

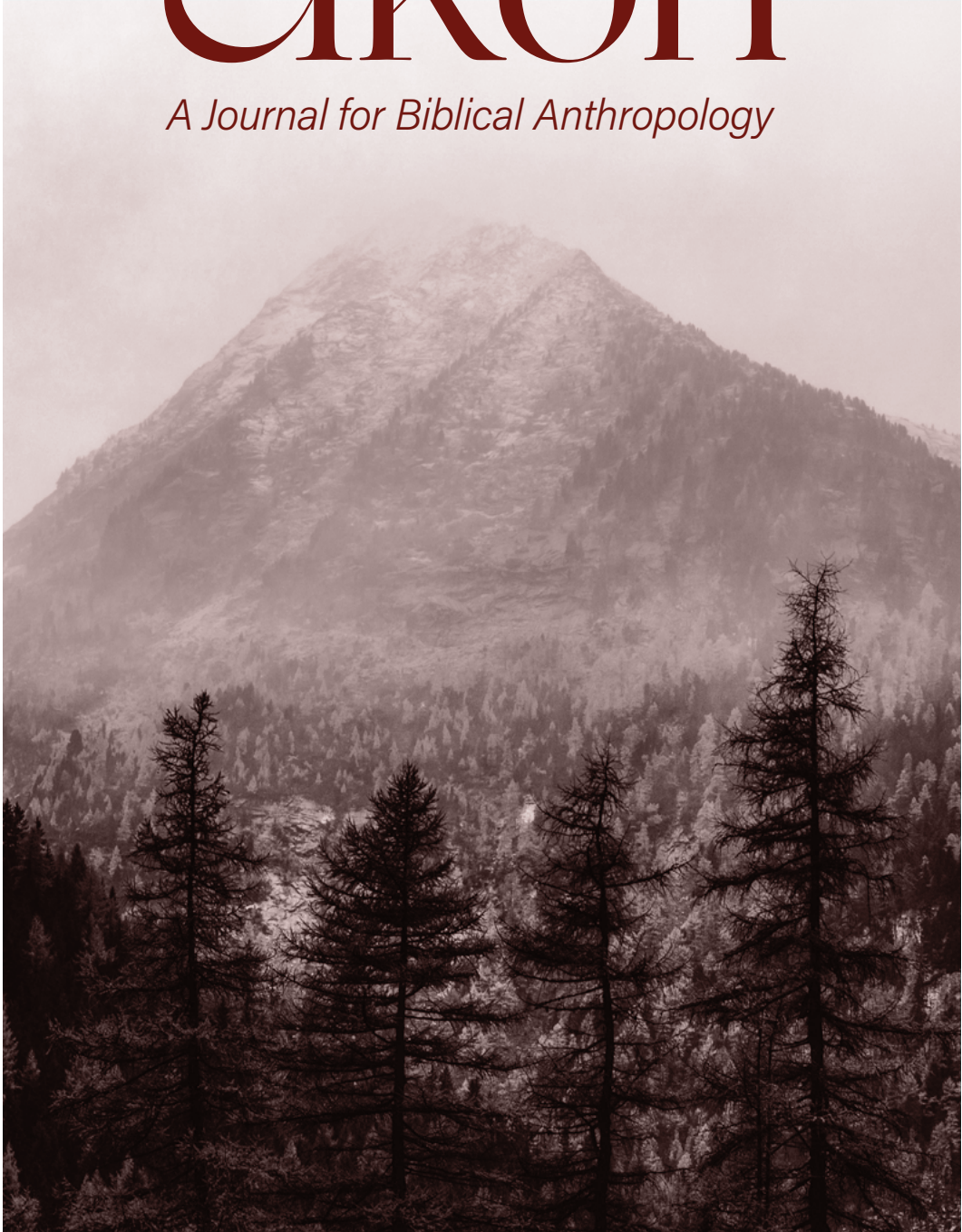
THE MOST IMPORTANT
PHILOSOPHER OF WHOM YOU
HAVE (PROBABLY) NEVER HEARD
Carl Trueman

AN INTERVIEW WITH
Oliver O'Donovan
ON THE NATURAL LAW

KARL BARTH, NATURAL
REVELATION, AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHICS
Stephen J. Wellum

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Fall 2020 Issue Introduction

From Eikon's first issue, the editorial vision has been to direct our focus toward fostering a uniquely Protestant and evangelical formulation of natural law. The recently named president of Bethlehem College and Seminary, Joe Rigney, wrote an essay in the first issue of Eikon "With One Voice" (Spring 2019), making the case from the start of this journal that special revelation and general revelation are never in conflict, but complementary. No more is this true than for matters of biblical anthropology, where the Christian vision for gender and sexuality faces particular derision.

In his recently released and magisterial volume *Politics After Christendom*, David VanDrunen defines "natural law" as "the idea that God makes known the basic substance of his moral law through the created order itself. Human beings therefore know this law simply by virtue of being human, even apart from access to Scripture or to other forms of special revelation. They know it through their

natural capacities as they live in the world." Elsewhere, he defines it as "the moral order that directs people to the proper human goals corresponding to the purposes for which God made them." I agree with VanDrunen's wording and would add my own definition of natural law: the moral theory that a God-given and self-evident universal moral order exists that acts of reason and practical deliberation, in theory and in practice, can grasp as intellectually knowable and understand as behaviorally directive. This comprehension of the moral order and its basic goods defines and identifies which actions are imminently reasonable and worth pursuing—even apart from an *immediate* appeal to divine revelation—by achieving the purposes or goals consistent with goods constitutive of human nature's design. The language of "immediate appeal" is simply my insistence, as a Protestant, that any theory of natural law will, eventually, need to be grounded in Scripture for its foundation.



We believe the value of the natural law resides less in its apologetical persuasiveness (though we do not deny its significance on this front), and more in its ability to give intelligible explanation of the creation we read of in Scripture. Natural law is action-guiding and action-explaining by providing an account of the directiveness we intuitively act upon to achieve the ends and goods consistent with our design. For example, when Genesis speaks of the "one flesh union" of man and woman, we believe that natural law is at its best when it articulates the meaning of "one flesh" as a corporeal, embodied union of man and woman. Male and female design supports a directiveness to an embodied union. This union's distinctiveness in its procreative potential makes it unlike other forms of sexual expression, and only this union can ever be genuinely marital as a result.

We are excited that the Fall 2020 issue of Eikon is devoted almost exclusively

to the topics above, whether using the taxonomic categories of "natural law," "creation order," or "general revelation." We believe the disjunction between Protestant rejection of natural law and Catholic reception of natural law need not be as stark as commonly rendered. To that end, we present this issue to remedy an ethical imbalance within the Protestant tradition that needs retrieval consistent with our Reformational heritage. We have assembled a roster of natural law thinkers hoping to speak "with one voice" about the ways God has ordered this world for our good, and ultimately, for his glory. ✕

Andrew T. Walker is an Associate Professor of Christian Ethics at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Eikon's Executive Editor.

PCA Report Names Sin While Not Being Named by It

The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) has been facing a great deal of internal controversy over the last couple of years because of the Revoice Conference, which was first hosted in 2018 by a PCA church in St. Louis. The following summer, the PCA General Assembly addressed the controversy with two crucial decisions. First, the General Assembly voted to affirm the Nashville Statement and to use the Nashville Statement in discipleship materials produced by the denomination. Second (and I believe more consequentially), the General Assembly voted to appoint a committee to draft a statement of belief on gender and sexuality. Bryan Chapell, Kevin DeYoung, and Tim Keller are among those who were tasked with drafting the report.

The committee has completed its work and issued its report on May 28, 2020. Their work now awaits consideration at the 2021 meeting of the General Assembly, where it will hopefully be approved by the denomination. The report aligns with the teaching of the Nashville Statement but roots its affirmations much more explicitly within the Reformed tradition.

The report is quite long, but the heart of it consists of twelve affirmations that set forth the consensus of the committee and hopefully of the entire denomination. So even if you are not able to read the entire document, you at least need to read the twelve statements. They address every major point of contention in the intramural debate among evangelicals about gender and sexuality.

Here are some of the most significant items that I noted in my reading of the twelve affirmations:

1. THE MORAL STATUS OF SAME-SEX ATTRACTION

“The experience of same-sex attraction is not morally neutral; the attraction is an expression of original or indwelling sin that must be repented of and put to death.” – Statement 4

This has been a major point of contention over the last several years among evangelicals. While all sides recognize that same-sex behavior is sinful, there has been disagreement about same-sex attraction. The Revoice/Spiritual Friendship side of the conversation typically treats same-sex attraction as a morally benign reality or as something to be sanctified. Heath Lambert and I wrote an entire book refuting that perspective. Many others have weighed in as well. With this statement, the PCA would be putting this issue to rest once and for all — at least in the PCA.

2. DEFINING CONCUPISCENCE

This may seem like an esoteric point, but I assure you that it only seems that way. One of the major reasons for controversy is due to the fact that Roman Catholic notions of concupiscence have influenced the Revoice/Spiritual Friendship side of this conversation in significant ways. Rosaria Butterfield and I wrote an essay two summers ago trying to explain this, and that led to rejoinders from the other side, some of whom were Roman Catholic. Thankfully, the PCA committee report comes down firmly on the side of the Reformed tradition:

¹Kate Shellnutt, “PCA Sides With the Nashville Statement Over Revoice’s Approach,” *Christianity Today*, June 28, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2019/june/pca-nashville-statement-lgbt-revoice-sbc-ecc-vote.html>.

²Bryan Chapell et al., “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality to the Forty-Eight General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America” (Presbyterian Church in America, 2020), <https://pcaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/AIC-Report-to-48th-GA-5-28-20.pdf>.

³Denny Burk and Heath Lambert, *Transforming Homosexuality: What the Bible Says about Sexual Orientation and Change* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2015).

⁴Denny Burk and Rosaria Butterfield, “Learning to Hate Our Sin without Hating Ourselves,” *Public Discourse*, July 4, 2018, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/07/22066/>.

"We affirm that impure thoughts and desires arising in us prior to and apart from a conscious act of the will are still sin. We reject the Roman Catholic understanding of concupiscence whereby disordered desires that afflict us due to the Fall do not become sin without a consenting act of the will. These desires within us are not mere weaknesses or inclinations to sin but are themselves idolatrous and sinful."

– **Statement 5**

3. WHETHER TEMPTATION IS SIN

Is temptation sinful? This has been a real bone of contention and it's related to the question of concupiscence. If same-sex desires are morally neutral (as some Revoice/Spiritual Friendship advocates affirm), then of course being tempted by them is morally neutral as well. But if same-sex attraction is an expression of concupiscence, then the temptation itself would also be sinful. I was happy to see the committee affirm what is essentially John Owen's view on the question:

"When temptations come from without, the temptation itself is not sin, unless we enter into the temptation. But when the temptation arises from within, it is our own act and is rightly called sin." – **Statement 6**

4. WHETHER A CHRISTIAN SHOULD IDENTIFY AS A "GAY CHRISTIAN"

Some on the Revoice side of this conversation have argued that calling oneself a "gay Christian" may mean nothing more than saying one is a Christian who struggles with same-sex desires. Others have argued further that

there is nothing wrong with owning a gay identity, and thus there is nothing wrong with embracing the label "gay Christian" so long as one remains sexually chaste. The committee disagrees with this perspective. They write:

"There is a difference between speaking about a phenomenological facet of a person's sin-stained reality and employing the language of sinful desires as a personal identity marker. That is, we name our sins, but are not named by them." – **Statement 9**

"We affirm that those in our churches would be wise to avoid the term 'gay Christian.' Although the term 'gay' may refer to more than being attracted to persons of the same sex, the term does not communicate less than that. For many people in our culture, to self-identify as 'gay' suggests that one is engaged in homosexual practice. At the very least, the term normally communicates the presence and approval of same-sex sexual attraction as morally neutral or morally praiseworthy. Even if 'gay,' for some Christians, simply means 'same-sex attraction,' it is still inappropriate to juxtapose this sinful desire, or any other sinful desire, as an identity marker alongside our identity as new creations in Christ." – **Statement 10**

I couldn't agree more with this. Owning a gay identity is not a morally neutral act. As the Nashville Statement puts it, "We deny that adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is consistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption" (Article 7). For that reason, the way we name

ourselves matters. The "gay Christian" label *at best* risks confusing people about whether or not one believes same-sex attraction to be sinful.

5. REJECTION OF MARRIAGE-LIKE "SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIPS"

Some on the Revoice side of this conversation have argued for covenanted "spiritual friendships," which come across in some cases like a "gay" marriage without the sex. Romance and even physical affection are sometimes a part of these "spiritual friendships," even though they seek to remain celibate. The committee has rejected this clearly:

"We do not support the formation of exclusive, contractual marriage-like friendships, nor do we support same-sex romantic behavior or the assumption that certain sensibilities and interests are necessarily aspects of a gay identity. We do not consider same-sex attraction a gift in itself, nor do we think this sin struggle, or any sin struggle, should be celebrated in the church." – **Statement 11**

I couldn't be more grateful to see these twelve affirmations from the PCA study committee. I look forward to seeing the General Assembly take it up next summer. I hope and pray they approve it. If they do, it will perhaps be the most comprehensive statement on biblical sexuality adopted by a Protestant denomination.

This is the kind of work that every church and denomination ought to be doing if they haven't already. Whether they adopt a pre-existing statement like the Nashville Statement, write their own, or

do both as the PCA has done, we need *churches* to make the effort and to establish accountability within and among their own congregations. I'm grateful to see the PCA doing this important work. May more follow.



⁵I develop this more fully in Denny Burk, "Is Temptation Sinful?" *Denny Burk* (blog), July 11, 2018, <https://www.dennyburk.com/is-temptation-sinful/>.
⁶E.g., Wesley Hill, *Spiritual Friendship: Finding Love in the Church as a Celibate Gay Christian* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015).

MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN

Understanding Human Nature



In his commentary on the King James rendering of 1 Corinthians 11:14 (“Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?”), the eighteenth-century Baptist autodidact John Gill observed that by the word “nature” (φύσις), the Apostle had in mind one of four things: “the law and light of nature, reason in man, common sense, or rather custom, which is second nature.” As to which of these possibilities was best, Gill opted for the last, namely, custom. In this, he was following the lead of the French preacher John Calvin, who had argued for a

similar position when he stated that it was common for the Greeks and for Jewish men to keep their hair short, although, among other ancient peoples like the Celtic Gauls and the German tribes of Germania, men wore their hair long.

Although Calvin interpreted φύσις here as regional custom, he was well aware that this term could at times be used to describe a universal reality. For instance, in the opening chapters of his *magnum opus*, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin argued that all human

beings have an inbuilt awareness that there is a divinity, a *sensus divinitatis* or *sensus deitatis*. Every human person is a created being who has not come into this world by accident, but all are here by design and bear the marks of their Designer and Maker within the architecture of their being. Try as they might, they cannot escape this sense within the depths of their being that there is a God to whom they are ever accountable. In other words, there is a φύσις common to all of humanity, namely, an awareness of divine existence.

And if there be one such commonality, then there are others and one can speak of human nature.

To the modern *mentalité*, which regards human beings as essentially plastic and hence mouldable to whatever shape desired, such thinking is considered to be both harmful and hateful. But Calvin’s thinking here is part of a tradition in Western thought that reaches back to antiquity and, as such, comes to us as a part of traditional wisdom that the ages would say we ignore at our peril. ✕

An Interview with Robert P. George and Andrew T. Walker on the Natural Law

Robert P. George is the McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University.

Andrew T. Walker is Associate Professor of Christian Ethics at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Executive Editor of *Eikon*.

ATW: First, what is your definition of natural law and natural law theory?

RPG: Natural law is the body of reasons (including moral reasons) for action and restraint accessible in principle to human reason even apart from special revelation. The first principles of practical reason and basic precepts of natural law direct our choosing and acting towards ends that are intelligibly choiceworthy not merely as means to other ends but as ends-in-themselves. Natural law theorists call these ends “basic human goods.” They are the constitutive aspects of human well-being and fulfillment. Moral norms, from the most general to the most specific, are identified by reflection on the integral directiveness of the first principles of practical reason.

ATW: To what extent is natural law learned versus innate and intuitive?

Reasons for action (like reasons for belief) are neither innate nor intuitive. They are grasped in intellectual acts. They are the fruit of insights which, like all insights, are insights into data supplied by experience. It is, for example, in the experience of true friendship, where friends genuinely will the good of the other for the sake of the other, that we grasp the intelligible point of friendship, making possible the sound judgment that the activity of friendship is inherently fulfilling of ourselves as human persons, that friendship is indeed intrinsically and not merely instrumentally valuable.

RPG: If there is a natural law, why do even natural lawyers disagree on its content?

For the same reasons people disagree about matters in other fields of philosophy or, more generally, in other domains of inquiry. There is nothing special in this respect about moral philosophy as opposed to logic, aesthetics, philosophy of mind, etc.; or about natural law theory as opposed to utilitarianism, Kantian (or “deontological”) ethics, virtue ethics, or even moral skepticism; or about philosophy generally as opposed to history, sociology, literary studies, and even the natural sciences.

ATW: What’s the distinction between that which comes natural versus natural law? Are you saying we should follow and obey what comes natural to us?

RPG: The word “natural” has various meanings, and the term is used differently for different purposes or in different contexts. There is no magic in the term, and it certainly has proven to be misleading on some occasions. The *natural law* is natural, as opposed to being conventional. It “exists” or “obtains” as a body of reasons that are in no way artefactual. These reasons are *accessible* to unaided — and in that sense “natural” — human reason, but they are not human creations. By contrast *positive law*, which may be morally good or bad, just or unjust, is a cultural artifact. It is man-made. When it is *just* — when it is properly fashioned — it will

be in line with and even in a sense (actually, in one of two distinct senses) be derived from natural law; but it is nevertheless conventional. As natural law thinkers from Cicero to Aquinas to Martin Luther King have all pointed out, the positive law of any community stands under the judgment of the natural — the moral — law. That is what makes it possible for us to speak of, and identify and condemn, *unjust* laws.

ATW: You are not a historian, but do you see any future in which Western civilization self-corrects from its move away from natural law and returns to sanity? Or, are we destined for civilizational collapse?

RPG: This one is above my pay grade. Ask God. Whatever the future holds, it is our job to do what is right — what the natural law and divine law require. As the late and very great Richard John Neuhaus never ceased reminding us, our job is not to produce the final victory; that is up to God and will come in his time and on his terms. Our job is to be faithful. Ever faithful.

ATW: A consistent criticism from Protestants when it comes to natural law is that natural law is not persuasive on its own terms — that it needs revelation for its authority. What's your response to this criticism?

RPG: It's sure persuasive to me. I doubt that people who don't "find it persuasive" will find the proposition that God exists, has authority over us, and has revealed his will or law to be very persuasive.

ATW: Do natural lawyers like yourselves see your project as one opposed to revelation?

No. Nor do I know of any other natural law theorist, past or present, who sees the project as one opposed to revelation. As Pope John Paul II taught, "faith and reason are the two wings on which the human spirit ascends to the contemplation of truth." That teaching holds true, in my opinion, whether the truths we are contemplating or seek to understand are in the domain of ethics or in other domains of inquiry in which Christian faith offers guidance.

ATW: Can you give a succinct explanation of the difference between New Natural Law theory and Classical Natural Law theory? Are the schools of thought in competition or complementary to one another?

RPG: Actually, there is not much "new" about the "new natural law theory"; it is a misnomer, though we seem to be stuck with it. In any case, it is distinguishable on some points from neo-scholastic theories of natural law. People in both camps claim the mantle of Aquinas, though all should treat the question of what Aquinas held or did not hold as a secondary matter. What is primary is the question of what is true. The most important point of debate, I believe, is how the intellect gets hold of the first and most basic principles of practical reason. Are they understood in non-inferential acts of understanding in which one grasps the point of, say, pursuing intellectual knowledge (e.g. pure mathematics, or Shakespeare, or the history of agriculture), or friendship, or aesthetic appreciation, or other intrinsically worthwhile activities for their own sake? (That is what the so-called "new natural law" theorists hold.) Or are they provided by methodologically antecedent *theoretical* inquiry (as opposed to *practical* reflection) into, say, nature or human nature? (That is what neo-scholastic natural law theorists hold.) If the former, then the first principles of practical reason and most basic precepts of natural law are, truly, first principles, like the principle of noncontradiction. They are underived and stand in no need of formal derivation. They are, as Aquinas said, *per se nota* and *indemonstrabilia*. If the latter, they are derived. From what? From methodologically antecedent theoretical knowledge.

ATW: What emerging concerns do you see in culture and public policy that further implicate natural law?

RPG: The natural law is the moral law insofar as it can, in principle, be known by unaided ("natural") human reason. Thus, it pertains to all moral inquiries, even when it is supplemented, clarified, etc. by divine revelation. These inquiries, of course, include questions of justice, human rights, and the common good.

ATW: A Protestant objection to Catholic moral theory is what we perceive as a reticence to cite Scripture in moral argument. Is that a fair criticism?

RPG: I admire and wholeheartedly endorse the Protestant love of the Bible and the use that Protestants, far more than Catholics, make of Scripture in their devotions and in their spiritual lives. This is a gift that Protestant Christianity gives to the universal Christian church. Over the course of the last half-century — since the Second Vatican Council — Catholics have become more Bible-oriented, and that is to the good. But we Catholics can and should make even more progress on this front, deepening our love (and understanding) of God's word. Protestants, especially Protestant intellectuals, have made similar progress in appropriating more fully the great tradition of philosophy — from Plato and Aristotle to the present — and making use of its insights and tools to illuminate the landscape and even better understand the Christian faith. This should not be regarded as a "Catholic thing." Here is an area where growth can and should be sought among Protestants. I personally know there is a strong desire for it out there. My own philosophical writings are read and appreciated and wrestled with as much by Protestants — especially Evangelicals — as by Catholics. Seventy-five years ago that certainly would not have been the case. ✕

*"I admire and
wholeheartedly
endorse the
Protestant love
of the Bible..."*

Nature vs. Transgenderism

In his book *Begotten or Made?*, Oliver O'Donovan sets about excavating the epistemological foundations that undergird the modern conscience. Originally delivered as part of the London Lectures in Contemporary Christianity in 1983, O'Donovan's book is a response to a government-sponsored inquiry into the social, ethical, and legal questions surrounding the then-burgeoning field of assisted reproductive technology in the United Kingdom.

O'Donovan's response, however, is more than a theological roadmap through the Wild West of medical bioethics. O'Donovan takes his reader underneath the ethics of reproductive technology and plumbs the depths of the human psyche, pinpointing a structural defect pervasive throughout contemporary ethical reasoning.

For O'Donovan, what underwrites the modern approach to these questions reveals a much wider ethical error: the relatively new penchant for viewing humanity as artificial instead of natural, as *man-made* instead of begotten or created. In the biblical account, God makes man, but man begets man. These terms are foundational: what is made is wholly unlike its maker and remains under the maker's authority; but what is begotten is of the same substance and relates as an equal. Once man begins to think of himself as *made* by other men and himself a maker of men, he considers mankind to be a product.

O'Donovan devotes one whole chapter in his book on the ethics of reproductive technology to the issue of transsexualism, which seems out of place until one reckons with the totality of his diagnosis.

For O'Donovan, modern man's root error is his failure to accept his God-given nature, which comes with designed limitations. Augustine writes in his *Exposition of the Psalms* on how the given-ness of our nature is connected to God's goodness toward us: "From God we have our being and also our well-being." But in a world full of man-made inventions and technological advancements, we have mistaken ourselves for one more manufactured thing, an artifact of the human will to manipulate. In a perverse corollary to Augustine, if we have our being from ourselves, then so also our well-being.

CONFRONTING NATURE

No longer does man appreciate the natural world for its natural-ness; he instead sees it as a series of frontiers to be conquered or manipulated. According to O'Donovan, this mindset sets up a confrontation with the self:

The relation of human beings to their own bodies, we might say, is the last frontier of nature. However much we may surround ourselves with our artifacts, banish every bird from the sky and every fish from the river, tidy every blade of grass into a park with concrete paths and iron railings, however blind we may become to the givenness of the natural order on which our culture is erected, nevertheless, when we take off our clothes to have a bath, we confront something as natural, as given, as completely non-artifactual as anything in this universe: we confront our own bodily existence.

In a bygone era, such a confrontation would serve to temper man's ambitions. But today, the basic structures of nature itself, including man himself, present an insatiable challenge. And appetites are not immune to self-harm or self-destruction.

In modern man's current mode, his confrontation with his own bodily existence — which puts him face-to-face with the image that is meant to turn him to the One he images — has prompted a number of mistaken responses: the narcissist worships his own reflection like Eve at the pool in *Paradise Lost*; the gnostic recoils in horror and attempts an escape from bodily reality; but the transhumanist pines for a bodily existence altogether different from the one he confronts. Transsexualism, or what is more commonly known today as transgenderism, combines these final two responses, and the more extreme forms turn to the scalpel for resolution. The name for the purveyors of such operations, *plastic* surgeons, betrays the whole project: the body as mere construction material to be re-fashioned, re-modeled, re-formed to satisfy the human will.

THE POT'S ATTEMPT AT POTTERY

The book of Isaiah offers a fascinating angle on the ethical dimensions of transgenderism.

"Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' or 'Your work has no handles'?" Isaiah 45:9

*"Does the clay say to
him who forms it,
'What are you making?'"*


A dissatisfied pot is ridiculous enough that Isaiah's question can be left unanswered. But in O'Donovan's accounting, the metaphor needs updating. The modern pot would be unaware of the potter, ruling out the kind of allegorical conversation Isaiah rehearses. Instead, we would have to envision a pot at work at the wheel, or perhaps attempting to shape itself. Of course, to do so is to border on the absurd; but such is man's attempt to escape nature and given-ness.

Isaiah's question is rhetorical for a reason. The scenario highlights the irrationality of a created thing offering any kind of creative input back to its creator. Everything it is, it owes to its creator, including its form and function. To wish for anything different is to call into question the creator's competence, or his goodness.

SIGNPOSTS ON THE ANCIENT PATHS

It seems to me that the Christian church's response to transgenderism should be the same to modern man writ large. We must recover signposts to the ancient paths. Those looking for a "thou shalt not

transgender" proof-text in the Bible might find an assist from Deuteronomy 22:5, but there is a reason the biblical world did not confront cross-sex hormone treatments or sex-reassignment surgeries. And herein lies part of the solution. We need to reframe the issues altogether to think more like the ancients, more like those in the biblical world: we are not self-made automatons, but God-made creatures. As God-made creatures, we participate in human nature as male or female — one nature, two sexes — and this nature given for our well-being, as Augustine reminds us.

In other words, the transgender question isn't fundamentally a question about physical possibility, but metaphysical reality. When we reframe it so, the question Who am I? is addressed only in conversation with the question, Who made me? 

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Sameness and Distinction: Rethinking Assumptions about God's Design of Men and Women

A father shames a ten-year-old boy for helping his grandma: "Get out of the kitchen; that's a woman's work!" A woman sits dejectedly during a Sunday sermon as her pastor preaches through Ephesians 4:11–13 and says, "Only pastors and elders were given the gift of teaching." She thinks, "Am I abnormal? I don't want to be a pastor, but I know God's gifted me as a teacher. Was that a mistake?" These are real situations where individuals were confronted by a distorted view of sexuality that categorizes things common to humanity as distinctly male or female.

Beyond the church, the world is deeply confused about what it means to be male and female. As our culture's view of sex has shifted rapidly over the last few decades, even the most basic patterns of living together in society as men and women have been called into question. As a result, pastors, parents, kids, and even spouses are presently facing challenges and rethinking vital questions about gender and sexuality that previous generations simply took for granted. As we've considered this issue, one thing that has become clear is that the church needs a better understanding of God's design for men and women.

This is not the time to be wrong about sex and gender. If anything, the cultural moment we find ourselves in demands that the church articulate what it means to be male and female more clearly than ever before. We must embrace the fullness of what it means to be created as male or female and recognize that sin can distort God's design in either direction (e.g. a male's tendency toward either emasculation or hyper-masculinity).

In our tenacity to defend the patterns of God's design in a culture that seeks to blur the distinction between male and female, it is crucial that we not forget that God made humanity (singular) in his image. But he has purposefully made us male and female (binary), and our distinctions are manifest in more than just physical or genetic traits. We must neither diminish biblical distinctions between men and women, nor create artificial categories to define masculinity or femininity that undermine our sameness as humans. Scripture and nature speak to both the fundamental sameness of the sexes and the beautiful distinctions between men and women.

"From the beginning, we see that sex is binary. Everyone is created either male or female. Many human experiences and characteristics, however, are not."

FROM THE BEGINNING (GENESIS 1-3)

Genesis is a book of foundations. It is where we learn so many fundamental truths about the natural order God instilled in the world. It is also where we see how the Fall has distorted God's design and how sinful humans reject the created order. In Genesis 1, we see God creating human beings. It is clear that the man and woman are of two different sexes, but distinction is not the only thing emphasized. Genesis 1–2 clearly highlights Adam and Eve's sameness as image bearers.

When Adam speaks in Genesis 2, he says the woman is "bone of my bones" and "flesh of my flesh" (2:24). Though we often speak of men and women as though the two sexes couldn't possibly be more distinct, the truth is just the opposite. Not only are men and women not completely different, but in all of creation there is nothing more like man than woman. This is the stated reason Eve was created (2:18). In naming the animals, Adam saw his need for someone like him, not his need for someone different. Moreover, God recognized Adam's need for someone who was complementary to him, who would be his perfect partner.

BEGINNING WITH SAMENESS

From the beginning, we see that sex is binary. Everyone is created either male or female (Gen. 5:2; Matt. 19:4). Many human experiences and characteristics, however, are not. It is not as though every human trait or activity comes down a conveyor belt to be categorized as either male or female: Rollerblades: female, legos: male, kitchen: female, garage: male, theological training: male, gentleness: female, courage: male. In other words, if we were to create a venn diagram of human characteristics and activities with one circle representing males and another females, there would be much overlap.

