; Isa. 41.10; Rev. 2.10.

82 Andrew D. Sutherland and Tiffany A. Dykstra-DeVette, 'Constructing Identification and Division through Fake News Reports of Refugees', *Language, Discourse & Society* 6, no. 1 (2018), pp. 19–31; Charlotte Taylor, 'Disinformation and Immigration Discourses,' in *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse and Disinformation*, ed. Stefania M. Maci (London: Routledge, 2024), pp. 171–186; for recent examples from across Scotland, see: Adam Forrest, 'Inside Falkirk, the frontline of Scotland's anti-asylum flag wars,' *inews*, September 22, 2025, https://inews.co.uk/news/inside-falkirk-frontline-scotlands-anti-asylum-flag-wars-3927080; Kirsty Paterson, 'Falkirk asylum hotel protest 'concerning' as council chief tackles misinformation,' *Daily Record*, August 21, 2025, https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/falkirk-asylum-hotel-protest-concerning-35769870; Kathleen Nutt, 'Asylum hotel protest sparked by 'completely false' claims,' *The Herald*, August 24, 2024, https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/westminster/25413694.asylum-hotel-protest-sparked-completely-false-claims/; Lucy Garcia, ''Completely false': Perth council leader rejects further asylum hotel claims,' *The National*, August 24, 2024, https://www.thenational.scot/news/25413687.completely-false-perth-leader-rejects-asylum-hotel-claims/; Keiran Fleming, 'Council requests urgent meeting with UK Government over asylum seeker move,' *STV News*, August 29, 2025, https://news.stv.tv/north/aberdeen-city-council-calls-for-urgent-meeting-with-uk-government-after-asylum-seekers-moved-from-hotels. (all accessed 14 September 2025).

perspective of the astronauts in Samantha Harvey's novel in this article's opening quote, the blessing and difficulty of maintaining a biblical perspective is that Christians are motivated by a vision that does not see borders in the same way as the surrounding culture. As a community that recognises, like Paul, the missiological aspect of borders, the church must provide space for positive contact between people and communities.[83] True Christian hospitality reflects a community that is not bounded by states or policies, but lives into a kingdom defined by allegiance to Jesus Christ, shaped by his teaching and example. In this vision, borders serve a purpose, but they do not constrain the reach of God's justice, mercy, and love, and invitation to share life in that differently bordered Kingdom.

[83] For practical suggestions to this end, see my paper '"How Much Evil He Has Done to Your Saints?": Ananias, Saul, and a Christian Approach to the Contact Hypothesis in the Scottish Refugee Context.' *Theology in Scotland* 32, no. 2 (2025) [forthcoming].

Creative Mission In Kalimpong, India: The Contribution Of Katherine Graham (1861-1917)

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The missionary work of John Anderson Graham (1861-1942) has been the subject of ongoing interest. The homes for children which he founded in Kalimpong, India, from 1900 onwards, are being celebrated this year, 125 years later.[1] In 1931-32 he was Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, a role not filled by any other overseas missionary. James Minto wrote what became the standard biography, *Graham of Kalimpong* (1974). The book covers some of the work done by Katherine, who married John Anderson (as he was typically known). and Minto rightly highlighted that their marriage was 'a love match'; they 'needed each other, with their marriage 'a complete fulfilment for both of them'. This was expressed in their words and actions. Again, Minto notes how they 'shared all their hopes and expectations' and no scheme that John Anderson came up with 'was undertaken without a discussion with Katie [as she was known in the close family] whose practical mind often saw flaws or difficulties which the burning enthusiasm of Graham had overlooked or glossed over'.[2] All of this is true, but the role of Katherine has not been considered so far apart from in relation to her husband. This article seeks to bring out her contribution to the creative mission in Kalimpong, especially through using the rich archive held in the National Library of Scotland.[3] When Katherine and John Anderson were apart, they wrote to each other almost every day. In utilising letters Katherine wrote, her voice can be heard in a way that has not happened before.

MISSION AND MEETING IN EDINBURGH

Katherine McConachie was the eldest daughter of John and Margaret McConachie of Edinburgh. Both her parents came from Morayshire.

1 See https://drgrahamshomes.co.uk/our-story

2 James R. Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong* (Edinburgh: Blackwell, 1974), pp. 16, 34.

3 Personal and family correspondence of John Anderson Graham and Katherine Graham, 1884-1919, is to be found in: Acc.6039. National Library of Scotland (NLS). I am most grateful to Alison Metcalfe, Archivist and Curator at the NLS, for her help.

John was a native of Rothes, on the banks of the River Spey, ten miles south of Elgin. Margaret was born in Cottinch in Duffus, not far from the coast, and known for the nearby Duffus castle. Prior to her marriage, Margaret was a nurse, and it is said that was a favourite nursing assistant of Professor Joseph Lister, the founder of antiseptic medicine and a pioneer in preventive medicine. In the Royal Infirmary, Edinburgh, Lister conducted his famous experiments in antiseptic surgery in the years from 1869 to 1877, when he moved to London. Lister hoped Margaret would go with him to London, but she refused to leave Scotland. She and John had three girls and two boys. It is significant that the three girls all went to St George's High School for Girls, in Melville Street, which was founded in 1888 by a group of Victorian women led by Dame Sarah Mair, and aimed to provide education to girls previously denied it.[4] It is clear that John, who was in business, and Margaret, had aspirations for their daughters. John died while the family were still growing and Margaret opened her own small nursing home in Hailes Street, Edinburgh.[5]

Although Katherine, who was born on 14 December 1861, did not follow her mother into formal nursing training, she was deeply concerned for the health and wellbeing of poor children in Edinburgh. This led her to take up work in the early 1880s connected with child welfare, including health, clothing, proper food, and housing, concerns that would be central commitments throughout her life. A book published in 1891, *Slum Life in Edinburgh*, set out in stark terms the horrific, often poverty-stricken conditions for many adults and children in the slums around the Grassmarket and the Royal Mile.[6] There were wider problems connected with poor relief. A report in 1885 found that children in workhouses in Scotland were receiving half the amount of food that was considered reasonable in England.[7] The involvement Katherine had was not under the auspices of poor law provision, but was supported and coordinated by churches and Christian agencies. One of the agencies was Carrubber's Close Mission, which drew support from several denominations, with figures such as James Gall, a Free Church of Scotland minister, and William Robertson, a Church of Scotland minister and promoter of urban

4 See Judith Fewell and Fiona Paterson, *Girls in their prime* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1990).

5 Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, pp. 17-18.

6 T.B.M., *Slum Life in Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: James Thin, 1891).

7 M. McNeil, *Half-Yearly Report to the Board of Supervision*, June 1885, cited in Helen Jane MacDonald, 'Children under the Care of the Scottish Poor Law, 1880-1929' (PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 1994), p. 186.

mission, taking leadership. Those serving were to be in an evangelical church.[8]

The church of which Katherine was a member was St Cuthbert's Church of Scotland, Edinburgh. It had a history of social action and at the time when Katherine was active in this area James MacGregor was the well-established and respected minister, having alongside him a younger ministerial colleague in his twenties, Andrew Wallace Williamson. The congregation was large and energetic. Both the ministers later became Moderators of the Church of Scotland General Assembly.[9] It was through her care for children that Katherine met John Anderson Graham. He was born on 8 September 1861 in London, to a Scottish Presbyterian family. His father was a customs official. John Anderson's early education was at Cardross Parish School, after his father and mother moved to Cardross, Dunbartonshire, in 1862, and then later he was at Glasgow High School. This led to employment in Edinburgh in the civil service. In Edinburgh, his church was St Bernard's, where the minister was John McMurtrie, who became editor of the Church of Scotland's *Life and Work* magazine. John Anderson helped McMurtrie prepare magazine material, including coverage of missionary endeavours.[10]

A new phase of life opened for John Anderson when he left his civil service post to study at Edinburgh University, graduating MA in 1885. With a call to Church of Scotland ministry having been confirmed by McMurtie and others, he proceeded to studies in Divinity for three years. After his first year, he was in Dresden in Germany for a period of study and while there he had a deep spiritual experience, bringing assurance that he was 'really pardoned', and he resolved that he 'would work for Christ with my whole heart'. He relayed this conviction to Professor Archibald Charteris, who had become his spiritual mentor, and at the same time he told Charteris that he was considering overseas service.[11]

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8 Anon., *These Fifty Years: The Story of Carrubber's Close Mission, Edinburgh 1858-1909* (Edinburgh: The Tract and Colportage Society of Scotland, 1909); R. M. Robertson, ed., *William Robertson of the Carrubber's Close Mission: Reminiscences of a Life of Blessing* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1914), cited by Christina Christie Lumsden, 'Class, Gender and Christianity in Edinburgh 1850-1905: A Study in Denominationalism' (PhD Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012), pp. 152-3.

9 Lord Christopher Nicholson Johnston Sands, *Life of Andrew Wallace Williamson* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1929).

10 R.D. Kernohan, *Scotland's Life and Work* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1979), p. 14.

11 Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, pp. 9-10. Charteris was Professor of Biblical Criticism in the University of Edinburgh.

On John Anderson's return from Germany, he and Katherine met, and they recognised that the many contacts John Anderson had built up by that time were of great value in seeking to assist children in the slums. Over the course of a few months, she brought to his attention individuals who might be given foster homes. On 10 June 1887, for example, she wrote to 'My dear Mr Graham' and asked if he knew of a 'good home' for a boy, Paddy McQueenie. She was hoping for a reply but recognised that it might be a while, as John was travelling outside Edinburgh. She concluded 'Happy you to be going to the country!' and signed 'Most sincerely, Kate McConachie.'[12]

The formality of 'Mr Graham' was soon to change, since John proposed to her later in June and she accepted. Her next letter, on 2 July 1887, was to 'My darling Ian'.[13] Further travels had taken John Anderson to Keswick, in the Lake District, superintending some boys from Edinburgh at a camp in connection with the annual holiness Keswick Convention.[14] Katherine was thankful for his 'long interesting letter' and was sure his time in Keswick would bring 'great joy'. She affirmed that neither of them belonged to the 'nothing to do class!' That brought her to a request: she was looking for accommodation for a young woman who was in prison but was to be released that week.[15] By this time, both John and Katherine were associated with the Edinburgh University Missionary Association and while this was directed primarily to overseas mission it did bring together those who saw the need for mission in Scotland.[16] As part of her growing interest in theology and mission, Katherine wrote in July 1887 about looking into 'Natural Theology', reading Hegel - not with great enthusiasm - and being inspired by the life of Ion Keith-Falconer, son of the Earl and Countess of Kintore, Aberdeenshire. He had entered Trinity College in the University of Cambridge in 1874 and academic achievement led to his being appointed Lecturer and then Professor of Arabic in the University. In the 1880s, his thoughts turned to overseas mission,

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12 Katherine to John Anderson, 10 June 1887, Acc.6039 Box 2(2), 1886-1888. NLS.

13 Katherine to John Anderson, 2 July 1887, Acc.6039 Box 2(2). NLS. Although John Anderson Graham was always 'John' or 'John Anderson' in wider circles, in Katherine's communications she (alone) called him 'Ian'.

14 For Keswick, see Ian Randall and Charles Price, *Transforming Keswick: The Keswick Convention Past, Present and Future* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000).

15 Jo Turner and Helen Johnston, 'Female prisoners, aftercare and release: Residential provision and support in late nineteenth-century England', *British Journal of Community Justice*, 13/3 (2015), pp. 35-50.

16 For this missionary-supporting body see the Edinburgh University Missionary Association, AA 3.3, 1825-1926, in the University of Edinburgh archives.

and he became a Free Church of Scotland missionary to the Arab World. Having only just begun his outreach, however, he died after attacks of malaria.[17] This story of sacrifice affected Katherine.

Along with her work in poor areas of Edinburgh, Katherine was beginning to help John Anderson with proofs of written material. He was the national secretary of the Young Men's Guild, founded at the instigation of Charteris in 1880, to encourage young men towards devoted service for Christ within the Church of Scotland. Charteris was the Honorary President and he had recruited John Anderson, who with typical activism was putting together material for what had become 681 branches of the Guild, with 25,871 members.[18] Katherine wrote on 23 July 1887 that she had been 'chasing up the printer' for proofs of Guild reports. If the printer did not produce them in time, she threatened, 'I'll… him.'[19] The nature of the threat remained unclear. Contact with Edinburgh University and in particular the Divinity Hall meant that Katherine, with her vivacious nature, was noticed by other Divinity students, and she had to explain to John that 'there were no relationships with anyone else'. Another conversation about relationships was with her mother. Margaret and Katherine were close, and it was a relief - as Katherine reported on 28 July to John (who was travelling over the summer on behalf of the Guild) - that her mother had accepted that going abroad was likely in the foreseeable future. Margaret had protested, but largely in fun. Katherine's future was becoming clearer.

KALIMPONG: DESTINATION AND DEVELOPMENT

In 1885 one of the prominent members of the Young Men's Guild, James Dunlop, from Hamilton, Lanarkshire, proposed that the Guild should sponsor its own overseas missionary, and Guild members across the country endorsed this.[20] The Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee suggested that someone could serve in Kalimpong, a hill town in the Himalayan foothills of West Bengal - within the Church of Scotland's Eastern Himalayan Mission - with the Guild raising the financial support. This was agreed. John Anderson offered himself as the first candi-

[17] Katherine to John Anderson, 10 and 20 July 1887, Acc.6039 Box 2(2). NLS. See Robert Sinker, *Memorials of the Hon. Ion Keith-Falconer* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & Co., 1888) for what Katherine was reading.

[18] For the history, Mamie Magnusson, *Out of Silence: The Women's Guild 1887–1987* (Edinburgh: St Andrew's Press, 1987).

[19] Katherine to John Anderson, 23 July 1887, Acc.6039 Box 2(2). NLS.

[20] D.G. Manuel, *A Gladdening River. Twenty-Five Years Guild Influence among the Himalayas* (London: A.&C. Black Ltd., 1914), pp. 30-1.

date, and conferences of the Men's Guild in 1887-88 led to a unanimous vote for him to be supported as the first Guild missionary.[21] Meanwhile, Katherine's letters to him showed how she was engaging with contemporary thought, with a view to mission. She was appreciating 'a grand broad Christianity', and enjoyed a discussion group containing some Divinity students. Topics ranged from Reformed theology to Buddhism. Her reading included Thomas Carlyle's *Reminiscences*, W.H. Mallock's *New Republic*, and T.H. Huxley's *Science Primers*. She was also following correspondence in *The Scotsman* on the Westminster Confession of Faith. In September, when John's classes started up again, he was exhausted from travelling and he was persuaded to go to his class only by Katherine, who considered that the tutor owed her a 'heavy debt'. With India in mind, in November she recommended to John Anderson an essay, 'In an Indian temple', which she had read and 'liked it very much'.[22]

As well as preparing for the future through discussions and reading, Katherine was thinking about the deepening of her own spiritual life. Her reading in 1888 included *The Christian*, which featured articles by writers and speakers such as F.B. Meyer, whom John Anderson had heard at Keswick. Meyer advocated deeper spiritual experience out of which came fruitful, practical service.[23] One concern Katherine had in relation to this was that John Anderson continually over-worked, and she mentioned that in letters. Somebody had said to her: 'See to it that Mr Graham takes 2 days to do 5 days' work and not just one day!' Another theme in her letters in this period was the need for sermons to emerge from authentic spirituality. She was 'bored listening to long harangues by a few Revs of our esteemed Presbytery'. In July, however, she had been at a conference in Edinburgh at which two American missionary statesmen, A.T. Pierson and A.J. Gordon, were leading speakers. They were, she wrote, 'on fire' with zeal, and they wanted 'the blessing they had received to be transmitted to others'. The Scottish missionary Alexander Hetherwick had also

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21 Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, pp. 13-14. For earlier missionary history in the region see John Bray, 'Early Protestant Missionary Engagement with the Himalayan Region and Tibet', in John Bray, ed., *Ladakhi Histories: Local and Regional Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 249-70.

22 Katherine to John Anderson, 31 July 1887; 13 August 1887; 23 August 1887; 24 September 1887; 8 November 1887, Acc.6039 Box 2(2). NLS. 'In an Indian Temple' was in a book by Edwin Arnold, *Lotus and Jewel* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1887). Katherine was keeping up with very recently published books.

23 For Meyer's message, see Ian Randall, *Spirituality and Social Change: The Contribution of F.B. Meyer (1847-1929)* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), esp. chapter 5.

spoken, appealing for action for Africa. Katherine hoped for great results from the meeting, especially 'mission revival' in 'our land'. She was sure she would not forget that night.[24]

The few months before John Anderson and Katherine left Scotland were hectic. John's ordination was followed two days later by the wedding. The ordination was unique, with hundreds of members of the Young Men's Guild present, and although John Anderson was presented to the Edinburgh Presbytery by the Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee this was jointly with the Young Men's Guild. He would be an agent totally supported by the Guild, while working under the direction of the Foreign Mission Committee.[25] For Katherine these were highly emotional days, especially so given her personality. She had been appalled by a conversation with a friend who had spoke of loving sentiments as 'gush with little or no foundation!' Katherine, who revelled in such sentiments, had a wish: 'May her eyes be opened!' Although at the wedding ceremony she did not give a speech, in responding to congratulations she gave on 'oration'. Following the wedding came departure. On 20 January 1889, John Anderson preached a farewell sermon to members of the Guild at St George's Church, Edinburgh. He and Katherine then set out for India, via Switzerland, Austria, and Italy, staying with Professor Charteris and his wife Catherine in the Austrian Tyrol.[26] It was like a second commissioning to mission.

The Grahams sailed from Venice, changing ships at Suez, and reached Calcutta on 21 March 1889. With his usual activism, John Anderson preached his first sermon in India on the next day, in the Scots Kirk, Calcutta. Two weeks later they travelled on to Darjeeling, the final part of the journey on ponies. William Macfarlane had laid the foundation of the Church of Scotland's mission work in the Eastern Himalayas two decades before the arrival of the Grahams and the Presbyterian church in Kalimpong was named the Macfarlane Memorial Church. A further development was the decision in 1887 by the Scottish Universities' Mission to support a Training Institute at Kalimpong to train teachers and catechists.[27]

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[24] Katherine to John Anderson, 8 January 1888; 17 June 1888; 30 June 1888; 18 July 1888; 20 July 1888, Acc.6039 Box 2(2). NLS. For Pierson, and also Gordon, see Dana L. Robert, *Occupy Until I Come: A. T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

[25] Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, pp. 14-15.

[26] Arthur Gordon, *The Life of Archibald Hamilton Charteris* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 389.

[27] Elizabeth G.K. Hewat, *Vision and Achievement, 1796-1956: A History of the Foreign Missions of the Churches united in the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1969), pp. 163-4.

In 1889 the Kalimpong district had three main tribes - the Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalese – and John Anderson took on the supervision of local preachers whose activities extended over four centres. There was also a strong emphasis on education. Kalimpong and the area around had nine schools in 1889, with 274 students. There were only a few girls being educated, and in 1890 Katherine started – as a creative innovation - a small girls' school which was to become the Kalimpong Girls School. Initially she had two helpers, one from the Church of Scotland mission in Calcutta and one a young Bengali Christian. As the school expanded, the Church of Scotland Women's Guild added a trained teacher, Lily Waugh, to take responsibility for boarders. A Women's Training College was to develop.[28]

Medicine was another area to which Katherine gave attention at an early stage. Soon after their arrival, she started a small dispensary in the Kalimpong mission grounds.[29] As with the schooling, there was crucial financial support from the Woman's Guild in Scotland, who responded to a letter from Katherine. She was glad there was a beginning but was aware of the limitations of the clinic. Diseases such as dysentery, tuberculosis and hepatitis were common, and the goal quickly became a cottage hospital. The foundation stone of a building was laid in 1892 by the Scottish co-founder of the Darjeeling Tea Company, George Christison, and a qualified medical missionary, Dr. Charles F. Ponder, arrived in August 1893. He had been a tea planter in Darjeeling and then had studied at medical school in Edinburgh. As an indication of the need, he was reckoned to have treated 1,588 patients in the temporary dispensary in one month, October 1893. A 25-bed hospital was opened in 1894, with Bengali government as well as Church of Scotland support, and the name given was Charteris Hospital, as a reminder of all that was owed to those who had guided John and Katherine. Dr. Ponder was seen in Scotland as a representative of a Guild vision. His immediate concern, however, in line with Katherine's, was more local. He began training three local assistants soon after his arrival, and in 1895 they passed their government examinations.[30]

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28 Dick Bahadur Dewan, *Education in the Darjeeling Hills: An Historical Survey, 1835-1985* (New Delhi: Indus. 1991), p. 119; cf. *Eastern Himalayan Church News*, June 1970, p. 3.

29 See Alex McKay, 'Missionary Medicine and the Rise of Kalimpong', in his *Their Footprints Remain: Biomedical Beginnings Across the Indo-Tibetan Frontier* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007), chapter 1 (pp. 55-84), esp. p. 72.

30 Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, p. 36.

