

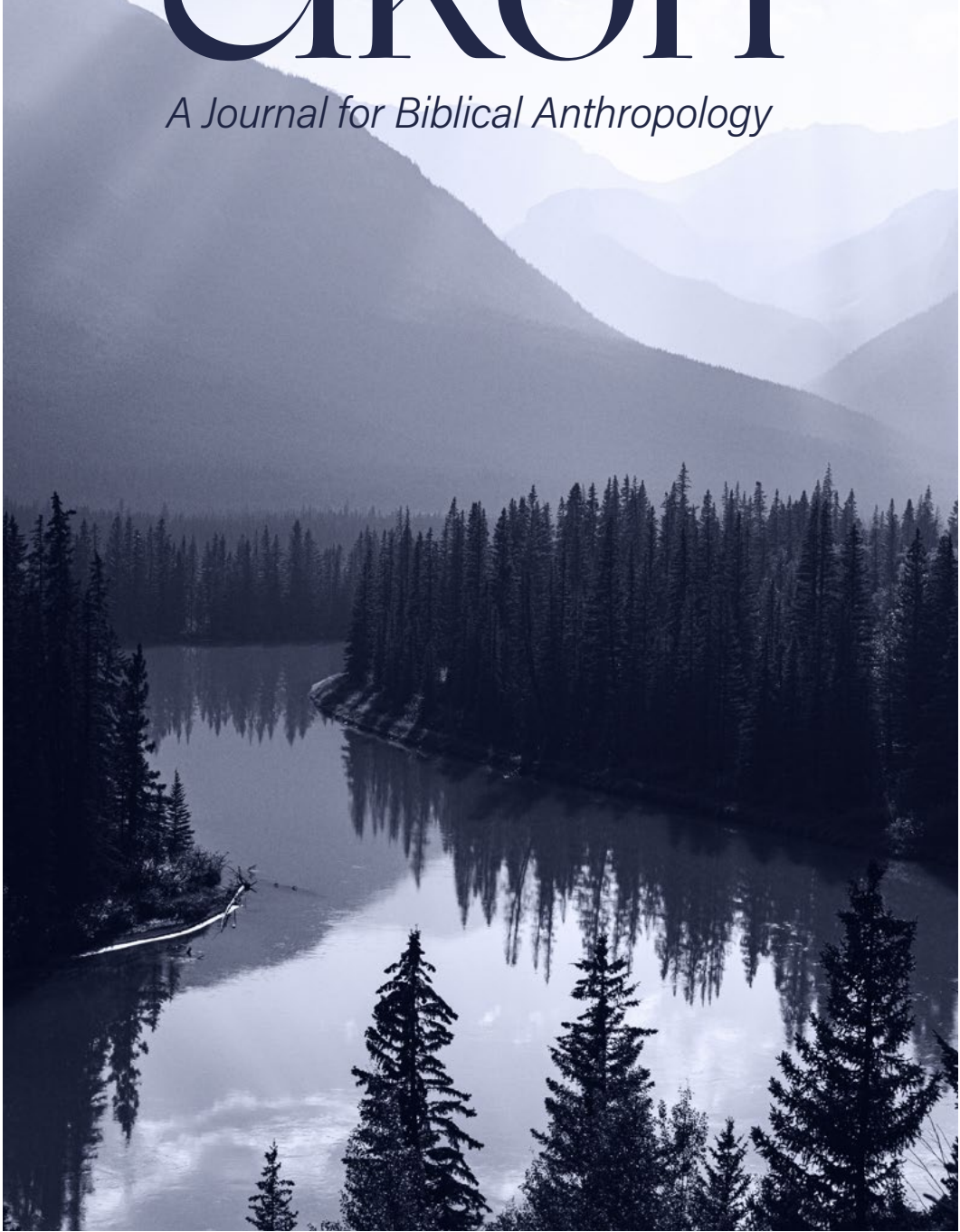
**GROUNDS FOR DIVORCE:
WHY I NOW BELIEVE THERE
ARE MORE THAN TWO**
Wayne Grudem

**HUMANITY AS THE DIVINE
IMAGE IN GENESIS 1:26-28**
Peter Gentry

**RECOVERING FROM
BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND
WOMANHOOD**
Reviewed by Andrew Naselli

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The “frantic passion for purple”: Ancient Fashion, Snails, and the Advance of the Gospel

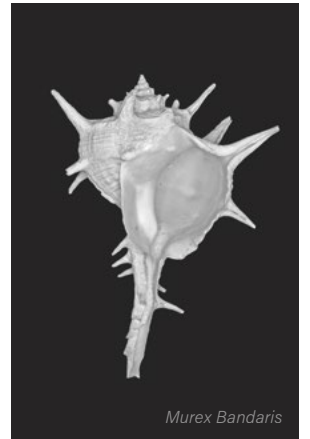
When I took what was called Church History I and Church History II in 1974–1975, the normal year-long survey of church history given to first-year theology students, I do not recall hearing anything about clothing and fashion. Yes, there was much about the “big” names in church history — Athanasius and Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas, Luther and Calvin — but nothing about clothing. After all, surely God is not really interested in what we wear and

what we put on our bodies? And even if he was, how does that have any bearing on the history of the church?

Now, the answer to that first question is an easy one. Yes, ever since God clothed our first parents after the Fall, he has been interested in what we use to cover our nakedness (see, for example, 1 Tim. 2:9). The answer to the second question is more complex, as shown by the following mini-history of the color purple.

MAKING ANCIENT TYRIAN PURPLE

Purple was a highly prized color in the Old Testament world of the ancient Near East, where it was associated with royalty and prestige and power.¹ In part, purple was so highly valued because obtaining it entailed monumental difficulties. According to the Roman scientist Pliny the Elder, who died in the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, the best purple dye in the ancient Near East was manufactured at the Phoenician city of Tyre.² The raw material out of which this dye was manufactured was obtained from the glandular secretion — or tears, as the Christian commentator Isidore of Seville poetically put it³ — of a carnivorous sea snail, which contemporary science knows as the *Murex bandaris*. Somewhere around twelve thousand of these snails had to be harvested from the sea to produce merely 0.05 of an ounce of dye.⁴ A foul stench emanated from the Phoenician factories manufacturing the dye, which were understandably placed on the outskirts of the city. Tyrian purple, as it was known, was literally worth more than its weight in gold, and purple-dyed fabrics commanded exorbitant prices. As Pliny noted of ancient fashion, “it adds radiance to every garment,” and this led to what he called a “frantic passion for purple” among the upper and middle classes of his world.



¹See, for example, Proverbs 31:22; Song of Solomon 3:9–10, 7:5; Daniel 5:7; Esther 8:15.

²For the association of Tyre with purple dye, see 2 Chronicles 2:7. ³Nancy MacDonell, “Fashion with a past: The Path of Purple From Pliny to Prince,” *The Wall Street Journal* (Saturday/Sunday, January 4–5, 2020): D3.

⁴Mark Woolmer, “Masters of the Mediterranean: The Phoenicians,” *National Geographic History* (May/June 2018): 17, 19.

THE CHRISTIAN SELLER OF PURPLE

Now, jump forward to one highly significant mention of this color of clothing in the New Testament. In Luke's Book of Acts, we read that when the Apostle Paul came to the city of Philippi in A.D. 49, he met a woman named Lydia, who was originally from the city of Thyatira in the Roman province of Asia (modern-day Turkey). Ethnically, she was Greek, but she had come to believe that the Jewish Old Testament contained the truth about God and the world, and thus she regularly met with a number of sincere Jewish women to pray and worship (Acts 16:14–15).

We are also told by Luke that she was “a dealer in purple” (v. 14), which meant that she either sold the dye, or, more likely, sold purple-dyed clothing. Either way, she would have been a woman of wealth and substance. Her regeneration by the Holy Spirit — “the Lord opened her heart”

(v. 14) — led to her baptism and to her encouraging Paul to use her home as a base of mission in the city of Philippi.

If one reads through the Book of Acts, it is apparent that when Paul went with the gospel to a new city, a key part of his mission strategy was to find a place where the churches that were founded through the preaching of the gospel could meet for distinctively Christian worship and fellowship. So it was that in Philippi, the Lord used the wealth that Lydia had obtained by the selling of purple clothing to rich and elite women — women who had a “frantic passion for purple” — to serve Paul's preaching and teaching about the Lord Christ.

The God who so made the Murex bandaris that its glands contained the base for purple appears to have had a greater purpose in mind than the making of a snail, wondrous though that be! ✕

*"...the Lord used the wealth that
Lydia had obtained...to serve
Paul's preaching and teaching
about the Lord Christ."*

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Recovering Bavinck's *The Christian Family*

Imagine, if you will, a divinely-designed institution perfectly tuned toward maximal human flourishing — dynamic, responsive, devoted, fecund, nurturing. Now consider any concerted opposition to such an institution. Would it be motivated by hatred toward God? Or man?

At the turn of the twentieth century, Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) found himself confronted by a society increasingly hostile to human flourishing according to divine design. Sufficiently alarmed, he busied himself with a counteroffensive, which has been passed down to the anglophone world under the title, *The Christian Family*. The family was in trouble, and one of the most influential theologians of the Christian era unsheathed his pen in defense — he knew it was a matter of civilizational life or death.

Bavinck wrote *The Christian Family* in a day animated with revolutionary spirits. Socialism, Marxism, and the collectivists were threatening to upset the political order from one end of the spectrum, and aftershocks from the French Revolution were galvanizing hyper-individualists from the other.

More fundamentally, what Bavinck termed “the women’s issue” was threatening the natural order, mobilizing various nascent feminist groups and their strange — but not altogether unsurprising — bed-fellows: proponents of legalized prostitution, supporters of communal-living, and advocates for universal, state-run childcare from birth. These and other destabilizing factors made the situation so dire in Bavinck’s estimation that he could write, “There has never been a time when the family faced so severe a crisis as the time in which we are now living” (61).

But that Bavinck was alive to see the state of the family today! Those of us used to tracing the familial ills of twenty-first century America back to the sexual revolution may be surprised by Bavinck’s assessment from the first decade of the twentieth century — a full half-century and an ocean away from the American ‘60s.

Bavinck’s *The Christian Family* is one of the best — it could be argued *the best* — book-length apologies for the family in print today. It is not my intention here to summarize or even extensively review the careful and convincing argument Bavinck makes in *The Christian Family*. The book is short enough that you would be much better served to get a copy for yourself and read it in a sitting or two. Instead, my purpose is to highlight key themes I see missing in today’s discourse on marriage and the family, and to provide constructive provocation on the authority of one of most well-respected Reformed theologians in print today.

Our era is increasingly marked by Great Tradition theological retrieval aimed at correcting twentieth century missteps. Calls for still more retrieval abound, which I heartily echo — not least because I’m surely not the only one who blushes at a side-by-side comparison of classical and contemporary curricula. But I do find it rather interesting what the retrievalists have heretofore neglected: anthropology — arguably the doctrine under the most internal and external pressure from contemporary forces.¹ I have my suspicions for why, and they have everything to do with the great chasm that exists between the world of our theological forebearers

and our world today. This distance strains our modern *egalitarian* sensibilities, and their reasoning makes us uncomfortable — especially when they speak about man *vis-à-vis* woman.

MALE-FEMALE DISTINCTION

Bavinck’s aim in *The Christian Family* is familial reformation according to the Word of God. Where then does he begin? In the same place divine revelation begins: “Scripture proceeds from the distinction between man and woman” (64). As a man of biblical conviction, Bavinck pursues familial reformation in the same way as Scripture. In this way, it is extraordinary and noteworthy how prominent male-female distinction is in *The Christian Family* — it is perhaps the most pervasive theme in the book. Throughout, Bavinck extols male-female complementarity and actively reasons from sexual difference; he even goes so far as to feature it as one of humanity’s — and in this way the family’s — crowning aspects. Consider the amalgamation of quotes below:

Man and woman are both human beings, and yet they are distinct in terms of physical build and psychological strength. So, even though they both receive the same calling, within that one calling each nevertheless receives a different task and activity (6) [T]he distinction between man and woman was always known among all people groups, and taken into account by all of them in terms of practice. Nature teaches this distinction, and no science or philosophy is needed to acquaint

¹Michael Haykin, “This Anthropological Moment,” *Eikon* 1.2 (Fall 2019), 6.

oneself with this. . . . no single people was unfamiliar with this and did not organize the practical matters of life accordingly (25). . . . [T]his distinction functions in all of life and in all kinds of activity (68). . . . [T]he woman is constructed differently than the man in terms of religion, intellect, and morality. The same laws of logic and morals, the same religion and morality apply to both. The man is not intellectually superior to the woman, and the woman is not morally superior to the man. But how entirely different each of them takes hold of religion and morality, art and science! (69). . . . If the husband is the head, then the wife is the heart of the family

the husband gives, the wife receives; the husband establishes the family, the wife preserves the family (95). . . . Within the first family, the distinction between man and woman, parents and children, brothers and sisters, were already present, and along with them was supplied in seed form all those relationships of authority and obedience, coordination and subordination, parity and fraternity, which now in various expressions and concrete ways still govern the social life of human beings (110). . . . For by nature the man has a different disposition, different needs and inclinations, a different calling than the woman. No theory or law can erase this difference,

which is grounded in nature (127). . . . Whatever changes the new society may bring about, human nature remains the same everywhere. Man and woman differ now, and in the future will differ just as much as previously in physical and psychological constitution, in disposition, capacity, and life calling (144).

This smattering of quotes is by no means exhaustive, but it is meant to illustrate just how prevalent this theme is for Bavinck. While he is quick to warn against both underestimating and overestimating male-female distinction, it is important to note Bavinck's careful labor to at least *estimate* the male-female difference, and how this difference informs his view of marriage, family, and beyond — indeed “all of life.”

Bavinck is unencumbered by twenty-first century egalitarian sensibilities, and we would do well to wrestle with his exploration of how male-female difference influences all of life — not just within the four walls of the home and the church. For Bavinck, this includes how we make decisions regarding child-rearing and care; how we raise and disciple boys and girls; how we consider male and female schooling and careers — again, “all of life.”

If we are to follow Bavinck in his reform, the implication is clear: recover the male-female distinction from which Scripture proceeds, and we are on the road toward familial reformation. Downplay the differences, cordon them off from some realms of life, or worse, completely ignore them — as so many writing on gender today so wantonly do — and we are no longer proceeding biblically and will not see the family reformed.

*"...recover the
male-female
distinction from
which Scripture
proceeds, and we
are on the road
toward familial
reformation."*

IDEOLOGICAL VS. INDIVIDUAL REFORM

Bavinck uses martial imagery throughout *The Christian Family* to underscore his perception of just how serious he perceived threats to the family to be. “An entire army of evils besieges the life of the family” (22). In the face of such organized evil, Bavinck saw resistance not only as a duty, but a calling.

When Bavinck writes about the threats and dangers facing family, he considers both its ideological and individual enemies. He considered the most serious dangers to be new theories on marriage and the family that were gaining traction in his day, including open marriage, intentional childlessness and abortion, giving up children for the state to raise, and even the



concept of radical “equality” that meant women needed to be “relieved” as much as possible from motherhood and duties at home. At the end of the day, Bavinck recognized these ideas flowed from and reinforced a statist error, namely that the state is the “one true family” (139). Progressive ideologies swallow the family whole; when everything is the family, nothing is.

When Bavinck names other evils besieging the family, he trots out familiar ghouls. The naming rhymes not only with the early chapters of Genesis, but with our own news headlines today:

the infidelity of the husband, the stubbornness of the wife, the disobedience of the child; both the worship and denigration of the woman, tyranny as well as slavery, the seduction and the hatred of men, both idolizing and killing children; sexual immorality, human trafficking, concubinage, bigamy, polygamy, polyandry, adultery, divorce, incest; unnatural sins whereby men commit scandalous acts with men, women with women, men with boys, women with girls, men and women and children with each other, people with animals; the stimulation of lust by impure thoughts, words, images, plays, literature, art, and clothing; glorifying nudity and evaluating even the passions of the flesh into the service of deity (22).

In this list, Bavinck makes good the words of Qohelet: there is nothing new under the sun (Eccles. 1:9) — particularly, it seems, when it comes to institutions as old as the sun.

Man is a product of both his own inner-life and the society in which he finds himself. Bavinck’s plan for combating such societal ills is instructive. For Bavinck, it would be a mistake to put the attempt to change one’s outward environment ahead of the war for internal, personal reform. Sin and unrighteousness are always the enemy. Not unaware of the malignant effects a society and its ideas can have on individuals and families — indeed, he names them for what they are — Bavinck nevertheless framed his efforts toward reforming and strengthening the family by addressing the individual, sinful heart:

In the modern era, as the notion of sin is slipping away, the culpability for every misery is being sought outside the person and located in the institutions, in social circumstances, in the organization of the state. All deliverance is naturally expected then from social and political reform. But conscience speaks a different language within every person who seriously examines himself and ventures to confront this moral reality. Such conscience lays the blame not on the institution of society and state, but on the person himself; you are the man (75)!

What shape does Bavinck’s counteroffensive take? If the family is in trouble, the best one can do is to reform and fortify the family through its constituents. Reform the individual, reform the family, and societal reform will follow. Combat the ideas, yes; but we must engage persons and work on society through individuals.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY ARE ESSENTIAL

For Bavinck, marriage and family are not just one option among many in a choose-your-own-adventure. They are instead “the foundation of all of civilized society.” Without the marriage, there is no family. Without family, there is no society. But more than foundational, the family is constitutive of the wellbeing of society: “The authority of the father, the love of the mother, and the obedience of the child form in their unity the threefold cord that binds together and sustains all relationships within human society” (8). Pity, then, any civilization that is bent on undermining and destroying such an estimable institution.

Bavinck believed marriage and family were not only essential for civilized society, but a norm to be encouraged for the vast majority of people. When he speaks of singleness, he recognizes it is permissible and even perhaps obligatory in some instances, but he is empathic to say that marriage is still the “usual route” men and women everywhere should follow. He goes on to name several movements arrayed against this ideal in his day that should be vigorously opposed, including asceticism and celibacy, Roman Catholic errors regarding marriage, and societal trends that normalize sex outside monogamous marriage.

Bavinck locates the origin of marital and familial disintegration not in the state, nor society, which precedes the state, but in the entrance of sin into humanity in the Fall in Genesis 3. Thus, at base, it is always primarily

sin and the curse that must be overcome in the fight for the family, including strained relations between man and woman. Susan Foh’s interpretation² of Genesis 3:16–17 — that woman’s desire for her husband in God’s curse is subversive — has been dismissed as a recent idiosyncrasy, but those who do should reckon with Bavinck’s take on God’s curse on the woman: “Driven to the man through her own desire, the woman seeks with her wiles to enchant him, or she bows like a slave under his feet” (13). God’s work in rolling back sin and the curse is illustrated in Ephesians 5, where husbands are commanded to love their wives, and wives are commanded to submit to their husbands.

Writing from the Netherlands in 1908, Bavinck noted that “in our country about 95 percent of women older than twenty get married, and most marriages by far are blessed with children” (153). If Bavinck could sound the alarm on the health of the family in his day, how much more in ours? In the United States today, the marriage rate for adults is fifty percent, including those who are divorced and no longer married.³ Perhaps even more alarming, almost forty percent of babies born in the US today are born to unmarried parents.⁴

What would Bavinck think of those today who argue that the church has made too much of marriage and the family? Consider this disparity — ninety-five vs. fifty percent of adult women married — the next time you notice someone being rebuked for overemphasizing marriage or making an idol out of the family.

²Susan T. Foh, “What Is the Woman’s Desire?” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1974/75), 376–83.

³Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Nikki Graf, and Gretchen Livingston, “Marriage and Cohabitation in the U.S.” *Pew Research Center*, November 6, 2019, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/11/06/marriage-and-cohabitation-in-the-u-s/>.

⁴Joyce A. Martin, et al., “Births: Final Data for 2018,” *National Vital Statistics Reports* vol. 68 no. 13, November 27, 2019, https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68_13-508.pdf.

FAMILIAL NURTURE

Essential to Bavinck’s estimation of the family’s importance is his concept of nurture, and he devotes an entire chapter to it. For Bavinck, the Christian view of familial nurture is set against what is desirable or even possible outside the family, with the state. This view directly implicates any who would neglect prioritizing familial nurture in pursuit of some other good. There were those in Bavinck’s day, like ours today, who were complaining about the family’s stultifying effect on individuals, especially women, because of its often unchosen aspects. But for Bavinck, the unchosen-ness of the family is part of its unique and divine design, a design which schools the human person from his earliest years in the virtues. There exists an “is” to the familial design long before there is an “ought,” but the “ought” needs follow in any Christian estimation. The microcosm that is the family is a school of virtue and nurture *par excellence*:

Masculine and feminine qualities, physical and spiritual strengths, intellectual, volitional, and emotional gifts, age and youth, strength and weakness, authority and obedience, affection and love, unity and diversity of interests, all of these come together in one family, unified and distinguished and blended together. The diversity both attracts and repels, unifies and isolates; sometimes the family is a small kingdom divided against itself, but such division can be intense because the unity is maintained by the father, and especially by the mother, a communal language, religion, and morality, communal

traditions, relationships, and interests, communal experiences of love and suffering, of joy and sorrow, of sickness and recovery, of death and grief, all preserve the unity and keep it in balance with the diversity (92).

In light of such beautiful diversity, surely lament is appropriate in response to the perversity that would dare to celebrate any arrangement that intentionally forgoes sexual diversity, procreation, or intentional child-rearing. There is a reason so-called same-sex marriage is nothing more than a pretense, and there is a reason why children are everywhere in the Bible considered marks of divine blessing.

Bavinck’s concept of familial nurture does not have in view only the benefits to children — though procreation and raising the next generation is clearly a primary good — but the benefits familial life has for parents too. Parenting changes a person for the good: “The family transforms ambition into service, miserliness into munificence, the weak into strong, cowards into heroes, coarse fathers into mild lambs, tenderhearted mothers into ferocious lionesses” (97). Do we want a society marked by the latter, not the former? Give children back to their parents and parents back to their children. According to Bavinck, this is how Christianity transforms a society, making strong, loving, nurturing mothers of women and devoted, tender, benevolent fathers of men.

The family is the first school of life: “A person’s becoming human occurs within the home” (108). If Bavinck is correct, rebukes are in order toward the raft

of literature that downplays or, worse, besmirches work in the home — even and especially what is being written from a purportedly Christian consideration.

CONCLUSION

While I have by no means exhausted Bavinck’s wisdom in *The Christian Family*, it is my hope that the strands of pearly wisdom from his book presented above will result in greater interaction, retrieval, and appropriation with respect to this classic work. If this happens, I hope it will raise questions like the following: In what ways is Bavinck’s thought incongruent with the modern evangelical church? Where do I observe anything approximating Bavinck’s expression of orthodoxy today? Is the Bible’s position on marriage and the family closer to the evangelical consensus, or Bavinck’s? Do we consider marriage to be “the apex of human life” (74) and uphold it as such? If not, have we been influenced more by the culture than the Bible?

Reading many of the salvos being published today against the work of complementarians, I can’t help but wonder what these authors would write against *The Christian Family* if it were published in 2020. But even more, I can’t help but wonder what Herman Bavinck would write if he were reading these complementarian critics today. Sign me up for that recovery. ✕

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In Memoriam: Sir Roger Scruton

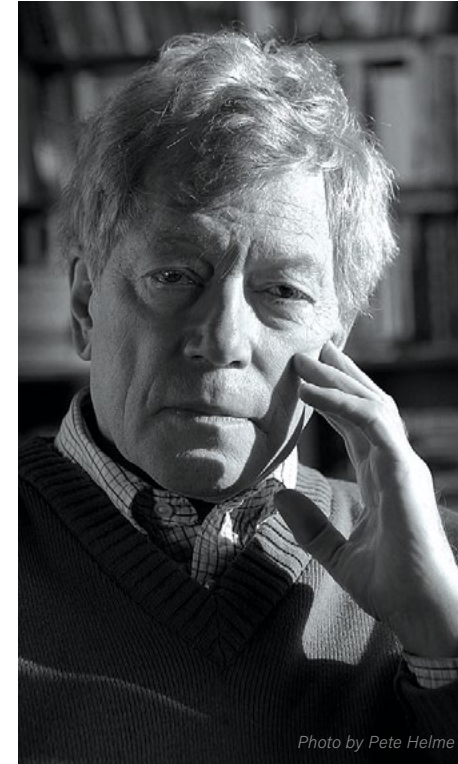


Photo by Pete Helme

As the outpouring obituaries demonstrate, Roger Scruton was one of the most influential philosophers of the last fifty years. He made original and profound contributions to the way we understand beauty, conservatism, and human nature. In 2016, Queen Elizabeth II bestowed him with a knighthood for his services to education, especially to those behind the Iron Curtain.

Were Scruton's sympathies resonant with those of today's cultural elites, he would have occupied the place of National Treasure, the position philosopher Bertrand Russell occupied in the twentieth century. For though Scruton's blazingly sharp mind and shy temperament were of the caliber and timbre of his intellectual grandfather, Ludwig Wittgenstein,¹ his forays into public debate were Russellian in their profligacy. Nonetheless, he was

an everyday fixture of British life through BBC Radio, *The London Times*, television, and popular books. In America he is most well-known within philosophical, conservative, and Christian circles.

Upon his passing in January, Britain's Prime Minister tweeted (in his inimitable idiom of punchy, Anglo-Saxon heavy English): "We have lost the greatest modern conservative thinker — who not only had the guts to say what he thought but said it beautifully."² The Prime Minister spoke for all — admirers and detractors alike — when he acknowledged the beauty that flowed from Scruton's life and pen.

Beauty, like the *ersterbend* E-flat of Mahler's last symphony, is the note that lingers over Scruton's life. His life's end began with slander concocted by a left-

wing magazine for which he wrote weekly wine columns for many years. As a result, Scruton momentarily lost his commission overseeing the beautification of Britain's buildings. Thanks to the untiring efforts of one journalist in particular, the truth soon came out. Scruton emerged with his reputation salvaged, but his health in tatters.

Scruton refused to harbor resentment toward his enemies. He forgave them.³ Ten years before this injustice, Scruton had written:

Happiness does not come from the pursuit of pleasure, nor is it guaranteed by freedom. It comes from sacrifice: that is the great message that all the memorable works of our culture convey. The message has been lost in the noise of repudiation, but we can hear it once again if we devote our energies to retrieving it. And in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the primary act of sacrifice is forgiveness. The one who forgives sacrifices resentment and thereby renounces something that had been dear to his heart.⁴

¹Elizabeth Anscombe supervised Scruton's doctoral thesis at Cambridge; she was supervised by Wittgenstein, who considered her his intellectual heir in the English-speaking world. Scruton would charmingly relate how Anscombe's price of tuition was a cigar and bottle of claret, both of which she would consume during the course of the tutorial. Mercifully, Scruton exacted no such tribute from his students.

²Boris Johnson, Twitter Post (January 13, 2020, 5:52 AM) <https://twitter.com/BorisJohnson/status/1216674269721219072>

³Roger Scruton, "Diary - 17 April 2019" *The Spectator*, April 17, 2019, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/diary---17-april-2019>

⁴Roger Scruton, "Forgiveness and Irony: What Makes the West Strong," *City Journal* (Winter 2009), <https://www.city-journal.org/html/forgiveness-and-irony-13144.html>

Scruton knew the ordeal he underwent and the cancer that followed meant he was close to death. His last sentence composed to the world was: “Coming close to death you begin to know what life means, and what it means is gratitude.”⁵ Scruton died grateful for his life, its valleys as well as its mountaintops, on January 12, 2020, in his home in rural Wiltshire.

“In my end is my beginning.” In what sense was this line from Scruton’s favorite poem of T.S. Eliot’s true for Scruton himself? It is a difficult question to answer. Scruton did not believe in heaven: not in the sense of an afterlife in which the human soul continues for eternity; he did not believe his earthly end was his heavenly beginning. For Scruton, the source of meaning is earth and her beauty. He found redemption not in hoping beyond this world, but in being reconciled to it.

Scruton loved Wagner and Mahler for expressing this belief through music: “In Mahler’s vision redemption comes through beauty; but the awareness of beauty is not merely an aesthetic thing, existing in fleeting moments of delight. It is a stance of the whole person and informs the whole of life. It has its moral and political expression; and it is best explained, to those who do not know it, as the ability to bless, and to be blessed by, the things of this world.”⁶ And yet, Scruton spoke of knowing the real presence of Christ in his life. What did he mean?

The summation of Scruton’s religious philosophy, *The Face of God*, accounts God’s presence as the effect of “*reaching through* the tissue of objects to the thing that they mean.”⁷ Scruton suggests that the objects we “reach through” include the whole of

nature, including our fellow human beings. In objects we find not just their physical reality but also “subjectivity enfolded” around us. The Malvern hills, in one sense, are mere objects; but when I walk through them they speak to me of longing, of glory, of permanence. Roger Scruton, in one sense, was a mere object: a dizzying collection of cells fueled by the digital information of his DNA; but when I looked into his eyes, I saw a subject: someone who could recognize *me* as a subject, too, and who could show understanding, empathy, and judgment. In other words, we know God through the face: the face of others and the face of the world. That is why defacing nature, other human beings, and ourselves, is so serious. This quasi-religious account of morality is part of what made Scruton so intriguing to Christians.⁸

“In my end is my beginning.” What about in the sense of *telos* — the “end” for which human beings are made — did Scruton accept teleology? Again, it is difficult to answer this question. Scruton was not an Aristotelian or a Thomist, though he had sympathy with many of the conclusions reached by philosophers in those traditions. When I suggested I wished to use Thomistic methodology for my thesis, Scruton hesitated. He gave his blessing on the condition that I read Kant for three months first “so that you come away from this degree having learned something *true*.” In the end, Scruton was a deontologist. So then, was Scruton an atheist, albeit a sophisticated one at ease with religious terminology?

To say Scruton was a Kantian is to say that he accepted God as a condition for the reliability of ethics but did not think he could reliably affirm God’s existence. To understand this outlook, we must situate Scruton in his

philosophical context. In doing so we take a page from Scruton himself when, explaining the philosophy of Kant, he emphasized the need for context to achieve clarity.⁹ But there is an additional reason to compare Scruton and Kant: the two are bookends to a long history of philosophy.

When Kant came of age, doubt ate away at the Judeo-Christian culture into which he was born. Profound skepticism that our senses and our reason are reliable means to true knowledge pervaded philosophy. The new scientific method, Renaissance *ressourcement* of ancient Greek texts, and the breakup of Christian doctrine, all contributed to undermined confidence in God’s existence — or at least, his immanence. Without God to guarantee the reliability of the senses or reason, it became imperative for philosophers to prove the self-sufficiency of either.

Empiricists (emphasizing sense experience) and Rationalists (emphasizing reason) vainly went about this task, coming to a standstill in the attempt. Kant knew that, should epistemological uncertainty continue, the body politic would gradually die without a strong worldview to hold it together. He knew that confidence in Judeo-Christian ethics would erode, leaving society vulnerable. He viewed himself as the patient’s noble healer stepping in to stay the bleeding. The following was the surgeon’s method.

Kant divided human experience from reality. Whereas Aristotle, Aquinas, and other epistemological realists trusted the senses to communicate external reality to the human mind, Kant argued that the human mind imposes upon the external world a structure independent of the world. Baked into our minds, prior to experience, are concepts like space, numerals, and time. We do not discover them by experience; we do not discover them by reflecting upon and reasoning them through. Instead, they are prior to both experience and reason. Such “synthetic *a priori*” concepts are, Kant thought, the condition of having a mind.

Thus, Kant divided the world into two halves. The half *we* know is the Phenomenal world. It is reality as we experience it. On the other side, like the dark half of the Moon, is the Noumenal world — the real world as it actually is — independent of mind. We are doomed never to experience it. We can never reach it. Reality itself — the Noumenal world — might not have space, time, or anything that composes what reality is to us. Then again, it might.

Intellectual historians like Francis Schaeffer place Kant in a descending narrative from order to despair.¹⁰ While this is the correct understanding of Kant from a Christian perspective, in his own time Kant acted as a philosophical conservative (albeit one who availed himself of dynamic methodology).

⁵Roger Scruton: “My 2019: Despite everything, I have so much to be grateful for,” *The Spectator*, December 21, 2019, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/roger-scruton-my-2019>.

⁶Roger Scruton, “David Matthews at 70,” *Sir Roger Scruton*, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://www.rogerscruton.com/articles/1-politics-and-society/186-offensive-jokes.html>.

⁷Roger Scruton, *The Face of God* (London: Continuum, 2012) 156. Emphasis original.

⁸See, Albert Mohler, “What Does Philosophy Say to Our Times? A Conversation with Roger Scruton,” *Thinking in Public*, podcast audio, February 14, 2011, <https://albertmohler.com/2011/02/14/thinking-in-public-2>.

⁹Roger Scruton, *Kant: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 16.

¹⁰Francis Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 227.



Kant said that in order to make room for faith (and, most importantly, the attending ethics of the Judeo-Christian worldview), he found it necessary to deny knowledge. He meant that he had to deny the possibility of real knowledge not grounded first in the human self.

By describing Kant's thought we sketch not only Scruton's context but Scruton's own philosophical framework. He accepted Kant's fundamental dichotomy between reality and reality-as-we-experience-it. Following Kant's successors, Hegel and Heidegger, he understood "our reality" as the *Lebenswelt*, or "life world," in which the human person experiences not necessarily reality, but reality *as known by* human minds.

Like Kant, Scruton came of age as anxiety ate away at Western culture. Philosophers were actively deconstructing the Judeo-Christian worldview because Kant's project had merely prolonged the West's life, not prevented its dissipation. From an apartment window in Paris in 1968, Scruton witnessed this breakdown in philosophy spill out onto the streets. He saw university students, the *soixante-huitards* — despairing that true knowledge could ever be reached — fight against their governing power structures not with truth, but with raw power. In this moment, Scruton knew he belonged on the opposite side of the students.

Like Kant, Scruton the conservative set about stemming this crisis in culture and ethics by going to the philosophical source. He met two tributaries flowing downstream from Kant. The first sought to construct the *Lebenswelt* despite its divorce from ultimate reality; the other sought to deconstruct the life-world *because* of its divorce from reality. Scruton found the latter a cop-out: a cowardly or lazy reaction to the titanic role of philosophy. The former spurred his aspirations.

This created a paradox at the heart of Scruton's thinking.¹¹ It is why conservatives and Christians find his writing worth taking seriously even though he worked outside of Christian metaphysics. Søren Kierkegaard, floating amidst the flotsam of the eighteenth century's philosophical wreckage, knew that the inevitable outcome of Western society's rejection of Christianity was the transference of religious faith from God to the world, and therefore the eventual renouncement of the individual — a move he saw as irremediably evil.¹² That is why Kierkegaard, accepting Kant's division of reality, had no choice but to advocate a "leap of faith" to belief in God's existence. This is a leap no man should take, and Scruton was too intelligent to make it.

Hegel understood the subjectivity of "I" as participation in the universal, obliterating the individual. Some philosophers post-Hegel thought irony — at best, romantic irony — was all we could now achieve without knowledge of our real selves and the real world. Nietzsche, fully realizing the crisis, brought the crisis to its logical conclusion, asserting that there are no moral facts, only different ways of representing the world. Existentialists in the 1950s and 60s likewise concluded that all that was left was the assertion of will — any will.

While Scruton joined Kant, Hegel, and the rest of the secular Enlightenment in transferring meaning from God to the world, he did so without renouncing the individual. Scruton saw the "I" as real. As one philosopher has noted, Scruton did better than his own philosophical presuppositions allowed.¹³ He was a modern man (in his presuppositions) fighting against Modernity.

Looking back on Scruton's life, we have a choice between reading Scruton flowing in the direction from order to chaos — from the direction of Christianity grounded in epistemic realism collapsing into the loss of faith dangling over epistemic scepticism. Or, we can historically situate Scruton as someone who attempted to stem the tide, not ride the wave crashing over civilization. This is the perspective of philosophers such as Mark Dooley and Bryan Baise.

¹¹Cf. Nigel Warburton, "Roger Scruton on Human Nature," *Philosophy Bites*, podcast audio, August 29, 2017, <https://philosophybites.com/2017/08/roger-scruton-on-human-nature-1.html>

¹²Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1995), 186.

¹³John Rist, "A Modern Man in Revolt Against Modernity," *Catholic Herald*, June 30, 2016, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://catholicherald.co.uk/a-modern-man-in-revolt-against-modernity>.

And it is how Scruton saw himself. In his semi-autobiographical work *Philosopher on Dover Beach*, Scruton listened to the same, harrowing, sound as Matthew Arnold, whose poem provided the title of the work:

The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar¹⁴

It is in this way that Scruton is the bookend to Kant. Like Kant, Scruton wanted to preserve the Judeo-Christian inheritance, not destroy it. Like Kant, and unlike Christian philosophers such as Elizabeth Anscombe, Richard Swinburne, and Alvin Plantinga — for whom a revised metaphysics is the exit out of modern philosophy's *cul de sac* — Scruton thought the only tools at his disposal were ones without reference to pre-modern metaphysics.

That is why Scruton wrote a book in 1985 called *Thinkers of the New Left* (later reissued as *Fools, Frauds, and Firebrands*). Scruton did not have the faith of T.S. Eliot to know that his end was his beginning, but he certainly knew that publishing this book was the beginning of the end of his academic career. The hate which he received for the book nearly brought him to suicide.¹⁵ In it, he deconstructs the deconstructors, those who deny the possibility of arriving at truth. Put in a pithy phrase: "A writer who says that there are no truths, or that all truth is 'merely relative,' is asking you not to believe him. So don't.

Deconstruction deconstructs itself, and disappears up its own behind, leaving only a disembodied smile and a faint smell of sulphur."¹⁶ Anglo-American philosophers despised the book; it was cherished behind the Iron Curtain.

Similarly, Scruton resisted the scientific reductionism of the "new atheists" such as Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins, and the reductionist neuroscience popularized by the Churchlands. He once participated in a "God debate" with atheists on one side, believers on the other. Paradox fully on display, Scruton cheerfully took the side of God.

In his book *Human Nature*, Scruton probed the reductionist assertion that mind is nothing more than matter. Where a philosopher like Dennett likens human experience to icons on a computer screen — fascinating to the eye but ultimately nothing but pigmentation — Scruton insists there is a deeper level to human consciousness. He invites us to consider *The Mona Lisa*. In one sense the painting is nothing more than a collection of dots, like the icon on our computer; but in another sense, only a human person endowed with reason and freedom can intend to smile.¹⁷ The same holds true with music. Mahler's 9th symphony is, in one sense, nothing more than a succession of noises that happen to excite the pleasure centers of the human brain. But is that all there is to say? In the *Lebenswelt*, we experience so much more. We call it music: the art of the Muses.

Perhaps Idealism — the catch-all term for post-Kantian philosophy — is the most efficient explanation of the universe without needing to reference a God of infinite complexity whose existence cannot be demonstrated by empirical methods of inquiry. Scruton thought so, though he constructed an elegant account of God in God's place. Yet the persistent interest of Christians in Scruton's philosophy points to something more. Perhaps Scruton is like the Fox in C.S. Lewis's *Till We Have Faces*, the Greek slave who instructs Orual in the ways of reason. He cannot bring her to God, but he paves the way.

Orual's longing in *Till We Have Faces* is the same as Scruton's: to find the place where beauty comes from — the place where we ought to have been born. One of Scruton's most profound contributions is an account of our love for home. We yearn to feel belonging in our environment; we long to know ourselves in the network of our relations. After sojourning in Virginia for several years, Scruton returned with his family to the English countryside with its familiar land, culture, neighbors, and laws. This was a lived-out action of Scruton's account of, as he called it, *oikophilia*: the love of home.

This yearning speaks to the transcendent. Scruton, with Kant, could only see the transcendent, not into it. But when we look into the transcendent — into the face of God — we see "well why the gods do not speak to us openly, nor let us answer. Till that word can be dug out of us, why should they hear the babble that we think we mean? How can they meet us face to face till we have faces?"¹⁸ Still, Orual only comes to this position of humility after walking the path of questions that leads to the fear of the Lord. Lewis knew that, in a post-Christian world, we need to recover the natural knowledge of the Fox (representing pagan philosophers) with its attendant understanding of wrong and right (the natural law) before the gospel could become intelligible again.

Scruton believed that we meet one another in language. For the Christian, this opens up fruitful discussion of the Word described in the first chapter of John's gospel. "In the beginning was the *logos*." It eventually leads us to say: "Lord . . . You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away."¹⁹ ✕

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¹⁴Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach," *Poetry Foundation*, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43588/dover-beach>.

¹⁵Tim Adams, "Roger Scruton: 'Funnily Enough, My Father Looked Like Jeremy Corbyn,'" *The Guardian*, October 4, 2015, accessed May 8, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/oct/04/roger-scruton-my-father-looked-like-jeremy-corbyn-fools-frauds-firebrands-interview>.

¹⁶Roger Kimball, "Saving Appearances: Roger Scruton on Philosophy," *The New Criterion* 12.10 (June 1994), accessed May 8, 2020, <https://newcriterion.com/issues/1994/6/saving-the-appearances-roger-scruton-on-philosophy>

¹⁷Roger Scruton, *Human Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 31.

¹⁸C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (New York City: Harper Collins, 2017), 335.

¹⁹Ibid., 349.



What does “act like men” mean in 1 Corinthians 16:13?

In her new book *Recovering from Biblical Manhood & Womanhood*, Aimee Byrd takes me and Owen Strachan to task for our understanding of 1 Corinthians 16:13. The verse reads as follows: “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (my translation). In particular, she takes umbrage with our interpretation of that little phrase “act like men.” She writes,

“This is certainly an obscure verse to build a teaching on masculinity. . . . This admonition is addressed to both men and women, as in the following verse 15, Paul addresses them as brothers

and sisters. ‘Act like men’ does not appear to be a helpful translation.”¹

To be clear, neither Strachan nor I are building a theological superstructure on this verse alone. The Bible and nature are shot through with divine revelation on this point. This verse is a piece of the puzzle, but it is not the whole puzzle by a longshot. Nevertheless, Byrd notes that the verse is addressed to both men and women and therefore cannot be saying anything meaningful about manhood per se.² She concludes, “Christian men and women don’t strive for so-called biblical masculinity or femininity, but Christlikeness.”³

¹Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 112.

²It is worth pointing out that Strachan acknowledges that Paul directs this text to both men and women: “His words in 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 apply to all believers, to be sure. . . .” See Owen Strachan and Gavin Peacock, *The Grand Design: Male and Female He Made Them* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2016), 51–52. Notice as well, that the very excerpt that Byrd quotes from Strachan’s book acknowledges the same thing: “Even as he calls all believers to maturity. . . .” (Ibid., 58).

³Byrd, 114.