Among many other things, the Bible teaches that both women and men should exhibit courage, care, hospitality, generosity, relationality, leadership and submission. But it is important to acknowledge that even the traits or behaviors we have in common are always embodied by

either a male or a female. The sex of the person displaying each trait will shape the way it is displayed. Our biological sex matters and is central to our lives as human beings. Instead of being incidental to our identities, giftings, abilities, relationships, or activities, our existence as male or female is integral to each. Who we are, what we do, how we think, feel, and act are not detached from our existence as either male or female.

The church has often been guilty of essentializing manhood and womanhood in unhelpful ways. In our conservative Christian circles, both of us grew up frequently hearing some version of the following: "Men protect and provide. Women help and nurture." While we can appreciate any attempt to clarify the differences between men and women, especially in the midst of a culture seeking to dismiss or erase these things, to create such hard-and-fast categories is harmful and incredibly reductive. Simply put, stereotypes like these hurt, not help, in a gender-confused age. For instance, within this framework one is forced to conclude that in his culinary enthusiasm the ten-year-old from our opening example has taken on not only the behavior but the desires of a woman. Likewise, such a paradigm would force us to conclude that women are bound by God's design to refrain from exercising protection under any circumstances. But in fact, neither are true.

A "Proverbs 31 woman" is too often portrayed as weak, needy, and dependent — a caricature of a helpless female who is useful in the kitchen or laundry room but good for little else. But these flawed descriptions don't match the portrait of the hard-working entrepreneur seen in that passage who provides for her family and employees (Prov. 31:13, 15–16, 18–19, 24). Hospitality and care are often depicted as feminine in Christian gender-stereotypes. And this is understandable, as women often excel in this area. But hospitality and care are also qualifications for elders (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24). And we shouldn't miss that the Apostle Paul uses the analogy of a tender nursing mother to describe his ministry to the church in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:7). When we consider the Scriptures as a whole, instead of isolated verses that may seem to reinforce certain stereotypes, it's

not surprising to find traits such as hard work, provision, hospitality, kindness, and gentleness exemplified by both men and women — these characteristics reflect the attributes of God, in whose image both men and women are made (Gen. 1:27).

EXPLORING DIFFERENCES

Though it seems counterintuitive, acknowledging a difference in design doesn't promote inequality. In fact, the opposite is the case; failing to do so promotes inequality. For example, if average men and women compete in the same athletic competition, the men will likely be faster and stronger. Because men have a built-in competitive advantage, the athletic abilities of women are needlessly diminished by not acknowledging the differences.

Recognizing the inherent strengths of each sex and grasping the beauty of God's complementary design for men and women fosters human flourishing. To recognize the propensities and strengths inherent to either sex demonstrates the need for both sexes. Our aim should be to realize a robust complementarianism that affirms men and women as both valuable and necessary. At the same time, we must discern our distinctions to allow men and women to flourish as they live their lives "with the grain," as it were, of God's design.

RETHINKING EXCLUSION

Once we grasp this fundamental distinction — that everything we do is connected to our existence as men or women — a second related concept also becomes clear. Upon deep reflection, we cannot name a single characteristic or trait that is mutually exclusive in terms of the sexes.¹ But while women and men will both display traits that reflect the image of God and are common to humanity, they will not always display those traits identically.

Provision. Protection. Nurture. Care. Though we can typically associate these traits with a particular sex, each one is regularly displayed by both men and women. But

this doesn't mean that men and women always exhibit these and other traits in the same ways or to equal degrees. In fact, men and women always exhibit these behaviors differently because we do each of these things as either a man or a woman.

Despite our intentions, in creating hard-and-fast categories of gender roles we've often misapplied the teachings of Scripture and caused harm and confusion about a critical issue by promoting improper restrictions and limitations. And we've done so in a way that has been particularly negative for women. Still, others in the church have responded to this error by insisting there are no distinctions between the sexes and that God intends men and women to manifest each of these traits in equal measure. This also fails to account for the beauty and complexity of God's design.

NATURE'S RESERVOIRS

So, if these traits are not mutually exclusive to, nor equally displayed in, men and women, how should Christians think of them? To answer that question, an analogy may prove helpful.² Picture two reservoirs (or wells) side-by-side that are interconnected at the surface. One represents men, and one represents women. They are both reservoirs and they both have water. The water flows between them and overlaps, but the reservoirs are not identical; they remain distinct. Further, think of the depth of each reservoir as representing the natural capacity of either sex to manifest a given trait. Taking the example of love, we would say that men and women are, in general, equally likely to manifest this trait. The same is true of something like generosity. Nothing in our natures, or revelation from Scripture, teaches us that men and women are different in this regard. But what about other traits?

Consider the idea of beauty. Beauty is more often associated with women, both biblically and culturally. This is why Peter instructs women not to allow their beauty to be from outward adornment (1 Pet. 3:3). Men and women both possess beauty, but it is associated with women in a unique way. In terms of their natural capacity

²No analogy is perfect. We acknowledge this attempt to illustrate the way God designed men and women cannot perfectly address the complexity of these issues. Still, we believe the reservoir analogy can helpfully illustrate the primary but non-exclusive nature of certain traits.

¹We recognize there are specific categories that are exclusive to each sex. For instance, fathering is always masculine and mothering is always feminine though both are gender-based expressions of parenting.

to manifest a trait, we would argue that women are gifted by God with deeper reservoirs for beauty than men. Such an example may seem rudimentary, but the idea becomes clearer when we think of a concept like nurture. Men are not exempt from nurturing or exercising care, but women, in general, have been gifted by God to display this characteristic in a special way (1 Thess. 2:7; Isa. 49:15). Again, both Scripture and human experience attest to the deep natural capacity of women to nurture. Part of this is built into human biology. For example, it is no accident that women are able to breastfeed. But women’s gifting in this area extends far beyond caring for infants or children. Nurture is a unique part of God’s design for women.

Men, however, often have a greater depth to draw from when it comes to strength or protection (Deut. 1:29-31). Paul acknowledges this when he instructs the Corinthians to “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). God intentionally built this into male biology. He doesn’t call men to protect their families because men happen, on average, to be stronger than women. Instead, strength and the ability to protect are a part of his design for men — the physical make-up follows the intended function. But this does not mean that strength and the ability to protect are limited to men. Nor is it the case that nurture is limited to women, which is why Paul described his care for the congregation in Thessalonica as being tender like a nursing mother (1 Thess. 2:7).

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE IGNORE SAMENESS OR DISTINCTION?

There’s often a temptation to either heighten the importance of sex and gender or ignore it completely. This tendency is seen in foundational social science research as well. Lawrence Kohlberg³ and William Perry⁴ included only male participants in their studies, respectively, on moral development and intellectual and ethical development. As a result, women often didn’t score in the upper stages of their development schemes. And understandably so, since they were being evaluated against metrics designed for men. Outraged, women

responded with studies of their own, focused exclusively on women. Belenky et. al,⁵ Marcia Baxter Magolda,⁶ and Carol Gilligan⁷ all published studies that included women, sometimes exclusively.

These studies often elevated the importance of sex as though these distinctions signified completely different species.⁸ But interestingly, this further research involving women revealed different patterns as well as an ethic of care⁹ that were not seen when the research was narrowly focused on men. Taken as a whole, the research revealed what we might expect: women and men are more alike than different when it comes to intellectual and ethical development, but the research also revealed distinct patterns and perspectives between the sexes.¹⁰

From this research we see there is a danger in neglecting our distinctions. Ignoring these distinctions tends to make a man’s experience the norm. To diminish either our differences or our similarities devalues women. And we see this take place in both the church and the world. To make us the same takes away from God’s unique design of men *as* men and women *as* women. It also denies our God-given purpose of glorifying him as either males or females.

This diminishing happens most often in the secular culture around us. In the name of progress and liberation, society today is doing everything possible to flatten or erase any distinctions between the sexes. But one’s biological sex is not a mutable characteristic, and the idea that it is incidental to one’s personhood is especially damaging to women and children. Women need not view themselves as inferior or inherently deficient because their biological makeup is substantially different than that of a man. That men are on average taller and stronger than women, for example, is of no consequence to our understanding of the ontological equality of men and women. But ignoring our differences disregards men’s and women’s experiences as such and denies an important aspect of our humanity. Far from indicating a lack of equality, taking note of these distinctions actually affirms the necessity and complementary nature of the two sexes.

⁵Mary Field Belenky et al., *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic, 1997).

⁶Marcia Baxter Magolda, *Knowing and Reasoning in College: Gender-Related Patterns in Students’ Intellectual Development* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

⁷Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁸Many of the studies set out alternate schemes for men and women, but even as they do so the overall structure of development remains very similar, showing that men and women are more alike than different in their ethical and epistemological development while demonstrating different patterns and perspectives.

⁹Carol Gilligan in her research cited that “women for a combination of psychological and political reasons voiced relational realities that were otherwise unspoken or dismissed as inconsequential.” See Carol Gilligan, “Hearing the Difference: Theorizing Connection,” *Hypatia* 10, no. 2 (1995): 123. Several of the researchers in addition to Gilligan emphasized a similar theme of care. As secular researchers they rightly observed this pattern of moral reasoning that appears when women are added, but they wrongly explain and apply this ethic. They recognize the connected relational reality that women tend to exhibit in decision making, but in some of the research wrongly use it to justify abortion as an ethically good decision. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 4.

¹⁰For more explanation on the similarities and differences of these schemes, see Jennifer Kintner, “Alike but Different: Epistemological Development of Men and Women,” *Eikon* 1.2 (2019), 20-27.

³Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1981).

⁴William G. Perry, Jr., *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

In the church, however, we often witness the inverse of this problem. Mindful of the Bible’s teaching about the differences between men and women, the church has frequently downplayed or overlooked the fundamental commonality of men and women as humans. To see men and women as wholly distinct from one another is to deny our common humanity. To affirm that men and women are equal in essence, dignity, and value, as the Scriptures do, is to affirm that men and women are equally human. As human beings, each of us experiences life as either a male or female, yet it is critical to remember that every person experiences life in the world *as a person*. Therefore, both our created differences and our created similarities should be further explored to better understand and celebrate manhood and womanhood without essentializing either in ways that God doesn’t.

HOW DO THOSE FINDINGS MATCH UP WITH SCRIPTURE?

Biblically, that’s what one would expect to find. There are not two separate types of knowledge or two ethics in Scripture, one for men and one for women. Both men and women are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Both are fallen (Rom. 3:10–12, 23). Both are redeemed through believing the same gospel (Rom 10:9; Acts 16:31; Col. 1:13–14; Eph. 2:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 9:12; Rom. 3:23–25). Men and women are addressed separately in certain passages (Deut. 22:5; Gal. 3; 1 Tim. 2; Col. 3; Eph. 5; 1 Cor. 14; Titus 2; etc.), which helps to clarify distinctions about what it means to be male and female. But throughout the Bible, the vast majority of commands and instructions apply to both men and women.

FAITHFUL EXPRESSION OF MALENESS AND FEMALENESS

As committed complementarians we understand that God has established certain distinct functions for men and women. We believe, for example, that God calls men to exercise leadership in a unique way in the church and in the home. Similarly, we believe that certain teaching roles within the church are reserved for men. But even in such cases, we recognize that God calling men to lead in the church

and home in no way means that women are prohibited from exercising leadership or using their teaching gifts (in appropriate ways) in either context. We readily affirm Paul’s instruction for wives to submit to their husbands in Ephesians 5:22, 1 Peter 3:1–5, and Colossians 3:18. But the fact that women are called to submit to their own husbands does not mean submission is a “feminine” trait. Within the church and before God, men and women are both called to practice submission (1 Pet 5:5; James 4:7; Titus 3:1).

For too long, the church has operated with a deficient understanding of sex and gender. We’ve been unprepared to answer the questions about manhood and womanhood posed by a ten-year-old boy being told to get out of the kitchen and by the woman in the church pew asking, “Did God make a mistake in making me a gifted teacher?” We need to be able to address the sameness and the differences of the sexes without resorting to unhelpful stereotypes. It is only by thinking carefully about these issues that we can begin to appreciate the fullness of God’s design, which is beautiful, robust, and complex.

Men and women are different by design. As we live our lives, we not only pull from different depths in different areas, but in our embodiment of these traits and behaviors, our masculinity and femininity are expressed. Whether she is speaking at a conference, leading a team of co-workers, or preparing a meal for friends and family, everything Jenn does, she does as a woman. And the inverse is true for Josh. Everything we do, we do as a male or a female, and in everything we do, that reality finds expression. To faithfully express the fullness of God’s design, we need a theology of sex and gender that can affirm these distinctions without undermining the fundamental sameness of men and women as both image bearers and human beings.

"Everything we do, we do as a male or a female, and in everything we do, that reality finds expression."

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"A radical question for
a conservative church":

Should the Christian and Missionary Alliance Call Women "Pastors"?

The Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) is an evangelical denomination of roughly 2,000 churches and 500,000 members in the United States. A. B. Simpson started the movement in the late nineteenth century as a multi-denominational coalition of Christians and churches committed to taking the gospel to the unreached people of the globe. It solidified into a denomination in 1974 and continues to exist with a focus on sharing Christ with the nations.¹

I grew up in the C&MA and then spent almost ten years in the Southern Baptist tribe. When I returned to the C&MA, I was made aware that national leadership had opened up a discussion about the appropriateness of applying the label of "pastor" to women serving in official roles in local churches. In fact, President John Stumbo, in his report to General Council 2019, the highest level of legislative authority in the C&MA, introduced "change conversations." He said these were conversations that had "only just begun and for which, over the course of the next two years, we desire to include the broader Alliance family."² One of the conversations was in regard to: "our polity as it relates to male and female roles in the church."³

Some months later, all pastors and church leaders in the Central District of the C&MA received the regular Advance Newsletter with an article entitled, "When Women Preach." At the outset it claimed to be one of "a series of articles examining roles that women leaders can participate in within the Christian and Missionary Alliance under our current polity and application of Scripture, all under the authority of the local church elder board. It is an attempt to give an experiential understanding of the impact of properly stewarding all the gifts of the body of Christ, within all the people that make up the Church."⁴

The statement was signed by its author, Becky Carter, and the District Superintendent at the time, Jeff Miller. The article itself stirred up significant debate, as it sought to normalize women preaching in the corporate worship of local churches. The argument can be summarized by one of the concluding sentences: "Just as I learn from anointed men preaching God's word [*sic*], so too can men learn from an anointed woman preaching the Word."⁵

¹For official denominational history, see Robert L. Niklaus, John S. Sawin, and Samuel J. Stoesz, *All for Jesus: God at Work in the Christian and Missionary Alliance* (Colorado Springs: The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 2013). The quotation in the title comes from a 1947 issue of *The Alliance Weekly*, the official organ of the C&MA, in which a report is given about the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. considering whether to ordain women as pastors. The editor concludes, "It is a radical question for a conservative church" (*The Alliance Weekly* 82, no. 14 [April 5, 1947], 216). The publication has had several titles since it was founded by A. B. Simpson and is now called *Alliance Life*.

²2017–2018 Report of the President and Minutes of 2019 General Council, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Orlando, FL: 2019), 4.

³2017–2018 Report of the President and Minutes of 2019 General Council, 6.

⁴Becky Carter, "When Women Preach," *Advance Newsletter*, January 29, 2020, <http://cdcm.org/blog/2020/1/15/when-women-preach>.

⁵Carter, "When Women Preach."

“with three dozen languages represented among us, issues such as titles, ordination, and eldership vary greatly among us.”

Around the same time, in an Alliance polity course, part of the credentialing process, the curriculum made explicit that women could serve in any function in the local church as long as they did not exercise elder authority or hold the office of elder. This was qualified by the inclusion of preaching and the administration of the ordinances as appropriate functions for women in the church.⁶ This, again, stirred up significant discussion.

These anecdotes illustrate the existence of a spectrum of opinion on matters pertaining to women in ministry within the C&MA and perhaps some confusion about where the C&MA stands today on these issues relative to its history. The purpose of this article is threefold. First, to summarize the question being asked in the C&MA with the reasons it is being asked. Second, to describe the historical trajectory of the denomination up to this point as it relates to women in ministry. Third, to both evaluate current C&MA practice according to Scripture and answer the question, “should the C&MA call women pastors?” from Scripture.

THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

When President Stumbo opened up the conversation about male and female roles in the church, he wrote, “with three dozen languages (and even more cultures) represented among us, issues such as titles (who should be able to be called ‘pastor’?), ordination (what authority does ordination carry?), and eldership (how are local churches being led?) vary *greatly* among us.”⁷ There are two important things to note here. First, as the conversation has crystalized, the issue of the title “pastor” has become front and center. There is no indication that the ordination of women is up for debate or that the office of elder could be held by women. And in current C&MA polity, senior pastors are automatically elders, so by extension, those two positions would continue to be reserved for men.⁸ Strictly speaking, the question is whether to give women in secondary staff positions the title of “pastor.” Not surprisingly, this limited question has served as the catalyst for the much larger consideration of women in ministry generally.

Second, the issue of diversity within the denomination is one of the reasons often given for revisiting the C&MA’s original and long-standing conviction that the title “pastor” is reserved for men and synonymous with “elder” and “overseer” in the New Testament. The C&MA in the U.S. is indeed diverse. It is diverse culturally and linguistically, with 37 languages represented. There are five affinity-based districts: Cambodian, Hmong, Korean, Spanish Eastern, and Vietnamese. In addition, there are nine minority-based associations. Then there is regional diversity with the U.S. being divided over 22 territory-based districts.⁹ There is also great diversity in church size, from single-cell, solo-pastor smaller churches to multi-staff churches with thousands of members. The question becomes, and has been articulated, should matters of titles — and even whether elder authority should be wed to titles — be decided as a matter of policy at the national level or on a local level?¹⁰

Another reason for questioning the C&MA’s historic, biblical understanding of the title “pastor” is that it potentially limits what women can do in twenty-first century American society. There are women who are not able to serve in certain chaplaincy roles. There are others who have trouble making clergy hospital visits. Some, it is claimed, are simply not respected in the local church setting in the same way their male counterparts are esteemed. Some claim all of this is the result of women not holding the title “pastor.”

⁶Steve Grusendorf, “Unit 5.1 – Investigating Alliance Position Statements,” Alliance Polity (class lecture, CMAAllianceU, <https://www.cmallianceu.org/>, April 7, 2020).
⁷2017–2018 Report of the President and Minutes of 2019 General Council, 6. Emphasis and parentheticals original.
⁸2020 Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (Colorado Springs: The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 2020), A5-3.

⁹“Districts and Associations,” The Christian and Missionary Alliance, accessed August 26, 2020, <https://www.cmalliance.org/district>.

¹⁰John Stumbo, “A Season of Change, Part Two – Stumbo Video Blog 76” (November 12, 2019), <https://www.cmalliance.org/video/watch/44644/?autoplay=true>.

A final reason proposed for reconsidering the C&MA’s consistent application of the title “pastor” is that the denomination is more restrictive of women than A. B. Simpson was. Also, current Alliance polity allows women to exercise the function of shepherding or pastoring in official capacities, serving as pastors in all but name. This brings us to one of the key components of our endeavor, namely, to gain an historical awareness of where the C&MA has been on these issues as crucial context for understanding where it is today.

THE FOUNDER OF A MOVEMENT

On issues of women in ministry, A. B. Simpson was clear in his principles, but at times can seem equivocal in practice.¹¹ His *The Christ in the Bible Commentary* serves as a window into his exegesis of pertinent biblical texts. Romans 16:1–2, where Paul commends Phoebe as a “servant of the church at Cenchreae” and “patron of many and of myself as well,” provides a platform for unpacking the proper role of women in the church. Simpson, after waxing eloquent about the equality of women and their freedom to do ministry, asserts,

It is quite certain that the apostle placed women under certain limitations. We believe that these had only to do with the exercise of authority in the churches. . . . She is not called to exercise ecclesiastical authority, or take her place in the ordained ministry and government of the church, but in the ministry of testimony and teaching, both in public and in private, and in every office of holy love consistent with the principles of Christianity, she has boundless right and freedom.¹²

It is also here where Simpson defends the office of deaconess, as the “one special ecclesiastical office given to women in the early church.” About the office, he claims, “it was recognized then as distinctively as the office of deacon, elder, or bishop; and while it gave women no ecclesiastical authority, yet it recognized her proper ministry in an official way, and opened the widest doors of usefulness.”¹³

Commenting on 1 Corinthians 14:33–35, where Paul forbids women to speak in church, exhorting them to keep silent and that to do otherwise is shameful, Simpson asks and answers the question, “what right has a woman to minister in the Church of Christ, and how far is she restricted by the apostle’s guarded regulation?”¹⁴ He qualifies Paul’s prohibition with 1 Corinthians 11:5, where women are recognized as having the right to pray and prophecy in public, as long as their heads were covered. The two passages cannot contradict, of course, so Simpson argues that the significance of the cultural phenomenon of head coverings “simply means today that she is to act with such reserve that she will never unsex herself or try to take the place of a man.”¹⁵ According to Simpson, Paul is not speaking about the inferiority of women to men, but rather their subordination to them. Simpson also makes an interesting observation in his comments on this passage that the word “church” cannot mean the building, as church buildings did not exist at this historical moment, but rather refers to the “ecclesiastical order, formal assembly of the congregation.” He then concludes, “the passage might mean that women were not to take an official place in the ecclesiastical organization, was not to be one of its elders, its rulers, its ecclesiastical leaders.”¹⁶

Simpson’s comments on the biblical texts discussed thus far reveal that he clearly did not support the idea of women in the office of elder or overseer, synonymous in his mind, but do not reveal what restrictions he thought were to be applied to the role or function of women ministering in the church, specifically regarding preaching, teaching, and pastoring. While he did not appear to limit women teaching publicly in his Romans commentary, he also did not make explicit one way or the other whether that included the teaching of men. It is in his thoughts on 1 and 2 Timothy that the proper role or function of women in the church comes into better focus.

In his section on the government of the church, Simpson explicitly recognizes that the New Testament uses “elder” and “overseer” interchangeably. Also, he believed that there existed two classes of elders: ruling elders and teaching elders. He concludes,

¹¹My analysis is necessarily narrow, focusing on offices, titles, and functions in the local church. For wider treatment of women in ministry from an egalitarian perspective, see Paul L. King, *Anointed Women: The Rich Heritage of Women in Ministry in the Christian & Missionary Alliance* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2009) and the work of Leslie A. Andrews, including “The Roles of Women in the Church,” *The Alliance Witness* 111, no. 9 (May 5, 1976), 3–6; “Restricted Freedom: A.B. Simpson’s View of Women,” in *The Birth of a Vision*, ed. David F. Hartzfeld and Charles Nienkirchen (Beaverlodge, CA: Buena Book Services, 1986), 219–40; “A. B. Simpson’s Understanding of the Role of Women in Ministry,” Alliance World Fellowship, accessed July 8, 2020, <http://awfworld/consult/leslie-andrews-a-b-simpsons-understanding-of-the-role-of-women-in-ministry/>.

¹²A. B. Simpson, *The Christ in the Bible Commentary* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1994), 5:142.

¹³Simpson, *Christ in the Bible*, 5:142. “Bishop” and “overseer” are both translations of the same Greek word, *episkopos*.

¹⁴Simpson, *Christ in the Bible*, 5:237.

¹⁵Simpson, *Christ in the Bible*, 5:237.

¹⁶Simpson, *Christ in the Bible*, 5:238.

There appears to have been no extremely rigid rule in the New Testament about church government further than that a certain body of spiritual overseers were appointed out of every church, and they were called elders or bishops. Some of them, who had the requisite qualifications, exercised the ministry of teaching, while others simply took pastoral oversight over the flock.¹⁷

This is a critical paragraph for several reasons. First, he prefaces his brief articulation of New Testament polity with the recognition that what he is about to say about elders is the inflexible minimum standard, indeed, an “extremely rigid rule.” Second, the teaching ministry or function was exercised by teaching elders. Simpson clearly has every church as a whole in view here, which he defined in his 1 Corinthians commentary as an “ecclesiastical order, formal assembly of the congregation.”¹⁸ Finally, the pastoral ministry or function is exercised by elders, at least in the sense of any church-wide oversight or pastoral care. At the conclusion of his section on church government, he states rather tersely, “The epistles to Timothy recognize the ministry of women, but with great restrictions. The woman is not allowed to teach or usurp authority over the man, but to maintain her place of subjection.”¹⁹

Simpson offers a whole chapter on pastoral ministry in his commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy, entitled *The True Minister of Jesus Christ*. It is worth noting that the fact that this role is reserved for a man is simply assumed in almost every paragraph. He says the minister is a “man of God.”²⁰ He uses the male singular pronoun throughout: “The good minister will be careful of *his* deportment” and “The good minister is careful in *his* selection of workers.”²¹ And Simpson ties the function of preaching and the label of “pastor” to this true minister. He claims that the preaching of this minister is the Word of God and that careful preparation of messages will characterize him.²² He states, “the good minister is a personal worker and pastor.”²³

One will not find the statements, “women cannot be given the title of pastor” or “women must not preach in church,” in Simpson’s commentaries. His use of the

label “pastor” was limited, preferring “elder,” “bishop,” and “minister,” and he simply did not speak to the presenting question directly or equate “pastor” with “elder” explicitly. Neither did he forbid women from preaching in church. Those things considered, he clearly reserved the office of elder for men and tied the functions of teaching and pastoral care to that office, at minimum precluding women from exercising those functions church-wide with regularity.

One treatment in Simpson’s magazine sheds further light on his principles. From 1891, early in the movement’s history, Simpson’s editorial on the ministry of women argues from the concept of headship in 1 Corinthians 11,

[T]he New Testament prohibits women from the formal and official ministry of the Christian church in the strictly ecclesiastical sense. She is not called to be a pastor, an elder, a bishop; but besides the official ministry and government of the Christian church there is an infinite room, for proclaiming a glad message of salvation.²⁴

Here Simpson rightly equates “pastor,” “elder,” and “bishop” or “overseer” in no uncertain terms. He goes on to highlight the prophetic ministry of women from the same passage and concludes that any word of exhortation, edification, or comfort is appropriate for a woman to offer in the assembly. But, “The less formal her testimony is, the better. The more it takes the form of a simple story of love, the less like a sermon and the more like a conversation, the more effective it will be.”²⁵ Simpson then makes an exegetical distinction between *kerago*, the Greek word meaning to proclaim officially with a trumpet, and *laleo*, meaning to talk. He asserts, “this latter word describes the ministry of woman, the former the ministry of man. Man is the official herald, woman is the echo of his voice, repeating in a thousand gentler tones, until love bears it to every human heart.”²⁶ While a questionable application of the distinction, it reveals Simpson’s extreme hesitance to allow, in principle, for women to preach in the local church, a function tied to the office of pastor, if not forbidding such activity outright.

¹⁷Simpson, *Christ in the Bible*, 6:42–43.

¹⁸Simpson, *Christ in the Bible*, 5:238.

¹⁹Simpson, *Christ in the Bible*, 6:43.

²⁰Simpson, *Christ in the Bible*, 6:57.

²¹Simpson, *Christ in the Bible*, 6:61.

²²Simpson, *Christ in the Bible*, 6:59–60.

²³Simpson, *Christ in the Bible*, 6:61.

²⁴*The Christian Alliance and Missionary Weekly* 6, no. 13 (March 27, 1891), 195 (hereafter *CAMW*).

²⁵*CAMW* 6, no. 13 (March 27, 1891), 195.

²⁶*CAMW* 6, no. 13 (March 27, 1891), 195.

However, one will find conflicting statements and practices from Simpson. These seem to flow from his singular focus on world evangelization. One notorious incident from 1893 illustrates this well. Simpson recalls in an editorial a significant and successful gathering of Christian workers in Atlanta and chides a prominent pastor from the city. He, along with the support of the ministerial association, went about “setting the community right on the subject of women speaking in public,” in a newspaper. Simpson wrote,

The dear brother seems to have quite forgotten all the glorious results of that great convention, in the single fact that it had run across one of his ecclesiastical convictions and the opportunity of proving that the convention and the women were wrong in that one particular seems to have almost obliterated all the other effects of the convention and kept him and his brethren from reaping the glorious harvest of spiritual blessing that ought to have been gathered out of such a meeting.

He continues to describe the issue as “a little side issue of purely speculative character, which God has already settled, not only in His Word but in His providence, by the seal which he is placing in this very day, in every part of the world, upon the public work of consecrated Christian women.”²⁷ It is important to note that at issue is not preaching in the local church, but rather women speaking in public in an extra-ecclesiastical setting. Simpson finally scolds, “Dear brother, let the Lord manage the women. He can do it better than you, and you turn your batteries against the common enemy.”²⁸

Simpson endorsed the wide-ranging evangelistic ministries of women like Mattie Perry and Mary Davies. Highlighting Miss Perry’s ministry in his magazine, he writes, “She is an authorized evangelist of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in all the Southern states, and God has used her to build up the work throughout the whole field,” and “We desire to call special attention to the noble work of our dear sister...Her evangelistic field covers the entire vast region.”²⁹ Simpson, in his annual report, celebrates that, “Miss Mary G. Davies was added to our staff last year as a field evangelist and has rendered splendid service over a

very wide field and under unusual conditions of labor and trying weather.”³⁰ These women were given broad license to evangelize, which would have included preaching to both men and women, but their office and role were outside of the ecclesiastical structure.

Again, Simpson appears conflicted at times, but was nonetheless clear. He committed himself tirelessly to world evangelization, and warmly welcomed and supported women who shared his vision and contributed to that great effort. He feared quenching the Holy Spirit’s work, so he was hesitant to curb the function of women in ministry. He enthusiastically supported women as missionaries, evangelists, and officers in the movement during his lifetime.³¹ However, in the final analysis, Simpson’s exegesis and extrapolated principles include the synonymous use of “pastor,” “elder,” and “bishop” or “overseer,” the limitation of that singular office to qualified men, and the fact that those who hold that singular office exercise the functions of preaching, teaching, and pastoral care. In applying these principles, Simpson left open the door for the prophetic ministry of women in the corporate worship of local churches, but the more such a ministry felt like preaching, the more uncomfortable he became.