Another creative initiative was teaching skills that would benefit local women, and here Katherine drew from her knowledge of cottage industries in the highlands of Scotland. For Katherine, acquiring skills could enable women to gain more satisfaction in work as well as making some money to help the income of the household. Women were involved in field cultivation work but there were times in the year when little was being done in the fields. Weaving was already an established skill in and around Kalimpong and traditional Tibetan designs were in demand.[31] The new 'Kalimpong Home Industries' took shape in 1897. As time went on, through teachers Katherine recruited, women became expert at knitting, embroidery, and crochet work. Dunfermline linen, Alloa yarn and British silk were imported for them to work on. The Home Industries started to produce socks, stockings, silk ties, tea cloths, bed spreads, bags, and other articles. Money was needed, but gifts came in, including a substantial gift from a Hindu friend of Katherine's, and, later, one from a Scot, Mrs McKean. There was also a grant from the Government. To a large extent, it was younger women who were involved in finer hand work. But Katherine found ways to encourage older women, for example to breed poultry. [32]

It is not that all of Katherine's experiences in this early period were positive. She found it hard when John Anderson was travelling elsewhere in India, and this became increasingly necessary as time went on. The growth in Kalimpong demanded increased financial backing and funds had to be raised. In a letter in November 1891 Katherine spoke of feeling 'very miserable'. She was not sleeping well and wished John was with her. At that point she was caring for the first two of what would be six children born to the Grahams: David Chateris, born in December 1889, and John (known at home as Jack) Stevenson, born in May 1891. When John Anderson was away, frequent letters continued, as was their practice, and the subjects covered by Katherine wove in domestic and communal matters. On 12 January 1893, for example, she reported that she had taken the boys up to the 'silk house' - we 'trailed up' – to find the building of the house progressing only slowly, as the bricks were not dry enough. She was also keeping up with the building of the hospital. Two extra masons were working on the arches. Finally, she appreciated what Lucy (Waugh) was doing, with twenty-eight girls in the boarding school.[33]

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31 Thomas Cole, *Dream Weavers: Textile Art from the Tibetan Plateau* (Singapore: Times Edition-Marshall Cavendish, 2004).

32 Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, pp. 93-4.

33 Katherine to John Anderson, 10 November 1891; 12 January 1893, Acc.6039 Box 2 (3). NLS.

WIDENING THE WORK

The early to mid-1890s saw a widening of the mission in Kalimpong. One task Katherine took on was to prepare publicity for use in Scotland. Professor Charteris was raising the profile of the links between Scotland and Kalimpong.[34] In the course of a week in January 1893, Katherine covered in five letters to John her varied concerns and activities. She was turning photographs she had taken into lantern slides, which could be shown when representatives of the mission were speaking. She also had involvement in the production of the *Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, and having seen some proofs she found the headings being used 'striking and suggestive'. Food was an issue: potatoes were doing well; cheese had to be thrown away as the rats had got to it; there was not enough milk, as some cows were unwell, and she was concerned about the effect of lack of milk on 'the bairns'. In tracing the boys' development, she was pleased that David, aged two, had said – in English – that the nursery was 'very nice'. John was replying to the letters and reported that his journey would take in the Khyber Pass. Katherine hoped he would navigate the Pass well.[35]

As Kalimpong's Charteris hospital facilities grew, Charles Ponder's sister arrived to assist him and increasing numbers of patients were treated.[36] The hospital became established as the medical training centre in the district. A Leprosy Home was added. Money was an ongoing issue and Katherine helped in that area by careful book-keeping. She also undertook some nursing training, perhaps thinking back to the way her mother had that calling. The government was content that the hospital should fulfil a central role and there was some government funding. However, the primary source of finance was the Women's Guild. Houses for the doctor and for the nurses were built.[37] In a booklet by Archibald Fleming, the third editor of *Life and Work*, then minister of St Columba's Church, London, as well as a pioneer religious broadcaster, Katherine was termed 'The Lady of Healing'. In a chapter with this title, Fleming also spoke of the description of Katherine as 'nursing mother' in Kalimpong. In Fleming's view, Katherine was the far-seeing brain behind the ministry of the

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34 *Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Sikkim News*, 1893, p. 26.

35 Katherine to John Anderson, 13, 14, 16, 17 and 18 January 1893, Acc.6039 Box 2 (3). NLS.

36 Manuel, *Gladdening River*, pp. 134-7; cf. Jayeeta Sharma, 'Kalimpong as a Transcultural Missionary Contact Zone', in Markus Viehbeck, ed., *Transcultural Encounters in the Himalayan Borderlands: Kalimpong as a "Contact Zone"* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2017), pp. 25-53.

37 Manuel, *Gladdening River*, pp. 172-6.

hospital.[38] In 1897, a branch dispensary was opened and other dispensaries followed in 1904 and 1912. Dispensaries were also opened in the Darjeeling district.[39] Katherine was concerned that there should be sustained Christian witness in medical settings.[40]

The Home Industries continued to develop. There were added areas, such as training for men and women in handicrafts such as carpentry, Tibetan rug and handbag weaving, and block-printing. The teaching and training laid the foundation for the Kalimpong Arts and Crafts Centre and Arts' College. A reputation for first-class quality was built up. One crucial development in lace-making took place in 1904 which Katherine saw as providential. Catherine Channer, who had qualifications for teaching not only ordinary Torchon and Cluny laces, but finer kinds like Brussels, Italian, Honiton and others, came on a visit to Kalimpong. She had taught in the English Midlands and was joint authoress of a book on lace-making. At the time of her visit to Kalimpong, Catherine Channer was well settled in Darjeeling, with a significant income for her teaching. However, Katherine appealed to the government for help and she was able to match the salary. Channer worked for four years, establishing the Kalimpong Lace School as part of the Home Industries, and when she had to leave owing to ill health she had trained a successor, Gladys Korb. Over time, the laces produced by the school gained acceptance and appreciation in national and international markets. Six other Lace Schools were opened in villages near Kalimpong. In 1911, when Queen Mary visited India, newspapers such as *The Times of India* reported that Katharine Stewart-Murray, the Duchess of Atholl, had gifted a lace handkerchief from Kalimpong to the Queen. At that point the lace-making had 162 employees.[41]

In 1900, as noted above, John Anderson began opening homes for children, on a cottage model, and it is this aspect of the mission which became the best known. He had a particular concern to take in Anglo-Indian children, who were often ostracised by both communities. As the

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38 Archibald Fleming, *John A. Graham of Kalimpong, DD* (Edinburgh: Church of Scotland, Foreign Mission Committee [1931]), chapter 4, 'The Lady of Healing'. In an essay by Subhadeep Paul, 'The Kinetic Mission of Kalimpong', in Bashabi Fraser and Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay, eds., *Lakshmi's Footprints and Paisley Patterns: Perspectives on Scoto-Indian Literary and Cultural Interrelations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2024), pp. 115-128, there is a misleading reference to John Anderson Graham marrying 'Lady Katherine' (p. 116).

39 Cindy Perry, *Nepali around the World: Emphasizing Nepali Christians of the Himalayas Perry* (Kathmandhu: Ekta, 1997), p. 77, n. 88.

40 Katherine to John Anderson, 11 December 1901, Acc.6039 Box 3 (2). NLS.

41 Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, pp. 93-4; Sandip C. Jain, 'The Lace Industry of Kalimpong', *Sikkim Express*, 5 February 2023.

homes multiplied, he was able to take in Anglo-Indian children from slum areas in Calcutta, along with the majority of the children who came from the plantations of Assam and Darjeeling, the offspring of white planter men and the women who worked in the plantations. They became known as 'tea garden children'. Although the homes were not Katherine's first priority, she was fully supportive of the endeavour. In the early 1900s she was looking out for places that might be suitable for homes. New homes were being built and she reported to John Anderson on progress – or lack of it, sometimes because of shortage of wood - when he was away. She was also keen to encourage prayer for the homes, together with all areas of mission, and in 1902 she was delighted about the numbers at prayers meetings. At other meetings she led singing, playing a harmonium which had come (probably through her mother) from Joseph Lister. Typically, worship embraced the whole of creation and in January 1903 she was pleased to find boys in one of the homes engaged in gardening.[42]

An important dimension of the Grahams' life in Kalimpong was the large number of guests entertained. One was Annie Taylor, who stayed at the Guild mission house. She was known in Scotland: in 1894, *The Scottish Geographical Magazine* published an article by her, 'My experiences in Tibet', which was derived from a paper she read at Royal Scottish Geographical Society meetings in Edinburgh and Glasgow in December 1893.[43] This was followed by a popular book in 1895, *Pioneering in Tibet*.[44] She had appealed for twelve missionaries for Tibet and Evan Mackenzie, from Dingwall, in the north of Scotland, was among the first to respond, accompanied by his wife, Elizabeth, and their infant child. There were six others from Scotland – from Peterhead, Aberdeen and Peterculter in the north, and Dunfermline, Lochgelly and Greenock in Scotland's central lowlands. Only two came from England (from London). Unusually for a small British-based initiative, four were Scandinavians seeking mission opportunities. Katherine was fascinated by hearing Annie describing how she led a band of missionaries seeking to work in Tibet. The band did not stay together, as Annie's style was too individualist. The Mackenzies joined the mission in Kalimpong.[45] Annie settled in Yatung, ministering

42 Katherine to John Anderson, 15 December 1901; 1 November 1902, 3 January 1903, Acc.6039 Box 3 (2). NLS.

43 Annie R. Taylor, 'My Experiences in Tibet', *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. 10, No 1 (January 1894), pp. 1-8.

44 Annie R. Taylor, *Pioneering in Tibet* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1895).

45 John Bray, 'Stumbling on the Threshold: Annie R. Taylor's Tibetan Pioneer Mission, 1893-1907', *Bulletin of Tibetology*, 50/1&2 (2014), pp. 91-116; Ian Randall, 'Annie Royale Taylor (1855–1922): A Missionary Adventurer in Tibet', *Priscilla Papers*, 39/2 (2025), pp. 19-23.

in various ways to Tibetans. Another unusual guest of the Grahams was 'Mr Judd', who travelled the roads writing texts on outcrops of rocks. He had a long beard, did not wash very often, and wanted to greet fellow missionaries with a brotherly kiss - which Katherine tried to avoid.[46]

Others who were not engaged in Christian mission were welcomed. Kalimpong's proximity to Tibet ensured a constant stream of so-called 'Tibetologists' and 'Nirvanaseekers' and most visited the Grahams. It was Katherine who was central to the hospitality: guests revelled in the relaxed atmosphere she created and the fun generated. At meal times the six Graham children were fully involved in conversations. David, Jack, Peggy, Isa, Bunty, and Betty were encouraged to express their opinions and they in turn learned a great deal from their varied guests. Also, on returning from his trips John Anderson would recount in detail all that had happened and people he had met. The Grahams were interested in what was termed the neighbouring 'closed lands' of Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, and John Anderson developed a good relationship with the Maharajas of Bhutan and Nepal. In 1897 he wrote popular-style book on Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan, for the benefit of the Men's Guild in Scotland as well as other readers, with an introduction by Sir Charles Elliott, Lieutenant-General of Bengal.[47] Along with welcoming those who called to see them, Katherine sometimes found that conversations in the bazaar with travellers prompted her to extend hospitality and on one occasion she met a student who then stayed for two weeks and later set up residential accommodation elsewhere in Bengal similar to what he had seen in Kalimpong.[48]

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

The perspectives of John and Katherine Graham stretched beyond their immediate Himalayan area. John Anderson's most wide-ranging book was *The Missionary Expansion of the Reformed Churches*.[49] This combined careful scholarship with a call to service. A Bible School was developed in Kalimpong to train local evangelists. In her letters, Katherine expressed hopes for the missionary message to be received. In the early twentieth century she became increasingly aware of the global interconnectedness of the ministry in Kalimpong. She wrote in January 1903

46 Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, p. 97.

47 J.A. Graham, *On the Threshold of Three Closed Lands: The Guild outpost in the Eastern Himalayas* (Edinburgh: R&R Clark, 1897). The first edition, of 10,000 copies, sold out. A second edition followed in 1905.

48 Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, p. 98.

49 J.A. Graham, *The Missionary Expansion of the Reformed Churches* (Edinburgh: R&R Clark, 1898).

about her perception that there were merits in boarding schools as places of transnational encounter and recalled that someone they knew had seen no need for such endeavours: 'Gussie couldn't bear the idea of a boarding school here'. She was busy writing letters back to Scotland to convey the needs, as the number of children being cared for grew to several hundred. One of the potential supporters for educational projects was German and - as Katherine said, in a letter to John Anderson - he 'insisted on talking German'. In fact, Katherine enjoyed languages and was teaching French as one of the aspects of education within her own family. She also enjoyed English teaching and in March 1903 was pleased when a report she had written was circulated in Scotland and seemed to be 'read very well'.[50]

Keeping in touch with Europe was important to Katherine. On the occasions when she was on furlough or for family reasons was back in Scotland, she was eager to know what books were being produced. She had ongoing interest in volumes of theology but also in reading novels. Her contacts stretched beyond Britain to the ways in which education and welfare were being undertaken in other parts of Europe. She met two young Swedish nurses sent by the Queen of Sweden to gain ideas from Scotland. During some months Katherine spent in Scotland in 1904, she looked at possibilities for boarding schools for some of the family, but the decision was made to keep everyone together in Kalimpong. On that visit Katherine's base was Kinghorn, Fife, and she travelled to speak at missionary meetings. A letter on 18 June was written while she was on the train to Aberdeen.[51] She also met David G. Manuel, a Church of Scotland minister and historian, who then visited Kalimpong in 1905, spending five months away from his congregation, and subsequently wrote two books about the East, the second specifically about Kalimpong.[52] All of this made an international audience more aware of what was being done and in 1905 John Anderson received the Kaiser-i-Hind medal from the Viceroy of India, with Katherine being recognised in the same way in 1916. These medals were tributes to their public service roles.

Katherine's time in Scotland was refreshing, and demanding. She came back having a wider circle with whom to connect and the letter writing needed was something she always took seriously. Her writing ability throughout her life was remarkable. In 1906 John Anderson was in Scotland and one long letter she wrote to him outlined how after regularly

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50 Katherine to John Anderson, 6 January 1903; 1 March 1903, 16 March 1903, 1 October 1903; Acc.6039 Box 3 (2). NLS.

51 Katherine to John Anderson, 18 June 1904, Acc.6039 Box 4 (1). NLS.

52 The first was D.G. Manuel, *Eastern Impressions* (Perth: John MacGregor & Co., 1907); the second was *Gladdening River*.

getting up early to write letters she was teaching in school all day. On Sundays, as well as playing the organ at the English language services in the church, she was also attending services conducted in Hindi. She was concerned about a lack of funds for all that had been taken on and was sorry that a newsletter highlighting Kalimpong's needs had been delayed. Furnishings were needed for new homes. However, a paper in India had commented favourably on the work. She had heard back from John earlier that he was going to stay in Scotland until the 1907 General Assembly. At the Assembly, J.R.M. Mitchell, who studied theology at Edinburgh and Cambridge, was elected moderator. He had a commitment to international Presbyterian ministry. Katherine hoped John would have a good time at the Assembly and added: 'You must take me to it the year you are Moderator!'[53] He did become moderator, but that was in 1931-32, more than a decade after Katherine's death.

After his return from Scotland, John Anderson had some months at home but early in 1908 he was travelling extensively in India, often – as before - to raise money. Katherine was glad that meetings were going well but was concerned that he did not have proper equipment to project slides he was showing. A greater concern was her husband's health. To have three months back in Scotland was one idea she raised, and that proved necessary later. Her experience was that she was being thrown back on herself for every little decision. However, that had spiritual benefit: 'This throws me back on Him and I believe He is teaching me Himself some very valuable lessons these days.' Having voiced this in January, in May there were further struggles, and she wrote that she had been fearful about the amount of work to be done. She then asked herself, 'Why am I so fearful?' It seemed that for all her experiences since her early years in Edinburgh she still had more to learn, and she wrote, 'I marvel at God's long suffering with me'. By June she had recovered from this period of questioning and was enjoying teaching a women's group regularly. A visiting speaker had, disappointingly, been 'a bit dreich!' Another visitor, however, had brought an encouraging report about mission among the Santals in India.[54] The Norwegian Lutheran Mission had been working among them since the later nineteenth century.[55]

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53 Katherine to John Anderson, 11 December 1906. Acc.6039 Box 4 (1). NLS.

54 Katherine to John Anderson, 11 January 1908; 22 January 1908; 24 May 1908; 5 June 1908. Box 4 (1) Acc.6039. NLS.

55 See Marine Carrin and Harald Tambs-Lyche, 'The Santals, though unable to plan for tomorrow, should be converted by Santals', in R.E. Frykenberg, ed., *Christians and Missionaries in India* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 274-94. For later mission among Santals, by English Presbyterians, see Ian Randall, 'Mission and Unity: The Contribution of Alan Gordon MacLeod

It was decided by the family in 1909 that Katherine would spend time in Scotland in 1910. The arrangements made always meant that one Graham parent would be with the children. Katherine was interested in exploring what chaplaincy involved, as people had been coming and opening to her their inner thoughts. One had wanted to make 'a full confession' - and 'so he did!' Also, she was keen to take advantage of time in Edinburgh for theological reading as she had been in some 'ecclesiastical discussion' with non-Presbyterians - who had been dismissed by Presbyterian worthies as 'having an indefinite vagueness![56] What was a surprising opportunity for Katherine in Edinburgh was that she was able to attend meetings of the World Missionary Conference being held in the Assembly Hall of the United Free Church of Scotland. In an excited letter to John, she spoke of this possibility.[57] The World Missionary Conference, held from 14 to 23 June 1910, has been recognised as a pivotal event in the history of world Christianity. There were 1,215 official delegates. The Conference chairman was John Mott, an American Methodist layman who was very well known as a leader in the student movement.[58] Katherine's report is particularly valuable, in that she was a member of the public, not a delegate.

In a letter to John of 20 June, Katherine described how she had hoped to hear the Archbishop of Canterbury, but tickets for the public had gone. However, she obtained a ticket to hear John Mott, who was received with a 'great ovation' that 'brought the house down'. Subsequently she was able to attend most sessions. The conference was 'really wonderful' and to look down from the public gallery on delegates 'gathered from all parts of the world' was inspiring. She appreciated the devotional meetings led by 'the saintly Bishop Moule', with her heart warmed as prayer was made for India. She was able to meet and have a private conversation with Handley Moule - then Bishop of Durham and the leading theological figure at the Keswick Convention - and his wife Mary. Moule told Katherine that interest in mission would be much greater after Edinburgh. He said: 'The Master is in the conference.' Among other evangelical Anglicans, Sir John and Lady Kennaway were 'particularly friendly', and she learned more about public life from Sir John, who had been a prominent politician. Another meeting was with an evangelical leader who spent time in parts

(1911-1984', *The Journal of the United Church History Society*, 10/9 (2021), pp. 481-99.

56 Katherine to John Anderson, 31 July 1909. Acc.6039 Box 4 (2). NLS.

57 Katherine to John Anderson, 11 June 1910. Acc.6039 Box 4 (2). NLS.

58 Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2009) is the authoritative book on the Conference.

of Europe, Lord Radstock. In what was quite a lengthy conversation, he told Katherine how 'the Lord was blessing his work among Society people in Paris'. This led to significant ministry in Russia. Something Katherine found 'curious' was his statement: 'There is little religion in Protestantism'. He then explained that in his view a time was coming when there would be 'no Protestantism or Romanism, only Jesus'. She also talked with Temple Gairdner, of the Church Missionary Society in Egypt.[59]

On 21, 22 and 23 June, Katherine gave further updates. These were not so much about personal conversations as about the Conference in general. There was a hope, she said, that Greek Orthodox and Roman Churches were now in closer relationship with Protestants and at the next world conference on mission their representatives 'would be present!!' This was said, she observed playfully, in the United Free Church Hall, 'under the shadow of John Knox!' At this news of ecumenical possibilities in relation to mission, delegates responded 'with one voice AYE!' On the preparation of missionaries, covered by delegates such as Georgina Gollock, Katherine felt she had not received that preparation.[60] As the Conference drew to its close, Katherine gave some reflections. Some who might have been expected to make an impression had not done so. She instanced the Archbishop of York, Cosmo Lang. She mentioned William Paterson, Professor in the Faculty of Divinity in the University of Edinburgh, noting with her typical humour that it was said 'he was becoming quite interested in missions!' There was, she commented, a feeling that the Church of Scotland had been somewhat remiss in not recalling some of its best missionaries to the conference. The close saw a 'wonderful consecration meeting', in which John Mott, 'through the influence of God's Holy Spirit, led every soul of the great gathering to God alone'. To make up to an extent for John Anderson not being there, Katherine would order the nine volumes from the Conference. They would, she assured him, 'contain the most exhaustive information on every subject pertaining to missions'.[61]

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59 Katherine to John Anderson, 19 June 1910. Acc.6039 Box 4 (2). NLS. Temple Gairdner wrote an account of the conference: W.H.T. Gairdner, *"Edinburgh 1910": An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (Edinburgh & London: Oliphant, Anderson & Farrier, 1910).