As others have pointed out, her conclusion is a false dichotomy. In scripture, Christlikeness and masculinity/femininity are not in opposition to one another. They are complements. To pit them against one another is highly misleading. Andy Naselli has a thorough review of Byrd's book elsewhere in this journal, so I will leave aside a full critique of her argument here. My narrow aim in this essay is to take issue with two claims that Byrd makes about 1 Corinthians 16:13 — first, that “act like men” is a bad translation; and second, that this text has nothing to say about biblical manhood.

The underlying Greek verb (*andrizesthei*) is rendered variously as “act like men” (ESV, NASB; cf. CSB, KJV) or “be courageous” (NIV, NRSV, NLT). Some interpreters who favor “act like men” understand the text as a call to manhood. Others — like Byrd — dismiss that interpretation by noting that the command is addressed to both men and women.

For my part, I think either translation is acceptable. Both translations capture something true and important about the original expression. The Greek word in question is built on a root that refers to adult males (*aner*). That means that there are at least two semantic oppositions here, not one—*male* as opposed to *female* and *adult* as opposed to *child*. As Thiselton explains, “it does not simply pose a contrast with supposedly ‘feminine’ qualities; it also stands in contrast with *childish ways*.”⁴ In other words, the root idea invokes both *masculinity* and *maturity*.

The term's actual usage, however, is idiomatic and reflects the stereotypical connection between manliness and

courage. It's a call to bravery that relies on a trope about masculine strength that was common in the ancient world. This particular usage means roughly the same thing we mean when we say “*be a man*” or “*man up*.” It calls for readers to put away whatever inhibitions or fears they might have about doing something, and do it. As commentators Ciampa and Rosner argue, it means “to faithfully carry out one's responsibilities even in the face of extreme danger and frightening circumstances.”⁵

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the usage is with a similar one in English. Imagine standing on the high dive at the public swimming pool. You walk slowly out to the edge, and when you see how far down it is, your stomach catches up in your throat. You're staring down trying to figure out whether you are actually going to go through with the long drop, and you're taking so long that the line of people behind you is getting impatient, and someone yells, “*C'mon, man up!*” They see your apprehension and fear, and they are telling you to get over it and get on with it. And so what do you do? You *man up*, and you jump.

Likewise, the expression in 1 Corinthians 16:13 calls for courage. That is why the NIV, NRSV, and others do well to render it as “*be courageous*.” That is a faithful interpretation. It calls us to put aside whatever fears we have about the conflict we face for following Christ, and to get on with it. In this sense, courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is the ability to overcome fear and apprehension because you fear God more than you fear man. We all understand that following Christ is sometimes going to be hard. It is sometimes going to be scary. But what

pushes us forward is not that we don't find things to be scary but that we love and trust Christ even more than our fears.

But the call to courage is not the only thing going on with this term. The author, the Apostle Paul, has clearly chosen to use a stereotype that associates courage with masculinity. Why would Paul speak like that? Is he trying to say that men are supposed to be courageous but women aren't? Of course not! This command is given to everyone in the congregation, both men and women. The call to courage is limited to neither male nor female but is required of both.

Nevertheless, the expression itself is a reflection of the way God designs men and women in their physical differences—that men are generally stronger than women and more mature than boys (1 Pet. 3:7). These characteristics make men fit for feats of courage and bravery. Of course not all men have great strength, but that is not the point of the stereotype. Stereotypes are generalizations, after all. And in this case the generalization reflects the Creator's design. As Kevin DeYoung has argued concerning this text, “Of course, this is a command to the whole church—men and women—but it is telling that Paul associates strength and courage with masculinity, a perspective embraced throughout Scripture (cf. 1 Kings 2:1).”⁶

The bottom line is that we have an apostle using a stereotypical expression that would not be received well were it uttered

in our own culture today. And there's the rub. Last summer, BBC News published an article noting that the phrase “man up” means to “demonstrate toughness or courage when faced with a difficult situation.”⁷ Nevertheless, the article went on to suggest that it is “sexist” to associate such qualities with men. And yet this association is precisely what appears in 1 Corinthians 16:13. It is no surprise, therefore, that modern readers might dislike Paul's expression as well.

Scripture is not afraid to speak stereotypically about the natural connection between masculine strength and courage. Because of that, we do well to recognize something fundamental about masculine virtue even as we recognize that the command to courage applies to all of us, both male and female followers of Christ.

Aimee Byrd has missed the importance of this text for our understanding not only of the Bible, but also of what natural revelation has to say about the difference between male and female. This text associates courage with masculine strength, and it holds out this virtue as an aspiration for all followers of Christ. This text is indeed about discipleship — a discipleship rooted in divinely ordained differences between male and female.



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⁴Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1336.

⁵Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 856.

⁶Kevin DeYoung, “How Are Men and Women Different?,” *9Marks Journal* (December 2019): 157.

⁷Hanna Yusuf, “Is It OK to Tell Someone to ‘Man Up?’,” *BBC News*, June 24, 2019, sec. UK, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-48743113>.

The New Gender Gnostics

On December 19, 2019 the British writer J. K. Rowling tweeted out the following message:

Dress however you please. Call yourself whatever you like. Sleep with any consenting adult who'll have you. Live your best life in peace and security. But force women out of their jobs for stating that sex is real? #IStandWithMaya

She was referring to Maya Forstater, a tax expert, who had just lost a legal case against her employer, a British think tank, which did not renew her contract because she tweeted that transgender women cannot actually change their sex. In the opinion, the judge found her beliefs “not worthy of respect in democratic society” and “absolutist.”¹ But she found a defender in the famous author, J. K. Rowling. Rowling’s tweet, however, was greeted by howls of outrage from the perpetually outraged transgender activists who are used to taking down anyone who dares to challenge them

¹As quoted in *The Guardian*, Dec. 18, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/dec/18/judge-rules-against-charity-worker-who-lost-job-over-transgender-tweets>

by weaponizing social media. Princeton Professor Robert P. George tweeted his support for Forstater and Rowling on December 19 and then wondered if Rowling would follow what has now become a disturbing pattern of caving to the outrage mob. He put up a poll and found that 61.9% of his readers predicted she would indeed cave. But two days later on December 21 he tweeted this surprising update:

The gender gnostics invite JK Rowling to re-education camp and she says no. They realize that there’s now a lot at stake and they must bend her to their will. If she refuses to cave & survives cancellation she licenses wholesale dissent from Woke orthodoxy. This is now a Big Deal.

At this point, I retweeted Robert George’s defence of J. K. Rowling for stating a scientific fact that the mob denies. I was happy to lend my support, for whatever it is worth, to George, Rowling, and Forstater for standing up for common sense and truth in this case. But, as a theologian, I was also interested in the unusual phrase he used: “gender Gnostics.”

I wrote a few brief comments on Twitter in which I suggested that his use of this term is not a gratuitous insult, or a throw-away line utilized as a rhetorical flourish, but is actually a sophisticated philosophical term, which accurately describes the people about whom he is speaking. In this article I want to expand a bit on what I said there because I think it is important to understand the nature of the ideas that are fueling the passions of the woke mob. The basic problem with the transgender activists is that they have bad theology, and Christians who are being tempted to abandon science and biblical teaching on human nature in order to avoid feeling their wrath need to be aware of how bad it is and what is wrong with it.

My concern with this issue is primarily theological and metaphysical, and only secondarily political. But it should be noted that good metaphysics leads to the kind of politics in which all human beings can truly flourish, and that good theology helps us see human beings as God sees them, which makes the world a better place. And, without doubt, good theology and good metaphysics also foster better content on social media!

WHAT IS A Gnostic?

The term “Gnostic” refers to an adherent of certain ideas that were common in both the ancient Jewish and Hellenistic worlds of late antiquity, that is, the age of Second Temple Judaism and the late Roman Empire in which the New Testament was written. This set of ideas has its roots in the ancient Persian dualism that forms the metaphysical framework for Zoroastrianism. But in the religious melting pot of late antiquity, these ideas merged with many others and were incorporated into many different kinds of new religions and what might be called today “spiritualities.” This era was in some ways similar to the late modern West in its fascination with both eastern and primitive religious ideas, as seen in what is often referred to as the New Age Movement.

It is interesting to note that Manichaeism, the Gnostic religion that Augustine of Hippo followed for nine years during his twenties, is an eclectic mix of religious ideas rooted in this sort of metaphysical dualism. Augustine, of course, would go on to provide a major critique of such a metaphysics and develop his Christian Platonism as an alternative to it, thus laying the foundation for a millennium of orthodox theology that would last until the rise of modern philosophy and the cultural movement known as the European Enlightenment in the seventeenth century.

In the Gnostic system of metaphysics, the cosmos is divided into two realms: the realm of spirit (which is good) and the realm of matter (which is evil). Since the human body is material, it is evil. Since Gnosticism views matter as evil, when it infiltrated early Christianity it redefined salvation as the soul’s permanent escape from the body, rather than as the resurrection of the body in the New Heavens and New Earth. Gnostic teachers like Marcion, for example, rejected the Old Testament and much of the New Testament in an attempt to shift Christianity away from its biblical metaphysics and toward an ontological dualism of good spirit and evil matter.

But Marcion was rejected by the mainstream of the Christian Church, which accepted the Old Testament as God’s Word and saw Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament hope. The New Testament bears witness to the full deity of

Jesus Christ, including his preexistence, virgin birth, sinless life, atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension, and future second coming. The New Testament also sees Jesus Christ as the hermeneutical key to interpreting the Old Testament. Jesus Christ was proclaimed by the Apostles to be the Messiah and Son of David prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures. The eschatological goal of God’s redemptive work in Jesus Christ was seen as the New Heavens and New Earth, in which the saints in their resurrected, glorified bodies would dwell forever in the presence of God. None of this was compatible with Gnostic dualism and its denigration of the material creation as evil and as something the soul needs to escape.

Different groups of Gnostics held one of two different views of the body, which appeared superficially to be almost opposite, but which actually share a crucial underlying assumption. On the one hand, some Gnostics advocated extreme asceticism to keep the influence of the body on the soul to an absolute minimum. Others, on the other hand, were libertines because they thought that the body is so utterly unimportant that what you do with it is unimportant. This led them to be indifferent toward those who followed their base instincts in whatever way they wished. These two approaches, extreme asceticism and extreme libertinism, may seem very different, but they actually share one basic conviction in common, namely, that there is no long-term future for the body. The body is part of the material world, which is inferior at best and downright evil at worst and, therefore, destined to be left behind, while the destiny of the soul is to enter a purely spiritual realm and live forever.

One of the presuppositions of the Gnostic view of the human person is a body-soul dualism in which the two are separable in principle. One of the implications of this view of the human person is that the soul is more important and valuable than the body. From there it is a very short step to understanding the soul as the “real you” and the body as basically something owned and used by the soul. The key idea here is the radical separation of the real “you” from your body. You are a disembodied *ego* floating above your body, and the body is just raw material on which to impose your will.

THE CHURCH REJECTS GNOSTICISM

Although early Christian thinkers like Augustine may seem to be saying something similar, in fact they believe that the human being is really a body-soul composite and that to be complete a person must have both a body and a soul. Even if the soul can, by a special act of God, survive in the intermediate state in heaven, it does so in anticipation of being reunited with its resurrected, glorified body at the end of the age. The idea that the human being consists of a body-soul unity was never lost, on account of the central importance in early Christian theology of the idea of the resurrection of the body, as we can see from its inclusion in the Apostles’ Creed. Thomas Aquinas would later solidify this anthropology by utilizing Aristotelian concepts in service of strengthening the concept of the body-soul unity of the human person. A theological anthropology in which the body is (1) created good, (2) an integral part of the human person, and (3) destined to be resurrected to eternal life in the New Heavens and New Earth became standard Christian orthodoxy throughout the pre-modern period and is reflected in the Reformation confessions and in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It has persisted in modernity under the influence of confessional orthodoxy despite heavy attacks from modern philosophy, as we shall see.

I have no interest in trying to make a historical argument connecting ancient Gnosticism with the beginnings of modern philosophy in thinkers such as René Descartes. But I do wish to point out a rather significant and obvious similarity between Cartesian dualism and ancient Gnostic dualism when it comes to philosophical anthropology. For Descartes, the “thinking thing” is the part of him that he views as the real person. He sees the self as consciousness or the mind. Having begun in “Meditation I” with his method of radical doubt, in “Meditation II” Descartes proves to himself the existence of himself as “a thing which thinks” before he goes on to prove the existence of God in Meditation III.² In doing so, he invents what comes to be known as the mind-body problem, which has become a staple of philosophical discussion and a topic in most first-year philosophy courses. At first, the influence of the Christian doctrine of the human person as a body-soul unity and the doctrine of the resurrection of the body mitigated the tendency of modern philosophical anthropology to split the person into a real self plus a body. But as secularization gained traction in the Enlightenment period, the relationship between the body and the soul became increasingly tenuous. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, modernity became increasingly “Gnostic-like.”

²Rene Descartes, “Meditations” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol. I*, edited by E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 153. Although this bears a superficial resemblance to Augustine’s exploration of the image of the Trinity in the human mind, it is more like the mirror opposite of Augustine’s procedure. Augustine begins from faith in God and understands the nature of the human mind from that beginning point; Descartes begins from belief in himself as a thinking thing and explores the possible existence of God from that beginning point. Here we see the essential difference between classical and modern philosophy in a nutshell. See Augustine, *The Trinity, De Trinitate*, Introduction, Translation and Notes by Edmund Hill. *The Works of Saint Augustine: A New Translation for the 21st Century, Part I, Vol. 5*, ed. John R. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1991).



Two of the key developments were the rise of skepticism after Hume and epistemological constructivism after Kant. As metaphysical realism was increasingly rejected in favor of nominalism, the very idea of human nature became a problem rather than a presupposition, as it had been in classical philosophy. Even as Enlightenment rationalism gave way to Romanticism in the nineteenth century, philosophical naturalism began to be taken for granted by many Western intellectuals as the starting point for science. The evolutionary metaphysics of Hegel dominated the nineteenth century mind and became the framework in which the data of natural science was organized and understood. The idea of evolution became a starting point in various sciences beginning with biology and geology and developing from there. By the time the new academic discipline of psychology began to emerge in the early twentieth century, a hard-edged materialism was the context for understanding the human mind. The concept of the emotions, understood as agitations of brain activity, displaced the older concept of the affections, which had historically been understood as the activity of the soul. The very idea of a human soul was reduced in many cases to the mind, which was reduced to the brain, which was reduced to chemistry. Soon there was no felt need to speak of the soul at all.

THE RETURN OF GNOSTICISM

In such an intellectual context, philosophical anthropology slipped its moorings and drifted off further and further from its Christian roots. By the 1960s the thought of certain French post-structuralists advocating deconstruction began to gain traction in the United States; their work was appropriated by the critical theorists, whose goal was the criticism and eventual dissolution of the family on the basis of Marxist theories of the pernicious influence of the family. As Stephen E. Bonner puts it: "Critical theory was intended as a general theory of society fueled by the desire for liberation."³ The 1970s and 1980s saw the development of something called "gender theory," in which the concept of "gender" was detached from its biological basis in sex in the name of liberation. The very idea of the sexual binary was challenged, and the concept of gender fluidity came to the fore. The whole idea of the LGBT alphabet soup approach to attacking the sexual binary was to force acceptance of the idea of gender fluidity and undermine the concept of "maleness" and "femaleness" as universals. By the 1970s metaphysical realism was so far in the rear-view mirror as far as many *avant garde* Western intellectuals were concerned that they were convinced that universals were an unnecessary restriction on the autonomy of the modern self.

³Stephen Eric Bonner, *Critical Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2107), 21.

"The very idea of a human soul was reduced in many cases to the mind, which was reduced to the brain, which was reduced to chemistry. Soon there was no felt need to speak of the soul at all."

The highest value in modernity is the same one that motivated first Eve and then Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden: the autonomy of the self. The modern sexual revolution is a revolt against the Christian God. It is a revolt motivated by the self-righteous conviction that the highest good for the human being is freedom defined as freedom from constraint. That prophet of modern decadence, Woody Allen, summed it up perfectly when he said: “The heart wants what the heart wants.” There is no appealing the decrees of this tribunal, for there is no higher court. The individual human being — defined as mind or consciousness or will — is supreme, and no church, government, or philosopher is permitted to tell it what to do. A particular action can be good, bad, or indifferent in itself or for other people, but when it is chosen by the sovereign self it magically becomes the good for that person. The self has become a god, just as the Serpent said, and this god determines good and evil for itself.

The gender Gnostics put this abstract theory into practice in a radical way. Leaving your spouse to find your soulmate is small potatoes. Women in traditionally male occupations is just a step in the process. When the modern autonomous self begins to think bigger, it contemplates transcending the whole idea of gender itself on the way to transcending the body itself. And so transgenderism, gender fluidity, and gender identity become new terms in the lexicon of modern life — in the name of freedom. The idea of sex is embodied gender and it must give way to the will of the self, which is defined in a non-bodily way. For somewhere along the way it has become an article of faith that the true self is not the limited, smelly, loathsome body. Like the old concept of “God,” the true self is pure spirit; embodiment presents unacceptable limitations to the pretensions of the divine self which, because it is free, must have no limitations of any kind.

The bitter fruit of late modernity, plucked from the tree of metaphysical realism and thus detached in a nominalist way, is gender theory. The essence of modern gender theory is the teaching that sex is merely incidental to identity, which must be true from the modern perspective because sex is merely bodily reality, which is to say, not real at all. In this way we see the return of ancient Gnosticism. The question of historical genealogy is not important for our purposes. All I am arguing for is that the new Gnosticism has the same attitude toward the body as the old Gnosticism did. And so, it is just as much the enemy of the Christian church as the old Gnosticism was. Will the church today expel the new gender Gnostics as the second-century church at Rome did when it told Marcion to take his money and get out?

Gnosticism has the distinction of being one of the few heresies of the patristic age to be denounced explicitly in the pages of the New Testament.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming and now is in the world already (1 John 4:1–3).

The early Gnostics often taught the heresy of Docetism, which is a word that comes from the Greek verb *dokeo* meaning “to seem or to appear.” They taught that Jesus only seemed or appeared to be a man, but actually was a divine being disguised as a mere man. Some taught that the divine spirit came upon Jesus at his baptism and left before his crucifixion. All Gnostics denied the full humanity of Jesus Christ and therefore they denied that upon which the gospel depends, namely the atoning death of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world. John appears to have had the Gnostic heresy in mind from the beginning of his letter. In the prologue he writes:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – the life was manifest, and we have seen it and testify to it (1 John 1:1–2).

The New Testament Christ is an embodied man who lives a righteous life, dies our death, and saves us by his blood shed in our place and on our behalf. To the startled disciples to whom he appeared after his resurrection he says: “Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39). The New Testament promises that the destiny of believers is not a disembodied existence in a purely non-physical realm, but rather that we shall be raised from the dead: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). If Gnosticism is true, then Christianity is false; but if Christianity is true, then Gnosticism is false.

These two views of the human body cannot coexist, and the sworn enemies of the Christian church understand this better than many Christians do. The end game is not sexual diversity and tolerance. All the libertarian rhetoric of letting people choose their own way of life is just a way of carving out space and gaining time for the sexual revolution to gain strength. The end game is the complete destruction of the sexual binary, which would mean the end of natural marriage and the end of the organization of society around the family. These are people who think that Huxley’s *Brave New World* is a manual for the ideal society rather than a dystopian novel. So, if you intend to

defend the continued existence of the sexual binary and the natural family in any form, you might as well fight now as later. All those who think science is important, all those who think the rights and dignity of women are important, and all Christians should be on the same side in this battle. The new gender Gnostics are determined to impose their value of autonomy on everyone else, because in the end it always comes down to me imposing my will on the world. And if you are in my way, then too bad. The goal of the new gender Gnostics is to crush all opposition to their body-hating and family-destroying agenda.

The Christian idea of the Good is the ability and inclination to choose the Good by affirming the universal human nature built into creation, which we all instantiate in either a male or a female manner. The Christian view of ethics sees the will as subservient to the Good, which is understood to be a universal — an idea in the mind of God that we cannot change or define out of existence. As Christians, we should receive our sexuality as a gift from our creator with gratitude and not presume to abuse our bodies as if they were not part of our very being as men and women in the image of God. For Christians, realism is a necessary metaphysical corollary of the doctrine of creation. The human will is good when it is directed toward the divine intent for human life and in submission to the universal of human nature. But the human will is evil when it is mis-directed away from the divine intent and when it breaks free of the universal of human nature implanted in creation by God. But, even worse, it becomes the expression of the antichrist when it begins to worship itself as the only good, which is what it does in the thought of the new gender Gnostics. ✕

"For Christians, realism is a necessary metaphysical corollary of the doctrine of creation."

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“Look Around You”: A Natural Theology of the Sexes

What are men and women? What are men and women *for*? As this seems to be among the most urgent questions of our moral hour, you could pardon theologians and pastors for running off to answer it and leaving their notes behind. But before we try to answer such a weighty question, we must first ask ourselves another: “how do we *know* what men and women are for?”

For many Christians, the answer seems obvious: “it’s in the Bible, of course!” But decades of withering critical interrogation have left conservatives wringing their hands with uncertainty about how exactly a biblical narrative featuring

polygamy, arranged marriages and bride-prices, Proverbs 31, Mary and Martha, deaconesses, head coverings, and Titus 2 can offer us a clear answer to the question of gender roles in the modern world. Even if we could fit all the biblical data into a set of tidy prescriptions, who’s to say that these still bind us today? After all, we don’t have slaves or cities of refuge anymore.

Faced with an inability to distill a dogma of gender roles that could rise above the vicissitudes of the Bible’s cultural history, conservative Christians have sometimes taken refuge in another answer: “by looking at God, of course.” God, after

all, never changes, so if the essence of male and female, the basic principle of complementarity, could be found in God himself, then it would be secure from every assault. With such an answer, I worry, the cure risks being worse than the disease. Rather than clarifying our understanding of sexuality by deriving it from God, we risk distorting our understanding of God by trying to import sexuality into it. In 2016, a fierce controversy flared up in evangelical ranks over the so-called “eternal subordination of the Son,” and many leading evangelical theologians were accused of stumbling unwittingly into a doctrine of the Trinity at odds with the Nicene Creed in their eagerness to find the foundations of male and female roles in the Holy Trinity.

Even setting aside worries about Nicene orthodoxy, the notion that the relationship of Father and Son is somehow the archetype of husband and wife never made any sense on the face of it to this author. Aren’t Father and Son both described in male terms? When the marriage metaphor is used of either Father or Son, aren’t they always presented as the bridegroom, and Israel or the Church as bride? And if the Father and Son are like husband and wife, where and what is the Holy Spirit? Far from presenting a glowing image of a happily-married heterosexual couple, to help anchor traditionalist morality in a sexually-confused age, this train of thought seemed more likely to underwrite homosexuality or polyamory, if one allowed oneself to follow it for long into such blasphemies.

But if we do not look to the Trinity as the archetype of man and woman, then where do we look?

*How do
we know what
men and women
are for?”*



I am reminded of a famous inscription under the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, in honor of its architect, Christopher Wren, buried below: "Reader, if you seek his monument — look around you." Sometimes we become so wrapped up in looking for something that we forget to stand up and look around, when all the while we are surrounded with answers to our question. At the opening of his great work *The Physics*, Aristotle set forth a principle for how humans should seek knowledge: if you want to clearly grasp a concept, you must start with that which is "less clear but more familiar" — the sense-world around you.

In this, Aristotle rejected the epistemology of his teacher Plato, summed up in his famous Allegory of the Cave. There, Plato argued that the senses give us access to nothing more than shadows and illusions in the "cave" of earthly existence; to gain true knowledge, we must emerge from the cave into the daylight of spiritual and intellectual reality, and discover the true source of all being and light, the Sun that is the Supreme Good. At last, when our eyes are accustomed, we can look on the Sun and gain true knowledge of all that is.

But there was a fatal flaw in this analogy. You can't look at the Sun. No matter how long you try to adjust your eyes, it will blind you if you try to look at it directly. God the Holy Trinity is the Sun of Plato's analogy, the true source of all being, light, and knowledge, the source from which all else derives its existence. But he is also that which can only be glimpsed obliquely, never gazed upon. If you try to look at the Trinity to find an answer to your questions about man and woman, your vision will be blinded, not enlightened. Instead, why not look around you?

"But," some will object, "doesn't it say right there in Genesis 1 that humans are created in God's image?" Is this not an invitation to see human nature as a reflection of the divine being — including our biological nature and sexuality? "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Biblical scholars have argued with increasing conviction and persuasiveness in recent decades that the concept of the "image of God" is more functional and vocational than structural,

that it is inextricable from the immediately following dominion mandate: mankind images God by serving as his vicegerent in the task of ruling the world. But even setting aside this point, theologians have long recognized that whatever features of humanity constitute the "image" of God, they cannot be bodily features since God does not have a body.

Still, there is an even more fundamental point to make. Surely, whatever "the image of God" means, it is meant to name something unique to humanity. We alone have the image of God — that is the whole point of the passage. So, is sexuality, is male-and-female-ness, something unique to human beings? To ask the question is to laugh at it. And yet it is astonishing how rarely in discussions of "complementarianism" anyone makes the point that our sexual complementarity is a basic part of our animal nature. Perhaps we can learn more about what it means to be male and female by looking at birds and bees than by attempting to gaze into the mysteries of the Holy Trinity.

To be sure, there are important objections and qualifications to be made: as humans, we are more than our mere biological nature, and the emotional bond of husband and wife certainly does uniquely reflect God's love in a way that no animal can. But pause for a minute to consider the basic point: the natural world around us is full of testimonies to the basic biological necessity of two sexes. Without male and female, there is no reproduction. Without reproduction, there is no continuation of the species. Why did God create us male and female, then? Well, for the same reason he created other animals male and female: because herein is his chosen

means of ensuring the propagation of each kind, including humankind. We cannot stop there, of course; there is more to be said, but we must certainly start there. Reproduction is much more than mere copulation; for many animals as for us, it involves protecting, fostering, and raising our offspring, and in this too male and female each plays a distinctive role rooted in distinctive biology: the one predominantly guarding, the other predominantly nourishing. The inescapability of sexual difference and yet the indispensable complementarity of the sexes is everywhere on display around us.

Of course, one cannot draw any precise lessons from these basic observations on the natural world. The roles of male and female penguins are quite different from those of male and female lions, so which is meant to teach us about the roles of male and female humans? The point is not to try to derive a script for gender roles from watching BBC nature documentaries. The point rather is twofold: (1) to insist, against those who would try to minimize or deny gender differences, that they are minimizing or denying a basic datum of the created order; and (2) when asked *why* men and women should be different, and *what for*, to point insistently back to this mundane biological necessity. This latter point, blandly obvious though it may seem, is particularly important for Christian discourse today, given the number of progressive Christians who insist that since in Christ "there is neither male nor female," neither should there be any real difference between male and female in the church or even in the family. Whenever I hear anyone say this, I'm tempted to ask, "So you're a Shaker then?" The Shakers were an oddball semi-Christian religious sect in the early

decades of America that, among other things, forbade procreation (although, in a curious reversal of the modern theological roles, they also argued for an archetypal male and female in God). The reader will not be surprised to hear that the Shaker sect all but died out quite some time ago. Transcendent though the eschatological reality of the church may be, for now, in history, the church must carry on *through* history, and that means, among other things, having and raising children. For this task, there is unquestionably male and female.

So, then, we find that by looking around us rather than trying to stare at the Sun, we have a blindingly obvious answer to our question, “What are men and women for?”: “To be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen. 1:28). Of course, to answer this question is to raise a dozen more. The need of the hour is for guidance on what men’s and women’s roles should be: which sex should do what when it comes to caring for the children or bringing home the bacon, or serving the church and community? As I noted already, the myriad examples of diverse roles in the animal kingdom cannot offer us clear or consistent guidance here. But they at least point us in the direction of which questions to begin asking: if it is indeed the case that our sexual complementarity is geared toward the end of raising families, then how do the unique features and tendencies of a man’s biology and psychology best equip him to serve this end? And how do the unique features and tendencies of a woman’s biology and psychology best equip her to serve this end? The answers will be of necessity imprecise, and depend significantly on cultural context, but certain regularities will suggest themselves.

And sure enough, when we consult the wisdom of the past and ask how millennia of diverse human cultures and civilizations have tried to think through this mystery of man and woman, we find that, despite myriad variations of practice and manifold injustices, certain regularities present themselves. Every culture has recognized the indispensable reality of male and female, and sought to preserve and protect the distinction. Every culture has in different ways tried to equip men to defend and provide, and women to care, heal, and nourish. With nature and history already pointing us in the right direction, we can look back to Scripture, not for a comprehensive code of gender roles, but for additional clarity and insight into that which, as Paul himself says, “nature itself teach[es]” (1 Cor. 11:14).

It is in the nature of such wisdom that it is perhaps less clear-cut and definitive than we might like, but if we try to escape the murk of earthly life by gazing at the Sun, we will see neither Sun nor world clearly. Just so, we gain nothing by trying to solve the mystery of male and female by penetrating the mysteries of God; let us rather have the patience and humility instead to fumble faithfully in the shadows, ready to learn by long years of experience rather than sudden leaps of exegesis what it means to be man and woman. ✕

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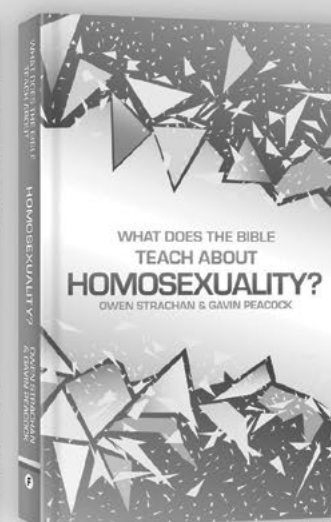
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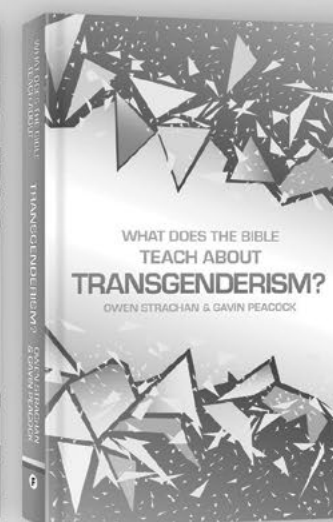
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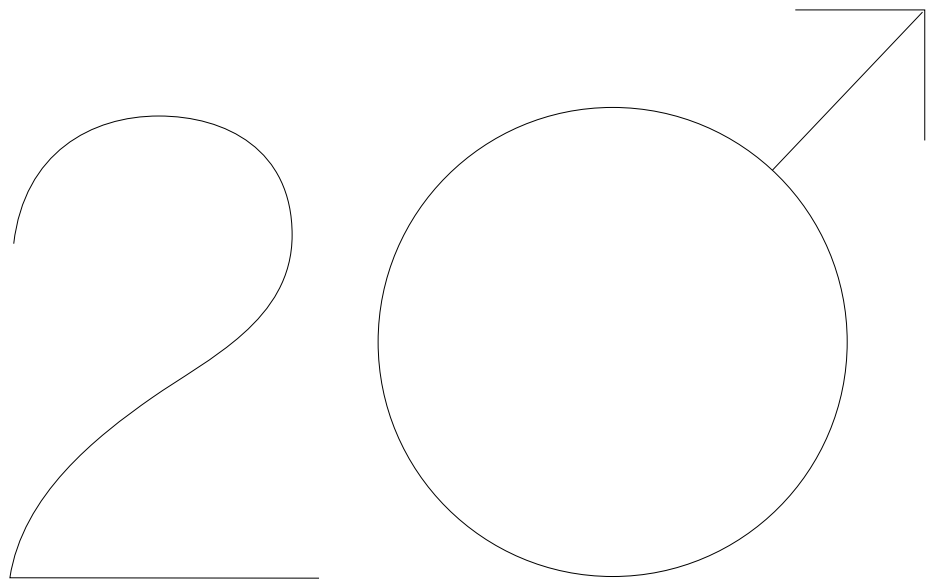
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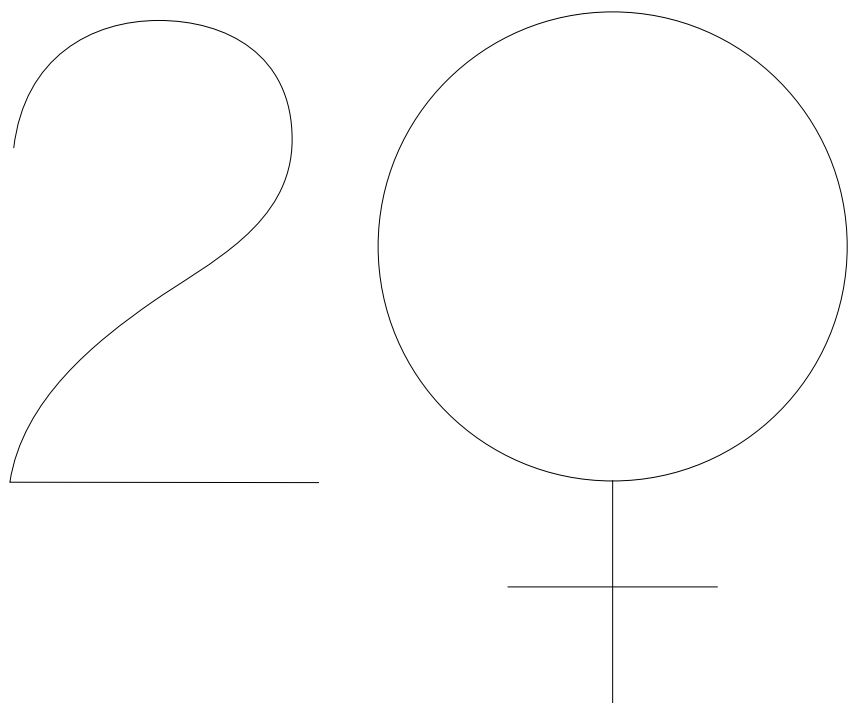
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DAVID CLOSSON

Gender and Sexuality in the 2020 Election



As the world seeks a sense of normalcy following the coronavirus outbreak, Americans are once again turning their attention to the 2020 election. In November, voters will elect a new Congress and weigh in on dozens of state amendments and referendums. Thirty-five U.S. Senate seats, all 435 seats in the House of Representatives, and ten gubernatorial races are on the ballot. Additionally, eighty-six of the nation's ninety-nine state legislative chambers are holding elections. But most importantly, voters will decide whether President Donald J. Trump has earned a second term, or whether former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive nominee of the Democratic Party, will become the next president.

A wide range of issues — such as the economy, health care, trade, immigration, and national security — will be affected by the election's outcome. Issues related to sexuality and gender — such as how “sex” is defined in federal statutes, whether individuals with gender dysphoria can serve in the military, and whether “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” become protected categories in federal civil rights law — will be significantly influenced as well.

In 2016, Donald Trump was a political newcomer with no prior experience in public office. His ideological leanings

and political convictions were, therefore, mostly unknown. However, in his first term, President Trump has made decisions on a host of items important to social conservatives and now has a record open for scrutiny.

By contrast, Joe Biden is no stranger to the national political scene. He served as vice president for two terms under President Obama (2009–2017) and represented Delaware in the U.S. Senate for more than three decades (1973–2009). Throughout his political career, Biden has cast votes, enacted policies, and advocated for his views related to marriage, gender, and sexuality. Moreover, his campaign recently outlined an aggressive and detailed plan for advancing LGBT rights in America and around the world.

If we want to know how the 2020 election will influence issues deemed important by those committed to biblical complementarity, we must evaluate the proposed policies, party platforms, and past decisions of the two major candidates. While there are many important races on the ballot this year, the top of the ticket always attracts the most attention and dictates political priorities. Therefore, a careful analysis of the core beliefs, policies, and campaigns of President Trump and former Vice President Biden should give us valuable insight into how the election will shape significant social issues.

TRUMP’S RECORD

When Donald Trump clinched the Republican nomination in 2016, most social conservatives were wary. Throughout his career as a businessman, the New York real estate mogul was not known as a champion for family values. In fact, the thrice-married television personality identified as pro-choice for much of his adult life, even claiming in 1999 to be “totally pro-choice.”¹ On same-sex marriage, then-president-elect Trump said in 2016 that his own views on the subject were “irrelevant” and that the 2015 *Obergefell* decision legalizing same-sex marriage was “settled” law.²

However, despite past ambivalence toward subjects of great concern to conservative Christians, President Trump’s administration has repeatedly prioritized life, family, and religious liberty issues. While some have questioned the administration’s motives, many of these decisions cannot be attributed to political expediency. The administration has expended political capital to repeal Obama-era directives dealing with sexual orientation and gender identity and has taken proactive steps to defend those who hold to a biblical sexual ethic. In addition, the administration has implemented an originalist interpretation of the Constitution, which does not read social policy preferences into the law but allows for an interpretation of the plain text to arrive at legal conclusions. Many of the administration’s policy changes flow from this interpretation.

To get a clearer picture of how the Trump administration has dealt with issues related to gender and complementarity, it is worth reviewing a few specific examples.

First, on February 22, 2017, a month after his inauguration, President Trump directed the Department of Education to rescind Obama-era guidance that mandated public schools allow students who identify as transgender to use bathrooms, locker rooms, and showers of their choice. Some argue this was an “easy lift” due to the administration’s ability to argue on procedural grounds that the Department had overstepped its authority in redefining a key word in a duly enacted statute without a proper notice and comment period.³ Nevertheless, the move exhibited leadership on a contentious issue.

Second, on July 26, 2017, President Trump announced on Twitter that “the United States Government will not accept or allow Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military.”⁴ This was a reversal of an Obama-era policy adopted just a year earlier, which had done away with the longstanding prohibition on transgender military service. The Obama policy was implemented despite concerns that using the military for social experiments would negatively impact

military readiness, lethality, and unit cohesion. It fell to Defense Secretary James Mattis to determine how to implement President Trump’s policy, and the details were released on March 23, 2018. The Trump administration’s policy allows existing transgender-identifying personnel to remain in the military while preventing those who have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria or have undergone gender transition surgery from joining the military. Those who identify as transgender, but do not undergo gender transition surgery, can join so long as they serve in accordance with their biological sex. Several lawsuits were filed against the new policy, but it went into effect on April 12, 2019, after the last preliminary injunction against it was lifted.⁵

Third, the Trump administration’s Department of Justice (DOJ) filed an amicus brief with the Supreme Court defending the First Amendment rights of baker Jack Phillips who declined to create a custom cake for a same-sex wedding ceremony.⁶ The DOJ argued that the government should not coerce Phillips into creating messages that violated his sincerely held religious beliefs. Phillips won a 7-2 decision delivered on June 4, 2018.⁷

¹Dan Amira, “Donald Trump vs. Donald Trump: The Difference a Decade Makes,” *Intelligencer*, Vox Media, Inc., February 16, 2011, nymag.com/intelligencer/2011/02/trump_through_the_years_1.html.

²Eli Stokols, “Trump Says He’s ‘Fine’ with Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage,” *Politico*, November 13, 2016, [politico.com/story/2016/11/donald-trump-same-sex-marriage-231310](https://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/donald-trump-same-sex-marriage-231310).

³Ryan T. Anderson, “Proxy Wars over Religious Liberty,” *National Affairs*, Number 43, Spring 2020, nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/proxy-wars-over-religious-liberty.

⁴Donald J. Trump, “After consultation with my Generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States government will not accept or allow Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military. Our military must be focused on decisive and overwhelming victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail. Thank you,” Twitter, July 26, 2017, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/890193981585444864>.

⁵For more details, see: Peter Sprigg, “Summary of Trump Administration Policy on Transgender Military Service,” *Issue Brief* IF18D01, Family Research Council, April 2018; online at: <https://www.frc.org/trump-transgender-military-policy>; and Peter Sprigg, “Department of Defense on Why Those with ‘Gender Dysphoria’ Are Disqualified from Military Service,” *Issue Analysis* IS19B01, Family Research Council, February 2019; online at: <https://www.frc.org/transgenderpolicy>.

⁶“MASTERPIECE CAKESHOP, LTD., ET AL., PETITIONERS v. COLORADO CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION, ET AL,” (Brief for the United States as Amicus Curiae Supporting Petitioners No. 16-111, Supreme Court of the United States, 2017), https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/briefs/2017/09/08/16-111tsacunitedstates_0.pdf.

⁷*Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, 584 U.S. ____ (2018).

Fourth, on the interpretation of statutes, the Trump administration has consistently argued that “sex” refers to biological sex, not “gender identity.” For example, on May 24, 2019, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) proposed a new regulation that clarifies that discrimination on the basis of sex in section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act was to be interpreted under the plain meaning of the word. Therefore, “sex” does not include “gender identity” as set forth by a 2016 Obama administration regulation.⁸

Fifth, the DOJ has filed a number of amicus briefs and statements of interest in federal court cases around the country, including two amicus briefs in cases pending before the Supreme Court. In the first case, *Bostock v. Clayton County*, the plaintiff is suing his former employer for employment discrimination based on his sexual orientation. The Court must determine whether Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of “sex,” encompasses discrimination based on an individual’s sexual orientation.



The other case, *R.G. & G.R. Harris Funeral Homes Inc. v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, asks the Court to consider the question of whether Title VII prohibits discrimination based on gender identity. Whereas the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has sided with the plaintiff, the DOJ has argued that “When Title VII was enacted in 1964, ‘sex’ meant biological sex; it referred to the physiological distinction between male and female.”⁹ In both cases, the Trump administration is taking the position that “sex” is a biological reality different from the subjective categories of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Beyond these two cases, the administration has become involved in cases defending those affected by society’s push to normalize transgenderism. For instance, the DOJ recently filed a “statement of interest” defending Title IX and the right of girls to compete only against other biological females in school sporting events.¹⁰

Finally, the Trump administration has taken steps to protect those whose views on marriage and human sexuality are informed by their religious faith. On November 19, 2019, HHS issued a notification of enforcement discretion regarding an Obama administration regulation that all

grantees, including those that are faith-based, must accept the validity of same-sex marriage and transgender ideology in order to be eligible to participate in grant programs.¹¹ These rules had previously been used to shut down faith-based adoption and foster care providers; now they will not be enforced.

Although not comprehensive, these actions are representative of the Trump administration’s policies related to gender and human sexuality. True, there are additional actions the president’s team could take. For example, President Trump has not rescinded President Obama’s executive order that elevated sexual orientation and gender identity to the status of protected classes for the employment of federal contractors, and several federal agencies have Obama-era policies on this issue still on the books. President Trump could have issued a much stronger executive order protecting religious liberty in the context of marriage and sexuality — along the lines of the First Amendment Defense Act — instead of the more generally drafted religious liberty executive order he issued in May 2017.¹² That said, the worldview underlying a significant portion of the president’s policies in this area — whether driven by an originalist legal framework or other policy concerns — are, for the most part, aligned with a biblical sexual ethic.