THE DIRECTION OF A DENOMINATION

Fast forward to 1974, the year the C&MA transitioned from being a movement, a coalition of churches, to a denomination. The formal licensing and ordination process, which the C&MA carried over from its existence as a movement, was reserved exclusively for men. The preamble for the *Uniform Procedures on Licensing* in the C&MA manual read,

Since the Christian ministry is regarded with honor and reverence, the church has insisted that only men with the “Call of God” or a summons into the Holy ministry by the sovereign will of God shall be credentialed and commissioned by the church to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. Only a person of sound Christian experience, Godly life, a keen sense of mission and who is in genuine accord with the doctrines and teachings of The Christian and Missionary Alliance, may be approved by The Christian and Missionary Alliance as a minister of the Gospel.³²

³⁰*The C&MA* 32, no. 10 (June 5, 1909), 153.

³¹For examples of women in ministry more broadly, see Andrews, “Restricted Freedom,” 230–37. There are several instances in Andrews’s survey of attribution to Simpson, when in reality the quotations are from another contributor to his magazine, but overall her analysis is compelling.

³²*1975-1976 Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance* (Nyack, NY: The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1936), 124. The word “men” was replaced with “persons” in 1995, though it does not appear to have been reported to General Council 1996 (*1995 Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance* [Colorado Springs: The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1994], E3-1).

²⁷*CAMW* 11, no. 26 (December 29, 1893), 402.

²⁸*CAMW* 11, no. 26 (December 29, 1893), 402.

²⁹*The Christian and Missionary Alliance* 21, no. 16 (October 19, 1898), 373 (hereafter *The CMA*), and *The CMA* 21, no. 18 (November 5, 1898), 421.



Licenses were given for the positions of “Pastor, Assistant Pastor, Evangelist, Home Missionary, and Christian Education Director,” all of which were reserved exclusively for men.³³

Women in ministry had a separate, less formal credentialing process for the office of “Deaconess.” The article describing this office and process was new to the denomination’s first manual. It stated clearly that “the licensed deaconess shall not be eligible for ordination” and “is not authorized to administer the ordinances.” It then provides direction for the function of women holding this official office:

The ministry of the licensed deaconess may include visitation of church families, new-contact visitation for evangelism, women’s work, children’s work, Bible classes, ministry to shut-ins, youth work, Christian education, prayer meetings, and teacher training. Her ministry may be expanded by the local church executive committee to include other functions.³⁴

While parameters for what expanded functions are appropriate are not defined, what is and is not included on the illustrative list of ministry functions is noteworthy.

At the outset of the C&MA as a denomination, the biblical distinction between the role and function of men and women in the ministry of the local church was maintained and plainly expressed. The same cannot be said of policies and procedures governing the C&MA today. The evolution over the past four decades has included both minor, incremental changes, and several lurches in the egalitarian direction.

One flashpoint occurred in 1979. The General Council, at a committee recommendation, commissioned the Board of Managers (now called the Board of Directors), the body that governed the C&MA between councils, to study and report on the role of women in ministry. The reasons for the recommendation included the difficulty of women finding positions as a result of the singular available title of “deaconess.”³⁵ General Council 1980 accepted the report as a progress report and tasked the Board of Managers with development.³⁶ The final report considered at General Council 1981 included a statement of nine principles and concluded, “that women may properly engage in any kind of ministry except that which involves elder authority.”³⁷ The principles affirmed the equality of men and women, and their difference in role in the family and church in terms of authority. All of the principles were affirmed by Council, with one notable exception. The ninth principle stated, “We recognize also that God, in His sovereignty has at times placed women in positions of authority (e.g. celibacy, Nazarite vow, Deborah, etc.). We need to be open when God chooses to work in this way.”³⁸ This was voted down. While the study committee wanted to make room for exceptions in the God-given authority structure for the church, the majority in the C&MA said “no.”

The study committee also made five recommendations in 1981, all of which were accepted, one with slight modification. These primarily called for encouraging women in ministry and for the licensing process for women to better reflect what ministries women were officially part of, rather than the less formal and limited process for deaconesses. Recommendation two required the following sentence be added to the manual: “Women may fulfill any function in the local church which

³⁵*Annual Report for 1978 and Minutes of the General Council 1979*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Lincoln, NB: 1979), 209.

³⁶*Annual Report for 1979 and Minutes of the General Council 1980*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Hartford, CN: 1980), 212. The committee for the 1980 report was made up of Roger Irwin (Chairman), Leslie A. Andrews (Secretary), Teresa Dunham, C. A. Epperson, John Fogal, Thomas Fraser, Elizabeth Jackson, Eugene Q. McGee, Wendell W. Price, and Marilyn Weldin.

³⁷*Minutes of the General Council 1981 and Annual Report for 1980*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Anaheim, CA: 1981), 325. For full report, see pages 307–28. The committee for the 1981 report was made up of Walter Sandell (Chairman), Jean Bubna (Secretary), Olive Battles, Thomas Collord, Teresa Dunham, Charles Epperson, Elmer Fitch, John Fogal, Elizabeth Jackson, David Morre, and Gerald Welbourn.

³⁸*Minutes of the General Council 1981 and Annual Report for 1980*, 325.

³³1975-1976 *Manual*, 125

³⁴1975-1976 *Manual*, 129–30

the pastor and elders may choose to delegate to them consistent with the Manual.”³⁹ The immediate impact this had on the 1981 manual was the addition of an explanatory note on the definition of an official worker, which read, “Women may engage in any kind of ministry except that which involves elder authority.”⁴⁰ It would be almost 20 years before the licensing process for women received an overhaul, but some language changes came in 1989 when the article “Deaconess” became “Women in Ministry.” With this development, the list of suggested functions was removed, while the parameters were set with the statement, “She shall be able to hold all appointed ministries other than that of pastor, associate pastor or assistant pastor.”⁴¹

In 1994, an episode at General Council involving women and the ordinance of communion brought the question of women in ministry to a heated debate that would last the rest of the decade. The idea of women serving communion at the council was ruled out of order and a committee was appointed to study and recommend policy regarding women in ministry.⁴² In the report to General Council 1995, the committee asserted, “While we seek consensus as much as is within us, we view the issue of women in ministry as peripheral to those things which are essential in matters of faith and doctrine and, therefore, require unity.”⁴³ With this premise, the committee recommended, “that there be no restrictions on the ministry of unordained men and women in ministry” and “that local churches of The Christian and Missionary Alliance be authorized to adjust their bylaws to reflect their local convictions and practice with respect to the role of women in ministry.”⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly, this generated a flurry of motions, recommendations, and amendments, which resulted in none of the recommendations being voted on, dispensing with consideration of the report as a whole, and the appointing of an entirely different committee. This follow-up committee was more narrowly focused on the privileges and responsibilities conferred with ordination, whether differences in privileges and restrictions should exist between licensed unordained men and licensed women, and recommendations for a more formal preparatory process for women in ministry.⁴⁵

This task force to develop a set of proposals regarding licensed unordained men and licensed women in ministry recognized that the concept of “elder authority” was both intimately related to the categories they were considering and unhelpfully vague. The committee recommended that a study into the definition and application of elder authority be launched, which General Council 1996 adopted.⁴⁶ The results of this and recommendations concerning the formalization of the process of preparing women for ministry would manifest at General Council 1999, when the results regarding elder authority were decided and the new policy for consecration was reported.⁴⁷ The *Report of the Committee Appointed to Study Elder Authority* defined it this way: “With authority delegated from Christ the Chief Shepherd and confirmed by the church membership, the elders are the highest level of servant leadership in the local church. As undershepherds, elders collectively oversee the local church and its ministries to accomplish Christ’s mission.”⁴⁸ It goes on, “Basic to the understanding of ‘elder authority’ given above, it is evident that clergy are a sub-category of overseers/elders/shepherds. As such, biblically the privileges and responsibilities of being ordained are no more or less than those of non-ordained elders.”⁴⁹ General Council accepted the report as a whole and it was in the wrangling over the recommendations that elders were officially freed to delegate the ordinances of baptism and communion to others, including women.⁵⁰

It was here too, in 1999, that the consecration track for the preparation of women for ministry was unveiled. The licensing process for men entering ministry became the licensing process for women as well, including all of the same requirements.⁵¹ After the initial licensing and ministry appointment, men would then pursue ordination, while women pursued consecration. The requirements for both were virtually identical, with one notable exception. For ordination, “each year the candidate shall present to his sponsor at least one audio or videotape of a full-length sermon which was preached at a regular church service for the sponsor’s review of both content and delivery of biblical material,” while for consecration, “each year the candidate shall present to her sponsor at least one full-length videotape of her teaching

³⁹*Minutes of the General Council 1981 and Annual Report for 1980*, 228–29.
⁴⁰*1981 Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance* (Nyack, NY: The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1981), 114. The “elder authority” language was added to the manual illegitimately, as it was not the terminology in the recommendation approved by General Council. This was at least identified years later in 1997 by a committee tasked with defining “elder authority” (*Minutes of General Council 1999 and Annual Report 1998*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Portland, 1999), 215).
⁴¹*1989 Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance* (Nyack, NY: The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1989), 154.
⁴²*Minutes of General Council 1994 & Annual Report 1993*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Columbus, OH: 1994), 140–43. The committee was instructed to study the Scriptures, C&MA history, and current C&MA practice. The scene inspired some heated letters to the editor, including one from Leslie A. Andrews. She wrote, “Perhaps when women who are seeking a way to be a part of the C&MA have gone away, we can get on with our primary task” (*Alliance Life* 129, no. 12 [June 15, 1994], 26).
⁴³*Minutes of General Council 1995 & Annual Report 1994*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Pittsburgh, PA: 1995), 248. The committee was made up of Leslie A. Andrews (Chairperson), Marjorie Cline, Albert Runge, and Samuel J. Stoesz.
⁴⁴*Minutes of General Council 1995 & Annual Report 1994*, 260–61.
⁴⁵*Minutes of General Council 1995 & Annual Report 1994*, 160–71.

⁴⁶For the report, see *Minutes of General Council 1996 & Annual Report 1995*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Indianapolis: 1996), 362–73. The task force was made up by P. McGarvey, K. Bailey, A. Poon, D. Wiggins, and N. Zobel. For the council’s response, see *Minutes of General Council 1996 & Annual Report 1995*, 211–25.
⁴⁷A preliminary report on elder authority was offered in 1997 without recommendations (*Minutes of General Council 1997 & Annual Report 1996*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance [Charlotte, NC: 1997], 217–18) and the full report with recommendations presented in 1998, with time only allowing for consideration of three of the eleven recommendations (*Minutes of General Council 1998 & Annual Report 1997*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance [Milwaukee: 1998], 178–81).
⁴⁸*Minutes of General Council 1999 and Annual Report 1998*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Portland: 1999), 219.
⁴⁹*Minutes of General Council 1999 and Annual Report 1998*, 222.
⁵⁰*Minutes of General Council 1999 and Annual Report 1998*, 148–51.
⁵¹*1999 Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance* (Colorado Springs: The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 1999), E3–1–E3–17. It is interesting that one of the requirements was “homiletics” (1999 *Manual*, E3–2) and the article *Women in Ministry* with its reference to a separate licensing process and prohibition of women administering the ordinances and their appointment as pastors remained in the manual until 2001 (1999 *Manual*, E3–11–E3–12).

at the church for the sponsors review of both content and delivery of the biblical material.”⁵² The Board of Managers that approved the policy language distinguished between preaching at a regular church service and teaching at church, the former reserved for men and the latter open to women. This distinction was also maintained in the theological definitions of ordination and consecration.

For the C&MA in 1999, ordination was the church’s public recognition of the call from God, distinct from human vocational choice, to men for a lifetime of ministry, through speech and exemplary lifestyle, of preaching and teaching the Word of God, protecting God’s people from spiritual enemies and doctrinal heresies, overseeing and promoting the spiritual development of God’s people, and equipping God’s people to fulfill the Great Commission to “make disciples of all nations” for the purpose of knowing and glorifying God by obeying His will and building His Kingdom.⁵³

*"Ordination was the church's public
recognition of the call from God, distinct
from human vocational choice, to men for
a lifetime of ministry."*

Consecration was defined as the public recognition and affirmation of God’s call to women for a lifetime of service. This call, distinct from human vocational choice, is exercised through God-given and Holy Spirit-empowered giftedness for an effective witness about Jesus Christ and proclamation of biblical truth for the purpose of reconciling people to God and equipping God’s people to fulfill the Great Commission to “make disciples of all nations.”⁵⁴

Consistent with C&MA theology and polity, the definition of ordained ministry was loaded with language of elder responsibility and function, including preaching, teaching, and ecclesiastical oversight. All of these are absent from the language describing consecration, the less specific concepts of effective witness and general proclamation appeared instead.

Despite these differences in ordination and consecration, the uniform licensing policy for men and women coupled with the overlap in the processes for ordination and consecration sowed confusion, and understandably so. The *2001 Report of the Committee on Legislation Relating to National Church Ministries* identified this problem. The committee recommended “the Division of National Church Ministries review and revise the present guidelines for the consecration of licensed female official workers in order to establish a procedure for consecration that is consistent with the particular needs of women who are called to vocational ministries.” The reasoning for this recommendation included, among other inconsistencies, that “ordination confers elder authority and that eldership in the New Testament is restricted to men,” combined with the fact that “present guidelines for the consecration of women to vocational church ministries are identical to the requirements for the ordination of men,” meant that “women in ministry would be better served by a process designed to prepare them for ministries appropriate to their calling and consistent with the denomination’s understanding of the role of women in ministry.”⁵⁵ Regrettably, the motion to adopt this recommendation lost.⁵⁶

Two years later, an effort to define the functions of licensed men and women in ministry ensued. Individuals with an ordained/consecrated “Official Worker License” were “considered spiritual leaders having certain rights and privileges including but not limited to the authority to administer the sacraments, conduct worship services, and perform service(s) in the control, conduct, and maintenance of designated entities of the C&MA.”⁵⁷ At the same time, the distinction between ordination and consecration was maintained explicitly by the addition of a paragraph in the preambles to the ordination and consecration policies. It read,

⁵⁵*Minutes of General Council 2001 and Annual Report 2000*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Columbus, OH: 2001), 287.

⁵⁶*Minutes of General Council 2001 and Annual Report 2000*, 164.

⁵⁷*2003 Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance* (Colorado Springs: The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 2003), E3-4. All of the changes to the Uniform Policy on Licensing, Ordination, and Consecration were reported at General Council 2003 (*Minutes of General Council 2003 & Annual Report 2002*, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Phoenix: 2003), 162–80).

⁵²1999 *Manual*, E4-4; E5-4.

⁵³1999 *Manual*, E4-1–E4-2.

⁵⁴1999 *Manual*, E5-1.

In accordance with the Uniform Constitution for Accredited Churches which identifies that “elders shall be male members” and that all pastors are understood to be “elders,” the ordination process is applicable only to male candidates. The consecration process, which acknowledges a woman’s call to serve the Lord’s Church in other equally important roles, will apply to female candidates.⁵⁸

This tension of highlighting distinguishing characteristics within a uniform process continued in the 2011 manual, which finalized the policies and procedures relevant to women in ministry as they are in place today.

The distinction remained in 2011, and does to this day, between ordination and consecration, but the function of men and women respectively credentialed became almost indistinguishable. The manual stated,

“[O]rdination” refers to a male official worker who has been publically set apart for pastoral ministry, and who is therefore recognized as a teaching elder within the C&MA. The term “consecration” similarly refers to a woman who has been publically set apart for ministry. However, women who have been publically consecrated are not recognized as elders.⁵⁹

But all licensed official workers, whether male or female, “are recognized as clergy and serve in positions dedicated to preaching and teaching the Word of God, administering the ordinances, and leading the church to walk in the fullness of Christ and fulfill the Great Commission worldwide.”⁶⁰ Further, while,

An Ordained Official Worker License may be issued to men who are appointed by the district superintendent to serve in pastoral and other related ministries which have as a primary responsibility preaching and teaching the Word of God, administering ordinances, and leading the church.

Identically, in a functional sense,

A Consecrated Official Worker License may be issued to women who are appointed by the district superintendent to serve in church and other related ministries (except for that of pastor and/or senior pastor) which include preaching and teaching the Word of God and administering the ordinances under the oversight of elders and/or an ordained official worker, and providing leadership to the church and its ministries.⁶¹

For the first time, C&MA official policy explicitly authorized women to preach during the gathered worship of local churches.

THE LENS OF SCRIPTURE

A biblical evaluation of the current C&MA position on women in ministry and answer to the question at hand must center on two exegetical enquiries: how to interpret 1 Timothy 2:8–15 and whether “pastor” is synonymous with “elder” and “overseer” in the New Testament.⁶² First Timothy 2:12, specifically, where Paul writes, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man,” is critical because it provides a prohibition of two functions of women in the church. Presently, in the C&MA, women may hold any office and perform any function that does not involve elder authority, meaning a woman cannot hold the office of elder, but may function freely and without restriction under the collective authority of the elders through delegation. This policy and practice are based on a dubious interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12.

The historical context is that of Paul writing to Timothy after an unpleasant visit to Ephesus, where he left him to root out false teaching and restore order. A key statement in the letter comes in 3:15, where Paul makes explicit his purpose in writing, namely, “that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God.” Paul is giving behavioral instructions to the local church, providing guidance to the congregation for conduct during worship.⁶³ After opening up the chapter talking about prayer, he asserts that men are to pray with a pure heart, without division that hinders their prayers.

⁵⁸2003 Manual, E4-1; E5-1.
⁵⁹2011 Manual of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (Colorado Springs: The Christian and Missionary Alliance, 2011), E3-2. This and the following noted additions, while not enumerated in detail, were reported to General Council 2011 as a blanket policy overhaul (2009-10 Report of the President and Minutes of General Council 2011, The Christian and Missionary Alliance [Kansas City, MO: 2011], 140–41).
⁶⁰2011 Manual, E3-1.

⁶¹2011 Manual, E3-1–E3-2.
⁶²The purpose of this section is not to provide a thoroughly defended, definitive interpretation, but rather to offer a position that points readers to some solid resources and historic CMA exegesis.
⁶³Andreas J. Köstenberger and Margaret E. Köstenberger, God’s Design for Man and Woman: A Biblical-Theological Survey (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 205.

Women should be modest, motivated by propriety and self-restraint. He continues with an exhortation for women to learn, a radical, countercultural imperative in the first-century Greco-Roman world. This learning is to be done quietly, which means respectfully. “Quietly” cannot imply silence, as Paul elsewhere encouraged women to participate in worship services through prayer, prophesying, and singing. This learning was to be done quietly and in submission. So verse 11 assumes women are disciples and are learning, but they are not to hijack the leadership and teaching role. Verse 12 clarifies this by reiterating the point of verse 11 in reverse. Why the prohibition? Paul does not point to culture or custom, to a lack of education or female inferiority, or negative examples of female teaching and leadership failure. Paul grounds his argument in verse 13 in God’s design, the very order of creation.⁶⁴ And this is not order merely in terms of chronology, but what the order points to in the Genesis account. Adam was the leader, protector, and provider, while Eve was to submit, help, and nurture. Man and woman are ontologically equal, yet given complementary roles in the home and the church. This complementarianism was woven into the fabric of human nature expressed in maleness and femaleness; it is not the result of the fall.

Paul continues his reasoning in verse 14 by highlighting the fact that a departure from this complementarity was intertwined with the first human sin. Adam stood by when he should have protected Eve. He followed when he ought to have led. Eve, rather than submitting, took initiative as Satan tempted her to “and became a transgressor.” When the divine design is abandoned, disaster ensues. Instead, according to verse 15, women are saved from usurping the role of men by embracing the role of women, embracing it with the Christian virtues of faith, love, holiness, and self-control.⁶⁵

Back to consideration of the all-important verse 12, the question becomes what teaching and authority are forbidden? The prohibition of women teaching is not absolute, but it is qualified in some ways. The immediate context offers two qualifications. First, a woman is not to teach “a man.” Second, a woman is not to teach a



man “in the household of God” (1 Tim. 3:15). In the context of the pastoral epistles, teaching is the public transmission of authoritative material. Put together, Paul forbids a woman to teach in the mixed gathering of the congregation. In short, he does not permit them to preach during corporate worship. Paul moves from this specific function to the more general activity of exercising authority. The categories overlap, to be sure. Teaching is an exercise of authority and authority is primarily, though not exclusively, exercised through teaching in the church.⁶⁶ These two prerogatives are united in the office of elder, such that women may neither teach like an elder nor rule like one. Verse 11 could mean more than that in certain church contexts, but it cannot mean less.

⁶⁴Report of the Board of Managers Regarding the Role of Women in Ministry in the Christian and Missionary Alliance to General Council 1981,” in *Minutes of the General Council 1981 and Annual Report for 1980*, 316–19.

⁶⁵Alexander Strauch, *Men and Women Equal Yet Different* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1999), 77–81.

⁶⁶“Report of the Board of Managers Regarding the Role of Women in Ministry in the Christian and Missionary Alliance to General Council 1981,” 316–19. See also, Douglas Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men? 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 184–87; J. Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt, *Women’s Ministry in the Local Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 73–74.

The idea that functions such as preaching in corporate worship or exercising elder-like leadership may be delegated to women and therefore women may perform them under the authority of the elders is based on an unlikely understanding of *authenteo*, “to have authority.” The verb would need to have a pejorative meaning, such as “domineer,” or an ingressive meaning, like “usurp authority,” to warrant such conclusions and practices. An exhaustive analysis of all known occurrences of *authenteo* in ancient and medieval Greek reveals that while translations like “assume authority” are justified at times, it is only when an ingressive aorist is used, not other verb forms. Paul uses the present tense in 1 Timothy 2:12.⁶⁷

Syntax also bears the result that *authenteo* should be understood as a positive exercise of authority. The grammar demands that *didasko*, “to teach,” and *authenteo* must both be taken either negatively or positively. The default lexical connotation of *didasko* is positive unless negatively qualified; New Testament usage is consistent with this. In the absence of a negative qualifier in the context of 1 Timothy 2:12, both verbs should be taken positively.⁶⁸ We may safely conclude that the office of elder, with its unique teaching function, is reserved for qualified men.⁶⁹

The fact that “elder” is synonymous with “overseer” and “pastor” in the New Testament is the established position of the C&MA. The *Report of the Committee Appointed to Study Elder Authority*, which was adopted by General Council 1999, speaks to all three of these titles.⁷⁰ It states,

As Paul and others went about establishing churches, they repeatedly used three different words to refer to the elder role in the local church. Shepherd (poimen): In Ephesians 4:11, Paul refers to gifted leaders in the church, including the one who is most often a combination of shepherd and teacher...Overseer/ Bishop (episkopos)...Elder (presbuteros).⁷¹

The committee concluded, “Undoubtedly, these three titles all refer to one role in the local church for writers use the terms interchangeably.” This conclusion was founded on an impeccable exercise in biblical theology, which is worth quoting at length:

In Acts 20 Paul addresses them as elders (vs. 17), tells them to shepherd the people (vs. 28), and calls them overseers (vs. 28). Peter addresses the elders, urges them to be shepherds of God’s flock serving as overseers (1 Peter 5:1-4). In Titus 1:5-7 Paul begins to spell out elder qualifications and then calls them “overseers.” Clearly these writers are using three terms to refer to one kind of leader. “Shepherd” captures the caring part of their function; “elder” fits the Jewish origin of the leadership role and tells something of the leader’s nature, usually older and more mature; “overseer” would communicate better in Gentile/Greek contexts and speaks to another part of the elder’s role, giving oversight to God’s work.⁷²

This exegesis ought to be debated and repudiated before considering whether the title “pastor” should be given to women in the C&MA.

CONCLUSION: A QUESTION OF FAITHFULNESS

The local option for deciding whether women may be called “pastors” is the wrong way forward. The question should be answered for the C&MA at the national level, and in fact it has been answered. Both C&MA exegesis and history preclude women from being given the label “pastor.” Departure from this position to a local option would be problematic for more than reasons of questionable biblical interpretation. For one, it would assuredly cause division in local churches. In regions like mine, there are multiple C&MA churches within a short driving distance. As churches decided the question differently for themselves, reputations of progressivism and conservatism would develop, spurring exoduses likely both ways.

For another, the C&MA is not congregational in its polity. It has a denominational hierarchy, with district Licensing, Ordination, and Consecration Committees (LO&CC) that hold the keys to credentialing. When an individual is appointed to a position, he or she is licensed and begins the ordination or consecration process, respectively. Both processes are directed, and successful completion determined by the LO&CC. What happens when a woman pastor is being considered by

⁶⁷Al Wolters, “The Meaning of αὐθεντέω,” in *Women in the Church: An Interpretation & Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 3rd Edition, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 113.

⁶⁸Andreas J. Köstenberger, “A Complex Sentence: The Syntax of 1 Timothy 2:12,” in *Women in the Church*, 159–61. See “Report of the Board of Managers Regarding the Role of Women in Ministry in the Christian and Missionary Alliance to General Council 1981,” 318–19 for further support of this interpretation.

⁶⁹For C&MA articulations of the connection between the office of elder and teaching, see “Instructional Statement on Church Government,” in *1981 Manual*, 207 and “Report of the Committee Appointed to Study Elder Authority,” in *Minutes of General Council 1999 and Annual Report 1998*, 218.

⁷⁰*Minutes of General Council 1999 and Annual Report 1998*, 151.

⁷¹*Minutes of General Council 1999 and Annual Report 1998*, 217.

⁷²*Minutes of General Council 1999 and Annual Report 1998*, 217.

the LO&CC for licensing or consecration? Are members of the committee supposed to violate their consciences by vetting her, when their convictions are that her position is contrary to Scripture? Or are those who hold the current C&MA view supposed to forgo such positions of denominational leadership? What about a District Superintendent? Will he have to simply set aside his principles and worship in the churches he visits when women pastors are on the preaching team? What about a future president? Will he have to simply live with what he believes is out of step with the Bible in denominational policy and refuse to open this whole question up again? And what about every church that faithfully gives to the District Development Fund? Are churches to continue contributing when monies are used to support church plants with women pastors? What about the Great Commission Fund?

The narrow “should the C&MA call women pastors” question is part of a larger historical discussion, indeed, a trajectory. That trajectory has already moved beyond exegetical warrant. It not only must be stopped, but ground needs to be regained. The issue is not the opening of the door to egalitarianism, it is the survival of complementarianism. The line should be drawn where Scripture is clear. A pastor is an elder is an overseer. Pastors-elders-overseers are biblically qualified men. And only those qualified to be pastors-elders-overseers preach during corporate worship of local churches.⁷³

When recommendations and decisions are made at General Council in May, 2021, it will be impossible to make the entire denomination happy. Better to have people leave over what the C&MA has always been, than to drive people out by changing it into what it has never been. And what has the C&MA always been? Committed to the authority of Scripture and its application, over and above pragmatic, emotive, convenient, or cultural temptations. The C&MA is a Bible people. We bring our emotions, experience, traditions, and reason itself under the authority of God’s Word. I believe that with all my heart. And I intend to devote my life to the larger cause of Christ from within the C&MA as long as I believe that to be true. ✕

⁷³For a helpful spectrum on women’s roles in the church and exposition and application of the Danvers Statement, see Wayne Grudem, “But what *should* women do in the church?” *CBMW News* 1, no. 2 (November, 1995), 3.

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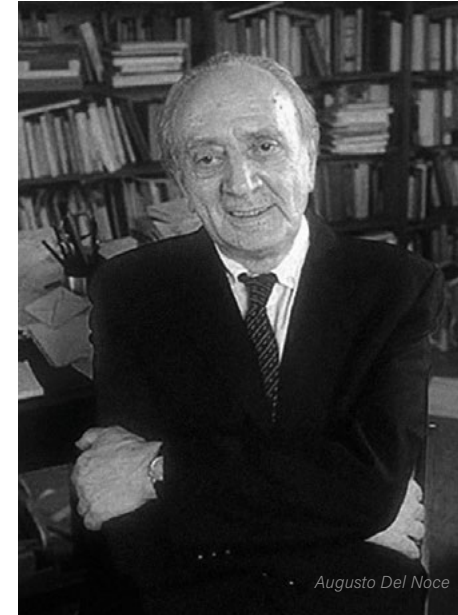
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The Most Important Philosopher Of Whom You Have (Probably) Never Heard

While he is little known among Protestant Christians, the Italian Catholic philosopher Augusto Del Noce was one of the most perceptive late-twentieth-century critics of both secularism and the sexual revolution. Indeed, his most important work is arguably that which drew an intimate and necessary connection between these two phenomena: the abolition of Christianity as a dominant cultural force and the transformation of sexual morality. While one may question whether the idea of Christianity as a dominant cultural force was an unmitigated good, given the way Christendom could often be little more than worldly concerns expressed in a religious idiom, the current contested status of religious freedom certainly points to the problematic political consequences of its rapid decline.

Del Noce's basic thesis is that in the twentieth century the political left came to see the dismantling of traditional sexual codes as the means by which Christianity could be destroyed. Of course, sexual morality and religion were not novel targets of social radicals. The demolition of the normative status of lifelong, monogamous marriage was something that William Godwin, among others, had attacked in the early nineteenth century. Human freedom consisted, in large part, of sexual freedom. Marx assumed the validity of Feuerbach's materialist critique of religion as alienation and drew the political conclusion that demolition of the illusions of religion was thus a vital part of preparing the proletariat for revolution. What Del Noce saw was that the left had brought these two ideas together in a potent way that



Augusto Del Noce

meant the sexual revolution of the sixties and beyond was both deeply political and deeply anti-Christian not only in its effects, but also in its intentions.