60 See Ian Randall, *Georgina Gollock (1861-1940): Pioneering Female Missiologist* (Cambridge: CCCW, 2023), pp. 66-70.

61 Katherine to John Anderson, 21, 22 and 23 June 1910. Acc.6039 Box 4 (2). NLS. In these letters the exclamation marks have been shown as they were written.

LIFE AND LEGACY

After Edinburgh 1910, Katherine stayed a few more weeks in Scotland. She was receiving gifts of money for Kalimpong, some specifically for the Industrial School, of which she was the Honorary Superintendent. A notable gift as a legacy was from Charlotte Anderson of Woodside, Fife, who left money in her will to the Kalimpong Medical Mission.[62] Through the hard years of the First World War, Katherine continued to devote herself to the work which she loved, but her health deteriorated. She had warned John Anderson about over-stretching himself, but she had failed to apply this to herself. On 15 May 1919, Katherine died, at 57. Illness had required an operation, from which she never recovered.[63] The *Calcutta Statesman* of 16 May paid a tribute to an 'exceptionally gifted woman' who was 'an outstanding figure in the missionary and industrial development of Bengal'. She was 'the presiding genius over an awakening which is without question destined to leave an equally deep impression upon the industrial life of the country'. The article spoke of her hospitality, which she extended along with her husband to 'thousands of visitors of Kalimpong'. She could, it concluded, have shone in politics, business, or any other sphere to which she might have chosen to give 'her remarkable talents and personality'. But it was her Christian faith which led her and which was expressed with 'grace and tenderness'.[64]

Those who knew Katherine in close family life or as close friends and colleagues, shared personal tributes. They spoke of the laughter that she generated, and her love for young people. She also had an eye for detail as part of care; in buildings she knew, for example, she noted when any piece of crockery needed replacing. When it came to the girls in the school, she not only spoke to them individually but looked out for needs such as new dresses. Her colleagues spoke about the well-known 'K.G.' which appeared on notes and suggested action. But this was not her expecting others to do the work; she was herself, her friends said, 'a woman of action'. In what she said and did there was a combination of tact, thoroughness, common sense, sympathy, and friendliness. Others spoke of her impact – an impact she did not realise she had – at retreats that had been held for the missionary team when there was breakfast together followed by prayer, Bible study and teaching. Also, the local workers connected with the mission were invited to a one week retreat each year. Katherine believed in sharing

62 *Dundee Courier*, 12 February 1907.

63 Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, p. 96.

64 'In Memoriam', *Calcutta Statesman*, 16 May 1919.

life together and in a combination of prayer, Bible study and listening to one another.[65]

Further reports covered events that took in Katherine's funeral. The *Eastern Himalayan Missionary News* report averred that no event in the history of Kalimpong had 'stirred the depths of feeling' across the district as had the death of Katherine Graham. Although she had been ill, to lose her was a great shock. People of every 'race and caste and language' came together, drawn by a bond of common grief and shared loss. For many of them, even if they did not know her well, Katherine was 'The Mother of us all'. In her struggle with illness, she had kept 'strenuously at work as long as it was physically possible'. When it became evident that she might be facing terminal illness she showed 'faith and courage', qualities that had marked her life. Many people gathered in the Macfarlane Memorial Church to pray for her restoration and along with that to commit her in life and death, whatever was to come, to God's love and keeping. After her death, hundreds passed by to see her in repose and when the funeral was held the church was filled to overflowing. Huge crowds followed the coffin to the place of burial and among the songs that the approximately 1,500 people took up in worship was 'Shall we gather at the river….' with the refrain, 'Yes, we'll gather at the river…Gather with the saints at the river, That flows by the throne of God.'[66]

In his biography of John Anderson Graham, Minto noted that John Anderson had torn the pages for the greater part of May 1919 from his diary. His wife's death affected him greatly, as it did the whole family, especially since she was in what could have been the prime of her life and she had been at the centre of plans for the furtherance of her areas of work.[67] In Scotland the Men's Guild and Women's Guild members were deeply affected. Katherine had kept in close touch by letter and by visits when she was in Scotland. In a 'Guild Mission' statement there was reference to 'the great loss which the mission had sustained' through the death of Katherine Graham, and on behalf of those who led the work of the Guilds in Scotland deep appreciation was expressed for her ministry in Kalimpong. The Foreign Mission Committee of the Church of Scotland also wanted whole-heartedly to associate themselves with this. 'Her service to the mission had been invaluable', the Committee stated, and she had been 'the inspiration of many of the most important developments in

[65] Tributes from colleagues, *Eastern Himalayan Mission News*, June 1919.
[66] 'Kalimpong's Grief', *Eastern Himalayan Mission News*, June 1919.
[67] Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, p. 99.

connection to it.' Deep sympathy was conveyed to John Anderson Graham.[68]

Lord Ronaldshay, the Marquess of Zetland, an advocate of the achievements in Kalimpong, started a movement to build a chapel as a memorial to Katherine Graham. Among his principal commitments was to India and its aspirations. After studying at Trinity College, Cambridge, he visited Ceylon, Egypt, and Kashmir, before joining the staff of Lord Curzon, then Viceroy of India, in the spring of 1900. Between 1900 and 1906, he visited Persia, Burma, Russian Central Asia and Siberia, Mongolia, China, and Japan. In 1917 he became Governor of Bengal, and he retained connection with India long after returning to Britain.[69] He was therefore ideally placed to launch a world-wide appeal. It was also the case that a new chapel was needed, as Christian worship had extended significantly and services were being held in different languages at different times. The response to the appeal was immediate and generous, and all that happened was a great comfort and strength to John Anderson. He always spoke of the new Chapel affectionately as ' Katie's Chapel' or ' Katie's Church'. In the planning stages he had voluminous correspondence with his friend Henry Lennox Anderson, an architect associated with St Columba's Church, London, who gave his services freely as architect and designer and detailed almost every stone of the chapel for the builders.[70]

The design of the church emphasised simplicity and beauty, with delicate grey stone pillars, elegant proportions, and high vaulted roof. The stained-glass windows, appropriately in view of Katherine's love of children, showed the childhood of Jesus. They were the work of Douglas Strachan from Aberdeen, one of the greatest artists - perhaps the greatest - in the revival of stained-glass work in Scotland in the twentieth century. His name was synonymous with large-scale public artworks and memorials, not least the Peace Palace at The Hague in the Netherlands. He was also deeply committed to Christian art, to enhance church buildings, and he was commissioned for creative work in St Margaret's Chapel at Edinburgh Castle, with a depiction of St Columba; the Crombie Window at St Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen, depicting St Machar on mission; and King's College Chapel, the University of Aberdeen, with a depiction of

68 Guild Committee Minutes, 18. Dep. 298. NLS.

69 See his book: Lawrence John Lumley Dundas, *Lands of the Thunderbolt, Sikkim, Chumbi, and Bhutan* (London: Constable, 1923). He followed this with two other volumes.

70 H. L. Anderson contributed to the classical streetscape of the City of London, as did his father, despite refusing to participate in competitive tenders and being opposed to advertising.

Mary and Joseph.[71] For Kalimpong, because of his interest in needy children, Strachan charged only half his usual rates and also gave a large donation.[72]

Two baptistries were installed - one for baptisms of infants and the other for the immersion of those professing faith. This second baptistry made it clear that John Anderson and the Graham family wanted the Chapel to be fully interdenominational. Gifts from individuals included the organ, and, from St Columba's Church, London, a stone pulpit paid for by the minister, Archibald Fleming, his wife, and other members.[73] The Chapel was opened in 1925, with the name Katherine Graham Memorial Chapel. Victor Bulwer-Lytton, Earl of Lytton, who was born in India and was then Governor of Bengal, was among those who spoke. The whole service was shared by several ministers from across the denominations. Lord Lytton said that no worthier memory of Katherine Graham could have been selected, 'none which could better promote the work to which she dedicated her life'. In this building, he continued, 'her memory will ever be held dear, and her example shine as a guiding light to future generations of workers and children.' He stressed that building materials had been obtained locally and construction was under local supervision. He described the Chapel as 'an offering from Kalimpong to one who won the hearts of all who came in contact with her; it will serve as an everlasting emblem of the spiritual influence which Mrs Graham exercised.'[74]

CONCLUSION

The life and work of John Anderson Graham has been written about and analysed by authors in various publications. So far this is the first attempt to look at Katherine Graham, although the lives of the two were intimately intertwined. A larger study would examine – for example – the letters from John Anderson that made up one half of their voluminous and deeply affectionate correspondence. In the scope of this brief study, it is only elements of what Katherine wrote that have been included. Her story has some consistent themes, related to creative ministry. In Edinburgh she was concerned for the welfare of children and this was a feature throughout her years in Kalimpong. Indeed, through what she did, scholars from the school in Kalimpong were in touch with young

71 Kirstie Waterston, 'Douglas Strachan', *Press and Journal*, 3 July 2025.
72 Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, pp. 100-101.
73 There was a long-standing link between the Grahams and the Flemings.
74 Minto, *Graham of Kalimpong*, p. 102.

people in Scotland, exchanging of letters.[75] Another constant desire was for authentic spirituality. Whenever she found this, she was inspired, but where it was absent, she was deeply dissatisfied. A further characteristic was her profoundly passionate nature. This was seen in her relationship with her husband, with her own children, and in somewhat different but heart-felt ways with her colleagues and the children in her care. However, there was also change as time went on. Kalimpong offered new challenges not known in Scotland. Much of what Katherine did was new, and was a response to the setting in India - such as the Home Industries. She was also open to her views being expanded, and found that this happened significantly through Edinburgh 1910. Perhaps the words spoken in 1925 sum up her life: through her, 'spiritual influence' was experienced, and her creative ministry meant that others were enabled to flourish.

[75] Church of Scotland Foreign Mission Committee minute book, 1919-21. MS. 7535. NLS.

From Caring For Creation to Caring Through (Re-) Creation: Missiological Implications of the Theology of Creation in Evangelical and Neo-Calvinist Thought[1]

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A RELEVANT TOPIC FOR CONTEMPORARY MISSIOLOGY

Our physical planet has become a central topic over recent years in various aspects of public life. Nowhere are people perhaps more aware of the impact of climate change, deforestation and exploitation of natural resources on daily life than those living in South America. Brazil is in fact hosting COP30, the UN Climate Change Conference, from 10th to 25th November this year.

Books and articles are continuously being produced to present a Christian response to the ongoing climate crisis. There is a clear concern for the physical world which is shared between Christians and non-Christians, and which is at the forefront of many people's minds across the planet. Research which emerged from Greece in 2023 concluded that Generation Z apply an existential element to climate change, suffering from what is termed 'eco-anxiety'.[2]

There has been, however, a shift in language when speaking about the Christian approach to climate change or ecological issues. Traditional globally-representative evangelical organisations such as Lausanne and World Evangelical Alliance in this context replace terms like 'climate' and 'environment', and the prefix 'eco-' - which are commonplace in the third sector, in sociology, in politics, and in anthropology – with the word 'creation', when grammatically correct to do so. 'Creation care' becomes the prominent term rather than 'environmental care' or 'climate care'.

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1 This article is a lightly edited version of a paper presented by Màiri MacPherson at the conference *A Public Gospel: Evangelicals, Neo-Calvinists, and Society* which was held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in May 2025.

2 N Proutsos, D. Tigkas, I. Tsevreni, M. Tsevreni, 'Generation Z Worries, Suffers and Acts against Climate Crisis—The Potential of Sensing Children's and Young People's Eco-Anxiety: A Critical Analysis Based on an Integrative Review' *Climate* 11.8 (2023), p. 171. Online: https://doi.org/10.3390/cli11080171.

Just to nip any expectations of facts and figures in the bud, and for clarification, I am *not* a scientist or an eco-theologian. What I am wrestling with is this language of 'creation' and how the doctrine of creation is used in the context of mission. By 'mission' here I mean bringing people of every tribe, tongue and nation into the kingdom of God by the power of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ's 'all-inclusive salvation'.[3]

A COMMONLY HELD DOCTRINE OF CREATION

The shift in terminology from 'climate' to 'creation' in the context of ecological debate demonstrates an inherently theological approach to this topic. It is based at its very foundation on the theological supposition that the one true triune God created the heavens and the earth, and that he also sustains them. Humanity is vitally viewed as part of this creation event, but is set apart, being recognised as creatures made in the image of God. Additionally, in settings where this terminology shift is taking place, there is the commonly held idea of '*new* creation'. The idea of new creation meaning here that God will not destroy the world but rather restore it in a renewed perfected form. These basic doctrines of creation are affirmed in the Evangelical and Neo-Calvinist traditions. What then develops from this basis is not completely separate in the two traditions, but it *is* distinct in emphasis and missiological outworking.

I will firstly look at the evangelical approach, then move on to the Neo-Calvinist approach. I aim to show how we, through comparing and contrasting these two thought traditions, are offered the opportunity to expand our missiological interpretation of the word 'creation' beyond 'creation care as mission' towards 'caring through (re-)creation'.

THE DOCTRINE OF CREATION IN EVANGELICAL MISSIOLOGY

In general evangelical thought, the term 'creation' both connotes the singular event of God making the physical world and it describes this physical world itself. The development of evangelical thought over the past 50 years regarding 'creation', the physical planet (i.e. the environment, climate, eco-systems, biodiversity) has often been a reaction to previously enacted theology which failed to place emphasis on the natural world. Hollinghurst describes how it is 'easy to develop a Christian theology that is very unfriendly to the environment.' He goes on to say that until the

[3] I have incorporated some terminology used by Johan Herman Bavinck into this definition. Johan Herman Bavinck and David Hugh Freeman (tr), *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960), pp. 22, 62.

mid-20th century, the church had developed an 'ark' mentality, rather than a 'new creation' mentality when it came to creation. The physical world was not seen as the everlasting home of humanity, therefore mission work was to save people from (out of) the temporary world. 'If this is true, then environmentalism is a distraction'.[4] The 'ark' mentality in theology and mission led to the exploitation of land and people for the cause of the Kingdom of God and its expansion.

Evangelical missiology thus saw the need for a correction to the idea that Christian theology was 'bad for the environment'. In evangelical missiology, the act of God creating the world is placed directly alongside the act of God assigning humanity stewardship of the physical world, as seen in God's command to humanity in Genesis 1:28.[5]

What then is the intersection between creation and mission in evangelical thought?

a) The idea of the *missio dei*, is the presumed stance in evangelical missiology regarding 'creation'. In contemporary evangelical missiology, *missio dei* (here I am speaking of the specific missiological phenomenon developed in the mid-20th century as part of the 1952 Willingen Conference) provides an invitation for the church to step into an area in which God is already working, for example the area of climate awareness and environment care. It is viewed as an opportunity for the church to engage with a pertinent topic which is gaining traction in wider society and use it for the growth of God's kingdom. Additionally, the *missio dei* is seen to give purpose to the mission of humanity, 'Humans have a unique role to play on that journey because, made in God's image, they have a unique calling and responsibility to protect and nurture creation, but they must learn to listen to creation as well as each other if we are to travel this path together as God desires.'[6] Creation care is therefore framed as a duty assigned to humanity as part of the *missio dei*; it is a mission of reconciliation which humanity is called to fulfil. It is our duty as Christians then to strive for this reconciliation between humanity and the earth, empowered by the Holy Spirit, before the earth is ultimately renewed in the new creation by God. Creation care is presented as

4 Steve Hollinghurst, 'Environmentalism and evangelism, essential companions in Christian creation care', *Practical Theology* 15.5 (2022), pp. 481, 484. DOI: 10.1080/1756073X.2022.2102711.

5 Gen. 1:28 reads: 'God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."'

6 Hollinghurst, 'Environmentalism', pp. 484-489.

a missional declaration for humanity to be God's hands and feet on earth in love rather than in dominance.

b) Creation care is often framed as a justice issue in evangelical missiology. Statistically, it is those who are poorer in the world who will suffer more from the negative impacts of the climate crisis. Evangelical missiology therefore argues for mission to include advocacy on the behalf of others; it is seen as a form of justice mission, or justice as mission. It serves to address a disparity in the approach to climate care where people in the Global North 'worry' about climate change while people in the Global South 'suffer' it.[7] This therefore requires a global and contextualised missiology; those suffering the impact of climate change directly are encouraged to talk about the climate crisis from their perspectives, and practical work is encouraged as part of the mission of the church.

c) Consideration of, and care for, creation is additionally framed as an expected response after an acceptance of the Christian gospel. The 2010 Cape Town Commitment from the Lausanne Movement states 'we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says 'Jesus is Lord' is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ's Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.'[8] Creation care is therefore a matter of discipleship, which Dave Bookless (Director of Theology at A Rocha International) argues is in keeping with the Great Commission.[9] Lausanne advocates for misión integral (English: integral mission/holistic mission) and incorporates this idea of discipleship producing care for creation.[10]

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7 Proutsos et al., 'Generation Z'.

8 Doug Birdsall and Lindsay Brown, *The Cape Town commitment: A confession of faith and a call to action* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011). <https://lausanne.org/statement/ctcommitment>.

9 Dave Bookless, 'Christian Mission and Environmental Issues: An Evangelical Reflection', *Mission Studies* 25.1 (2008), pp. 37–52. DOI: 10.1163/157338308X293891.

10 Lausanne are defining creation as the environment/climate/bio-diversity. See Dave Bookless, Jasmine Kwong, Seth Appiah-Kubi & Jocabed Solano, 'Creation Care', *Lausanne Movement* (2023), <https://lausanne.org/report/sustainable/creation-care>.

The use of the term 'creation' in evangelical missiology has therefore evidently been narrowed to refer almost exclusively to our physical planet, to its climate, its biodiversity and its eco systems.

WHAT ABOUT NEO-CALVINIST THOUGHT?

Neo-Calvinist thought on the other hand broadens what we mean by the term 'creation' itself, subsequently broadening the missiological potential of 'creation'. The term 'creation' in Neo-Calvinism refers not only to the literal physical world which was once made by God and which is sustained by Him, but it is also inextricably linked to the concept of God's self-revelation. Steve Bishop explains this helpfully in the Handbook for Neo-Calvinism. Bishop highlights two distinctive elements that God reveals to us in the physical world he has created:

a) **The creator/creature distinction.** This is supported by arguments for i) *creatio ex nihilo*: God is the only pre-existing being and the world is by nature contingent on him; and ii) the concept of *pancreationism*: 'Creation is not limited to the things we can see such as rocks, plants, and animals. It includes things we cannot see, including heaven, angels, ideas, institutions, and the products of human cultural development. Pancreation undermines the notion that rationality and logic are uncreated.'[11]

b) **Creation as an 'organic whole'**, as presented in the works of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. This is supported by the concepts such as unity-in-diversity, creation as dynamic rather than static, and the 'cultural mandate' (a term which was coined by Klaas Schilder). To focus in on the 'cultural mandate' - God's command of Genesis to humanity is not just about the physical world; it includes the task of 'unfolding' as Kuyper puts it. It involves the ''opening up,' and bringing to fruition, of all potentialities within creation, for God's glory.'[12] Bishop argues that this 'includes the discovery, development, and unlocking of the possibilities implicit within the creation in accordance with creational norms. It involves a discerning of the creation order and ordinances placed there by the Creator.'[13] This includes the

[11] Steve Bishop, 'Creation', in *T&T Clark Handbook of Neo-Calvinism*, ed. By Nathaniel Gray Sutanto and Cory Brock (London: T&T Clark, 2024), p. 25. <http:// dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780567698100.0006>.

[12] Bishop, 'Creation', p. 28.

[13] Bishop, 'Creation', p. 29.

formation of different languages, the development of new cuisines, the discovery of new species – these are all part of 'creation'.

Bishop lays out for us the distinctives of the Neo-Calvinist interpretation of the doctrine of creation. But these are not then applied to mission and have not been applied as such in contemporary Neo-Calvinist missiology.[14]

I want to highlight some of the key points in the intersection between creation and mission in Neo-Calvinist thought. I am drawing from the work of missiologist Johan Herman Bavinck (1895-1964) to inform these points:

a) **Creation as a 'point of contact':** Creation can be presented as a 'point of contact' for non-Christians in a mission setting. JH Bavinck uses the German term 'Anknüpfung' (English: *connection*) to describe this in his 1940 work *Het probleem der anknüpfung bij de Evangelieverkondiging* and uses the Dutch term 'aanspreekpunt' (English: *point of contact*) in works such as *Inleidung in de Zendingswetenschap* (1954). The 'point of contact' is the idea of finding an element of worldview within a person's heart which can be connected with and can be addressed by a gospel truth. This truth can then be used to bring transformation and fulfilment to this part of the person. JH Bavinck describes this part of the person which can be transformed as 'angrijpenpunkt', which I argue connotes a *grasping*, or a *taking hold of* rather than an 'attack' as some scholars translate it, which is more abrasive in my opinion.[15] Taking hold of one part of the person's life then leads to the transformation and fulfilment of the rest of the person, orientating the entirety of their life to come under the lordship of Jesus. This is often done through a point of shared human experience. Using JH Bavinck's language of 'point of contact', we could see creation as a 'point of contact'. For instance, we are all

[14] It is useful to note that Bishop has advocated for the development of a Neo-Calvinist ecotheology using the work of Arnold A. Van Ruler. See Steve Bishop, 'Book Review: This Earthly Life Matters: The Promise of Arnold A. van Ruler for Ecotheology', Affinity 86 (2024). <https://www.affinity.org.uk/foundations/issue-86-summer-2024/this-earthly-life-matters/>.
The Neo-Calvinist doctrine of creation has also been addressed from a biblical theological angle by Albert M. Wolters, *Creation regained: Biblical basics for a reformational worldview*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005).