⁸As of March 2020, the proposed rule has not been finalized.

⁹*R.G. & G.R. HARRIS FUNERAL HOMES, INC., PETITIONER v. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION, ET AL.*, (No. 18-107, Supreme Court of the United States, 2018), 17. See https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/briefs/2018/10/24/18-107_rg_gr_harris_funeral_homes_opp.pdf.

¹⁰“Statement of Interest,” (Case 3:20-cv-00201-RNC, United States District Court for the District of Connecticut, 2020), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1262901/download>.

¹¹Eric D. Hargan, “HHS-OS-2019-0014,” (0991-AC16, Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). See <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=HHS-OS-2019-0014-0002>.

¹²Donald J. Trump, “Presidential Executive Order Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty” (Executive Order, The White House, 2017), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-executive-order-promoting-free-speech-religious-liberty/>.

BIDEN'S RECORD

Because of his extended time in public life, Joe Biden has a long track record on most policy issues, including policies related to marriage and gender. However, because politicians sometimes change their minds and shift positions, we must also examine what the former vice president is saying today. By looking at both his legislative record and current campaign, what he thinks about marriage, gender, and religious liberty will become more evident.

Throughout his career, Joe Biden has been progressive on LGBT-rights and same-sex marriage.¹³ For example, in February 2010, Biden advocated for the repeal of the 1993 law barring military service by those who engage in homosexual conduct (often referred to colloquially as “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell”). Arguing that it was “the right thing to do,” Biden supported President Obama’s push for the repeal, which was enacted by Congress in late 2010 and took effect in 2011.¹⁴ On May 6, 2012, Biden surprised even President Obama by announcing his support for same-sex marriage; Obama followed suit three days later.¹⁵ And in August 2016, Biden officiated his first wedding — a same-sex wedding — at the vice president’s residence.¹⁶ Thus, although Senator Bernie Sanders attacked Biden’s record on LGBT issues during the recent Democratic primary,¹⁷ it is clear that Biden has been a staunch ally of the LGBT lobby during the last decade.

Today, Joe Biden is running for president on a platform committed to advancing LGBT rights.¹⁸ The centerpiece of his publicly released plan is the passage of the Equality Act. In fact, according to his campaign, enacting the Equality Act is the

“top legislative priority” for Biden’s first 100 days.¹⁹ Notably, the Equality Act would codify sexual orientation and gender identity as protected classes in U.S. civil rights law, thereby granting them the same status as race and national origin. The act also undermines religious protections currently in place by stripping individuals of a Religious Freedom and Restoration Act (RFRA) claim or defense.

If Republicans maintain control of the U.S. Senate, the Equality Act has little chance of passing Congress. However, Biden’s LGBTQ+ plan promises several executive actions that would circumvent the legislative process and go into effect immediately. For example, Biden has promised to reinstate Obama-era guidance to “restore transgender students’ access to sports, bathrooms, and locker rooms in accordance with their gender identity” on his first day in office. Biden has also committed to reverting to the Obama administration’s interpretation of Title VII, and “reaffirm that the Civil Rights Act prohibits employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.” Additionally, Biden will instruct the State Department to allow people who identify as transgender or non-binary to use “preferred pronouns” on government identifications, passports, and other documentation.²⁰

Biden’s push for LGBT rights extends to his approach to foreign policy. He has promised to install a “point person” for LGBT rights on the National Security Council and appoint a Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTQ+ Persons at the Department of State. He is also promising to appoint a Special Coordinator in charge of international LGBTQ+ programming at USAID.

Legislatively, Biden supports the Therapeutic Fraud Prevention Act, which would prohibit sexual orientation change efforts, or so-called “conversion therapy.”²¹ This legislation is problematic because it infringes upon the freedom of people with unwanted same-sex attractions to voluntarily obtain counseling to help them achieve their own goals. It also undermines the privacy of the therapeutic relationship, the autonomy of the client, and the religious liberty of those seeking help to live their lives in accordance with the teachings of their faith. He also has signaled support for the Globe Act, which, among other things, would establish that persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity may form the basis of an asylum request.²² He has also promised that LGBTQ Americans will have “full access to health care treatments and resources,” including “care related to transitioning—including gender confirmation surgery.”²³

Finally, Biden has actively campaigned on expanding rights for people who identify as transgender. On the campaign trail, he has argued that “transgender equality is the civil rights issue of our time” and proposed several related policy changes.²⁴ These include overturning the Trump administration’s policy regarding service members who identify as transgender (and allowing them to receive government-funded gender transition surgery),²⁵ repealing the proposed HHS rule that permits faith-based adoption agencies to receive government funding while still operating according to their convictions on marriage and sexuality, and requiring the Bureau of Prisons to take into account an inmate’s gender identity when considering housing assignments.²⁶ Biden has frequently touted this last proposal on the campaign trail. On September 20, 2019, Biden told the crowd at an Iowa LGBTQ forum, “In prison, the determination should be that your sexual identity is defined by what

¹³This is not to say that Biden hasn’t evolved on these issues. For example, then-Senator Biden voted for the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in 1996. DOMA defined marriage for federal purposes as the union of one man and one woman and allowed states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages granted under the laws of other states. When asked in the 2008 vice presidential debate if he supported gay marriage, Biden answered, “No, Barack Obama nor I support redefining from a civil side what constitutes marriage. We do not support that. That is basically the decision to be able to be left to faiths and people who practice their faiths the determination what you call it.”
¹⁴Michael O’Brien, “Biden Says, ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ Will Be Gone by Year’s End,” *The Hill*, February 2, 2010, thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/79265-biden-says-dont-ask-dont-tell-will-be-gone-by-end-of-year.
¹⁵Biden made these comments in an interview on NBC’s “Meet the Press.” He said, “I am absolutely comfortable with the fact that men marrying men, women marrying women, and heterosexual men and women marrying, are entitled to the same exact rights, all the civil rights, all the civil liberties. And, quite frankly, I don’t see much of a distinction beyond that.” See Michael Barbaro, “A Scramble as Biden Backs Same-Sex Marriage,” *New York Times*, May 6, 2012, nytimes.com/2012/05/07/us/politics/biden-expresses-support-for-same-sex-marriages.html
¹⁶Brian McBride, “Vice President Joe Biden Officiated His First Wedding for Same-Sex Couple,” *ABC News*, August 2, 2016, abcnews.go.com/Politics/vice-president-joe-biden-officiated-wedding-sex-couple/story?id=41058123.
¹⁷Mary Margaret Olohan, “Bernie Attacks Biden For Flip Flopping On Gay Marriage, Abortion,” *Daily Caller*, March 15, 2020, dailycaller.com/2020/03/15/bernie-sanders-joe-biden-gay-marriage-abortion-flip-flop/.
¹⁸Biden’s plan titled “The Biden Plan to Advance LGBTQ+ Equality in American and Around the World” is an approximately 8,000-word plan that was released on March 5, 2020. The plan can be viewed at joe Biden.com/lgbtq. ¹⁹“The Biden Plan to Advance LGBTQ Equality in America and Around the World,” Joe Biden for President, Accessed March 27, 2020, joe Biden.com/lgbtq/.
²⁰These proposed actions, and others, are laid out in “The Biden Plan to Advance LGBTQ Equality in America and Around the World,” Joe Biden for President, Accessed March 27, 2020, joe Biden.com/lgbtq/.
²¹U.S. Congress, House, *Therapeutic Fraud Prevention Act of 2019*, HR 3570, 116th Cong., 1st sess., introduced in House June 27, 2019, congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/3570.
²²U.S. Congress, House, Greater Leadership Overseas for the Benefit of Equality Act of 2019, HR 3874, 116th Cong., 1st sess., introduced in House July 22, 2019, congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/3874.
²³“The Biden Plan to Advance LGBTQ Equality in America and Around the World,” Joe Biden for President, Accessed March 27, 2020, joe Biden.com/lgbtq/.
²⁴Joe Biden, “Let’s be clear: Transgender equality is the civil rights issue of our time. There is no room for compromise when it comes to basic human rights,” *Twitter*, January 25, 2020, 1:20pm, https://twitter.com/joe Biden/status/1221135646107955200?lang=en.
²⁵Veronica Rocha and Brandon Tensley, “Biden: Transgender People Should Be Allowed to Serve in the Military,” CNN, Cable News Network, October 10, 2019, cnn.com/politics/live-news/lgbtq-town-hall-2019/h_ff5f39bde757d0b86e8393fb7abafc62
²⁶“The Biden Plan to Advance LGBTQ Equality in America and Around the World,” Joe Biden for President, Accessed March 27, 2020, joe Biden.com/lgbtq/.

you say it is, not what in fact the prison says it is.”²⁷ Biden’s press secretary Jamal Brown reiterated this position, saying, “Transgender women are women, and their placement in men’s prisons is inhumane.”²⁸

PARTY PLATFORMS

Another useful gauge for determining where a politician stands on issues related to marriage and sexuality is the party platforms. Politicians increasingly vote in line with their party’s platform — eighty percent of the time over the last thirty years.²⁹ Consequently, a party’s platform is a good indicator of how politicians from that party will vote.

In 2016, the Democratic Party Platform fully embraced LGBT rights. The platform affirmed the 2015 *Obergefell* decision, pledged to combat LGBT discrimination, and promised to “support a progressive vision of religious freedom that respects pluralism and rejects the misuse of religion to discriminate.”³⁰

The 2016 Republican Party Platform also addressed these issues. However, Republicans condemned the “Supreme Court’s lawless ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*,” endorsed the First Amendment Defense Act (which would bar government discrimination against individuals and businesses for acting on the belief that marriage is the union of one man and one woman), and affirmed that “every child deserves a married mom and dad.”³¹

This summer, delegates from each party will gather to officially choose their respective nominee. (Unless the conventions are rescheduled due to the coronavirus crisis, Democrats will meet July 13–16 and Republicans will gather August 24–27.) They will also write new party platforms. If the past conventions give any indication, the 2020 platforms will provide even greater clarity into how both parties are today viewing issues connected to sexuality and marriage.

CONCLUSION

Voters will make an important decision in November. Unquestionably, there are significant policy differences between the two major parties and their respective nominees. This is especially true with issues related to gender and complementarity. Christians everywhere should commit to praying for politicians in both parties and every candidate appearing on the November ballot. Moreover, they should vote based on biblical principles.³² But regardless of the outcome of the election, Christians should continue praying for their elected leaders (1 Tim. 2:2), submit to the God-delegated authority of civil rulers (Rom. 13:1–7), and seek ways to love and serve their neighbors (Matt. 22:39). ✕

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²⁸Kate Sosin, “Biden, Warren, Buttigieg: It Is Inhumane to Imprison Trans Women With Men,” *LOGO News*, January 16, 2020, newnownext.com/biden-warren-buttigieg-speak-out-against-imprisoning-trans-women-with-men/01/2020/

²⁹Jeff Stein, “We Asked 8 Political Scientists If Party Platforms Matter. Here’s What We Learned,” *Vox*, December 7, 2016, [vox.com/2016/7/12/12060358/political-science-of-platforms](https://www.vox.com/2016/7/12/12060358/political-science-of-platforms)

³⁰2016 Democratic Party Platform, (Orlando, FL: The Democratic Platform Committee, 2016), 17. For full platform, see https://democrats.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2016_DNC_Platform.pdf

³¹Republican Platform 2016, (Cleveland, OH: Republican National Convention, 2016), 10, 11, 31. For full platform, see https://prod-cdn-static.gop.com/media/documents/DRAFT_12_FINAL%5B1%5D-ben_1468872234.pdf

³²See David Closson, *Biblical Principles for Political Engagement: Worldview, Issues, and Voting* (Washington, D.C.: Family Research Council, 2019); online at <https://www.frc.org/engage>. Also, see Closson, “4 Reasons Christians Should Care About Politics,” *ERLC.com*, August 4, 2015, <https://erlc.com/resource-library/articles/4-reasons-christians-should-care-about-politics>

*"But regardless of the outcome of the election,
Christians should continue praying for their elected leaders,
submit to the God-delegated authority of civil rulers,
and seek ways to love and serve their neighbors.*

Humanity as the Divine Image in Genesis 1:26–28

So much ink has been spilled debating and discussing the *imago dei*. Can anyone possibly improve our thinking on this topic? Is an attempt to do so arrogance?

Recent study undertaken on the primary sources since the publication of the second edition of *Kingdom through Covenant* in June of 2018 has led me to a better grasp and understanding of the ancient texts. I would like to focus here on the consensus in scholarship today and seek to show what can be improved or needs to be altered as far as this consensus is concerned. In the conclusion I shall seek to interpret what this means for human being and function in the world.

STATE OF THE ART

Let us first note a few important publications on the *imago dei*. Some show the consensus existing today while others represent the most recent treatments.¹

We begin with the treatment of *dēmut* (likeness) and *šelem* (image) in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (TDOT). The articles are by Preuss and Stendebach, respectively, and derive from the original German publications of 1974 and 1989, respectively.² Both scholars assert that *dēmut* and *šelem* are almost indistinguishable in meaning. Further, they assert that the prepositions *bē* (in) and *kē* (according to) are semantically

indistinguishable and are to be understood in the sense of *beth essentiae*, or *beth* of identity. Stendebach concludes,

“in any event, v. 26b is not describing the content of humans being created in the divine image, since although 1:26, 28 do associate this notion with dominion over the non-human part of creation, 5:3 and 9:6 do not. Genesis 5:3 involves a genealogy in which Adam is said to have become the father of a son according to his image. Here the reference to dominion makes no sense. The same applies to 9:6, which justifies the sanctions against spilling human blood by recalling how God made humankind in his own image. Hence dominion over other creatures can only be a result or purpose of being made in the image of God.”³

Articles by E. Jenni in *The Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* derive from an original in German appearing in 1971, even though the English translation came out in 1997 after TDOT.⁴ His treatment agrees in essence with the results in TDOT.

The recent commentary of Jean L’Hour may be mentioned.⁵ This commentary, which appeared in 2016, is over 260 pages and deals only with Genesis 1–2:4a. It is the most detailed and extensive exegetical treatment in recent scholarship. The results

of L’Hour’s study are in line with the authors of TDOT. In addition, L’Hour considers the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription and concludes that *dēmut* and *šelem* are indistinguishable in this ninth century BC Aramaic text. The newer Hebrew lexica, such as the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (2010) and *18th Edition of Gesenius* (2009), do not alter the picture significantly. Lastly, in a collection of essays from IVP in 2016, Catherine McDowell popularises her doctoral dissertation published in 2015 and adds material on Genesis 1. She considers *dēmut* and *šelem* to be synonymous in both Genesis 1 and the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription. As we will note later in this paper, her considerations of the divine image as sonship support the exposition given independently by myself, C. L. Crouch, and Gavin Ortlund⁶ in earlier publications. In summary, scholars have generally understood *dēmut* and *šelem* to be virtually identical in meaning.

For the first and second editions of *Kingdom through Covenant*, I felt it sufficient to base my study on the description of the words *dēmut* and *šelem* in Hebrew in the superb monograph of Randall Garr which appeared in 2003.⁷ While I continue to hold that the description of Garr is both accurate and even-handed, I learned interesting things from my own exhaustive analysis of these words carried out since the publication of the second edition of *Kingdom through Covenant* on June 30 of 2018.

¹Earlier expositions of the *imago dei* by Hoekema and Collins are moving in a direction that is helpful but lack the exegetical precision and sharpening of thought attempted here: C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007): 61–67 and Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

²H. D. Preuss, “דָּמוּת *dāmāh*; דְּמוּת *d’mūth*,” TDOT, 3:250–260 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) and F. J. Stendebach, “שֵׁלֶם *šelem* image, model,” TDOT, 12:386–396 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

³F. J. Stendebach, “שֵׁלֶם *šelem* image, model,” TDOT, 12:394.

⁴Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 339–42, 1080–85.

⁵Jean L’Hour, *Genèse 1–2, 4a Commentaire* (Études Bibliques, Nouvelle série 71; Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 166–80.

⁶See also C. L. Crouch, “Genesis 1:26–27 As a Statement of Humanity’s Divine Parentage,” *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 61 (2010), 1–15 and Gavin Ortlund, “Image of God, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue,” *JETS* 57/4 (2014): 673–88.

⁷W. Randall Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness: Humanity, Divinity, and Monotheism* (Culture & History of the Ancient Near East 15; Leiden: Brill, 2003).

LEXICAL ANALYSIS OF “IMAGE” AND “LIKENESS”

Lexical and semantic analysis is based primarily on three things: (1) context and usage, (2) cognate languages, and (3) ancient translations. Of these three approaches, usage is primary in establishing meaning.

First, *selem* is found in seventeen instances in Hebrew and seventeen in Aramaic in the Old Testament. Setting aside the five occurrences in Genesis 1 and 5, six instances refer to images or statues of idols (Num. 33:52; 2 Kgs. 11:18 = 2 Chr. 23:17; Ezek. 7:20; 16:17; Amos 5:26). Three further instances occur in 1 Samuel 6:5, 11 when the Philistines captured the Ark of Yahweh and suffered from boils and mice. They made images of the boils and mice and put them in the ox-cart that carried the Ark back to Israel. Presumably, these images had an apotropaic value. One instance has to do with an image drawn or better etched (חקק) on a wall, possibly in a relief of some sort (Ezek. 23:14 Qr). Two occurrences in Psalms have to do with images that are phantoms or shadows (Ps. 39:7; 73:20), i.e. images that are abstract and non-concrete.

In biblical Aramaic, five instances of *selem* refer to a statue Nebuchadnezzar saw in a dream (Dan. 2:31(2x), 32, 34,35), eleven refer to an idolatrous image or statue he built for his people to worship (Dan. 3:1, 2, 3(2x), 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 18), and one

case has to do with the expression on his face which is described as “the image of his face” (Dan. 3:19, e.g. facial expression). Extensive usage in Akkadian reveals a similar pattern, referring to an image or statue of a god, king, or general image, to a figurine or bas-relief drawing, to a constellation or one’s bodily stature, and beyond that are metaphorical uses.⁸ Usage in Ugaritic, all epochs of Aramaic, and later phases of Hebrew are similar.⁹ The Septuagint usually renders *selem* as εἰκών, although εἰδωλον is used in Numbers 33:52, ὁμοίωμα in 1 Samuel 6:5, and τύπος in Amos 5:26.

Turning our attention to the twenty-five instances of *dēmut* in the Old Testament (not extant in biblical Aramaic, although the cognate verb דמה is found in Daniel 3:25 and 7:3), aside from three occurrences in Genesis, the bulk of the occurrences are in Ezekiel 1, 8, and 10, where Ezekiel is attempting to describe features in his visions. Sometimes he says x is like y, where the word *dēmut* is used for “like” in English. Occasionally he employs the expression דמוֹת כ (Ezek. 1:28). Daniel 10:16 כְּדִמוֹת is similar. Rarely he speaks of דְּמוֹת כְּמִרְאָה־ (Ezek. 1:26, 8:2) or כְּמִרְאָה דְּמוֹת־ (Ezek. 10:1) or uses מִרְאָה as a synonym.¹⁰

The pair of instances in Isaiah (13:4; 40:18) function in a similar way to that of Psalm 58:5. They are abstract and non-concrete. In 2 Kings 16:10, Ahaz saw an altar in Syria and sent his priest in Jerusalem a sketch of the altar and

detailed plans for construction (1984 NIV rendering is excellent). Our word is used in 2 Chronicles 4:3 to describe what looked like bulls below the rim in the casting of the bronze sea. Finally, Ezekiel 23:15 refers to an etching on a wall. This passage will be discussed shortly.

A cognate of *dēmut* in Hebrew is the verb *dāmā* and *dēmot* in Samaritan Hebrew. The related noun occurs throughout all phases of Aramaic, beginning with the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription, to be discussed shortly.¹¹ A rare occurrence in Akkadian means a ‘copy’¹² while in Arabic, a freeze-image or statue is signified.¹³ An indistinct figure or object is the meaning in Tigrinya, a derivative of ancient Ethiopic.¹⁴ The cognate most significant is Aramaic.

The rendering in the Septuagint is usually ὁμοίωμα (14x) or ὁμοίωσις (5x), εἰκών (Gen. 5:1), ἰδέα (Gen. 5:3), and ὁμοιος (Isa. 13:4).

Can we learn anything new from these data? Let us address directly the claim made often that *dēmut* and *selem* are synonyms or otherwise indistinguishable. First, we can observe from the cognate languages that, at first glance, Egypt and Mesopotamia have only one word for image. Conversely, Aramaic seems to be the only language besides Hebrew which offers both words in its vocabulary.

The term *selem* is a loanword in Arabic, and Wellhausen thought *dēmut* was an Aramaic loanword in Hebrew. As we will see, in the bilingual inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh, the Akkadian part has only one word for image, whereas the Aramaic has two different words. Yet further research reveals that Akkadian employs the words *tamšīlu* and *muššulu*, derived from a root cognate to מַשַּׁל in Hebrew, in a way quite similar to *dēmut* in Aramaic; and so Akkadian may have the distinction possible in Aramaic and Hebrew that I shall propose. In Akkadian, the word *tamšīlu* means (1) “likeness,” “effigy,” “replica;” (2) “image,” “resemblance,” “counterpart.” It can refer to statues, figurines in magic, buildings, or topographic features. The images can be concrete or non-concrete.¹⁵ The related *muššulu* can mean (1) “likeness” or (2) “mirror.”¹⁶ There may be more overlap in meaning between *šalmu* and *tamšīlu* in Akkadian than *selem* and *dēmut* in Aramaic and Hebrew, but a distinction is nonetheless possible, as we shall see.

Second let us observe that the ancient translators did not normally render *dēmut* and *selem* by the same terms in Greek or Latin. From this we can see they understood them as carrying a different nuance or meaning, however similar or synonymous they might be. They were not just stylistic variants for the ancient translators.

⁸AHw 1078 f.; CAD S 16:79–85.

⁹See DLU 783 and Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (<http://cal.huc.edu/>). Apparently *šanam* is an Aramaic loanword in Arabic, and the word is also attested in Old South Arabic and modern *šheri*. R. Meyer, J. Renz, and H. Donner, Wilhelm Gesenius Hebräisches und Aramaisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament, 18. Auflage (Berlin: Springer, 2013), s.v.

¹⁰See E. Jenni, Die hebräischen Präpositionen, Band 2: Die Präposition Kaph (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1994), 57.

¹¹See Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon (<http://cal.huc.edu/>).

¹²AK. *damtu* = copy CAD D 3:74. See R. Meyer, J. Renz, and H. Donner, *Gesenius Hebräisches und Aramaisches Handwörterbuch* 18 (Berlin: Springer, 2013), s.v. דְּמוֹת.

¹³H. Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1979), s.v. duma.

¹⁴R. Meyer, J. Renz, and H. Donner, *Gesenius Hebräisches und Aramaisches Handwörterbuch* 18 (Berlin: Springer, 2013), s.v.

¹⁵CAD T 18:147–50.

¹⁶CAD M 2:281.

Thirdly, none of the major lexica or lexical studies observe that Ezekiel is the only biblical book besides Genesis which allows us to see both *dēmut* and *šelem* employed side by side, nor do they make use of that text to determine whether or not the two words have a different nuance or are identical and completely interchangeable.

Is there a difference in the Old Testament between these two words? Yes, there is, I would claim. The term *šelem* normally refers to an image or statue of a god or human person. The emphasis is on how the image or statue *represents* this god or human person to the world. Conversely, the term *dēmut* focuses on the concept of comparison and likeness. Unlike *šelem* in Hebrew or *tamšilu* in Akkadian, *dēmut* is never used in the Old Testament of a statue. Instead, the word focuses on the relationship of the copy to the original. Sometimes the word essentially functions precisely the same way as the prefixed preposition *kaph*.

While two words may be synonyms, what does this really mean in linguistic terms? Even when we are dealing with synonyms, we do not think that the field of meaning or usage of the two words is identical or overlaps perfectly. There is usually some slight difference in nuance between the two words.

Let us look at the usage in Ezekiel 23:14–15 where both terms occur together and also in the Tell Fakhariyeh

Inscription from the ninth century BC where both terms are also found.

The text in Ezekiel 23:14–15 is as follows:

וְתֹסֶף אֶל־תְּזִנּוּתֶיהָ וְתֵרָא אִנְשֵׁי מְחַקָּה 14
עַל־הַקִּיר צִלְמֵי כְשָׁדִים חֲקָקִים בְּשֵׁשׁ:
חֲגוּלֵי אֲזֹר בְּמַתְנֵיהֶם סְרוּחֵי טְבוּלִים 15
בְּרֵאשֵׁיהֶם מְרִאָה שְׁלֹשִׁים כָּלָם דָּמוֹת בְּנֵי־
בָּבֶל כְּשָׁדִים אֶרֶץ מוֹלְדָתָם:

“But she carried her prostitution still further. She saw men portrayed on a wall, figures of Chaldeans portrayed in red, with belts around their waists and flowing turbans on their heads; all of them looked like Babylonian chariot officers, natives of Chaldea” (2011 NIV).

The word rendered “portrayed” by the NIV means “drawn,” “etched,” or “inscribed.” The term “figures” in v. 14 is the Hebrew *šelem* and the translation “all of them looked like Babylonian chariot officers” in v. 15 entails the word *dēmut*. Contrary to authors of lexica and lexical studies, it seems easy to distinguish *dēmut* and *šelem* in this text. The term *dēmut* focuses on the relationship of the copy to the original. The term *šelem*, however, focuses on how the physical figures or images in bas-relief impacted those who saw them, i.e. the relationship of the copy to the larger world. The impact and power of the images is that they excited lust in the eyes of the beholder so that they sought political alliances with the Chaldeans. This is metaphorically pictured as fornication by Ezekiel.

Next, consider the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription from the ninth century BC. Professor Alan Millard provides the English Translation in the well-known collection of texts called *Context of Scripture*. The term *dēmut* occurs twice and the term *šelem* also occurs twice. In footnote 10 Millard states,

“[t]he monument is termed *dmwt*’ at two points and *š/m* at two others, both words clearly referring to the same stone figure. While remembering that Aram. and Heb. are not identical, this parallel use suggests no significant differences of meaning should be sought between the two cognate Heb. words used in a similar way in Gen. 1:26, 27; 5:3.”

This view is affirmed by the recent commentary of L’Hour and also in the lexical studies in *TDOT*.

Closer analysis may cause us to question this orthodoxy. I have subjected the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription to a careful text-linguistic analysis as modelled by Aaron Schade.¹⁷ This is important for the literary structure of this text. Macrosyntactic signals clearly mark Focus and Topic and these changes in Focus and Topic correspond to divisions in the text vis à vis the literary structure. As Professor Millard himself recognises, the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription (hereafter TF) actually represents two inscriptions. The first entails the dedication of an earlier statue; the second involves the rededication of the statue currently bearing the inscription.

The following literary structure is informed by all scholarly work on this text, but describes the text according to its content in simple terms:

Literary Structure of Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription

| | |
|------------------------------|---------|
| A. Dedication | |
| Identification | 1 |
| god Praise | 2-6a |
| king Praise | 6b-7a |
| king prayer | 7b-10a |
| dedication | 10b |
| king imprecation | 10c-12b |
| B. Rededication | 12c |
| Identification/(king Praise) | 13a |
| king prayer | 13b-14 |
| dedication | 15a |
| god Praise | 15b-16a |
| king imprecation | 16b-23 |

The attitude, emphasis, and tone in the rededication is different from that of the initial dedication. In the original dedication, Hadad-Yithi is king of Gozan alone; in the rededication he is king of Gozan, Sikkanu, and Azran. Obviously, he has prospered, and his kingdom has grown. In the original dedication he was a young king; now he is established in his kingdom and much more powerful. Notice in the original dedication, the majority of the text is devoted to praise of his god. The imprecation section occupies only a couple of lines. In the rededication, only two lines take up his relation to his god, and a full eight lines occupy the imprecation section. Randall Garr has noted this as well. Most importantly, what scholars have not noticed is that the term

¹⁷Aaron Schade, “Fronted Word Order in Phoenician Inscriptions,” in *Linguistic Studies in Phoenician in Memory of J. Brian Peckham*, Robert Holmstedt and Aaron Schade, eds., (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 111–37.



dmwt’ refers to the original statue in the first occurrence and to the relationship of the copy to the original in the second occurrence, while the term *šlm* refers to the second version of the statue in both its occurrences. So, both occurrences of *dmwt*’ focus on the relationship of the copy to the original and emphasise the vertical relationship of king to his god while the term *šlm* corresponds to the emphasis in the rededication section on the horizontal relationship of king to his subjects—the majesty and power of the king in relation to his world. Here I am simply adding to the detailed discussion of Randall Garr.

Admittedly the Akkadian version doesn’t draw out these distinctions, but the country ruled by Hadad-Yithi was originally Aramaic speaking and only secondarily a vassal of Assyria. So, the Aramaic text is primary vis à vis the Akkadian version. In the Akkadian translation, one instance of *dmwt*’ and

both instances of *šlm* are rendered by *šalmu* in Akkadian; one instance of *dmwt*’ is not translated.

Pace Preuss, Stendebach, and Jenni in *TDOT* and *THAT*, L’Hour, Millard and others argue for no distinction between the terms. Randall Garr however, in a article in *IEJ* on the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription and in his three hundred page monograph on the image of God, is more on target when he argues that *dmwt*’ emphasises the relation of the king to his god while the term *šlm* emphasises the relation of the king to his subjects.¹⁸ Notice that in line 15 of the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription, the king states that he made the *dmwt*’ better than what it was before. In other words, the statue made for the rededication has a better likeness to the original than the first statue had. The sculpture was more realistic and the likeness more recognisable. And *dmwt*’ is used to express this rather than *šlm*.¹⁹

¹⁸W. Randall Garr, “‘Image’ and ‘Likeness’ in the Inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 50/3–4 (2000): 231–232 and idem, *In His Own Image and Likeness: Humanity, Divinity, and Monotheism* (Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 15; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 121–22.

¹⁹The concordance of Old and Imperial Aramaic Inscriptions by Schwiderski lists three instances of דמו and six instances of צלם excluding the occurrences in the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription (see Dirk Schwiderski, *Die alt- und reichsaramäischen Inschriften, Band I: Konkordanz* [Fontes et Subsidia ad Bibliam pertinentes 1; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004], 211 and 710). For דמו, the instance in *Ahiqar* 201 speaks of “the colour of his face returning.” This is relationship of copy to original. In Kraeling 3, 20f, the signatories guarantee a house corresponding to the original. Finally, the Tell-Ḥalaf Altar speaks of the correspondence of the statue to the original. The instances of צלם in *Daskyleion* 1, *Emar Stele* Fragment, *Nerab* 1:3, 6, 12 and *Nerab* 2:2 are all in funerary monuments and focus on the relationship of the copy to the world. The image has power for others.



Before turning to the instances in Genesis, let us consider the meaning of the prepositions *bě* and *kě*. Earlier we saw that the consensus in scholarship is that the prepositions *bě* and *kě* are semantically indistinguishable and are to be understood in the sense of *beth essentiae*.²⁰

In spite of the fact that the two prepositions are close in meaning, we must not assume that the meaning is identical. Randall Garr is correct to affirm that “the differential marking of each non-obligatory phrase suggests that each phrase has distinct meaning, at least in relation to one [an]other.”²¹ His careful and thorough linguistic analysis reveals that the preposition *bě* = “in” emphasises proximity, while the preposition *kě* = “as” or “according to” emphasises something similar, yet distinct and separate. Garr’s linguistic analysis is also supported by the exhaustive research of Ernst Jenni, who has produced an entire monograph on each of the three basic prepositions in Hebrew. One volume analyses all 15,570

instances of the preposition *bě*, a second all 3,000 instances of *kě*, and a third all 20,000 instances of the preposition *lē* (“to” or “for”) in the Hebrew Bible. Jenni concludes that, in fundamental meaning, *kě* stands between the opposition pair *bě* (marking an equating relation) and *lē* (marking a non-equating relation) as an expression of partial equation (and so also partial non-equation) of the semantic characteristics of two quantifications.²² Thus, again, *bě* indicates something locative and proximate while *kě* indicates something similar but distal and separate.²³

We have already seen that, although the words “image” and “likeness” share similar meanings, each has a different emphasis. In the Tell Fakhariyeh Inscription the word “likeness” focuses on the king as a suppliant and worshipper of his god and communicates sonship. The word “image” focuses on the majesty and power of the king in relation to his subjects.

²⁰See E. Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, Band 1: *Die Präposition Beth* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1992), 84.

²¹Garr, *In His Own Image and Likeness*, 95.

²²Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, Band 1: *Die Präposition Beth* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1992), 11–40; idem, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, Band 2: *Die Präposition Kaph* (Stuttgart: Kolhammer, 1994), 11–12.

²³A common error in the transmission of the text is to confuse *bě* and *kě* since the letters are so similar. Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls is not extant for 1:26, 27; 5:1, 3; 9:6. There is no clear evidence from the Septuagint, Syriac, Latin Vulgate, Targums, or early Jewish Revisors (Theodotion, Aquila, and Symmachus) for confusion of the prepositions. A few late medieval manuscripts show confusion only in 5:3, since the prepositions are reversed from 1:26, 27. Thus, remarkably, the textual transmission is solid in these texts.

These ancient Near Eastern data confirm and correspond to the use in the biblical text. The word “likeness” (דְּמוּת) in Genesis is closely associated with the creation of the human race, human genealogy, and sonship. It occurs in Genesis 1:26 in the creation of humans and again in 5:1, when this is recapitulated under the heading “Birth History of Humankind.”²⁴ The third use is in 5:3 with the generation of Seth. The word “image” (צֶלֶם) is consistently used of man representing God in terms of royal rule. Putting the nouns and prepositions together, humans closely represent God in image, i.e., they actually represent his rule in the world. Humans are also similar to God in performing the action of creating human life, *but not in the same way*. Thus, *bē* emphasises a way in which humans are closely like God, *kē* a way in which humans are similar, but distinct. This interpretation also explains the reversal of the prepositions in Genesis 5:3. Here Seth shares precisely in the matter of generation and sonship but is only similar and not identical in the representation of his father’s image to the rest of the world.

We turn now to Genesis 5:1–3 where we have the term “likeness” twice with the preposition *bē* and, conversely, the term “image” once with the preposition *kē*.

“This is the book of the generations of humanity. When God created humanity, he made it in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them humanity when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.”²⁵

Catherine McDowell comments as follows:

“Seth is in some way similar to his father, yet he is not Adam, just as Adam and Eve are like God in some way, yet they are not God. The author gives no explanation of what constitutes the likeness, but the plain reading of the text suggests that Seth resembles his father simply because his father begat him. By analogy, humans correspond to God because God creates them. Thus, this correspondence is intrinsic to the relationship between Creator and created. When read in light of Genesis 1:26–27, to which Genesis 5:1–3 refers, the correspondence the author may have had in mind seems to be that of class. Seth is a human being, not a fish or a sheep, because his father is a human being. In short, to be created in Adam’s likeness and according to his image means that Seth was created according to Adam’s kind.”²⁶

Ten times prior to Genesis 1:26 we are told that grasses or fruit trees produce according to their kind or that God created creatures according to its kind/their kind. The implication is first that Seth belongs to Adam’s kind as a human being; and second, that some kind of kinship exists between humans and God.

As McDowell notes, the divine sonship of the king in the ancient Near East is an enormous topic. In addition to the examples discussed in *Kingdom through Covenant* to illustrate *šalmu* in Akkadian, she draws attention to passages I did not discuss, but which may possibly support the distinction I am making between “image” and “likeness.” Perhaps I may cite her illustrations at length so that nothing is taken out of context:

“Beginning with Tukulti-Ninurta I (1243–1207 BC) the divine-royal relationship in Assyria was expressed in terms of statue manufacture and divine birth. In the hymn from the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, the king’s body is likened to “the flesh of the gods,” a phrase known elsewhere in the Assyrian Erra Myth as referring to the wood from which divine statues were made. He was “successfully engendered through/cast (*ši-pi-ik-šu*) into the channel of the womb of the gods” and, as a result, “He alone is the eternal image (*šalmu*) of Enlil,” whom “Enlil raised ... like a natural father, after his first-born son.” The combination of birthing and manufacturing imagery is striking. Not only is Tukulti-Ninurta’s body likened to a divine statue, but the process of his creation is described both in terms of manufacture and procreation. Peter Machinist rightly

"By analogy,
humans correspond
to God because
God creates them.
Thus, this
correspondence
is intrinsic to
the relationship
between Creator
and created."

²⁴The Hebrew term *tôlēdôt* is construed as a heading in the text.

²⁵Translation by Catherine McDowell, “‘In the Image of God He Created Them’: How Genesis 1:26–27 Defines the Divine-Human Relationship and Why It Matters,” in Beth Felker Jones and Jeffrey W. Barbeau, eds., *The Image of God in an Image Driven Age: Explorations in Theological Anthropology* edited by (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016), 35. See also her doctoral dissertation: Catherine L. McDowell, *The “Image of God” in the Garden of Eden: the Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5–3:24 in Light of the mis pī pit pī and wpt-r Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt* (Shiphrut 15; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

²⁶Catherine McDowell, “‘In the Image of God He Created Them’: How Genesis 1:26–27 Defines the Divine-Human Relationship and Why It Matters,” 35.

concludes that here “image” identifies the physical body of the king with a divine statue. However, in this context, “image” may have been intended as a double entendre, referring to the king both as a “living statue” of the god and also as Enlil’s royal son. Although the hymn avoids explicit deification of the king, it certainly leaves the reader with the impression that Tukulti-Ninurta I, unlike any other human being, had a unique and special relationship—which finds its closest analogy in sonship—with the god Enlil.

“The opening lines of the Babylonian creation story *Enuma Elish* reinforce the idea that image and likeness terminology designated sonship. The account begins with the creation of the primordial gods: Apsu and Tiamat beget Lahmu, Lahamu, Anshar and Kishar. Anshar and Kishar then beget their firstborn son, Anu, who is described as the likeness (*muššulu*) of his father. The following line reads, “and Anu begot Nudimmud, his image.” Both examples define the father-son relationship in terms of image and likeness: Anu is the *image* (*muššulu*) of his father Anshar, and Ea is the “likeness, effigy, replica,

image, resemblance, counterpart, or equivalent” (*tamšilu*) of his father, Anu. Although there are additional texts to which one could appeal, the biblical and extrabiblical examples just noted are sufficient to demonstrate that image and likeness language was indeed used in Mesopotamia to define the relationship of a god to a royal or divine son.”²⁷

Like Genesis 1:26, “image” is used of the body of the king as a statue of the god. There is a double entendre of divine kingship and sonship in the Tukulti-Ninurta Epic, but the emphasis is on kingship and so the term *šalmu* is used. Interestingly, in *Enuma Elish* the term ‘likeness’ (*muššulu*, *tamšilu*) is used when the focus is more on begetting and sonship rather than on royal status. This is a clear indication of the distinction I am proposing in a cognate language. So the examples adduced by McDowell not only support her general treatment, but also the finer point made in *Kingdom through Covenant* of the distinction between “image” and “likeness”: the word “likeness” emphasises the relation to the original and speaks of generation and sonship; the word “image” emphasises the representation of the original to the world and speaks of royal rule and status.²⁸

This discussion can be concluded by summarising evidence adduced in detail in *Kingdom through Covenant*. Nathan MacDonald has recently written on Genesis 1:26 as a text without a context.²⁹ He points to the narratives in Genesis 2, Genesis 3, and Genesis 4 as further discussion and treatment of the meaning of the divine image. He also appeals to Irenaeus, who, in spite of bad exegesis at points, understood the important connection between protology and eschatology. This confirms the approach I have taken.

In *Kingdom through Covenant*, both in the First and Second Editions, I attempted to expound Genesis 1:26–28 in the light of Genesis 2–3, Genesis 5, Genesis 9, Psalm 8 and also Luke 3, Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3.³⁰ Recent work by Catherine McDowell on Genesis 2–3, and also Gavin Ortlund and Richard Lints focusing on the later texts, have developed this further. McDowell’s argument for sonship is supported by Genesis 5, but Psalm 8 argues for the idea of kingship as related to the divine image.³¹

Michael Jones, a ThM Student at SBTS, recently explored the notion of *fictive kinship* in covenants; we need to focus on this idea to flesh out all that is meant by “image” and “likeness” in Genesis 1:26–28.³² One aspect of covenant language in the Bible and in the ancient Near East is the use of family language to support the notion of covenant. In the Covenant at Sinai, the language in the covenant ratification ceremony in Exodus 24 clearly portrays Yahweh and Israel as “getting married.” In marriage, we have individuals who are not related by blood but who by virtue of the covenant of marriage are now more closely related than blood relatives. Marriage entails fictive kinship. Fictive kinship explains the communal meal eaten at a wedding and the communal meal on the mountain in Exodus 24. In the ancient Near East you don’t eat with humans who are not family. When individuals who are not related by blood get married, the first thing they want to do is to eat together to show that they are now closer than any blood/family ties. This is supported by the research of Scott Hahn in his large work *Covenant by Kinship* and also by the massive data collected by Paul Kalluveettil



²⁷Catherine McDowell, “In the Image of God He Created Them’: How Genesis 1:26–27 Defines the Divine-Human Relationship and Why It Matters,” 40–41. See Philippe Talon, *The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth Enūma Eliš: Introduction, Cuneiform Text, Transliteration and Sign List with a Translation and Glossary in French* (State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts IV; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2005), 33.

²⁸McDowell rightly sees human rule as a result of royal status (34). Failure to distinguish image and likeness, however, results in perceiving humanity’s identity as son of God, but not the covenant relationship between humanity and creation (35–42). McDowell’s discussion of Yahweh as father and humanity as son cites important texts in the Old Testament but does not put them into the metanarrative of Scripture as in *Kingdom through Covenant*. A number of the texts cited are descriptions of those given *Adamic* roles and therefore relate more to the point than McDowell thinks (39). From assessing the ancient Near Eastern data she concludes, “Humanity is defined both as God’s royal “son” and as living “statuettes” representing God and his rule in his macro-temple, the world. I have focused on the former because the connection between image and sonship has received far less attention in the commentaries and the secondary sources despite its fundamental importance for understanding what it means to be created in the image of God” (42). Thus, she admits focusing on sonship even though she acknowledges humanity royal status. For page references, see Catherine McDowell, “In the Image of God He Created Them’: How Genesis 1:26–27 Defines the Divine-Human Relationship and Why It Matters.”

²⁹Nathan MacDonald, “A Text in Search of Context: The *Imago Dei* in the First Chapters of Genesis,” in D. Baer and R.P. Gordon (eds.), *Leshon Limmudim: Essays in the Language and Literature of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of A.A. Macintosh* (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, 593; The Hebrew Bible and its Versions; London: T&T Clark International, 2013), 3–16.

³⁰See chapter 6 in Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012, 2018).