Del Noce saw two key moves facilitating this, both connected to the rise of the New Left. First, the New Left reconceptualized oppression as something with a significant, even central, psychological component. While the traditional Left had regarded oppression as essentially economic, certain Marxists in the 1930s had drawn on Freud's anthropology to move oppression into the realm of psychology. Second, again drawing on Freud, these thinkers had sexualized psychology and thus made oppression something that was intimately connected to sexual codes.

Del Noce presented his argument most pungently in a 1970 essay, "The Ascendancy of Eroticism." Here he identified Wilhelm Reich as the key intellectual progenitor of the modern philosophy of politicized sexuality, as expressed in his 1936 book, *The Sexual Revolution*. Reich transformed Marxist thought by replacing the categories of *bourgeoisie* and *proletariat* with *advocates of repressive morality* and *advocates of sexual freedom*. The class struggle of classical Marxism was still there, but now it was seen in competing approaches to sex and sexuality. Traditional sexual codes were the ideological tools by which the bourgeois world could be naturalized and thus maintained. The political revolution must therefore have a central sexual component because liberation from oppression is most obviously manifested by liberation from

bourgeois sexual morality. The process by which this is being achieved is what Del Noce calls 'the ascendance of eroticism,' which is constituted by the placing of sex at the center of public life and the subsequent repudiation, not simply expansion or revision, of concepts used to guard traditional morality such as modesty and chastity.

There is much that could be said about Del Noce's response to Reich and the appropriation of his ideas by the New Left and the advocates of the sexual revolution, but three points, in particular, are of note for Christians in the present time. Del Noce lists them as follows:

1. The question of eroticism is primarily one of metaphysics.
2. It is linked to a politics devoid of any sense of the sacred.
3. Any attempt to dialogue with the advocates of sexual freedom is pointless because of 1 above.

The truth of the first point is easy to establish. The purpose of sex in terms of Christian teaching is unitive, in that it is the seal on a unique relationship between one man and one woman, and procreative. Both are connected to a transcendent or sacred. Sex mimics the creativity of God and so reflects the image in which we are made; and unites one man to one woman in a manner analogous to the union between Christ and his church. Its meaning is to be found not simply in the intrinsic act itself but in deeper structures of relationship. To understand sex to mean something else — or to mean nothing at all — is to deny the dependent, creaturely status of human beings which is as significant a metaphysical move as it is possible to make.

The second point is an implication of the first but also points to the wider imaginative world in which the sexual revolution can take place. A de-created world is a world with nothing beyond itself to justify it, nothing which transcends the current instant. And indeed anything which makes a claim to any such transcendence is simply an ideological mask hiding a bid for power. We see this perhaps most clearly in the iconoclastic attitude to history which the sexual revolution manifests. The history that gave us the repressive sexual codes is itself repressive and needs to be overcome, not considered a source of wisdom. Politics thus quickly defaults to immanent and indeed immediate concerns. And even at a domestic level, this can start to play a role: marriage is only useful as long as the contracting parties are happy; children function as therapy or status symbols, not as ends in themselves or as establishing the future beyond the lifespan of the parents.

The third point is perhaps the most disturbing: no dialogue, no reasoning between Christians and sexual

"...he can help us see the method in the madness that characterizes too much of our late modernity."

revolutionaries is possible because there is no agreement on the basis of which any dialogue could take place. We see this today: the Christian objects to gay sex; but the gay person hears that as a denial of his identity. The Christian sees abstinence as the answer to STDs; the sexually liberated sees that as the last resort, given that such inhibits freedom; far better are the technical, amoral solutions such as contraception, antivirals, and antibiotics.

While Del Noce's analysis of the sexual revolution is far more wide-ranging than these three points, these are enough in themselves for us to understand his central idea: the sexual revolution is not simply a matter of behavior; it is a matter of profound political significance because it is of profound metaphysical significance. It offers an answer, exclusive of all others, to the question, "What does it mean to be human?" And it has ramifications well beyond the sexual realm. The futility of dialogue, resting as it does upon the metaphysics underlying the sexual revolution, is something we see all around us today, whether it is on matters

of abortion, race, euthanasia, and other such matters. It also helps us understand why traditional virtues such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion have suddenly become vices. A world where dignity is grounded in the notion that humans are made in the image of God is very different from one where dignity is grounded in individual autonomy.

The Protestant world is increasingly familiar with and often grateful for the analyses offered by thinkers such as Philip Rieff, Charles Taylor, and Alasdair MacIntyre. We should familiarize ourselves with the work of Augusto Del Noce too. Like them, he can help us see the method in the madness that characterizes too much of our late modernity. ✕

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An Interview with Ryan T. Anderson and Andrew T. Walker on Natural Law and Public Affairs

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Andrew T. Walker is Associate Professor of Christian Ethics at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Executive Editor of *Eikon*.

ATW: Can you explain the “basic goods” of natural law — their identity? Is the concept of a “basic good” elastic or is all human action reducible to these categories?

RTA: Sure, the idea here is one taken right from the beginning of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. That all human actions are for ends, ends that the agent perceives as beneficial (and, in that sense, valuable, worthwhile, *good*). So you could treat basic goods — the ends one pursues for their intrinsic worth, and not merely as means to other ends — as synonymous with basic ends. Then the question becomes one of identifying what those basic goods or basic ends are. You can think of these as the basic goods/ends of human nature. Given our nature, what ends/goods perfect us, fulfill us, constitute happiness, not in the sense of a mere psychological state, but in the sense that Aristotle had in mind in speaking of *eudaimonia* (flourishing) or in Latin *beatitudo*. Here various theorists of natural law have various lists, but that’s ultimately just a question of taxonomy. The reality is that there are certain ends/goods that we should seek precisely because they are not merely means to, but are constitutive of, our flourishing. So obviously care for our bodily life and health is one of those goods, knowledge of truth is another, as are skillful work and play, and

enjoyment of aesthetic experiences, and then there are four forms of harmony: harmony amongst people, so friendship and human sociability in general; harmony within the practical dimensions of the person, that is, harmony between our judgments, choices, actions, and emotions, what we might call practical harmony, integrity, conscience, practical reasonableness, etc.; a distinct form of interpersonal harmony founded on comprehensive conjugal union, and ordered toward the bearing and rearing of children, called marriage; and finally harmony with the more-than-human source(s) of truth and goodness, or harmony with God or the gods, or religion.

All intelligible action is ultimately in pursuit of these basic goods. And you can test this out yourself by asking “why” questions. So consider: Why are we doing this interview? To have material for the journal. Why have the journal? Because it’s part of my job. Why have the job? To make money? Why make money? To take care of my wife and kids. Why care for your wife and kids? And then people start stuttering. Just because. I don’t need any further reason or explanation as to why I care for my wife and kids — it’s a basic reason for acting, a basic human good, a basic end of human nature: flourishing with respect to my marital and familial life. Now I could have answered this question in a different way. So consider: Why are we doing this interview? To learn something about natural law. Why do you want to learn something about natural law? To figure out if it’s true or not. Why do you want to figure out if it’s true? And then people might start stuttering — I just do! Because knowing the truth matters for its own sake — it is inherently enriching, an intrinsic aspect of our wellbeing and fulfillment as human beings. Of course someone could give a different answer at that point: I want to know the truth about natural law because it’ll help with various forms of harmony — it’ll help my own inner harmony by living according to natural law, it’ll help interpersonal harmony because societies thrive when structured according to natural law, etc. etc. But the basic point is that any intelligible answer to a “why” question about action will eventually bedrock at basic goods. And, of course, we seek the basic goods precisely because we want to be fulfilled, to flourish, to be all — and the best — that we can be.

"As we discover more truths about God, we're able to act more, or more fully, in harmony with him and thus flourish more completely with respect to religion."

One last comment on this. You'll notice that when I got to the discussion of religion I left it ambiguous as to what the true religion is, and thus I spoke of harmony with a more-than-human source(s) of truth and goodness, or harmony with God or the gods. That's because as a *basic* reason for action, we first need to figure out what the truth about God is to then be in harmony with him. This explains the intelligibility of the non-believer who is a seeker, seeking out the truth about God — is there a God? Is there only one God? Who is God? What does he demand of me? Even before arriving at answers to these questions, the pursuit makes sense because the religious good or end of our nature is there. As we discover more truths about God, we're able to act more, or more fully, in harmony with him and thus flourish more completely with respect to religion. And, of course, the full flourishing of this aspect of our life will only come in the kingdom.

ATW: How does one understand the basic goods that determine right action when it comes to sexuality?

RTA: The central good at stake with our sexuality, of course, is marriage. Robby George and Sherif Girgis and I have written an entire book, *What Is Marriage?*, explaining how to think about marriage from a natural law perspective. The basic gist is that it is a comprehensive union, uniting persons in three respects: in a comprehensive act (conjugal union), which is then ordered toward a comprehensive good (procreation and the sharing of life that makes the bearing and rearing of children successful), and thus demands comprehensive commitments (comprehensive throughout time: permanent; comprehensive at every moment in time: exclusive). Sexual ethics — what your question about determining right action is about — will always be in reference to this good (and can, in addition, be in reference to some others). The basic idea here is whether or not any given action is compatible with respecting and promoting the good of marriage. This explains why non-marital sex, for example, is always wrong (and why degraded and degrading sex, even between spouses, is inherently non-marital, failing to be expressive of the good of marital love).

ATW: In a natural law framework, is intentional killing always wrong? What about lying?

RTA: There is debate amongst natural law theorists and within the natural law tradition on these questions. The question of lying is less contested, so I'll start there. Augustine, Aquinas, John Paul II all teach that one may never lie, where lying is understood as false assertion. From the natural law perspective, to falsely assert goes against the truth, against practical harmony between our judgments and actions, and against interpersonal harmony. Against the truth because you're knowingly asserting as true something you believe to be false; against practical harmony because your actions are out of alignment with your judgments about the truth; and against interpersonal harmony because a false self-disclosure thwarts any potential sociality and harmony. Now this doesn't mean that you always have to reveal the truth (you can remain quiet), or the fullness of the truth (you can speak partially), or that you have a duty to reveal the truth to anyone who asks of it from you (the Nazi at the door), or that you can't deceive in non-lying ways (military feints, etc.). So while you may never lie, that doesn't mean you can't conceal the truth in a variety of ways from those who have no right to it from you at that moment (again the Nazi at the door).

The debate over killing extends primarily to issues like capital punishment and killing in war. What the tradition as a whole more-or-less agrees on is that a private person (i.e., someone who does not have public authority) may never intend death. Full stop. So you and I may never intentionally kill. But that doesn't mean we can't use lethal force when justified, as in self-defense. Here, however, our action isn't one of intentional killing, but using sufficient force necessary to repel an unjust aggressor, where we might foresee and accept — but not intend — the aggressor's death. This is all straight out of Aquinas's discussion of killing in self-defense, in one of the central texts on the so-called doctrine of double-effect.

The tradition also agrees that public persons (i.e., police, military, judge/jury/executioner) may never intentionally kill the innocent. Not even for a great benefit. So public authorities can't execute an innocent person to get a village to cooperate. And they can't drop a bomb on innocent civilians to get their leaders to surrender. Public authority can, however, target a military base, knowing that some innocent civilians will perish as collateral damage, again under double-effect reasoning, where their deaths are foreseen but not intended. The contrast being that when bombing a residential neighborhood, the deaths of the innocent civilians are intended, precisely as a means to the end of getting their government to surrender.

So here's where the debate enters. Some natural law thinkers argue that all justified uses of lethal force — even from public persons — should be understood as a form of self-defense. That instead of the moral norm being no intentional killing of the innocent, the norm is no intentional killing, period. So all justified use of lethal force needs to be defensive and where the death is foreseen but unintended. The reason is that what grounds our human worth and dignity and value is our human nature, and this doesn't change even for the worst of criminals. In other words, the life of the criminal has the same dignity because it is *intrinsic* dignity. Hence their life is always a basic good and gives all of us a basic reason to respect their life. Here, uses of lethal force by the police, military, and criminal justice system would all have to be defensive in nature. Thus capital punishment should be thought of more as capital defense, and with the rise of the modern prison system it seems less and less necessary as a defensive measure. Hence the recent teachings of Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis.

ATW: Does natural law theory speak to the construction of gender norms in society?

RTA: Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that every culture needs to have a sound understanding of how our embodiment as male or female makes a difference for our pursuit of certain goods, and thus needs certain cultural and legal norms to help channel our personal and collective choices towards those goods. But no in the sense that it doesn't

provide a one-size-fits-all answer, these norms are going to be somewhat culturally relative, in the sense that the natural law itself doesn't say anything about pink and blue or pants and skirts. The basic task of a sound culture is to help guide people's understandings and shape their attitudes and feelings so the trajectory of boy to man to husband to father, and girl to woman to wife to mother, is smooth and reasonably comfortable.

Gender is socially shaped, but it is not a mere social construct. It originates in biology, but in turn it directs our bodily nature to human goods such as marriage and various forms of friendship. A sound understanding of gender clarifies the important differences between the sexes and guides our distinctly male or female qualities toward our wellbeing. A concept of gender that denies or distorts these differences, on the other hand, hinders human flourishing.

I try to explain some of this in chapter 7 of my book, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment*, and my law review article, "Neither Androgyny nor Stereotypes: Sex Differences and the Difference They Make." The basic idea is that androgyny denies the differences between males and females, while stereotypes distort them. Between stereotypes on the one hand and androgyny on the other, the virtuous mean is a view of gender that reveals meaningful sex differences and communicates the difference they make — a view that takes sex differences seriously while upholding the fundamental equality of the sexes as complements to one another. It acknowledges what sex differences mean for marriage and family, friendship and education. Our sexual embodiment is precisely what makes marriage possible, and a host of social practices, including how we nurture boys and girls, are shaped with the good of marriage in view. On average, boys and girls, and men and women have different needs and inclinations, so our law and culture should not take the male way of being human as the norm. This means that women should not be forced to live, work, and compete as if they were men. Society should accept that men and women may, on the whole, have different preferences and freely make different choices.

ATW: Using a natural law framework, why is it impossible for a man to become a woman?

RTA: Well, partly this is straightforward biology: it's impossible. And biology is the reason why it's impossible. Then the natural law says why we shouldn't try. I explain this at great length in *When Harry Became Sally*, but the basic gist is our bodies, no less than our minds and feelings, are parts of our *personal* reality as human beings; we are our bodies, though we are not merely materials, and do not inhabit our bodies and use them as extrinsic instruments. We are integrated body-soul composites, not "ghosts in machines." We are personal bodies, embodied souls, ensouled bodies. Sex is a biological reality, conceptualized and identified based on an organism's organization with respect to sexual reproduction. In human beings, this organization begins to form as a result of the chromosomes we inherit from our parents, as well as the reproductive organs, systems, genitalia, and hormones that develop as a consequence. As there are two reproductive systems, there are two sexes. Sex-reassignment is a physical impossibility — all that can be done is amputations and cosmetic procedures to make someone more closely externally resemble the opposite sex's typical body type. But there's no way to actually *make* someone the opposite sex. Attempts to do so go wrong for three basic reasons. First, they are attempts to affirm a falsehood. Attempts to reinforce a mistaken belief about identity. Second, they do damage to bodily integrity and bodily health; many procedures amounting to little more than mutilation of the body. And third, the best evidence shows that they don't produce the positive psychological outcomes that are, at least ostensibly, their goals. Again, all of this is discussed at length in the book and other recent writings.

ATW: When it comes to religious liberty, how does natural law brace for erring belief on religious matters? Surely we would not say that everyone's grasp of the divine is correct on natural law grounds, right?

RTA: Correct! Religious liberty is not based on relativism. Nor is it based on indifference. What I mean by this is that some people will say, "well we need religious liberty

because one religion is just as good or just as true as another, and therefore it would be arbitrary to favor one over another. There is no religious truth, therefore we need religious freedom." Or, someone might say, "religion just doesn't matter. We can be indifferent to religion, and thus have religious liberty, because it's simply not important. And unimportant things we can leave alone." So that's the basic relativism and indifferentism arguments for religious liberty. I make a different argument in my book *Truth Overruled: The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom*, and then Sherif Girgis and I expand it in our co-authored book *Debating Religious Liberty and Discrimination*. The basic argument here is that religious truth is really important, and that's why the state shouldn't coerce our acts seeking and adhering to religious truth. But none of that entails thinking that everyone's grasp of the divine is correct, or fully correct.

ATW: Is there a way in which natural law is not applicable to an ongoing debate in society?

RTA: Nope. Did you want me to say more? More or less every debate taking place right now in our society fundamentally comes down to competing visions of the human person, and thus of human nature and the fulfillment of that nature. That's what natural law is all about. So whether it be debates about economic justice and racial equality, or debates about abortion and sexuality, all of these ultimately come down to questions of how we understand the human person and the ends/goods that perfect us. It's applicable to everything. ><

"It's applicable to everything."

Man and Woman: Toward an Ontology

INTRODUCTION

When most people hear the name Shania Twain, they think of one song: “Man! I Feel Like a Woman!” The lyrics concern the freedom of women to do whatever they want in terms of dress, partying, and having fun. The title is a play on words, *Man! I Feel Like a Woman!*

In the current culture, some might critique Twain for associating female power too closely with a “traditional” twentieth-century American femininity: hair, dress, makeup, going out with girlfriends. Christians will take issue with her adoption of expressive individualism. She sings about the liberation of women, arguing true womanhood does not mean suppressing the female self.

Much could be said about the song, and I will probably get a few emails for including it here.¹ The point I want to draw attention to, however, is that she presses into her nature as a woman. She writes a song for women as a woman. She sings toward and in light of women’s liberation. She explicitly acknowledges the difference between men and women.

For readers of this journal, a more suitable illustration comes from G. K. Chesterton. In his essay “The Romance of Thrift,” Chesterton explains why it is important to treat men and women differently.

I remember an artistic and eager lady asking me in her grand green drawing-room whether I believed in the comradeship of the sexes, and why not. I was driven back on offering

the obvious and sincere answer, “Because if I were to treat you for two minutes like a comrade, you would turn me out of the house.”²

Both Chesterton and Shania Twain acknowledge the difference between man and woman. Between how you treat them. Between their natures. But this raises the

question: what is different about man and woman? What is their ontology?³ What is their nature? And where do these differences originate?

In a recent class on complementarianism and egalitarianism, one of my students raised the concern that we should be able to answer the question of why men are allowed to do certain things and women are not in a more robust way than simply, “the Bible tells me so.” He was advocating that we dig for deeper divine reasons for the guidelines.⁴

I agree. Ontological, metaphysical, natural-law grounds are needed as a harmonizing foundation to exegesis for gender complementarity. To put this another way, it is hard to know the *ought* without an understanding of the *is*. As Alastair Roberts has affirmed, divinely commanded gender roles should be “understood as a clarification and intensification of internal beckonings of being that we experience as men and women in the world.”⁵

Too often gender discussions only focus on exegesis, which is of utmost importance. But complementarians have neglected nature arguments, thus

¹Though I generally despise the word “toward” in titles, I put this as a gesture of humility. This is not the last word on the subject. Nor do I think I have this issue cornered. I suppose it would take decades of the entire church thinking about this to satisfactorily describe the unity and complementarity of men and women. I thought this essay would be a good place to catalogue some thoughts on the topic in hopes of pushing the conversation forward. My hope is that we all can continue to have more precise conversations about what it means to glorify God as both men and women.
Thanks to Tom Schreiner, Julia Mayo, Josh Hedger, Brandon Smith, Matthew Emerson, Allyson Todd, Scott Swain, Jennifer Kitner, Jason Duesing, and Hannah Anderson for reading this before it was published and helping me hone and clarify the argument.
²Gilbert Keith Chesterton and James V. Schall, *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 4:123.
³Paul Jewett affirms maleness and femaleness are essential, not peripheral, to our personhood. He says, “Sexuality permeates one’s individual being to its very depth; it conditions every facet of one’s life as a person. As the self is always aware of itself as an ‘I,’ so this ‘I’ is always aware of itself as *himself* or *herself*. Our self-knowledge is indissolubly bound up not simply with our *human* being but with our *sexual* being.” Paul K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 172.
⁴These questions are similar but also distinct to when Piper asks if complementarity between men and women is beautiful, satisfying, and fulfilling. His essay deals not so much with the exegetical argument but more in terms of whether people can live with it. John 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* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 33.
⁵Alastair Roberts, “Natural Complementarians: Men, Women, and the Way Things Are,” Blog, *The Calvinist International*, 13 September 2016, <https://calvinistinternational.com/2016/09/13/natural-complementarians-men-women/>.

chipping away the ground on which we stand. We thus unearth a structural weakness in the foundation of a complementarian position.

On the one hand, we may be found thinking that though there are differences, these differences do not make much of a difference. Alternatively, those of us adhering to complementary gender roles might have the opposite structural weakness: too vociferously affirming difference as a reaction to the wider culture.

While debates continue to rage about gender roles, headship and submission, or same-sex sexuality, more fundamental questions must undergird these discussions. For too long we have had the *ought* conversations without pressing into the *is*. A deeper *why* exists that grounds why men and women are equal in essence but complementary not only in roles but in being. Manhood and womanhood are not social constructs. They are written into nature.⁶

In this essay I attempt to give a description of manhood and womanhood from a natural law perspective. These natural law arguments are based ultimately in Scripture, but provide the backdrop for many of the distinctions.

I will overview what natural law is, explain the similarities *and* the differences between men and women from a biological and sociological point of view, identify a simple description of manhood and womanhood, compare this to the description given in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, respond to some criticisms, and then add some clarifications of my own.

NATURAL LAW

Natural law is the revelation of God’s will through creation. It is the moral truth God has revealed in the created order and made accessible to human minds.⁷ There is a moral and meaningful natural order that corresponds to reality, and it is knowable.⁸

Christians believe the world is objectively meaningful and purposeful because God made it. Human beings have been given minds by God which are equipped to discover this meaning and purpose so as to produce flourishing and blessedness. To go against nature as God intended it produces chaos and death. Scripture affirms that the created order reveals God’s moral law.

For example, the topic comes up twice in Romans 1–2. In Romans 2:14 Paul affirms the Gentiles don’t have the Torah, but *by nature* (φύσις) do what the Torah requires. Gentiles know the right they ought to do even though God only gave the Torah to the Jews. Beneath the surface of this argument resides the presupposition that *nature* embeds a certain rightness and order to creation that is available to all.

Paul goes on to say this other *law* (νόμος) is written on human hearts (2:15). It is an *unwritten* law but *written* into the fabric of creation and stamped onto humanity’s being. Even people’s consciences (συνείδησις) bear witness to natural law, as there is an ingrained knowing of what is proper and improper.⁹ People’s thoughts or conscience either accuse or excuse them because this law is entrenched in their nature.

The same concepts are employed in Romans 1:26–27 when Paul describes the downward spiral of sin and includes homosexuality in his list. He says, “women exchanged *natural* relations for those that are contrary to *nature*; and the men likewise gave up *natural* relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another.” Three times Paul brings up what is natural or contrary to

nature. This is the law written on people’s hearts, their consciences.

Paul has employed four terms that revolve around the idea of natural law: nature, law, heart, and conscience. But how do they relate? Budziszewski, though not exegeting Romans 2, argues there are four “witnesses” to natural law: conscience, design of the universe, our own design, and natural consequences.¹⁰

FOUR WITNESSES TO NATURAL LAW	
CONSCIENCE	Something internal that beckons us toward the right, awareness of the moral basics.
UNIVERSAL DESIGN	The design of the universe which points to a universal Designer.
OUR OWN DESIGN	For example, the complementarity of the sexes which shows men and women complete one another.
NATURAL CONSEQUENCES	Natural penalties for breaking natural law.

⁶People use terms in different ways. In my opinion manhood and womanhood transcend cultural expressions. Masculinity and femininity are socially constructed, not in the sense that they are disconnected from natural law, but that each culture will express these differences in culturally specific ways. I personally am unsure of how to relate our embodied gender with the soul. Farris gives two historical models: gender is an essential property of the soul (Thomistic) or gender is an essential property of the earthly body and a common property of the soul (Gregory of Nyssa). Joshua R. Farris, *Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans, Both Creaturely and Divine* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 224–29. Gregory in *On the Making of Man* is famous for constructing human sexuality in such a way that it is not a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human. He says sexuality will not characterize humanity in its resurrected form, though Cortez interprets him as saying there will be some continued significance of gender. *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 5, Series 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 5.2; 16.5; 16.7; 25.10. Marc Cortez, *Christological Anthropology in Historical Perspective: Ancient and Contemporary Approaches to Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 51–52.

⁷Hannah Anderson was right to point out to me that nature’s witness still requires interpretation. Sometimes conversations on natural law assume the witness is simply downloaded into our brains, but we must acknowledge subjectivity still exists.

⁸Whether one sees manhood and womanhood as intrinsic to nature or the result of social ideals and stereotypes is a dividing line. Certainly, the two can also be integrated, but nature precedes sociology.

⁹The term “conscience” (συνείδησις) is a key aspect of Stoicism. Conscience is a word in the realm of knowledge. The word itself is derived from the verb *synoida* which is a compound of *oida* which means “to know.” With *syn* it means to know “with” or “with oneself.” It meant therefore to know immediately or intuitively. For the Stoics, this concept concerned the ethical norms we approve of in our experience and action.

¹⁰J. Budziszewski, *What We Can’t Not Know: A Guide* (Wilmington, DE: Ignatius Press, 2011), Part 2. In a complementary (I had to use the word one more time) way, Joe Rigney gives three witnesses to God’s design: nature, Scripture, and culture. He says culture is the expression of nature in a particular time and place. “Because our nature is bent, our culture is also bent.” Joe Rigney, “What Makes a Man — or a Woman? Lost Voices on a Vital Question,” *Desiring God*, 9 September 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-makes-a-man-or-a-woman>.

Natural law, our consciences, design, and the consequences of breaking this law teach us that an order exists to creation; and this order is discoverable, though it still needs to be interpreted. God is an intentional and precise Creator.

If this is the case, then natural law can be helpful for us in constructing masculinity and femininity.¹¹ Paul and the rest of the authors in the Bible did not *construct* gender roles. They *recognized* them. They based sociological and organizational instructions on a deeper reality found in creational order (1 Cor. 11; 1 Tim. 2; Eph. 5).¹²

The nature of men and women was and is embedded into the order of things, and we can know it.¹³ Natural law thus indicates “the difference between men and women is not invented or constructed, but simply recognized. It lies in the nature of things.”¹⁴

BIOLOGICALLY AND SOCIOLOGICALLY THE SAME, YET DIFFERENT

The nature of things in terms of humanity can be viewed from a variety of perspectives, but a good place to begin is in *adam’s* (humankind’s) biology and sociology. If God created things in an ordered way with a purpose, then biology and sociology are key markers, pointers, and symbols in understanding the way things are.

Though biology and sociology do not exhaust this discussion, they are a good place to begin because the body and soul are integrated. Humans are psychosomatic unities;¹⁵ our bodies correspond to who we are.

In this section I simply want to note how male and female are the same, yet different, and different in complementary ways. Male and female fit together, physically and sociologically speaking. These complementarities provide support for moving toward a more philosophical and spiritual description. I must, however, give three caveats before explaining the data.

First, readers must be careful to avoid the crippling stereotypes of the “Rambo man” and the “Snow White woman” which might too easily arise in the mind. Male-female differences can be embodied differently in different contexts and cultures, and recognizing one’s own situatedness and idealistic pictures is an important first step.

Second, differences usually lead to comparison. It is too easy to begin to say men are better at this because their brain is constructed in this way, or women are better at that because they are more holistic. But this leads us down a precarious path.

Differences are not deficits.¹⁶ It is better to think of these as true differences, not in the sense of comparison, but in the sense of fittingness. Each sex will inflect strengths differently. One is not better than another; they are simply different in corresponding ways.

Third, these traits pattern themselves out over large samples of groups, but individuals can certainly break these molds. In other words, not all men or all women fit into these categories. However, a majority do, like a bell-curve. These are not absolutes; they are tendencies.

Having given these caveats, abundant evidence exists that men and women are constructed as same yet different.¹⁷ Fewer of those arguing from a natural law viewpoint stress sameness, but there are so many similarities between men and women that the list could go on for pages. Both psychologically and biologically, men and women are more alike than different.¹⁸

Our bodies are largely the same: two legs, arms, eyes, ears. Our brains reside at the top, protected by a skull, organs in the middle, and limbs come down to the ground and off our torso. We both have chests and our genitalia are in the same spots. We walk upright. We both have one nose, one heart, one liver, one stomach. Our eyes, ears, muscles, and feet work the same.

Our organs are organized similarly. Our brains are basically the same. Even our genitalia emerge from the same mass of

embryonic tissue. If you were to examine several fetuses miscarried in the third month of pregnancy, you would not know the males from the females unless you did a laboratory test to check. This is why Adam declares to Eve, “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23).

But there are differences too. Physically, men tend to have more muscle and are generally taller than women. Females tend to live longer than males and they tend to mature more quickly . Physically, our genitalia are different, but there is also complementarity to them fitting together.

Male and female brains are similar but also different in some ways. According to neuroscientist Larry Cahill, the differences are marked, pervasive, and consistent.¹⁹ For example, the hippocampus, which plays a role in memory and spatial navigation, takes up a greater portion

¹¹Cortez gives a different view from this article. He argues gender essentialism is not required for maintaining a traditional sexual ethic or a complementarian view of church government. He says God can stipulate norms irrespective of underlying biological realities. He gives the example of God choosing the Levites who would serve as priests. It is not because they had essential qualities that made them essentially different from the other tribes. In the same way he forbade marriage with Canaanites, but there was nothing essentially different between Israel and Canaan at a biological level. Marc Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology: A Constructive Account of Humanity in the Light of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 209.

¹²With the inclusion of Ephesians, some might wonder if Paul’s household codes all fall under natural law even in the case of masters and slaves (Eph. 6:5–9). However, Paul doesn’t use a natural law argument for masters and slaves. He does not base master and slave relationships in created order. In fact, the rest of Scripture demonstrates this relationship goes directly against natural law. Paul speaks to a bad situation attempting to make it better.