[15] For example David Freeman's translation of Inleidung in de Zendingswetenschap: Johan Herman Bavinck and David Hugh Freeman (tr), *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960).

humans who live on this planet and experience the created world.[16] We come from a shared source, Adam in the Garden of Eden.[17] But we as humanity flipped the creator/creature distinction to try and make ourselves into our own gods.[18] This has brought sin into the world, but by the effectiveness of Christ's redemption, by the grace of God the Father and by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, this distinction can be rectified and we can become the creatures made in the image of the God that we were intended to be. Someone's worldview of creation could be used in such a way as an access point to further gospel teaching. JH Bavinck argues that this is particularly true of individuals in different religions, who already have stories of creation in their religions. Bavinck pleads for the preacher in these contexts to think about the creation worldview of their hearer, being sure not to affirm anything not in keeping with the Bible, but simultaneously unveiling the truth of God as creator and sustainer, a truth which they have sub-consciously suppressed.[19]

b) **Caring through re-creation** (i.e. mission): The idea of 're-creation' (*herschepping*) in Neo-Calvinism, is trinitarian in its function and inherently pancreationist, in line with what we have already discussed.[20] JH Bavinck then talks about re-creation, or 'regeneration', through missionary activity. 'Re-creation' is what takes place when a point of contact is discovered and is taken hold of under the lordship of Christ. Bavinck argues that all cultures are a means to address humanity's relationship with nature and with God, therefore presenting the gospel to them is a means of re-creating their culture (through the work of the Holy Spirit) so that it is then orientated towards God, the Creator of the world. This is done in various ways, both 'organized' and 'unorganized' as Bavinck puts it.[21] For example, Bavinck refers to Bible translation and the use of the vernacular in

16 Johan Herman Bavinck, 'Het probleem der anknüpfung bij de Evangelieverkondiging', *Vox Theologica* 11.4 (1940), pp. 110-111.

17 Johan Herman Bavinck, *Zending in een Wereld in Nood*. (Utrecht, Netherlands: Zomer & Keuning, 1946), p. 10.

18 Johan Herman Bavinck, *Het Probleem van de Pseudo-Religie en de Algemene Openbaring* (no place name, 1941), p. 8.

19 Johan Herman Bavinck, *Ons Zendingsboek*, (Bilthoven, Netherlands: De Vereeniging de Gereformeerde Meisjesbond en de Vereeniging de Gereformeerde Jongelingsbond, 1941), p. 71.

20 Bishop, 'Creation', p. 33.

21 Bavinck, *Introduction*, pp. 67-68.

missional preaching as a way of 're-creating' or 'regenerating' the language, which in turn leads to a 'regeneration' of society.[22]

c) **Caring through creation**: In Neo-Calvinism, creation is presented as having a missional role for humanity, who are created by God within time and space, and placed in the physical created world, dependent upon it. JH Bavinck uses Romans 1:18-32 to argue for this position, bringing in the idea of 'religious consciousness' which all humanity has due to their exposure to physical creation.[23] Doornbos argues that JH Bavinck's reading of Romans 1 is missional. General revelation in creation therefore not only reveals God to humanity, but the created world also plays the missional role of bringing people to a knowledge of God, a work which God is already doing in all areas of the world. People have however suppressed this truth which God has revealed to them himself through creation.[24] Contemporary Neo-Calvinism could therefore argue for creation care as a preservation of God's general self-revelation to the world, and therefore a preservation of the missional potential of creation. This is the idea of 'caring *through* creation'. We can protect and preserve the created world for future generations and for others so that all may see God's general revelation and glory through it, and come to recognise and know Him as their Creator and Sustainer. The global church could approach caring through creation as God giving us the capacity, the science, the logic, the creativity to discuss creation care and find solutions. God has given the tools to look after the environment and be creative within that, so we should see it as a privilege to do this work to God's glory. It is however vital to note here that general revelation through creation alone does not save, but rather Bavinck argues that it must be accompanied by the preaching of the gospel which he defines as the good news of 'reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'[25]

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22 Johan Herman Bavinck, *The Impact of Christianity on the non-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: WB Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), p.58.

23 Johan Herman Bavinck, 'Religious Consciousness and Christian Faith', In *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, ed. by John Bolt et al. (Cambridge & Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), p. 297.

24 Gayle Doornbos, 'We Do Not Proceed into a Vacuum: J. H. Bavinck's Missional Reading of Romans 1', *The Bavinck Review* 5 (2014), pp. 61-75.

25 Johan Herman Bavinck, 'Christ and Asian Mysticism', in *The J. H. Bavinck Reader*, ed. by John Bolt et al. (Cambridge & Grand Rapids: WB Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), pp. 303-304.

WHAT NOW?

Further work could be done in examining how J.H. Bavinck and other Neo-Calvinist scholars talk about the physical created world and mission. It would also be useful to develop a Neo-Calvinist perspective on the specific mid-20th century missiological phenomenon of *missio dei* which informs so much of evangelical missiology, sometimes unknowingly. Bavinck uses the term of 'God's plan for the world' and 'God's plan of salvation'. 'God steers with his almighty hand to that exalted goal, the gathering and summoning up of all people and races and tongues under one head, and he bestows on us the immeasurable privilege of being co-laborers to that same final end.'[26] Is this just the *missio dei* in different words? Justin Schell defines the *missio dei* as 'God's revelatory work intended to establish a divine-human communion within creation.'[27] Could this be a helpful middle ground between the two traditions?

Ultimately, if evangelical missiology were to engage more with the Neo-Calvinist doctrine of creation, it would guard against anthropocentrism. It does not fall on the church's activities to bring reconciliation between God and creation, but rather it falls on the church to provide opportunity for the re-creation of people's lives through contact with the gospel and to preserve creation for the declaration of God's glory as it is in the birth pains of a coming age when it will be restored by God.

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[26] Bavinck, Introduction, pp. 23, 45, 49.

[27] Justin A. Schell and Dane Ortlund eds., *The Mission of God and the Witness of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2024), p.2.

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Artificial Intelligence: What is at Theological Stake?

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INTRODUCTION

Artificial intelligence (AI) is ubiquitous in the land, and covers a wide range of phenomena. In asking what is at theological stake in reckoning with it, I am allowing theological concerns to dictate what in AI is of interest, rather than attending dispassionately to everything that it comprehends. Of itself, this scarcely narrows the area we might cover; in all its diversity, AI proffers plenty of material for theological consideration. Still, it is profitable to ask whether there is something at or near the heart of this sprawling but distinct phenomenon of AI, from a Christian point of view. In what follows, I pursue a train of thought which does *not* seek to be a balanced and dispassionate evaluation of AI. It explores an angle.

The global portent attending the military use of AI makes us ask if what is theologically at stake must be one with what is humanly at stake. It is no commendation to be born a human being and die a theologian, and while David Hume is not obvious candidate for helping us to cultivate the relevant self-awareness, his reminder is well taken: 'Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man.'[1] Pride of place amongst public causes for military alarm doubtless goes to Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), which introduce the possibility of human decision-making being replaced by AI. However, there are other military aspects to consider, and attending to one of the most important gives us a direct route into theology. The Bundeswehr Office for Defence Planning in Germany and the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre in the Ministry of Defence jointly produced a document on *Human Augmentation – the Dawn of a New Paradigm*.[2] Human augmentation is 'the application of science and technologies to temporarily or permanently improve human performance' (18). Under consideration is the use of AI to augment human capacities, that is, AI used in the service of IA: Intel-

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1 *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* in P.H.Nidditch ed., *Hume's Enquiries*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), p. 9.

2 This is accessible on the government (www.gov.ac.uk) website. From now on, I shall often incorporate page details into the body of the text of this article.

ligence Augmentation. We are solemnly assured that such augmentation is a dangerous and unethical tinkering with our humanity. Nonetheless, while our ethical scruples bid us desist from it, other nations will proceed with it. Accordingly, responsibility for national security forces us to devise an ethical framework which justifies our giving human augmentation positive consideration.

Theology appears in the wings with the observation that '[h]uman augmentation may challenge or offend religious views and appear to give credence to other belief systems, such as transhumanism' (58). In a footnote, transhumanism is defined (in a standard way) as the belief 'that humankind can and should eradicate ageing as a cause of death, and that humans and machines should be merged to enhance the human condition'. Later, reference is made to 'the transhumanistic thinking model' (85). Immersed in weighty military concerns, we are thus directed both to the centrality of the question of what it is to be human and to the religious stake in that question. Adverting to human augmentation is not an excuse for skipping lightly over the admission that the ethical issues immediately surrounding LAWS are vital and urgent, and that theological ethics must engage with them specifically. Rather, the appearance of transhumanism on the military scene suggests that it does not betray massive and leisurely social and political complacency if we place the broader question of AI and humanity, with all its social, cultural, technological, and intellectual sweep, at the centre of our theological interest.

Perhaps I have wielded a miniature sledgehammer to crack a little nut; it is a truism to note the centrality of the question of what it is to be human in connection with AI. Secular and religious thinkers alike bear witness to that. For example, Max Tegmark, professor of Physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and president of the Future of Life Institute, wrote *Life 3.0: Being Human in the Age of AI*.[3] Life 3.0, yet to appear on Earth, is life that can 'dramatically redesign' life, changing what it is to be human, and succeeding 'simple biological' life (1.0), and cultural life (2.0) (26). Tegmark concluded that we need to humble ourselves, rebranding ourselves *homo sentiens*, because AI renders the claim that *homo sapiens* is the summit of human evolution embarrassing (314).

Tegmark is not alone in telling us that 'the age of AI' compels the deflation of human pride. More recently, Henry Kissinger, Eric Schmidt (formerly CEO of Google), and Daniel Huttenlocher (Schwartzman College of Computing at MIT) produced *The Age of AI*.[4] The authors varied

[3] Tegmark, *Life 3.0* (London: Penguin, 2018).

[4] Kissinger et al, *The Age of AI and Our Human Future* (London: John Murray, 2022).

somewhat in their mix of optimism and pessimism about AI, but together focussed on a sobering challenge: AI is overthrowing the hegemony of reason which, since the Enlightenment, we have identified as the supreme instrument of knowledge. Since the Enlightenment, 'choice based on reason has been…the defining attribute of humanity' (25). AI knows things which humans not only do not, but also cannot know. When Alpha Zero plays chess, it not only metaphorically hammers its human protagonists, it plays chess in a different dimension, making some impossibly bizarre moves in our dimension. It certainly did not learn any of them from humans. It was simply taught the objective and the rules of chess.

There is a more dramatic example. When AI undertook a hitherto unsuccessful human search for an antibiotic to kill bacteria strains, it spotted molecular attributes which exceed the capacity of the human mind to spot. Moreover, it identified molecular relationships that might be humanly indescribable, let alone humanly detectable. AI forces us to posit a knowable realm out there that is not knowable by humans. Human reason can never access it. AI, which can and does, operates on terms that transcend reason (187). Since we have come to view reason as the pinnacle of who we are, we have to re-think who we are, not just re-think reason. 'Human perception and experience, filtered through reason, has long defined our understanding of reality' (131). AI transforms our experience of reality. No other technology has so altered how we 'humans understand reality and our role within it' is transformed (17). Our authors are untroubled by our humanly relative perceptual shortcomings; bats or bears tuned into sonic frequencies outwith our range cause no sleepless nights. Reason outdone is the problem.

I am using this as a springboard into the ensuing discussion of the image of God as the (predictable) focus of what is at theological stake with AI. As worthy springboards do, it will send us briefly underwater before the image comes to the surface, but the trajectory will be clear.

FROM DIGNITY TO IMAGE

Those who believe that God knows things about the created order that humans, certainly in this life, cannot, are unlikely to be fazed by their belief. Perhaps nothing in their view of reason leads Christians to suspect *a priori* the kind of limits on human reason which AI has revealed to be the case in relation to the created order. Even so, they are surely not emotionally averse to or find spiritually disturbing the possibility that there are constitutionally elusive molecular relationships. Perhaps this is too cavalierly tossed out by the non-scientist, and we must reckon with the conviction that humans are beings borne along by 'the pure desire

to know' everything there is to be known.[5] Still, many of us will stolidly remain unfazed.

In the literature, AI is commonly described as 'knowing' things, even when it is denied or doubted that it possesses conscious knowledge, the language being commonly used in a loose and operational, not a studied and philosophical, way. That said, the supposition that there exist material realities unknowable to human beings should command our interest.[6] Kissinger and his colleagues' account alerts us to the possibility that the prospect of material realities or existences eternally imperceptible by a knowing mind dismays the human spirit. Those vaguely aware of Bishop Berkeley's reputation for claiming that 'to exist is to be perceived' might prick up their ears, and wonder if it is coherent to suppose that there are material realities which are categorically imperceptible. For Berkeley, it was impossible for anything to exist without being perceived, because there is nothing that is not perceived by God. Translated into the idiom of AI, Berkeley's God is a conscious, uncreated super-intelligence. 'Uncreated' marks the incontrovertible distinction between God and AI, as there are some who believe that the creation of a conscious intelligence or super-intelligence is at least conceivable.

Although cultural responses to AI 'knowledge' beckons us along an important theological path, our three authors encourage us to strike out on another, and I shall keep faith with them. Adjusting to the age of AI, they propose that '[t]o make sense of our place in this world, our emphasis may need to shift from the centrality of human reason to the centrality of human dignity and autonomy' (196). They do not develop their proposal, but they set a theological agenda which theologians might comfortably adopt. In regard to this trio of concepts, Descartes surely sounded the fanfare of modernity, studiously assigning to human reason its central place precisely because it is the epistemological efflux of the spiritual autonomy which constitutes human dignity.[7] (I mention Descartes because he will return later.) Perhaps theology has nothing new to say about autonomy in relation to AI that it has not said in other contexts. This should be qualified: from a disability perspective, we have to ask what is presupposed

[5] So, for example, Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1983), XII.1.

[6] Such realities might be knowable to imagined post-humans, enhanced beyond humankind in their intellectual, as well as physical, capacities.

[7] Peter Schouls' rewarding study of *Descartes and the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989) encourages me to put it this way.

about embodiment and intelligence in the ideal underlying AI, and the question of autonomy might be freshly addressed in that context.[8]

What about human dignity? Gary Kasparov, then world chess master, remarked that in his match against the computer, Deep Blue, he was there to 'help defend our [human] dignity'.[9] Robert Song identifies the question of dignity as lying at the heart of a theological response to AI.[10] He discourages a defence of human dignity in the face of AI that takes the form of highlighting human uniqueness. His argument goes like this. If intelligent machines threaten human uniqueness, they do not thereby threaten human dignity. Human dignity does not consist in the possession of distinctive characteristics, and does not require us to posit human uniqueness. The reason why we should be concerned about human dignity, rather than human uniqueness, is because the philosophy undergirding AI is prone to downgrading human dignity. It is the philosophy of naturalism. For naturalism, what is matter is matter only, so human beings are mere matter. For Christians, human dignity properly consists in the fact that we are not mere matter. This reality shapes our human vocation; that vocation is the stamp of our God-given dignity; and we are not robbed of our dignity by the possibility that we cannot specify characteristics, such as our intelligence, that make us unique.

Song's observations on the naturalistic assumptions characterizing philosophies which typically undergird AI are well taken, but we must demur from his conclusion. Granted, we should not operate *a priori* with a rather abstract or untested presumption that human dignity is only protected as long as we protect human uniqueness. However, when we read in Genesis of humankind made in the image of God, we read of that wherein it is unique, and if we import the language of dignity in order to do theological work in connection with this unique order, must not human dignity either reside in or include what uniquely character-

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8 There are important practical questions about the relation of AI to disability. In correspondence, I have learned of the difficulty that can be encountered in AI-powered interviews when an applicant with disability is judged to have fallen short in the areas of eye contact or vocal enthusiasm. AI algorithms may be so devised that no account is taken of this, even though the law requires that reasonable accommodation should be made for applicants with disability.

9 Quoted in Noreen Herzfeld, *In Our Image: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), p. 4.

10 'Robots, AI and human uniqueness: learning what not to fear', in John Wyatt & Stephen N. Williams, *The Robot Will See You Now: Artificial Intelligence and the Christian Faith* (London: SPCK, 2021), pp. 107-20.

izes human being.[11] ('Include' simply takes into account features humans share with the animal and even wider creation.) Robert Song takes Genesis seriously for theology today. If so, unless AI possesses the capacity to be in the image of God – or, more cautiously, at least partakes of whatever it is about the image which marks out human uniqueness – human uniqueness is ingredient in human dignity.[12]

Does or can AI possess or partake of that capacity? It neither does nor can. To get at why not, I refer to an early theological engagement with AI, where Noreen Herzfeld addressed the question of what has driven people to create it.[13] Herzfeld described its goal as being 'to create an "other" in our own image' (ix). She detected parallels between the major historical interpretations of the image of God and the reasons for creating AI in the image of humans. Three such historical interpretations were identified: the image of God has been understood as something (a) substantial - humans are intelligent or rational, (b) functional - the gift and responsibility of dominion, or (c) relational – in regard both to God and to others. In devising AI in the image of humans, the substantial, functional and relational have all featured: we have sought to make AI (a) with the property of intelligence - the substantial aspect, or (b) capable of performing certain tasks - the functional aspect, or (c) to which we can relate and perhaps can relate to us - the relational aspect. (Some combination of the three is possible.) Herzfeld returned briefly to this in a recent volume, where she characterized the creation of AI in our image in corresponding terms of 'mirror', or 'servant', or 'friend'.[14]

This is an instructive thesis, but there is also an instructive omission. Omitted is a fourth view of the image that has been historically influential, one espoused by many in the Protestant tradition, though present in the early church. It interprets the image as a moral quality, a moral

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[11] For an attempt to connect image and dignity, see John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, Mi/Cambridge: 2015), especially Part II. Those who believe that humans have forfeited the image can still accept the substance of all that I argue, although they will reformulate some sentences. So, most recently, Brian Brock, *Joining Creation's Praise: A Theological Ethic of Creatureliness* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, Mi: 2025), chapter 4.

[12] We are concerned only with the connection between human uniqueness and human dignity germane to human vocation on earth. The question of what the connection would look like if we compared humans to angels or to hypothetical forms of extra-terrestrial intelligence is not on the table.

[13] See above, n.10.

[14] *The Artifice of Intelligence: Divine and Human Relationship in a Robotic Age* (Minneapolis, Mi: Fortress, 2023), p. 9.

excellence: to be in the image of God is to be righteous, so it is a moral quality suffused with religious substance. Unfortunately, others writing on AI have followed Herzfeld.[15] What is interesting is less the fact than the significance of this omission in her account. Had she reckoned with this fourth view, she would not readily have found a parallel with the creation of AI in the image of humankind. True, there is talk of moral AI and of religious AI, but the production of an intelligence for the sake of moral excellence *coram Deo* has not motivated or driven the creation of AI. That is the case even where creators of AI incorporate an essential moral component into the substance of its intelligence, the exercise of its tasks, or its relational aptitude.

Whether or not any of these four ways is actually true to Genesis or Scripture more widely, the generic capacity for religious relationship with God, which God has established in the human creature, and in which moral agency is embedded, is biblically and theologically at the heart of the dignity of humans made in the divine image. Such a capacity is clearly not essential to AI, but why pronounce that its acquisition not even possible? Christianity views the religious relationship between God and humans in both generic and in particular terms: generic, in that humankind is constituted for that relationship; particular, in that the relationship of discrete individuals to God is constituted variously, and variously incorporated into the history of humankind. Humankind is incapable of creating AI that has this relationship. It does not have a clue how it could be done generically, has no control over the relationship into which God enters with any particular being, and cannot integrate AI into a corporate religious history.