³¹Gavin Ortlund, “Image of God, Son of God: Genesis 5:3 and Luke 3:38 in Intercanonical Dialogue,” *JETS* 57/4 (2014): 673–688 and Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015).

³²Michael Jones, “Fictive Kinship and the Heart of Yahweh: How Adamic Sonship Entails a Loving Creation Covenant,” Paper Presented February 28, 2018 in 84100—OT Seminar, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

on terms employed in the ancient Near East and Old Testament for covenant where the exact term covenant is not used.³³ There are many ways of speaking about covenant without using the word. So, many agreements and treaties borrow familial language. The Suzerain-Vassal treaties employ the language of father and son. This is to underscore the fact that in a covenant, parties have undertaken commitments and obligations as strong or stronger than family ties. Even the relationship of a king to his subjects is understood in these terms since one of the epithets for king in the ancient Near East is “father.”³⁴

Genesis 5 clearly features generation and sonship as characteristic of “likeness” and Genesis 1 and 2 features servant kingship as characteristic of “image.”

The final passage in Genesis mentioning the divine image is 9:6, where the basis for avenging a human life taken wantonly is the fact that we are made as the divine image. McDowell points out that later in the Torah, avenging blood is the duty of the “nearest relative” so that Genesis 9:6 affirms the connection between the divine image and kinship / sonship.³⁵ In the Torah, damage to another person must be repaid as much as but not more than the damage caused (an eye for an eye, etc.) Damage to another person’s property must be repaid plus an additional amount (e.g. Exod 22:1). This difference in the law of retributive justice indicates the value placed upon human life as the divine image.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MEANING OF “IMAGE” AND “LIKENESS”

Let us now consider the occurrences of *dēmut* and *šelem* in Genesis in light of the lexical study. Then results from our earlier study can be added to this.

The one and only supreme creator deity announces to the divine council in Genesis 1:26 the decision to make *’ādām*. The adverbial modifiers “in our image,” and “according to our likeness” indicate a vertical relationship between humans and God that can be described as obedient sonship and a horizontal relationship between humans and all creation that can be characterised as servant kingship. The preposition *bē* indicates that humans represent the creator God in the world precisely, while the preposition *kē* heading “likeness” shows that our generation is similar but not precise to that of God. As I explain in *Kingdom through Covenant*, God addresses the divine assembly but proceeds to create humans in his own image and likeness and disenfranchises the divine assembly by assigning the ruling function to the humans.

In reporting the execution of the divine decision, Genesis 1:27 employs only *šelem* with the preposition *bē* because this verse is preparing us for the role of humans in the world. Their royal status will result in representing God’s rule among creatures on the earth. Their binary sexuality will equip them to multiply as God planned.

The exposition in *Kingdom through Covenant* argues that ruling is the result of the divine image and not the image itself. It also demonstrates that the image applies to both male and female, since *’ādām* is generic. Furthermore, since the grammar applies to the product and not to the process, the fact that humans are the divine image is not merely a description of their function and role but speaks of human ontology and structure as well. We are hard-wired for relationship with God and with all creatures.

The fictive kinship of “sonship” and the royal status of kingship force us to view these relationships as covenantal. This is crystal clear from the language used in the Bible and in the ancient Near East. Moreover, this exposition is both full-orbed, positive, and rich in describing the covenant relationship between humans and God and far surpasses the shallow so-called “covenant of works” described in covenant theology, as Richard Lukas has shown.³⁶



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³³Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Purposes* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2009) and Paul Kalluveettil, *Declaration and Covenant* (Analecta Biblica 88: Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982).

³⁴M.-J. Seux, *Épithètes Royales Akkadiennes et Sumériennes* (Paris: LeTouzey et Ané, 1967), 33. Cf. CAD A 1:71.

³⁵Cf. Psalm 9:12–13 (11–12 ESV) where Yahweh is the avenger of blood and also 2 Chronicles 24:25.

³⁶Richard J. Lucas, “Re-examining Eden: The Creation Covenant in Theological Systems,” Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, November, 2016. After completing the research for this paper, I came across a major work by Andreas Wagner. He is a specialist in ancient Near Eastern studies, and especially art forms. His research confirms in broad outlines the conclusions reached here as can be seen in the following citations from his work. First, Wagner shows how images in the Old Testament, whether physical or verbal must be understood: “The main thesis of this book is that the image of God’s body, as it is drawn verbally in the Old Testament, must be comprehended along the lines of the Ancient Oriental / Old Testament understanding of images. Pictures in our modern world refer to visible objects, they are understood as portrayals of real objects. In the Ancient Orient, pictures referred to objects in their ideal, typical conceived form, more or less independent of their visible aspect. This is combined with a corporeal concept which diverges from ours, in which the body always stands for the functions it exercises. Figures in human form in the Ancient Orient can, therefore, be understood to indicate functions of the body quite independent of visibility, without referring to the visibility of the parts of the body depicted at all. Consequently, verbal images of the body of God in the Old Testament, the anthropomorphic figure, can express the functions connected with core elements of the body without indicating a visual figure.” Andreas Wagner, *God’s Body: The Anthropomorphic God in the Old Testament*. Translated by Marion Salzmann. London: T & T Clark, 2019, 159. Second, here are Wagner’s conclusions about the image of God: “Humans are conceived to ‘represent’ God’s cult image *šaelæm* is conceived to express similarity, *d’mût*. Together they constitute (a merism) the whole person in his relationship with God. Mankind wields dominion vicariously for God on earth (cf. the mandate to rule), as God’s representative (B. Janowski), the mandatary (G. v. Rad). Communication between God and humans must work smoothly if the mandate is to be understood, and therefore similarity is a basic prerequisite. Secondly, humans must be able to act like God, less almighty and within the confines of human ability, but nonetheless capable of acting like God. Both these aspects, communication and the ability to act, lead us back to the similarity of the corporeal and of God and humans, as described previously.” Ibid., 157. These conclusions are compatible with the conclusions here. Humans are created to have a covenant relationship with God on the one hand and the world on the other. The notions of obedient sonship and servant kingship define humanity both functionally and ontologically. Also, the priority of worship is determinative for implementing the mandate.



Grounds for Divorce: Why I Now Believe There Are More Than Two¹

Until 2019, I held the common, historic Protestant view of divorce, namely, that adultery and desertion were the only two legitimate grounds for divorce allowed by Scripture. This is the position set forth, for example, in the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646):

In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce: and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead. . . . Nothing but *adultery*, or such *willful desertion* as can no way be remedied by the church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage. (24.5, 6)

I defended this position and interacted extensively with numerous other positions in a forty-five page chapter in my book, *Christian Ethics*, and I will not repeat those arguments here.²

However, as a result of additional research that I carried out in 2019, I now believe that 1 Corinthians 7:15 implies that divorce may be legitimate in other circumstances that damage the marriage as severely as adultery or desertion. This change in my position has come because I reached a new understanding of Paul's expression "in such cases" in 1 Corinthians 7:15.

¹This article is adapted from my forthcoming book, *What the Bible Says about Divorce and Remarriage* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), and is used with permission of Crossway Books.

²Chapter 32 in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 799–843.

A. A NEW AND BROADER UNDERSTANDING OF “IN SUCH CASES” (1 CORINTHIANS 7:15).

Here is the key verse where Paul allows for divorce in cases of desertion by an unbeliever:

But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. *In such cases* the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace. (1 Cor. 7:15)

The Greek phrase translated “in such cases” is *en tois toioutois*. The phrase does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament, nor does it occur in the Septuagint. This phrase does occur in Greek literature outside the Bible, but, so far as I could tell, no interpreter of 1 Corinthians has ever studied its use in extra-biblical literature.³ Most commentaries just assume that it means “in cases of desertion by an unbeliever,” which is the specific situation that Paul mentions. But could its meaning be broader?

I found several examples where this phrase clearly referred to more kinds of situations than the specific situation that the author was discussing. Here are some of those examples:

(1) **Philo** (Jewish author; ca. 30 B.C. – A.D. 45): In commenting on the tenth plague on Egypt, when the Egyptians discovered that all their firstborn sons and firstborn cattle had been killed, Philo comments,

And, as so often happens *in such cases* (*en tois toioutois*), they thought that their present condition was but the beginning of greater evils, and were filled with fear of the destruction of those who still lived. (*The Life of Moses*, 1. 38).

The specific situation that Philo names is the sudden death of their firstborn sons. But “in such cases” cannot be limited to that situation only, because that had never happened before. Yet Philo is referring to something that happens quite often, for he says “as so often happens in such cases.” His meaning must be, “as so often happens when sudden tragedy strikes,” which is a much broader category than just the death of all the firstborn sons in a nation.”

(2) **Lysias** (Greek orator, ca. 459 – ca. 380 B.C.):

When Phrynichus had to pay a fine to the Treasury, my father did not bring him his contribution of money: yet it is *in such cases* (*en tois toioutois*), that we see the best proof of a man’s friends. (*Pro Polystrato* 12:4).

In this statement, Lysias cannot be claiming that “the best proof of a man’s friends” comes only when someone suddenly has to pay a fine to the Treasury, for such circumstances are uncommon. He must mean that “the best proof of a man’s friends” comes when someone suddenly has an unexpected need for money — then you will find out who your friends really are. Here again, the expression “in such cases” refers to a much broader category of situations than the specific example named.

(3) **Euripides** (Greek tragedian, ca. 480 – ca. 406 B.C.):

But go inside the house at once and make things ready there. Surely a woman, if she wants to, can find many additions to a meal. Really there is still enough in the house to cram them with food for one day at least. It is *in*

such cases (*en tois toioutois*) . . . that I see how wealth has great power, to give to strangers, and to expend in curing the body when it falls sick. (*Electra*, line 426)

The specific situation named is a sudden need for food to feed to unexpected guests, but “in such cases” refers more broadly to any situation in which wealth provides the ability to meet unexpected needs.

Other examples could be given,⁴ but it should be clear from these examples that, when Paul used *en tois toioutois* to say that “*in such cases* the brother or sister is not enslaved” (1 Cor. 7:15), he implied that divorce was a legitimate possibility not only in cases of desertion by unbeliever, but also in other circumstances *similar to* but not necessarily exactly like desertion. A reasonable possibility is that “in such cases” in 1 Corinthians 7:15 means “*in this and other similarly destructive situations*” (that is, situations that destroy a marriage as much as adultery or desertion).

A confirming argument comes from Paul’s use of the *plural* expression “in such cases,” whereas he could have just used the singular expression *en touto* (“in this case”) if he had wanted to refer only to the case of desertion

by an unbeliever (he uses the singular phrase in 1 Cor. 11:22 and 2 Cor. 8:10, for example).

Someone might object that Paul uses a plural expression because he mentions “the brother or sister,” which includes two people. But that objection is not persuasive because the sense of the expression “such cases” (*toioutois*) requires that it refer to something previously mentioned, and therefore it must refer back to the “if” clause in Paul’s argument, “if the unbeliever separates.”

B. WHAT OTHER KINDS OF SITUATIONS MIGHT BE HARMFUL ENOUGH TO INCLUDE IN “IN SUCH CASES”?

Paul did not specify a list of any other specific situations in which divorce might be considered legitimate. He must have been aware of Jesus’ teaching while on earth, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:6), for he says that it is a command from “the Lord” that “the wife should not separate from her husband” and “the husband should not divorce his wife” (1 Cor. 7:10–11). But in this same context Jesus had also taught that adultery was a legitimate reason, in fact the only legitimate reason, for divorce (see Matt. 19:9), and Paul no doubt was also aware of that teaching.

³I could not find any discussion of *en tois toioutois* in literature outside the Bible in any of the numerous academic commentaries on 1 Corinthians that I have in my home library, nor could my teaching assistant Brett Gray find any such research in any of the commentaries in the Phoenix Seminary library. I do not think any such study of a 3-word Greek phrase would have been possible before the development of the TLG (Thesaurus Linguae Graecae) database at the University of California-Irvine, which did not become available for academic research by outside scholars until the early to mid-1980s.

⁴See Euripides, *Troïades*, line 303; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica* 1.23.7; Sophocles, *Electra*, line 990; and Epictetus, *Dissertationes ab Arriano digestae* 11.21. I did find other examples where “in such cases” referred to a broad category of actions or things that were the same or very similar to the specific situation named (such as Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8. 379), but none of these examples was exactly parallel to 1 Corinthians 7:15, because they all had a *plural* antecedent, which is different from Paul’s singular example “if the unbeliever departs.” I examined 52 examples of *en tois toioutois* (I chose them because the English translations were most readily available to me), and I did not find one example where the phrase referred to a *singular* antecedent (like 1 Cor. 7:15) and the context implied that “such cases” were limited to situations that were *exactly the same* as the one named by the author.

...instead of slavery, "God has called you to peace"

1. Paul's reasoning: In light of this background, what reasoning led Paul, with his apostolic authority, to add desertion (which was not specified by Jesus) as another legitimate ground for divorce? In order to do this, he must have been persuaded that desertion by an unbeliever destroyed a marriage as much as adultery did.⁵ Once the unbeliever has departed, the man and woman are no longer living together and no longer acting in any sense as husband and wife. If the deserting spouse is an unbeliever, then he or she is beyond the reach of church discipline, and there is no reasonable human hope that the man and woman will ever again function as if they are husband and wife. The marriage has been destroyed. Recognizing this reality, Paul says, "In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved" (1 Cor. 7:15). And when he uses the broad category "in such cases," he suggests that other situations might also be included, following the same line of reasoning. We might even consider translating the phrase as "in cases similar to this."

2. "Not enslaved": Paul gives another indication of the kinds of situations that would fall in this category when he permits divorce by using the unusual expression "is not enslaved" (Greek *douloō*, "to enslave"; this is the Greek verb

that corresponds to the common noun *doulos*, "slave, bondservant, servant"). The Bible never uses the verb *douloō* anywhere else to refer to marriage, and by using it here Paul implies that forbidding a deserted spouse to be divorced would be akin to trapping that spouse in slavery. But God does not require his children to live their entire lives in a slave-like situation, Paul assures his readers, because instead of slavery, "God has called you to peace" (Greek *eirēnē*, "peace, harmony, well-being," with echoes of the Old Testament concept of *shālôm*, "peace, well-being").

3. Other situations that require wise consideration: With this background, we can now ask what other kinds of situations might destroy a marriage to the same extent that adultery or desertion would destroy it, and what other situations would trap a spouse in a slave-like condition that can only be remedied by divorce. Several categories of situations come to mind.

(1) Abuse: If an abused spouse is *forced to flee from the home for self-protection* from ongoing, violent abuse, in my judgment, that would be a situation where the damage is sufficiently similar to the damage from adultery or desertion, so that divorce would

be a legitimate option.⁶ In some ways such abuse is worse than desertion because it involves repeated demonstrations of actual malice, not simply indifference. Abuse is actively malevolent, and the result is the same (the couple is no longer together). The abusing spouse has not technically "deserted," but he or she bears the moral guilt of *causing* the separation.

This was in fact the view of the church father Chrysostom (ca. 349–407); in commenting on 1 Corinthians 7:15 he wrote,

But what is the meaning of, "if the unbelieving departeth?" For instance, if he bid thee sacrifice and take part in his ungodliness on account of thy marriage, or else part company; it were better if the marriage were annulled, and no breach made in godliness. Wherefore he adds, "A brother is not under bondage, nor yet a sister, in such cases." If day by day he buffet (*pukteuō*, box, punch) thee and keep up combats (*polemos*, war, battle,

fighting) on this account, it is better to separate. For this is what he glances at, saying, "But God has called us in peace." For it is the other party who furnished the ground of separation, even as he did who committed uncleanness (*porneuō*). (Homily 19 on 1 Corinthians in *NPNF*, 1:12, 108).

Let me be very clear at this point. I am *not* saying that divorce is legitimate in every case where a spouse claims to be abused (whether physically, verbally/emotionally, or both). But I am saying that *there are some cases* where the abuse (whether physical or verbal/emotional) has damaged the marriage as much as adultery or desertion would damage it, and "in such cases" in 1 Corinthians 7:15 would apply, and divorce would be legitimate. In some cases, even a single instance of abuse may be so violent (even resulting in broken bones and hospitalization) that it would be dangerous for the abused spouse to return, and in such a situation it would be legitimate to seek a divorce.

⁵David Clyde Jones also sees this as the reason, for, in explaining why adultery and desertion are the two grounds for divorce given in Matthew 19:9 and 1 Corinthians 7:15, he writes, "The exceptional circumstance common to both instances is willful and radical violation of the marriage covenant" in *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Baker, 1994), 202.

⁶John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 781, sees abuse as a legitimate ground for divorce in some cases. David Clyde Jones also thinks that physical abuse so violates the marriage covenant that it is a sufficient ground, as well as adultery and desertion, for divorce. See his *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994), 177–204.



(2) Abuse of children: The same reasoning would apply if the abuse is directed against the children instead of the spouse.

(3) Extreme, prolonged verbal and relational cruelty that is destroying the other spouse's mental and emotional stability could be so severe that it would fall in the category of "in such cases," and would be a legitimate ground for divorce.

(4) Credible threats of serious physical harm or murder of a spouse or children could also, in some cases, fall in this category.

(5) Incurable drug or alcohol addiction, accompanied by regular lies, deceptions, thefts, and/or violence might, in some cases, be so destructive to the marriage that it would also fall in this category.

(6) Incurable gambling addiction that has led to massive, overwhelming indebtedness could also, in some cases, fall in this category.

(7) Incurable addiction to pornography might also fall in this category. But I also think that this kind of addiction could be included under the meaning of "sexual immorality" (Greek *porneia*) in Matthew 19:9.

(8) Situations that are not legitimate grounds for divorce: In the midst of a secular culture where divorces are far too easy and far too common, it is good to remember that Scripture does not allow divorce just because a marriage is difficult, or because a husband and wife are not getting along, or because one spouse wants to marry another person. We need to be reminded again of the warnings of Jesus that such divorces are

contrary to God's will and commonly result in what God considers to be adultery (see Matthew 19:3–9).

4. The need for wisdom: Pastors, elders, and Christian counselors, if asked for counsel about whether divorce is a legitimate option in specific cases, need much wisdom and discernment (see Phil. 1:9; James 1:5–6) in order to rightly evaluate the actual degree of harm in individual cases, and whether there is a reasonable basis for hope that the destructive behavior has ended and the marriage can be saved. This is why I have repeatedly used the words "might" and "could" in the list above. No general academic article on divorce (such as this article) can possibly specify all the complex details that will be part of every real-life situation.

⁷See chapter 20 in Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics*, 551–65.

C. ADDITIONAL NOTE: CHURCHES NEED TO AGGRESSIVELY PROTECT AN ABUSED SPOUSE.

I want to emphasize at this point that in all churches, including churches that only recognize two legitimate grounds for divorce, when a situation of abuse becomes known, the church must quickly protect the abused spouse.

In a case of physical abuse, *something* — perhaps *several things* — must be done quickly to prevent the abused spouse from having to endure further suffering. As soon as church leaders become aware of a situation of physical abuse, they should act to bring the abuse to an immediate halt, often by encouraging the abused spouse to separate and move to another, perhaps undisclosed, living location (for the eventual purpose of bringing restoration of the marriage along with the complete cessation of the abuse). In addition, other actions may need to be taken, and these will vary from case to case. These actions may include church discipline, confrontation and counseling, police intervention, a court order, and other kinds of intervention by church members, family members, and friends. As I have argued elsewhere, when a person is facing the likelihood of physical assault, self-defense or fleeing from the danger are both morally right actions.⁷ In some cases, filing a complaint with local police and pressing charges may also be appropriate, because violently attacking one's spouse and doing physical harm is a criminal act and subject to legal penalties. Using every available means, the abuse must be stopped and the abused spouse must be protected.

D. RESTORATION OF THE MARRIAGE, IF POSSIBLE, MUST REMAIN THE FIRST GOAL

It is important to remember that God established marriage as a lifelong commitment (see Matt. 19:3–9; 1 Cor. 7:10–14). So long as it is consistent with the necessary protection for an abused spouse, pastors and counselors should first seek to restore a marriage to health and obedience to God’s instructions about marriage. If the abusing spouse is a professing Christian, church discipline should be initiated, and it will frequently bring a good result and the marriage will be saved.

E. OBJECTIONS

There are several possible objections that may be brought against my argument about “in such cases” in 1 Corinthians 7:15.

(1) Objection: In a case of abuse, why not just counsel lifelong separation without divorce?

My answer is that this would be leaving the abused spouse “enslaved” to the marriage and the abusing spouse, but Paul says such a spouse is “not enslaved” in situations like this.

(2) Objection: This will open the floodgates to many needless divorces in marriages that could have been saved.

My answer is that I am not advocating for “needless divorces.” A genuine effort to save the marriage should be attempted first. But allowing for these additional possible grounds for divorce will save thousands of sincere Christian believers from suffering horrible abuse for decades.

(3) Objection: Staying in an abusive marriage is a better way to give a witness to society about the goodness of God’s plan for lifelong marriage.

But I would reply that leaving an abusive marriage with the blessing of the church is a *better* way to give witness to society that God is pleased when we can help to rescue those who suffer unjustly.

(4) Objection: Sometimes God calls his children to endure suffering. In fact, Peter says, “If when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God” (1 Pet. 2:20).

In response, I agree that God sometimes calls his people to endure suffering, but there is more to the story. God also rescues his people from suffering and calls them to escape from suffering when possible: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex. 20:2). “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13). “When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next” (Matt. 10:23). “Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)” (1 Cor. 7:21).

F. CONCLUSION

In 1 Corinthians 7:15, Paul writes as follows:

But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. *In such cases (en tois toioutois)* the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.

Several examples from extra-biblical literature show that the expression “in such cases” (*en tois toioutois*) often refers to a variety of situations that are *similar to* but clearly not identical to the specific situation mentioned. This suggests that Paul considered divorce a legitimate possibility not only in cases of desertion by an unbeliever, but also in other situations that similarly brought extensive and severe damage to the marriage. ✕

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"A genuine effort to save the marriage should be attempted first. But allowing for these additional possible grounds for divorce will save thousands of sincere Christian believers from suffering horrible abuse for decades."

Contending for a Culture of

LIFE

Abortion in the Work and Witness of the Early Church

NATHAN TARR

The issue of abortion is never far out of the news. This perennial discussion provides believers with regular opportunity to articulate our convictions as well meaningfully engage those with different convictions. Certain opinions, such the claim that the right to “terminate one’s pregnancy” is “fundamental to one’s humanity” published in America’s paper of record, may sadden us but are no longer surprising.¹ They are immediately recognizable as a distortion, and indeed a rejection, of the biblical anthropology which roots our humanity in the *imago Dei*.

¹West took to the op-ed pages of the *New York Times* to decry the “morally putrescent” idea that Democrats should support anti-abortion candidates in order to contest elections in conservative districts. She championed a vision of the Democratic Party that views abortion as just such a litmus test: “It is true that the left will have to choose (and soon) between absolute ideological purity and the huge numbers required to seize the rudder of the nation...But abortion is not valid fodder for such compromise.” Abortion, West argued, cannot be a fringe issue. “Abortion is liberty.” Lindy West, “Of Course Abortion Should be a Litmus Test for Democrats,” *New York Times* Op-Ed, 8–2–17. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/opinion/trump-democrats-abortion-litmus-test.ht>. Accessed May 4, 2020.

But what of arguments in favor of abortion that lay claim to the history of the church itself? This approach can be both surprising and, for believers unfamiliar with the convictions of their forebears in the faith, even disorienting. Christiana Forrester, founder and director of Christian Democrats of America, attempted to formulate such an argument in the *Huffington Post*. Forrester advanced the claim that, “for hundreds of years Christians weren’t concerned about abortion.” In fact, she continued, there is “a lack of interest in the topic in early Christian teaching.” She concluded that because “there is little to no mention of abortion as a topic of great alarm,” from the Old Testament through to modern history, there is therefore “no case to be made for a definitive Christian stance throughout history on the spiritual or moral aspects of abortion.”²

Forrester’s wholesale revision of the historical record — suggesting that Christians first began to care about abortion after *Roe v. Wade* — smuggled in a payload of lying implications. She used her claim first to deny pro-life arguments any biblical and historical legitimacy, then to diminish the moral significance of abortion, placing it well beneath the mandate to excise xenophobia and alleviate poverty, and finally to reduce resistance to abortion to the level of political pragmatism.³ Most troubling, for the purposes of this article, Forrester’s claim that her conclusions “simply bring the biblical and historical record to light,” forfeited the very sources contemporary Christians so desperately need in order to formulate and practice a biblically faithful, relationally sensitive, historically informed response to the cluster of issues surrounding abortion.

The purpose of this article is to resource just such a robust Christian response by revisiting the historical record of the church’s encounter with the practice of abortion and by re-presenting the culture of life for which these believers faithfully contended. In order to be helpful as well as brief, this study focuses on the period beginning with the death of the last Apostle (c.90 AD) and extending for roughly three hundred years thereafter. Leaders in these earliest centuries of Christianity regularly faced — and articulated a univocal response to — the practice of abortion amid the moral decadence of the Roman empire.⁴ As we observe the

way the believing community mingled the radiant warmth of divine grace toward those who were hurting together with an unflinching conviction regarding the image of the God in the life of the unborn, we can be encouraged and equipped in our own labors to contend for a culture of life.

A CULTURE OF DEATH: ABORTION IN THE GREEK AND ROMAN WORLD

Michael Gorman opens his seminal book, *Abortion and the Early Church*, with words that may surprise some: “abortion was not at all uncommon two thousand years ago.” The prevalence of this practice meant that “early Christians were forced to develop both an appropriate attitude to their culture’s practice and a standard for life within the Christian community.”⁵ Before turning to examine the different aspects of the Christian response to abortion, this first section considers the cultural context in which Christianity emerged and distinguished itself as a growing religion within the Roman empire. This engagement with the Græco-Roman world must be brief, but it should be sufficient to reveal that a broad tolerance of abortion did in fact exist, along with the more common practice of exposing unwanted newborns. Furthermore, where cultural mores did come to discourage abortion as unlawful or illegitimate, the reasoning behind this pagan resistance was very different than the motivation guiding the Christian response.⁶

²Christiana Forrester, “The Truth About Christianity and Abortion,” *Huffington Post* 4/19/2017. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-truth-about-christianity-and-abortion_us_58f52ed7e4b048372700dab5. Accessed May 4, 2020.

³It is now a commonplace to suggest that the New Testament writings do not speak directly to the issue of abortion, with Exodus 21:2 as the lone, and malleable, Old Testament passage carrying any direct relevance. Michael Gorman, however, alerts us to the implicit teaching of the New Testament in the use of *pharmakeia* (and its cognates) in Galatians 5:20 and Revelation 9:21, 18:23, 21:8, and 22:15. This word, often translated “sorcery,” was also used to refer to the poisons given to women as abortifacients. Michael Gorman, *Abortion and the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 48. O.M. Bakke follows Gorman in his *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 114. An example of just such an interpretation can be seen in Jerome’s *Epistle to the Galatians*. Commenting on Galatians 5:20, Jerome takes the point of the apostolic injunction to be “so that poisoning and sorcery might not appear to be condoned in the New Testament.” Quoted in Mark Edwards ed. *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 8 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 88. For a discussion of the Old Testament Scriptures, see Bruce Waltke, “Reflections from the Old Testament on Abortion,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19 (1976): 3–13.

⁴For the growth of Christianity within the decline of the Roman empire see Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Excellent Empire: The Fall of Rome and the Triumph of the Church* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), especially pages 15–52; Larry Hurtado, *Destroyer of the gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), especially pages 143–182; Robert Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), especially pages 35–92; Edward Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015); and Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁵Gorman, *Abortion*, 14.

⁶For the Græco-Roman attitude toward abortion, see Gorman, *Abortion*, 13–32; Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 15–55; Richard Harrow Fein, “Abortion and Exposure in Ancient Greece: Assessing the Status of the Fetus and ‘Newborn’ from Classical Sources” in William Bondeson, et. al. ed. *Abortion and the Status of the Fetus* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1983), 283–300.



Greek medical practice largely opposed abortion. *The Oath of Hippocrates*, dating from the fifth-century BC, includes an explicit promise not to perform an abortion; “I swear...I will not give to a woman a pessary to cause abortion.”⁷ This rejection owed largely to the fact that the poisons prescribed were dangerous to the life of the mother, and therefore in violation of the same oath to “keep them from harm.” The surgical procedures used for abortion were likewise horrifically dangerous to the mother; therefore, exposure of newborns became the preferred method for controlling the quantity and quality of the population in the family or *polis*.⁸ Many doctors, however — including Hippocrates himself it seems — were willing to perform abortions and “women who wanted abortions, for whatever reason, had a great variety of means available to them.”⁹ In fact, leading Greek philosophers such as Plato (428–348BC) and Aristotle (384–322BC) endorsed abortion in cases where the child would threaten the welfare of the state. This endorsement was in keeping with their subjection of all individual rights to the good of the community. In Plato’s case, it came in spite of his conviction, against Aristotle, that life began at conception.¹⁰

Roman attitudes toward abortion were a similar mixture. Legally, abortion was viewed as a violation of the *patria potestas*. Children were vital to the security both of the community and family line. The father of a Roman household held the future of his family, and therefore the lives of

those under his roof, in his hand. This power meant that a woman who sought an abortion apart from her husband’s consent could face severe repercussions, including fines, divorce, and even exile.¹¹ In the *Twelve Tables*, Roman law also provided that husbands who pressured their wives to abort without cause were to be censured in view of the danger abortion posed to the woman. Actual penalties were not set, however, and these legal injunctions did not translate to the protection of children inside or outside of the womb. Furthermore, the *Twelve Tables* extended the authority to the *paterfamilias* to expose or abort any infant he deemed unsupportable. Such an action was not considered murder since Roman law did not recognize the fetus as a person, but only as part of the mother, and even newborn children were not considered a part of the family until they were formally acknowledged by the father as his child. According to a Roman euphemism, to abort or expose was simply “the refusal to admit to society.”¹² By the time of Christ’s birth, abortion was widespread and had reached the point of being practiced, despite its dangers, as a personal convenience.¹³ Significantly, even where poets, philosophers, or politicians came to decry the practice of abortion, their motive for such a stand derived from a desire to maintain the rights of the father, or the future population of the empire. This perspective was strikingly different from the explicitly theological convictions on which Christians would take their stand for life.¹⁴

⁷Gorman, *Abortion*, 20.

⁸For several ancient descriptions of the procedure, see Gorman, *Abortion*, 17.

⁹Gorman, *Abortion*, 15.

¹⁰See Gorman, *Abortion*, 20–24, 35. Aristotle held that the fetus acquired a kind of vegetable life at conception, which was then replaced by an animal soul, and finally a rational mind after a long developmental course. The Stoics held that life only begins as the fully developed infant takes its first breath, but their philosophers did nevertheless condemn abortion as detrimental to the common good. Most likely they had the population of the polis in mind. For a discussion of the way the body could be used as a metaphor for society in antiquity, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

¹¹Gorman, *Abortion*, 25–32, 35. Plutarch, and later Cicero, called for divorce and the death penalty, respectively, as fitting punishment for deliberate abortion. In both cases, the concern was to maintain the power of the father.

¹²Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 80–81. Gorman states, “that the fetus is not a person was fundamental to Roman law.” Gorman, *Abortion*, 32. For a discussion of the religious ceremony constituting the reception of a newborn, see H. J. Rose, *Religion in Greece and Rome* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 30–31, 189–90.

¹³Juvenal (c.55–127AD) comments on how rarely a “gilded bed” contained a pregnant woman. The rich frequently made use of their access to abortion, and often in order to maintain a standard of living, sexual appeal, or to cover up illicit activity. Juvenal, *Satire* 6:592–601. Cited in Gorman, *Abortion*, 14. The poet Ovid (43BC–43AD) suggests a popular motivation for seeking abortion when he asks, “Can it be that, to spare your bosom the reproach of lines, you would scatter the tragic sands of deadly combat?” Ovid, *De nuce*, 22–23. Cited in William Lecky, *History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne*, (New York: Appleton and Company, 1872), 2:23.

¹⁴Christians were able to draw on a long-standing Jewish tradition in their theological rejection of abortion. For a presentation of this tradition see Gorman, *Abortion*, 33–45; and Andreas Lindemann, “Do Not Let a Woman Destroy the Unborn Babe in Her Belly’: Abortion in Ancient Judaism and Christianity,” *Studia theologica* 49 (1995): 253–271. See also, John Frame, “Abortion from a Biblical Perspective” in R.L. Ganz, ed., *Thou Shalt Not Kill* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1978), 50–57.

THE TWO WAYS: DEFINING A CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

The culture in which the church cut her moral teeth was coarsened by violence of many kinds, including violence against the unborn. It was in this world that followers of Jesus worked both to define themselves and to defend themselves as they caught increasing attention from the empire. To accomplish this twin task, the image that dominated the Christian ethical imagination, as seen in the earliest post-canonical writings, was that of the “two ways.” Drawn from the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, as well as from Jewish oral tradition, these alternatives were opposed to one another as the way of life and the way of death. For example, the *Didache*, a manual for Christian morality and church order dating from the first half of the second century, opens with these lines, “There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways.”¹⁵ The contemporary *Epistle of Barnabas* shifts the image slightly to “one of light and one of darkness,” but stresses again the “great difference between these two ways.”¹⁶ The main thrust of this difference, in the context of both works, is ethical. These authors were attempting to shape the daily behavior of their fellow believers.¹⁷

Significantly, both the *Didache* and *Barnabas* served as instruction manuals for baptismal candidates in the early church. This period of catechesis and character formation, often prolonged over several years, carried the purpose of “alter[ing] the habits of perception and standards of judgment of novices coming out of a pagan lifestyle.”¹⁸ In other words, the goal was to take men and women whose lives had been saturated with the world and inculcate an explicitly Christian identity, both in terms of doctrine and practice. Recognizing that a verbal confession could come more quickly than a corresponding change in behavior, early Christian catechesis emphasized what it looked like to live according to the teachings of Jesus.¹⁹

The result of this intentional discipleship was that the lives of Christ-followers began to take on an identifiable moral stamp in the midst of their culture. The ethical behavior of believers was just as noticeable and unique, if not initially more so, as the doctrinal beliefs that drove it. Recalling the

image of the “two ways,” these paths were sufficiently close in terms of relational proximity, but sufficiently divergent in terms of behavioral practice, that travelers could recognize who was who along the road. And because this way of life issued ultimately from allegiance to Christ, who is king over all, this distinctly Christian morality forged a community across social classes and ethnic barriers, from the eastern to the western reaches of the Roman empire. As Wayne Meeks recognizes, “making morals means making community.”²⁰ Whatever their prior background, believers in Jesus were now a new *ethnos* with a correspondingly unique *ethos*. As the author of the early letter *To Diognetus* understood,

Christians are not distinguished from the rest of humanity by country, language, or custom...But while they live in both Greek and barbarian cities...and follow the local customs in dress and food and other aspects of life, at the same time they demonstrate the remarkable and admittedly unusual character of their own citizenship. They live in their own countries, but only as nonresidents; they participate in everything as citizens, but endure everything as foreigners. Every foreign country is their fatherland, and every fatherland is foreign.²¹

¹⁵Michael Holmes, trans. *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 345. Holmes's introduction provides a helpful discussion of the debates regarding the date, place, and purpose of this “most fascinating yet perplexing document.” It also includes a helpful bibliography for further study.

¹⁶Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 433. The majority of *The Epistle of Barnabas* is a storehouse of Christian interpretation of the Old Testament as providing types and shadows of the person and work of Christ. Where it speaks to Christian morality, it tracks closely with *The Didache*. For a discussion of the relationship between these two documents, and their possible shared dependence on a common source, see Jonathan Draper, “Barnabas and the Riddle of the Didache Revisited,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 58 (1995): 96–99.

¹⁷Nevertheless, the biblical connection between a life that bears good fruit and a root of true and vital faith was never totally out of view. The way of life was the way to life. In the words of *Barnabas*, “This, therefore, is the way of light; if any desire to make their way to the designated place, let them be diligent with respect to their works.” Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 435. Contrast this with, “But the way of the black one is crooked and completely cursed. For it is a way of eternal death and punishment.” Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 439.

¹⁸Thomas O'Loughlin, “The Missionary Strategy of the *Didache*,” *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 28.2 (2001): 84.

¹⁹This was because, in the words of Justin Martyr, “Those who are found not living as he taught should know that they are not really Christians, even if his teachings are on their lips.” Justin, *First Apology* 16.8 in C. C. Richardson ed., E.R. Hardy trans., *Early Christian Fathers* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), 161–82. For a helpful discussion of the purposes and processes of both catechesis and baptism in early Christianity see Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 133–84. For a helpful engagement with Kreider's main thesis, see Bryan Litfin, “Was the Early Church ‘Patient’?” <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/book-reviews-patient-ferment-of-the-early-church>. Accessed May 4, 2020.

²⁰Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 5.

²¹Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 701–703.

The Athenian apologist Aristides (fl.110–130) argues in a similar fashion. He begins his *Apology* to the emperor by boldly announcing that the Christians “are the ones, beyond all the [other] nations of the earth, who have found the truth.” At least three claims are made in this brief introduction. First, Christians, as a whole and wherever they are found, are presented as a distinct nation (*ethnos*) among all the other nations -- Aristides juxtaposes this identity with the Babylonians, Greeks, Egyptians, and even the Jews.²² Second, the fundamental or underlying Christian distinctive, as Aristides presents it, is theological; “For they know the God who is creator and maker of everything and they worship no other God but him.”²³ Third, and from this theological foundation, Aristides goes on to stress the way Christians, in contrast to other philosophical schools of the day, refuse to espouse teaching they had no intention of embodying. Rather, what follows in the *Apology*, as in *Diognetus*, is a lengthy discussion of Christian morality. This conviction that orthodoxy and orthopraxy belongs together fits with the biblical insistence, to use Meeks’s words, that

“the things one believes
about God affect the way
one behaves.”²⁴

In developing a distinctly Christian identity within these new converts, therefore, the Christian community drew heavily on the doctrinal and ethical implications of the “two ways.” And these two ways often divided along the issue of the sanctity of the life of unborn children.

THE WAY OF LIFE: THE EARLY CHRISTIAN POSITION ON ABORTION

The Christian rejection of abortion differed fundamentally from that of their pagan neighbors because they carried the personhood of the unborn child always in view. The grid of implications through which their culture considered the practice of abortion -- the power of the father, the population of the empire, or even the safety of the mother undergoing the procedure -- were, for believers, secondary considerations. The primary conviction motivating the Christian stand for life was that the unborn child was a human being, created by God, and therefore was included under the divine commands against murder and for the love of neighbor.

The *Didache*, for example, in unfolding the steps along the way of life, calls believers to the love of God and neighbor. This neighbor-love is then developed, after the pattern of the Ten Commandments, through a series of prohibitions against murder, including “you shall not abort a child or commit infanticide.”²⁵ The *Epistle of Barnabas* situates the same prohibition even more immediately in the context of a Christian’s sacrificial love, “You shall love your neighbor more than your own life. You shall not abort a child, nor, again, commit infanticide.”²⁶ Both documents return to the issue of abortion when describing the path of death. Down this dark road, abortion made one liable to divine judgment because it was the culpable destruction of God’s creation.²⁷

²²Aristides, *Apology* 15.3–7 in J. Stevenson trans., *A New Eusebius* rev. W.H.C. Frend (London: The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, 1987), 53–55.

²³Aristides, *Apology*, 53. Everett Ferguson issues a helpful reminder at this point. Namely, that the authority of Christianity rests, and has always rested, not on the absolute originality of its teachings and practices, but “on whether it is a revelation from God.” Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 619.

²⁴Meeks, *Origin*, 16. Or to use the words of the apostle James, that “faith without works is dead.”

²⁵Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 347. For more on the early Christian position, see Harold O.J. Brown, “What the Supreme Court Didn’t Know: Ancient and Early Christian Views on Abortion,” *Human Life Review* 1 (Springs, 1975): 5–21.

²⁶Holmes, *Apostolic Fathers*, 435.

²⁷The *Apocalypse of Peter*, written around the same time as the *Didache* and *Barnabas*, contained a graphic vision of the tortures experienced in hell. Included, in “a very great and very deep pit,” are “women swallowed up to their necks and punished with great pain” who “have procured abortions and have ruined the work of God which he has created.” Cited in Bakke, *Children*, 117. This document carried significant weight in the earliest Christian communities, with both Clement of Alexandria (150–215) and the *Muratorian Fragment* giving it canonical status. Though it was ultimately recognized as non-canonical in the fourth century, the *Apocalypse of Peter* provides a vivid picture of the seriousness with which the church took the issue of abortion. It was the culpable murder of God’s creation. Significantly, the men who assisted these murders by procuring the poisons, or pressuring the women, are also condemned. As *Peter* pictures it, they are condemned by the voices of the very children they have murdered, who themselves live in the presence of God.

The fact that these early manuals of Christian thought and practice describe abortion both as the murder of children and as the corruption of God’s creation is significant. The conclusion Christians drew from this connection is that the unborn child, as God’s creation, is the object of his protection. Abortion, in other words, had to do with God. This theological starting point carried direct ethical implications for God’s people; namely, that the unborn child was not considered to be at the disposal of his father, nor again as part of the body of her mother. Rather, as the handiwork of God, the unborn were not to be violated and, as a human being, they were to be protected, even preferred, as a neighbor.²⁸ Remembering that the Lord Jesus locates a believer’s enemy in the place of a neighbor must have caused this teaching to take on a special poignancy in the face of difficult pregnancies. Women who found themselves abandoned, impoverished, or impregnated by a man they detested could easily have considered their growing child to be an enemy.²⁹ But the Christian gospel carried, and still carries, sufficient power to transform the heart of a believer from hatred of one’s adversary to self-sacrificial love.