¹³Piper agrees. He says the Bible does not leave us ignorant about the meaning of masculine and feminine personhood. He affirms Paul’s commands are based on the permanent facts of creation. Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 35. Storkey puts it this way: “We can accept that our sexuality is indeed a given, part of the deep created structure of our humanness. The differences in our sexual makeup are part of the rich complementarity that God has breathed into creation. Yet, a creational perspective is different from a ‘natural’ one; sexuality is not simply that which defines our ‘nature.’ Creation is ordered, not by something people used to call the laws of nature but by complex normative structures that define and delineate our various relationships God has created a norm for the structure of reality and breathed an ethical order into it, and that has implications for our sexuality. Far from being driven by the unremitting desire to procreate, we have the responsibility to use our sexuality responsibly and to act always in love. How we express our sexuality matters, and we remain accountable to God.” Storkey, *Origins of Difference*, 127.

¹⁴J. Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014), 50.

¹⁵Storkey says, “if our differences are ‘fixed,’ part of our very biology, there is little we can do to alter them.” Storkey, *Origins of Difference*, 7.

¹⁶Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *Gender & Grace: Love, Work & Parenting in a Changing World* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 1990), 77.

¹⁷Clark asserts the differences between men and women should be stated descriptively rather than evaluatively, they should not be viewed as absolute, we should recognize that both sexes possess every trait, and that many trait comparisons are not universal but hold only within the same social group or within the context of male-female relationships. Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1980), 374–77.

¹⁸Wedgeworth’s article is an example of going straight for differences rather than sameness. Steven Wedgeworth, “The Science of Male and Female: What God Teaches Through Nature,” *Desiring God*, 11 September 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-science-of-male-and-female>.

¹⁹Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*, 38.

of the female brain than the male brain. Other parts of the hippocampus are larger in the male brain. The right and left hemispheres are more interconnected in female brains than male brains. The amygdala, which is involved in emotional memory, is larger in men.

Sociologically, men and women are similar but again different, yet in complementary ways. It has been shown that men “are considerably more aggressive, competitive, and inclined to risk taking or violent behavior than women. Men, for instance, constitute the overwhelming majority of those within prisons in nations around the world and commit practically every crime at a higher rate than women.”²⁰

In addition, “Male groups are much more agonistic and prone to direct violence; female groups can be much more prone to indirect and dissembled forms of social conflict. Women tend to prefer smaller groups; men tend to prefer larger ones. Male groups are more hierarchical in tendency; women are more likely to be egalitarian in their group norms. Women tend to be more people and social-emotional oriented than men; men tend to be more thing, task, and agency oriented than women.”²¹

Moving to consider generalities at a sociological level, many have noted that women are more integrative and men prone towards differentiation. Women differ from men in the way their minds, emotions, and bodies function together. Women typically confront situations as an entire person — with their emotions, intellect, and body all involved. Men more easily compartmentalize where they can ignore different aspects of their being.

Von Hildebrand puts it this way:

If we try to delineate these specifically feminine and masculine features, we find in women a unity of personality by the fact that heart, intellect and temperament are much more interwoven; whereas in a man there is a specific capacity to emancipate himself with his intellect from the affective sphere.²²

Edith Stein similarly says this:

The female species is characterized by the unity and wholeness of the entire psycho-somatic personality and by the harmonious development of the faculties; the male species by the perfecting of individual capacities to obtain record achievements.²³

In this way women tend to perceive more things with their entire person. They respond more immediately and totally. Men on the other hand will respond in a more compartmentalized way. Sometimes men will respond mainly with their intellect, or with their physicality, while other parts of them remain detached. These differences don’t make men stronger or women weaker or men weaker or women stronger, but they are differences. Yet again, these differences complement one another.

The sameness-yet-differentness of male and female are clear. Yet these “traits and tendencies” fall short of constructing a larger *telos*. These are data points without interpretation. These are pieces of the puzzle without overall construction. We need something tied to these findings, but also something more foundational and philosophical.

CONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

So based on biology and sociology, how should we describe masculinity and femininity? If biology is aimed and ordered, if it is a bow pulled taught, if it has a *telos*, then at what is it aimed?

The most succinct and useful definition has come from J. Budziszewski in his book *On the Meaning of Sex*.²⁴ Budziszewski begins with biology because the physical points to something spiritual. The body speaks and pushes us to more ontological and philosophical concepts. He provides the following summative statements based on a theology of the body.²⁵

The fundamental meaning of masculinity is potentiality toward paternity.

The fundamental meaning of womanhood is potentiality toward maternity.

Pope John Paul II, who has has written about the body and the relationships between male and female, says, “masculinity and femininity [are] . . . two ways of ‘being a body.’” This is what Spanish philosopher Julian Marias referred to as our “sexuate condition,” referring to everything that is involved in our being sexed (not merely our sexual activity). This includes the biological, but it also includes more.²⁶

Budziszewski gives the example of sitting down with a college student who was contending men and women can all do the same things. Budziszewski pointed out there is one very important thing that women can do that men can’t: give birth. Along the same lines, women can’t father children. Biologically, this indicates a difference.

Budziszewski is quick to qualify that though this arises from biology, it does not suspend there. Paternity and maternity are defined more in the spiritual and natural sense. Potentiality can be confused with physical possibility only, but potentiality is more like calling. Motherhood and fatherhood are analogical concepts that can be applied to civil, professional, and ecclesiastical contexts. He goes onto say:

Even though every woman and man is not called to marry and bear physical children, every woman and man, whether married or unmarried, is called upon to be a biological, psychological, or spiritual mother or father....

Consider a man who fathers four different children by four different mothers, abandoning each mother and child in turn before moving on to a new sexual conquest. Is such a man a father? In one sense, yes. But in a deeper and more important sense, no, because the meaning of paternity is not just procreation, but provision and protection, faithful love...

²⁰Roberts, “Natural Complementarians.”

²¹Roberts, “Natural Complementarians.”

²²Dietrich Von Hildebrand, *Man and Woman* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1965), 13.

²³Edith Stein, *The Writings of Edith Stein* (London: Peter Owen, 1956), 142.

²⁴Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*, 35–65.

²⁵Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*, 54, 58. Budziszewski seems to have been influenced by Pope John Paul II who said “we should observe that in Genesis 4:1 the mystery of femininity manifests and reveals itself in its full depth through motherhood.... the mystery of man’s masculinity, that is, the generative and ‘paternal’ meaning of his body.” John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 210–11, 217.

²⁶Julian Marias, *Metaphysical Anthropology: The Empirical Structure of Human Life* (Penn State, PA: Penn State University Press, 1971). The English word sex derives from the Latin word *secare*, which means to “to cut or divide.”

Now consider a woman who is biologically unable to have children, but who, with her husband, welcomes foster children into her home, pouring love and nurture into their lives. Is such a woman a mother? In the biological sense, no; but because the meaning of motherhood is nurture and sacrificial, self-giving love she is more truly a mother than someone who bears a child before neglecting it until it leaves home. Thus, a woman who never bears a child does not cease to be a woman. Nor is her womanhood diminished, even if she never cares for children, for she maintains the capacity and freedom to live in a maternal way toward others in need of maternal nurture. In this larger sense, “all women are called to motherhood” and “all men are called to fatherhood.”²⁷

Pressing this definition forward, manhood, in general, is directed outward (external agency), while womanhood, in general, is directed inward (internal agency). Inward-directed doesn’t mean *self-focused* and outward-directed doesn’t mean *others focused*. Men are typically (though not always) initiators, builders, and protectors of communities, while women are formers, nurturers, and sustainers of community.

To return to the physical, a man may deeply love his children, but he has not carried them in his womb and nourished them from his own body. These experiences attach a mother to her child in a unique way and make sense of some of the differences between men and women.

Edith Stein notes most men are more prone to abstraction and what is impersonal, while women are more prone to focus on the concrete and personal. Men tend to be specialists, single-task oriented, while women tend to be generalists and multitaskers. Stein continues saying the female sexuate is oriented toward supporting new life while the male sexuate is oriented toward reproducing and then detachment. The woman thus engages with the world more inwardly, while the man receives the world more externally. Women tend to view things more in totality, while men judge in a more compartmentalized manner.

Stein identifies the essential characteristics of womanhood in this way:

[The woman’s] point of view embraces the living and personal rather than the objective; . . . she tends towards wholeness and self-containment in contrast to one-sided specialization; . . . [with an ability] to become a complete person oneself . . . whose faculties are developed and coexist in harmony; . . . [who] helps others to become complete human beings; and in all contact with other persons, [who] respects the complete human being....Woman’s intrinsic value can contribute productively to the national community by her activities in the home as well as in professional and public life.²⁸

Stein and Budziszewski seem to be on the same page, and so does Pope John Paul II, who says the following:



This unique contact with the new human being developing within her [the mother] gives rise to an attitude towards human beings—not only towards her own child, but every human being—which profoundly marks the woman’s personality. It is commonly thought that *women* are more capable than men of paying attention *to another person*, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more. The man—even with all his sharing

in parenthood—always remains “outside” the process of pregnancy and the baby’s birth; in many ways he has to *learn* his own “fatherhood” from the mother.²⁹

Budziszewski, Pope John Paul, and Stein all base their ontology on biology but also extend it to the spiritual, natural, and calling realms. There is something mysterious, beautiful, and complementary about the difference between paternity and maternity.

²⁷Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*, 55–56.

²⁸Edith Stein, *Essays On Woman*, ed. L. Gelber and Romaeus Leuven, trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1996), ?

²⁹Pope John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Mulieris Dignitatem of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II on the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), 18.

DECONSTRUCTING MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

In this section I want to put Budziszewski’s description of masculinity and femininity in conversation with what is found in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (RBMW). In 1991 John Piper constructed a short description of masculinity and femininity. It was a needed task as confusion, debates, and disagreement rained down concerning this topic.

Though the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood does not include this definition of masculinity and femininity, it seems to be taken for granted in some complementarian circles as it is contained in the book connected to Danvers. The short description is as follows.³⁰

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.

Piper admits his descriptions are not exhaustive and are intended to embrace both married and single people, but he does affirm they get to the heart of the matter.³¹ In some ways, one *could* argue Budziszewski’s and Piper’s descriptions overlap and are correlated. In other words, paternity is defined by leading and involves providing, and protecting. Maternity is defined by affirmation, reception, and nurture.

However, the following paragraphs will explain why I think Budziszewski’s description is an improvement, but also an improvement that also needs nuancing and additions. Below are four reasons I think the description in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* has some structural problems.

First, the description is oppositional in its construction.

Piper’s description seems to teach that masculinity and femininity don’t exist unless in relation to the other. Piper explicitly states, “a significant aspect of femininity is how a woman responds to the pattern of initiative established by mature masculinity.”³² To put this another way, the definition capitalizes on differentness rather than sameness. Even worse, it could be claimed that in this framework women are not women without a corresponding man. Yet in this construction a man can exist without a woman, which makes the man the “default” humanity.³³

Now of course, when defining two similar pairs many are looking for the essence of difference. However, we get off on the wrong foot when we start here. Men don’t become men as they interact with women; nor do women become women as they interact with men or become wives — hey are men or women before.³⁴ While there are elements of truth to Piper’s description, it leans too far in contrasting and opposing male and female. We should aim at a more integrative and even complementary definition.³⁵

While physically and sociologically there are differences between men and women, as we have already seen, it is also true that

these differences are not absolute. Large overlap exists in physical, mental, and psychological spheres. Men and women are of the same species; their similarities outweigh their differences.³⁶

We need to start conversations about men and women with the idea of union or sameness. Perhaps there has been a tendency to undersell the category of “humanity” in these conversations. Genesis 1 begins with sameness, with humanity. Although it does identify humanity as “male and female,” which points to differentness, the emphasis in Genesis 1 is the unity of male and female; they are one species. In 1:26 God says, “Let us make *adam* (humanity) in our image and after our likeness.” *Adam* here refers not only to Adam but to Adam and Eve together.

This is evidenced by the next part of the verse where it says, “and let *them* have dominion over the fish and sea.” In Hebrew, as in English, the construction is in the plural.³⁷ The point in Genesis 1 is that *adam* (male and female) are made in God’s image and they are both tasked with having dominion. They are united in their differentness from the rest of creation and similarity to God. The Bible starts the natural law conversation with sameness; so should we. But this does not mean we should ignore differences as outlined in Genesis 2.

The difficulty is holding together the concepts the Bible affirms: sameness/differentness and union/complementarity. Finding, maintaining, and living the paradox is one of the most difficult tasks for humans.

³⁰Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 35–36. Piper admits definitions are risky and pleads that people not jump to implied conclusions. He asks that anyone who critiques his definitions would put them in ways that he would agree with. When one reads these statements, they might be tempted to import some off-putting previous teaching or actions from their past. But before one does, it is important to go and read Piper’s whole chapter first where he elaborates on each phrase. He is more nuanced and careful than a Twitter world and cancel culture allow.

³¹Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 35.

³²Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 45–46.

³³Thanks to Julia Mayo for pointing this out to me. Some might claim Jesus’ maleness is an argument in support of male as the default humanity. However, the Scripture rarely points to Jesus’ maleness, but rather to his humanity (Heb 2:14, 17–18; Phil 2:7; Col 1:15–16). This is not to deny Jesus’s maleness. However, Cortez and other church Fathers are also right to point out Jesus is put next to Logos-Sophia which is a female personification. But some scholars have taken this point too far. Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 190–211.

³⁴Piper affirms this as well. “They [the sexes] are not simply reflexes of a marriage relationship. Man does not become man by getting married.” He goes onto say the form of leadership will vary based on the different relationships man has with women. Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 44. However, the descriptions make it hard to see how both of these can be true.

³⁵Piper admits his aim is to point out the uniqueness of the male and female personhood, since the tendency when he wrote it was to stress the equality of men and women by minimizing their difference. This was written right before 1991. Thirty years later this is still true in the wider culture, but maybe complementarians in their reaction have oversold the differences. Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 33.

³⁶Though I don’t follow Gregory of Nyssa in all his anthropology, his logic implies the *imago Dei* is what is most essential to being human, not sexual differentiation. Marc Cortez, *Christological Anthropology in Historical Perspective: Ancient and Contemporary Approaches to Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 48.

³⁷Though some have argued the use of *adam* is significant for “headship” arguments I find this argument lacking. Grammatically this makes little sense in Hebrew. There is no neuter gender in Hebrew and *adam* does not mean male gender in Scripture. Additionally, the emphasis is on union in Genesis 1, not headship.

Second, the description is too atomistic in its wording.

This builds on the previous point but also presses forward. Rather than looking at what it means to be a man or woman in terms of calling, the description goes straight for traits. Too often, it is easy to break down groups into individuals and individuals into traits and then to universalize them.³⁸

However, there are actually very few “gendered commands” in the Scripture, pointing more to overlap than opposition. Yes, there are some, but the vast majority of the Scriptures are for both men and women, indicating God typically speaks to humanity as a whole and only rarely speaks directly to one gender.

This is important because the Bible — all of it — is for both men and women. Doing a study on what it means to be a man or woman by selecting texts that directly speak to men or women would be quite short and incomplete. Many of the definitions of masculinity and femininity seem to do just that.

One of my former pastors consistently said the following: “It takes a whole Bible to make a whole Christian.” In a similar way, “it takes a whole Bible to make a whole Christian man or Christian woman.” We would do well to recognize the vast majority of the Scriptures brings men and women into union rather than separating them.

For example, the fruit of the Spirit are for both men and women: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness are not gendered gifts but

for *adam* (Gal. 5:22–23). There has been a tendency, especially in conservative circles, to define or put the emphasis on manhood and womanhood as two separate spheres that don’t overlap, as seen in the description Piper gives. However, it is probably better to view masculinity and femininity as a Venn diagram with a large overlapping middle.

Another argument in support of this is that the biblical authors expect the Spirit to produce in Christians the same kind of virtue and behaviors we see in Jesus. The Bible never claims his virtues are limited to *men*, even though he was and is a *man*. The Bible simply calls on believers to be Christlike.³⁹ Christ is the representative of all humanity.

Third, evidence exists in the Scripture that the descriptors given (lead, provide, protect vs. affirm, receive, nurture) are embodied in both genders, but differently.

Piper’s definition is too atomistic in that the descriptors don’t seem to only apply to one gender. In the Scriptures women lead and initiate (Jdg. 4; 1 Sam. 25; Exod 2; Esther 4; Ruth 3; Prov. 31; Luke 8:43-48; Matt. 15:21-28; Acts 16:14-15), provide (Ruth, Rachel, Zipporah, Prov. 31), protect (Ex. 1:15-21; Ex. 2:1-10; Ex. 4:24-26; 1 Sam. 25; Esther, Josh 2), are strong (Jdg. 4:21; Prov. 31; Pss. 27:14; 31:24; Eph. 6:10; 1 Cor. 16:13), and have authority even in the marriage relationship (1 Cor. 7:4).

In the Scriptures men help (Rom. 16:2; Acts 1:5), are called to be gentle and quiet (Matt. 11:29; Phil. 4:5; 1 Tim. 3:3; Gal. 5:22; 1 Thess. 4:11; 2:2), give life (Prov. 23:22; 1 Cor. 15:45), respond to leadership (Jdg. 4:6-8; Gen. 21:12; 1 Sam. 1:21-28; Prov. 8; Acts 18:24-26; Ruth 3:6-15), are soft and tenderhearted (2 Sam. 12:24;

Eph. 5:25-32; Isa. 40:11; Isa. 49:16, 66:13; Hos. 11:3-4; 1 Thess. 2:7; Matt. 23:37).

Piper acknowledges this in his opening chapter illustration where he speaks about his hard-working mother, but then goes on to define femininity in a way that seems to contradict the way his mother acted.⁴⁰ While there is some truth to Piper’s definition, and his mother likely embodied his descriptors as well, the definition puts things in an overly atomistic and specific way.

In sum, the description doesn’t take a scalpel but rather a flat mallet that compresses everything in its path. It is interesting that as noted above, the Scripture, as a whole, doesn’t focus on a single description or even embodiment of gender. There are a variety of narratives and presentations, compelling a more complex representation of male-female relations. A better way forward is to see these traits are embodied by both males and females, but differently.

Fourth, the description is not comprehensive enough.

Piper’s description of masculinity and femininity doesn’t get to the underlying difference between men and women, though he admits the definitions are not

exhaustive.⁴¹ It looks to the fruit rather than the root. A structural weakness lurks beneath the surface. For example, the statement could be construed in such a way that all women are dependent upon a man or all men lead a woman or that all men have a woman to provide for and lead, something Piper explicitly denies.

The way the descriptions are framed seems to assume a marriage relationship, yet the essence of male and female must go beyond this. It is difficult to see how unmarried men and women are able to fulfill this definition, not to mention differing personalities in marriage relationships (unless he is also pointing to potentiality).⁴² To put it succinctly, Piper’s definition focuses on husband and wife rather than expanding and multiplying our categories.

Scott Swain recently wrote an article where he requested more concepts to help define manhood and womanhood.⁴³ The husband-wife relationship (and maybe elder-congregant) seems to have been paradigmatic for the above definition. But men may be husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers. Women may be wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters. These descriptors exist in familial relationships, but these can even be extended to civil, social, and ecclesiastical contexts.

³⁸For much of this point, I am dependent upon Roberts’s argument. Alastair Roberts, “Natural Complementarians: Men, Women, and the Way Things Are,” Blog, *The Calvinist International*, 13 September 2016, <https://calvinistinternational.com/2016/09/13/natural-complementarians-men-women/>.

³⁹For more on this topic see Cortez, *ReSourcing Theological Anthropology*, 205.

⁴⁰He says, “Mother was strong. I can remember her arms even today thirty years later. They were big and in the summertime they were bronze. But it never occurred to me to think of my mother and father in the same category. Both were strong. Both were bright. Both were kind. Both would kiss me and both would spank me. Both were good with words. Both prayed with fervor and loved the Bible. But unmistakably my father was a man and my mother was a woman. They knew it and I knew it. And it was not mainly a biological fact. It was mainly a matter of personhood and relational dynamics.” Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 31.

⁴¹Under the description of “at the heart of” he says they are not exhaustive. Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 36.

⁴²Piper admits that a man can be masculine in this way without being married or even around women. This is what he means by “a sense of.” This also can be true of those who can’t physically provide or protect their family. However, even with the caveats, the descriptions still lend themselves to marriage relationships. Piper, “A Vision of Biblical Complementarity,” 36.

⁴³Scott Swain, “More Thoughts on Theological Anthropology: Man as Male and Female,” *Reformed Blogmatics*, 14 May 2020. <https://journal.rts.edu/article/thoughts-on-theological-anthropology-man-as-male-and-female/>.

The possible weakness with the Piper's description is that every relationship is defined by an authority relation, but there is more to say about manhood and womanhood.⁴⁴ According to the Scriptures, authority-submission seems to be part of what it means in certain relationships as male and female, but other relationships should be considered as well.

To put this more precisely, brothers and sisters don't exist in authority-relations, so what does it mean to be a man who is a brother or a woman who is a sister? I find it interesting that the dominant way of addressing men and women in the Christian community according to the Bible is through the image of sibling. Piper's definitions don't seem to help in this regard, but neither does Budziszewski's, as I will show.

Men are also sons and women are also daughters. But what does it mean to be a son and lead, provide, and protect? What does it mean to be a daughter and affirm, receive, and nurture? Piper's definition doesn't seem to travel very far in answering these questions, and therefore we need to ask whether it is sufficient for all the relationships men and women occupy.

In sum, I think the descriptions found in *RBMW* begin in an oppositional way, are too specific in looking at the fruit rather than the root, don't respect the overlap of male and female, and are not comprehensive enough for all relationships as male and female. What I am not arguing for is a plasticity of male-female relations, but a more well-defined, broad, but also nuanced description, which Budziszewski presents.

OBJECTIONS TO BUDZISZEWSKI

I have argued Budziszewski's descriptions concerning *paternity* and *maternity* more accurately get to the heart of masculinity and femininity than the ones found in *RBMW*. However, it is fair to ask whether the critiques I have leveled could also be applied to Budziszewski, and whether his descriptions suffer from other weaknesses.

In other words, could it not be claimed that he also defines things in an oppositional way, is too specific, doesn't respect the overlap of male and female, and is not comprehensive enough for all relationships as male and female? And does Budziszewski introduce other weaknesses?

First, in terms of defining masculinity and femininity in an oppositional way, it is true both definitions do focus on differentness. This is natural in trying to describe how male and female are different. However, Budziszewski's definition does tilt more toward mutuality and union. Paternity and maternity are integrated. Physically you need both a male and female to have a child. Even if we push the conversation more toward calling, people need or at least are made for both paternal and maternal figures in their lives, even if these people are not biologically related to them.

Second, is Budziszewski's definition too specific? What about singles? What about childless women? What about the disabled? Does he also narrow the definition to the marriage relationship? It sounds as though he leaves these other groups out by using paternity and maternity language. However, he actually

moves past the marriage relationship in that he is not talking about husband/wife, but paternal and maternal virtues that go beyond marriage and having children. Although he qualifies his definition, nevertheless, this critique partially lands, which is why in the next section we will have to expand his definition.

Third, does Budziszewski's definition not respect the large overlap between male and female? In Budziszewski's definition the point seems to be that the genders will inflect virtues in different ways. He actually avoids this by not listing traits but giving a larger umbrella category. The reason most language (and the Scripture) can be gender neutral is that most of it applies to both male and female. Yet, the genders will embody these traits in different ways. Budziszewski puts it this way:

To say that there is a real difference between manhood and womanhood as such is not at all to say that this difference is simple or all-encompassing. Because men and women are not different species, but corresponding sexes of the same species, each is defined partly in terms of the other.⁴⁵

What we don't want to lose is that men and women are not just different, but different in corresponding ways that make them natural partners. Each helps bring the other into balance.

Budziszewski's definition allows women to lead, but to embody leadership in a different way and in different spheres. It

allows men to be gentle and quiet of spirit, but in a different way than women. It allows men and women to both be addressed in the Scripture most of the time, but also to embody these virtues in different ways. Men and women reflect the same human nature with equal fidelity and dignity, but reflect different aspects of it.

Men and women are both called to joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness, but it may look differently in each individual. As Alastair Roberts has put it:

Many are inclined to think of gendered virtues in an oppositional manner, as if speaking of a 'masculine virtue' implicitly meant that it were not a 'feminine' virtue. This is unhelpful. Gendered virtues should rather be understood as those virtues that enable us to live as the sort of distinct symbolic and relational beings that we are. Any particular virtue will typically be a virtue for both sexes. However, each sex will inflect the virtues in its own particular way.⁴⁶

What this means is that some fields of work might be more attractive to women and others to men. But even when that mold is broken, women will embody those roles in different ways than men. For example, a female president of an institution will interact differently than a male president, but both are called to lead, guide, and protect.

The fourth critique that could be leveled against Budziszewski is that he

⁴⁴Piper does say his definition needs to be in relation to man and woman's differing relationships.

⁴⁵Budziszewski, *On the Meaning of Sex*, 51.

⁴⁶Alastair Roberts, "A Biblical Gender Essentialism?," *Alastair's Adversaria*, 1 September 2014, <https://alastairadversaria.com/2014/09/01/a-biblical-gender-essentialism/>.



defines things too narrowly in terms of procreation and marriage and teleology. Again, I think this is a valid critique. Budziszewski seems to be aiming for *the essence* of the difference, but still restricts his description unnecessarily.

Fifth, some might claim that Piper and Budziszewski's descriptions actually imply the same thing. Budziszewski looks at manhood and womanhood from the sky and Piper from the ground. My whole argument is a distinction without a difference. But because of my critiques of Piper's descriptions above, I still think Budziszewski's description is an improvement.

Sixth, it could be asserted that Budziszewski's definition is not specific enough and doesn't give enough direction in terms of how this plays out. At least with Piper's definition there is a

sense of what men and women are called to do. I find this critique fair. It does lack specificity. What turns out to be Budziszewski's strength is his weakness, and what turns out to be Piper's strength is also his weakness. Having admitted this, I still believe a broader definition is needed now, as more and more people are abandoning ship in terms of "masculinity" and "femininity" because of the weaknesses identified above.

Thus, Budziszewski's definition avoids the trappings of some of Piper's descriptions and allows for more emphasis upon union, sameness, complementarity, and how these things can look differently from one individual to another. It gives guardrails without boxing in. It gives categories without being too specific. Though it is not as specific as Piper's description, it allows more contextual flexibility while also affirming complementarity.

IMPROVING UPON BUDZISZEWSKI

I have argued Budziszewski's description is an improvement. However, I have also reflected on how Budziszewski's definition is both too specific and too broad — too specific in that it does lean toward married couples, and too broad in that it doesn't give enough specifics in terms of how this will be played out in relationships.

Because of Budziszewski's own "structural weaknesses" I have added to his descriptions by including the following phrases.⁴⁷

The fundamental meaning of masculinity is *sonship, brotherly love*, and potentiality toward paternity.

The fundamental meaning of femininity is *daughterhood, sisterly love*, and potentiality toward maternity.

Each of these expand and enlarge how men and women are defined by their relationships in the body. I did this for three reasons.

First, my definition more explicitly expands past the marriage relationship by beginning with sonship and daughterhood.⁴⁸

Budziszewski's definition too quickly pushes to what we can become, but neglects what we are. We are all offspring of God (Acts 17:28).

Sonship and daughterhood don't need to be actualized or potentialized. To speak only of paternity and maternity immediately puts the conversation in the realm of marriage, while for many people

the marriage relationship will never happen. Teleology needs to be balanced with genesis and ontology.

Humanity's most fundamental relationship, as both male and female, is with God. We are God's sons and daughters. Humanity is not only aimed at "paternity and maternity." We are born as sons and daughters. But in another sense we are also called to be sons and daughters. We are called to perform what we are.

We *continue* as sons and daughters in the family of God, albeit in a heightened way. When describing masculinity and femininity we need to press both back to our beginning and forward to our future. Men are sons. Women are daughters. This is our first sociological relationship. It is also our first calling.

Second, my definition expands past the marriage relationship by including the most common biblical idiom given to Christians: familial.

Paul and the rest of the biblical authors call the covenant community "brothers and sisters." We are to treat all as brothers and sisters, thereby implying we are all brothers and sisters as well.

The familial metaphors expand when describing the church. God is our Father. Christ is the husband and our brother (Heb. 2:11; Rom. 8:29). The church is the bride. Interestingly, when Jesus is asked about the new creation, he asserts there won't be marriage. Brotherhood and sisterhood will encompass all our relationships in the new creation (Matt. 22:30).

⁴⁷Both of these descriptions are rooted in biological distinction.

⁴⁸Hannah Anderson pointed this reality out to me in personal correspondence. This point comes largely from her.

Though this familial language is directed at the church specifically, there is also evidence that brotherhood and sisterhood is the reality all humanity should aim for. The church is simply humanity remade, redeemed by blood and given the Spirit. Including the language of brotherhood and sisterhood thus embraces a more fundamental reality and all humanity — children, singles, the disabled, and the widowed — are more explicitly included. Complementarity goes beyond wife and husband, beyond mother and father.

Third, my definition includes the virtue of love, which is the supreme virtue.

Jesus asserted multiple times there are “weightier” matters of the law or “most important” commands (Matt. 23:23; 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31). In short, some things are more important than others. According to Jesus and Paul’s words, love is the greatest (1 Cor. 13:13; Matt. 22:36-40).

To put this in the frame of this discussion, love is greater than authority-submission. To leave out love neglects the weightier matters of what it means to be male and female. Neither does including love “cancel” authority-submission.

Any definition that does not include love explicitly seems to be lacking, as this is the highest calling. It allows some specificity without getting too narrow. And as Piper explains, sometimes this love will be reflected in leading, affirming, and protecting; sometimes this love will be reflected in affirming, receiving, and nurturing.