Question: if a relationship with God of the kind humans enjoy cannot be engineered, could not God, to the best of our knowledge, sovereignly enter into a relationship with products of the human hand which may closely resemble his relationship with humans? Discussion of this question has to negotiate the hurdle of AI consciousness. Is there a theological stake in discussion of the possibility of AI consciousness? Not necessarily. The possibility of AI possessing some form of consciousness is rather a matter for neuroscience or philosophy than for theology. Indeed, if we thought that AI consciousness could or was likely to come about, we should have to reckon theologically with that, in the same way that we reckon theologically with anything scientifically learned or technologi-

[15] So in the most recent theological treatment of AI, Ximian Xu, *The Digitalised Image of God: Artificial Intelligence, Liturgy, and Ethics* (New York, NY/Abingdon: Routledge, 2025), pp. 18-25. In contrast, throughout *Dignity and Destiny*, Kilner identifies the four views.

cally devised. But Donald Mackay, one-time Research Professor of Communication and Neuroscience in the University of Keele, was surely right to deny that we are directly committed theologically to a position on the possibility of AI consciousness.[16] This is not to presume brightly that it is intellectually open season as regards the possibility of conscious AI. It is a question of the grounds on which we come to our conclusions. In a parallel way, Christian faith does not directly commit us to a belief that the earth orbits the sun, but Christians will not for that reason regard it as an open question.

However, even if theology does not directly outlaw the possibility of AI consciousness, I have claimed that it denies the possibility that any such hypothetical consciousness could replicate or significantly resemble that of humans created in the image of God. Admittedly, when public life is in view, we might wonder if Christians can afford the luxury of being non-committal on AI consciousness in general, while restricting its possible forms. Should robots or electronic persons acquire political and legal rights? If the church aspires to contribute to public discussion of this question, must it not form a theological opinion on the possibility of AI consciousness in general? Again, not necessarily. Robot rights are discussed against the backdrop of human rights, and human rights are the rights of beings made in the image of God. Christians will thus have their own reasons for denying that robots can be accorded social and political rights in a way redolent of human rights. They may also have non-religious natural-scientific, social-scientific, ethical, or philosophical reasons for reaching conclusions on the matter of robot rights, and advance them in the public square. I conclude – rather tentatively - that there is no specifically theological stake in the possibility of some form of AI consciousness.

CHANGING THE ANGLE

We have broached the question of AI consciousness on the back of the question of the image of God. Should this whole discussion not have been aborted at take-off by observing that Christians should agree with secular thinkers who insist that consciousness is essentially embodied? Noreen Herzfeld is a good example of those who incorporate non-religious thought into their reasoning here. A chapter in *The Artifice of Intelligence* on 'Why We Need Bodies' treats the difficulty of uploading a mind onto

[16] Donald M. Mackay, *Brains, Machines, and Persons* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Eerdmans, 1980), pp. 62-65. Mackay talked in terms of a 'biblical' commitment, but that seems to comprise a 'theological' commitment.

a computer. Brains are more than neurons; the brain is only part of our neurological system; the enteric system (the gut), with its multitude of neurons, has been called 'a second brain'. There are scientific difficulties with the idea that brain can be so dissociated from the rest of the body as to enable a computer simulation of mind. She also talks about the spirituality of the body in relationships, the importance of face or of touch, and the psychology of non-relational isolation.

While theologians properly invoke all this, a degree of caution is in order when agreeing that anything resembling human intelligence is essentially embodied. The apostle Paul envisaged a transformation of the physical into a spiritual body, one not constituted of flesh and blood, and countered scepticism about the resurrection by emphasizing the discontinuity between the present and future forms of human embodiment (1 Corinthians 15:35-50).[17] Being human does not entail having flesh and blood. Yet, eschatological embodiment is not *creatio ex nihilo*. Its possibility is the possibility of succession to and mysterious connection with our earthly bodies composed of flesh and blood. Accordingly, if the eschatological prospect shows that human intelligence is not necessarily embodied in the form of flesh and blood, that does not *per se* establish the possibility of a positive connection between human intelligence and AI. AI does not manifest a form of eschatological succession to the temporal.

AI brings to distinctive expression the widespread Western cultural supposition that humankind is not essentially religious, that is, constituted in its very being in relation to God. AI is undergirded by two salient beliefs. One is that, if we describe humankind in biological or, species terms, *homo sapiens sapiens* is not, scientifically speaking, essentially religious, despite its contingent religious evolutionary history. The other is that an intelligence which is not essentially religious is not for that reason lacking in some desideratum. These two beliefs have important consequence for those who think in terms of higher and lower, superior and inferior forms of being. In theological perspective, if these terms are accepted, AI would here count as a lower form of created entity than the human, constitutionally related to God in its unique way. This judgement applies to enhanced humans too, and to the transhumanist project, just as long as religious existence is regarded as something just contingent.

To say that what is at theological stake in reckoning with AI is the significance of humankind in the image of God may be trite, but we are surely in danger of minimising its significance. It is a significance

[17] In speaking about our future spiritual bodies, Paul never indicates the pre-ascension resurrected body of Christ, where there is a continuity between his earthly flesh and blood and resurrected body.

more effectively shown than said, or most effectively said only when first shown. In his impressive adumbration of inter-personal neurobiology, Dan Siegel forcefully expounds the nature of mind, laying out scientifically 'the interconnections among the body and its brain, the mind, and our relationships with people and the planet'.[18] He demonstrates how the human brain is wired to human community. If the church is the divinely ordered optimal form of earthly human community, then must we not conclude that the human brain is wired to the church? At first blush, the question, let alone a positive answer, registers somewhere on the scale of risible to preposterous. Let the blush be spared. A positive answer is just a specific, considered application of inter-personal scientific neuro-biology. However, until this proposition about the church is undergirded by its existing and visible reality, set in a biblical mould, it will indeed loll about comfortably in the domain of the risible or preposterous.

Here, in the context of AI, we are sounding a wearily familiar ecclesiological note. The religious formation off Descartes is instructive here. Descartes is a rewarding figure to study in connection with AI.[19] His whole century is stacked with intellectual background to AI, featuring Thomas Hobbes, the 'grandfather of AI', credited with 'prophetically launching' it, Gottfried Leibniz, 'the patron saint of cybernetics', and John Locke, who scared the living daylights out of orthodox Christians by asking whether or not God could attach to matter the power of thought.[20] If Descartes belongs to their century, he seems not to belong to their company: for him, mind is immaterial, and what is material does not have the power of thought and cognition. His dualism seems antithetical to AI. However, not one respondent to the work in which he set out this position most influentially, the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, was convinced by his

[18] Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY/London: Guilford, 2020), p. 6.

[19] I have attempted a superficial and preliminary account in 'Artificial Intelligence in the Shadow of Descartes', in *Faith and Thought*, 77 (2024), pp. 3-19.

[20] For Hobbes, see John Haugeland, *Artificial Intelligence: The Very Idea* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989), p. 23; for Leibniz, see Norbert Wiener, *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* (Cambridge, Mass: Technology Press, 1948), p. 20; for Locke, see *An Essay on Human Understanding*, ed., P. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), IV.3.6. For contemporary relevance of the connection between cybernetics and AI, see the introduction in John Brockman, ed., *Possible Minds: 25 Ways of Looking at AI* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2019).

arguments.[21] So vigorously did he expound a redoubtable, uncompromising, and austere mechanicity in relation to the human body that his critics found inexplicable the exemption of mind from such a comprehensive materialist account set out on the terms that he did. The impetus which Descartes gave to the 'machine-mindedness' which informs AI is arguably second to none in modern philosophy.[22]

Our ecclesiological interest lies in remarks which Descartes makes in what has been regarded as the founding document of modern philosophy, usually referred to under the abbreviated title of *Discourse on Method*.[23] Here, he provides an account of how he prosecuted his intellectual enterprise. Dissatisfied with his intellectual training, he appointed reason to be his guide in a long search for truth, which famously proceeded by razing to the ground any philosophical edifice not built on the presumption of universal doubt. While a house is being re-built, Descartes reminds us, its occupant must live somewhere. Accordingly, he resolved to live by a provisional moral code, suited to a 'place where you can live comfortably while building is in progress' (122). Comfort matters. The first rule in a code he devised for the maximization of happiness is to 'obey the law and customs of my country, holding constantly to the religion in which by God's grace I had been instructed from my childhood…'

Well, Descartes was nurtured in the faith of the (Catholic) Church. The religion in which he was instructed, and the code inculcated into him from childhood, should accordingly have been grounded in the truth that the human individual at core is constituted as an embodied being-in-relationship, fulfilled in love. It is a religion and code that should have been transmitted by example, and not just by precept. Had this been done, Descartes would both have experienced as existential reality and held provisionally as a theological tenet that humans are destined not for individual self-possession, but for relationships and love. Of course, once embarked on the philosophical seas, he might have chucked it all

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21 See in John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, trs., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, volume 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

22 'Machine-mindedness' is a central preoccupation in Iain McGilchrist's monumental study of *The Matter With Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmasking of the World*, 2 vols, (London: Perspectiva, 2022). Descartes is prominent here, as he was in McGilchrist's earlier *The Master and his Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven, Ct/London: Yale University Press, 2012).

23 See in John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, trs., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, volume 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

overboard, or, to stick to his terrestrial analogy, torn down his temporary ecclesial abode and provisional religious scheme. Who knows? What we do know is that his provisional code did not incorporate ecclesiology or ecclesial life.[24] The barren ecclesial design of his temporary abode was scarcely crafted in a community of love.

We might boldly venture a further connection between theology, Descartes and AI. The most comprehensive contemporary resource for adjudging AI in a wider, civilizational context is provided by two books authored by Iain McGilchrist: *The Master and His Emissary*, and *The Matter with Things*.[25] McGilchrist's thesis is that the two hemispheres of the brain approach the world differently, approaching it properly only when the left, which is analytic and piecemeal in its approach, plays servant to the right, which should be incorporating the findings of the left into its own integrative, intuitive, whole-picture approach. Unfortunately, the left has usurped the right, the emissary the master, with the result that our world-view is being dramatically misshapen. This role-reversal means that we take for reality what is really the left hemisphere's distorted take on reality. Consequently, our civilization is under serious threat.

Descartes is omnipresent in McGilchrist's work. It is hard to exaggerate much the significance and prominence of his profile. He is the only philosopher mentioned in the 'Introduction' of *The Master and His Emissary*, which sets out the neuroscientific thesis advanced in bot volumes, and the first major one to be introduced in its first chapter. Things take a dramatic turn when McGilchrist cites David Levin's comments on the passage in Descartes where Descartes supposes that, when he looks out of the window and sees people crossing the square, he sees only 'hats and coats which could conceal automatons. I *judge* that they are men.'[26] In both his works, McGilchrist is keenly interested in schizophrenia and madness. Levin comments: 'What could be a greater symptom of madness than to look out of one's window and see (what might, for all one knows, be) machines, instead of real people?...This kind of vision is what the rationality he [Descartes] has embraced leads to.'[27] Influenced by the work of Louis Sass, McGilchrist capitalizes on the connection between

[24] We might infer that from some other features in his provisional code too; see *Discourse*, pp. 123-24.

[25] See footnote 23.

[26] So Descartes in his second *Meditation*, p. 21.

[27] *The Master*, p. 333. McGilchrist alludes to this passage again on p. 439. In *The Matter with Things*, this passage in Descartes turns up in the account of 'Zombies', pp. 1113-14.

Cartesian and schizophrenic ways of thinking.[28] Reason is rooted in the body. Descartes' reason is apparently not. Descartes is not sure whether he has a body at all.[29] Meanwhile, Descartes espouses a rationality surpassed in its kind only by the Vienna Circle, which came into existence less than a generation before AI, and whose approach to reason had some early influence on it.[30]

Theologians are no more expert on schizophrenia or madness than they are on general neuroscience or inter-personal neurobiology, but the calamity of human delusion and its ultimate technological end is suggestively described in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Nothing was amiss in Eve's perception that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was good for food and a delight to the eyes, but delusion set in when she thought she 'saw' that its fruit was to be desired to make her flourish in wisdom (3:6). Pathologically, sustained delusions can take the form of insanity. The story of Genesis 1-11 is the story of dominion gone awry, culminating in the edifice of Babel, product of the twin fear of dispersal and ambition to make a name (11:4). Commenting on this passage, von Rad remarked that the pride which seeks fame, and, alongside it anxiety, constitute 'the basic forces of what we call culture'.[31] Claus Westermann observed that 'the building of a massive structure that presumes definite technical discoveries and mathematical skills, as well as the common will of a group of people who think it necessary to erect this building… in essence anticipates the possibility of a development that would be realized only in the technical age in a way that would affect the whole

[28] McGilchrist first introduces this connection in *The Master*, pp. 332-35, though he does not say that Descartes had schizophrenia. His quarry is especially, but not only, *Sass, Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought*, revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), although this revised edition appeared between the publication of *The Master and The Matter With Things*. In 2019, McGilchrist added a substantial preface to his own volume.

[29] *The Master*, p. 333.

[30] McGilchrist follows Stephen Toulmin here, p. 391, although the link with AI is not explicitly made. However, in the work which McGilchrist cites, among those whom Toulmin mentions in connection with Descartes is Rudolf Carnap; see Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 154. In what is the most widely-used English text-book on AI, the authors, after referring to the Vienna Circle, describe Carnap's *The Logical Structure of the World* (1928) as 'perhaps the first theory of mind as a computational process'; so Stuart Russell and Peter Norvig, *Artificial Intelligence: A Modern Approach*, 4th ed. (Harlow: Pearson, 2022), p. 25.

[31] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1961), p. 145.

of humanity.'[32] There is a number of verbal parallels in Hebrew between the Babel account and the second and third chapters of Genesis, which recount the story of Adam and Eve.[33] Should we not think of Babel as the social and collective expression of the personal and individual insanity which afflicted the parents of the human race?

What has this to do with AI? Genesis 3-11 invites us to reflect on the associated escalations of delusion and power, and we surely cannot avoid asking if AI can be situated within that reflection. To ask it is not to be tacitly committed to an apocalyptic take on AI.[34] It is a question which arises naturally when advanced intelligence is created without acknowledgement of a Creator. Does AI belong in the Babel syndrome?

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this article, I discounted any ambition to provide a balanced theological assessment of AI. Neither have I dwelt on its merits, nor attempted a constructive response, beyond a stratospherically general and perhaps unprepossessingly beige appeal to the life of the church. Perhaps every novel challenge for theology is fundamentally the challenge to shed new light on Christological truth. If there is an inspiration here in relation to AI, Teilhard de Chardin deserves special mention, 'an iconic figure amongst computer scientists and entrepreneurs'.[35] We may reject Teilhard's theology, but our sights should not be set lower than his when he studiously crafted a Christology apt for the reality of evolutionary development.[36] Teilhard's innovative and visionary Christology was the product equally of religious piety and of science. The wide scope of his vision has been compared with that of the Leibniz, whose role in the story of AI has often been noted.[37] Leibniz tried to think through the nature of

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[32] Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, Minn: Augsburg, 1984), p. 554.

[33] See, e.g., Kenneth A. Mathews in his commentary on the relevant passages in *Genesis 1-11:26* (Nashville, Tn: Broadman & Holman, 1995). 'The attempt of the Babelites to transgress human limits is reminiscent of Eve's ambition (3:5-6)', p. 467. Reminiscent of her delusion too, we might add.

[34] For this take on AI, see Robert Geraci, *Apocalyptic AI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[35] So George Zarkadakis, *In Our Own Image: Will Artificial Intelligence Save Or Destroy Us?* (London: Rider, 2015), p. 245. See also pp. 126-27.

[36] See, e.g., *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1976).

[37] For comparison, see Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), p. 410. Also, in general, C. A. van Peursen, *Leibniz* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), p. 25.

mind and of Christology in tandem.[38] In the event, we may not receive much substantively from Leibniz, and exploration of Teilhard's route may be instructive principally as a healthy stimulus to follow an alternative. Still, as we grapple with AI and Christology and the (loosely speaking) modernity of our day, we should remember our precursors' sensibility for locating on a wide canvas what is at theological stake. Global events featuring AI may prove that this is an example of theology idling, a worry flagged up at the beginning of the article. But as long as we train our sights on the question of AI and what it is to be human, we at least assume a point of view from which both the wider phenomenon and the manifold applications of AI are optimally visible.

[38] See Maria Rosa Antognazza, *Leibniz on the Trinity and the Incarnation: Reason and Revelation in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, Ct/London: Yale University Press, 2007), chapter 3.

REVIEWS

The Genevan Réveil in International Perspective. Edited by Jean D. Decorver, Tim Grass, and Kenneth J. Stewart. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2023. ISBN: 978-1-7252-5654-5. xxi + 544pp. £53.00.

The *Réveil* ('awakening') was a movement of evangelical revival on the European Continent in the early nineteenth century, commencing in the Swiss city of Geneva. The collection successfully establishes that the movement was larger in origin than the famous Bible study through Romans led by the Scottish preacher Robert Haldane at his Genevan lodgings in 1816. In fact, the early traces of the movement were evident from around 1810, and its significance went far beyond the small but impressive group of students who gathered around Haldane and were immediately shaped by his exegesis. Essays in this collection trace the influence of the *Réveil* extending throughout the francophone sphere, even as far as the migrants of Canada and the mission field of Lesotho, into the Low Countries, and into the German- and English-speaking worlds also. Prominent individual writers from the movement, such as Louis Gaussen and J. H. Merle d'Aubigné, have left a permanent mark in evangelical literature, and institutions, both denominational and educational, established as products of the movement, endure.

This work is therefore a treasure trove of research and insight into the global spread of evangelicalism during the nineteenth century. The editors have done a sterling job of assembling specialist scholars representative of the different countries and languages in which the *Réveil* was influential, and the resulting collection is diverse in expertise and approach, but impressive in consistency of calibre.

The contributors recognise a diversity of factors behind the movement. It was, of course, a movement permitted politically by the new liberty, both civic and religious, enjoyed by the city of Geneva in the post-Napoleonic settlement of Europe. Intellectually, it followed the Enlightenment and could not but be influenced by that movement. But it was also inspired by Geneva's heritage as a centre of Reformed theology and ecclesiology in the sixteenth century under the ministry of Calvin, though Decorver notes that 'the revivalists addressed themselves primarily to the individual and not to society as Calvin did…[,] an ideological anchoring in the "psychology of the individual" proper to modernity' (p. 17). Olaf Blaschke similarly sees the period as a time of rediscovery, calling the early nineteenth century 'a second confessional age', 'a time of strong renewal of Protestant and Catholic communal identity' (summarised by Sarah Scholl, p. 496). His reference is to Germany, but the parallels with the *Réveil* in Switzer-

land, and with concurrent movements elsewhere, such as the resurgence of Scottish evangelicalism under Thomas Chalmers, are apparent.

The *Réveil* was, of course, far from welcome to the established institutions of Continental Protestantism, which were dominated by a rather moralistic Enlightenment liberalism. The Genevan Company of Pastors' clumsy attempt to restrict the doctrines which preachers could discuss in the pulpit made separation inevitable. The result, in the development of independent churches such as Cesar Malan's Chapelle du Témoignage, and eventually of wider denominational structures such as the Église Libre, brought a welcome diversity in religious provision to Geneva, and later to France itself. Fascinatingly, Malan's ongoing ministerial status was provided by a Scottish denomination, the United Associate Synod of the Secession Church (pp. 16–17). Another intriguing institutional connection is with the establishment of the Red Cross in Geneva in 1863, at the instigation of the Calvinist author Henri Dunant, a son and convert of the *Réveil*, who would later receive the first Nobel Peace Prize in honour of his work (pp.447–53).

It may seem invidious to highlight individual contributions in reviewing such a fine collection but readers will particularly appreciate Kenneth J. Stewart's discussion of the influence of the *Réveil* in the English-speaking world. This, as he shows, went far beyond Malan's preaching tours and the popularity of Merle d'Aubigné's *History of the Reformation*, both of which helped to stimulate the concurrent evangelical revival in Scotland. The Monods and Neff were celebrated in America, and the churches of the *Réveil* helped to found the Evangelical Alliance and the World Presbyterian Alliance (pp. 162–75).

Unquestionably one of the most valuable contributions is a closing chapter of reflection on the movement by French systematic theologian Henri Blocher, a self-described 'heir of the so-called Genevan Réveil' (p. 501). He considers that divisions weakened the *Réveil*, especially the movements associated with Irving and Darby, preventing it from fulfilling its full potential. Nonetheless, it was a movement deeply interested in history, shaped by fresh scholarship rediscovering Continental Europe's Protestant heritage, and considering itself therefore, even in its very name, as an awakening from a slumber of inactivity to fresh ardour in piety in emulation of these forebears (pp. 501–9). He concludes thoughtfully: 'The God of the *Réveil* is the God of men and women, such as those whom this book brings to life, who *allow themselves to be awakened*' (p. 509, italics in original).

It is, of course, no deficiency in this collection that it provokes further questions to explore for the future. To what extent was the early-nineteenth-century revival of evangelicalism a rejection of the values of the

Enlightenment? What relationship did it bear to the wider cultural movement of Romanticism? One vital question is offered by Decorver himself, quoting Savart: 'To what extent was the *Réveil* an innovative movement' (p. 24)? To what extent is the more liberal and ecumenical evangelicalism that predominates today a legitimate child of the *Réveil*? Perhaps above all, why did the francophone world overall remain so stubbornly wedded to Roman Catholicism, despite the vitality of the *Réveil*? Such questions invite further study and discussion. This work is highly recommended to all with an interest in nineteenth-century church history, and especially in the development of evangelical Protestantism. The editors and contributors are to be congratulated on a fine and lasting scholarly achievement.