Driven by the conviction that life was the gift and prerogative of God, the Christian community was governed by an ethic that drew on these twin commands: “though shalt not murder” and, “thou shalt love your neighbor, even an enemy, as yourself.” Combined, these laws led the church to contend for a culture of life and extend a sacrificial welcome toward the unborn.³⁰

THE QUESTION OF THE BEGINNING OF LIFE

Given the significance of this call to serve and protect the life of their unborn neighbor, the early church wrestled with the question of when life began inside the womb. The church largely rejected adaptations of Aristotle’s progression from non-life to life *in utero*, arguing instead that life began at the moment of conception. In his *De anima*, for example, the Latin theologian Tertullian (c.160–240) continued to develop this idea, expressed in his earlier *Apology*, that “that is a man which is going to be one; you have the fruit already in the seed.” He deploys arguments from medicine, logic, and biblical passages such as Luke 1:41, 46 and Jeremiah 1:5 to argue that even though a fetus does not take a fully human form until just before birth, it is nevertheless to be considered, and so treated, as a living being from the moment of conception.³¹ This view continued to hold sway even after the conversion of the emperor Constantine (272–337AD) released an influx of “nominal believers” into the church. When writing his *On the Soul and Resurrection* in 379, Gregory of Nyssa (335–394AD) argued that the “soul and body have one and the same beginning.” For Gregory, life must begin at conception because soul-less beings do not possess “the power of movement and growth.” Yet the unborn child clearly developed.³² Basil of Caesarea (329–379), a fellow Cappadocian Father, was able to sweep away all considerations of whether the fetus was formed or unformed, claiming that “among us there is no fine distinction between a completely formed and unformed [embryo].” Rather, “the woman who has deliberately destroyed [her fetus] is subject to the penalty for murder.” The reason for this guilt, according to Basil, was that a human soul is present in a developing fetus from the moment of conception.³³ Gorman’s conclusion regarding Basil’s *Letter to Amphilochius*, from which these lines come, provides an apt summary of the position taken by the early church as a whole toward the unborn at any stage of development: “[the church] dismisses as irrelevant all casuistic distinctions between the formed and the unformed fetus. For [them], intention matters above all because all life -- that of the fetus and that of the mother -- is sacred.”³⁴

²⁸See the discussion in Bakke, *Children*, 114–115.

²⁹The emperor Justinian recorded the case of a woman who aborted her child after suffering a divorce so that she would not have to endure a child by the man she now despised. Alan Watson ed. *The Digest of Justinian* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 4:48:19.39.

³⁰This welcome included Christian efforts to rescue and adopt infants who had been exposed. For the work of believers such as Benignus of Dijon, who nourished and sheltered abandoned children, including those deformed by unsuccessful abortions, see “The Beginning of Life and Abortion,” in *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 2537–2539.

³¹Toward the end of his *De anima*, Tertullian, wrestling with Exodus 21:22–25, used the language of an embryo “becom[ing] a human being from the moment when its formation is completed.” See the discussion in Gorman, *Abortion*, 55–59.

³²Catharine Roth trans. *On the Soul and Resurrection* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), 99–100.

³³See Joseph Donceel, “Immediate Animation and Delayed Homogenization,” *Theological Studies* 31 (1970):76–105. See also the discussion in Michael A. G. Haykin, “Basil of Caesarea on Those who Commit Abortion” in Haykin, *The Church Fathers as Spiritual Mentors* (Kitchener, Ontario: Joshua Press, 2017), 95.

³⁴Gorman, *Abortion*, 67. An example of the sacredness of all life sweeping distinctions before it comes in the thought of Augustine (354–430). In Gorman’s words, “Speculation about the origin of the soul, about the human and nonhuman fetus, about the meaning of original sin now gave way [in the mature thought of the *Enchiridion*] to his long-held conviction that all human life is ‘God’s own work.’” See the discussion in Gorman, *Abortion*, 70–73.

THE WAY OF LIFE: DEFENDING CHRISTIAN MORALITY

When the Christian community turned from defining its community ethic for new members to the work of defending this “way of life” to the broader culture, abortion featured prominently in its apologetic. It may be fair to say, in light of the available documents, that the conviction regarding the unborn as God’s creation, and therefore of abortion as murder, was heard more frequently when the church faced outward than when she faced inward. Such frequency should not surprise us given how unanimous this conviction -- to eschew violence of all kinds -- was within the church and how far it set them apart from their culture. What was significant, however, was that Christian apologists could assume that their pagan audience was familiar with the church’s position on abortion, and therefore could draw on this common knowledge to alleviate confusion over behavior at other rites, such as the Lord’s Supper and baptism.

The Athenian apologist Athenagoras (c.133–c.190), for example, wrote to the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180) to answer charges of Christian cannibalism stemming from a misunderstanding of the “flesh” eaten at the Lord’s Supper. In his defense, Athenagoras asks, “What reason would we have to commit murder when we say that women who induce abortions are murderers, and will have to give account of it to God? For the same person would not regard

the fetus in the womb as a living thing and therefore an object of God’s care [and then kill it]. But we are altogether consistent in our conduct.”³⁵ For this argument to carry logical force, Athenagoras must have been confident that the Christian position on abortion was known even to the emperor. In the West, Tertullian combatted the same accusation -- “we are accused of observing a holy rite in which we kill a little child and then eat it” -- by adopting the same approach. He wrote, “In our case, murder being once for all forbidden, we may not even destroy the fetus in the womb.”³⁶ Furthermore, these apologists would often turn the tables on their pagan inquisitors, refuting the charge of Christian immorality by pointing out that only a pagan mind, deformed by so many moral travesties, could have conjured up such an idea in the first place. For example, in his *Octavius*, Municius Felix (d. c.260) rejects the idea that Christian initiation rites included drinking the blood of infants, arguing instead that, “It is a practice of yours, I observe, to expose your very own children to birds and wild beasts, or at times to smother and strangle them -- a pitiful way to die; and there are women who swallow drugs to stifle in their own womb the beginnings of a man to be -- committing infanticide before they give birth.”³⁷

In fairness, the historical record demonstrates that abortion was known to exist within the early Christian community. The practice of abortion, interpreted by the church’s pastors as pagan influence on the people of God, was admitted as cause for significant concern.³⁸ Even where individual Christians did not live up to the ethical standard their theology required, the church as a whole was known, by insiders and outsiders alike, to stand for life in all stages. The final section of this article considers the church’s response to those who claim the name of Christ yet still procure an abortion.



³⁵Athenagoras, *Legatio*, 35. Cited in Gorman, *Abortion*, 54. Evaluating the effect this Christian witness had on their culture, Gorman asks, “Is it only coincidental that the apologetic writings of Athenagoras and Tertullian immediately preceded the first Roman laws against abortions?” Gorman, *Abortion*, 62.

³⁶Tertullian, *Apology*, 9.6. Cited in Gorman, *Abortion*, 55.

³⁷Municius Felix, *Octavius*, 30.1. Cited in Bakke, *Children*, 124.

³⁸See the discussion of the responses of Origen, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Chrysostom in Gorman, *Abortion*, 59–73. Gorman concludes that “the Christian position first articulated in the early second century survived through the fourth. Despite an increasing problem with its borders, which now included much of the populace [after Constantine], the church managed to maintain its ethical position.” Gorman, *Abortion*, 70.

RETURNING TO THE WAY: THE OPPORTUNITY OF REPENTANCE AND RECONCILIATION

Surveying the sea-change in the church created by Constantine's consequential edict, as well as the legal and theological disputes of the fourth and fifth centuries, Michael Gorman was still able to affirm that the fifth-century church "maintained the earliest Christian stance against abortion." The conviction that life begins at conception, and therefore that the unborn is a neighbor and abortion is murder, was not adjusted to fit a changing moral climate inside or outside the church. But Gorman does note an addition to the church's witness in these later centuries of the ancient period; namely, "they introduced the theme of forgiveness and grace for those who had obtained abortions."³⁹ This focus on forgiveness opening a door back to the way of life is a vital, but often overlooked, aspect of the church's holistic response to abortion in her midst.

In his survey of *The Church Fathers as Spiritual Mentors*, Michael Haykin recommends the example of Basil of Caesarea as an appropriate blend of this truth and love: "[Basil] recognizes the heinousness of this sin in the eyes of God, but at the same time, he is cognizant that this sin is not beyond the pale of God's forgiveness."⁴⁰ Several church councils before Basil's day had codified the Christian response to abortion within the church by means of penance, or even being put out of the church. According to the Council of Elvira (305/306AD), a woman who sought and received an abortion was placed under the ban for the remainder of her life. In 314 AD, the Council of Ancyra reduced the period of excommunication to ten years, after which a repentant woman might be restored to the church. Basil joined these councils, and the Christian consensus they represented, in condemning abortion as "something worse than murder."⁴¹ But he moved then to prioritize not penance but the power of the gospel to bring a sinner to repentance. Basil argued, "their restoration should be determined not by time, but by the manner of their repentance."⁴² Following this repentance, the door was open to healing and reconciliation with the church.

This balance of truth -- abortion is murder -- and love -- the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin -- is captured in an ancient prayer that is still used today in the Eastern Orthodox church. It provides a good summary of the early church's work to contend for the life both of the unborn and those who sin against them: "Lord our God...according to your great mercy, have mercy upon [name], who today is in sin, having fallen into voluntary or involuntary murder, and has aborted that conceived in her; and be gracious unto her willing and unwilling iniquities, and preserve her from every diabolical wile, cleanse her defilement and heal her suffering."⁴³



³⁹Gorman, *Abortion*, 73.

⁴⁰Haykin, *Mentors*, 95.

⁴¹The language is that of John Chrysostom (349–407), preaching in Constantinople on Romans 13:11–14. Chrysostom, *Homily 24* on Romans. Cited in Gorman, *Abortion*, 72–73.

⁴²The translation is that of Haykin, *Mentors*, 92. Gorman considers Basil's letter to be "one of the most profound theological and ethical statements on abortion" produced by the early church. Gorman, *Abortion*, 66.

⁴³John Kowalczyk, *An Orthodox View of Abortion* (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publishing, 1987), 36–37.

CONCLUSION

The regularity with which abortion is given a place in our national conversation means that Christians are regularly required to articulate both what we believe, and why. Thankfully, we are not left without either biblical teaching or historical precedent as we cultivate a response that holistically addresses the exigencies of such a complex issue. In defining and defending Christian moral values, the early church drew on the biblical conviction that, from the moment of conception, unborn children are created by God in his image. This theological foundation calls the church, as an ethical corollary, to welcome the unborn as a neighbor, even preferring them above ourselves, rather than to destroy them as an enemy. Significantly, in contending for this culture of life, the mother is not asked to bear this cost alone. Rather, both mother and child are to be welcomed, served, and protected by the Christian community. Such service includes extending grace and forgiveness to facilitate healing and restore fellowship even after grievous sin. ✕

"In defining and defending Christian moral values, the early church drew on the biblical conviction that, from the moment of conception, unborn children are created by God in his image."

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Methodism and Coming Schism

After fifty years of fractious debate over sexuality, The United Methodist Church is about to divide into two or more denominations. This division would have occurred at the scheduled May 2020 quadrennial General Conference, now postponed until 2021 due to COVID-19.

If ratified next year, this schism will be the first organized division of a major national US denomination since before the Civil War, when Methodists, Baptists, and others divided over slavery.

United Methodist traditionalists and liberals have fought ever since the denomination in 1972 declared homosexual practice “incompatible with Christian teaching.” The church subsequently banned same-sex rites and reaffirmed that clergy must be celibate if single and monogamous in male/female marriage, otherwise risking defrocking.

This traditionalist stance has been upheld at every governing General Conference since 1972. These conventions of up to one thousand delegates meet for approximately ten days every four years to set denominational policy. Evangelical and moderate institutionalists in the US church sustained this teaching for decades in sync with American culture. But when the culture shifted, the church’s moderates followed.

But the church’s evangelicals gained new allies with the dramatic rise over the last twenty-five years of United Methodism in Africa, where nearly half and perhaps more of the church’s 12.5 million membership now live. The Africans are staunch theological conservatives.

As other historically liberal mainline Protestant denominations surrendered traditional Christian sexual standards over the past twenty years, United Methodism,

which is the largest mainline church, became nearly the only holdout for traditionalism. US church liberals, who had long assumed history was on their side, were exasperated and unprepared for this American evangelical-African majority bloc.

The final showdown came at the February 2019 Special General Conference in St. Louis, which was summoned specifically to settle the church’s differences on sex. US bishops, with the US church bureaucracy behind them, pushed a plan to liberalize the denomination by allowing local options on sexual standards. The bishops and other US liberals were stunned when the delegates instead tightened the church’s rules against heterodox sexual behavior. Liberals complained their church had been infected by an “Ebola Virus.” Africans told of spiritual visions they had of invisible cosmic warfare at the convention.

St. Louis helped persuade US liberals that even if history is on their side, church demography is not. US United Methodism loses nearly one hundred thousand members annually, while Africa sometimes gains twice that number every year. Later in 2019, liberal and conservative church caucus groups convened to negotiate a denominational division. A bishop from Sierra Leone chaired the meetings, which were mediated by legendary D.C. lawyer Kenneth Feinberg, former Special Master of the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund.

In January 2020, this mediation announced agreement on a Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation, which would divide United Methodism. Liberals would inherit the church’s name and US-based bureaucracy. Traditionalists would create a new Methodist denomination

that all local congregations could join by majority vote, keeping their church property (in United Methodism, church properties are held in trust by the denomination through the local conference, which is like a diocese or presbytery). Conferences, which typically follow state lines, could join by 57% vote. The new traditional church also would receive \$25 million from the old liberalized denomination. There would also be smaller funding for potentially additional new denominations, which might include a radical liberationist Methodism impatient with conventionally liberal United Methodism.

Many conservative United Methodists initially reacted to this protocol for separation with indignation. Why should the global traditionalist majority “leave?” Shouldn’t US liberals who always lost the votes on sexuality instead leave to create their new denomination? But these complaints from conservatives, after reflection, have largely subsided.

The US church bureaucracy has been liberal for many decades, and few conservatives are interested in trying to reform it. It is also financially unsustainable, with the church already predicting funding cuts of 40% or more, likely exacerbated by COVID-19. Most traditionalists prefer a new denomination without the albatross of bloated church agencies.

There is also the consideration that while traditionalists are a global majority, they are only a plurality in the US. A church poll showed 44% of US church members are traditionalist, with the remainder divided between progressives and moderates. US clergy typically are more

liberal than laity. A new denomination will allow traditionalist clergy to self-select into it, allowing for greater unity behind traditional orthodoxy.

The new traditionalist Methodist denomination likely will end up with larger membership than the old liberal United Methodism. About 20% of US local conferences will likely align traditionalist, with a population of about 1.5 million. Another one million or more from congregations in liberal conferences also will likely join. This 2.5 million in the US will be joined by over five million in Africa, and thousands more in the Philippines and Europe, for perhaps a total global denomination of 7.5 million or more. Meanwhile, old United Methodism will be almost totally comprised of US members, with 3.5 or four million, a number that will quickly shrink further, following the example of other denominations that liberalized on sexuality.

Of course, as this division rolls through thousands of congregations, it will not always be clean and amicable. The debate may cripple and perhaps ultimately kill many divided local churches. But overall, United Methodists have the opportunity through this organized division to avoid the chaos inflicted on other mainline denominations, where departing conservative congregations often lost their properties amid millions of dollars in litigation.

The new global Methodist Church will have the opportunity to revive the Wesleyan witness in America, in solidarity with its international members, who will be the denominational majority. Liberal United Methodism has lost more

than four million members in America over 55 years and is virtually incapable of planting new churches. New, orthodox Methodism can reach cities, the West Coast, the Northeast, immigrant and nonwhite populations, and young people whom liberal mainline Protestantism largely cannot.

There is also the opportunity for a Wesleyan intellectual and theological revival. After many decades of liberal control of United Methodism’s seminaries, orthodox theologians have long operated as a minority but robust resistance. They will have the chance to shape a new global denomination with classic Methodist theology. Asbury Seminary in Kentucky, which is not officially United Methodist but produces more clergy for the denomination than any other school, will be the leader. United Seminary in Ohio, the church’s only mostly orthodox school out of thirteen seminaries, will also play a large role.

Orthodox United Methodist theologians are prominent in the Wesleyan Theological Society, where the more liberal voices are typically from evangelical denominations like the Church of the Nazarene. At the society’s recent meeting, I heard friends discuss a core group of forty-to-sixty orthodox United Methodist thinkers who could resource the new church. It was exciting to hear.

Just prior to the Wesleyan Theological Society, a group of traditional US and international bishops, pastors, and renewal caucus group leaders, including myself, convened to agree on principles for the new global Methodism. There was an encouraging spirit of unity and hope.

As a lifelong United Methodist who has spent my whole adult life (more than thirty years) laboring for church renewal, I confess I had not hoped for or expected schism. But I now believe that United Methodist division is the best course forward, and I look forward to great days ahead for traditional Methodism in America and globally. ✕

*"...I now believe
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*Mark Tooley is the President of the
Institute on Religion and Democracy*

Jason K. Allen on the Importance of Confessional Theological Education

Dr. Jason K. Allen is President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a Southern Baptist seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. He is also a council member of CBMW. In the following interview, I asked Dr. Allen to articulate his vision for confessional education, as well as his rationale for adopting CBMW's Danvers and Nashville Statements at Midwestern.

Jonthan Swan: Since your election as President of MBTS you have added multiple confessional statements as conditions of employment. In addition to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000, which was in place when you arrived at MBTS, you have added the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and the Danvers and Nashville Statements of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. What do you believe is the purpose of such confessional statements in a seminary and university setting? And what role do they play at MBTS?

JKA: There are many different ways to evaluate a theological institution, and accrediting agencies do. Institutions are classified by such metrics as size and enrollment, the strength of the endowment, faculty-to-student ratio, demographic make-up of the student body, and a host of other factors. But

in the final analysis, the most important classification of all is whether or not the institution is a confessional institution.

By confessional, I do not mean an historic document on the books that does not enjoy present enforcement at the institution. By confessional, I mean an institution that clearly sets forth its beliefs, clearly requires its instructional staff to abide by those beliefs, and signals to all onlookers where the institution stands on essential doctrinal and cultural matters.

As for Midwestern Seminary, in recent years, I've led us to adopt the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and the Nashville Statement on Biblical Sexuality. These, of course, are in addition to the Baptist Faith & Message 2000.

For Midwestern Seminary, the adoption of these statements was not to move us in a more conservative direction, but to acknowledge and to codify the convictions that we already held. What is more, as it relates to the Nashville Statement, it is acknowledging that our cultural moment is changing rapidly, and we must speak to these changes with biblical conviction and, just as important, clarity.

JS: Most evangelical Christians understand the importance of doctrinal statements such as the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. A high view of Scripture has historically been central to evangelical Christianity. But can you explain why you have deemed it important to also include the Danvers and Nashville Statements as confessional standards at MBTS?

JKA: The way you framed the question is right. For many decades, convictional, evangelical institutions have understood the importance of the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. An affirmation of biblical inerrancy ought to lead one to other theological conclusions, but it does not always do so.

For example, a strong affirmation of biblical inerrancy typically leads one to also affirm the biblical complementarity of the genders. However, this is not always the case. Because issues like marriage, sexuality, gender, and the roles of men and women within the church are essential matters for the church and for Christian living, it is imperative that an institution which desires to be faithful is clear on these matters as well.

In other words, it would be foolish for me as president to make assumptions about non-essential matters, and it would be doubly foolish for me to make assumptions about essential matters. It would be foolish for me personally as president, or for the institution I lead, to assume clarity and biblical faithfulness by all who teach here.

My responsibility is not to draw comfort from general assumptions and vague assurances, but to ensure faithfulness. The adoption and usage of the right confessional statements is a significant step in the right direction in this regard.

JS: What would you say to encourage other like-minded churches and institutions to adopt the Danvers and Nashville Statements as part of their confessional identity?

JKA: My initial response to this question is to simply ask, “Why not?” There are occasionally good reasons for not adopting clear confessional statements. It may be that the institution already has similar wording in a governing document, so to adopt an additional confessional statement may be redundant.

In fact, when Midwestern Seminary adopted the Nashville Statement, it was a step of redundancy. We already had similar wording in our governing documents, but we elected to adopt the Nashville Statement nonetheless, because we wanted to signal publicly where we stand on these issues.

Furthermore, we hoped to embolden other institutions to make a similar statement. Therefore, adopting confessional statements is not only for internal clarity and boundary setting, it’s also for external projection both as to who you are and what you value as an institution. And that, of course, will draw a certain type of faculty — and a certain type of student.



JS: How would you describe the importance of statements of faith, such as the ones you have incorporated into the confessional identity at MBTS, for the health and vitality of denominational institutions like MBTS?

JKA:

*"It is hard to overstate
the importance of a
statement of faith."*

We are a theological institution, not a sentimental one. We make truth claims, declare propositional statements, and are giving our lives to proclaiming and defending biblical truth. Thus, the written word is our friend. Codified statements are essential to missional faithfulness, both in the present and into the future.

It would be foolish for us as an institution to rely on vague generalities, passive-voice affirmations, and shared gospel sentiments for doctrinal accountability and denominational faithfulness. On the contrary, when I see an institution that lacks confessional statements or insufficiently uses them for theological accountability, alarm bells go off to me.

JS: How do you understand your role as president with respect to the confessional standards MBTS has in place?

JKA: As president, I'm the essential actor in Midwestern Seminary's confessional standards. Over the years, the Board of Trustees has adopted our confessional statements, and they've hired me as president to ensure that these are faithfully implemented.

Every member of our instructional staff, whether elected faculty members, appointed adjuncts, or instructors who find themselves somewhere between these two poles are required to teach in accordance with and not contrary to our confessional statements.

It would be a treacherous act on my part to gloss over our confessional statements, ignore them, or just permit members of our faculty to swerve in and out of their boundaries.

What is more, to outsource that accountability to the faculty members would be a failure of leadership on my part. It's not enough for them to affirm their adherence. Of course, that's the essential first step. But their track record of teaching, preaching, and writing, and an objective evaluation of the same, must also demonstrate they believe and teach within those boundaries.

The integrity of my office and the integrity of our work here demands a president who is actively engaged in such matters and who signals clearly to all who teach here the sacred trust we have on behalf of the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention to affirm these doctrinal statements and to teach from them accordingly. ✕

*Dr. Jason K. Allen is President of
Midwestern Baptist Theological
Seminary and is a council member
for CBMW.*

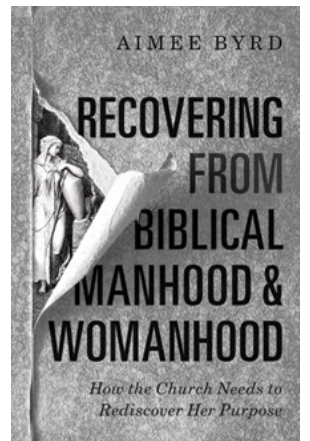
*Jonathan Swan is Book Review
Editor for Eikon.*

BOOK REVIEWS

ANDREW DAVID NASELLI

Does Anyone Need to Recover from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood?

John Piper and Wayne Grudem edited *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* in 1991, and now Aimee Byrd has written *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* some thirty years later.¹ Byrd, an influential author, speaker, blogger, and podcaster,² claims to be recovering from so-called “biblical manhood and womanhood.” For the past several years on her podcast and blog, Byrd has been criticizing the version of complementarianism that leaders such as John Piper teach. (The term *complementarianism* summarizes the theological view of the Danvers Statement and conveys that men and women are both *equal* in value and dignity and beneficially *different*.)³ Byrd has developed and expanded those critiques in her latest book.



Aimee Byrd. *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020.

¹John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991); Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020). Piper and Grudem's book is 575 pages, and Byrd's book is 240. Thanks to friends who examined a draft of this article and shared helpful feedback, especially Denny Burk, Tim Challies, Kevin DeYoung, Abigail Dodds, Sam Emadi, Caleb Figgers, Phil Gons, Pam Larson, Steven Lee, Jonathan Leeman, Charles Naselli, Jenni Naselli, Joe Rigney, Colin Smothers, Justin Taylor, Joe Tyrpak, Mark Ward, and Steven Wedgeworth.

²Zondervan's website says, "Aimee is author of several books, including *Housewife Theologian* (P&R, 2013), *Theological Fitness* (P&R, 2015), *No Little Women* (P&R, 2016), and *Why Can't We Be Friends?* (P&R, 2018). Her articles have appeared in *First Things*, *Table Talk*, *Modern Reformation*, *By Faith*, *New Horizons*, *Ordained Servant*, *Harvest USA*, and *Credo Magazine* and she has been interviewed and quoted in *Christianity Today* and *The Atlantic*. She is the cohost of *Mortification of Spin* podcast [with Carl Trueman and Todd Pruitt] for The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals and regularly blogs there as well. Aimee and her husband have three children and reside in Brunswick, Maryland." <https://zondervanacademic.com/products/recovering-from-biblical-manhood-and-womanhood> (accessed March 14, 2020).

³See <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>.

Is Byrd's case compelling? I don't think it is. To demonstrate that, I proceed in three steps: (1) *Summarize the argument*. What is the gist of Byrd's book? (2) *Provide some context*. Where does Byrd's book fit on the spectrum of views on men and women? (3) *Evaluate the book*. Is Byrd's book fair and sound?

1. SUMMARY:

WHAT IS THE GIST OF BYRD'S BOOK?

Byrd doesn't explicitly state her book's thesis. Here's my attempt to paraphrase her basic argument: *So-called "biblical manhood and womanhood"—especially as John Piper and Wayne Grudem teach it—uses traditional patriarchal structures to oppress women*. Byrd argues that "biblical manhood and womanhood" is not all biblical. A lot of it is unbiblical. A lot of it is based on cultural stereotypes that wrongly restrict women and thus prevent them from flourishing.

Byrd uses yellow wallpaper as her main metaphor throughout the book. She draws this metaphor from *The Yellow Wallpaper*, an 1892 novel and semi-autobiography by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, a utopian feminist. In Byrd's book, the yellow wallpaper symbolizes how "biblical manhood and womanhood" oppresses women:⁴

Today the church's yellow wallpaper manifests itself in much of the current teaching on so-called "biblical manhood and womanhood." . . . We often don't see the yellow wallpaper because it was established as a hedge against real threats to God's people. I believe that is the case with a lot of the teaching on biblical manhood and womanhood. . . . And even though the teaching may have good intentions behind it, it is damaging. . . . This kind of teaching chokes the growth of God's people. . . . The gender tropes of biblical manhood and womanhood . . . keep us trapped in the yellow wallpaper. (19, 21, 22, 229)⁵

Byrd's book proceeds in three parts. In Part 1 (31–95), Byrd argues that we need to recover the way we read Scripture—especially by emphasizing parts that have women-centered perspectives. "Liberal radical feminists like to regard our canon of Scripture as

a 'hopelessly patriarchal construction,'" and Byrd wonders if the way conservative evangelicals "market customized devotions to women sends that same message" (37). "When we examine Scripture, we find that it isn't a patriarchal construction. And we find that it is not an androcentric text that lacks female contribution. In fact, we find that the female voice is important and necessary" (42–43). The book of Ruth, for example, "demolishes the lens of biblical manhood and womanhood that has been imposed on our Bible reading and opens the doors to how we see God working in his people" (49). "The female voice is needed in Scripture. . . . In Ruth men and women see that sometimes we need a different set of eyes to see the fuller picture" (54). In the Bible, "Women aren't left out. They aren't ignored; they are heard. They are more than heard; they contribute" (68).

In Part 2 (99–178), Byrd argues that we must recover our mission through church-based discipleship. The aim of discipleship is not biblical manhood and womanhood.

Byrd qualifies,

There are plenty of helpful teachings in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, written by authors who have benefited the church in numerous ways. This is what makes the troubling teaching all the more disconcerting. I'm not saying that everything the authors have contributed is bad. It's because they have offered so many good contributions to the church that we need to be all the more discerning of their influence on us. (100)

The most serious "troubling teaching" is that God the Son eternally submits to God the Father (100–103 et al.). When Byrd hears complementarian leader Owen Strachan assert, "The gospel has a complementarian structure," she responds, "The implication is that anyone who does not subscribe to his teaching on complementarity, the teaching that directly connects ESS [eternal subordination of the Son] to 'biblical' manhood and womanhood, is denying the gospel. I firmly disagree. This is exactly why I cannot call myself a complementarian" (121).

⁴In Gilman's story a woman is having continuous nervous breakdowns, and her doctor drives her mad by prescribing that she abstain from any mental, social, or physical activity. Her husband requires her to stay in a room that has yellow wallpaper that is ripped in various spots. She fixates on that yellow wallpaper and thinks that a woman is trapped inside it. She finally pulls most of it off the wall and exults that her husband therefore can't put her back. Her husband faints when he sees what she has done, and the book ends by her stepping over her fainted husband.

⁵All page numbers in the body refer to Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

Another troubling teaching for Byrd is to define masculinity as leading and providing for and protecting women and to define femininity as affirming and receiving and nurturing strength and leadership from worthy men. Byrd writes,

Nowhere does Scripture state that all women submit to all men. My aim in life is not to be constantly looking for male leadership. And it's very difficult for a laywoman like me, who does see some theological teaching for God outfitting qualified men for an office to see this kind of reductive teaching and call it complementarianism. Perpetuating this constant framework of authority and submission between men and women can be very harmful. My femininity is not defined by how I look for and nurture male leadership in my neighbors, coworkers, or mail carriers. I am not denying the order needed in both my personal household and in the household of God, but I do not reduce the rights and obligations in a household to mere authority and submission roles. Paul teaches mutual submission among Christians even as he addresses husbands and wives specifically. I uphold distinction between the sexes without reduction, as Scripture does. (105)

It is unhelpful, Byrd argues, to sharply distinguish between feminine and masculine virtues (106–9). “In Scripture we don’t find that our ultimate goal is as narrow as biblical manhood or biblical womanhood, but complete, glorified resurrection to live eternally with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (109). Christ presents virtues for us “in the Sermon on the Mount, which is surprisingly not a gendered pursuit” (109). “There are no exhortations in Scripture for men to be masculine and women to be feminine.” (The translation “act like men” in 1 Corinthians 16:13 is unhelpful [111–12].) “Christian men and women don’t strive for so-called biblical masculinity or femininity, but Christlikeness” (114). “The word *complementarian* has been hijacked by an outspoken and overpublished group of evangelicals who flatten its meaning and rob it of true beauty and complementarity” (124).

Church leaders must do a better job at proactively “equipping women well in the church as competent allies to the men” (145). Byrd argues that Paul embraced reciprocity with women by placing himself under Phoebe, who was a leader and ally in a patriarchal culture (148).

Byrd warns,

Parachurch often reinforces bad gender tropes, outfitting and amplifying many of the divisions between men and women in the church. . . . When parachurch organizations such as CBMW [the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood] develop their own confessional statements [such as the Danvers and Nashville Statements], we need to ask if they are replacing the church as an interpretive community in this way. (169)

Byrd explains why she is hesitant to recommend the Nashville Statement:⁶ “CBMW also hasn’t retracted any of the hyperauthoritarian, hypermachismo teaching about manhood and their hypersubmissive and stereotypical teaching about womanhood. Instead, I have seen much more of the same by some of their popular leaders” (172).

⁶See <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>.

In Part 3 (181–235), Byrd argues that we should recover the responsibility of every believer, which entails giving women more prominent roles to teach and lead both men and women in the church:

Under the ostensible banner of “complementarianism” women are told they may learn alongside men but are to continuously be looking for, affirming, and nurturing male authority. Many churches thus limit, in ways they do not limit for laymen, the capacity for laywomen to learn deeply and to teach. The consensus is that men are the necessary teachers in the church. While some give the nod for women to teach other women and children, they are sending the message that this is ancillary work to be done. Are the laywomen disciples in your church serving in the same capacity as the laymen? . . . Biblical manhood and womanhood isn’t so biblical if women in the early church were able to contribute more than they may today. (188, 202)

So in her book Byrd basically argues that so-called “biblical manhood and womanhood” wrongly restricts women and that women will better flourish if conservative evangelical churches remove what she believes to be unbiblical restrictions (such as not allowing women to teach the Bible in Sunday School classes to adult men and women).

2. CONTEXT:

WHERE DOES BYRD'S BOOK FIT ON THE SPECTRUM OF VIEWS ON MEN AND WOMEN?

Before I evaluate Byrd's book, it would be helpful to locate where her book fits on the spectrum of views on men and women. One way to lay out the spectrum from far left to far right might be something like this:

- LGBTQ+ activism
- radical feminism (e.g., Virginia Ramey Molenkott)
- reformist feminism (e.g., Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza)
- evangelical feminism or egalitarianism (e.g., Christians for Biblical Equality)⁷
- complementarianism (e.g., The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood)⁸
- authoritarianism (i.e., males selfishly abusing authority—what my fellow pastor Jason Meyer calls hyper-headship)⁹

As complementarianism has matured over the past thirty years, complementarians now hold some significantly different viewpoints and leanings and theological instincts. Two versions of complementarianism are now distinguishable: narrow and broad.¹⁰ (See Table 1.)

⁷On CBE, see <https://www.cbeinternational.org/content/cbes-mission>. On the above three categories of feminism (radical, reformist, and evangelical), see Margaret E. Köstenberger, *Jesus and the Feminists: Who Do They Say That He Is?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008). According to Köstenberger, radical feminism rejects the Bible and Christianity because of their patriarchal bias; reformist feminism uses the Bible as a means to reconstruct “positive theology” for women; and evangelical feminism says that the Bible, rightly interpreted, teaches complete gender equality (see her table on p. 23).

⁸On CBMW, see <https://cbmw.org/about/mission-vision/>.

⁹Jason Meyer, “A Complementarian Manifesto against Domestic Abuse,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 2 December 2015, <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/a-complementarian-manifesto-against-domestic-abuse>. For another way to lay out the spectrum, see Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 54–55.

¹⁰Kevin DeYoung coined the broad-versus-narrow terminology at a private meeting for Together for the Gospel speakers in January 2018. The first article I'm aware of that uses these labels is Jonathan Leeman, “A Word of Empathy, Warning, and Counsel for ‘Narrow’ Complementarians,” *9Marks*, 8 February 2018, <https://www.9marks.org/article/a-word-of-empathy-warning-and-counsel-for-narrow-complementarians/>. It is difficult to sharply distinguish two distinct positions, but a pattern seems to be emerging. See Denny Burk, “Can Broad and Narrow Complementarians Coexist in the SBC?,” *Denny Burk*, 3 June 2019, <https://www.dennyburk.com/can-broad-and-narrow-complementarians-coexist-in-the-sbc/>; Jonathan Leeman, “Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning,” *9Marks Journal* (2019): 8–32.

*"Two versions of
complementarianism are
now distinguishable:
narrow and broad."*



TABLE 1. NARROW VS. BROAD COMPLEMENTARIANISM

| | NARROW (OR THIN) COMPLEMENTARIANISM | BROAD (OR THICK) COMPLEMENTARIANISM |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD | Men and women are equally in God's image, biologically different, and complementary. | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Narrow application:</i> God requires men and women to relate differently to each other in only two specific areas: marriage (a husband is the head of his wife) and ordination (only men may be elders/pastors).• Reluctant to define manhood and womanhood• Reluctant to specify differences between men and women beyond the obvious biological ones• Quick to point out that broad complementarians typically include cultural stereotypes in their definitions• Reluctant to treat manhood and womanhood as significant for Christian discipleship | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Broad application:</i> The way God created and designed males and females applies in some way to all of life in the home, church, and society.• John Piper: "At the heart of mature masculinity is a sense of benevolent responsibility to lead, provide for and protect women in ways appropriate to a man's differing relationships. At the heart of mature femininity is a freeing disposition to affirm, receive and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in ways appropriate to a woman's differing relationships."¹¹• Matt Merker: "Biblical masculinity is displayed in a sense of benevolent responsibility to tend God's creation, provide for and protect others, and express loving, sacrificial leadership in particular contexts prescribed by God's word. Biblical femininity is displayed in a gracious disposition to cultivate life, to help others flourish, and to affirm, receive, and nurture strength and leadership from worthy men in particular contexts prescribed by God's Word."¹²• Bobby Jamieson: Manhood and womanhood are "the potential to be a father or mother, in both biological and metaphorical senses. . . . To father is not only to procreate but to provide, protect, and lead. To mother is not only to nurture life physically but to nurture every facet of life, to care comprehensively and intimately."¹³ |
| MARRAIGE | A husband should lovingly lead his wife (which entails unselfishly and sacrificially serving her), and a wife should submit to her husband (which entails gladly and intelligently following him). | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tends to emphasize "mutual submission" and not that a husband has authority• Tends to be more open to a mother pursuing vocations outside the home while putting the children in daycare | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tends to emphasize that a husband leads and that a wife submits• Tends to advocate living on the husband's income so that a mother can better nurture the children at home, especially when they are young |
| CHURCH | Only qualified men should be ordained. | |
| | An unordained woman may do anything an unordained man may do (e.g., teach an adult Sunday school class to men and women). | Only qualified men should teach and exercise authority over the church. This includes the <i>function</i> and not merely the <i>office</i> of elder/pastor. |
| SOCIETY | Reluctant to specify how men and women should function differently in society | The different ways that God designed men and women apply to how men and women function in society. For example, some vocations are appropriate for males only (e.g., military combat) |

TABLE 1. NARROW VS. BROAD COMPLEMENTARIANISM (CONT.)

| | NARROW (OR THIN) COMPLEMENTARIANISM | BROAD (OR THICK) COMPLEMENTARIANISM |
|--|--|---|
| THEOLOGICAL INSTINCTS, INTUITIONS, AND BURDENS ¹⁴ | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The biggest problem facing the church's understanding of manhood and womanhood today is that men abuse their authority in the home and church. So we should emphasize that men and women are equal.• Affirms but does not emphasize that men and women are different and that God has given men authority in the home and church• Tends to criticize broad complementarianism rather than to make a positive case for complementarianism | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agrees that we should emphasize that men and women are equally made in God's image and that it is sinful for men to abuse their authority. Sinful men and women use any advantage they have to get their way (e.g., privilege, wealth, strength, beauty, brains). Men abusing their authority has been a perennially urgent and major problem since Adam and Eve first sinned.• The most generationally urgent problem facing the church's understanding of manhood and womanhood today is that our culture rejects God-designed differences between men and women. So while our culture is emphasizing an unbiblical androgyny and egalitarianism, Christians should emphasize that God has made men and women with complementary differences and that God has given men authority in the home and church.¹⁵ |
| THEOLOGICAL METHOD | Tends to be more biblicist: narrowly affirms that God requires men and women to relate differently to each other in only two areas (marriage and ordination) because the Bible explicitly addresses those areas | Tends to include nature: broadly affirms different roles for men and women because of exegesis, theology, and natural revelation ¹⁶ |

¹¹John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined according to the Bible," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 35–52.

¹²Matt Merker, ed., "Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: Biblical Foundations for Gender" (Capitol Hill Baptist Church, 2018), <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/biblical-manhood-womanhood/>.

¹³Bobby Jamieson, "Book Review: *On the Meaning of Sex*, by J. Budziszewski," *9Marks Journal* (2019): 255–66, esp. 264–65.

¹⁴Leeman explains that one's cultural context can affect our intuitions: "In the home, for instance, one husband and wife will read the Bible and feel burdened for the wife to remain at home while the children are young, while another Christian couple won't. What's the difference? The two couples have different instincts based on how they were raised, the friend groups they keep, the church they attend, the decade they occupy, the social class they occupy, and what's generally treated as 'normal' around them." Leeman, "Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning," 14.

¹⁵For a biblical understanding of authority and equality, see Leeman, "Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning," 19–24. E.g., "Godly authority . . . is seldom an advantage to those who possess it. . . . Those 'under' that authority often possess most of the advantages. They're provided protection and opportunity, strength and freedom. . . . Godly equality feels no threat from God-given roles, responsibilities, and even hierarchies. It delights in difference, trusting that every God-assigned distinction possesses purpose and contributes to the countless refractions of his glory. It doesn't assume that God's assignments of different stewardships and stations, responsibilities and roles, undermines equality. Rather it views them as so many parts of one body, each part purposed with doing the work of the whole body" (pp. 21, 23).

¹⁶See Joe Rigney, "With One Voice: Scripture and Nature for Ethics and Discipleship," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1.1 (2019): 26–37. Cf. Matthew Mason, "The Authority of the Body: Discovering Natural Manhood and Womanhood," *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 4.2 (2017): 39–57.

Here are four clarifying thoughts on Table 1:

1. CBMW is an organization that prominently represents complementarianism—both narrow and broad (though most CBMW leaders are probably broad complementarians). *Complementarianism* summarizes the theological view of the Danvers Statement. According to Denny Burk (CBMW's current president), John Piper drafted the Danvers Statement, and Piper, Wayne Grudem, and some others coined the term *complementarianism* in 1988. Burk then argues that the Danvers Statement itself is *mere complementarianism*—that is, what all complementarians affirm.¹⁷

2. Both narrow and broad complementarians affirm that women may teach in various ways. Grudem, for example, lists four areas:

Not all teaching is prohibited: Other kinds of teaching and speaking by women that Scripture views positively. [1] *Acts 18:26: Explaining Scripture privately, outside the context of the assembled congregation. . . . This passage gives warrant for women and men to talk together about the meaning of biblical passages and to "teach" one another in such settings.* A parallel example in modern church life would be a home Bible study where both men and women contribute to the discussion of the meaning and application of Scripture. In such discussions, everyone is able to "teach" everyone else in some sense, for such discussions of the meaning of the Word of God are not the authoritative teaching that would be done by a pastor or elder to an assembled congregation, as in 1 Timothy 2. Another modern parallel to the private conversation between Priscilla and Aquila and Apollos would be *the writing of books on the Bible and theology by women. . . .* [2] *1 Corinthians 11:4–5: Praying and prophesying in the assembled congregation. . . .* [3] *Titus 2:3–5: Women teaching women. . . .* [4] *John 4:28–30 and Matthew 28:5–10: Evangelism.*¹⁸

3. It might be helpful to suggest some examples of current proponents of narrow and broad complementarianism. Narrow complementarians probably include J. D. Greear,¹⁹ Kathy Keller,²⁰ and Beth Moore. Broad complementarians include Denny Burk, Kevin DeYoung,²¹ Abigail Dodds, John Piper, and Tom Schreiner.

4. There's a spectrum within narrow complementarianism and within broad complementarianism, and sometimes it is challenging to distinguish someone as either narrow or broad.²² For example, John Piper is broad, and Wayne Grudem is narrower but not quite as narrow as the narrow complementarian column in Table 1. Piper and Grudem speak differently about the role of men and women in society. Piper more broadly applies what the Bible and nature teach by arguing that it is not fitting for a woman to be a police officer or a drill sergeant.²³ Grudem is uncomfortable arguing that way:

We cannot assume that the general pattern of restricting *civil government* leadership over the people of God to men would also apply to the New Testament age, where the civil government is separate from the government of the church. The positive examples of women involved in civil leadership over nations other than Israel (such as Esther and the Queen of Sheba) should prevent us from arguing that it is wrong for women to hold a governing office. . . .

¹⁷See Denny Burk, "Mere Complementarianism," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1.2 (2019): 28–42.

¹⁸Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 75–78.

¹⁹J. D. Greear, "One in Christ Jesus: The Role of Women in Ministry at The Summit Church," 15 March 2019, <https://jdgrear.com/blog/can-women-teach-in-the-church/>.

²⁰Kathy Keller, *Jesus, Justice, and Gender: A Case for Gender Roles in Ministry*, Fresh Perspectives on Women in Ministry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

²¹Kevin DeYoung, "How Are Men and Women Different?," *9Marks Journal* (2019): 147–57.