Males and females will embody these in

different ways based on their different roles, based on who they are interacting with, based on what social situation they are in. In fact, there are different types of love: parental, friendship, benefactor, and beneficiary. Love is only love when aimed at and respecting the reality in front of it. We are all called to love. This love will be refracted in different ways based on differing relationships.

CONCLUSION AND A FEW IMPLICATIONS

This article has attempted to give a natural law argument for male and female that supports complementarity. However, in doing so we revisited some previous descriptions of masculinity and femininity, arguing they were too oppositional, too specific, didn’t appreciate the overlap of male and female, and not comprehensive enough for all relationships as male and female.

In sum, there is a structural weakness in saying that men lead, provide, and protect while women affirm, receive, and nurture. It is not that this definition is untrue in some situations, it is simply not true in enough situations to stand as the heart of masculinity and femininity.

Budziszewski’s definition focuses on paternity and maternity and gets to the heart of the issue while also allowing more flexibility. It recognizes differences but does so in a more balancing way. It allows for different embodiments of virtues and doesn’t put male and female in an oppositional relationship.

However, Budziszewski’s description has its own weaknesses. It focuses too

"I hope this article serves to further the discussion on the beautiful unity and complementarity of men and women."

much on the marriage relationship, majors on teleology and potentiality, and doesn’t specify any virtues. Adding sonship/daughterhood, brotherhood/sisterhood, and love expands his description to more relationships and includes the supreme virtue.

The strength of Piper’s description is that it puts flesh on the practicality of masculinity and femininity. His weakness is that by so doing he leaves out quite a few relationships that don’t fit under that banner. The strength of Budziszewski is that his description is broader and thus fits various contexts. The weakness is that some might walk away not knowing exactly what this looks like.⁴⁹

One implication of this paper is that the church, and evangelicals in general, need both mothers and fathers in the spiritual sense. Both genders reflect the virtues of the Spirit in different ways. This is another way that God has given the body a variety of gifts that should all be employed in building up the body of Christ.

Complementarians, without folding on arguments for distinct gender roles, can press more into familial language. Not every male-female relationship should be framed with authority-submission. Familial language in the church far outpaces the gender role passages, but perhaps we have lost focus on these.

Overall, I hope this article serves to further the discussion on the beautiful unity and complementarity of men and women. I don’t think natural law arguments for masculinity and femininity have been employed enough, and evangelicals would do well to press further up and in. Exegesis still needs to be done, but Paul bases his commands on a fundamental reality found in creation. We need this foundation as well, or else we might be found to be building our house on sinking sand. ✕

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⁴⁹Scott Swain mentioned to me in personal correspondence that this is where the virtue of prudence applies in a natural law scheme. Prudence discerns appropriate applications in appropriate contexts and does not require pre-formed conclusions like a rules-based approach.

Good and Proper: Paul's use of Nature, Custom, and Decorum in Pastoral Theology

For much of the twentieth century, Protestants, especially Reformed Evangelical ones, viewed natural law with suspicion at best. It was frequently alleged to be the product of Roman Catholic theology, Enlightenment philosophy, or some combination of both.¹ But recent scholarly attitudes, driven in part by a desire to recover elements of the larger Reformed tradition, are beginning to change.² Natural law is even beginning to appear in more popular and pastoral writings.³ It makes good sense, then, for complementarian Christians to consider how this natural law resourcement might fit in with their own recovery project.

This essay will investigate to what extent the Apostle Paul uses a sort of natural-law reasoning in his argument against women teaching or holding an office of authority in the church. The primary textual subject will be 1 Timothy 2:8–15, but parallel New

Testament passages will be considered insofar as they provide additional support for understanding the logic of Paul's argument. I will argue that Paul is making a kind of natural law argument, by way of custom and decorum. This is not a simple appeal to human intuition, neither is it a generalized observation of empirical data taken from nature. It is, however, an argument based on the concepts of basic honor to authority figures, an element of the natural law, and the social power of decorum, of what is proper or fitting for social relationships between men and women. These are concepts grounded in a particular philosophy of nature and the morally formative role of custom. While appropriately using language and categories from the creation order, Paul is indeed employing a particular kind of natural-law application of this biblical account in order to prescribe customary social relations between men and women in the church.

INTERPRETING 1 TIMOTHY 2:8–15

First Timothy 2 is well-worn ground, as it is rightly seen to be a definitive text for the debate over women in leadership in the church. In verse 12, Paul states, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man,” and he goes on to ground this in the way God created humanity. The most thorough survey of the various positions and leading academic literature can likely still be found in William Mounce's commentary on 1 Timothy.⁴ While many more works have been written in the intervening twenty years, the basic hermeneutical and exegetical principles are all represented in Mounce's study. The basic division still lies between the egalitarian reading, represented in its evangelical form by a respected commentator like Gordon Fee,⁵ and the complementarian reading, which is affirmed by Mounce, as well as the majority of conservative or traditional commentators.⁶

The egalitarian interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8–15 largely argues that the passage is of an occasional or ad hoc nature, meant only

to correct a local error. Paul's words there should not, they argue, be taken to imply a general truth about church leadership in all churches, and thus it cannot be used to prohibit women from the ministerial office or other leadership positions in the church.⁷ For the positive case for women teaching and leading in the church, they point to passages of Scripture other than 1 Timothy 2, namely Jesus' acceptance of women learning from him, the role of women in testifying to the resurrection and assisting in the transmission of authoritative documents, Priscilla's role in Acts 18, the presence of women prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5, and the supposedly egalitarian nature of Christ's redemptive ministry. To this last point, Gordon Fee explains it as something of a core commitment, “It is hard to imagine under any circumstances how the denial of one half the human race to minister to the other half brings glory to the gospel, which intends to break down such barriers and bring redemption to the whole body.”⁸ The overarching theological message of the New Testament is perceived to be egalitarian, and that is thought to provide a sufficient affirmative argument.

¹ On this history, see Louis C. Midgley, “Karl Barth and Natural Law: The Anatomy of Debate; Note,” *Natural Law Forum* 140 (Jan. 1968) 108–26; Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, & Contemporary Protestant Thought* (Christian University Press, 1985) 121–60; Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Eerdmans, 2006) 21–53.
² See Grabill, *op. cit.*; David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms* (Eerdmans, 2010); David Haines & Andrew Fulford, *Natural Law: A Brief Introduction and Biblical Defense* (Davenant Institute, 2017).
³ See Russell Kirk, “The Case for and Against Natural Law,” *Heritage Lecture* No. 469, (The Heritage Foundation, 1993); Joe Rigney, “With One Voice: Scripture and Nature for Ethics and Discipleship,” *Eikon: A Journal for Biblical Anthropology* vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 26–37; Michael R. Pompeo, “Unalienable Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy,” *The Wall Street Journal*, July 7, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/unalienable-rights-and-u-s-foreign-policy-11562526448>; David VanDrunen, “Should Protestants Reject Natural Law? Responding to Common Objections,” *Public Discourse: The Journal of the Witherspoon Institute*, August 2, 2020, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/08/67076/>.
⁴ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles in Word Biblical Commentary* Vol. 46, ed. Metzger, Hubbard, Barker, etc. (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000) 103–49.
⁵ Gordon Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Baker Academic, 1991) 52–65, “Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles, with Further Reflections on the Hermeneutics of Ad Hoc Documents,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 28, no. 2 (June 1985): 141–51.
⁶ Gordon Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Baker Academic, 1991) 52–65, “Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles, with Further Reflections on the Hermeneutics of Ad Hoc Documents,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 28, no. 2 (June 1985): 141–51.
⁷ See Fee, “Reflections on Church Order,” 146, 150–51.
⁸ Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 64.

Complementarians, on the other hand, affirm that Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2 are indeed meant to be understood in a general or universal sense, applying to all Christian communities throughout history. They maintain that Paul's argument can be shown to be universal in character by its basic moral recommendations, the generality of its statements about women's relationship to men, and its appeal to creation.⁹ While the occasion of 1 Timothy certainly involved unique historical and pastoral circumstances, this is not in itself an argument in favor of one conclusion or another. Mounce explains this simply, "the specificity of the application does not relegate the principle to the halls of cultural relativity."¹⁰ Complementarians respond to the argument for equality by distinguishing between spiritual and temporal equality, as well as equality of worth or value and equality of role or function.

The strongest argument for understanding 1 Timothy 2:8–15 in a universal way is the fact that Paul provides us with his rationale. In 1 Timothy 2:13–14, Paul says, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." This is an appeal to the creation account as found in Genesis 2 and 3, and it can only be useful for Paul's argument if he believes that the creation of Adam and Eve, and certain aspects of their fall into sin, have an abiding relevance to men and women. This point becomes even more compelling when we note that Paul makes roughly the same kind of argument in 1 Corinthians 11:3, 8–12. These parallels include both the order of creation as well as the role of child-bearing (1 Tim. 2:15; 1 Cor. 11:12). If we consider 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 in this same context, we can also understand Paul's reference in 1 Timothy

2:14 to the deception of Eve as a reference to the subordination described in Genesis 3:16. "The law" mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:34 would likewise then be the judgment on Eve.¹¹ Taken together, this means that when Paul encounters questions of social authority between men and women in various church settings, he appeals to the particulars of the creation account and applies them to men and women in a consistent way. Thus, the complementarian reading of 1 Timothy 2:8–15 accounts for the fundamental logic of Paul's argument, whereas the egalitarian reading does not.

A final point of interpretation, one frequently made in defense of the particularist or egalitarian reading, should be discussed. It has to do with the literary unity of 1 Timothy 2. Philip Towner argues that verses 8–15 hold together as a single unit, with the conceptual link being found in the notion of proper public behavior. Towner writes "this span of text is not an addendum treating a separate topic; it occurs within the textual frame indicated by repetition of the key ethical term 'propriety' in vv. 9 and 15 (*sōphrosynē*) and within the cultural frame of the expectations governing the behavior of women in public."¹² He also adds that this section is presented in the "traditional shape" of "the household code."¹³ Gordon Fee makes the similar point, different in focus but complementary in logic, that all of the instructions to women 1 Timothy 2:9–15 are a contrast to the impious behavior of "false" widows in 1 Timothy 5:11–15.¹⁴ Thus the quiet learning and submission of women is an expression of how they are to be "adorned" with godliness and good works (1 Tim. 2:9–11). This interpretation is further strengthened when we note how closely this text parallels 1 Peter 3:1–7.

For Towner, the appearance of the household code is an indication that Paul is making a strategic pastoral accommodation to his culture. Fee, too, uses these observations to restrict Paul's statement to a local context. The literary form and structure is claimed to be an argument against applying 1 Tim. 2:11–12 to modern churches. But one could just as easily argue that Paul assumed and accepted the basic structure of ancient household codes. Indeed, the same household code appears in Ephesians 5–6, and as C. R. Wiley argues, this is central to the overall theme of Ephesians. Wiley notes the occurrence of *oikonomia* in both Ephesians 1:10 and 3:2 and then connects this to the conceptual framing of the "house of God." Wiley writes, "Christians have always said that the Church is a house. That's what a temple is. . . . Paul tells us that . . . the Lord's temple is actually God's people working together, like in any economy."¹⁵ And, "a household ordered by the household code in Ephesians reflects the rule of Christ."¹⁶ The same emphasis on the church as "house" appears in both

Ephesians and 1 Timothy, so it makes good sense for household codes to appear. The codes are not a mere construct for contemporary concerns but are indeed connected to a central theological and ecclesiological argument.

Noticing that Paul's instructions to women in 1 Timothy 2:12–15 are a continuation of his larger instruction in verses 9–11, as well as the larger household code of the entire chapter, illustrates that submissiveness according to one's relation and social station is a practical way of maintaining "propriety," a concept Towner is right to emphasize,¹⁷ and godliness (1 Tim. 2:9–10). Ephesians also exhibits this kind of unified literary structure and moral-theological paradigm, as the various orders of submission in Ephesians 5:22–6:9 follow from Paul's teaching on the proper Christian walk (Eph. 5:1–3ff) and Spirit-filled life (Eph. 5:18–21).¹⁸ And so, while occasional because they are pastoral, the particular instructions to men and women are not accidental to the Pauline theology but rather applications of it.

⁹See Clark, 197–203; Knight, 139–55; Mounce, 130.

¹⁰Mounce, *ibid.*

¹¹This is John Calvin's understanding of 1 Tim. 2:14, though he does not make the same application to 1 Cor. 14:34; Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. W. Pringle (Calvin Translation Society, 1856) 69. John Chrysostom does read 1 Cor. 14:34 along these lines; see Chrysostom *Homily 37 on 1 Corinthians, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 1/12, ed. Schaff (T&T Clark, Eerdmans, 1989) 222.

¹²Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus in The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Green (Eerdmans, 2006) 190.

¹³*Ibid.*, 192.

¹⁴Fee, "Reflections on Church Order," 146.

¹⁵C. R. Wiley, *The Household and the War for the Cosmos* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2019) 80.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁷Towner, 190, 236.

¹⁸While I have based this argument on the hermeneutical observations of certain particularist and egalitarian writers, it should also be pointed out that many complementarians understand it as a rather straightforward reading of 1 Tim. 2; for instance Knight, 130–31, 148–49.

UNDERSTANDING NATURAL LAW

As mentioned in the introduction, natural law is not yet familiar ground for evangelical Protestants. It is still often thought of and rejected as either a variation of Hume's is-ought problem¹⁹ or a religiously "neutral" self-evident moral observation. These are both misconceptions, though they do approximate certain important features of natural law theory, and so we need to clarify our meaning.

Thomas Aquinas provides the classic definition of natural law. It is the "participation of the eternal law in the rational creature."²⁰ This then presumes the prior existence of the eternal law, which Thomas explains as simply God's own rational nature, or "the Divine Reason's conception of things."²¹ We can immediately see that this is not a religiously-neutral line of reasoning. Thomas's natural law theory depends upon a theology. God exists as the ultimate foundation for rationality and morality, and "natural law" is the way in which He has imprinted that rationality and morality in humans. It is, in Thomas's words, "an imprint on us of the Divine light."²² Contemporary readers would simply call this the image of God in man, and indeed we see some of the sixteenth-century Reformers doing precisely this. Girolamo Zanchi writes, "the law is nothing else but a true and lively picture of the image of God, to which man was created. . ."²³

This natural-law constitution also has a causal character, as humans were created with a purpose. Thomas states, "from its being imprinted on them, [humans] derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends."²⁴ This is how

the natural law accounts for the common inclinations in human nature, why people generally value certain basic goods and behave in fundamental ways, and it is why the natural law can be seen in the universal testimony of mankind. Thus, consensus across time and history is evidence of the natural law's existence.

It is important to note that these sorts of common inclinations are of a very rudimentary order, reducible to "seek the good and avoid the evil."²⁵ They can allow for diverse applications. Any further application of natural law necessarily moves one from the "speculative reason" to the "practical reason,"²⁶ and whenever elements of the law are codified in a social or political setting, they become "human law."²⁷ Errors can be made in the realm of human law, and indeed the more one begins to "descend further into detail,"²⁸ the greater the possibility for error. But the possibility of error in human law does not mean that natural law is useless, that is it is only "speculative" and never "practical." Rather, the fallibility of human law highlights the need to have an intelligible standard by which it can be judged. "If in any point [a human law] deflects from the law of nature, it is no longer law but a perversion of law,"²⁹ a point powerfully made anew in the twentieth century by Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail."³⁰

While the first principles of the natural law are extremely basic, Thomas asserts that they address matters like "sexual intercourse" and the "education of offspring."³¹ The Protestant Reformers, who did indeed retain this concept of the natural law, identified it with the moral law found in the Ten Commandments.³² The



relevance of this point for our discussion of 1 Timothy is that natural-law reasoning would also explain directions about headship and submission. It would do so not by simply asserting a positive law, but by appealing to the Fifth Commandment and its rational grounding in honoring and obeying authority. We see exactly this in Archbishop Ussher's exposition of the

law in *A Body of Divinity*, as he applies the Fifth Commandment to all relationships of superiority, inferiority, and inequality. This includes parents and children, citizens and magistrates, and husbands and wives, among other offices and relations.³³ A simplified form of the same logic is present in the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, questions 123–133.³⁴ The specific duties prescribed to superiors and inferiors are practical applications of the natural law, and so are of the nature of human law, but the foundation for each application is the Fifth Commandment itself, which is an inflection of the natural law. Should superiors fail in their duty or obligation towards their inferiors (or *vice versa*), then they would be guilty of violating the natural law. Any particular case would be judged according to the relevant human law in question, but that human law could itself be verified or overturned according to the natural law, as discussed earlier. Thus we see how a basic natural-law principle like "obey authority" can be applied to particular cases of people in familial and other social relationships.

¹⁹Scottish philosopher David Hume argued in his 1739 *A Treatise on Human Nature* 3.1.1 that you cannot deduce a moral imperative from a mere fact of existence; you cannot prove an "ought" from an "is."

²⁰Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, 91, ii, co.

²¹ST I-II, 91, i, co.

²²ST I-II, 91, ii, co.

²³Zanchi, *Confession of Christian Religion* 10.3, vol. 1, ed. Baschera and Moser, (Brill, 2007) 191. Zanchi is here speaking of the law given at Mt. Sinai, but he is explaining how it is a reflection of the law of nature.

²⁴ST I-II, 91, ii, co.

²⁵ST I-II, 94, ii, co.

²⁶ST I-II, 94, iv, co.

²⁷ST I-II, 91, iii, co.

²⁸ST I-II, 94, iv, co.

²⁹ST I-II, 95, ii, co.

³⁰King wrote, "To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law" ("Letter From Birmingham Jail" in *Why We Can't Wait* ((Signet Classics, 2000)) 70).

³¹ST I-II, 94, ii, co.

³²Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* II.8.1 ed. McNeill (Westminster John Knox Press, 1960) 367–68; Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (P&R reprint, 1852) 491–92; Zanchi, *Confession of Christian Religion*, op. cit., 191; Junius, *The Mosaic Polity* (Acton, 2015) 44, 60–62; Witsius, *Economy of the Covenant* I.3.7 vol. 1, trans. Crookshank (T. Tegg & Son, 1837) 39. This is even true of Martin Luther; see the discussion in Johannes Heckel *Lex Charitatis* (Eerdmans, 2010) 54–61.

³³Ussher, *A Body of Divinity* (Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007) 231–41.

³⁴*Westminster Confession of Faith* (Free Presbyterian Publications, 2003) 209–17.

³⁵ST I-II, 95, ii, co.

³⁶*Ibid.*

CUSTOM AND DECORUM

So far, this discussion of natural law has addressed philosophy and moral reasoning. But any application of morals in a historically contingent human community (the actual business of human law) will require more than simply a recognition of nature. It will require deliberation, prudence, and political rule. For Thomas this means that human law projects always involve a “science” and an “art.”³⁵ The scientific element of human law is when specific conclusions are logically derived from first principles. An example would be when the premise “do harm to no man” leads to the conclusion “one must not kill.” One could derive similar conclusions, such as the prohibition against assault, from the same principle. The artistic element of human law, however, is when the “general forms are particularized into details.”³⁶ To explain this, Thomas gives the example of deciding on a particular sort of punishment. “That the evil-doer should be punished” is a strict conclusion from the law of nature, but “that he be punished this or that way” is what Thomas calls “a determination of the law of nature.” The determination involves human art and is necessarily more subjective.

This artistic realm of human law involves strict positive laws, as in the above case of specific penalties, but it also involves custom. Customs are “repeated external actions” which “effectually declar[e]” the “concepts of reason.”³⁷ Examples of customs would be the practice of standing when an honored person enters a room or a ceremony like a marriage service (and its particular elements). While more subjective than positive law and involving less immediately coercive

force, customs are nevertheless extremely powerful elements of human law and social life. They are a practical way to “incline [people] to acts of virtue.”³⁸ This is also why customs must be rightly ordered and grounded in nature. If they are disordered, then customs can actually promote evil and have a seriously harmful effect upon society. Writing several centuries after Thomas, Richard Hooker stated that “lewd and wicked custom, beginning perhaps at the first among few, afterwards spreading into greater multitudes, and so continuing from time to time, may be of force even in plain things to smother the light of natural understanding.”³⁹ Customs, then, are powerful social practices which can shape the human community towards virtue or vice, leading either to a reasonable conformity to the natural law or the collective loss of it. Indeed, as Thomas concludes, “custom has the force of a law, abolishes law, and is the interpreter of law.”⁴⁰

John Calvin made the same kind of argument. In a sermon on 1 Corinthians 11:11–16, he stated, “when there is an accepted custom, and it is a good and decent one, we must accept it. And whoever tries to change it is surely the enemy of the common good. . . .”⁴¹ He qualifies that these customs must be “good and decent,” “according to nature,” and “edifying.”⁴² For Calvin, this is judged by “the word of God, the law of nature, and human decency.”⁴³ Once good customs are identified, however, we should “agree that whatever is good for the well-being of the whole Church will be practiced, and let everyone keep to it.”⁴⁴ Doing so will promote “meekness and humility” which in turn produces the “excellent virtue” of peace.⁴⁵

In his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, treating the same passage, Calvin states that when custom receives “universal consent,” it can even be called “nature.”⁴⁶ Thus, good customs are closely associated with the natural law. They promote the natural virtue on a social level by shaping habits and attitudes.

A final important concept for this discussion is “decorum.” Decorum indicates the proper use of customs for a virtuous purpose. Commenting on 1 Cor. 11:2, he says:

For as a man’s dress or gesture has in some cases the effect of disfiguring, and in others of adorning him, so all actions are set off to advantage by decorum, and are vitiated by the want of it. Much, therefore, depends upon decorum (τὸ πρεπον) and that not merely for securing for our actions gracefulness and beauty, but also to accustom our minds to propriety.⁴⁷

This is an important passage because it shows how Calvin interprets a Biblical passage which prescribes a particular custom. He does not see the custom as itself a divine-law command, but neither does he see it as mere cultural accommodation with no further grounding. Rather, Calvin sees the social custom as a means of affirming and promoting a natural virtue.

The customs in 1 Cor. 11, the head covering and long hair for women and short hair for men, are good and proper. Calvin fears that rashly setting aside such customs will lead to an overturning of the natural law. The term he uses to indicate the respect for and moderate use of customs is “decorum.”

The editor of Calvin’s commentaries gives an important note here on the term “decorum” or the Greek term Calvin points to, τὸ πρεπον. He points out that this was a fundamental concept in classical rhetoric and philosophy, most famously associated with Cicero. In his work *On Moral Duties*, Cicero discusses “decorum” or “becomingness” at some length. Cicero defines decorum as that “which is so in accordance with nature as to present the aspect of moderation or self-restraint.”⁴⁸ A little later he illustrates this point by saying that “it is the part of justice not to injure men; of courtesy, not to give them offense, and it is in this last that the influence of becomingness is most clearly seen.”⁴⁹ Thus “becomingness,” or decorum, is the wise application of justice to specific related actions and behaviors, in keeping with the nature of things. It describes what is “proper” of “fitting” for any given occasion. We might also say that decorum is a shorthand way to express that a custom is indeed in accordance with nature and is being applied in an appropriate way for the right objective.

³⁷ST I-II, 97. iii, co.
³⁸ST I-II, 95. i, co.
³⁹Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* I.vi.11 vol. 1 (Everyman’s Library, 1969) 184.
⁴⁰ST I-II, 97. iii, co.
⁴¹Calvin, *Men Women and Order in the Church: Three Sermons* trans. Skolnitsky (Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1992), 57.
⁴²Ibid., 54
⁴³Ibid., 55
⁴⁴Ibid., 60
⁴⁵Ibid., 62
⁴⁶*Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostles to the Corinthians* vol. 1, trans. Pringle (Calvin Translation Society, 1848), 361–62.
⁴⁷Ibid., 350.
⁴⁸Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, I.27 trans. Peabody (Little, Brown, and Co., 1887), 61.
⁴⁹Ibid., 62–63.

DECORUM IN THE APOSTLE PAUL

We introduced the concept of decorum by way of Calvin’s discussion of 1 Corinthians 11:2, but Calvin is himself observing its presence in the Biblical text. The Apostle Paul uses the term *πρεπον* in verse 13, when he asks, “is it *proper* for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?” This is not simply a coincidental word choice. Paul is employing a term with a rich philosophical meaning in a polemical context that employs the same sorts of concepts. Paul was familiar with the Greek philosophical and rhetorical discourse, as evidenced by his citation of Aratus and Epimenides in Acts 17:28. Additionally, we should note that Paul’s hometown had a close connection with certain Greek philosophical traditions. Bruce Chilton notes that Tarsus was a “thoroughly Hellenistic city.”⁵⁰ Indeed, Tarsus was the hometown of several famous stoic philosophers, including Antipater, to whom Cicero himself makes reference in *On Duties*.⁵¹ When we consider this classical context, Paul’s appeal to decorum can be seen as a theologically informed but otherwise typical piece of late-antique Greco-Roman moral philosophy.⁵² It is what we should expect from someone writing within this cultural milieu. Viewed from the internal logic of 1 Cor. 11, it also makes good sense. Paul is discussing a matter of custom which he grounds in nature, in the creation of Adam and Eve. Paul wants women to dress and behave in a certain way in order to signify how God made them, and he believes that their doing so will be a way of exhibiting self-control on a social level. This is a classic case of decorum.

We can bring this discussion back to our original text, 1 Timothy 2:9–15, by pointing out that the same word, *πρέπει*, appears in 1 Tim. 2:10, as well. Paul says that it is “proper” or “fitting” for a woman to adorn herself with good deeds. Just as in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is here promoting decorum. The chapter begins with a general call to honor authority by praying and then living in peace and quiet (1 Tim. 2:1–2). After an explanation about prayer and the mediatorial work of Christ (vss. 3–7), Paul then states that he wants the men to pray “without anger or quarreling” (vs. 8). When he moves to the women, Paul continues to emphasize peaceable virtues, but specifically “modesty and self-control” (vs. 9). These become their proper “adornment,” not physical things characteristic of luxury or haughtiness, but rather a quiet and submissive demeanor (vss. 9–11). This is then further exhibited in not teaching or exercising authority over a man (vs. 12). Finally, Paul reminds the people of their natural state, how God originally created mankind (vs. 13), and he points women towards childrearing, carried out in faith, love, and holiness with self-control (vs. 15). Taken collectively, this is the decorum for the people of God. Whereas Paul prescribes a literal outward adornment in 1 Corinthians 11:1–6, in 1 Timothy 2:8–15 he appeals to demeanor and practice. In both cases, though, he is calling the church to maintain a fitting order which testifies of God’s creation in a moderate way by respecting particular customs.

Thus, the particular historical or cultural elements of 1 Tim. 2:8-15, the kind of clothing and jewelry worn by women, or the silence of women, can be described as customs, but they are customs grounded

in the natural law. The customs then are concrete ways to promote humility and submission to proper authority in a public gathering. Paul wants the customs to be preserved so that the natural-law principles can be maintained and applied on a social level. Paul is therefore also teaching that authority in church is established in a way that is consistent with this more fundamental rational order, in a way that preserves decorum. Only men hold offices of authority in the church because this is how God created the world.

CONCLUSION

There are many relevant questions which reasonably follow from interpreting Paul with these categories of natural law, custom, and decorum. To what extent did Paul believe any particular custom was changeable, and by whom? How should Christians respond to a culture which has lost many natural customs and adopted many disordered and even wicked ones? These cannot be pursued in this essay, though helpful direction can be found in the historical sources mentioned. For now, we only want to establish that Paul presents a case for a rational and intelligible divine order in creation, a basic natural law constitution, and that he believes customs and practices should be maintained in order to preserve this order and promote virtues consistent with it in the life of the church. Such virtues include modesty and

temperance. One important practice that reinforces this order is male teaching and authority, a custom which Paul practically identifies with nature and to which he gives the force of law.

This reading of Paul takes advantage of some of the stronger observations of recent egalitarian commentators, namely their attention to particulars in the literary and historical material. But it incorporates these observations into the larger, and more coherent, complementarian reading of 1 Timothy 2:8–15. Further, it demonstrates how we can speak of a “natural law” argument in 1 Timothy 2, by seeing Paul’s argument as a pastoral use of custom to confirm the natural order and to promote peace through decorum. ✕

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⁵⁰Bruce Chilton, *Rabbi Paul* (Image Books Doubleday, 2004), 17.

⁵¹Cicero, *op. cit.*, 198–202

⁵²Bruce Winter notes several parallels between 1 Timothy 2:9–15 and Greco-Roman moral philosophy; see Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and Pauline Communities* (Eerdmans, 2003), 97–122.

Creation or Nature? Or both?

Oliver O'Donovan and Carl
F. H. Henry on Natural Law,
the *imago Dei*, Creation, and
Gender Distinctions.

As the distinction between the genders continues to be erased, Christians must wrestle with how they will engage their non-Christian, secular neighbors with what they know to be true about God's world. In engaging their neighbors, Christians have God's special revelation that tells human beings they are made in God's image as distinct, complementary genders, male and female. What Christians have wrestled with for

millennia is whether they have moral resources outside of God's special revelation in Scripture to make appeals to their non-Christian neighbors for an objective moral, natural law. Particularly for our time, on what grounds do Christians engage their non-Christian neighbors about the objective reality of gender distinctions and a normative nature to those distinctions? At the root of these questions lie discussions about natural law, the doctrine of creation, the *imago Dei*, and divine revelation.

Christian ethicist, Daniel Heimbach, offers a sufficient definition of natural law. According to Heimbach, "this moral ideal or ethical law is in some way present in nature or the natural order of things; that what this moral ideal or ethical law demands is knowable in some natural way (by reason, or intuition, or experience, or sensation) by men in their natural state (apart from revelation, regeneration, or specialized training); and that what this moral ideal or ethical law requires may or may not be the same for all people, for all time, in all places."¹

¹Daniel Heimbach, "Rethinking Natural Law," *Liberty University Law Review* 2, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 4. This definition aims to be broad enough to avoid wading into contemporary, intramural debates surrounding Thomistic natural law, Analytical Thomism, and New Natural Law Theory.