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Introduction to Theological French. By Damon Di Mauro. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2025. ISBN: 978-1-60899-074-0. v + 536pp. £42.00.

For much of the last century, theological scholarship in English-speaking academies has prioritised German as the essential modern theological language, to be studied after the the primary biblical languages and Latin. This focus is understandable, owing to the towering influence of figures such as Martin Luther, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, and Rudolf Bultmann. However, this the prevalence of German has led to a curious neglect of Europe's other great theological language: French. This oversight is particularly striking given the historical importance of writers like Jean Calvin, Théodore de Bèze, Henri de Lubac, and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. To suggest that the French language deserves greater support and appreciation is not to diminish the importance of German. Rather, it is to recognise that the scarcity of resources for French reflects a lack of attention, not a lack of significance. Damon Di Mauro's *Introduction to Theological French* offers one step in the right direction to redress this situation.

Prior to this publication, the most significant manual for learning French for students of theology was K. Janet Ritch's Reading French for Students of Religion and Theology (Clements, 2006). While a useful introduction, it was primarily concerned with the single skill noted in the title: reading. Ritch's book, useful as it was, is also limited by its stated focus on the Canadian context and its prohibitive price tag of nearly £200. Moreover, there have been significant advances in second-language acquisition and applied linguistics in the past two decades, which have reshaped the pedagogy of language learning. Di Mauro's new book has ably filled this gap, offering a more integrated, holistic approach to theological French that engages skills beyond mere translation.

After a succinct preface that sets out the method and scope, Di Mauro leads his readers through French prosody. He then builds lessons around mastering key verbs (e.g., *être, avoir, aller, faire*), integrating other aspects of grammar such as nouns, adjectives, and prepositions into chapters organised around these verbs. As expected for a language manual, the book builds on the vocabulary learned in previous chapters, and Di Mauro assumes that the student will have mastered the concepts in each chapter before moving to the next. In a world of language-learning apps engineered to deliver dopamine hits for maintaining a 'streak' or earning digital gems of no actual value, Di Mauro offers a more traditional approach, insisting there is no substitute for the hard work of steadily learning vocabulary and mastering grammatical concepts. Furthermore, despite the difficulty of French prosody and pronunciation for English speakers, Di Mauro reminds the reader that 'the good news... is that two-fifths of their vocabulary comes directly from French' (p. x). Di Mauro is adept at helping English speakers to make connections to cognates through contextual learning, which makes acquiring vocabulary intuitive.

The book's traditional approach is anything but dry. Di Mauro's clear enthusiasm for the subject is evident in the book's integrative pedagogy: from chapter three onwards, contrived exercises give way to authentic theological texts that illustrate the grammar being taught (sometimes lightly edited). This allows learners to engage with the source material early in their learning journey. The selection of these examples aptly demonstrates the breadth of theological French, using texts from Catholic (e.g., the Ave Maria and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet) and Protestant (e.g., Jean Calvin and *La Confession de la Rochelle*) traditions, as well as devotional texts and songs (e.g., *Il est né, le divin enfant*). Accompanied by historical notes, these readings do more than illustrate grammar; they showcase the variety and beauty of French theological expression, offering the reader ample motivation to persevere with the hard graft of language learning.

The book would make a good foundation for a college course in theological French, but is also well suited to individual study. Broken into 21 chapters, the book provides a comprehensive introduction to French that will provide a competence for further forays into French theological texts. The chapters are dense, and at two chapters a week, they could form the basis of an accelerated semester course, though but the books is, possibly, better suited to being spread over a year.

For those using the book for independent study, Di Mauro explains pronunciation using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). This, of course, is no substitute for the aural experience of the language. To this end, Di Mauro has provided links to recordings on the book's accom-

panying Google Site. The recordings are not overly professional, but are clear and spoken naturally. Unlike some language apps where voices are standardised and smoothed by AI, all the recordings feature a native speaker. The inclusion of these recordings will be of great benefit to those learning individually but would also reinforce what is taught in a classroom setting. The interface the of Google Site is a somewhat fiddly (with each audio file loading in a separate window or tab) but this is a minor issue. The recordings are clearly organised and easy to pair with the relevant sections of the book. While such resources cannot replace face-to-face interaction with a teacher, they provide an invaluable aid for the independent learner.

The first two chapters on pronunciation and prosody are dense and inevitably slow-going. Here, the recordings are especially helpful, because the instructions on how to hold one's mouth and tongue can be difficult to follow; a visual guide might have been helpful. That said, one of the biggest sticking points for English speakers is the French 'r', which he ingeniously introduces by way of the easier-to-pronounce 'g', then transitioning to the French 'r' (p. 8).

Di Mauro is to be thanked for providing an excellent introduction to theological French. This, of course, will be of great interest to students of historical theology, but the book also provides a window into an exciting world of contemporary Francophone theology and biblical studies, where key scholars such as Jean-Daniel Macchi, Christophe Pichon, Anne-Marie Pelletier, Simon Butticaz, and Daniel Marguerat remain only sporadically translated into English. Moreover, another great benefit of French is that, like English, it is an international language, and learning it can provide access to global theologies, especially from African scholars, past and present, such as Jean-Marc Ela, Oscar Bimwenyi-Kweshi, Sœur Josée Ngalula, and Hélène Yinda (to name but a few), whose work often remains untranslated. Ultimately, Introduction to Theological French is a fantastic resource that not only facilitates the acquisition of French, but more importantly, it offers readers an invaluable entry point into the rich world of Francophone theological expression, past and present.

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Paul and Secular Singleness in 1 Corinthians 7. By Barry N. Danylak. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-009-37388-3. xviii + 344pp. £100.00.

The dominant consensus for the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7 has been that Paul responded to a form of sexual asceticism (p.1-2). Barry

Danylak argues that the main issue in 1 Corinthians 7 was an Epicurean form of libertine promiscuity among the Corinthians in their desire to remain unmarried. The common approach, i.e., through 'a strictly Stoic-Cynic caricature,' Danylak argues, does not account for the nuances of Paul's discussion (p.2-3, 270). His analysis shows Epicurean influence in the Corinthian church and demonstrates Epicurean elements in 1 Corinthians 7. The main point at issue is 7:1b that 'it is good for a man not to touch a woman,' whether or not Paul was quoting the Corinthians (p.1). Danylak shows that the question of marriage was based on three factors: availability, feasibility, and desirability (p.38-9). He discusses the cultural context in the first two chapters, examining the ratio of men to women (availability), and mid-first century economic struggles (feasibility), and various experiences of pressure to remain single or marry (desirability). He applies his analysis to 1 Corinthians 7 in its historical, social, and textual context. From these points Danylak argues that the Corinthians were heavily influenced by Epicurean ideas to reject marriage and to utilise the local brothels for their sexual urges. Thus, Paul responded by supporting singleness (in agreement with Epicureanism), and commanding sexual chastity (in contrast to Epicureanism).

Danylak sketches the demographic context of first-century Corinth, showing that it was disproportionately dominated by single men (p.41-2). He synthesises three sources of data: epigraphic inscriptions in cemeteries, skeletal remains, and the Egyptian census returns from 'a body of about 300 census declarations, dating from 12 CE to 259 CE' (p.47). From these sources Danylak confirms that Roman urban settings were male dominated. Thus, the target demographic target of the prostitution industry was high for the prostitution industry was high (p.84-5), and divorced or widowed women were pressured to remarry (p.83). With such a social context, it follows that the availability factor, at least for men, favoured remaining single.

Danylak then discusses the desirability factor of marriage, i.e., 'whether a man was better off with or without a wife' (p.88). Beginning with the earliest textual examples, Danylak demonstrates the near unanimous preference for singleness, while still valuing marriage. The Stoics generally held that marriage was a good thing, but only for those who rationally determined a benefit from a care-giving companion (p.100, 102). Peripatetics and Cynics held that a family caused a distraction from studying philosophy, but the wealthy could benefit (p.102, 109). Danylak notes that available evidence suggests that the Cynic rejection of marriage was drawn from Epicurean thinking (p.109, 119). Danylak thus argues that Epicureanism, uniquely among the philosophical schools, prioritised singleness over marriage and developed a systematic philosophy around

such teachings. Philodemus argued that wives rarely 'provide a net benefit' for the man and would complicate achieving happiness (p.124-7; cf. Oec. 2.21-35). Lucretius showcased the dangers of erotic attachment that consumes a man (p.129-33). Thus, the notion of rejecting marriage was primarily an Epicurean idea. Danylak then shows the significant evidence that Epicureanism was prominent in first-century Corinth (p.135-40). Thus, it follows that the Corinthian Christians, desiring to remain single, were influenced by Epicureanism.

The remainder of the book connects the above analysis to 1 Corinthians 7. The purpose of chapter four is to look at the two topical phrases, διὰ τὰς πορνείας (7:2) and διὰ τὴν ἐνεστῶσαν ἀνάγκην (7:26) in context with the whole epistle. Danylak questions whether 7:1b ('it is good for a man not to touch a woman') is Paul's statement, or a quote from the Corinthian correspondence. Through analysing Greek epistolary literature and Paul's other quotations of the Corinthians (e.g. 6:12; 8:1, 4; 10:23; 15:12), Danylak argues that this statement was Paul's statement (p.190-1). The immorality of 7:2 and the 'crisis' of 7:26 are important factors for the Epicurean views on marriage in Corinth. For single men, there were few marriage options, and rampant prostitution (p.169-74). The 'crisis' of 7:26 is likely one of the many Corinthian famines (p.185-9). Thus, for many Corinthian men, marriage was neither available, feasible, nor desirable. This explains why Paul focused on the problems of utilizing prostitutes in 6:12-20, right before his statement about not touching women.

Danylak then analyses the four 'it is good' statements (7:1, 8, 26, 40) that shape Paul's rhetoric. He says the statement in 7:26 is the 'direct quotation from the Corinthian letter' whereas the others are Paul's adaptations (p.196, 203). Paul critiqued the Epicurean freedom for extra-marital sexual release, while affirming the Epicurean idea that happiness can be found 'apart from the conventional paths of family, rank, and status in the Roman world' (p.205). Thus, Paul is able both to agree and disagree with the Corinthian Epicureanism; it is good to remain single, but also sexually chaste (p.210). In addition, the adaptation of the quote in 7:40 applies the same 'good' to women (p.267). Thus, Paul empowers women to reject the pressure to marry.

Chapter six demonstrates how the above analyses work together in the passage. Danylak shows Paul's creative engagement with the Corinthians' Epicureanism. Paul sometimes condemns it (6:12-20) and other times affirms it (7:1, 26; p.216). Danylak shows that the Epicurean notion that marriage and erotic attachment lead to problems (cf. DRN 4.1063-67) as well as 'domestic anxieties' (cf. Luke 10:41) is another point that Paul affirms (p.255). This affirmation comes with a utilitarian caveat, i.e., this freedom is for serving the Lord (7:32-4). 'Thus, while Paul corrects

[the Corinthians'] Epicurean assumptions regarding appropriate sexual behaviour among the unmarried early in his response (7:1-7) . . . Paul resonates with an Epicurean perspective on marriage' (p.281).

Danylak thoroughly analyses and meticulously argues his case. He engages with these questions, showing that the Epicurean context solves problems with general scholarly consensus. He critically develops Norman DeWitt's thesis, i.e., that Paul's corpus is saturated with Epicureanism. Danylak rightly pushes back on the problematic extent to which DeWitt argued for this, but shows that there is legitimacy to recognising Epicureanism in Paul's writings. Thus, Danylak's study is an excellent contribution to scholarship both of New Testament studies and early Christian engagement with Epicureanism.

The scholarly neglect of Epicurean presence and influence among the early Christian communities is an unfortunate reality that Danylak's study aims to rectify. It promotes new areas of research for a better understanding of early Christianity and Paul's teachings on marriage and singleness.

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The Kingdom of God Is Among You: Lectures to My Students on New Testament Theology. By Gordon D. Fee and Cherith Fee Nordling. Eugene: Cascade Books, 2025. ISBN: 978-1-6667-3292-4. xviii + 376pp. £34.00.

Gordon D. Fee was a renowned New Testament scholar whose works, including handbooks on biblical interpretation, commentaries, and monographs, are widely popular among evangelical circles and beyond. He excelled at making New Testament theology accessible to scholars, leaders, and laypeople who seek to engage with scholarly works from a faith-based perspective.

This latest book, *The Kingdom of God Is Among You: Lectures to My Students on New Testament Theology*, is a posthumous work based on Fee's lectures on New Testament theology at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. The lectures are organised and edited by Fee's daughter, Cherith Fee Nordling, a distinguished theologian. The editorial work is appreciated for shaping the lectures into a coherent narrative. Cherith notes that Fee's lectures invite readers to experience the love of the Triune God and to be transformed as a community of co-heirs with Jesus of Nazareth.

The book is a brilliant compendium of New Testament theology and contributes to New Testament studies by offering a nuanced exploration of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments through the lens of inaugurated eschatology. It brings out the significance of the Holy

Spirit and Christ's resurrection in fulfilling the new covenant, providing a framework that integrates theological concepts within a lived, 'already and not yet' experience of God's kingdom. The book enriches our understanding of an inaugurated eschatology, being in the radical middle, and ecclesiology and ethics, offering a profound and pastoral perspective that engages readers with the practical and transformative aspects of Scripture.

The book is divided into five segments, each beginning with a prayer. In Chapter 1, Fee addresses the relationship between the Old and New Testaments in the context of New Testament theology, focusing on the questions of continuity and discontinuity between them and other challenges. The book seeks to discover a theological method that maintains the distinct contributions of each testament, a crucial task in doing biblical theology. Theologically, Fee puts this unity and diversity of the New Testament books, with God the Holy Spirit as the ultimate source, a subject he has profoundly built upon previous works like *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (1994).

Chapters 2 and 3 explore New Testament theology through the concept of the new covenant as fulfilled by the role of Christ and the Spirit's work. This is central to understanding the continuity between the Testaments, an intertextual moment. The promise of the new covenant anticipated in the Old Testament, is exemplified in the lives of early Christians through Paul's writings and Luke's gospel. The new covenant realised in Christ Jesus now presents an inaugurated eschatology, meaning we have already experienced the end's beginning and now await its completion. This theology sees all things consummated in the risen Christ and the Spirit, determining our present existence. With this, Fee suggests that every theological concern in the New Testament be understood within this eschatological framework.

In chapter 4, Fee outlines the eschatological framework by emphasising the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit. Christian existence is lived in the 'already and not yet' of the kingdom of God, inaugurated through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, but not fully consummated. This concept is central to Paul and New Testament theology, which Fee describes as 'Living by the Spirit in the radical middle.' This Pauline theology influences the rest of the New Testament writings. In Christ, the eschatological kingdom is fulfilled yet not fully realised, and this fulfilment is experienced as salvation.

Chapters 5 to 9 unpack how the eschatological kingdom of God shapes our experience of salvation in Christ as eternal life with God, empowered by the Spirit. Fee addresses the human predicament that necessitates salvation in Christ, emphasising it as a cornerstone of New Testament theol-

ogy, understood only through awareness of our sinful state. Salvation in Christ is presented as eschatological: new life from the Father, effected by Christ, and appropriated by the Holy Spirit. This salvation is communal, as God saves individuals to join them to Jesus and his body, connecting them as a people.

Chapters 10 to 12 focus on Christology, examining the image of Jesus with an emphasis on the resurrection as key to revealing his identity. This section develops its argument by examining perspectives from Paul, John, and Hebrews.

From Chapters 13 to 16, Fee discusses God's eschatological people, the church, from the perspective of Jesus and Paul. For Jesus, the inception of God's people lies in his proclamation of the kingdom of God as good news, initiated through his ministry yet not fully realised. This eschatological framework of a beginning yet to be completed reflects Jesus' vision, where God's people are disciples who continue to disciple others, allowing everyone to receive the kingdom's blessings. Paul's understanding of God's people is communal and holy, with discipleship demonstrated in ethical admonitions, suggesting that the ethics of God's kingdom are both a gift and a directive.

With his Pentecostal background and remarkable scholarship, Fee's lectures, edited by Cherith, present a relevant work on New Testament theology. While the editorial contributions add depth, they also provide an additional layer for readers to consider. Furthermore, the book's extensive coverage leads to scattered details and overlapping ideas, reflecting the complexity of New Testament writings and historical realities, which can make it challenging to build a unified framework for readers to follow. Nonetheless, the book serves as a valuable theological meditation: charismatic, pastoral, and reflective of Fee's teaching, preaching, and life. It is a stimulating and enjoyable read, and I recommend it for those seeking a theology that engages deeply with Scripture in real life and encourages readers to recognise Scripture's powerful and radical message that the Kingdom of God conveys.

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Scripture and Literature: A David Jasper Anthology. By David Jasper. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2023. ISBN: 978-1-4813-1958-4. xi + 256pp. $49.99.

As it says on the back cover, 'With Scripture and Literature, David Jasper has compiled forty years of his writings on the relationship between the Bible, literature, and art. These writings are interdisciplinary in nature

and are not the work of a specialist.' This is quite an odd disclaimer, as one might assume that being a specialist in all three things is pretty much impossible. In any case Chapters 2 to 6 are preoccupied with or specialise in the Gospel of Mark (essays from 1982, 2005, 2006, 1990 and 2012). Inspired by Frank Kermode's The Genesis of Secrecy and behind that the ahistorical and literary approach of Austin Farrer, he proffers a store of quotes in a continuation of this tradition. Realism may record, but 'life goes faster than realism, but Romanticism is always in front of life' (Oscar Wilde). If one must talk of the text's having a referent, then it is the Barthian-Kierkegaardian 'present' Jesus. As with all great literature Mark's Gospel is timeless. It is also harsh as in Mk4:12: 'in order that they might not turn', which Matthew softened to 'Because they will not turn'. (C.F.D. Moule refused to countenance that Jesus subscribed to God hardening hearts, he tells us.) Jasper seems unwilling to consider that the hardening of hearts is a topos of the Exodus, long before the Evangelist picked it up. For Jasper, Mark's Gospel is thus 'funny and tragic, infinitely complex and elusive – like life itself' (42). Frei and Tillich join forces in promoting 'imaginative readings' that such an imaginative text deserves, rather than 'worrying away at the facts'.

The fourth essay 'Down through all Christian Minstrelsy' argues for the text finding its own resurrection through having its afterlife in its effect on its readers. This is probably the best essay of the lot. Joyce's Finnegans Wake is postmodern in its love of uniting binaries, which Joyce shared with Blake. But what Jasper claims Joyce shares with the Bible is intriguing. Neither text is to be understood but one is called to participate in (new) being. 'We read Scripture in order to ingest and digest the Word. If that is so, then Joyce is the most deeply biblical of our writers.' (70) His language is that of making things new.

Yet, in contrast to Joyce, Scripture is not above hefty evaluative criticism: 'The Gospel of Mark in which, it seems, tends towards an absolute claim to truth without evidence and without recourse to logical argument.' (77). Yet in the previous chapter Jasper seems to have favoured the idea he associates with Aristotle, that (contra Plato) rhetoric should not be subject to dialectic (logical argument). So which is it? The main example he gives from Mark is the lack of the enthymeme that Matthew used: 'repent for the kingdom of God is at hand'. Possibly because he was writing for Alexandrian Christians, who were already well converted, Mark doesn't argue from the presence of the kingdom to the command to repent. Instead, we are told, Mark just adds a number of other statements: 'the time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand, repent, believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15)'. But if one may quibble, first of all, Matthew's use of 'for' is hardly an enthymeme of classical logic, and second, Mark

by giving a sequence offers the reader if not a chain of logical deduction, at least a sequence of conditions and consequences. Part of the problem is that Jasper is often so much in a rush to make yet another interesting point that he doesn't take the time to show his working. He also finds it oppressive that Jesus spoke with authority (Mk 1:27). 'Here is no Pauline kenosis but a demonic parody of it.' (83) Actually, it is no such thing. Jasper even claims that Jesus was out to humble his precursors thereby displaying unpleasant arrogance and that Mark by failing to put any ironic distance between Jesus and the Truth was out to create a climate of fear as well as darkness and repression: 'which suggests a community founded by a rhetoric of power that both alienates and dictates' (85). If Joseph Conrad described and probed the Heart of Darkness, this Evangelist blocked out the light. M.A. Tolbert has observed the frequency of κατά in Mk, and Jasper takes this to mean 'down' most of the time such that the Gospel reports a gradual descent into hell. On the psychiatrist couch, 'he [Mark] seems pretty obsessive if not mad', in part because he could not face his gospel having a shorter ending, having a 'concern to protect the church from overexposure to harsh reality' (109).