²²Leeman qualifies, "Many complementarians defy easy categorization as either fully broad or fully narrow. A person might combine both broad and narrow instincts in both. For instance, writer and speaker Jen Wilkin talks at length about design differences (broad). She is unafraid to fill in the blanks on 'Men are ____' and 'Women are ____' and builds her argument for single-sex learning environments off of those differences. Yet she also pushes hard at programmatizing female leadership in the church without necessarily defining the nature of that leadership (narrow)." Leeman, "Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning," 13–14. See J. T. English, ed., "The Role of Women at The Village Church," 2018, https://d1nwfrzxhi8dp.cloudfront.net/uploads/resource_library/attachment/file/937/Institute_-_2017_-_The_Role_of_Women_at_The_Village_Church-Long-Paper.pdf. That PDF is 64 pages; for a 3-page condensed version, see <https://www.thevillagechurch.net/Content/ExternalSite/Documents/Beliefs/Institute%20-%202017%20-%20The%20Role%20of%20Women%20at%20The%20Village%20Church%20-%20Condensed%20Version.pdf>. J. T. English and Jen Wilkin label their view "generous complementarianism" in a May 16, 2019 podcast: <https://www.tvcresearches.net/resource-library/podcasts/44-a-generous-complementarianism>.

²³John Piper, "Should Women Be Police Officers?," *Desiring God*, 13 August 2015, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/should-women-be-police-officers>. Cf. Rigney, "With One Voice," 36–37: Rigney argues, "There are some things that we need the Bible for. Nature will not tell you that Christ died for sinners and calls you to repentance and faith. You need a Bible for that. But you do not need a Bible to know what a man is, and what a woman is, and what marriage is, and what sex is for. Such things are a part of natural revelation and are sufficiently clear to all men everywhere that our refusal to acknowledge them will condemn us on the last day. . . . In my judgment, one of the crying needs of the hour is for Christians to know in their bones that our view of men and women and marriage and sexuality is not simply the product of Bible verses, but is itself natural, normative, and universally binding on all people because we live in the world God made. It's incumbent upon pastors and teachers to instruct the church of God, not only what the Scriptures require, but to point to the reasons beneath the rules that make God's written laws intelligible and reasonable. Our social context—what we often call the World—can easily deceive us here. Because the World is moving in one direction, we begin to feel that we are the weird ones. We are the outliers. We begin to believe the propaganda that we are the last holdouts on the wrong side of history. But we're not the weird ones. Not just God in his Word, but all of heaven and earth testifies to God's design for men and women and marriage and sexuality."

We are simply to obey the Bible in the specific application of these principles. What we find in the Bible is that God has given commands that establish male leadership in the *home* and in the *church*, but that other teachings in His Word give considerable freedom in other areas of life. We should not try to require either more or less than Scripture itself requires.²⁴

Some within broad complementarianism are broader than John Piper. For example, Michael Foster and Bnonn Tennant reject the term *complementarianism* and prefer the term *patriarchy*—that is, “the doctrine that men are made to rule in behalf of their Father, and that this naturally begins in their houses, and continues out into the larger houses of nations and churches.”²⁵ The label *patriarchy* captures the concept of authority, but most complementarians agree it has insurmountably negative connotations.²⁶

Within narrow complementarianism, some are narrower than others. For example, some affirm that God requires men and women to relate differently to each other in marriage, but they are neutral regarding whether women may be elders/pastors.²⁷

So where does Byrd’s book fit on the spectrum of views on men and women? Her book addresses an in-house debate among complementarians, though she identifies with neither complementarianism nor egalitarianism. She seems to overlap with parts of both views. By affirming male-only ordination she overlaps with narrow complementarianism, but many of her arguments overlap with egalitarianism. She argues in line with Rachel Green Miller’s *Beyond Authority and Submission* (for which Byrd wrote the foreword).²⁸ Both Miller and Byrd write their ex-complementarian books from within “the complementarian camp” so to speak since both Miller and Byrd are members of churches in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church denomination.

3. EVALUATION: IS BYRD’S BOOK FAIR AND SOUND?

Now we’re ready to evaluate Byrd’s book. As I evaluate it, I share the attitude that Tom Schreiner recently expressed:

I worked and studied in schools for 17 years where I was a minority as a complementarian. I thank God for evangelical egalitarians! And I thank God for complementarians who I think are slipping a bit. Still, what we do in churches is important, and I don’t want to say it doesn’t matter. It does matter, and I am concerned about the next generation. But we can love those who disagree and rejoice that we believe in the same gospel. The cultural forces are incredibly strong, and our society in my judgment overemphasizes freedom and equality, and doesn’t value sufficiently authority, obedience, and submission. Are complementarians like me too strong sometimes? Do we make mistakes in how we present our view? Of course! *Simul iustus et peccator*! But it doesn’t follow from this that the view itself is wrong.²⁹

²⁹Cited in Burk, “Can Broad and Narrow Complementarians Coexist in the SBC?”

I agree with Byrd in many areas. Here are four examples: (1) Some complementarians define masculinity and femininity in a way that is more cultural than biblical. (2) Women are indispensable, and men need to hear their perspective and learn from them. (3) Women can minister in many ways, and pastors should encourage women to study the Bible and theology just as seriously as men should. Bible studies for women should focus on exegesis and theology and not always focus on marriage and childrearing. I’m grateful Byrd has been motivating women to study the Bible and think deeply about theology. (4) A person’s local church—not parachurch organizations—should have the most disciple-shaping influence on a Christian man or woman.

Yet Byrd’s overall approach to manhood and womanhood in her book is misleading and misguided.

²⁴Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 140, 393.

²⁵See <https://itsgoodtobeaman.com/complementarianism-presupposes-androgynism/>. Cf. <https://itsgoodtobeaman.com/where-we-stand-on/>. In 2006 Russell Moore defended the term *patriarchy*. See Russell D. Moore, “After Patriarchy, What? Why Egalitarians Are Winning the Gender Debate,” *JETS* 49 (2006): 569–76.

²⁶Cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Of Professors and Madmen: Currents in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship,” *Faith and Mission* 23.2 (2006): 13–14; D. A. Carson, “What’s Wrong with Patriarchy?,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 14 August 2012, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/08/14/whats-wrong-with-patriarchy/>; Burk, “Mere Complementarianism,” 32–33.a

²⁷Grudem labels this “one-point complementarianism” (*Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 518–21).

²⁸Rachel Green Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission: Women and Men in Marriage, Church, and Society* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019). See the penetrating review by Steven Wedgworth, “A New Way to Understand Men and Women in Christ? A Review of Rachel Green Miller’s *Beyond Authority and Submission*,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1.2 (2019): 103–15.

3.1. MISLEADING: BYRD MISREPRESENTS COMPLEMENTARIANISM

To prepare for reviewing Byrd's book, I carefully reread what I think are the three most significant books that present and defend complementarianism:

Piper, John, and Wayne Grudem, eds. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991. 575 pp. (This is the ur-text of complementarianism.)

Grudem, Wayne. *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than One Hundred Disputed Questions*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012. 856 pp. (This reprints the 2004 edition that Multnomah published. It responds to egalitarian arguments clearly, concisely, and comprehensively.)

Köstenberger, Andreas J., and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds. *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15*. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. 415 pp. (This is the definitive analysis of a central passage that directly addresses the role of men and women in the church.)

Given the polemical title of Byrd's book, I was expecting her to make a case against complementarianism as the above books present it. I thought Byrd might write a narrow complementarian version of the egalitarian response to the Piper-Grudem book, something akin to *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*.³⁰ Or maybe a biblical-theological survey in a style similar to what the Köstenbergers wrote.³¹ I was expecting substantive arguments and counterarguments.

But Byrd doesn't address the most significant biblical texts or engage the strongest complementarian arguments. Instead, she repeatedly misrepresents complementarianism and thus knocks down straw men. (As I interact with Byrd's book, I purposely cite Piper and Grudem most often because they, as the most prominent proponents for "biblical manhood and womanhood," are the primary targets of Byrd's book. But broad complementarianism is much bigger than Piper and Grudem.)³²

Byrd Asserts That Complementarianism Teaches That All Women Must Submit to All Men

Byrd argues that John Piper's definitions of biblical manhood and womanhood "appear to say that all men lead all women. A man needs to be leading a woman, many women, to be mature in his masculinity. A woman's function is to affirm a man's, many men's, strength and leadership" (22). Byrd says over and over, "We don't find a command anywhere in Scripture for all women to submit to all men" (25; cf. 105, 109).

But complementarians don't teach that. For example, Piper writes,

"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands" [1 Peter 3:1]. Notice the word *own* in "your *own* husbands." That means that there is a uniquely fitting submission to your own husband that is not fitting in relation to other men. You are not called to submit to all men the way you do to your husband.³³

Similarly, David Mathis, Piper's longtime assistant and one of his protégés, writes this in an article on the website of Piper's ministry: "God's call to a wife is to affirm, receive, and nurture her husband's loving leadership in marriage. Her husband is unique for her. God does not call a wife to submit to all men—no way. Only to her *own* husband (Ephesians 5:22; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:1, 5)."³⁴

"...Byrd doesn't address the most significant biblical texts or engage the strongest complementarian arguments."

³⁰Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, eds., *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005).

³¹Andreas J. Köstenberger and Margaret E. Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

³²Other notable resources include Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women, Equal yet Different: A Brief Study of the Biblical Passages on Gender* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1999); Thomas R. Schreiner, "Women in Ministry: Another Complementarian Perspective," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck, 2nd ed., Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 265-327 (also 106-10, 191-95, 264-68); Kevin DeYoung, *Freedom and Boundaries: A Pastoral Primer on the Role of Women in the Church* (Enumclaw, WA: Pleasant Word, 2006); J. Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt, *Women's Ministry in the Local Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006); Köstenberger and Köstenberger, *God's Design for Man and Woman*.

³³John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 95.

³⁴David Mathis, "The Story of Marriage in Seven Verses," *Desiring God*, 19 March 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-story-of-marriage-in-seven-verses>.

Byrd Asserts That Complementarianism Teaches That the Key Aim of Discipleship Is Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

Byrd asks, “Will Christian discipleship become irretrievably damaged if biblical manhood and womanhood are not the key aim for preaching, teaching, and discipleship?” (109). Complementarians say that biblical manhood and womanhood are *important*—especially in our cultural moment that dogmatically rejects God’s sexual ethic. But I am not aware of any who say that it is *the key aim*.

Byrd Presents a Particular View of the Trinity as Essential to Complementarianism

In June 2016, a theological debate erupted regarding whether the Father-Son relationship of authority and submission is eternal (and thus applies to the immanent or ontological Trinity) or whether it applies only to Jesus’ earthly ministry (and thus applies only to the economic or functional Trinity).³⁵ Byrd has been at the center of this debate and has argued against the eternal relations of authority and submission view of theologians such as Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware.

I agree with Byrd’s theological position on this issue. But the way she articulates it is misleading for four reasons:

1. Byrd misrepresents the eternal relations of authority and submission view when she writes, “This doctrine teaches that the Son, the second person of the Trinity, is subordinate to the Father, not only in the economy of salvation but in his essence” (101). Grudem and Ware and others who hold to eternal relations of authority and submission would not affirm that statement; they would explicitly reject it.³⁶

2. Byrd misrepresents the motives of those who teach this view when she asserts that they employ “an unorthodox teaching of the Trinity, the eternal subordination of the Son (ESS), in order to promote subordination of women to men” (100). But the motive for such a teaching is to elevate women and dignify the submission that God calls them to.³⁷ The motive for such a teaching is to attempt to explain

and apply passages about authority and submission such as 1 Corinthians 11:3: “I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.”³⁸

3. Byrd implies that theologians such as Grudem and Ware are heretics and thus not genuine Christians. She argues that such theologians hold unorthodox teachings “on a first-order doctrine,” (121) and that they are “unorthodox teachers that are not in line with Nicene Trinitarian doctrine” (173). But the eternal relations of authority and submission position that Grudem and Ware defend is not heresy.³⁹

4. Byrd repeatedly writes (especially in ch. 4—pp. 99–132) as if the eternal relations of authority and submission position that Grudem and Ware defend is essential to complementarianism. I understand why some might assume it is essential since Grudem is a leading proponent of complementarianism. But some complementarians intensely criticized Grudem and Ware on this matter, and most complementarians realize that Grudem and Ware made some theological missteps—even Grudem and Ware acknowledge that!⁴⁰ More importantly, complementarianism does not stand or fall regarding whether the eternal relations of authority and submission view is true. That view is not part of the Danvers Statement, which states what all complementarians affirm. Complementarianism is not intrinsically tied to that particular view of the Trinity.

³⁵See Jack Jeffery, “The Trinity Debate Bibliography: The Complete List—Is It Okay to Teach a Complementarianism Based on Eternal Subordination?,” *Books at a Glance*, n.d., <http://www.booksataglance.com/blog/trinity-debate-bibliography-complete-list/>.

³⁶Both Wayne Grudem and Bruce Ware confirmed that in emails to me on 19 March 2020.

³⁷E.g., Kathy Keller, “Embracing the Other,” in Tim Keller with Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 170–91.

³⁸Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

³⁹See R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Heresy and Humility—Lessons from a Current Controversy,” 28 June 2016, <https://albertmohler.com/2016/06/28/heresy>. Cf. Hangyi Yang, *A Development, Not a Departure: The Lacunae in the Debate of the Doctrine of the Trinity and Gender Roles*, Reformed Academic Dissertations (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018). Fred Sanders writes the foreword to Yang’s book; Robert Letham, Tom Schreiner, Robert Yarbrough, Malcolm Yarnell, and others endorse her book not necessarily because they agree with all her conclusions but because her approach is constructive and her conclusions reasonable.

⁴⁰Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), chap. 14; Bruce A. Ware, “Unity and Distinction of the Trinitarian Persons,” in *Trinitarian Theology: Theological Models and Doctrinal Application*, ed. Keith S. Whitfield, B&H Theological Review 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2019), 17–61 (also 129–37).

Byrd Implies that Complementarianism Inevitably Leads to Abuse

Byrd writes,

I hear from women who are in and who have come out of abusive situations under this kind of irresponsible teaching. When this so-called complementarian teaching, advocating such poor theology and environment for women, is presented as our design from creation and part of the gospel structure, I'm not surprised that some end up questioning their faith. (131)

Complementarianism firmly and resolutely opposes abuse. Grudem explains, "It is not biblical male leadership but distortion and abuse of biblical male leadership that leads to the abuse and repression of women. . . . Biblical male headship, rightly understood, protects women from abuse and repression and truly honors them as equal in value before God."⁴¹ Studies actually show that nominal Christianity (not complementarianism) leads to abuse.⁴²

Byrd doesn't substantively engage with John Piper's inclusion of *protecting others* in his definition of masculinity. Men protect others. That's part of what it means to be a man. Grudem explains,

Biblical support for the idea that the man has the primary responsibility to protect his family is found in Deuteronomy 20:7-8 (men go forth to war, not women, here and in many Old Testament passages); 24:5; Joshua 1:14; Judges 4:8-10 (Barak does not get the glory because he insisted that a woman accompany him into battle); Nehemiah 4:13-14 (the people are to fight for their brothers, homes, wives, and children, but it does not say they are to fight for their husbands!); Jeremiah 50:37 (it is the disgrace of a nation when its warriors become women); Nahum 3:13 ("Behold, your troops are women in your midst" is a taunt of derision); Matthew 2:13-14 (Joseph is told to protect Mary and baby Jesus by taking them to Egypt); Ephesians 5:25 (a husband's love should extend even to a willingness to lay down his life for his wife, something many soldiers in battle have done

throughout history to protect their families and homelands); 1 Peter 3:7 (a wife is a "weaker vessel," and therefore the husband, as generally stronger, has a greater responsibility to use his strength to protect his wife).⁴³

When I was teaching through 1 Corinthians to a group in my church several months ago, some of my sisters asked thoughtful questions about manhood and womanhood. One in particular was trying to put her finger on what makes a man a man and a woman a woman. How do we relate to each other differently? I shared something like this: "I relate to you as my sister in Christ. I don't lead you like I lead my wife, and you don't submit to me like my wife submits to me. But I do feel a responsibility to protect you that you shouldn't feel toward me. For example, if you and I walked out to the church's parking lot and a gunman started randomly shooting people, I would protect you with my body. That's just the kind of thing a man instinctively does." She was OK with that.

Related: Biblical manhood opposes not just domestic abuse but the cowardly activity of indulging in pornography. That is the opposite of masculinity because—among other sins—it exploits women instead of protecting them.⁴⁴

Byrd Argues against Broad Complementarianism without Substantively Engaging Its Strongest Exegetical and Theological Arguments

The strongest exegetical and theological arguments for complementarianism are rooted in texts such as Genesis 1-3; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:29-35; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; and 1 Peter 3:1-7. Byrd either fails to consider those texts, or she interacts only superficially with them. This is the most misleading aspect of Byrd's book.

⁴¹Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 490-96. Cf. John Piper, "Clarifying Words on Wife Abuse," *Desiring God*, 19 December 2012, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/clarifying-words-on-wife-abuse>.

⁴²Caleb Morell, "Nominal Christianity—Not Complementarianism—Leads to Abuse," *9Marks Journal* (2019): 37-43.

⁴³Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 44.

⁴⁴See the final reason in Andrew David Naselli, "Seven Reasons You Should Not Indulge in Pornography," *Them* 41 (2016): 473-83.

(1) Genesis 1–3

Byrd interacts sparsely with Genesis 1–3, mainly to argue that the Hebrew word *ezer* refers not merely to a helper but to a necessary ally (188–89). She does not engage the best complementarian arguments. For example, Grudem lists nine arguments that demonstrate that God designed male headship in marriage before the fall.⁴⁵

- (1) *The order*: Adam was created first, then Eve.
- (2) *The representation*: Adam, not Eve, had a special role in representing the human race.
- (3) *The naming of woman*: The person doing the “naming” of created things is always the person who has authority over those things.⁴⁶
- (4) *The naming of the human race*: God named the human race “Man,” not “Woman.”
- (5) *The primary accountability*: God spoke to Adam first after the Fall.
- (6) *The purpose*: Eve was created as a helper for Adam, not Adam as a helper for Eve.
- (7) *The conflict*: The curse brought a distortion of previous roles, not the introduction of new roles.
- (8) *The restoration*: When we come to the New Testament, salvation in Christ reaffirms the creation order.
- (9) *The mystery*: Marriage from the beginning of Creation was a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church.

Embedded in those arguments are foundational principles that apply to more than just marriage (more on that below regarding 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2). Byrd does not interact with these principles.

(2) 1 Corinthians 14:29–35

Paul writes, “The women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says” (1 Cor 14:34). Byrd asserts, “Many affirm that these passages [i.e., 1 Corinthians 11–14] teach a silence of the women in worship. In fact, a Biblicist reading of 1 Corinthians 14:34 can be pretty scary for women to read” (193). She gives the impression that complementarians teach that women must be absolutely silent in church meetings (193–200). She does not engage complementarian arguments that argue that Paul means *women should not audibly evaluate prophecies during church meetings*. Byrd briefly argues for that view herself, but she presents it as if she is refuting complementarianism (197). But complementarians such as D. A. Carson, Wayne Grudem, and Thomas R. Schreiner recognize that Paul cannot mean that women must never speak at all during a church meeting because in this same letter he encourages women to pray and prophesy during church meetings with their heads covered (1 Cor 11:5, 13).⁴⁷

Further, Byrd appeals to three egalitarians (Kenneth Bailey, Cythnia Westfall, and Ben Witherington III) to argue that based on the historical-cultural context of 1 Corinthians 14:34 what Paul says is not transcultural (198). Byrd does not explain what “as the Law also says” means in 1 Corinthians 14:34, nor does she harmonize her position with 1 Timothy 2:12: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.”

⁴⁵See Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 30–41; cf. 102–30. I am not including Grudem's tenth argument here (“the parallel with the Trinity”). Cf. Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991), 95–112, 479–83; John M. Frame, “Men and Women in the Image of God,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 225–32, 506–8; Schreiner, “Women in Ministry,” 293–313.

⁴⁶Cf. Joe Rigney, “Faithfully Naming the Past: A Theological Exploration of the Discipline of History” (MA thesis, New Saint Andrews College, 2014).

⁴⁷Cf. D. A. Carson, “‘Silent in the Churches’: On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991), 140–53, 487–90; Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 232–47; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, TNTC 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 296–99.

(3) *Ephesians 5:21–33 and Colossians 3:18–19*

Byrd does not quote or cite or explain Colossians 3:18–19: “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them.” And one of the few times Byrd mentions Ephesians 5:21–33 is as a proof-text for a single sentence in which she asserts with no argument, “Paul teaches mutual submission among Christians even as he addresses husbands and wives specifically” (105).

Byrd defines husbandly submission as “sacrifice of the man’s own rights and body for the protection of the temple and home and out of love for his wife” (117), and she affirms Andrew Bartlett’s defining submission in general as “humbly ranking others as more important than oneself” (230).⁴⁸ Byrd does not engage complementarian arguments that while a husband and wife should sacrificially and unselfishly love one another, Paul does not command a husband to submit to his wife; in all Greek literature the word translated *submit* refers to *being subject to someone else’s authority*.⁴⁹ The most culturally offensive element of complementarianism is authority and submission. Even egalitarians seem to want to be complementarians as long as it excludes authority and submission.⁵⁰ Steven Wedgeworth’s evaluation of Rachel Green Miller’s *Beyond Authority and Submission* applies to Byrd’s book:

Miller also devotes little time to the more complicated aspects of leadership. She encourages love, service, sacrifice, and mutual submission, but she never discusses how real-life disagreements are to be resolved. Miller presents the notion of a husband’s tie-breaking authority as one of the unhelpful notions argued for by complementarians (120). She does not explain what she would put in its place. . . . But if they ought not to think of their authority as tie-breaking authority and should not attempt to enforce their authority, how and in what way is their authority actually authoritative? Can it really be possible that submission will always come so easily, that a husband and wife will not find themselves in a significant disagreement? And how would submission that only occurs after both parties reach an agreement be different from the egalitarian position, which would

propose all disagreements be handled as negotiations apart from any singular leading authority? This does not actually follow from the Christological example, either. After all, Jesus will indeed “enforce” His authority. Without further explanation, no actual new position has been advanced.⁵¹

(4) *1 Peter 3:1–7*

Byrd does not mention 1 Peter 3:1–7. This passage directly addresses how God commands husbands and wives to relate to each other:

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Pet 3:1–7)

The commands to wives and husbands are different.⁵² Husbands and wives have different obligations that flow from their distinct identities as men and women.

⁴⁸Editor’s note: See Sharon James’s review of Andrew Bartlett’s *Men and Women in Christ* in this issue of *Eikon*.

⁴⁹Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 188–200.

⁵⁰Note the subtitle of Pierce and Groothuis’s egalitarian response to Piper and Grudem: *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*.

⁵¹Wedgeworth, “A New Way to Understand Men and Women in Christ?” 111–12.

⁵²See Wayne Grudem, “Wives Like Sarah, and the Husbands Who Honor Them: 1 Peter 3:1–7,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991), 194–208, 499–503.

(5) 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 and 1 Timothy 2:8–15

Most astonishing of all, Byrd's book does not address 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 or 1 Timothy 2:8–15. In 1 Timothy 2:12–14, Paul writes, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." I won't repeat the exegetical arguments in Köstenberger and Schreiner's *Women in the Church*. Instead, I'd like to highlight how Paul argues here.

Why does Paul prohibit a woman from the *function* (not just the *office*) of teaching or exercising authority over a man when the church gathers to worship?⁵³ Note the first word of v. 13: "For" (the Greek word *gar*). Paul gives two *reasons* for his prohibition:

1. God formed Adam first, and then he formed Eve.⁵⁴
2. Adam wasn't deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Those are two principles that Paul cites to support his application in v. 12. *That means that these principles support other applications, too.* For example, I could say, "I do not permit my daughter to marry a woman. For [i.e., here's the reason] God created marriage for one man and one woman." The reason is a principle that applies to more than just that one application. It also applies to why I don't permit my daughter to marry a snake or a donkey or a child. Paul frequently reasons this way. Here are a few other examples from Paul's same letter:

But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for [Gk. *gar*—here's the reason, which is a principle that applies in more than one way] this is pleasing in the sight of God. (1 Tim 5:4)

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For [Gk. *gar*] the Scripture says, [reason 1] "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, [reason 2] "The laborer deserves his wages." (1 Tim 5:17–18)

In the very next paragraph after 1 Timothy 2:8–15, Paul writes that an overseer (i.e., a pastor or elder) "must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" (1 Tim 3:4–5). There's a connection between a *man* leading his home and a *man* leading a church. It's *fitting* for a man to lead.

⁵³See Denny Burk, "Should Churches Allow Women to Preach to Men?," *Denny Burk*, 8 May 2019, <http://www.dennyburk.com/should-churches-allow-women-to-preach-to-men/>; Thomas R Schreiner, "Should Women Teach (1 Timothy 2:12)?" *9Marks Journal* (2019): 104–12.

⁵⁴Cf. Marjorie J. Cooper and Jay G. Caballero, "Reasoning through Creation Order as a Basis for the Prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12," *Presb* 43.1 (2017): 30–38.



Paul argues in a similar way in 1 Corinthians 11:7–9: “A man ought not to cover his head, since [i.e., here is the reason] he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For [Gk. *gar*—reason 1] man was not made from woman, but woman from man. [untranslated Gk. *gar*—reason 2] Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”

Here are some critical questions for narrow complementarians and for egalitarians:

Why does God command wives to submit to husbands, and *why* does God command that only men teach and exercise authority over the church? Is it arbitrary? Could God have flipped a coin with men on one side and women on the other? Or is *fittingness* involved?

If fittingness is involved (which is how Paul argues in 1 Timothy 2:12–14 and 1 Corinthians 11:7–9), then does that fittingness principle apply to anything else at all beyond marriage and ordination? If not, why not?

I’m not sure how Byrd would answer the question about a wife’s submitting to her husband because she argues that a husband should also submit to his wife (see above on “mutual submission”). Here is the only argument I could find in Byrd’s book for why God commands that only men teach and exercise authority over the church:

A visitor to our church should notice a different dynamic in corporate worship from the rest of the activity of church life: God has summoned us to come and receive Christ and all his blessings. The prominent voice we should be hearing, which is spoken through the preached Word, is Christ’s. Our voices in worship are responsive to his. This is part of the apologetic in churches that hold to male-only ordination—Christ, our Bridegroom, would be best represented by a man. (231)

But *why*? Why is it most fitting for a man to teach and exercise authority over the gathered church? Does the Bible give no further reasons beyond that Jesus is male? And why is it most fitting that Jesus be male?

Broad complementarians are simply trying to argue like Paul. When John Piper considers whether it is fitting for a woman to be a police officer or a seminary professor,⁵⁵ he is trying to reason from rock-solid principles—including the *reasons* Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 and 1 Timothy 2:12–14—to particular applications in the nitty gritty of life. That doesn’t mean Piper’s applications are correct (though I think they are). But at least he’s *trying to apply biblical principles*. And instead of attempting to reason the way Paul does, Byrd ridicules Piper for being so traditional and culture-bound and unfair and disrespectful to women.⁵⁶ The reader wonders what Byrd thinks of Paul’s logic in 1 Timothy 2:12–14 and 1 Corinthians 11:7–9.⁵⁷

Contrast Byrd’s logic:

Bonus question for complementarian churches: If there are no female teaching voices in seminary, how do we expect the pastors graduating *not* to shepherd a church with a distinctly male culture? If men and women are distinct sexes, how do we train pastors to preach for and shepherd both men and women in their congregations? How do we expect them to value the female voice if they are told they should not learn from them in seminary? (235)⁵⁸

⁵⁵Piper, “Should Women Be Police Officers?”; John Piper, “Is There a Place for Female Professors at Seminary?,” *Desiring God*, 22 January 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-there-a-place-for-female-professors-at-seminary>.

⁵⁶I concede that some of Piper’s specific applications are awkward; there is room for broad complementarians to disagree on specific applications, and Piper is not infallible. But there is a way to criticize without maligning a faithful pastor who is simply trying to help God’s people faithfully live out what it means to be a man and a woman. If the way God made humans as male and female applies broadly to not just marriage and the church but to all human relationships, then should we ridicule pastors who try to faithfully apply the Bible (especially passages such as 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11) to all of life?

⁵⁷The way Byrd critiques Piper’s definitions of manhood and womanhood sounds like how feminists critique 1 Corinthians 11:8–9: “Rather than woman having a unique contribution, the biblical manhood and womanhood definitions above describe the woman’s contribution as parasitic” (Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 106).

⁵⁸When Abigail Dodds (a fellow church member and an M.A. student at my school) shared feedback on a draft of this review article, she responded to Byrd’s questions: “We expect pastors to be able to shepherd women well because they have the Holy Spirit and also because they have women in their lives (mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, friends) whom they are living with, learning from, etc. Priscillas exist in the church, and men do well to listen to them. But that does not mean women must get a paycheck or a pulpit or a formal position of authority over men in order to faithfully fulfill what God calls them to do.” See also Sam Emadi, “The Conversation behind the Conversation: How Ecclesiological Assumptions Shape Our Complementarianism,” *9Marks Journal* (2019): 44–51; Sam Emadi, “You’re Not a Healthy Church Unless You Care About Titus 2,” *9Marks Journal* (2019): 205–8.

Byrd quotes a string of New Testament passages that call God's people to teach (Col 3:16; Heb 5:12; Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:31; 14:1, 26) and concludes,

There's no qualifier in these verses, saying that men are not to learn from women or that women are only to teach their own sex and children. Any divinely ordained differences that men and women have do not prohibit women from teaching. It would be disobedient to Scripture to withhold women from teaching. (174)

Byrd asks, “Are the laywomen disciples in your church serving in the same capacity as the laymen?” (188). If not, then Byrd thinks that your church is unfairly limiting women and not treating women as equal to men. But Byrd has not proven what she asserts because she doesn't address 1 Timothy 2:12–14 and 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 and show how such passages harmonize with what she asserts.⁵⁹



⁵⁹For an instructive exchange on whether women may preach to a church under the authority of that church's elders, see John Piper, “Can a Woman Preach If Elders Affirm It?,” *Desiring God*, 16 February 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/can-a-woman-preach-if-elders-affirm-it>; Andrew Wilson, “Women Preachers: A Response to John Piper,” *Think*, 16 May 2015, http://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/women_preachers_a_response_to_john_piper; Thomas R. Schreiner, “Why Not to Have a Woman Preach: A Response to Andrew Wilson,” *Desiring God*, 7 May 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-not-to-have-a-woman-preach>; Andrew Wilson, “Women Preaching: A Grateful Response to Tom Schreiner,” *Think*, 13 May 2015, http://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/women_preaching_a_grateful_response_to_tom_schreiner; John Piper, “Should a Woman Preach Next Sunday? Digging for the Root Difference with Andrew Wilson,” *Desiring God*, 19 May 2015, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/should-a-woman-preach-next-sunday>; Jonathan Leeman, “Can Women Teach under the Authority of Elders?,” *9Marks*, 22 May 2015, <http://9marks.org/article/can-women-teach-under-the-authority-of-elders/>; Mary A. Kassian, “Women Teaching Men—How Far Is Too Far?,” *Desiring God*, 21 May 2016, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/women-teaching-men-how-far-is-too-far>. Leeman insightfully explains, “What seems to be driving the different approaches to 1 Timothy 2:12 are Presbyterian versus congregationalist conceptions of teaching and authority” (“Can Women Teach under the Authority of Elders?”).

3.2. MISGUIDED:

BYRD SHOWS FAULTY JUDGMENT OR REASONING

In addition to misrepresenting complementarianism, Byrd's book is misguided in at least five ways.

Byrd Focuses on Stories (While Largely Ignoring Direct Teaching on Men and Women)

While Byrd never interacts with some key passages that directly and didactically address what God says about how men and women should relate to each other (e.g., 1 Cor 11:7–9; 1 Tim 2:8–15; 1 Pet 3:1–7), she spends large portions of her book “focusing on the reciprocity of the male and female voices in Scripture” (25). She conjectures about woman-centered perspectives in a small selection of Bible stories—Ruth, the Egyptian midwives in Exodus 1, Deborah, Jephthah, Rahab, and Mary and Martha (49–95, 181–88). Byrd argues, for example, that the way “the female voice functions” in the book of Ruth “demolishes the lens of biblical manhood and womanhood that has been imposed on our Bible reading and opens the doors to how we see God working in his people” (49).

Byrd repeatedly calls such episodes *gynocentric interruptions*. The reader may wonder if she thinks church life should mirror the proportions of the man-centered perspectives to the woman-centered perspectives in the Bible.

It's noteworthy that Byrd does not focus on the story that Peter tells women to remember and imitate. In that story how does the female voice function? She obeys her husband and calls him lord. That woman was Sarah, whom Peter describes as a holy woman who hoped in God and who adorned herself by submitting to her own husband (1 Pet 3:5–6).

Byrd Constructs Overimaginative and Unlikely Scenarios

In a book that responds to biblical manhood and womanhood, Byrd spends a disproportionately large space speculating about what some texts might be saying while disregarding central passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12–14 that explicitly address the issue. She presents three unrealistic arguments for why women should serve as key church leaders (190–92, 213–35):

1. Byrd argues that the women who were benefactors of house churches did not merely open their homes but helped plant and lead those churches. But her argument hinges on what it means to *lead* a church. There's a kind of leading that only the elders/pastors do. Were these women teaching the gathered church in the 1 Timothy 2:12 sense?

2. Byrd argues that Phoebe, under whose patronage Paul placed himself, delivered Paul's epistle to the Romans and therefore authoritatively taught it to men and women. Byrd does not demonstrate how this harmonizes with 1 Timothy 2:12: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." (Byrd's argument is very similar to N. T. Wright's.)⁶⁰

Piper and Grudem explain,

Paul praises Phoebe as a "servant" or "deacon" of the church at Cenchreae since, as he puts it, she "has been a patron of many and of myself as well" (Rom. 16:1-2). Some have tried to argue that the Greek word behind "patron" really means "leader." [Endnote: The Greek word *prostatis* does not mean "leader" but "helper" or "patron." In the Bible it occurs only here.] This is doubtful, since it is hard to imagine, on any account, what Paul would mean by saying that Phoebe became his leader. He could, of course, mean that she was an influential patroness who gave sanctuary to him and his band or that she used her community influence for the cause of the gospel and for Paul in particular. She was a very significant person and played a crucial role in the ministry. But to derive anything from this term that is contrary to our understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12, one would have to assume that Phoebe exercised authority over men. The text simply doesn't show that.⁶¹

3. Byrd argues that Junia in Romans 16:7 was a woman, an apostle, and likely the same person that the Gospel of Luke calls Joanna, who witnessed Jesus's empty tomb (Luke 8:3; 23:55; 24:10). But Piper and Grudem explain, (1) we can't know with certainty whether the Greek name refers to a woman (Junia) or a man (Junias); (2) the reading "They are well known to the apostles" is more likely; and (3)

the word *apostle* has various levels of authority in the New Testament and can refer broadly to a messenger or to someone serving in some kind of itinerant ministry.⁶² Schreiner assesses, "Bauckham's . . . claim [which Byrd repeats] that Junia is to be identified with Joanna (Luke 8:3) is speculative and thus unlikely."⁶³

Byrd applies Phoebe's and Junia's service to how women should have expanded teaching roles to adult men and women when the church gathers:

If Phoebe can deliver the epistle to the Romans, a sister should be able to handle delivering an offering basket. Backing it up a little more, are laypeople teaching adult Sunday school in your church? If so, are both laymen and laywomen being equipped to do that? If Junia can be sent as an apostle with Andronicus to establish churches throughout Rome, then you should at least value coeducational teaching teams in Sunday school. Do the men in your church learn from the women's theological contributions? . . . Sisters make great adult Sunday school teachers when invested in well . . . (233)

⁶⁰See Denny Burk, "Engaging a Viral Interview with N. T. Wright about Women in Ministry," *CBMW*, 25 February 2020, <https://cbmw.org/2020/02/25/engaging-a-viral-interview-with-n-t-wright-about-women-in-ministry/>.

⁶¹John Piper and Wayne Grudem, *50 Crucial Questions: An Overview of Central Concerns about Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 36-37. This book lightly expands and updates chapter 2 in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. See also Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 263-68, 660n12, 706; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 759-61.

⁶²Piper and Grudem, *50 Crucial Questions*, 58-61, 91. See also Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 223-27; Michael H. Burer and Daniel B. Wallace, "Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Reexamination of Romans 16:7," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 6.1 (2001): 4-11; Al Wolters, "IOFNIAN (Romans 16:7) and the Hebrew Name Yēhunnā," *JBL* 127 (2008): 397-408; Michael H. Burer, "Ἐπίσημοι 'Εν τοῖς Ἀποστόλοις in Rom 16:7 as 'Well Known to the Apostles': Further Defense and New Evidence," *JETS* 58 (2015): 731-55.

⁶³Schreiner, *Romans*, 669.

Byrd Supports Her Conjectures by Citing Evangelical Feminists

To support her conjectures, Byrd interacts primarily with egalitarian works and repeatedly cites them—authors such as Richard Bauckham, Kenneth Bailey, Lynn Cohick, Kevin Giles, Carolyn Custis James,⁶⁴ Philip Payne, Cynthia Westfall, and Ben Witherington. As Byrd selectively quotes egalitarians to support her arguments, she usually assumes the egalitarian reading is correct without interacting with robust complementarian arguments.⁶⁵ This suggests that she shares many philosophical principles with egalitarianism.

Byrd Does Not Specify How Men and Women Are Different

Byrd affirms that men and women are different, but she does not specify precisely how they are different beyond being biologically male or female:

My contributions, my living and moving, are distinctly feminine because I am a female. I do not need to do something a certain way to be feminine (such as receive my mail in a way that affirms the masculinity of the mailman). I simply am feminine because I am female. (114)

I don't need to *act* like a woman; I actually *am* a woman. (120)

Byrd is correct that what makes a human a woman is that God created her female. She's right that she *is* a woman and doesn't need to *act* like a woman in the sense of *pretending* to be a woman. But is it possible for a woman to be masculine or for a man to be effeminate? Do those categories exist? Or are all biological females automatically always and only feminine, and are all biological males automatically always and only masculine?⁶⁶ Biblical womanhood refers to how women live in a way *that accords with* how God created them female. That entails living in an appropriately *feminine* way. I admit that it's difficult to define exactly what it means to be feminine and that good-intentioned Christians can wrongly bind consciences by dogmatically proclaiming specific ways that women must be feminine. But it shouldn't be controversial among Christians to affirm that women must live in an appropriately feminine way.⁶⁷

Byrd is determined not to associate any kind of subordinate role to women. She asks, "If women's key distinction from man is ontological subordination, how is she then equal to him?" (118). While complementarians don't describe their view as "ontological subordination" (it's more common to say, "Men and women are equal in value and dignity," and "men and women have different roles in marriage as part of the created order"),⁶⁸ Byrd's argument is a classic egalitarian response. She argues, "We need to stop using the word *role* in reference to permanent fixed identity" (120).

According to a typical dictionary, *role* means "the function assumed or part played by a person or thing in a particular situation." The word *role* is misleading if we think we must *pretend* to act out our maleness or femaleness—as opposed to our maleness or femaleness incorporating our entire beings. But the word *role* can be helpful if it refers to how God designed men and women—that it is a necessary entailment of how God made males and females.

This is the closest Byrd comes to specifying how men and women are different:

As we think about two ways of being human, as males and as females, do our physical differences mean anything other than the fact that women are men's sexual counterparts? What is the meaningfulness in being male and female? What is beautiful about it? It is certainly important to note that men and women are sexual counterparts—woman is not made as a sexual counterpart for woman, and vice versa. It is the union of man and woman that is considered one flesh.

⁶⁴In 2008 my wife reviewed James's book on Ruth and was concerned about her egalitarian arguments and trajectory. See Jennifer J. Naselli, "Is This Good News for Women? A Review of Carolyn Custis James, *The Gospel of Ruth*," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 13.2 (2008): 79–81. Now James is unambiguously promoting an evangelical feminist view in her speaking and writing.

⁶⁵Again, Wedgeworth's evaluation of Rachel Green Miller's *Beyond Authority and Submission* applies to Byrd's book: "One cannot help but notice how often Miller's biblical argumentation relies on modern commentators, including egalitarian ones. ... It may be the case that these new readings of the Scriptures are the correct ones, but that argument would need to be demonstrated. *Beyond Authority and Submission* makes no attempt to do this, and it often leaves us with more questions than answers as to what any given New Testament text means." Wedgeworth, "A New Way to Understand Men and Women in Christ?," 112.

⁶⁶Cf. Jason S. DeRouchie, "Confronting the Transgender Storm: New Covenant Reflections on Deuteronomy 22:5," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 21.1 (2016): 58–69.

⁶⁷Thanks to Abigail Dodds for helping me craft this paragraph.

⁶⁸Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 25–30.

And this union is fruitful. Some have written about how a woman's body is continuously preparing itself to receive and create life within herself, in contrast to how man creates life outside of himself, leading to different dispositions or "complementary roots of femininity and masculinity." In this teaching, a woman "has the disposition to receive and foster the growth of particular persons in her sphere of activity; a man has the disposition, after accepting responsibility for particular persons in his sphere of activity, to protect and provide for them." (124–25)

Byrd is quoting *The Concept of Woman* by Prudence Allen, who here "is summarizing Pope John Paul's teaching on the genius of women and men" (125n80). The final sentence above almost sounds like John Piper. Does Byrd agree with Allen?