Carl F. H. Henry and Oliver O'Donovan are two prominent Protestant moral theologians who have developed public, political theologies apart from natural law theory. They provide accounts of the objective moral character of creation and human beings as made in the *imago Dei* yet without appealing to natural law. Rather, their accounts are thoroughly theological, while affirming that the normative features of reality and humanity can be and are known by even those who do not have Christian presuppositions. By looking at their treatment of natural law and their proposals for Christian engagement with the world around them regarding gender distinctions, Henry and O'Donovan both show that Christians have the rich theological resources of the doctrine of creation and the *imago Dei* at their disposal for moral reflection and cultural engagement. Though having those resources, unresolved ambiguities in Henry's and O'Donovan's treatment of natural law show that Protestants can embrace natural law while maintaining robust commitments to the doctrine of creation's and biblical anthropology's role in moral reflection and engagement.

HENRY, THE *IMAGO DEI*, AND DIVINE REVELATION

Henry was a Baptist theologian, professor, the first editor of Christianity Today and a leader in the burgeoning evangelical movement that came out of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the early twentieth century in the United States.² Coming from the Baptist tradition, Henry was an early advocate of evangelical social and political engagement and frequently argued in his writings against what he called natural law “strategies of engagement.”³ Henry thinks Christians have the sure foundation of God’s moral law in the special revelation of Christian Scripture, and they can and should appeal to that revelation when engaging in society, politics, culture, and their non-Christian neighbors.

In addition to having the epistemic resources of Holy Scripture, humans are made in the imago Dei and thus able to receive divine revelation, but with the caveat that being made in the imago Dei does not guarantee true moral knowledge about God’s world. Finite creatures, especially post-fall, need God’s revelation in his word to know God’s moral will for their lives. In his discussion on the imago Dei, Henry asks whether any moral content can be established by humans merely from being created in the imago Dei. Henry gives three reasons that no detailed theory of morality can be developed by solely being made in the imago Dei. First, because humans are sinners, they know the imago from the perspective of revolt against God. The imago remains, yet the moral content of the imago is falsely perceived and expositied by sinful human beings. Second, general revelation does not define the precise moral content given in the pre-lapsarian imago Dei. He says, “Scripture assuredly exhibits the moral claim in its fullness. It is certainly more comprehensive in content than is our knowledge solely from general revelation.”⁴ Third, because God addresses humanity in statutes and precepts in external revelation, even to pre-fall humanity, the creation narrative gives evidence of the necessary dependence on divine revelation for an adequate knowledge of the moral content of God’s will.⁵

Henry concludes that the image of God in humanity only establishes human beings’ capacity for a relationship with God and provides for moral accountability. Every human being is guilty of sinning against the law that they know

based on their being made in the image of God. Rebellious humanity uses the “law written on their hearts” to erect “spurious alternatives to the Divine moral law which enable him in self-delusion to ‘justify himself’ by works.”⁶ Henry thinks that any morality that is not directly established on or does not appeal to divine revelation is an attempt by fallen humanity to circumvent moral accountability to God and establish moral integrity apart from the work of Christ.⁷ Nevertheless, some moral knowledge survives the fall; and because of the enduring nature of the conscience post-fall, “the moral content which man always bears because the imago enters into the stuff of which ethical theories are made.”⁸ Ethical theories are put together wrongly by “man-as-sinner.” Consequently, an “ethics of natural-law” is ruled out, because “the sinner in the handling distorts the imago-content.”⁹ Though Henry wants to affirm some moral content to the moral knowledge known via conscience in the imago Dei, he is skeptical of any attempt of sinful, and more particularly unregenerate, humans to reconstruct or construct the elements of that moral content, like is done in natural law theory.

In a 1995 *First Things* article, Henry addresses natural law specifically and defines it as the term “used to mean a body of ethical imperatives supposedly inherent in human beings and discovered by human reason. It, therefore, differs from statute law, from the supernaturally revealed law, and even from so-called ‘laws of nature.’”¹⁰ Henry recognizes an ambiguity in the term natural law, but he seeks to differentiate it from any moral law that is merely subjective, evolutionary, pragmatic, or existential and even from the transcendent supernatural (divine revelation). Instead, natural law refers to that

set of ethical norms and imperatives that they commonly perceive without dependence on supernatural disclosure and illumination. Humanity, in short, universally knows a body of morally binding laws that shape a common pattern of social behavior, and moreover knows these imperatives without reference to transcendent revelation.¹¹

Any argument for the natural law must be made on natural foundations rather than supernatural ones.¹²

²See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) and James Davidson Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law, and Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 1992) for the history of fundamentalism in American Christianity.

³Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Apply the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 187.

⁴Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 155.

⁵*Ibid.*²2017–2018 Report of the President and Minutes of 2019 General Council, The Christian and Missionary Alliance (Orlando, FL: 2019), 4.

³2017–2018 Report of the President and Minutes of 2019 General Council, 6.

⁴Becky Carter, “When Women Preach,” *Advance Newsletter*, January 29, 2020, <http://cdcm.org/blog/2020/1/15/when-women-preach>.

⁵Carter, “When Women Preach.”

⁶*Ibid.*, 150.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, 157.

⁹*Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁰Carl F. H. Henry, “Natural Law and a Nihilistic Culture,” *First Things* (January 1995), 1.

¹¹Henry, *Natural Law and Nihilistic Culture*, 4.

¹²*Ibid.*

"Nevertheless, God's revelation of his will in Scripture provides the surest and most coherent account of the reality of the distinction between male and female as made in the image of God."

Henry argues that three basic contentions of natural law have evoked broad evangelical objections.¹³ These are "(1) that independently of divine revelation, (2) there exists a universally shared body or system of moral beliefs, (3) that human reasoning articulates despite the noetic consequences of the Adamic fall."¹⁴ Henry affirms these three objections first by epistemically grounding morality solely in both general and special revelation; second, he argues that the *imago Dei* makes human beings able to receive this revelation; and third, due to the noetic effects of sin, all humanity misinterprets this divinely-revealed morality in general and special revelation and actively uses it in rebellion against God.

Henry grounds knowledge of the divine, moral law in divine revelation, particularly special revelation. In his critique of natural law, Henry asks the following epistemological question: "If, as champions of natural morality insist, human nature is inherently structured with imperatives, how can humans know that these very requirements are ethically legitimate?"¹⁵ He challenges the natural law theorists that they cannot appeal to special or general revelation. All the natural law theorist can appeal to is intuition. What is to guard against the emergence of a potential Hitler or Mao, employing counter-moralities in society based on their moral intuitions? His rhetorical answer is "nothing," saying, "What humanity affirms solely on the basis of inherent instincts and philosophical reasoning lacks normative force; only what God says in Scripture and has disclosed in Christ is normative."¹⁶ What God has revealed in Scripture is the ultimate moral authority, and all moral claims must conform to that standard.

Based on Henry's rejection of natural law theory, one can infer that he would reject any notion that the normative nature of gender distinctions can be known apart from divine revelation. Granting that Henry strongly affirms the abiding nature of the *imago Dei*, Henry would see attempts to ground the normative nature of gender distinctions on something other than explicitly theological grounds such as divine revelation, the doctrine of creation, or the *imago Dei* as futile. In short, only theological or biblical grounds for the distinction between male and female are rationally coherent. Non-Christians who acknowledge and live according to a distinction between male and female believe and are living inconsistently with their basic presuppositions. They may not live utterly debauched lives of sexual perversion, because the abiding nature of the *imago Dei* and the universal nature of general revelation preserve some non-Christians and non-Christian ethical systems from utter depravity. Nevertheless, God's revelation of his will in Scripture provides the surest and most coherent account of the reality of the distinction between male and female as made in the image of God.

¹³Henry's treatment of natural law is in view here. An in-depth exploration of his interpretation of the contested ground of the Reformer's view of the natural law is not essential; Henry has his reasons for rejecting the knowability of natural law, which he nonetheless thinks are consistent with the Reformers' views. Several interpretations of Calvin's position of natural law have called into question the view that the Reformers simply rejected it. See Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, where he discusses Calvin's affirmation of both natural theology and natural law in Calvin's doctrine of the Duplex Cognitio Dei. Grabill says, "Calvin viewed the knowledge of God the Creator as belonging both to the order of nature and to the general teaching of Scripture. So, far from denying that the pagan philosophers (or even the common folk) have received an elementary and useful knowledge of God as Creator from natural revelation, Calvin showed that because of sin they failed to move from that knowledge to true religion, and thus, in the end, their gifts rendered them yet more inexcusable." Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, 83. For treatments of Calvin's view of natural law, also see John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," *Journal of Religion* 26 (1946): 168-82; Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), 39; Susan E. Schreiner, "Calvin's Use of Natural Law," in *A Preserving Grace: Protestants, Catholics, and Natural Law*, ed. Michael Cromartie (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 54-55; Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004); and C. Scott Pryor, "God's Bridle: John Calvin's Application of Natural Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 22, no. 1 (2006-2007): 225-54.

¹⁴Henry, *Natural Law and Nihilistic Culture*, 4.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

O'DONOVAN, MORAL REALISM, AND GOD'S GOOD CREATION

O'Donovan is an ordained priest in the Church of England. He is part of a revival in political theology that seeks to draw out “an earthly political discourse from the political language of religious discourse.”¹⁷ From a distinctly Christian perspective, the goal of his political theology is “to push back the horizon of commonplace politics and open it up to the activity of God.”¹⁸ His work brings the disciplines of Christian systematic, historical, and biblical theology into conversation with classical, medieval, and modern political theory.

O'Donovan sees contemporary debates in ethical theory over the nature of moral judgments, including those surrounding gender distinctions, as debates about ontology, because these debates revolve around questions of natural teleology -- over whether objective purposes exist in nature. By discerning what the nature and purpose of something is, human beings will have the criterion for determining right and wrong and would be able to resolve moral disagreements by making truthful moral judgments about them.¹⁹

The scientific revolution, of which the current cultural milieu is an heir, tried to dispense with two principles of natural law ethics. The first principle of the natural law ethic is that “reality is given to us, not simply in discrete, isolated phenomena, but in kinds. Things have *a natural meaning*.”²⁰ The second principle is that “these given kinds themselves are not isolated from each other but relate to each other in a given pattern within the order of things. . . . Things have *a natural purpose*.”²¹ This fact leaves science and Christians who seek to know the world around them left with lingering anxiety over the choice between the disintegration and incompleteness of scientific knowledge and “the perception of the world as an integrated whole that our faith demands of us.”²² Christians must “reintegrate what we see through the lens into a total pattern of understanding,” which O'Donovan believes is supplied by the theological categories of revelation, creation, and eschatology.

Revelation provides the necessary Christian epistemology for Christian ethics. This epistemology should not be confused with ontology.²³ Inherent to any notion of the spoiling and disordering of creation due to the fall is the idea of creation's original good order. The doctrines of creation and eschatology provide the solution to rejections of natural and historical teleology. Creation's *telos* is in creation's ultimate deliverance from evil and corruption. This *telos* is not a gnostic configuration: “It is because God is the creator of nature that he does, and will, redeem nature from its state of corruption.”²⁴ O'Donovan describes creation's and history's *telos* in terms of eschatological hope grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ. O'Donovan stresses that creation and revelation are consistent with natural knowledge because nature and natural knowledge are brought about and sustained by the same God revealed in Jesus Christ.²⁵ In other words, “natural knowledge is restored by revelation, the natural order of things by saving history.”²⁶ He affirms the use of the term *natural* or *nature*, but only in an ontological sense of God's created order, creation.

Does O'Donovan hold that the nature of things in the created order is transparent to human knowledge apart from special revelation? Like Carl Henry, O'Donovan seems skeptical about humanity's ability to know the world rightly without the necessary aid of divine revelation. Why? Because of the noetic effects of sin on fallen humanity, revelation is needed to provide a unified knowledge of creation.²⁷ Fallen humanity misconstrues the order and kinds in God's good creation. Because of the noetic effects of sin, what is needed is divine revelation to correct human knowledge (both theoretical and moral). He says, “Theology is committed to pursuing a unified vision.”²⁸ That unified vision comes only through the objective, ontological reality grounded in the divine Logos.²⁹

Creation is an objective, ordered totality and not merely the raw material on which God imposed order and coherence.³⁰ Creation has a real, objective moral order to it. Discussions surrounding teleological order give rise to considerations of the ontological dignity of objective reality.³¹ When determining what counts as

²³O'Donovan, “The Natural Ethic,” 26.

²⁴Ibid., 27.

²⁵Ibid., 32.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., 34.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹O'Donovan's answer to ethical systems that reject the teleology of evangelical ethics grounded in the eternal Logos is the foundation to his entire project, which he begins in this early essay and fully explains in *The Resurrection and Moral Order*.

³⁰O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 32.

¹⁷Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (New York, NY: Cambridge University, 1996), 2.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Oliver O'Donovan, “The Natural Ethic,” in *Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics*, ed. David F. Wright (London: Paternoster, 1979), 21.

²⁰Ibid., 23.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 24. A magisterial foray into this issue is Michael Hanby, *No God, No Science? Theology, Cosmology, Biology* (Madlin, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

the flourishing or end of a particular kind of thing, one must see it in the broader order in which it is located. To the specific question of the flourishing of human nature, God establishes this creational order: “Thus in speaking of the order which God the Creator and Redeemer has established in the universe, we are not speaking merely of our own capacities to impose order upon what we see there.”³² Human beings are constrained epistemologically and morally by the creational order.

Part of that creation is human beings made in the *imago Dei*. O’Donovan maintains that the *imago Dei* remains intact and operational after the fall. Humans are beings that continue to know and think, but “knowledge is not that communion with the truth of things around him; but misknowledge, confusion, and deception. He continues to observe the generic and teleological order in the things around himself, but misconstrues that order and constructs false and terrifying world-views.”³³ Knowledge of the moral order of creation is not destroyed because the universe, “though fractured and broken, displays the fact that its brokenness is the brokenness of order not merely unordered chaos.”³⁴

Does this view mean that no moral knowledge can be known apart from special revelation of Jesus and his resurrection? The short answer is no.³⁵ O’Donovan does not understand revelation as giving humanity new knowledge of the moral order that they previously did not possess, but rather “revelation catches man out in the guilty possession of knowledge which he has always had, but from which he has never won a true understanding.”³⁶ He means that unbelievers and un-Christian cultures can have firm grasps on particular elements of the whole of moral truth, such as the virtue of mercy, vice of cowardice, the duty of justice, or the distinction between male and female. They will not have an intelligible morality, because they do not know how to relate that partial knowledge to the whole found in Christ. In other words, their moral knowledge is incomplete unless “the created order is grasped as a whole, and that includes the relations to the uncreated. . . . If one term of that relation is obscured, the universe cannot be understood.”³⁷ The revelation of the divine logos integrates moral truth.

So in speaking of the distinction between male and female and the normative nature of that distinction, O’Donovan argues for the objective and teleological character of human bodies as male and female. The cosmos, including human bodies, has a form that must be discerned and respected, even as humans exercise creativity in endowing new forms upon the old.³⁸ Human bodies have a teleological character based on a distinction between male and female bodies, a teleological character that is an objective feature of reality. He says, “To have a male body is to have a body structurally ordered to loving union with a female body, and vice versa. There is no human maleness or femaleness by itself; there is only maleness and femaleness belonging to the dimorphic opposition of human sexuality.”³⁹ This dimorphic nature of male and female bodies forms the basis from which anyone should think about his or her sexuality.⁴⁰ Because that structure of the human body is an objective feature of God’s good creation, O’Donovan seems to assume it is knowable by Christians and non-Christians alike. He is hesitant to say the normative feature of gender distinctions is grounded in natural law but rather is the fabric of God’s good creation. Because of the abiding nature of post-lapsarian *imago Dei* and goodness of creation, even non-Christians and secular ethical systems will not escape the objectivity of the distinction between male and female, though sinners clearly can and will distort the goodness of created reality. And when rebel humans come to face their distortion of God’s good creation, Christians have the resources of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to offer those who wish to be restored to God and his purposes for them.

³⁸O’Donovan, Oliver. “Transsexualism and Christian Marriage.” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 11, no. 1 (1983): 150.
³⁹*Ibid.*, 152.
⁴⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*, 34.
³²*Ibid.*, 36.
³³*Ibid.*
³⁴*Ibid.*
³⁵*Ibid.*
³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*, 88. Because of the sinful nature of humans, O’Donovan argues that the nature of idolatry is to take one part and define the whole in terms of that part.



A WAY FORWARD

What we can learn from Henry and O'Donovan's is that the goods of creation are the goods of natural law. They are coextensive. The moral order referred to by natural law theorists and Protestants, like Henry and O'Donovan, is the moral order of God's good creation. Both Henry and O'Donovan show that one can be a moral realist on theological grounds yet without being committed to natural law theory as such. This conclusion leaves a lingering ambiguity in Henry's and O'Donovan's work over why they will not just call the goods of creation the natural law since they seem to refer to the same moral reality. The reason appears to be that Henry and O'Donovan remain skeptical about the knowability, and thus usability, of appeals to that moral order without the more epistemically secure sources of general and special revelation.

Nevertheless, Henry and O'Donovan believe in an objective, universal moral order of creation and of human beings as created in the imago Dei, both male and female. They both offer a way of cultural engagement for Protestants who are skeptical of appeals to natural law yet who remain realists about the moral order of creation. Christians can openly acknowledge one's Christian presuppositions about the created nature of reality by God while arguing for the objective, knowable moral order of that creation. In actual engagement in the public square, whether one calls that objective moral order God's good creation or natural law seems secondary to what the Christian is trying to get others to "see." What we want others to "see" is the objective and ordered structure of reality and that embracing this structure leads to human flourishing. Because the goods of creation and the natural law refer to the same moral reality, using the term natural law is using truthful speech about that reality. Because of that, Protestants should not be timid to use it.

Henry and O'Donovan show that even for Protestants, particularly that hard to define group called Evangelicals, who may be skeptical of appeals to natural law, have the witness of God's good creation and the abiding character of the imago Dei when engaging with their non-Christian neighbors on the topic of gender distinctions. Because the natural law and the moral order of creation refer to the same reality, moral claims between image bearers interpersonally and in the public square are morally intelligible. Christians can say to their male and female neighbors as made in imago Dei, "behold, your gendered body is very good." God's good creation, or dare one say "natural law," and Scripture testify to that moral reality. ✕

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Sexuality: On Being Human and Promoting Social Justice

This brief essay considers the main thesis of the book, *Kingdom through Covenant*, and the relation of that thesis to human sexuality.¹ (Gentry & Wellum, 2018). Understanding human sexuality entails grasping *first*, what it means to be human, and *second*, what is the purpose and role of human sexuality.

BEING HUMAN

As a foundation we shall start with a definition of “being human” within the context of a Christian worldview, that is, a worldview derived from Christian Scripture, the Old and New Testaments. The biblical teaching on creation determines our understanding of being human. For it is in the creation narratives that we understand, first, the nature of the soul according to the Bible, and second, the differences between humans and all the other creatures made by the creator God.

What Is the Soul?

The fundamental text describing the soul is Genesis 2:7:²

And Yahweh God formed / shaped the man out of dust from the ground, and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul (*nepeš ḥayyâ*).

This text provides a description of the creation of humans that complements the text in Genesis 1:26–28. It consists of just three short sentences. The first sentence informs us that, in part, humans are made out of “dust” (Hebrew *’āpār*, i.e. “loose earth” or “soil”) from the “earth” or “ground” (*’ādāmâ*) and personally fashioned by God, as an artisan or potter would make an earthenware vessel. “Forming” or “shaping,” as Gordon Wenham notes, is an artistic and inventive activity that requires planning and skill (cf. Isaiah 44:9–10).³ One component of a human being, then, is the earth or soil. We can see this statement corroborated by the fact that humans ingest the earth, or soil, to live. Genesis 3:17 confirms this when it actually states that we eat the ground.⁴ We eat plants, in fact, which are derived from the ground; and later on in Genesis 9:2–3 human beings are permitted to eat animals, which in turn eat plants. Thus, we ingest the soil indirectly. Indeed, Genesis 3:19 repeats the statement that *’ādām* (“humankind”) was taken from the *’ādāmâ* (“ground”), a

synonym in this verse for *’āpār*, (“dust,” “loose soil”). Not only is the statement in Genesis 2:7a confirmed by the fact that we ingest the ground or soil, but it is also confirmed by the fact that upon death, the body returns to dust. This is clearly stated in Genesis 3:19, but it is open to observation and can easily be confirmed apart from Scripture. This material or physical component of humans is typically referred to in Hebrew by the term *bāśar*, (“flesh” or “body”) and in Greek by the term *σῶμα* (“body”).

The second sentence in Genesis 2:7, “and he blew into his nostrils the breath of life,” reveals that man’s origin is not only from the earth but also from heaven. The noun phrase “the breath of life” can be analysed as an epexegetical genitive,⁵ indicating that breath is that which is characteristic of life. When the breath is gone, the animal or human is considered to be dead — without life. Hans Walter Wolff concludes the same thing: “For Old Testament man, life is essentially manifested in the breath.”⁶

The breath (*nəšāmâ*), which is also referred to as the wind or spirit (Hebrew *rûāḥ*, Greek *πνεῦμα*), speaks of the immaterial component of human beings. Several other texts in the Old Testament clearly indicate that the life of humans, manifested by their breathing, comes from the Spirit of God. For example Job, whose words were approved by the Lord (Job 42:7), said,

¹Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*; 2nd edition (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018).

²(Waltke, 1976).

³Wenham, (1987, 59).

⁴The 3rd feminine singular suffix on the verb has the “ground” (*’ādāmâ*), a feminine noun, as its referent.

⁵(Waltke & O’Connor, 1990, § 9.5.3c).

⁶(1974, 59).

as long as my breath (*nəšāmā*) is in me,
and the spirit (*rûāḥ*) of God is in
my nostrils (Job 27:3, ESV)

Elihu, an Israelite, spoke in the same vein:

If he should set his heart to it
and gather to himself his spirit
(*rûāḥ*) and his breath (*nəšāmā*),
all flesh would perish together,
and man would return to dust
(*‘āpār*). (Job 34:14–15, ESV)

Almost identical to the statement of Elihu
are the words of the Preacher, affirmed as
truth (Eccl. 12:10):

and the dust (*‘āpār*) returns to the
earth (*‘ereṣ*) as it was, and the spirit
(*rûāḥ*) returns to God who gave it.
(Eccl 12:7, ESV)

The prophet Isaiah, who based much of
his instruction upon creation doctrine,
also affirmed this truth:

Thus, says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and
stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and
what comes from it,
who gives breath (*nəšāmā*) to the
people on it
and spirit (*rûāḥ*) to those who
walk in it: (Isaiah 42:5, ESV)

We can see, then, that “breath” (*nəšāmā*)
and “spirit” (*rûāḥ*) are essentially
interchangeable and synonymous in
describing the immaterial aspect of
humanity. The term “breath” is a bit
more earthy than “spirit” and more
suitable to the picture painted in a
narrative portraying God as an artisan

skillfully at work in the creation of man.
Moses is careful in Genesis 1–2 to avoid
making statements that would lead to
considering humans in idolatrous terms.
In addition, as Anthony Thiselton warns,
rûāḥ denoting “Spirit of God” must not be
confused with *rûāḥ* when the term denotes
the human spirit.⁷ The Old Testament can
speak of “the spirits of all flesh” (Num.
16:22), or of the “breath of every human
being” (Job 12:10). Yet by contrast, the
42 instances of the Spirit in the book of
Ezekiel emphasise that the Spirit of God is
creative, dynamic, and transcendent.

The final sentence in Genesis 2:7, “and the
man became a living soul,” shows that the
result of the union of “clods of earth” with
the “breath of life” is called a living *nepeš*
in Hebrew and has traditionally been
translated by the English word “soul.”
It is extremely important to grasp the
syntax in Hebrew. The *lamed* preposition
indicates that the *nepeš* is the goal or
result of bringing the dust and the spirit
together. The soul is a *tertium quid* (a
third something) that is neither dust nor
wind. Thus, although one may say that
human beings have a soul, it may be more
accurate to say that they are a soul. I have
a soul because I *am* a soul.⁸ It refers to an
individuated life or vital self. The soul is a
way of referring to my being as a whole.
The soul is the unique bringing together
of the material and the immaterial.
Indeed, the dividing point between
the two is a mystery that may well be
impossible for us to penetrate (Hebrews
4:12). Even the best research in science
today cannot differentiate between the
brain and the mind. And although the
term *nepeš* is used in a great many ways
in the Old Testament, it is clear that this
basic text is not specifying the soul as an

aspect or component of a human being,
but denotes the body animated with the
life of God *as a whole* (Gen. 1:24, 30; 2:19;
6:17; 7:15, 22).

The expression *nepeš ḥayyā*, i.e. living
soul or living being, occurs some 13
times in the entire Old Testament.⁹ The
concrete meaning of *nepeš* is “neck”
(from outside) or “throat” (from inside).
By metonymy it can mean “breath”
and by synecdoche, “individual life.”
The “individual life” can be the life of a
dead body, or refer to a “person/people.”
The term can also be used as a personal
pronoun, especially expressing emotion,
and can designate one’s needs, desire,
or will. Thus, there is some overlap with
other terms used to designate “inner life”
such as the Hebrew word for “heart.”¹⁰

The definition of a human being cannot
end with only a description of the soul,
since all that has been said so far about
human beings *is also said about all
animals* in the Old Testament. First, the
bodies of animals, like the bodies of
human beings, are also derived from the

⁷(Thiselton, 2013, 6-8).
⁸The attempt by R. Pleijel to identify *nepeš* as an inner, immaterial part of a human is not persuasive. The term ‘breath’ is satisfactory, e.g. in Gen. 35:18. See Richard Pleijel, “To Be or to Have a nephesh?,” ZAW 131/2 (2019):194-206. There may be development towards this idea later on. See Richard C. Steiner, *Disembodied Souls: The Nefesh in Israel and Kindred Spirits in the Ancient Near East, With an Appendix on the Katumuwa Inscription* (Ancient Near East Monographs 11; Atlanta: SBL, 2015).
⁹Gen. 1:20, 21, 24, 30; 2:7, 19; 9:10, 12, 15, 16, Lev. 11:10, 46; Ezek. 47:9.
¹⁰The survey here is based on Mengen Gao, “A Word Study of Nephesh in the Context of Old Testament Anthropology,” Th.M. Thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020. Similarly, cf. David J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 5:724-734. Also relevant is Matthew McAfee, *Life and Mortality in Ugaritic: A Lexical and Literary Study* (Explorations in Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations 7; University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns / Penn State, 2019). A major question not resolved in our current state of knowledge is the Hellenisation of the Hebrew words for anthropology. For example, *nepeš* is frequently translated by ψυχή in the Septuagint. The authors of the New Testament were Jewish communicating in a Greek world and influenced by the Septuagint. Yet how are the Hebrew meanings from the Old Testament communicated in the world of the New Testament? Recently a massive study appeared determining the meanings of Greek terms in their Hellenistic setting: Annette Weissenrieder and Katrin Dolle, eds., *Körper und Verkörperung: Biblische Anthropologie im Kontext Antiker Medizin und Philosophie. Ein Quellenbuch für die Septuaginta und das Neue Testament* (Fontes et Subsidia ad Bibliam pertinentes 8; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019). But we still do not have studies that are sensitive to how the Hebrew meanings are being brought across and communicated in the Hellenistic world. See our discussion in Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 407-409.

earth or soil according to Genesis 1:24:
“let the earth bring forth living creatures
according to its kind.” Second, animals
like humans also derive their life from
the Spirit of God. For example, Psalm
104:30, speaking of the animals, says
this: “When you send forth your Spirit,
they [the animals] are created, and you
renew the face of the ground” (ESV). The
Preacher also notes similarities between
animals and humans in their bodies and
their spirits:

¹⁸I said in my heart with regard to the
children of man that God is testing
them that they may see that they
themselves are but beasts. ¹⁹For
what happens to the children of man
and what happens to the beasts is
the same; as one dies, so dies the
other. They all have the same breath,
and man has no advantage over the
beasts, for all is vanity. ²⁰All go to one
place. All are from the dust, and to
dust all return. ²¹Who knows whether
the spirit of man goes upward and the
spirit of the beast goes down into the
earth? (Eccl. 3:18–21, ESV)

Both animals and humans come from the dust and return to the dust; both animals and humans have the same breath or spirit in them. Other texts affirm that animal life comes from the wind or Spirit of God (Gen. 6:17; 7:15, 22).

Third, animals are also called “living souls” in Scripture. Genesis 1:24 was just cited in reference to the animals: “let the earth bring living creatures according to its kind.” The expression “living creatures” renders *nepeš hayyā* in the Hebrew Text. It is normal in English translations of the Bible for *nepeš hayyā* to be rendered by the expression “living creatures” in this verse as well as in Genesis 2:19, but the biblical text employs the same expression as it does for humans everywhere (cf. Gen. 1:30). From the biblical evidence, then, both animals and humans have souls — or to be more precise, *are* souls. They are living beings, the result of material and immaterial substance combined mysteriously by God into a unitary whole.

Personhood / The Divine Image

What then is (are) the difference(s) between humans and animals, if any difference exists at all? According to the biblical text, the only differences between humans and animals are (1) humans are persons and (2) humans have been *made as the divine image*.

How is personhood defined? Generally, psychologists define persons as beings that display emotions, mind, and will. In the Old Testament, the term “heart” conveys these three things in one word.

In Hebrew, the word “heart” refers to the core of who you are, the centre of each person. It refers in particular to the place where we feel, where we think, and where we make decisions and plans — i.e., emotions, mind, and will. This can be easily seen from the following illustrative passages:

A. Feelings:

A glad heart makes a cheerful face,
but by sorrow of heart the spirit is
crushed. (Prov. 15:13, *ESV*)

A joyful heart is good medicine,
but a crushed spirit dries up the
bones. (Prov. 17:22, *ESV*)

When these proverbs refer to a “glad heart” or a “joyful heart,” they are clearly referring to one’s emotions and feelings in terms of a healthy psyche.