Following these 'Mark as/in literature' essays, there is a chapter on a novel by Jim Crace called Quarantine (1997), which gives him an occasion to puzzle over whether a human being really could last in the desert without sustenance for forty days; Lawrence of Arabia and the Desert Fathers provide intertext. Only four pages are given to this particular work before jumping to other parts of Crace's oeuvre. At p. 126 there is: 'Theology, of all enterprises of the human mind, is the one most likely to become flat and predictable because of its incorrigible addiction to religious orthodoxy and correctness.' (Novelists have more freedom.) By now one is tempted to comment: 'How predictable.' The next essay on Turner's later, darker art is interesting, and that on Holman Hunt's 'The Scapegoat' a little less so. Finally, Jasper laments that not much has appeared since his and S. Prickett's The Bible and Literature: A Reader from 1999 (politely disparaging that by Jo Carruthers et al from 2014). Chinese literature might offer a new future. In the Afterword, Coleridge is mentioned as (on the one hand) as the first (and long before Jowett) to tell us to read the Bible as any other book ('nothing special'), and on the other to write: 'the Bible finds me' (special, inspired). 'From the beginning of the Christian era wise people have known that its value as Christian Scripture is in direct proportion to its dynamic power as literature' (190). This of course is nonsense. Matthew Arnold might have thought so, that the Bible was 'Super-literature', but he was hardly at the beginning of the Christian era, when most Christian interpreters admitted the Bible was far from literary. A couple of times, including in the final essay, 'Teaching the Bible and

Literature' (2014) Jasper mentions T.S. Eliot's saying that the Bible had its effect on literature, not because it was literary but because it was sacred. However, he draws from this the idea that the Bible's having a kerygma implies a plurality of meanings for writers to work with, which is rather to twist Eliot's point (178). 'God' has become a literary term; not even 'God' is 'outside the text'.

Much learning, but also the gnawing sound of the branch on which one is sitting being sawn almost completely through.

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Fully Alive: Tending to the Soul in Turbulent Times. By Elizabeth Oldfield. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-3998-1076-0. 261pp. £18.99.

Former director and now senior fellow of think tank Theos, Oldfield's debut book examines the ways in which a 'spiritual core strength' can build resilience in the contemporary age, characterised by instability and change. The book aims to address the question 'What does it mean to live a good, whole and fulfilling life?' Her relatable style will appeal to people both within and without the Christian faith, and at varying levels of theological literacy and education. Oldfield is a skilled communicator, as her podcast *The Sacred* testifies, in which she purposefully, and respectfully, converses with guests with whose views diverge from her own, the aim of the conversation being listening to understand the perspective of the other. Despite this skilled level of communication, the book has a few choice swear words, which could have been omitted and the point to be made would still have been adequately addressed.

Each chapter focuses on a specific sin: wrath, avarice, acedia, envy, gluttony, lust and pride and considers the ways in which that sin is manifested in the modern era. For example, the sin of wrath is considered within the context of polarisation or 'othering' of those with whom we disagree. She suggests that the counteraction to polarisation is peacemaking, seeking to see the humanity in one another and understanding their perspective and reasons for it. The definition of each sin is considered, including its historical interpretation, before the author reflects on how that sin is manifest in her own life. Using concrete examples from her own life, firmly situated within contemporary culture, the reflections bring into stark illumination the ways in which sin may be present in the reader's life also. Oldfield then moves on to examine spiritual practices which she employs to guard against such sin, again looking at the history of the practice and the ways in which it can be practised in relation to the sin's manifestation in modernity.

Interweaving ancient spiritual practices, drawn from the Christian tradition, such as prayer, examen, generosity and retreat, she uses candid examples from her own life and faith to illustrate how ancient spiritual practices can aid modern problems. She draws from fields including theology, history, and psychology, which is engaging and brings a modern interdisciplinary relevance to the book; thus when she delays focussing in on God until the last chapter she does so 'not because [God] is skittish, but because we are. We are easily spooked by the psychological depth charge of the possibility of unconditional love.' (p.226).

The book ends on an invitation to the reader, in particular the reader who has not yet surrendered to the Christian faith. Oldfield emphasises that the spiritual practices she has examined are worthwhile and have merit in their own right, practices which can enhance a person's spiritual wellbeing and psychological health. As she describes her own faith and the ways it helps her navigate the world, she ends with the invitation that spiritual practices 'open a door to a different kind of perception. And you may thereby find that there was something worth surrendering to all along.' (p.240). Because of this gentle, rounded consideration of sin, the relatable style of a skilled communicator and the very practical nature of the application, the book would make an excellent book for group study, in a house group or book group for example, possibly as a missional exercise.

The book could benefit from an opportunity between chapters to pause for reflection, perhaps prompt to consider alone or as part of a group. The book remains well referenced and achieves its aims of being relatable and conversational in style, whilst prompting reflection on the topic of sin. On the whole, the book is readable to a wide range of audiences, and multifactorial in its uses, from providing reflection material for personal study to a tool for starting conversations about the Christian faith and its relevance to modern life with those not yet familiar with it.

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Les Actes des apôtres (13–28). 2e édition actualisée et corrigée. By Daniel Marguerat. Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2024. ISBN: 978-2-8309-1836-6. 400pp. €45.00.

The work of the Swiss New Testament scholar Daniel Marguerat has signalled a paradigm shift in the study of Luke-Acts. His contribution comes not by rejecting the historical-critical method in which he was trained, but by recognising its limits and integrating narrative analysis. This approach was exemplified in his seminal work *Le Premier Historien du Christianisme: La composition des Actes des Apôtres* (Cerf, 1999), later

translated into English as *The First Christian Historian: Writing the 'Acts of the Apostles'* (CUP, 2002).

Marguerat argues that evaluating Luke by modern historical standards is anachronistic. Rather, he is to be read within the ancient genres of biography (Luke) and historiography (Acts), which were less concerned with relaying 'facts' and more with forming the identity of primitive Christianity. Historical analysis situates Luke's narrative in its temporal and social context, while narrative study clarifies its literary and theological aims. The resulting portrait is of Luke as a mediator who stands at the intersection of Greek and Jewish historiography. This location also exemplifies Luke's theological approach: interested in Christianity's continuity with Judaism, whilst embracing Graeco-Roman universalistic horizons. For Marguerat, Luke is a bona fide centrist between the symbolic poles of Jerusalem and Rome. While not all have accepted his thesis, most scholars now place themselves on the continuum that Marguerat has identified. Furthermore, *Le Premier Historien du Christianisme* marks a wider trend in scholarship characterised by eclectic interdisciplinary approaches to the Lukan *Doppelwerk*.

While Marguerat had previously applied this approach mostly to select passages, leading some (notably, C.K. Barrett) to question its workability across the broader Lukan corpus, the publication of his two-volume commentary has answered that question definitively. Although Marguerat's interpretations may raise few surprises for those familiar with his work, his pioneering historical and narrative-critical approach is consistently applied throughout. His methodology is eclectic, drawing on Patristics, Paul Ricoeur, contemporary narratologists, and, unsurprisingly for a Protestant commentator, John Calvin's commentary on Acts. This second volume, originally published in 2014 (following the first volume on Acts 1–12 in 2011), is now updated with a 'refreshed bibliography' (p. 8) and minor corrections. The completion of this revised, two-volume work is a significant achievement and marks the first critical commentary in French in nearly a century, since Eugène Jacquier's *Les Actes des Apôtres* (Victor Lecoffre, 1926).

The commentary's structure is standard for the Commentaire du Nouveau Testament series. It begins with a translation of the text and a select bibliography. Marguerat then offers a 'bird's eye view' in the analysis section, followed by a detailed verse-by-verse explanation, and concluding with his 'theological perspectives' on the text. Marguerat states that he did not want to offer yet another 'bloated' commentary (p. 7; a comment he makes cognisant of the irony when publishing a two-volume work). Like Steve Walton's recent Acts 1–9:42 volume in the Word Biblical Commentary series (Zondervan, 2024), this is not a commentary on com-

mentaries but provides Marguerat's judicious interpretation of the text. He presents his own take on critical issues, using references to encourage the reader down their own hermeneutical path. This follows in a welcome trend that prioritises direct engagement with the text. One hopes that commentaries like these signal a shift in the genre toward a more text-focused approach. This is not to say that the history of interpretation is unimportant, but both Marguerat's and Walton's commentaries feel more dynamic because of their freedom to engage directly with the text, rather than becoming a mere catalogue of secondary literature. In a moment of scholarly honesty, Marguerat admits that most people do not read a commentary cover to cover, so he deliberately repeats some references fully in the footnotes. All of this combines to make the commentary a user-friendly resource.

Marguerat's treatment of the hermeneutical chestnut of the Jerusalem Council exemplifies his distinctive approach and contribution. He proposes Acts 15:1–21 and Galatians 2:1–10 describe the same event in different rhetorical modes. Rather than pitting Acts against Paul, he explains the differences by genre, noting they also share much in common. He argues that Luke 'telescoped' two distinct events: the original council (Gal. 2:1-10) which settled the theology of salvation, and the later Apostolic Decree, a practical measure for community life. Marguerat proposes that Luke, writing decades later with a compromising intent, combined these two social memories into one harmonious scene. This argument, however, hinges on the contested assumption that Luke lacked knowledge of Paul's writings (p. 90 But even if Paul's letters were not yet codified, this does not preclude Luke's knowledge of them. One wonders if the 'telescoping' argument is more persuasive if Luke did know Paul's letters. In this view, Luke becomes a more deliberate conciliator, intentionally reporting what he understood as both ends of a polemical conversation (partially preserved in Galatians) to show a final, Spirit-led resolution to the debate Paul described.

One area the commentary neglects is recent studies on Luke's relationship to Judaism. Gregory Sterling, Jason Moraff, and Joshua Paul Smith have all made significant arguments (published before this second volume was released) for Luke as a Jewish author or a proselyte in the Diaspora. Especially given Luke's positive (or, at the very least, ambivalent) attitude towards the temple and ritual (e.g., Acts 2:46; 16:3; 21:27–30), this perspective deserves consideration. If Luke is writing from within Judaism, the reading of Acts as an apologetic to Rome becomes secondary. The narrative's focus shifts inward, reframing the story as a chronicle of internal debates and compromises about ritual as the nascent movement grapples with Gentile inclusion. Placing Luke within Judaism is certainly

debated, but given the loosening of the former scholarly consensus of a Gentile Luke, the commentary's lack of engagement with this significant question is a curious omission.

While some evangelical readers may be uncomfortable with Marguerat's underlying critical assumptions (e.g., a late composition date and questioning of traditional authorship; all articulated succinctly in the first volume's introduction), the commentary's literary focus means that such issues are not foregrounded. The concluding 'Theological Perspectives' sections show that robust theological readings of scripture are not antithetical to critical scholarship. Of note is his missional conclusion on the interplay between divine guidance and human agency. Analysing Paul's Macedonian vision, Marguerat argues that 'God does not treat his people as puppets' (p. 123); instead, the Spirit's guidance involves and validates active human agency and creativity. Equally valuable is his framework for conflict resolution drawn from the Jerusalem Council, where Acts 15 provides an 'exemplary procedure' (p. 109) for church conflict. The goal is not to avoid crises, but to manage them through open debate, empathy, scriptural discernment, and compromise under the Spirit's guidance. There is much to commend and inspire in Marguerat's theological summaries.

The commentary has been translated into Italian, German, and Spanish, but sadly, not yet into English. An English translation would be welcome, making this important work of an often neglected (in Anglophone circles) Francophone scholar accessible to a broader audience. Until then, for those willing to engage with the French (which is clear and not overly complex), they will be rewarded with a commentary that is both a serious tool for scholars and a rich resource full of theological insights for preaching, pastoral work, and missional applications.

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Evangelism in an Age of Despair: Hope beyond the Failed Promise of Happiness. By Andrew Root. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. ISBN: 978-1-5409-6871-5. xiv + 289pp. £24.99.

In *Evangelism in an Age of Despair*, Andrew Root, in his characteristic style, guides the reader on a lengthy journey, examining contemporary evangelism by exploring the philosophical and cultural shifts that have shaped our post-modern Western imagination. This includes a brief overview of French Renaissance philosophy, recounting the story of Michel de Montaigne and emphasising his influence on our culture's obsession with the pursuit of happiness. Root admits in his introduction that this book is

not primarily about evangelism. Instead, it is a historical and theological examination of consolation, culminating in an analysis of the consolation experienced by the third-century Gregory of Nyssa and his companions. Along the way, Root integrates biographies of thinkers (sometimes with surprising digressions), creative thought experiments, and cultural critique.

At times these historical excursions feel more like rabbit holes than necessary detours, leading one to wonder whether some might have been better left as footnotes. However, the true treasure is in Root's sharp social commentary. He adeptly reveals the futility of our culture's relentless quest for self-fulfilment, reminding readers that for much of human history, life was lived with a keen awareness of mortality and finiteness. In this context, Root emphasises the urgent mental health crisis, describing the unprecedented levels of anxiety and depression in the West as symptoms of what he calls 'our inflation of self.' He argues that the modern belief that individuals must create their own meaning, purpose, and happiness leaves many not only exhausted but also disillusioned.

Root addresses contemporary aversions to the language of *sin*, noting its frequent replacement with the language of *sickness*. He writes, 'if all moral shortcomings are bound to sickness, as opposed to sin, then no one can judge' (p. 171). His perceptive line of thought suggests that if we can attribute our behaviour to something beyond our control, we relieve ourselves of the responsibility for it, and sadly, in the process, render forgiveness and therefore redemption, unnecessary. In our attempts to numb or excuse ourselves, we risk alienating ourselves from the very salvation that consoles.

For much of the book, the explicit links to evangelism remain thin, but about two-thirds in, Root begins to weave his threads together into his central claim that sorrow is the true site of evangelism. He argues that the church's calling is not to win arguments or grow attendance but to meet people in their sorrow, to minister consolation, and to embody the good news of Christ at the very place of suffering. Evangelism, in Root's vision, is not apologetics but consolation—a cross-centred witness. Drawing on Jean Gerson, he emphasises that it is the sorrowful who most need a word of salvation, and that it is in death that God delivers us to life. Root reframes a vision of life, not as the pursuit of happiness, but as a pilgrimage marked by goodbyes. Stating that it is precisely in these losses that God is found. Thus, Christians are called not to live as 'tourists' who merely watch from the sidelines, but as 'pilgrims' who enter into sorrow as fellow travellers toward God.

This is a demanding and specific vision for church ministry. Root's challenging call is to move away from programmatic busyness toward the

presence of real suffering. While his thought-experiment of a consoling church is stirring, the book would have benefited from concrete, contemporary examples of communities already embodying this practice. I was also left wondering: what does consolation look like for those who suffer without access to a consoling community?

Practical solutions are not the book's strong suit. But it does raise some significant theological and pastoral questions. Root's central argument, that the sorrowful are not cursed but the elect, met by God in consolation, is a timely reminder for the church. Rather than numbing ourselves against the pain of loss, Root urges us to lean into it as the very place where Christ meets us. He closes with a turn to Martin Luther, suggesting 'Protestants would do well to take a break from the heroic, polemical Luther and remember (even emulate) the Luther of pastoral consolation' (p. 273).

Ultimately, *Evangelism in an Age of Despair* is less a manual for evangelistic practice and more a provocative reimagining of evangelism as participation in the sorrow of others, shaped by a theology of the cross. Root offers little in terms of biblical exegesis or step-by-step methodology; instead, he draws on historical biography (particularly heavy on French Renaissance philosophy), on the tradition of consolation literature, and on the imagination through his thought experiment. The book succeeds in unsettling comfortable assumptions and inviting pastors, ministers, and laypeople alike to rethink evangelism, not as a call to happier thinking or church growth, but as a call to enter sorrow and discover the God who consoles.

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Jesus and the Law of Moses: The Gospels and the Restoration of Israel within First-Century Judaism. By Paul T. Sloan. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. ISBN: 978-1-5409-6638-4. £27.99.

In *Jesus and the Law of Moses: The Gospels and the Restoration of Israel within First-Century Judaism*, Paul Sloan brings the insights and arguments developed in several different studies on issues like ritual purity, sacrificial practices, and the function of Torah (particularly in the Pauline corpus), to bear on the Synoptic Gospels and their portrayal of Jesus's life and teaching. Sloan's writing is accessible and the argument does not require an extensive academic foundation to follow. Readers with knowledge of Greek and familiarity with other texts will find certain details of the argument clearer or easier to follow, but the central argument hinges

primarily on a familiarity with the narratives of the Synoptic Gospels and the key texts from the Pentateuch and prophets.

The brief introduction notes the minimal engagement with Jesus's positive statements regarding the Law in the Synoptic Gospels, like Matt 5:17–19. This section also addresses his methodological approach and its limitations and outlines the argument ahead. The work proceeds with two broad chapters regarding the Law of Moses and restoration eschatology in the first century before considering key texts from all three synoptic accounts where interpreters argue for Jesus's replacement of Jewish law.

Chapter 1 deconstructs the typical interpretations of Jesus's understanding of Torah in the Synoptics. Sloan describes these in the broad categories of other Jewish approaches to Torah as: 1) legalism, with Bultmann as the exemplar; 2) 'compassionless exclusivism' exemplified by Marcus Borg; and 3) nationalism, as articulated by N. T. Wright. Sloan provides detailed critiques of each of these perspectives, but, on a larger scale, points out that Jesus never critiques anyone for these three supposed errors. Sloan instead argues for a positive view of Torah within the Synoptic Gospels, with Jesus's discussions and debates as disputes of Torah interpretation, not replacement. Sloan points out that within Torah there are various issues that can supersede legislation. For example, priestly work in the Temple is done even on the Sabbath, but the priests are not considered to break Sabbath legislation.

Chapter 2 lays out what Sloan argues is the difference between Jesus and his interlocutors, namely the reality of the arrival of Israel's eschatological restoration, of which Jesus is the proclaimer in the vein of Isaiah 61. Sloan frames the exile as divine discipline, a consequence that sacrifice cannot resolve within the legal requirements of Torah itself, resulting in the prophetic comments about the insufficiency of sacrifice. The question of 'how shall we return?' comes along with the prophetic promises of Israel's restoration, and this question defines the disputes between Jesus and his interlocutors. Sloan uses the Lord's Prayer to demonstrate how the hopes of restoration eschatology shape and define Jesus's ministry in the Synoptics, while also looking beyond this passage with brief broad strokes. More detailed engagement comes in the following chapters.

The following chapters demonstrate in more detail Sloan's proposed frame of Jesus's teaching (Chapter 4: 'The Law on the Mount') and disputes (Chapter 5: 'Conflict and Controversy') as fundamentally debating, rather than superseding, Torah practice. The final two substantive chapters (Chapter 5: 'Eschatological Nomism' and Chapter 6: 'The Temple and the Cross') discuss Jesus's understanding of Torah within his own eschatological timing, particularly his commission as the harbinger of

God's eschatological restoration of Israel. It is this final piece that Jesus's opponents cannot agree on, and therefore it is this claim that leads to Jesus's crucifixion. In his crucifixion, Jesus takes on the Torah-ordained punishment of Israel, and those who follow him and likewise take up this punishment will be included in the restored people of God. The brief conclusion looks beyond the Synoptic Gospels with a particular emphasis on Acts, especially chapters 10 and 15. Sloan builds upon the work of Richard Bauckham, arguing that Acts presents the gentile mission as including them into the people of Israel, with the exceptions of Leviticus 17–18 providing the foundation for the requirements made of gentiles in Acts 15.

This book is an excellent contribution to the ongoing conversation around the Law and the New Testament. Sloan draws together several threads in recent study and applies them to the Synoptic Gospels in a way that has not been done to this point. Sloan's work draws together recent publications by Matthew Thiessen, Andrew Remington Rillera, Logan Williams, Jason Staples, and Matthew Novenson, as well as insights from David Moffit, Paula Fredriksen and others. If one wants to understand what a positive understanding of Torah in the Synoptic Gospels would look like, then this is the book. Sloan's bibliography points the interested reader to the appropriate sources for further study.

For those readers interested in particular passages that Sloan engages with directly and at length, this book will be invaluable. Chapters 4–6 involve several lengthy engagements with rabbinic and second temple literature that are dense reading, but provide helpful context for each of the considered passages, demonstrating Jesus's (and his opponents') place within the broader discussion of Torah in the first century and beyond. However, these denser sections are not foundational to the argument, though they provide valuable information for readers interested in the particular passage or those who desire further detailed supporting evidence.

Whether one agrees with Sloan or not, one must reckon with his critiques of some of the common approaches to Torah in the Synoptics (and the NT more broadly). Also, the description of restoration eschatology and the demonstration of its prevalence in the relevant primary texts is one of the best articulations in current literature. Anyone wanting to understand what scholars mean by 'restoration eschatology' and where it comes from should read Chapter 2. This book is a valuable addition to the shelf of anyone who works with the Synoptic Gospels, either in the classroom or from the pulpit.

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Jesus and the Abolitionists: How Anarchist Christianity Empowers the People. By Terry J. Stokes. Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2024. ISBN: 979-8-88983-081-8. ix + 173pp.