I agree with the teaching in so far as men and women have something distinct to give. And yet both genders are called to all these virtues in our spheres of activity. So I would not want to overgeneralize every man's or woman's disposition. Even in Scripture, we see women, such as Moses's mom and sister, and Pharaoh's daughter, receiving and letting go to foster growth and protect. I wonder about being too rigid by assigning these dispositions as masculine and feminine when, for example, as a mom I intimately know how fierce my disposition to protect is. (125)

Byrd quickly moves away from thinking about how nature might have anything to do with what it means to be a man or a woman. When Byrd addresses masculinity and femininity, she seems uncomfortable. She hesitates to define and explain. She rushes to change the subject and emphasize *sameness*. She does not distinguish *headship* (which is for only men in the home and the church) from *influence* (which women should have in every sphere). She does not emphasize the *primary* roles that men have to tend God's creation and to provide for and protect others and to express loving, sacrificial leadership in various contexts. She does not emphasize the *primary* roles that women have to cultivate life and to help others flourish and to affirm, receive, and nurture strength and leadership from worthy

men in various contexts. To paraphrase the gist of her message, "Yes, men and women have some differences—at least biologically and maybe in some other ways. But we can't be sure what those other ways are. It's more important to focus on how men and women are equal and similar." In other words, a fitting term to describe Byrd's emphasis is *functional androgyny*. She wants to emphasize *humans in general*, not humans as male and female. She intentionally underemphasizes sexual distinctions and hierarchy. And she doesn't specify what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman beyond being biologically male or female.⁶⁹

"...Christlikeness looks different in different areas"

Byrd commits a category error when she asserts, "Christian men and women don't strive for so-called biblical masculinity or femininity, but Christlikeness" (114). But Christlikeness looks different in different areas—for parents and children, for pastors and other church members, for government leaders and regular citizens, for employers and employees, and for men and women. The goal for Christians in every domain is Christlikeness, but what exactly that looks like may be a bit different for people based on a variety of factors—including whether a person is male or female. What does Christlikeness mean for a man and for a woman? Does it always mean exactly the same thing?⁷⁰

⁶⁹Byrd is inconsistent at best. On the one hand, she concedes that men and women offer "two distinct ways of being human" (124) and different "dispositions" (125) and that together they abide in "dynamic, fruit-bearing communion" (130). She rejects androgyny (19, 104, 111). On the other hand, she does not put any substance inside of those different "ways" or "dispositions." She affirms that God created us male and female and that therefore they are not identical, but like so many egalitarians and narrow complementarians, she does not say what that something is. Again, Wedgeworth's evaluation of Rachel Green Miller's *Beyond Authority and Submission* applies to Byrd's book: "Her [i.e., Miller's] position looks more like a variation of egalitarianism, albeit an egalitarianism which still restricts church ordination to men. Indeed, Miller's thesis is that there really is no such thing as 'masculinity' or 'femininity,' at least not when it comes to Christian piety or vocational purpose. . . . For her, masculinity is nothing other than a person being biologically male and femininity is nothing other than a person being biologically female. Does this also mean that there are no temperamental, cognitive, behavioral, or vocational characteristics which should be associated with masculinity and femininity? Again, this is closer to the egalitarian position than the complementarian one." Wedgeworth, "A New Way to Understand Men and Women in Christ?," 110–11.

⁷⁰See Jonathan Leeman, "Biblical Manhood and Womanhood—or Christlikeness?" *9Marks*, 20 March 2020, <https://www.9marks.org/article/biblical-manhood-and-womanhood-or-christlikeness/>.

Byrd Uses the “Biblicist” Hermeneutic She Denounces

Byrd repeatedly accuses complementarians of “biblicism” in a derogatory sense. For example,

Rather than the passing down of the apostolic traditions and ministering Christ to us through ordinary means of grace and church accountability, the parachurch has often embraced a Biblicist method of teaching Scripture. Biblicists rightly uphold the authority of Scripture but often read the Bible with a narrow, flat lens of interpretation, zooming in on the words in the texts themselves while missing the history, context, and confessing tradition of the faith. Biblicists emphasize proof texting over a comprehensive biblical theology. What often happens unintentionally is that the Biblicist readers become their own authority, since they often don't notice they are also looking through their own lens of preconceived theological assumptions. Indeed, this is something we all need to be aware of in our Bible interpretation. The troubling teaching of biblical manhood and womanhood has thrived under this rubric of popular Biblicist interpretive methods.

I demonstrated this in chapter 4. The unorthodox teaching of the eternal subordination of the Son was conceived by Biblicist interpretive methods.⁷¹ Rather than a more systematic approach of stepping back from the words of the text “to consider the One who is present in the entirety of the text” and what we can know about him from all of Scripture, and without retrieving what has been faithfully handed down to us from centuries of the Holy Spirit's work through tradents of the faith, Biblicists employ a fundamentalist approach to God's Word that doesn't take into account how the church and the Scriptures go hand in hand. Biblicists believe that since the Bible is the authoritative Word of God, then all they need to look to is their Bible to understand what God wants to say to them. But that begs the question of how we read our Bibles. (159; cf. 27, 165, 169, 193)

We can quibble over how to define biblicism.⁷² But what's striking here is that the hermeneutic Byrd denounces is the same one she uses to defend a position that celebrates expanded leadership roles for women—a position that is relatively new and unusual in the history of the people of God, especially in the Reformed tradition of which Byrd is a part (as a member of an OPC church).⁷³ Not only do such arguments fail exegetically (e.g., 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2); they are based on a narrow biblicism that fails to incorporate both natural theology and robust historical theology.

- Regarding natural revelation: What is most fitting? Do typical characteristics of men and women indicate that God has designed them to be biological and metaphorical fathers and mothers?
- Regarding historical theology: What do significant exegetes and theologians in church history say about men and women in the home, church, and society? Quotations from Chrysostom and Calvin and Luther about women could make us blush today.⁷⁴ Why has the church traditionally embraced broad complementarianism, and why are egalitarianism and narrow complementarianism relatively new? Is it possible that the spirit of our age has significantly influenced how we think about men and women?

I have a friendly suggestion for my Reformed friends who are leaning toward a narrow complementarianism: read Herman Bavinck's *The Christian Family*.⁷⁵ Reformed theologians (rightly) love Bavinck, the Dutch theologian who wrote the massive four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics* (which Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* basically condenses). Byrd quotes Bavinck favorably on the doctrine of the church (136–37). Bavinck's *The Christian Family* is incredibly relevant to contemporary debates about complementarianism.

⁷¹When Steven Wedgeworth shared feedback on a draft of this article, he responded to Byrd's sentence above, “Ironically, the original motivation for ESS was an extrabiblical question regarding the concept of equality. Certain complementarians were attempting to answer the feminist claim that any appearance of hierarchy would stand in contradiction to equality. The ESS advocate looked to the doctrine of the Trinity as a rebuttal to that argument. They did often treat certain Bible verses in a biblicistic way, but the most basic issue was actually philosophical.”

⁷²Cf. John M. Frame, “In Defense of Something Close to Biblicism,” *WTJ* 59 (1997): 269–318; R. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, “In Defense of Proof-Texting,” *JETS* 54 (2011): 589–606.

⁷³Editor's note: See David Talcott's article in this issue of *Eikon*, which reflects on complementarianism in church history and why the theological retrieval movement has neglected it.

⁷⁴Cf. Steven Wedgeworth, “Male-Only Ordination Is Natural: Why the Church Is a Model of Reality,” *The Calvinist International*, 16 January 2019, <https://calvinistinternational.com/2019/01/16/male-only-ordination-is-natural-why-the-church-is-a-model-of-reality/>.

⁷⁵Herman Bavinck, *The Christian Family*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library, 2012).

4. CONCLUSION AND FOUR EXHORTATIONS

Here's what I've argued:

1. Summary: The gist of Byrd's book is that biblical manhood and womanhood—especially as John Piper and Wayne Grudem teach it—uses traditional patriarchal structures to oppress women.
2. Context: On the spectrum of views on men and women, Byrd's position overlaps partly with the far left side of narrow complementarianism and partly with egalitarianism.
3. Evaluation: Byrd's book is misleading because she misrepresents complementarianism, and it is misguided because she shows faulty judgment or reasoning.

I conclude with four final exhortations to my brothers and sisters who affirm complementarianism and to others who may be on the fence between complementarianism and egalitarianism:

1. Study this issue for yourself.

Many Christians today have not carefully studied for themselves what the Bible teaches about the way God created and designed males and females. Some have inherited complementarianism and are not deeply convinced that the Bible teaches it. Don't accept something simply because John Piper or Aimee Byrd or whoever says so. Carefully read and reread the Bible. Read *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, and compare how egalitarians respond in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without Hierarchy*.⁷⁶ Survey Grudem's *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, and weigh the arguments in Köstenberger and Schreiner's *Women in the Church*. Read old voices such as Bavinck's *The Christian Family*. Read new voices such as Kevin DeYoung and Joe Rigney. Contrast Byrd's approach with writings by women such as Abigail Dodds, Elisabeth Elliot, Carolyn Mahaney, Rebekah Merkle, and Claire Smith.⁷⁷ Those refreshing voices winsomely present what the Bible teaches and cheerfully follow it as part of our Creator's good design for men and women.

2. Beware of the ditches on either side of complementarianism.⁷⁸

The ditch on the right is a version of authoritarianism or hyper-headship in which men have abused their authority and hindered a woman from flourishing. The ditch on the left is a version of egalitarianism or feminism.

Understanding these two ditches is important as we analyze why we might struggle with complementarianism. An increasingly popular view in complementarian circles right now is that we need a progressive complementarianism that is more egalitarian—or at least that is kinder, gentler, more affirming, and more liberating to women. What do we make of Christian women who testify that they need to recover *from* biblical manhood and womanhood? To recover means to return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength. If a woman genuinely needs to recover, then the problem isn't biblical manhood and womanhood. The problem is probably one of those two ditches.

Consider an analogy: What do you make of a fifteen-year-old girl who testifies that she needs to recover from overbearing parents? It's certainly possible that her parents may be sinfully domineering. It's also possible that the problem is primarily not her parents but her own rebellious attitude that is chafing against the God-given authority of her wise and loving parents.

⁷⁶Note counterarguments to that book in the *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* Spring 2005 issue (101): <https://cbmw.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/10-1.pdf>.

⁷⁷Abigail Dodds, (A)Typical Woman: Free, Whole, and Called in Christ (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019); Elisabeth Elliot, *Let Me Be a Woman: Notes to My Daughter on the Meaning of Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1976); Elisabeth Elliot, *The Mark of a Man* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1981); Carolyn Mahaney, *Feminine Appeal: Seven Virtues of a Godly Wife and Mother* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Mahaney Whitacre, *Girl Talk: Mother-Daughter Conversations on Biblical Womanhood* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); Carolyn Mahaney and Nicole Whitacre, *True Beauty* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014); Rebekah Merkle, *Eve in Exile: And the Restoration of Femininity* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2016); Claire Smith, *God's Good Design: What the Bible Really Says about Men and Women* (Kingsford NSW, Australia: Matthias Media, 2012). Smith wrote *God's Good Design* after she wrote a published PhD dissertation on the topic: Claire S. Smith, *Pauline Communities as 'Scholastic Communities': A Study of the Vocabulary of 'Teaching' in 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, WUNT 2/335 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

⁷⁸Cf. Meyer, "A Complementarian Manifesto against Domestic Abuse."

On the one hand, the reason some women feel like they need to recover from the male leadership in their home and church is that the male authorities in their lives are abusive. Abuse is evil, and complementarians must be self-critical about whether they are tolerating it.⁷⁹ On the other hand, the reason some women may feel like they need to recover is not that their male authorities are abusive. It could be that women are rebelliously chafing against the God-given authority of godly and unselfish husbands and pastors. Or it could be that their husbands and pastors are complementarian in name only—that is, the men affirm the biblical concept but do not actively practice it; instead, they are wimpy and passive. When men characteristically fail and disappoint the women they are supposed to be leading, women may become embittered toward biblical manhood and womanhood.

3. *Discern which ditch you are more prone to fall into.*

Or as my colleague Joe Rigney puts it, a helpful diagnostic question to ask yourself is “Which slope is most slippery for you?”⁸⁰ He explains,

When it comes to complementarianism, everyone acknowledges that biblical truth can be misused and abused. The truth that men are the head of their homes (Eph. 5:25) and that wives should submit to their husbands as is fitting in the Lord (Col. 3:18) can be twisted to justify domestic tyranny, oppression, and even abuse. The truth that “there is no male and female in Christ” (Gal. 3:28) can be used to deny the glorious and complementary differences between men and women and the goodness of male headship in proper contexts.

Given what you know of your heart, your background, and your context, which error are you more prone to? Rigney suggests,

As elders and church leaders attempt to steer between the two ditches, one (though not the only) way to diagnose our particular danger is to ask a simple question: when it comes to preaching and teaching my congregation, which truth am I eager to say out loud and clearly, and which truth am I reluctant to speak, or only speak with layers upon layers of qualification and nuance? Put another way, if you want to know your danger, ask which passage in the Bible you’re eager to preach and which one you’re reluctant to preach. Which one can you preach straight down the middle, and which one do you feel the need to tread carefully with? . . . When it comes to in-house complementarian debates, we can make the question more concrete. Ask yourself, Which passage would I rather preach on: “Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them?” (Col. 3:19) or “Wives, submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord” (Col. 3:18)? For my own part, in our present climate, I’m willing to bet that large numbers of complementarians would be eager to preach the first sermon, summoning men to love and sacrifice for their wives like Christ did. They would preach it clearly, straight down the middle. On the other hand, there would be some fear and trepidation about preaching the second one, and everything would be handled with massive amounts of nuance and qualifications. . . . In our egalitarian age, I can imagine significantly more churches that are eager to preach Christ-like headship, and tiptoe around Sarah-like submission.

*"Which slope is most
slippery for you?"*

⁷⁹See CBMW's "Statement on Abuse," 12 March 2018, <https://cbmw.org/about/statement-on-abuse/>. Cf. Chris Moles, *The Heart of Domestic Abuse: Gospel Solutions for Men Who Use Control and Violence in the Home* (Bemidji, MN: Focus, 2015). Albert Mohler warns complementarians of two dangerous blind spots: (1) equating complementarianism with "male superiority" and (2) "failing to correct abuses that come in the name of complementarianism." R. Albert Mohler Jr., "The State of Complementarianism," *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* 1.2 (2019): 99–100.

⁸⁰Joe Rigney, "A Simple Question for Complementarians," *The Gospel Coalition*, 27 December 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/simple-question-complementarians/>.

4. Love and celebrate how God has designed men and women.

We shouldn't be satisfied with dutifully going along with what God has revealed to us in his word even if it doesn't make sense to us. That's immature obedience. That's better than disobedience, but a mature obedience is ideal. A mature obedience understands the underlying reasons God gives for what he commands; it loves and praises God for how he brilliantly designed it all—including how he created and designed men and women.

Some complementarians think complementarianism is embarrassing. They'd rather not talk about it. They'd prefer not to emphasize or celebrate it. They hold to it reluctantly because that's what the Bible says even though it might not make sense. They believe it, but they don't love it. That's not how we should think about what God has revealed. We must not only believe whatever God reveals to be true; we should cherish it. It's not okay to say, "The Bible teaches that, but I don't like it." It's a bad sign if we want to ignore or apologize for what God has revealed in the Bible. If we have a problem understanding the nature and rationale of what God has revealed in his word, then the problem is with us—not with God and not with the truth he has revealed.⁸¹

We shouldn't reluctantly affirm biblical manhood and womanhood, nor should we follow it while thinking it seems arbitrary or even a bit illogical. We should *love* and *celebrate* biblical manhood and womanhood as good and wise and beautiful and fitting. It's how God himself designed men and women to flourish. Nobody needs to recover from it. In a culture that rejects God's design for men and women, many need to recover it. ✕

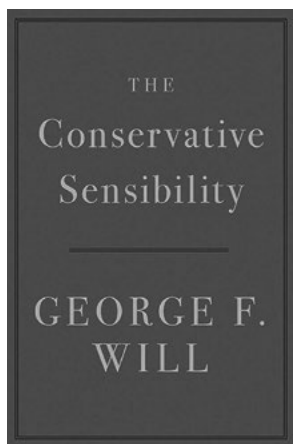
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REVIEW BY JEREMY J. LLOYD

The Conservative Sensibility



George F. Will. *The Conservative Sensibility*. New York: Hachette Books, 2019.

INTRODUCTION

Combine exceptional research, brilliant storytelling, unassailable logic, and a world-class, Pulitzer Prize winning author, and you have George Will's recent book *The Conservative Sensibility*. The purpose of Will's book, he writes, is "to suggest how to think about the enduring questions concerning the proper scope and actual competence of government" (xvii). The answers he gives to these questions are well worth considering as he provides a beautiful vision for the future of America that is achieved by retrieving her founding principles.

SUMMARY

Will begins with an explanation of the principles and beliefs of America's Founding Fathers and the government they created. He believes America and its founding principles are under a decades-old assault from a progressive agenda. As he details the rise of progressivism and liberal attacks on human nature, he demonstrates how the idea grew that human nature is not fixed but malleable. "The crux of modern radicalism," Will writes, "is that human nature has no constancy, that it is merely an unstable imprint of the fluctuating social atmosphere" (57). He points to the presidency of Woodrow Wilson as one of the primary means of the rise of progressivism and today's liberal philosophy. He marks Wilson's presidency as the beginning of institutional changes that had lasting consequences.

Will explains that the Founders separated the powers of the government into three branches (legislative, judicial, and executive) in order to prevent the kind of changes that have been brought about by progressivism. Regrettably, power grabs by each branch have resulted in a system that looks less and less like it was intended.

One of the basic tenets of the Declaration of Independence is respect for human dignity. This idea became the impetus behind America's foundational principles of freedom and liberty. Inequality, however, can limit a citizen's opportunity to enjoy these principles, and such limitations can begin from the moment a child is born. Many think that if everyone has the same schooling or money that they will have the same likelihood of success in life. However, the childhood home is one of the biggest indicators of how one will progress through life.

Instead of fixing these problems, the progressive vision of fighting poverty and inequality has given rise to the institutionalization of the welfare state. In what is one of the most shocking statistics in the entire book, Will writes, "Between 1960 and 2010, entitlements exploded from 28 percent to 67 percent of federal spending" (329). This extreme growth of the government has had detrimental effects on work ethic, the open marketplace, and the family. He cites Nicholas Eberstadt, who said that in 1960 the ratio of gainfully employed Americans to disabled workers was 134 to 1. By 2010 that was down to just 16 to 1 (330).

Both sides agree that education can help with these problems, but disagree on what this should look like. Will expresses his vision for the education system and states that it should be a way of "tak[ing] seriously the unending political task of recapturing the past through the cultivation of memories" (355). He remarks that our education system should be one that equips students with the "literacy, numeracy, and civic and historical information needed for remunerative work and responsible citizenship" (358). It is not possible for a good system of education to create excellence *ex nihilo*, but it has a responsibility to elevate it.

Once this can be achieved, America should not keep these political ideals inside its borders. This form of government exists because Americans believe that it best accords with freedom, liberty, and human flourishing. These principles should be the country's greatest export to the world. Will says, "The belief that American principles *should* be universal begets the belief that America's ambitious purpose in the world should be to shape the world in such a way that America will no longer have to have ambitious purposes" (449, emphasis original).

Will, an atheist, takes a bit of an excursus in chapter nine to explain that he is very thankful for the religions of the world as a way of giving a foundation to morality and of anchoring natural law. Nonetheless, he remains ultimately unpersuaded by these religions and the claims they present. In his view, it is logically consistent to be both an atheist and a conservative.

Will closes the book similarly to how he began, by expressing the importance of looking back to the foundations and the framework for government established by America's forefathers. According to Will, America has swerved from many of its founding principles through progressives who seek *progress*, to improve and be improving. To progressives, harkening to the past is going backward. In contrast to these progressive ideals, Will is concerned with the question, "Can we get back... to the premises with which we started?" (538) "A usable past," he argues, "will not be present, however, unless conservatives make it so. Their challenge is to make the Founders constantly consulted... Thoughtful Americans who revisit the great arguments of their nation's political tradition will be rewarded by a richer sense of their home" (536).

CRITICAL INTERACTION

The strongest aspect of the entire book is the way Will interacts with the Declaration of Independence and explains how it is the guiding philosophical document for America. His engagement with the Declaration in chapter four — the book's most important chapter — should be required reading for every civics class in America. Will provides some of the best lessons on the subject one will

find anywhere. According to Will, "The Declaration is not just chronologically prior to the Constitution, it is logically prior" (150). The Constitution is the codification of the Declaration into law. Its writing ushered in a period of history that declared government would no longer function from the top down. Since, as the founders thought, natural rights are the birthright of all men, government would be by the "consent of the governed." Will argues that the importance of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution is such that every political discussion is a distillation of them. Lawyers are, in essence, "America's practitioners of political philosophy" (157). He further argues that the single most important word in the Declaration is "secure" (23). As Will understands the founders' intentions, the government does not bestow rights on its citizens. Rather, rights pre-exist the government. While progressives want to expand government and make it the overseer of every aspect of life, this notion is contrary to the very ideals of the Declaration. According to the Declaration, freedom resides in pursuing liberty for oneself, not setting up the government to hand it out. America's founders did not throw off the shackles of a tyrannical government merely to set up another one.

Another key contribution is Will's discussion of the family, where he demonstrates how poverty and poor education are ruining generations of families in America. Some of the statistics he provides are devastatingly sad. Will argues that a healthy family is one of the strongest ways to ensure a child grows up to excel academically and vocationally. A study he cites claims that the primary indicator of a school's success is the quality of the family from which students come

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(316). This claim is based on what is called the 9/91 factor. Will explains, "Between birth and their nineteenth birthdays, American children spend 9 percent of their time in school, 91 percent elsewhere. The fate of American education is being shaped not by legislative acts but by the fact that, increasingly, 'elsewhere' is not an intact family" (316). The amount of verbal interaction a child receives, from the time of birth, is crucial for mental development. He says,

Children raised in poverty are apt to hear 600 words per hour. Working-class children hear 1,200, and children of professional-class parents hear 2,100. The issue is not the substance of the chatter...but the torrent of verbal stimuli as the child's brain is developing. By age three, children from poor homes have heard, on average, 30 million fewer words spoken at home than children in professional-class homes (317).

Doctors can determine the probability of a child flourishing based on reading the body language in children as young as nine-months-old. Sadly, “some babies expect to fail for the rest of their lives” (318). Children who are used to praise from adults in their lives will play with the blocks forcefully or throw them around and then look for someone to cheer for them. A baby that “expects to fail will have a more limited repertory of play, limited by the realization that no one will care. Poor children sense and acquire the helplessness of their parents — or, more likely, of a single parent” (318). He goes on to say that “*at least* 15 percent of IQ points are experientially rather than genetically based, and the preschool experiences of some children can cost them a significant portion of those points” (321, emphasis mine). These studies only affirm what Christians know is true from Scripture — that healthy families are monumentally important to the flourishing of society.

For Christians, these alarming studies should prompt thoughtful action on behalf of the family in our society. Pro-choice progressives sometimes chide pro-life advocates and say they are really only pro-birth because they often ignore these issues. Christians, however, believe that the family is the building block of society and know that as the family goes, so goes society. This is why Christians can affirm both that abortion is a vital pro-life policy issue and also that faithfulness to Christ requires a holistic approach to the welfare of all men, women, and children made in the image of God.

Will’s ninth chapter, “Welcoming Whirl: Conservatism Without Theism,” is a puzzling addition to this book. His brilliant


expression of the Declaration’s belief in natural rights given by “nature’s God” stands in stark contrast to his atheism. He asks, “Is a moral sense independent of religion constitutive of human nature?” (485) and then explains how cosmology and Darwinism can be helpful to conservatism. Will ultimately fails to explain in this chapter why mankind is entitled to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” for any ultimate reason. If there is no foundational, unchanging standard, then what moral basis is there to stop anyone from pursuing their own happiness at the expense of their neighbor? He says at the close of the chapter, “The nobility, humor, and pathos presented in [Shakespeare’s] plays and poems testify to his fervent belief that somehow the way we behave matters, even if — or perhaps it matters especially because — we live beneath a blank sky” (511). One would be hard pressed to find a flimsier defense of moral and political reasoning than “somehow...it matters.”

CONCLUSION

Will’s *The Conservative Sensibility* is an enjoyable, informative, and engaging book. Starting from the ground up, he explains the history of America, the core beliefs and guiding principles of its Founding Fathers, and then details what he believes has gone wrong in America and how to fix it. It is a call for conservatives to rise up and fight in order to *conserve* the political philosophy that has been handed down from prior generations. He says in the final chapter,

This book is, among other things, a summons to pessimism. What is needed now, and what is especially incumbent on conservatives to provide, is intelligent pessimism

that is more than a mere mood. It should be a mentality grounded in a philosophic tradition that has a distinguished pedigree, and that is validated by abundant historical evidence for this proposition: Nothing lasts (515).

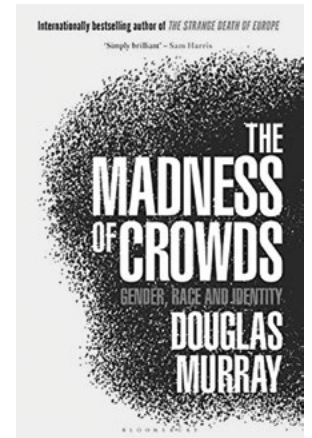
Indeed, nothing does. Life is short and Americans must indeed strive to make a greater country for the next generation, building on the foundation provided by its founders. The Christian reader knows, however, that it is most important not to get so attached to this country as to forget that “here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:14). 

"...it is most important not to get so attached to this country as to forget that 'here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come' (Heb. 13:14)."

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The Madness of Crowds: *Gender, Race, and Identity*

Douglas Murray, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race, and Identity*. London: Bloomsbury, 2019.



The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race, and Identity begins with a quote from G.K. Chesterton: “The special mark of the modern world is not that it is sceptical [sic], but that it is dogmatic without knowing it.” As epigraphs go, it’s a fine choice. Yet perhaps a better one would be this one: “A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed.” *The Madness of Crowds* faithfully and forcefully documents the chaos that reigns when an entire generation of elites embraces this inversion.

Douglas Murray dives headlong into the contemporary “social justice” orthodoxy that already seemingly owns the whole of Western higher education and much of our politics.

Though not a conservative — he’s an irreligious English journalist who also happens to be gay — Murray looks into progressive ideology in the areas of feminism, homosexuality, race, and transgenderism, and reports back a dogmatic orthodoxy punishing enough to make Nathaniel Hawthorne tremble. Murray’s curation of social justice culture’s alarming character is an extraordinarily valuable work of journalism, even if, unlike Mr. Chesterton, his secularist commitments keep him from connecting the most crucial dots.

Murray warns early on that the spectacles of outrage, cancellation, and ideological persecution that are now epidemic in Western life threaten not just manners but civilization itself. “We face not just a

future of ever-greater atomization, rage, and violence,” Murray writes in the introduction, “but a future in which the possibility of a backlash against all rights advances — including the good ones — grows more likely” (9). The “madness” Murray has in mind is that of a mob. According to Murray, the fuel powering the steamrolling machine of madness is identity. Once it is politically weaponized, identity becomes a powerful means to shut down truth-seeking and impose dogmatism.

One example is the conflation of what Murray terms “hardware” — innate, objective, biologically-determined facts about people — with “software,” i.e., social conditioning, preferences, and psychology. Calling hardware what is actually software empowers a multitude of intellectual dishonesties and political strong-arming.

As a gay man, Murray has no qualms with LGBT equality. But he does sharply criticize the social and political weaponization of homosexuality (“Gay”), as evidenced by the cynical way the gay left rejects any suggestion that experiences or upbringing may cultivate homoerotic feeling — even when such suggestions come from gays. Murray bemoans the way the contemporary gay rights movement reduces sexuality to sexual politics, and thus only values gay people who leverage their identity toward progressive ideology.

This is an important theme running throughout *The Madness of Crowds*. Identity politics, Murray observes, bottoms out in irony: the gradual erasure of personality and reduction of individuals



to their politics. Murray recounts how technology entrepreneur Peter Thiel, who is gay, was relentlessly attacked by LGBT activists for endorsing Donald Trump. Murray cites one journalist who asked, “When you abandon numerous aspects of queer identity, are you still LGBT?” (44). Had *The Madness of Crowds* gone to press a little bit later, Murray would almost certainly have cited similar attacks from progressives toward mayor Pete Buttigieg.

Failure to toe the ideological line is the unforgivable sin throughout contemporary liberalism. In “Race,” Murray observes the disorienting spectacle of progressives who question Clarence Thomas’s authentic blackness on account of his judicial opinions, but defend Rachel Dolezal from criticism over her (ethnically baseless) claim to be black. What’s the difference? Answer: politics. In the current climate of progressive social justice, membership in the right in-group only matters if it is accompanied with orthodox politics.

Murray also discusses how this plays out within contemporary feminism (“Women”), which, in his view, encourages females to see themselves as a permanent underclass of the patriarchy, while simultaneously denying that *any* inherent sexual differences exist between men and women. Murray draws on dozens of examples from media, business, and politics that illustrate the abandonment of nuance and evidence in favor of omnipotent social categories: oppressed and oppressor, victim and guilty, deserving and privileged.

As smoothly as this worldview might go down in left-wing media outlets and Ivy League classrooms, it alienates most ordinary, working-class people. Progressive ideology, Murray writes, has set itself in opposition to basic intuition and experience, a point that swells to a crescendo in the book’s concluding chapter on transgenderism. He summarizes the madness: “All the rage — including the wild, destructive misandry, the double-think, and the self-delusion — stem from this fact: that we are being not just asked, but expected, to radically alter

our lives and societies on the basis of claims that our instincts all tell us cannot possibly be true” (106). In other words, the spirit of the age is one doubtful about the truth, undoubtful about ourselves (as long as we ourselves are politically correct).

The Madness of Crowds is a unique work. Rather than advancing an idea or an argument, Murray’s strategy is to let the excesses of social justice culture — often outrageous offenses against common sense, humility, and neighborliness — review themselves. It’s an effective approach. After all, how does one agree or disagree with the plight of university professors, hounded out of their jobs and reputations by student activists who shouted them down with obscenity? What possible rebuttal is there to the absurd spectacle of a millionaire who describes middle- or even low-class citizens as “privileged” merely because of their color or gender? Murray has titled his book correctly; this is madness.

But that effective strategy leaves the book’s flaws and weaknesses apparent as well. The weakest chapter is the chapter on race, not because the progressive silliness on display is not actually silly, but because merely laughing or decrying it is a dead end for left and right alike. Murray fails to appreciate how the American history of chattel slavery, reconstruction, Jim Crow, and other injustices radically shape contemporary racial discourse.

Of course, such considerations are not the point of the book. Murray is single-mindedly focused on crowd madness, and this usually restricts his vision to elite media outlets. With such a limited purview, the book’s helpfulness is mostly relative. If readers want relief from the stultifying air

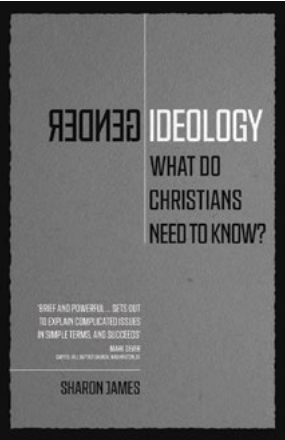
of PC culture, this is an excellent way of getting it. Yet in terms of understanding issues better, merely stoking aversion to journalistic groupthink may help perpetuate the kind of unthinking aversion to the out-group that Murray opposes.

Evangelicals will have much to appreciate about Murray’s work. Most of us will find the book self-recommending and friendly to our priors. But this means that it’s all the more important to be distinctly Christian in these conversations. Christians are not content merely to pop politically correct bubbles (though we often must). We are obligated to speak the truth in love — an obligation that secular critics of progressivism like Murray won’t necessarily share.

We are also obligated to offer a robust anthropology, one rooted in revealed truth and confirmed by the givenness of the natural world. The doctrine of original sin causes bipartisan offense, since it contradicts both neo-Marxist theories and regressive traditionalism. Evangelicals committed to the truthfulness of the whole gospel shouldn’t expect to feel totally at home among non-Christian critics of PC culture. Ours is an identity of strangers and aliens: a pan-ethnic, pro-man and pro-woman kingdom not of this world or any of this world’s tribes. We owe gratitude to Douglas Murray for sounding alarms where they need to sound. Let the madness of crowds be silenced by the “foolishness” that shames the wise and saves the lost. ✕

Samuel D. James is associate acquisitions editor at Crossway Books and writes at Letter & Liturgy.

Gender Ideology: What do Christians Need to Know?



Sharon James. *Gender Ideology: What do Christians Need to Know?* Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2019.

INTRODUCTION:

Sharon James observes, “We live in an age of unprecedented confusion about sexual identity” (14). Literature on gender studies and human sexuality is a slog for the uninitiated, yet those thinkers and their volumes are shifting the dialogue for an entire generation. James, who has a doctorate from the University of Wales and serves as a Social Policy Analyst for the Christian Institute, has written *Gender Ideology: What do Christians Need to Know?* “to explain in simple terms what is going on” so that Christians “will be better equipped to protect the next generation from believing lies that lead to lasting physical and emotional harm” (16).

SUMMARY:

After introducing her volume, James moves into a brief description of the global revolution regarding human sexuality (chapter 1). Various global and national organizations are pushing for comprehensive educational measures (in numerous Western countries) that reject

the connection between biological sex and gender, as well as heteronormativity (18–19), as mere social constructs. According to James, “Most adults instinctively know that the ‘binary’ division of humanity into male and female genders is an objective reality” (22); yet, laws and educational standards, which codify the rejection of that binary, are being imposed on entire societies.

Given the rejection of the “man/woman” binary, the fundamental question looms in the title of chapter 2, “Can we Really Change Sex?” Here, James addresses some basic definitions in the discussion and tackles some of the most important claims made by gender theorists. The most basic terms are sex and gender. Sex—referring “to the *biological category* of male or female” (*italics original*)—and gender—“from the Latin term for ‘kind’ or ‘set’” (24)—have traditionally been organically connected but are currently being rent asunder by modern gender theorists. Contra gender theory, the author clearly affirms, “It is impossible to ‘change sex’; you can only change appearance. Our birth sex cannot be changed” (34).

In chapter 3, James briefly lays out the fundamental tenets and significant issues of gender theory. One is the gender spectrum, which James incisively deconstructs as being contrary to reality. She demonstrates not only the fallacious premises but also the deceitful vocabulary employed in this discussion. She concludes with three points: gender theory is “a denial of basic biology” (50), “destroys the definition of men, women; mothers and fathers” (50), and “leads to a denial of history” (51). Next in chapter 4, James traces the genesis of gender theory, namely, to thinkers like Sigmund Freud and John Money, as well as the contemporary coalescence of “Identity Politics, Radical Feminism, and Queer Theory” (65–67). The result of this “partnership” has been the identification of sexual minorities as “the most victimised of the victim classes,” wherein they are granted special rights and privileges, despite a lack of scientific research (66–67).

In chapter 5, James lays the foundation of the Christian view of sex and gender by appealing to both natural and special

revelation. Gender binary is affirmed by creation itself, which “teaches us both the fundamental *distinction* and the necessary *complementarity* between men and women” (69; italics original). Procreation requires the union of man and woman. The Bible grounds the witness of nature in God’s creative and redemptive work. Contrary to Gnosticism, the Bible teaches that embodiment is good and that the union of man and woman in marriage is a reflection of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Gender ideology, on the other hand, “downplays the significance of our physical bodies and says that our subjective feelings are more important” (76). This rejection of nature is tantamount to a rejection of reason, and the church must stand firm in opposition to such activism; yet, Christians must learn to show respect and compassion to individuals who are personally suffering.

In contemporary society, childhood-onset dysphoria and rapid-onset dysphoria are becoming more prevalent as confusion continues to grow among our children (chapter 6). James identifies various factors increasing this confusion and shows how gender activists are using such confusion to unseat heteronormativity and normalize the alternative lifestyles of various sexual minority groups. These activists are using children as political pawns, and Christians must equip themselves to address this issue, which is how the author concludes her book (chapter 7). James demonstrates shrewdness and courageous truth-telling on the one hand as well as gospel-centered kindness on the other. Christians must stand up and respond to these challenges from a robust Christian worldview built upon the Word of God infused with the grace and mercy of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The wellbeing of a generation is at stake.

COMMENDATION:

We all remember the public transition of Bruce to Caitlyn Jenner, and we have since seen the significant shift in public dialogue regarding human sexuality. The sorts of questions that we now face are quite disorienting, not to mention the attendant fear of being labelled a bigot. Conviction conquers fear, and knowledge grows into conviction. James’s work serves to inform and orient its readers in this cultural moment through the explanation of terms and concepts employed by gender theory, the presentation of gender theory’s impact on contemporary legal and educational standards, and the biblical response to these issues. *Gender Ideology* is a clear and accessible introduction to gender theory, which is a notoriously jargon-laden field.

Though the author’s focus is primarily tied to care for children, the book is useful for anyone who participates in contemporary culture. The author is able to distill difficult concepts and present them in an interesting and readable way. The brevity of *Gender Ideology* makes it accessible to high schoolers as well as parents—anyone who is concerned for the wellbeing of the next generation. It serves as an excellent introduction to the field for those looking for one book on the topic, but it also serves as a springboard into further engagement.

In a day and age when truth-telling is often opposed to grace and kindness, the Christian response to issues like gender theory often lacks balance. Christians seem to embrace either bitter vitriol in fervency for the truth or thoughtless passivity in showing charity to those

*Conviction conquers fear,
and knowledge grows
into conviction.*

who need the gospel. James is refreshing in her proportionality. She perceptively identifies destructive ideologies and forcefully challenges their premises. Engagement with activists requires keen argumentation as we champion the truth. Yet, James encourages compassion, kindness, and love as we seek to minister to those who have been caught up in the confusion resulting from our disorienting culture. *Gender Ideology* will fuel a passion for the truth that is mingled with sorrow for the sin-decimated state of humanity. Such a balance ought to be a hallmark of the Christian witness in the world.

CONCLUSION:

Gender Ideology by Sharon James is a timely book and is worthy of consideration. Readers will find that James is able to weave the testimonies of those affected by gender theory, technical explanation, critical engagement, and positive application together into an educated, coherent, and passionate plea for the protection of children. ✕

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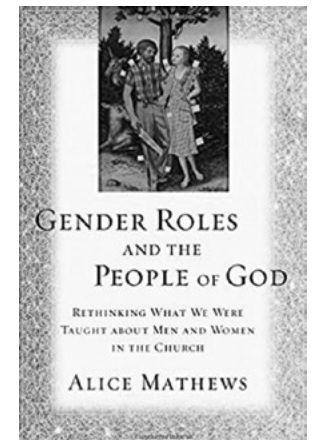
Gender Roles and the People of God: Rethinking What We Were Taught About Men and Women in the Church

In *Gender Roles and the People of God*, Mathews considers modern evangelicalism's "third rail" issue—the role of women in the church. Her aim is to challenge traditional complementarian theology and advocate for an egalitarian reading of Scripture. Based on teaching notes that developed over decades as a professor at Gordon-Conwell, Mathews's book surveys the relevant texts on women in the history of redemption and in the church, the theological underpinnings of complementarian theology, as well as how the church's perception of women has changed throughout its history — often in ways that oppress or demean women.

MISREPRESENTING COMPLEMENTARIANISM

While Mathews's work has some significant problems, I do want to express appreciation for her clear commitment to the authority of Scripture (18) and I would commend much of what she says about hermeneutics in her book's introductory chapter. We may not share the same convictions on gender or church polity, but clearly Mathews attempts to uncover the Bible's teaching on gender, which is a noble aspiration.

Nevertheless, Mathews seems unwilling to extend this same charity to those on the other side of this debate. Her book continues a troubling pattern among many recent egalitarian books and articles which either accuse complementarians of the worst types of sinister intent or at least insinuate complementarians are largely responsible for any oppression or abuse women have suffered.



Alice Mathews. *Gender Roles and the People of God: Rethinking What We Were Taught about Men and Women in the Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017.

For instance, Mathews repeatedly juxtaposes complementarian theology with anti-abolitionists who supported slavery. She writes, “Whenever our interpretation leads to injustice, oppression, or structural violence, then the very heart of the Bible is repudiated. Such views are anti-biblical, no matter what texts they cite” (30). In fact, at the end of the book she essentially designates complementarianism as a tool of Satan: “If gender-based hierarchy is allowed to continue destroying lives and disrupting God’s work of redeeming a broken world, it plays into Satan’s hand. . . . We cannot shrug off church history as if the millions of women’s blighted lives didn’t matter” (238). This type of rhetoric unfairly characterizes complementarianism. Complementarians have always condemned abuse, and first-generation complementarians labeled themselves “complementarian” to distinguish their convictions from traditional patriarchy.

Furthermore, Mathews misrepresents complementarian theology. She repeatedly refers to complementarianism as “gender-based hierarchy” — a name complementarians would not ascribe to themselves. She also asserts that the complementarian interpretation of Genesis 2:20 (Eve made as Adam’s “helper”) relegates women to a role of unintelligent, passive servitude — “like a plumber’s assistant handing the man the right wrench” (50). Anyone familiar with complementarian literature will find her representation of complementarian readings of Genesis 1–3 woefully reductionistic.

AFFIRMING WHAT NO ONE DENIES

One of the most helpful parts of Mathews’s book is her survey of the meaningful role women have played in the history of redemption and in the early church. What is baffling, however, is her assumption that any complementarian would be surprised, disconcerted, or threatened by these data. Juxtaposing complementarian convictions with her survey of women in redemptive history, she writes “how are we to understand what looks like a clear contradiction? Some Christians choose to ignore one set of data and accept only the other set. Others may find this seeming contradiction enough to shatter their confidence in the Bible” (90). But the significant role women play in the history of redemption does not overturn complementarian theology, let alone confidence in Scripture. After all, complementarians have produced articles highlighting these same themes.

The problem with Mathews’s conclusion from her survey is that she assumes too much. Identifying women in the early church who labored for the gospel in particularly noteworthy ways does not actually say anything about whether these women served as elders or preached in the corporate assembly. Complementarians affirm that women are essential and indispensable in the mission of the church — we witness this fact in our own local churches week by week. Yes, many women in the New Testament were engaged in meaningful, significant, and even notable ministries, but none of those features undermine complementarian principles or a commitment to male-only eldership.

IS NEW TESTAMENT ECCLESIOLOGY NORMATIVE?

Behind these misguided assumptions is a more fundamental flaw with Mathews’s reasoning. She asserts that the New Testament does not present a consistent church polity. Instead, she argues that “in Paul’s letters, we find diversity in how churches were led. It is not ‘one size fits all’ — with gender-based hierarchical structure in place that is permanent and applies to all people in all places at all times” (157). Instead, Mathews argues that ministry was restricted to those “who have a high level of maturity and spiritual discernment” in times of church crisis (157). Thus, Paul restricted ministry in Ephesus to a select few (“the elders”) because of the threat of false teaching — particularly teaching that was spreading among women.

I’ll not repeat here the many arguments from Baptists, Presbyterians, and other Protestant denominations demonstrating that New Testament polity is consistent and prescriptive. Even still, Mathews’s case is simply unconvincing. She assumes Paul’s admonitions to congregations necessarily preclude any unique role for elders (152). Most of her arguments rely on historical reconstructions of controversies in these early churches — reconstructions which force biblical texts to say more than they actually affirm. Finally, her conclusions do not cohere with the facts of the New

Testament. She asserts that Paul encouraged churches that had lost their way to restrict ministry to “carefully screened individuals” (157) — hence the need for elders at the church at Ephesus. Are we really to assume that the church at Ephesus was in more turmoil than the church in Corinth? Yet, Paul spent far more time admonishing the congregation in Corinth than its leaders (1 Cor 5:4; 12:1–26). By Mathews’s reasoning, shouldn’t he have spent more time limiting congregational participation in ministry in the Corinthian church?

IS THERE A PLACE FOR AUTHORITY?