In this very readable book, Stokes constructs a system of Christian anarchism based on the ethical teachings of Jesus. In two parts and ten chapters, Stokes weaves together a systematic radical theology that does not seek to create a Christian version of anarchist philosophy but instead demonstrates that Christian theology naturally leads to an anarchist approach to the state. However, the Christian theology that Stokes draws upon is one step removed from standard Christian orthodoxy.

Stokes describes his process in this book as 'rudimentary, expressly non-academic, and light-hearted.' Whilst the book is written with humour and a light touch, Stokes does not shy away from difficult topics and finishes with practical suggestions for implementing his system of radical Christianity.

In Part One, Stokes provides the context for his understanding of anarchism as a political philosophy and its relation to his Christianity. In Chapters One and Two, Stokes gives the context for his development and radicalisation into Christian anarchism, offering examples from his family history, his experience with progressive theology at seminary, and how the events of 2020 and the Black Lives Matter movement exposed him to revolutionary thinking. He then defines his approach to anarchist philosophy as 'Black, pacifist, utopian and municipalist.' His approach to anarchism is rooted in an ethnic, cultural, and social context that is characterised by 'a condition of ontological ungovernability and anti-state orientation.' Anarchism in this mode is a dialectic of interdependence and autonomy.

In Part Two, Stokes explores the relationship between Christian theology and anarchism. Chapter Three brings together Trinitarian theology with anarchist philosophy. For Stokes, many Christians too easily assign human ideas of coercive power to God's lordship. Instead, we should know God's lordship through self-sacrificial love and the community of the Trinity. In Chapter Four, 'Anarchy in Humanity', Stokes argues that we need to move away from sin as a cosmic legal system and courtroom and instead move towards ideas of harm. Harm comes from the desire for autonomy, supremacy, and rulership, which is the corruption of the desire for safety, freedom, and security. Salvation becomes the restoration and healing of those corrupted desires and the harm that has been caused.

In Chapter Five, Stokes turns to anarchy in Revelation. For Stokes, the process by which scripture is the speech-act of God being given to us in this moment and in this place is always dynamic. The contextual and

historical reality in which we live means that theology can only be done in our lived reality. Stokes argues that revelation is always anarchic because it occurs freely and in the solidarity of the community.

In Chapter Six, Stokes employs biblical texts commonly used within Christian anarchism, such as 1 Samuel 8 and the first four chapters of the Book of Acts. However, he also draws on Esther for its anti-imperialist narrative, and Ezra-Nehemiah as an example of anarchist communities that come together to achieve a goal. Stokes emphasises the non-violent ethics of the New Testament and the collective decision-making shown by the early Church in Acts 15.

In Chapter Seven, 'Anarchy in the Church,' Stokes argues that the early Church operated through community assemblies and mutual aid groups. Stokes revisits old arguments that the Constantinian settlement corrupted the Church, that the Reformation attempted to challenge this, but ultimately rooted the Church more firmly in the power of the state. In modern times, Christian anarchism is found in communities that embrace deconstruction and theologies of liberation.

In Chapter Eight, Stokes suggests that Christian anarchism is rooted in virtue ethics, within the framework of the Sabbath being made for humanity, not humanity being made for the Sabbath. The beatitudes are unsurprisingly central to this argument, with the Lord's Prayer being seen as a vow of covenantal obedience to Christ. The voluntary nature of a covenant is emphasised, as is the role of the community.

In Chapter Nine, Stokes argues that Christian eschatology is essentially anarchist because it is the ethical union of all people under the loving care of God. God will reconcile all things and all people to Himself through Jesus, while maintaining a place for those who willingly reject Him, to ensure that God is not coercive. Here, Stokes grounds his Christian anarchism in the moral exemplar theory of the atonement. He argues that Jesus did not need to die and did not need to take our place for salvation to be effective. The incarnation and Christ's moral behaviour were sufficient to draw us to him.

In Chapter Ten, Stokes brings the book to a conclusion by highlighting several examples of how anarchist communities, particularly Christian anarchist communities, have successfully functioned in practice. He argues that any attempt to live out Christian anarchism must begin at the local level, be grounded in a radical sense of unity with creation, and make a distinction between good works that render the state obsolete and those that prop up the state. There also needs to be a shift from charity towards mutual aid.

Stokes makes a clear and engaging argument for Christian theology naturally leading to an anarchist philosophy. He draws on well-made

arguments from classical Christian anarchism but does so within his own modern context. However, in doing so, Stokes moves away from orthodox Christian theology in matters of sin and salvation, which I do not think is necessary to make the argument for Christian anarchism. The final chapter makes a strong and practical offering to the Church today by providing examples of how it can fulfil its task to love our neighbour as Christ loved us through community organising and mutual aid in the same way the early Church functioned.

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The Final Triumph of God: Jesus, the Eyewitnesses, and the Resurrection of the Body in 1 Corinthians 15. By James P. Ware. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2025. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7947-9. 510pp. £49.99.

The material nature of the resurrection body in Paul has in recent years been hotly debated in Biblical Studies, and the publication of two major books on 1 Corinthians 15 in 2025 only illustrates this further. This book by James P. Ware is one of these two books. Yet, unlike *The Enspirited body in 1 Corinthians 15* by John Granger Cook, Ware's book is unique by being a detailed verse-by-verse commentary on the entirety of 1 Corinthians 15, which '…aims to provide the most complete and exhaustive scholarly treatment of this chapter in any modern language…' (p.2). With its 411 pages this aim has arguably been achieved. Yet, its detailed nature does not make it boring since it often offers stimulating considerations of the text with refreshing perspectives and insights on old debates.

The book is structured with an introduction, 15 chapters, and four excursuses slotted in after chapters 3, 5, 7, and 11. The chapters, apart from the first which considers the letter structure, contain a detailed verse-by-verse commentary. The four excursuses deal with broader topics on the world in which Paul wrote this chapter and the historical and theological implications of Paul's message about Jesus' resurrection.

Contrary to much modern exegesis, the overall thesis of the book argues that when Paul's thought in 1 Corinthians 15 is tracked in its historical context using careful exegesis, it becomes clear that the final triumph of God over sin, death, and the cosmic powers is realised because Jesus rose from the grave in the same body that died yet as a transformed and glorified body composed of immortal flesh and bones, which believers also will receive at their own resurrection when Jesus returns.

While the book offers many intriguing and surprising takes on debated texts in the chapter, the overall argument hinges mainly on the following four points:

Firstly, it is argued from a linguistic and historical perspective that the apostolic formula with its list of eyewitnesses (vv.3-11) has to refer to actual sightings of the resurrected Jesus in the flesh. There are three main reasons for this: (1) It is argued that the formula is pre-Pauline and dates within a few years of Jesus' resurrection. (2) A linguistic analysis of the usage of ἐγείρω (*egeirō*) is used to demonstrate that it is less flexible semantically than the English 'to rise', and thus always refers to a physical movement upwards mostly from sleep in classical usage. This means that when it is used in contexts of resurrection it refers to the movement of the fleshly body from lying dead to standing up alive, which shows that the tomb must be empty and that an elevation or ascension into heaven is an impossible interpretation of the formula. (3) The language of ὤφθη (*ōphthē*) 'appeared' in this context cannot refer to spiritual visions because the usage of ἐγείρω (*egeirō*) demands these appearances to be of the bodily resurrected Jesus in the flesh.

Secondly, it is argued that Paul in vv.12-19 uses the apostolic formula and its list of eyewitnesses grounding in history (vv.3-11) to make an argument *reductio ad absurdum* that proves wrong the deniers of the resurrection in Corinth. It is also argued that Paul does this by employing Aristotelian and Stoic logic at a density rarely seen in ancient literature.

Thirdly, on vv.20-28 it is argued against the majority view with great precision that the triumph of God over death, Satan, and the powers is an insight into Pauline Christology that illustrates a logic that can only be described accurately with the later developed trinitarian language. This is because it would be inappropriate that the Son gives the kingdom to the Father unless he is fully God himself. Additionally, it is also argued that the Son does not stop reigning when he gives the kingdom to the Father, but that they will be co-reigning in eternity.

Finally, on vv.35-58, the part of the chapter that is essential to the discussion of the resurrection body's material nature, Ware argues for a body of immortal glorified flesh in some unexpected ways. A few are worth highlighting. (1) He underscores the allusions to the Genesis creation account in vv.36-41 and uses them to argue that this connection makes the list of flesh in v.39 depict flesh positively rather than negatively. (2) He argues that the resurrection body will be like the heavenly bodies but in glory rather than materially. Yet, the heavenly glory given to the resurrection body will not be that of the stars but rather God's own heavenly glory. (3) It is argued that the σῶμα πνευματικόν (*sōma pneumatikon*) means that the body itself partakes in the gift of the Holy Spirit, which means that the Holy Spirit will not only indwell the soul of the believer but also the body in the resurrection—securing incorruptible life. (4) It is argued that bearing the image of the man of heaven (vv.47-49) is not

to be understood as locative but as incarnational so that it is the characteristics of the immortal fleshly body of Son of God which will be shared with the believer in the resurrection. (5) It is argued more detailed than anywhere else in scholarship that 'flesh and blood' does not mean flesh per se but flesh in its mortal state. (6) It is argued that the use of 'clothing' language (vv.53-55), which describes how believers will become immortal, indicates that it is not a shedding of flesh but a transformation of the flesh into immortal flesh.

This book is a must-read for anyone interested in resurrection in Paul. It puts forward one of the strongest expositions of 1 Corinthians 15 in modern scholarship arguing that Paul believed the resurrection body to be a body of transformed glorified immortalised flesh, which all who engage with resurrection in Paul must reckon with. The contributions referenced above are for the most part done so well that they in many ways demonstrate that it is unlikely that Paul could have understood resurrection as a body composed of spirit in 1 Corinthians 15. I am personally most impressed with the exposition of the apostolic formula in light of the linguistic investigation of ἐγείρω (*egeirō*), the exposition of vv.20-28 and its rich Christology, and the explanation that the heavenly man in vv.46-49 is Christological and therefore refers to how the characteristics of Christ are transferred to the believer rather than materiality and location.

This being said, I also have some points of critique. A minor point on style, which I at times found unnecessarily forceful despite a strong argument. I would, also, need more persuasion that the resurrection body will be like the heavenly bodies (vv.39-41). My biggest issue with the book is that Ware dismisses the idea that people in the early Roman Empire should have believed that a select few individuals were resurrected to immortal fleshly embodied life. I concur that the sources have conflicting information and lack uniformity, but Ware's conclusion is only possible because he reads the sources of Greek mythology through the lens of Greek philosophy rather than on their own terms. This is problematic because the Olympian gods were believed to possess immortal flesh in popular belief (e.g. Homer *Il.* 5.335-345; *Od.* 5.192-213; see e.g. Vernant, *Mortals and Immortals*, p.27-49). The immortal Achilles brutalises a slave girl (Philostratus, *Heroicus* 56.6-10). Also, Plutarch critiques and complains about the populace believing these things (*Romulus* 28.4-9). I do, however, agree with Ware that Jesus' resurrection is the only uniform and historically reliable resurrection story, which brought a hope to the masses that no resurrection story within Greek beliefs ever could. None-

theless, this book is overall an impressive piece of work, which argues a strong and persuasive case.

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The Fruits of Listening. By Colleen C. B. Weaver. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2024. ISBN: 978-1-6667-8854-4. 212pp. £24.00.

Colleen Weaver, professor of spiritual formation and inductive Bible study at Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary in Estonia, formerly served in theological education in various countries with One Mission Society. For Weaver, a study of contextual theological education from a qualitative research approach is akin to harvesting the ripe fruit of emerging designs and practices through listening and sharing the seeds for future growth. Survey data and case study interviews form the primary voices to which the author listens.

The book is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter introduces her research, aim, hypothesis, and positionality. Weaver's research traces the development and importance of effective practices and characterisations of contextual theological education in Spain's Protestant evangelical community. A guiding thread throughout the book connects readers to the benefits, limitations, expectations, and desired competencies for the theological and spiritual education of church leaders who thrive in their local communities. Given the lack of locally and contextually trained ministry leaders by Spanish scholars and theologians, this information is needed to ensure leaders are culturally astute and relationally capable to accompany faith communities.

Tracing a Eurocentric history of theological education in chapter two, Weaver summarises major epochs, extends Roony's historical models of theological education (catechism, monasteries, scholasticism, and the seminary), and proposes 'eclectic' as a fifth model (i.e., various options and numerous design configurations) (p. 23). David Goodbourn's original three continua tool for congregational adult Christian education analysis is adapted by adding a fourth continuum to map theological education's design and practices.

Weaver guides readers through the complicated history of Protestantism in Spain in chapter three. Describing the challenges faced by Spain's Protestant community: from the Spanish Inquisition's vast persecution, through the arrival of nineteenth-century foreign missionaries and Franco's repression, to eventual religious freedoms under democracy and the impact of immigration on the religious landscape, Weaver points to statistical data to underscore the community's ongoing deficiencies. In the overall population of Spain, faith and worship participation are declining.

However, there is an increase in the number of Protestant believers and churches, translating to an increased need for trained pastors and ministry leaders to shepherd congregations struggling with 'marginalization, limited resources, and identity issues' in the 'context of spiritual decline' (p. 49).

Chapter four lifts up the voices of the laity from local faith communities in the province of Madrid, sharing the results of a perception study. Weaver's mixed-methods survey included qualitative questions and quantitative Likert scale responses to understand their expectations of theological education. Four themes and five perspectives indicate the expectations that theological education should be accessible to everyone and equip leaders for ministry with relational and spiritual development skills in addition to appropriate knowledge for contextualising theological reflection.

The fifth chapter connects the book title to the research through the dialogue and careful listening to three Madrid-province Protestant evangelical seminaries in case study interviews. Six emerging, comparative themes were explored with each institution, including: 'context, mission and identity, contextualization of the curriculum, accreditation, church relations, and societal engagement' (p. 73). Weaver concludes this comparative chapter by mapping the characteristics of each seminary with her modified Goodbourn's Continua to represent core formational priorities.

In chapter six, Weaver shares the findings from her conversations with faculty, students, and church attenders and points out the deficiencies of the four-discipline model (Bible, theology, church history, and pastoral ministry) for the effective formation of ministry leaders. Findings from the analysis of case studies (contextualisation through indigenous faculty and curricular content control) as well as the emerging fruits from collected data (critical remembering, keeping pace with society, accreditation as contextual engagement, contextual wisdom of the church, and theological discernment and cultural parables) indicate the importance of ongoing adaption and interdependence of the institution, church, and society.

The seventh chapter concludes the work by sharing the seeds from listening to local faith communities and institutions express their desire for accessible and contextual theological education that forms relational leaders who can accompany the church forward. Weaver generously shares her data collection tools and does an impressive job of describing her research process and clearly reporting the results from the multiple reflections.

However, more rationale for and details on Grounded Theory could benefit readers unfamiliar with the method. Additionally, including

voices from trained clergy, whose vocations intersect the church, institution, and society, could strengthen Weaver's argument on what is needed to equip ministry leaders to navigate increasingly complex societies.

While the research context was Spain's Protestant evangelical community of Madrid, the methodology and observations yield 'transformative resonance' (p. 152) for theological educators in various global contexts. In short, this book is the fruit of Weaver's dissertation journey, ripe with insights into the importance of historical contexts and their impacts on diverse aspects of ministry formation. Weaver's models, especially her modified Goodbourn's Continua, the practice of critical remembering, and mixed-method surveys, offer theological institutions promising analytical tools to contextualise their designs and practices as they respond to the ever-changing needs of the church and society.

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Tales of Fire and Flood: Divine Destruction Stories in the Pentateuch. By J. Schneider-Woods. Leuven: Peeters, 2025. ISBN: 978-90-429-5496-0. vi + 195pp. €65.00.

From a cosmic deluge to the skewering of a couple caught in an illicit union, *Tales of Fire and Flood: Divine Destruction Stories in the Pentateuch* analyses eight narratives featuring the divine destruction of various groups. In this volume Jonathan Schneider-Woods argues, 'when read as a sequence of mutually dependent stories, one observes a progression from the simplest case to the most complex, from a story of destruction targeting a thoroughly corrupt community to a destruction story in which a mixed cast of Yhwh's own people is under threat' (p. 4). Tracing this progression, Woods aims to understand 'the theological development' reflected in these stories (p. 6).

Following scholars who champion intertextual hermeneutics (e.g., Zakovitch, Fishbane, Tooman, Nihan), Woods argues these texts were continuously revised during the Second Temple period in order to coordinate intertextual links between similar stories (pp. 6-7). These links are signalled primarily through 'the use of shared lexemes and the use of shared plot elements' (pp. 9-10). Once these links are identified, Woods 'investigates the effect of this complex compositional process on the final form of the text' (p. 8; emphasis original).

Chapter two surveys various destruction stories from the ancient Near East, which serve as a cultural backdrop for the biblical stories. Woods finds that the rationale for divine destruction includes humanity's loud noise (p. 38), human rebellion (p. 38), and 'divine Intrigue' (p. 39). Fur-

thermore, with the exception of an Egyptian text, humanity's role in these stories is either non-existent or rote obedience to the god(s).

In chapter three, Woods begins his examination of biblical texts, first with the Flood, then with Sodom. The Flood narrative presents characters and events in a generally 'straightforward' way (p. 52): the flood generation is wicked (p. 43) and Noah alone is righteous (p. 44). That Noah is saved from destruction 'clarifies that Yhwh does not seek humanity's extinction but rather seeks to purge the wicked from humanity' (p. 44). Yet, the grounds for Noah's family's salvation are ambiguous, introducing the question of the transfer of merit/ demerit. This ambiguity is developed in the Sodom story.

Sodom follows a similar pattern, but with notable variation. Abraham is like Noah (pp. 52-54). Yet, while Noah made no intercession for his generation, Abraham indirectly intercedes for Sodom. Their conversation 'establishes the principle that it is more unjust for Yhwh to kill the righteous with the wicked than to spare the wicked from destruction' (p. 59). Ultimately, Sodom is destroyed and Lot is rescued on Abraham's merit, 'affirm[ing] the principle that the wicked can be saved from Yhwh's judgment through association with the righteous' (p. 75).

Chapter four increases the complexity. In the Exodus, the group of people threatened by judgment consists of both righteous and wicked Egyptians and Israelites (p. 82). The result is an increasingly precise judgment. In order to spare righteous Egyptians, 'Yhwh separates Pharaoh and his followers from the rest of Egypt' before drowning them in the sea (p. 108). Nevertheless, a transfer of (de)merit is at work: righteous Egyptians suffering for Pharaoh's wickedness and wicked Israelites saved because of the Patriarchs. The notion of intercession is also developed. While Abraham bases his argument on justice and only indirectly intercedes for Sodom, 'Moses explicitly prays for the wicked' (p. 108).

Chapter five considers the Golden Calf, 'the crescendo of this quartet of divine destruction stories' (p. 109). In it, Moses displays a 'rhetorically powerful' intercession packed with allusion to God's prior deliverance (p. 122). This intercession develops the role of the intercessor from what we find in Genesis 18 and offers specific principles from which to petition God (pp. 138-9). Additionally, Woods notes that while 'the righteous are presented with ways of pacifying Yhwh's anger' there is a trend toward God using the righteous as his instruments of judgment (p. 140).

Chapter six examines four stories in Numbers 'that activate the Exodus and Golden Calf narratives as primary intertexts' (p. 141). Numbers 14 further develops the role of the intercessor, presenting appeal to Yhwh's character as an effective tool (pp. 145-6). Additionally, Numbers 16 reverses the principle discussed in Genesis 18. While Abraham insisted

it is unjust to kill the wicked when the righteous are among them, 'Moses asks if the presence of one wicked person among the people is enough to condemn the nation to destruction'(p. 165). Furthermore, Numbers 17 reinforces 'the efficacy of the presence of the righteous to save the wicked' (p. 165), while Numbers 25 features the righteous as instruments of God's judgment (pp. 159-64).

There is much to commend in this volume. The degree to which Woods demonstrates intertextual connections between destruction stories and traces their thematic developments is thorough. This is especially the case when observing the effect of the righteous' presence when among the wicked, and the isolation of the wicked during destruction. Furthermore, his attention to characterisation through analogy is compelling. Two noteworthy cases are his treatment of Lot in Genesis 19 (pp. 60-71), and Aaron in Exodus 32 (pp. 124-7).

While his treatment is thorough, some of Woods' evidence for allusion is less convincing. Occasionally he identifies links between two stories that employ stock phrases. For instance, at a couple points he argues for allusion between Noah, Abraham, and Moses based on similar covenantal language (pp. 53, 83). While this may be intentional, the presence of covenantal language in covenant stories would be expected (see also his remarks on rising 'early in the morning' [p. 88]). Similarly, Woods sometimes asserts that one moment alludes to another when they have no shared vocabulary and minimal plot similarity. Such is the case when comparing Exodus 32:1 with Numbers 14:4 (p. 149).

Overall, *Tales of Fire and Flood* convincingly demonstrates that these eight destruction stories are connected. Woods shows how they not only speak to similar themes, but intentionally interact with one through intertextual links in order to develop a theology of God's judgment and the righteous intercessor.

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