Gender Roles and the People of God has a number of additional significant problems. Mathews’s treatment of the so-called complementarian “clobber texts” (1 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor. 14:34–35) largely repeats traditional egalitarian explanations of these texts. Complementarian scholars have already responded to these arguments in a number of resources.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of Mathews’s book is her dismissive attitude toward the very notion of authority in the church and the home. She writes, “in short, sin requires some form of hierarchy” (46); “Jesus had no patience for establishing hierarchies among his followers” (70); “Why ask who’s in charge? Does someone have to be in charge? Why not let God be in charge as we humbly work together for his kingdom?” (235).

¹Though I would register some disagreement with her presentation of some of the women in this survey, for instance, her argument that Junia was an apostle in the early church.

²See James M. Hamilton, Jr., “A Biblical Theology of Motherhood,” in *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 2.2 (2012): 6–13; Jonathan Leeman, “Essential and Indispensable: Women and the Mission of the Church,” in *9Marks Journal* (December 2019), 29–34. See also The Village Church’s, “The Role of Women at the Village Church,” found at https://d1nwfrzxhi18dp.cloudfront.net/uploads/resource_library/attachment/file/937/Institute_-_2017_-_The_Role_of_Women_at_The_Village_Church-Long-Paper.pdf.

³See for instance Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

Scripture never speaks about authority so dismissively. Yes, authority can be abused, and abusing authority is a heinous sin — one of the most disturbing ways we distort the image of God. But authority that mirrors God's own gracious and life-giving authority both glorifies God and blesses those under it. Consider David's words in 2 Samuel 23:3–4:

The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me: When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God, he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.

Ultimately, even egalitarians should find Mathews's caricature of complementarian theology frustrating. Complementarians will not identify anything they believe in Mathews's description of "gender-based hierarchy." Whatever Mathews may be arguing against, it is not complementarianism. ✕

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REVIEWED BY SHARON JAMES

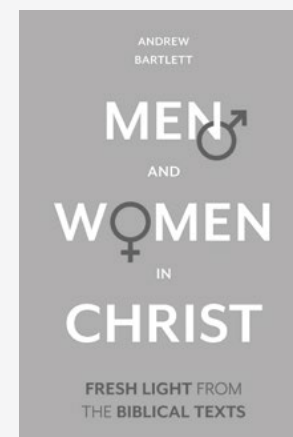
Fresh Light or Less Light?

'MEN AND WOMEN IN CHRIST: FRESH LIGHT FROM THE BIBLICAL TEXTS'

INTRODUCTION

For the last forty years, the evangelical world has been divided on the issue of women in ministry. Andrew Bartlett laments this 'needless schism' (1), and aims to bridge the divide with a "fresh perspective" that will "prove to be a blessing to the warring houses and bring them closer together" (15).¹ He has worked as both a barrister and advocate (arguing **for** one side), and as a judge and international arbitrator (judging dispassionately **between** two sides). He has applied the latter approach to this controversy:

Someone new to my church asked me for recommendations for things to read on each side of the debate. Her reaction to what I sent her was: 'But they are so partisan — isn't there something more balanced which I could read?' So I decided to have a go at writing something which would help her, and others like her. As I am not in church leadership, or in a seminary with a particular ethos, I was not committed to supporting a particular viewpoint. I was free to try to be impartial and see where I ended up.²



Andrew Bartlett. *Men and Women in Christ: Fresh Light from the Biblical Texts*. London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2019.

¹This comment is made in reference to the chapters on 1 Timothy 2, but the author's desire to bring the different sides together is evident throughout.

²"Looking for Fresh Light on Men and Women," A guest post by Andrew Bartlett, <https://margmowczko.com/andrew-bartlett-men-and-women-in-christ/> (accessed 22 January 2020).

Bartlett set out to investigate the biblical evidence, engaging along the way with a selection of the (considerable body) of contemporary literature on the complementarian/egalitarian debate. He focused on the work of Wayne Grudem (representing complementarianism) and Phil Payne (representing egalitarianism). He commenced the project “from a position of uncertainty” (15), *vis a vis* his conclusions, although he seemed confident that with his legal training and experience in adjudication he would be able to move this intra-evangelical division towards resolution. The major arguments will be presented in the author’s own words, before we turn to a critical evaluation.

SUMMARY

The introductory chapter summarises Bartlett’s evaluation of the current evangelical “state of play” regarding the biblical teaching about men and women:

The **traditional interpretation of the Bible**, to the effect that **women are innately inferior to men**, has rightly been rejected as being based more on **patriarchal culture** than on the actual text. Both egalitarians and complementarians now regard women and men as inherently equal and now affirm that women may be leaders in wider society. But complementarians insist on male leadership in the church and in marriage (16, emphasis mine).

He then outlines the interpretative principles he will adopt:

Faithful interpretation of the Bible gives Scripture priority over tradition, pays attention to culture, goes back to the source language in context, looks for coherence and takes a Christ-centred canonical approach; and it does this with spiritual openness and practical wisdom (16).³

Bartlett deals, firstly, with the question of male leadership in marriage (chapters 2-6). Present day complementarians do not argue for “female inferiority,” so, Bartlett concludes, “they rely on the detailed contents of particular texts” (Eph. 5:22–33; Col. 3:18–19; 1 Peter 3:1–7; 1 Cor. 11:3) and “a hierarchical reading of Genesis 2–3”

(17). He criticises their relative neglect of 1 Corinthians 7 (despite it containing the longest discussion of marriage in the New Testament). He therefore begins with an examination of this chapter, arguing:

According to Paul in verses 3–5, husband and wife have equal authority . . . [and as far as can be determined from the rest of the chapter] . . . Paul envisages complete equality of personal relations between men and women. **If Paul believed in a hierarchical, unilateral authority of husband over wife, it appears inexplicable that he wrote these words** (29–30, emphasis mine).

The next chapter examines Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5:

Does Paul teach in these letters that marriage is a **hierarchical relationship in which the husband is in a position of unilateral authority over the wife?** . . . Is the wife’s submission a one-way submission to a higher authority or does Paul envisage mutual submission of husbands and wives as in 1 Corinthians 7:3–5? Does Paul teach a complementarian view of marriage in which husbands and wives have differentiated responsibilities, or is his view fully egalitarian with no such distinction (31–32, emphasis mine)?

Bartlett concludes that the Colossians passage alone does not resolve these questions, so he offers a further chapter on Ephesians 5. He argues that the “head” metaphor refers to Christ as Saviour rather than Christ as Lord (67). Husbands are not called to rule their wives. There should be mutual submission between husbands and wives (and joint leadership in the home), but there *is* a measure of asymmetry in the relationship. Husbands are to lead in terms of willing self-sacrifice; wives are called to submit to their husbands, in order to imitate the humility of Christ.

Chapter 5 examines Genesis 1–3. Bartlett concludes that there is no explicit support here for an ongoing principle of male leadership or authority, and that complementarian arguments depend on inference. God created male and female as differentiated beings (Gen. 2), but this

³These principles further developed in appendix 1.

differentiation is not explicitly defined. The woman is to be the man's "powerful ally." The only explicit statement in the Bible about the "rule" of man over woman is in Genesis 3:16 (judgement as a consequence of the fall). New Testament teaching that Adam was the representative head of the human race (Bartlett maintains) does not infer "rule" or "authority" any more than a representative ambassador has governing "authority." (Even if some of the complementarian inferences from Genesis 1–3 were correct, he argues, redemption carries the believer forward into new creation, not backwards to life before the fall). A final section briefly looks at Old Testament examples of female leaders (such as Deborah), and prophets (such as Huldah). The final chapter on marriage examines 1 Peter 3, finding there a call to mutual submission, with no mandate for the husband to exercise authority over his wife.

Bartlett concludes that he cannot fully accept the egalitarian position. There *is* asymmetry in the husband-wife relationship, mirroring the non-reversible relationship of Christ and the church. He cannot accept the complementarian position either, as this relationship is not one of "unilateral authority" (his phrase), rather the husband's calling is to sacrificial service.

Bartlett turns, secondly, to the question of how men and women relate in the church (chapters 7–15). Beginning with 1 Corinthians 11:3–16,⁴ he argues that *kephale* here has to do with "sources." Men and women are interdependent, but in all they do they should honour God, who is the source of creation and redemption. When engaged in prayer and prophecy, neither men nor women should present themselves in a way that dishonours God's creation purpose (man-woman marriage).

Paul says nothing in this chapter about male authority over women. Nor does he say anything about reserving some governing and teaching roles within the church to men (159).

Turning to 1 Corinthians 14. Bartlett argues that verses 34 and 35 are "in severe conflict with the surrounding context" (179). He concludes that they probably are not an authentic part of the text (204).

Finally, considering 1 Timothy 2, Bartlett argues that the prohibition of verse 12 has a strictly local application. Paul has nowhere rescinded the permission given to female prophecy in 1 Corinthians 11. In context, this chapter is not focussed on the public assembly of the church.

First Timothy 2 does not justify a general ban on teaching by women in the church, or on the exercise of authority by women in the church (286).

Rather, Bartlett argues that Paul is saying:

I am not permitting a woman false teacher with expensive and immodest dress, lacking decency and self-control, to teach and overpower a man: she is to be quiet and reverent and learn how to behave in accordance with the truth, in full submission to God (285).

Summing up this section: are women prohibited from leadership positions in the church? "No!" concludes Bartlett. Men and women are equally united with Christ. Qualifications for ministry are gift-based not gender-based (310, Rom.12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–30; Eph. 4:11–13; 1 Peter 4:10–11). Even if Paul *did* consider that Genesis 2 included a creation principle of male leadership, then it would be inconsistent to apply that only in family and church (as, he claims, most complementarians do). It would have to apply across the whole of society.

A final chapter deals with broader themes: the paradox of equality and humility; creation and new creation; what it means to be male or female; our expectations of Scripture; the importance of unity, and obstacles to that unity.

⁴Bartlett argues that Paul's subject matter is the *hairstyles* worn by those who pray and prophesy during assembled worship (not veils or other external head coverings).

Summing up, Bartlett writes:

After it became clear that the **traditional view of women's innate inferiority** was out of step with Scripture, there began a reformation in the Christian understanding of what the Bible teaches about men and women. New interpretations have been advanced . . . Complementarian interpretations have not taken the reformation far enough, because they still retain unjustified restrictions on women's ministry in the church, and some still depict marriage as a hierarchical relationship. Egalitarian interpretations of Christian marriage seem to have taken the reformation too far, since they deny any definite differentiation of responsibilities of husband and wife beyond the biological (338, emphasis mine).

"Bartlett selects his starting point, a passage focusing on mutuality, and effectively filters the rest of the Scriptures addressed through that lens."

CRITICAL INTERACTION

Bartlett's motivation is worthy. It is a beautiful thing when Christians enjoy unity. Bartlett has worked diligently to provide background information about the context of some of the New Testament writings (e.g. 1 Tim. 3 and 5). His effort to investigate the meaning of individual texts (e.g. 1 Cor. 11) is commendable. We should humbly rejoice that when God's Word is carefully studied, fresh light may shine. Until Christ's return, no generation of God's people can claim infallible certainty about our interpretation of Scripture. The book rightly highlights some instances where Bible translation has been distorted by cultural assumptions about women.

Despite the author's worthy intentions and hard work, however, I believe that this book is fundamentally flawed. Bartlett selects his starting point, a passage focusing on mutuality (1 Cor. 7:3–5), and effectively filters the rest of the Scriptures addressed through that lens. No surprise then that he judges 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 to be inauthentic (despite the fact that it is found in all the ancient manuscripts, albeit in two variant positions in the different MSS).

The rest of this article will consider three methodological fault-lines running through the book which undermine the credibility of Bartlett's individual exegetical conclusions:

1. *The Illusion of Neutrality*
2. *Failure to use an Overarching Framework of Interpretation*
3. *Little Sensitivity to Historical Perspective*

"Many today
elevate
individual
experience
over Scripture."

1. *The Illusion of Neutrality*

Andrew Bartlett believed that with his professional training as an international arbitrator, his undoubted powers of analysis, and sheer hard work on the text, he could break through this stubborn dispute. Many today elevate individual *experience* over Scripture. Bartlett placed confidence in *reason*: his neutral standpoint, his legal approach of lining up the texts, weighing up the various interpretations, and coming to a logical conclusion.

He argues that pre-twentieth century biblical interpretation was tainted by "patriarchal culture." Only now, free from those preconceptions, can we go back to the "naked text" and see what the authors intended in their own context. He argues:

. . . cultural ideas and traditions in Bible translation have had powerful impacts upon verses bearing on a woman's place, and therefore require special attention to guard against them (392).

But is Bartlett really so impartial? His wholesale rejection of the pre-twentieth century tradition is shaped by the assumptions of gender feminism and identity politics. It would seem, then, that he is blind to his own blind spots. His use of vocabulary ("patriarchal," "inferior," "unilateral") reveals his presuppositions: equality must mean sameness, difference of roles means ontological inferiority of status, authority must be coerced. In the quotations above, I used bold font to highlight key words recurring through the book. What does his use of terminology reveal?

(i) The claim that Christians until the twentieth century assumed the "*inferiority*" of women (e.g. 4, 7, 8, 10, 14, 16, 17, 22) ignores the distinction between function and ontology. Respect for the inherent dignity of the human individual is based on the biblical teaching that human-kind, male and female, is created in the image of God. Ontological equality exists with variations in role. Until relatively recently it was accepted that the word "inferior" could be used of people (not just women!) *with respect to variations in degree or status*.⁵ The implication that the ontological equality of women *only* began to be respected

in the twentieth century buys into the radical feminist equation of "equality" with "equal outcomes." It borders on slander toward the testimony of the body of Christ through the past two millennia, and, more broadly, is a caricature of history.⁶

(ii) What about the term "*patriarchy*"? Throughout his book, Bartlett uses "patriarchy" (or "patriarchal") as a smear word without defining it (cf. 4, 8, 11, 12, 14, 16, 24, 26, 27, 48, 54, 111, 195, 386, 392). He demonstrates no awareness that the concept of "patriarchy" was framed by those who aimed for the overthrow of the oppressive system of heteronormativity.⁷ Perhaps we need a quick reminder of the provenance of the current demonisation of patriarchy.

A brilliant, but deeply troubled young American graduate student decided in 1970 that she had discovered that the real problem for women through the ages was *patriarchy* (from the Greek words *pater* for father, and *arche* for rule). In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millet used the term to describe societies where men rule over women. She argued that the *means* by which men rule is the traditional, heterosexual, married family. She rallied women to resist patriarchy, *aka* the heterosexual family. Radical feminists viewed Christianity as a dangerous male cultural projection, a myth constructed in order to legitimize a patriarchal world; for they recognised that the Bible is stubbornly "patriarchal." Adam is the leader of the human race. Abraham is chosen to be the father of the faithful. The line of descent running from Abraham to the Messiah is reckoned through the males. If reckoning descent through the male line is considered unjust and discriminatory, then God is unjust and discriminatory. And radical feminists demanded the rewriting of history (better, "her-story") to take account of the "fact" that throughout, women had been "victims of patriarchy."

⁵"The past is a foreign country." For a basic text book on the worldview that assumed order and hierarchy, see EMW Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (Penguin, 1943).

⁶Sharon James, *God's Design for Women in an Age of Gender Confusion* (Evangelical Press, 2019), chapter 1.

⁷James, *God's Design for Women in an Age of Gender Confusion*, 39–42, 61–63.

⁸Russell Moore, "After Patriarchy, What? Why Egalitarians are Winning the Gender Debate" *JETS*, 49/3, (September 2006), 598–76.

If you control language, you control the debate. Most Christians today are embarrassed by the term “patriarchy.” But we would do well to remember that all fatherhood in heaven and on earth ultimately derives its name from God (Eph. 3:14–15). The biblical picture of God as Father is tender, compassionate, faithful, and strong. He adopts wayward children, and is bound by covenant to care for them despite their rebellion (Ps. 103:13–14; Hos. 11:3). The gods of the surrounding nations were cruel and unpredictable, like irresponsible men who beget a child and walk away. The covenant keeping God of Israel does not abandon his children. Men made in his image are not intended to do so either.⁸ The marriage union means that if children are born, the father is there for them. What is known as “patriarchy” actually binds men into family units. The sexual “freedom” demanded by radical feminists means that men now expect sexual satisfaction without taking responsibility for their children.

Yes, family life has been spoiled and corrupted by sin. But **biblical** patriarchy mirrors the faithful covenant love of God Himself.⁹

Far from being neutral, Bartlett brings to his task the current assumption that “patriarchy” is the enemy. But the war on “patriarchy” has been a war against the God-ordained natural family, and a war against biblical Christianity.

(iii) What about “**unilateral authority**”? When the question of whether husbands have **authority** is raised, “**unilateral**” is invariably added (10, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 38, 44, 45, 47, 58, 59, 61, 67, 70, 85, 86, 102, 103, 114, 292, 293, 339, 341, 346). Bartlett gives his working definition: “the authority is one-way only, the husband being in a superior position,” as opposed to “mutual submission” (x). But the phrase “unilateral authority” is not neutral. It carries the negative connotation of “involuntary.” One dictionary definition:

A unilateral decision or action is taken by only one of the groups, organizations, or countries that are involved in a particular situation, without the agreement of the others.¹⁰

Throughout, Bartlett alludes to the authority of husbands as “unilateral authority,” but this is emotive. He never alludes to God or Christ as having “unilateral authority.” God’s design for marriage is that it be free, not forced. I freely and gladly agree to submit to my husband — just as true conversion is free not forced.¹¹ The church freely and gladly submits to Christ. Earthly patterns of submission are never absolute; Jesus is Lord. But Bartlett seems to have no awareness, for example, of Abraham Kuyper’s careful teaching on sphere sovereignty and the way that the kingship of Christ places limits on **all** earthly authority.

Bartlett denies that Ephesians 5 teaches that husbands should “rule over their wives” (54). He sets up a choice between “voluntary and mutual submission” or “compulsory, as in a one-way hierarchy” (99). This is the logical fallacy of the excluded middle.¹² He cites Wayne Grudem as advocating one-way authority for husbands (32). But twenty years ago, Wayne Grudem gave up his significant role at Trinity College, Deerfield, to move to a more obscure situation for the sake of his beloved wife’s health. She urged him to stay at Trinity; he insisted on moving for her sake. Their testimony is a shining example of Ephesians 5 in practice.¹³ The biblical pattern of husbandly leadership is that authority is entrusted to him by God for the purpose of taking responsibility for the safety and well-being of his family.

⁹James, *God’s Design for Women in an Age of Gender Confusion*, 58–61.

¹⁰<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/unilateral> (accessed 1 February, 2020).

¹¹I am not questioning the truth of God’s irresistible grace, but making the point that people should not be coerced into conversion by fellow human beings.

¹²Certainly some have presented a “chain of command” model of marriage that is a parody of Ephesians 5, but over the past forty years complementarians have rejected that extreme.

¹³Wayne Grudem, “Upon Leaving: Thoughts on Marriage and Ministry,” *Trinity*, Trinity International University, Summer 2001, <http://www.waynegrudem.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Upon-Leaving-Thoughts-on-Marriage-Ministry1.pdf> (accessed 1 February, 2020).

2. Refusal to use an Overarching Framework of Interpretation

Approaching the task of reconciling opposing factions as a neutral arbitrator, Bartlett lays out two viewpoints and then sets about assembling the various pieces of evidence. Fundamental to his forensic and objective approach is his refusal to start with an overarching framework. He began with the parts, with no grand plan, and no conclusion in mind. He was willing to go where the evidence might lead. His determination to begin the task with a “blank slate” reflects the demand of many evangelicals today that we should confine our attention to “the bare biblical text.”

Bartlett professes to respect the “whole canon” approach to hermeneutics. But the assumption that we can go back and interpret individual texts free from an overarching framework buys into the post-Enlightenment assumptions of biblical criticism.¹⁴ In practice, it means rejecting the understanding that because the Holy Spirit is the author of the *whole* biblical text, understanding of the parts *has* to be controlled by an accurate understanding of the whole. This requires the aid of systematic theology, which stands on the shoulders of (and respects) the historic orthodox stream of Trinitarian theology. Failing to respect this “great tradition” demonstrates dangerous hubris.

The current evangelical preoccupation with “bare biblicism” can, in practice, be used to justify any heresy to be found in church history.¹⁵ And all too often it reflects an arrogant (or lazy) reluctance to learn from the past. The (ironic) “thought experiment” put forward by Bartlett at the end of the book (366–367) is itself a near-perfect example of the folly of approaching the “bare text” without the restraint of the disciplines of systematic and biblical theology.

As explained above, Bartlett justifies his “blank slate” approach by suggesting that all pre-modern interpretations were vitiated with the assumption of female inferiority. But rejecting an overall framework, and faced with a heap of evidence, **Bartlett will choose himself what evidence to lead with, and how to frame the argument.** The project is, therefore, driven forward by his own reason. He is confident of his own impartiality. But that confidence is revealed as misplaced when we look both at the **order** in which he arranges his texts, and his overall **method**.



The order of texts selected: Rather than beginning with creation, Bartlett begins with 1 Corinthians 7 and the teaching on mutuality within marriage. He then filters his understanding of other texts through that grid.

The method: Bartlett presupposes that there are **two neatly divided areas of debate**: the role of husbands/wives in marriage, and the question of women’s ministry in the church, which can be separately examined in the light of a few key texts. He also presupposes that the role of women in wider society is **another discrete topic** that has, in practice, been “decided” given that neither complementarians nor egalitarians argue for clear biblical prohibitions in this area.

Bartlett assumes too much of a dichotomy between family and church. The “big picture” starting point would point to the fact that if there is significance in the man/woman distinction in the family, there is cross-over relevance to the church family as well. While three important chapters of his book deal with 1 Timothy, he fails to engage with the central point that Timothy is being told how to organise and shepherd “**God’s household**” (1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 2:20–12). Church families relate as father/mother/brother/sister, and there are parallels to the natural family in terms of order and responsibility.

¹⁴His method, beginning with the disparate pieces rather than the whole, represents a departure from what Craig Carter describes as the “Great Tradition.” Craig Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Baker Academic, 2018).

¹⁵G. Shearer, “The Acid of Biblicism,” <https://gjshearer.wordpress.com/2020/01/30/the-acid-of-biblicism/> (accessed 3 February 2020)

If we begin with the “big picture” we know that the original creation of the man and woman was designed as a signpost to the eternal glory of Christ’s self-giving love for his bride, the church. Manhood and womanhood both mirror deeper realities within God himself. We see a glorious pattern of equal dignity, significant difference, and a divinely ordained synergy when the two work together (yes in marriage, but also the church and community) that is fruitful in blessing future generations and glorifying God.¹⁶ There are implications for family *and* church *and* community. These areas cannot be clinically separated.

"There are implications for family and church and community. These areas cannot be clinically separated."

The fact that complementarians don’t demand “prohibitions” to apply in society is testimony to the reality that we believe that men and women are providentially equipped with varying capacities (seen not least in the fact that men throughout history have gone to war and died in their millions to protect their families). Let men and women freely follow their providential callings! We can welcome equal opportunities in education and employment (and Christians through history have been at the forefront of pushing for female education). We should encourage the differing gifts and aptitudes of all our children wherever those lead (our daughter is a mechanical engineer). But the reality is that Europe-wide, 80% of women want to put family ahead of career.¹⁷ That’s not a “problem” to be ruthlessly eliminated by social engineering (though Western governments are doing their best to push women out of the home). It reflects God’s design.

Bartlett’s **method** is to treat the “problem” of disagreement over men and women as “two discrete issues” to be decided by several discrete texts, and **he then presumes to say that this method is used by others!** Present day complementarians, he tells us, do not argue for “female inferiority,” so:

... they rely on the detailed contents of particular texts ... Ephesians 5:22–33 (with the parallel passage in Col. 3:18–19) and Peter’s exposition in 1 Peter 3:1–7. These are buttressed by 1 Corinthians 11:3 and a hierarchical reading of Genesis 2–3 (17).

No. The reality is that by starting with Genesis as the introduction to a “whole Bible” overview of the “big picture” of God ordained complementarity, complementarians then interpret particular texts within the controlling framework of systematic and biblical theology (making them less likely to be swayed by their own cultural presuppositions).

The Project of Deconstruction

Refusing to start with, or submit to, the “big picture” is symptomatic of the twentieth century project of deconstruction, or rejection of metanarratives.¹⁸ The Bible is a metanarrative *par excellence*, and the complementarity of men and women is a golden theme running throughout. The biblical story of God’s redemption is “bookended” by marriage. The original man-woman marriage in the garden was eternally designed to point forward to the cosmic Christ-church marriage in the book of Revelation. At the heart of the Bible we find the Song of Songs, the glorious portrayal of Christ’s love for the church as mirrored in the love of husband and wife.¹⁹ The big picture of the Bible portrays the glory of the incarnate God as both *Saviour and Lord*. In the analysis of Ephesians 5, Bartlett drives a wedge between the two (cf. 67). The Bible holds them together.

It is only within that overarching framework that we can properly understand the glory of God’s design for men and women. God, the author of special revelation (the Word), and of general revelation (creation), has placed complementarity patterns throughout nature.²⁰ Patterns of order and submission run through the warp and woof of the cosmos and mirror deeper realities within the Triune God himself.²¹

¹⁶Pope Jean Paul II, *The Theology of The Body*.

¹⁷Catherine Hakim, *Work-Lifestyle choices in the 21st Century: Preference Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁸Melvin Tinker, *That Hideous Strength: How the West Was Lost* (Evangelical Press, 2018).

¹⁹William McLean, *Royal Company: A Devotional on the Song of Solomon* (Christian Focus, 2012). The preface provides an historical overview of the interpretation of the Song.

²⁰G.R. McDermott, *Everyday Glory: The Revelation of God in All of Reality* (Baker, 2018), chapter 8.

²¹For a treatment of inter-Trinitarian relations, see Benedict Bird, “John Owen and the Question of the Eternal Submission of the Son within the Ontological Trinity,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, 80 (2018), 299–334.

“The art of imperious ignorance”

Bartlett concludes that it is illegitimate to come to either a complementarian or egalitarian position. He rules that both positions are flawed. He concludes that, *contra* the egalitarians, there *is* an asymmetry in the husband/wife relationship, in that the husband should be willing to sacrifice himself for his wife (mirroring Christ’s sacrifice for the church). He also concludes that, *contra* the complementarians, the husband should decline to “exercise ruling authority over his wife” and “a woman may do everything [in the church] that a man may do” (343). Like a school teacher separating naughty children fighting in the playground, he says that both sides should pull into the middle ground. And he says:

. . . it is time for complementarians to stop claiming that evangelical disagreement with complementarian interpretations threatens the authority of Scripture or the truth of the gospel (355).

But this conclusion is based on his own constructed argument, which rests on individual interpretations of individual texts (ordered by him), rather than submitting to the overarching biblical theme of the male/female relationship as designed to be a picture of the Christ/church relationship. To suggest that because **he** has not come to either a fully complementarian or fully egalitarian conclusion, it is illegitimate for **anyone else to either**, is an example of what Don Carson alludes to as the attempt to manipulate by means of “the art of imperious ignorance.”²²

3. Little Sensitivity to Historical Perspective

Bartlett provides three pages of selective quotations (5–7) “proving” that until recent days Christians believed in the inferiority of women (17). But the foundational teaching in Genesis 1:26–28 that man and woman were created equally in the image of God has laid at the foundation of Western “human rights” teaching (as atheist Tom Holland argues in his recent best-selling *Dominion*).²³

As already argued, the suggestion that Christians in a pre-feminist era believed in female “inferiority” owes more to radical feminist rhetoric than any understanding of church

history. One of the greatest intellects of the twentieth century, Roger Scruton, described the “devil’s project” of deconstructing culture. Our entire Western heritage is seen by many academics as “a burden they have done well to discard” he wrote.²⁴ Rewriting history as a cartoon account of oppressors (men) trampling down the oppressed (women) has been a key part of that deconstruction.

We need to maintain perspective: Yes, women have been abused in history. Yes, women are still abused in the world today. This is a symptom of sin and the fall. The countries in the world where women are most abused are those which have had *least* exposure to biblical Christianity.²⁵ Many women until recently lacked certain “rights,” but in reality many men lacked “rights” too. I am glad I can vote. Women (over the age of thirty) were given the vote in the UK in 1918: the *same year* that men without property were given the vote (and men, unlike women, had to be willing to fight for their country in return for their vote). I am grateful I was able to study at Cambridge University. The first women attended Cambridge in 1869. But as a Baptist, *whether male or female*, I would not have been admitted to Cambridge until 1871, two years later. In various areas of life, what we regard as non-negotiable “equality” for vast numbers of both men and women is something that has appeared relatively recently. To judge previous generations of Christians as believing in “women’s inferiority” is historically insensitive. Consider Chrysostom’s tender counsel to husbands in the 4th century to honour and prefer their wives:

Yea, even if it is needful for you to give your life for her, and to be cut into ten thousand pieces, you should not refuse to endure any suffering for her.²⁶

²²Don Carson, <https://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/but-thats-just-your-interpretation/> (accessed 1 February, 2020). Or, see page 288, under “Pillar 1,” Bartlett claims that no one has found an explanation for 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. He seems to be saying that because he is not certain, no one else can be either.

²³Tom Holland, *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (Little Brown, 2019). Also: A.D. Hertzke, and T.S. Shah, eds. *Christianity and Freedom: Volume I Historical Perspectives; Volume II Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 2016); Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (HarperCollins, 1997); *The Victory of Reason* (Random House, 2006); *The Triumph of Christianity* (Bravo, 2012).

²⁴Roger Scruton, *An Intelligent Person’s Guide to Modern Culture* (Duckworth, 1998), 130.

²⁵James, *God’s Design for Women in an Age of Gender Confusion*, chapter 1 outlines the positive impact on the dignity of women that Christianity has had through history.

²⁶David Robertson, “Ancient Wisdom for Modern Marriages,” *Evangelicals Now*, January, 2020, <https://theweeflea.com/2020/01/04/ancient-wisdom-for-modern-marriages-evangelicals-now/> (accessed 24 January 2020).

Among the English Puritans, the “poster” married couple were Richard and Margaret Baxter. The great theologian Richard Baxter cheerfully accepted that in some pastoral matters, his extraordinary wife Margaret displayed superior wisdom.²⁷ One of America’s greatest theologians, Jonathan Edwards, freely acknowledged that his wife’s religious experience served as a role model for his teaching on revival.²⁸ Ontological equality can coexist with functional difference in role. It was only with the advent of modern radical feminism that appreciation of this distinction was lost.



CONCLUSION: NO POSITIVE VISION OF WHAT IT IS TO BE A MAN OR A WOMAN

Just as Freudianism polluted the understanding of an entire culture, in that sexual desire (or even perversion) is now read into the most innocent of encounters,²⁹ radical feminism has corrupted the reading of history and literature. All is read through the grid of the “oppression of women.” The historical reality of the Titanic disaster is that nine men died for every one woman.³⁰ They willingly laid down their lives (and not just husbands for their wives). But any expression of courtesy is now cynically interpreted as patriarchal oppression. Young people are brought up without a positive vision of manhood and womanhood, and “*some things that should not have been forgotten [have been] lost.*”³¹

Bartlett writes:

Sometimes people extend the idea of the sufficiency of Scripture beyond its proper sphere, which makes them worry about using cultural knowledge to interpret the Bible. But there is really no way of avoiding this. The question is: which cultural knowledge are we using? Our own culture, or the cultures of the writer and of the original readers?³²

Certainly this book provides some valuable work on understanding elements of the *first century culture and context*. But ironically, the author seems to be unaware of the extent to which his own methodology and understanding is shaped by the presuppositions of our *own culture* as shaped by the “Enlightenment” tradition (primacy of human reason) and current gender ideology (where “patriarchy” is a convenient form of dismissal and abuse).

²⁷Sharon James, *In Trouble and in Joy* (Evangelical Press, 2004), Section 1, Biography of Margaret Baxter.

²⁸James, *In Trouble and in Joy*, Section 2, Biography of Sarah Edwards.

²⁹Roger Scruton, “An Unhappy Birthday to Sigmund the Fraud,” *The Spectator*, 18 May 2006, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2006/05/an-unhappy-birthday-to-sigmund-the-fraud/> (accessed 4 February, 2020).

³⁰D. Phillips, “Titanic chivalry,” *World Magazine*, March 28 1998, https://worldwng.org/1998/03/titanic_chivalry (accessed 8 August 2018).

³¹J.R.R. Tolkien, *Fellowship of the Ring*, (quoting words of Lady Galadrial). The Canadian lecturer Jordan Peterson has achieved global popularity, not least because he recognises the deep hunger to affirm the realities of manhood and womanhood.

³²“Looking for Fresh Light on Men and Women,” A guest post by Andrew Bartlett, <https://margmowczko.com/andrew-bartlett-men-and-women-in-christ/> (accessed 22 January 2020).

Bartlett's approach is fatally flawed. Beginning with individual texts with no reference to the overarching biblical framework is like providing a detailed analysis of individual leaves, while missing the shape of the tree; or examining the structure of individual bricks, but never seeing the overall structure of the building.

Men and Women In Christ is a 394-page work (excluding indices). The section on "What it means to be male or female" takes less than one page (343). This is because Bartlett does not really have anything to say here. There is no positive vision of the glory of the calling of women to be fruitful (both through spiritual motherhood, and, for many, biological motherhood); or the dignity of the calling of men (not just husbands) to take responsibility for the protection of women, which many non-Christians are still willing to accept. As one journalist wrote recently:

Times have changed; participation in war is not as inevitable as it once was. Still, though, I believe it's our job as men to do the right and noble thing, rescue damsels in distress and fight off bad guys. More importantly, most of our women folk still believe this too.³³

Scripture calls us to marvel at the reality that God chooses to reveal himself as Father, and to wonder at the condescension of the eternal Son of God stooping to become incarnate as a man, born of a woman. Our risen Lord Jesus Christ is still the God-Man, still recognisably man. Manhood and womanhood are eternal realities, and of **eternal significance**.³⁴ Bartlett rightly points out that earthly marriage and child-bearing ceases in the new heavens and earth, but he fails to see any eternal significance or glory in our embodied nature as male and female.

The Bible affirms and celebrates manhood and womanhood. General revelation also points to the mystery, the enchantment, the glory of embodied manhood and womanhood.

I close with a word of testimony. I was brought up in a godly home. As a young woman I loved the Lord and loved his Word. But my appreciation of the biblical truths of complementarity was dimmed because I was breathing in the toxic air of radical feminist presuppositions. I assented to biblical teaching about men and women, but did not rejoice in it. Over the years, as I studied theology, studied modern feminism, and especially as I saw the devastating effects of the outworking of feminist theory in society, the lights came on. I now see the glory of complementarity blazing out of Scripture, nature, society, history, family, and church. Yes, sin and abuse abound. But these only serve to magnify the glory of God's intended design and his wonderful redemptive plan.

*"The outpouring of God's eternal
Trinitarian love is beautifully pictured
in His plan for men and women."*

The unfolding of your words gives light (Ps.119:130). Bartlett believes that his work has provided the church with "fresh light" on the biblical text. Sadly, I am afraid his approach to Scripture only quenches the glory of that light. ✕

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³³James Delingpole, "How to be a Man," *The Spectator*, 31 January 2020.
³⁴<https://alastairadversaria.com/2014/07/23/a-new-icon-of-marriage/> (accessed 1 February, 2020).

Understanding Transgender Identities

INTRODUCTION

A Christian’s engagement in the world appears more complex with each generation. In the area of transgenderism, questions are being raised that require careful thought for evangelicals. While the question of how to define and converse about transgenderism as a believer is not new, it is perhaps a conversation that needs to be engaged in a new way. *Understanding Transgender Identities* (Baker Academic, 2019), edited by James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, highlights the conversation on transgenderism within Christianity using a four-views model by inviting five scholars with varying views on transgenderism to engage with one another’s ideas.

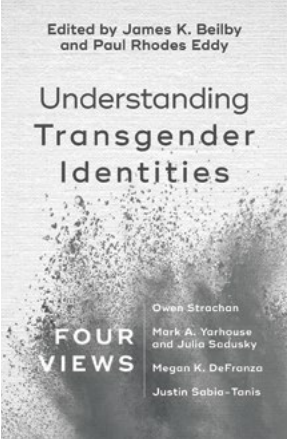
SUMMARY

The book begins with an editorial introduction describing the history of transgenderism in America and defining associated terms. The editors acknowledge transgenderism’s complexity as it deals with multiple facets of theology and culture. They also helpfully point out the lack of clarity surrounding the science of transgenderism, a fact seen throughout the rest of the book as scholars point to studies to substantiate their varied conclusions. Beilby and Eddy conclude the introduction by highlighting biblical and theological, scientific, and practical and pastoral differences that come up throughout the four views.

Owen Strachan’s chapter, “Transition or Transformation?,” voices a traditional biblical evangelical perspective. He begins asserting those who experience gender dysphoria are created in God’s image, laying the foundation for their dignity. Strachan approaches transgenderism from a biblical and theological lens which frames gender dysphoria within the understanding that God’s creation of humanity was male and female and any deviation is a result of the Fall. In light of this, Strachan views expressions of transgenderism to be sinful, and his pastoral advice is to “take steps to own once more the body, and bodily identity, that God has given” (76). Strachan takes the strongest stance in the book against transgenderism with his assertion that the Bible is clear on matters of gender and sexuality.

Mark A. Yarhouse and Julia Sadusky write “The Complexities of Gender Identity” from a psychological lens founded upon traditional biblical values regarding gender. They state, “gender dysphoria” exists “along a continuum” (102). Yarhouse and Sadusky also outline frameworks within which they classify transgenderism perspectives: the integrity, disability, and diversity lenses. The integrity lens sees transgenderism as a moral issue, caused by the Fall, and holds male and female as the ideal. The disability lens sees transgenderism as a hardship thrust upon someone and responds with “compassion” (104–5). The diversity lens celebrates “differences in gender identity,” arguing that God did not intend gender limitations in creation (105). Focusing on discipleship, they propose an integration of these three frameworks that encourages those experiencing gender dysphoria to journey with God toward “spiritual restoration” (115), an individually focused ministry model that seeks to listen before it seeks to save.

Edited by James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy. *Understanding Transgender Identities: Four Views*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019.



"...inviting five scholars with varying views on transgenderism to engage with one another’s ideas."

“Good News for Gender Minorities” by Megan K. DeFranza emphasizes a primarily practical/pastoral approach. She describes her journey from a traditional evangelical view of gender towards an accepting stance. She emphasizes that transgenderism is often seen by Christians as “more about sexuality” than gender (148) and how negative feelings regarding transgenderism can inform how one thinks about its morality. DeFranza also asserts that gender “falls on a continuum” (152). She follows a discussion of scientific research with an extensive theology of eunuchs in Scripture, stating God’s heart is to include those outside the sexual norm. Finally, she says the goal of Christianity is not to conform to one’s gender, but to Christ, which “can challenge gendered cultural ideals” (175).

“Holy Creation, Wholly Creative” by Justin Sabia-Tanis also advocates a primarily practical/pastoral approach. Writing from his own perspective, having transitioned from female to male, Sabia-Tanis agrees with the continuum view of gender. He argues that God names extremes in creation that have a myriad of modes in between which lack clear distinctions. After describing animal sexual ambiguity, he says likewise some persons are called to “change [their] gender” (204). Sabia-Tanis argues Christians must respond to transgenderism with compassion and focus on the alleviation of suffering by allowing gender transition “healing” and celebrating God’s “imagination” that allows for gender diversity (222).

CRITICAL INTERACTION

The introduction and glossary of *Understanding Transgender Identities* are extremely helpful. As a term is introduced within the book, it is given in bold and then defined within the glossary. Any believer who wishes to be better equipped in cultural conversations regarding transgenderism would benefit greatly from these careful definitions of often ambiguous terms.

Each of the four views shows its strengths and weaknesses particularly when seen against the other three in the writers’ responses to each chapter. Strachan’s chapter provides the most biblically sound exegesis of passages related to

transgenderism. He states clearly the Bible’s call for women to be women and men to be men. Yet, his critics point out that his application of what this should look like in our modern-day culture could be viewed as lacking a compassionate tone, which can hinder the reception of its crucial message, especially to those it affects most.

Approaching from a psychological perspective, Yarhouse and Sadusky provide clear definitions of terms and explanations of significant studies done regarding transgenderism. At first glance, their chapter seems to be a helpful bridge between the biblically saturated Strachan and the socially minded DeFranza and Sabia-Tanis as they discuss their frameworks for the transgenderism conversation. While these frameworks are helpful in defining varied approaches to transgenderism, their chapter lacks the biblical foundation needed in order to pastorally navigate the ambiguity inherent in such diverse approaches. In response, Strachan rightly commends their desire to hold creation and fall in tension as they approach this issue and yet critiques their conclusion that there is no clear *telos* to the issue of sexuality.

DeFranza challenges the traditional biblical stance on transgenderism with probing theological and practical points. She fails, however, to account for many passages which clearly teach distinctions regarding gender, as Strachan points out in his critique. Her chapter ultimately becomes decidedly opposed to the traditional evangelical view of transgenderism, particularly the Nashville Statement, a theological perspective she once held herself.



Instead, she advocates for an accepting stance towards transgenderism, which seems to be largely influenced by her positive experiences with people who are transgender and identify as Christian.

Sabia-Tanis's perspective as a transgender individual certainly furthers the conversation and provides a helpful perspective for conservative Christians to hear and be aware of. His narrational approach draws in the reader, showing how crucial compassion is in the conversation. However, his stance seems founded on vague biblical principles rather than clear biblical doctrine. Strachan critiques this chapter by pointing out the reality of our sinful nature which affects all aspects of life, something which Sabia-Tanis does not acknowledge in his discussion regarding gender identity and how pastors should approach the issue.

Each scholar enters into this dialogue well. In such a complex conversation, these scholars model how to affirm a person's worth while disagreeing with their work. However, the main critique of the book is the model of a four-view book itself. While these books are helpful for overviews of disagreements regarding a topic, they do have limitations because of the form. With Justin Sabia-Tanis, I wonder "What if we were...authors wrestling together with the meaning of these texts and concepts?" (190). In that vein, the limitation of the model of this book becomes the invitation for the reader. Armed with a biblical foundation of gender and knowledge of these varied perspectives, the careful reader can enter into conversations more equipped apologetically and pastorally.

CONCLUSION

Beilby and Eddy's stated purpose "to further the Christian conversation on transgender experience and identity by bringing a range of perspectives into dialogue" (2) was met. These five scholars will no doubt challenge many readers with their varied and opposing perspectives. For those seeking clear discussion on the Bible's teaching regarding transgenderism, this is not the book to read. However, for those with an already established biblical doctrine of gender seeking to approach the cultural conversation well, this book, read with an open Bible and prayerful heart, can helpfully introduce differing viewpoints and their emphases. After doing so, the reader will be further equipped to enter into this conversation as Christ calls us to, "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) "with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15).



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