B. Reasoning:

But to this day the LORD has not given
you a heart to understand or eyes to
see or ears to hear. (Deut. 29:4, *ESV*)

Make the heart of this people dull,
and their ears heavy,
and blind their eyes;
lest they see with their eyes,
and hear with their ears,
and understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed. (Isa. 6:10, *ESV*)

In both Deuteronomy 29:4 and Isaiah 6:10, one *understands* with the heart; surely then what is being referred to is what we normally call the mind. This is the place where we reason and think and understand.

C. Will:

The heart of man plans his way,
but the LORD establishes his steps.
(Prov. 16:9, *ESV*)

May he grant you your heart’s desire
and fulfill all your plans! (Ps. 20:4, *ESV*)

Proverbs 16:9 and Psalm 20:4 show that the “heart” makes plans and has desires; it is the place where we make decisions. Concerning the Hebrew word “heart,” H. W. Wolff says:

In by far the greatest number of cases it is intellectual, rational functions that are ascribed to the heart—i.e. precisely what we ascribe to the head and, more exactly, to the brain; cf. I Sam. 25:37. . . . We must guard against the false impression that biblical man is determined more by feeling than by reason.¹¹

According to Wolff, the Hebrew word “heart” refers to the mind in approximately 400 out of 814 passages speaking of the human heart.

We should note, then, that the biblical language differs markedly from our own in the Western world. For us, the heart is associated with emotions, feelings, love, and especially Valentine’s Day. Conversely, for the Bible, the heart is the centre of our being where we reason and think and make decisions and plans. Today we can speak of people who cannot bridge the 18 -inch gap between the head and the heart.

The ancient Hebrews knew no such gap. The heart is the centre of one’s being and the place where emotions, mind, and will operate in harmony and unity. Thus, the heart is the key term in the Old Testament for identifying personhood. Note, however, of 853 instances in the Hebrew Text, the term “heart” is not applied to animals. Fabry states:

The notion of an animal’s *lēb* is largely unknown to the OT. According to Job 41:16(24), the *lēb* of Leviathan is hard as stone. The reference is to his belly, which is impervious to spears, swords, and arrows (v.18[26]). The *lēb* of a lion is a metaphor for his courage (2 S. 17:10). The Aramaic occurrences in Daniel likewise are not anatomically specific: Nebuchadnezzar is punished by being given a *lēbāb ḥēwā’*, a “bestial nature” (Dnl. 4:13[16]; cf. 5:21); conversely, the apocalyptic lion is given a *lēbāb ʿenāš* a “human nature” (Dnl. 7:4).¹²

Hans W. Wolff concluded much the same in his exhaustive research on the anthropology of the Old Testament:

... in contrast to the other main concepts, it [the heart] is almost exclusively applied to man. Where *bāšār* refers to animal flesh in more than a third of all its instances, *lēb(āb)* [heart] is only applied to animals five times and four of these are in a comparison with the human heart (II Sam. 17:10; Hos. 7:11; Dan. 4:13; 5:21); only once does it refer exclusively to animals (Job 41:24).¹³

¹¹(Wolff, 1974, 46-47).
¹²(Fabry, 2003, 412).

We can conclude from the data that humans are endowed with personhood, while animals are not.

A clear definition of the divine image can be given by summarising the careful and painstaking study of Genesis 1:26–28 in *Kingdom through Covenant*.¹⁴ According to the cultural setting and linguistic data of the ancient Near East in the fourteenth century BC, how would the first readers of Genesis have understood the text? The term likeness indicates that humans were created to have a covenant relationship with their creator God, and the term image indicates that they were created to have a covenant relationship with the earth and the creatures in it. The former relationship is pictured in terms of obedient sonship and the latter relationship is pictured in terms of servant kingship. On the one hand, we are to relate to our creator as children responding with obedience and trust to a father who gives good instructions, leadership, love, and provisions for his family. On the other hand, as we spend time getting to know our heavenly Father, we represent his rule in the creation through humble service and wise stewardship. This view is corroborated from the cultural setting and linguistic data of the ancient Near East and, more importantly, is supported by later texts in Scripture. Although image and likeness are synonyms, each carries a meaning that differs slightly from the other. In Egypt by BC 1600, the king was called the image of God because he was the son of God.¹⁵ We ought to assume a meaning in Scripture similar to that of the culture surrounding Israel unless the Bible clearly distinguishes its meaning from the culture. Thus, image is linked with kingship that rules for God as his son.

The term likeness is employed in ancient culture indicating the relationship of a king to his god, i.e., how his behaviour reflects the character of the god that he worships.¹⁶ Likeness is also linked with generation of life and sonship in Genesis 5:3.

When the Hebrew text states literally that God made humans *in* his image yet *according to* his likeness, the preposition ‘in’ emphasises proximity while the preposition ‘according to’ indicates something similar, yet distinct and separate.¹⁷ Thus, man represents the rule of God in the world as the image, but in the matter of creating life and sonship, man is only similar and not identical in the representation of his Father’s image.

Moreover, the fact that the creation of humans as the divine image refers to the *result* and not the *process* clearly shows that the divine image cannot be conceived of in merely functional terms, but speaks of human essence or ontology. In computer language, we are speaking of hardware and not software. We are hard-wired, as it were, to have covenantal relationships — with God on the one hand and with the creation on the other. Our ruling for God is a result of being made as the divine image and not the image itself. A merely functional definition of the divine image falls short of adequately accounting for the biblical data. The definition of the divine image proposed here is functional, relational, and structural.

The meaning expected from the cultural and linguistic setting is strongly supported by Genesis 5:3, Psalm 8, Luke 3:38, as well as Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10.¹⁸

Humans image the being of God because the biblical teaching — particularly in the New Testament — is that within the being of the one and only God we can distinguish different persons: Father, Son and Spirit. While the biblical data does not specify the relationship between Father and Son within the being of God as a *covenant*, Scripture does distinguish the divine persons by their eternal personal relations that are characterized by faithful love and loyalty (*hesed* and *’emet*), which in turn show themselves in the economy in covenantal relationships. In redemptive history, just as there are different types of covenants, parity agreements and non-parity agreements, we may note that most of the covenants in the biblical text are non-parity agreements; they are between persons who are greater and lesser in authority and whose functional roles are different. In this way they are analogous to the Father and Son relations who are equal in being but are distinguished by their personal properties. In the economy, these eternal relations show themselves in the incarnate Son’s submission to the Father as our new covenant head. It is only in these kind of relationships where we can speak of a greater and lesser in terms of roles that we can talk of obedience and trust: *hesed* and *’emet*. Both Muslims and Christians can affirm that God is great, but only the Christian can affirm that God is love within himself: love requires person relations within God, which then show themselves in creatures and the creator-creature relationship. Apart from the doctrine of the Trinity and God’s creation of humans in his image and the entire covenant relationship, this leaves us with an extremely imperfect definition of love.

It is important to recognise that the biblical teaching does not support a theory of the supremacy of humans *ipso facto*. When one compares the human species with other animal species, our senses of hearing, smell, sight, taste, or touch are not necessarily better or superior. We do not seem by our physiognomy well designed to conquer others and survive. Our skin is not very tough and we have no sharp claws or terrible teeth. Scientists may attribute the supremacy of the human race to our minds, but this is inadequate.

It is the creation of humans as persons and as the divine image that gives humans a role as ruler over the earth. And this, in fact, is a gracious gift from God. Moreover, it entails a rule of the creation by humans that calls for humble servanthood and wise stewardship of the creation. As Philippians 2 demonstrates, Jesus came to show that the kingship of God is completely opposite to the self-serving aggrandisement of kingship displayed throughout human history, beginning in the ancient Near East. The biblical instruction on the creation of humans as the divine image does not demonstrate the natural supremacy of humans but rather a graciously God-given dignity: we are hardwired for covenant relationships with our creator and with the creation.

Finally, we must note that the *imago dei* and personhood are vitally interconnected. Only persons enter and experience and fulfil covenant relationships. In the Bible, covenants are only made with persons not with animals, and animals are not capable of covenant relationships.

¹³(Wolff, 1974, 40).

¹⁴(Gentry & Wellum, 2012, Chapter 6).

¹⁵(Dion, 1985).

¹⁶(Garr, 2003a).

¹⁷(Garr, 2003a).

¹⁸(Gentry & Wellum, 2012, 195–197, 201–202, Ortlund, 2014).

Diminishing or Increasing the Divine Image

Since the creation of humans as the divine image entails *covenant relationships* — with God on the one hand and the creation on the other — and since faithfulness and loyal love are at the heart of covenant relationships, the divine image may be diminished or it may be increased. This can be observed and understood from the use of Proverbs 3:1–4 in the New Testament. First, consider the meaning of Proverbs 3:1–4 in the context in which we find this text:

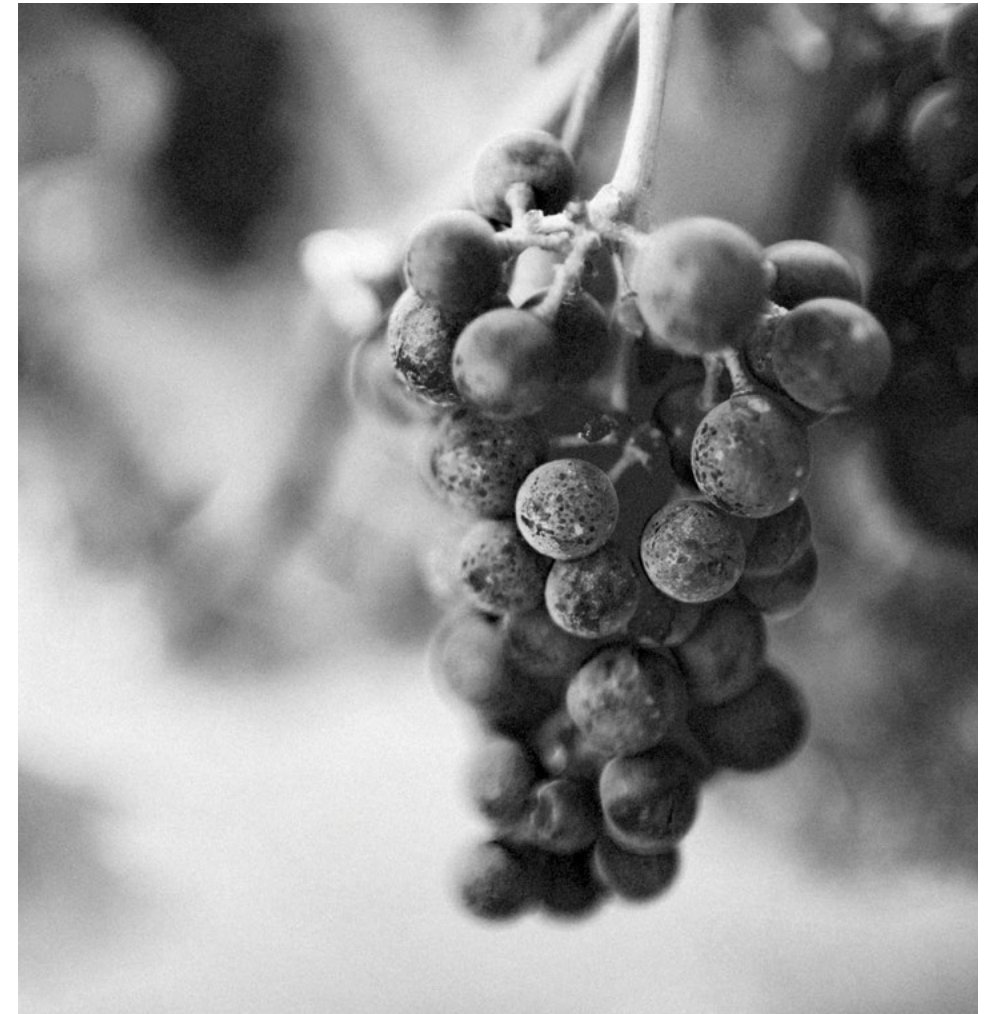
- ¹ My son, do not forget my teaching,
but keep my commands in your heart,
² for they will prolong your life many years
and bring you peace and prosperity.
³ Let love and faithfulness never leave you;
bind them around your neck,
write them on the tablet of your heart.
⁴ Then you will win favour and a good name
in the sight of God and man. (NIV)

In the Book of Proverbs, the king and queen of Israel are giving instruction to bring up and raise their son and they subsequently write down this instruction for the benefit of every father and mother in the covenant community. After the introduction (Prov. 1:1–7), the book commences with the “Father’s Praise of Wisdom” — a collection of ten serious talks from father to son arranged to form an argument in favour of wisdom. Proverbs 3:1–20 constitutes the third homily or address from father to son. In contrast to the first homily, which warns against grabbing the good life by cheating and by violence, the third homily describes the right pathway to the good life: a right relationship to Yahweh. Verses 1–4 of chapter 3 contain the introduction to the homily and these verses speak of a right relationship to our parents.

Since verses 1–12 are structured so that the odd verses are commands and the even verses are promises, the introduction constitutes two commands — each command followed by a promise — as the father calls on the son to hear the parental teaching.

Verse 1 presents the first command: the child must preserve the parental teaching. The father calls his teaching “instruction” (*tôrâ*) and “commands” (*mišwâ*), the same words in Hebrew used for the covenant or law given by Moses at Sinai. Therefore, the parental teaching is as authoritative and as important as the covenant instruction and stipulations given through Moses, because it is based on the Holy Scriptures.

Two verbs are employed to communicate the command in verse 1. The first is “Do not forget” (my instruction). In the Hebrew language, there are two words for “forget.” One entails a mental lapse, i.e., absent-mindedness, and the other entails a moral lapse. The “forgetting” here involves a moral lapse. This can be illustrated from Deuteronomy 8:11–14. In Deuteronomy Moses warns the people that when they enter the land and have good houses, crops, and flocks and herds and have conquered their enemies, they may “forget” the Lord. That is, they may be tempted to be self-sufficient and say, “Who needs the Lord?” This is forgetting God. It may be, then, that the child may later do well and become self-confident and may abandon the parental teaching. The second verb is “preserve.” This same word is used in Isaiah 5:2 of guarding a vineyard from a watchtower so that birds or other predators may not steal the vintage. We must expect that the parental teaching will be attacked from



without by society. In verse 2, the promise of a long life for following the parental teaching is based squarely on the Ten Commandments (see Exod. 20:12).

The second command in the introduction is in Proverbs 3:3 and is a call to the child to maintain a right relationship to the parent. The father says, “Let kindness and faithfulness never leave you.” In Hebrew, this entails the pair of words *hesed* and *’emet*. Neither of these words has an easy equivalent in English; together they form the notion of faithful, loyal love shown in the context of a

covenant relationship. In Exodus 34:6 we see this pair of words describes the heart of the being and character of God and forms the basis of his relations with his people in the covenant. In Joshua 2:14 the same pair of words speaks of a covenant and pact of human friendship formed between the spies and Rahab, a prostitute in Jericho. The use of these words, then, demonstrates that a child is assumed to have covenant relationship and responsibilities toward his or her parents. The implication is that the motivation children have for obeying their parents is loyalty and not duress.

The call to the child to maintain a right relationship to their parent is also spelled out by two commands, and the second is the double imperative “Bind them . . . write them.” The sequence “bind” and “write” is also found in Proverbs 1:9, 6:21, and 7:3 and hearkens back to Deuteronomy 6:8–9 and 11:18–20. In all cases except Proverbs 3:3, the object of these two verbs is the commands given by Moses. In Proverbs 3:3, however, the third person plural pronoun “them” refers to *hesed* and *’emet*, i.e., faithful, loyal love. “Kindness and faithfulness” speak of the character or manner of the child’s obedience. They speak of the quality or way of performing our covenant responsibilities as children. Thus, in essence, Proverbs 3:4 is equivalent to the parallel passages, but instead of emphasising obedience to the parents’ commands *per se*, it stresses the character of that obedience. Just as wives in 1 Peter 3:3–6 demonstrate beauty not by cosmetics, hairstyle, and jewelry, but rather through character and humility, so the beauty of children lies in their obedience to their parents. Sons and daughters must internalise the home teachings and thus maintain a right relationship to their parents. Throughout the entire Bible, from beginning to end, from Genesis to Revelation there is *only one command* for children: obey your parents. Leviticus 19:3 is no exception since the command to observe the Sabbath is subordinated to the command to obey one’s parents.

In the biblical texts, *hesed* and *’emet*, justice and righteousness, are summaries of the requirements and stipulations in the covenant relationship, just as they are summaries of the character of the being of God himself.

The promise attached to the second command is “you will find favour and good insight in the eyes of God and man.” In the context, “to acquire favour before God and humans” means that both God and others recognise that the child is developing behaviour and conduct that demonstrates *hesed* and *’emet* in covenantal relationships. This statement is nothing more and nothing less than another way of describing the divine image. The divine image consists of a covenant relationship with God on the one hand and with other creatures on the other — in other words, reputation for skilful relationships and getting along with both God and fellow humans.

Now in Luke 2:52 the gospel writer notes that Jesus *advanced* in wisdom and stature and favour with God and man. This evaluation of Jesus’ early life is based squarely on Proverbs 3:4 with the word “stature” added from 1 Samuel 2:26. In essence Luke is saying that Jesus *increased* in the divine image. It is clear, then, from these observations that the *display* of the divine image by a particular person can either be developed and increased or decreased and reduced, because the covenant loyalty and relationship can either deepen or lessen as our covenant obligations are fulfilled or not fulfilled through the exigencies of life. Every one bears the divine image, but one can decrease or increase in the demonstration of this day by day.

We should envision *diminishing* or *increasing* the divine image in two ways. First, there are no doubt developmental stages which psychologists would want

to classify, categorise, and describe. Second, just as chronological growth does not always bring developmental maturity, so disorders and deviance can result in diminishing appropriate growth or failing to reach a certain developmental stage.

It is not necessary to detail here appropriate developmental stages or growth in terms of increasing the divine image. From a theological viewpoint, this is the biblical teaching on sanctification: how, as Paul says, we become conformed to the image of the Son of God (Rom. 8:29) who is the divine image (Col. 1:15). It may be necessary, however, to demonstrate briefly that this development begins in the womb.

Psalm 51:5–6 is a text that addresses specifically the issue of the divine image in the life of an unborn baby:

⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
⁶Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart (ESV).

Note in particular the words “inward being” in verse 6a and “secret heart” in verse 6b. Most commentators and English translations seem to understand here the inner person, which is hidden from other people. Perhaps this is due to connecting this verse with the next, where David asks for cleansing from his sin, and we normally associate the cleansing of guilt with our inner person. This interpretation is not probable, due to the literary structure and the lexical meaning of the words.

Outline of Psalm 51

A. Plea for Help	1–2
B. Plight of Sin	3–6
1. The Deed	3–4
2. Moral Impotence Causing the Deed	5–6
C. Prayer for Pardon and Perseverance	7–12
1. Pardon for Actual Deed	7–9
2. Power over Moral Impotence	10–12
D. Request to Worship the Lord	13–17
E. Postscript	18–19

According to the literary structure, first David acknowledges his crime, and then traces his moral weakness back to conception. In the following stanza, he asks for pardon and then power over moral weakness. Notice how the two-part confession is matched by the two-part prayer. This shows that verse 6 is clearly connected to verse 5, and not verse 7. The context is the problem of moral weakness traced back to his life within the womb.

The terms in Hebrew for “inward being” and “secret heart” are *ṭuḥôṭ* and *sāṭum*, respectively. Neither one of these terms is used anywhere else in the Old Testament for the inner person. Instead the normal words for the inner person are “heart” (*lēḇ*) or “inwards” (*qereḇ*). The first term, *ṭuḥôṭ*, only occurs in Psalm 51:6 and Job 38:36. The noun comes from a root meaning to cover or smear over. The passage in Job is difficult, but surely has nothing to do with the inner being of a human. The second term, *sāṭum*, is a passive participle (i.e., verbal adjective) from a verb meaning to close or shut up. The “smeared over place” and the “closed up place” are better construed as references to the human womb. The

literary structure connects verse 6 to verse 5, not to verse 7, and therefore *requires* that these words refer to the human womb.

In Psalm 51:5–6, then, David traces his moral weakness back to conception and affirms that even in the human womb God is seeking faithfulness or truth as well as wisdom. The categories of faithfulness and wisdom clearly speak of issues relating to the divine image. This text proves that the unborn already bear the divine image. Even a baby in the womb can demonstrate character in relationship to its mother.

In our broken and fallen world we are also aware of cases of chronological growth without appropriate developmental stages or maturity. One thing is absolutely clear in the Bible: we treat others well because they are in God’s image, not on the basis of decrease or increase in reflecting the divine image (James 3:9).

THE DIVINE IMAGE AND SEXUALITY

Down through the centuries, indeed from the start, God has established covenant relationships with humanity in general and also with particular individuals and nations. Why does he do this? The answer is that he does this because this reflects who he is in himself.¹⁹

The Bible teaches that God is a tri-unity: there is only one Supreme Being, and yet within the being of this one God we can speak of three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And the relationship of Father to Son and Son to Father in the communion of the Holy Spirit is a relationship of devoted love and faithfulness (*hesed* and *’emet*), which as noted above, shows itself in the economy. Within the divine persons there is complete faithfulness and loyalty — which grounds *covenant* relationships. God wants to have precisely this kind of relationship with us because that is who he is in himself. We

should remember that the biblical teaching concerning the being and nature of God is not a mathematical puzzle which we have to overcome in order to be considered orthodox; conversely, it is only when we begin our thinking with this teaching that we can understand who we are and how we relate to our world. As Colin Gunton has said, “It is as if one had to establish one’s Christian orthodoxy by facing a series of mathematical and logical difficulties rather than by glorying in the being of a God whose reality as a communion of persons is the basis of a rational universe in which personal life may take shape.”²⁰

Since we are made *as the image of this God*, i.e., to mirror this God, we ourselves are *hard-wired* in the deepest part of our beings to exist in covenant relationships, not only vertically in our relationship with the creator God, but horizontally with all his creatures — including other humans. God has established certain covenant communities in which we are designed to live and function. The first one we experience is the family (all human beings come from one man and one woman). Another that we can experience is marriage, defined as one man and one woman in a relationship dissolved only by death — why this is so we shall see later. And if a person becomes a follower of Jesus Christ, they become part of a third covenant community, the people of the new creation, or new humanity. Note that the present humanity is committed to destroying itself and that the only humanity to outlast the present age is that of the new humanity (in Jesus Christ, the first Man in the new creation).

Sex is an appetite given to us by the creator God and, in fact, is specifically tied to one covenant community — that of marriage. It is an appetite like hunger and thirst, but is not to be awakened until the right time (see Song of Sol. 8). Most significantly, the sexual union between a man and a woman is designated in the Bible and the ancient Near East as the single requisite covenant-ratifying (and -renewing) oath sign for the covenant of marriage.

Detailed evidence from Scripture for viewing marriage as a covenant and for viewing the sexual union with consent (i.e., both parental, in the case of dependent daughters, and mutual) as a marriage-constituting act is provided by G. Hugenberger.²¹ The *mōhar* was not a bride price but a betrothal present, and does not relate to marriage *per se*, but to betrothal and gaining the consent of the parents. As to the sexual union, Genesis 29:21 is a clear example showing that *copula carnalis* is not just a characteristic feature of marriage but rather the decisive expression of the end of betrothal and as such consummates the marriage: “then Jacob said to Laban, ‘Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.’”²² Moreover, the Hebrew verb “to know” is frequently used of this marriage-constituting act: “and Adam knew his wife ...” (Genesis 4:1). In Hosea 2:22 [ET 20], the verb “know” is used of the covenant between Yahweh and his people: “I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know Yahweh.”

"One thing is absolutely clear in the Bible: we treat others well because they are in God's image, not on the basis of decrease or increase in reflecting the divine image."

¹⁹(Gentry & Wellum, 2102, 655).

²⁰(Gunton, 1991, 31-32).

We now need to look at alternative arrangements which are advocated and loudly proclaimed today and see not only how they fall short, but why they also bring death and destruction resulting in an experience that both dehumanises and violates social justice. The following discussions of different kinds of sexual behaviour are intended to be brief and far from exhaustive. Discussion is limited to the connection of deviant behaviours with the notion that sex is the sign of a covenant relationship.

Using the gift of sex brings pleasure. Nonetheless, from the biblical definition, sex is designed to enable us to give to the other person in a one-man-one-woman-covenant-of-marriage-relationship. Both masturbation and pornography are forms of self-stimulation that cheat the person doing this from experiencing the redemptive side of sex in giving oneself in a covenant relationship. The practice of exciting oneself cannot work as a sign of a covenant relationship. The person is confessing a lie. In the end, this lie cheapens sex and does not bring real satisfaction. William Struthers has demonstrated that pornography actually rewires the male brain and deprives the person who engages in it of finding real intimacy in a marriage relationship.²³

Current movies portray all manner of sexual immorality. It may be a man and a woman who are married in conventional terms, and one partner engages in sexual intercourse outside of the marriage. Since sex is exclusive and integral to the marriage relationship, extra-marital sex clearly violates the covenant. Although Hollywood has no appreciation of biblical teaching, when they portray adultery,

the partner who is wronged is frequently portrayed as crying out in pain. This response shows that being human requires covenant faithfulness as the biblical teaching makes plain. We are hard-wired for relationships that entail faithfulness and love. Thus, even Hollywood acknowledges adultery as a violation. Since the biblical teaching connects sex with covenant, lack of faithfulness and loyalty results in a *dehumanizing* experience. And this dehumanizing experience is fully explored by the film industry. Moreover, in the biblical literature, word-pairs like *hesed* and *’emet*, or justice and righteousness, are used to *summarise* all the instructions in the covenant as social justice.²⁴ Therefore, failure to correlate sex and covenant loyalty constitutes social *injustice*.

It could also be that a couple who are married attempt to introduce a third person into the sexual experience such as is portrayed in the movie *Garden of Eden* based upon the book by E. Hemingway. This fails the biblical norm, however, because polygamous and polyamorous relationships obscure the covenant as an agreement between two parties. In other words, if sex is tied to *complete devotion and loyalty in a covenant relationship*, it logically demands only one of each of the opposite sex.

Bestiality is an abominable practice found among humans going all the way back to antiquity. This is not only attested in ancient documents more than two to three thousand years old,²⁵ it is also portrayed on the internet today. Why does the Bible forbid it? First, bestiality violates God’s clear design in creation—a design revealed in the distinct non-

complementary bodies of humans and animals. Second, since animals are not made as the image of God, they cannot enter into covenant relationships.²⁶ Important here is the text in Genesis 2:18–20 which describes the exercise of the first man in naming the animals. As he analysed the character of each, he did not find any that corresponded to him (*kēnegdô*). Among other things, this must refer to the fact that the distinction between animals and humans lies in the capacity for covenant relationship (i.e., the divine image), since they are identical as souls. Animals lack this capacity, even those that have been domesticated and that serve as “companions” for humans. For example, dogs have been given an instinct that makes them seek a master. Dogs can be disciplined to be obedient and faithful, but this is not the same as covenant-keeping. Many consider their dog their best friend. But a *covenant* relationship is only possible between image-bearers. So those who engage in these acts are following a path that is dehumanizing.

What about homosexuality?²⁷ Is it possible for a monogamous, homosexual couple to enter into a covenant since they are both image-bearers? Although both bear the image of God, it is impossible for their homosexual union to mirror the covenant-keeping between God the Father and God the Son. Nor can it reflect the covenant-keeping between God and his people (Eph. 5:32). A covenant presupposes the distinct complementary roles of the covenant partners. Homosexual relationships, on the contrary, involve identity not complementarity. If there are two beings who are the same, there is no *a priori* place for obedience or trust. It is interesting to note that in every homosexual relationship that I have observed, one of the two parties feel they must imitate the opposite sex. Within their own being they sense that a covenant relationship requires a complementary role so that obedience and trust are possible. This shows that the homosexual relationship is a lie, contravenes the reality of being human, and is dehumanizing. It is a lie because

²¹(1994, 240-277)

²²(Hugenberger, 1994, Chapter 7).

²³(Struthers, 2009)

²⁴(Gentry & Wellum, 2012, Chapter 15)

²⁵(Hittite Laws, 187-188, 199; Strabo, *Geography*, 17.1.19)

²⁶Hos. 2:20 says “And I shall make for them [i.e. Israel] a covenant in that day with the wild animals, and with the birds of the sky, and with the ‘crawlers on the ground’ and bow and sword and war I shall break from the land and I shall make them to lie down in safety.” Hebrew literature is repetitive and recursive. Statements in one section are to be balanced against discussion of the same topic at an earlier or later point. As Hos. 4:3 clarifies, the animals suffer because Israel has broken her covenant with God (Romans 8:20). In the New Covenant, however, Yahweh, will renew and restore the covenant relationship and the animals will thrive as a result. The “covenant with the animals,” then, is the creation or new creation covenant in which blessing for the animals is *mediated* by an Adamic figure. In Isaiah 28:15 “the covenant with death” is a metaphor for the alliance with Egypt which provides no help against the Assyrian. There is no place in the Bible where covenants are made directly with animals or between them. They are not personal and only persons are capable of covenant relationships.

²⁷The discussion here is focused on homosexuality and covenant relationship. First and fundamentally, human sexuality is binary and entails two distinct genders: male and female. Binary sexuality, i.e., duality of gender, is the basis for being fruitful, and occurs within the context of marriage defined according to creation standards. Thus, homosexuality is contrary to the creation standard. See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway 2018), 223–224.

...practices apart from a one-man-one-woman-covenant-of-marriage-relationship result in experiences that dehumanise and acts of social injustice: the people practising them are decreasing and diminishing the divine image."

a covenant relationship that mirrors the covenant-keeping God cannot be between two who are the same. It also shows why these relationships, at least in the Graeco-Roman world, often involved the feminization of one of the men in the relationship. This tendency was especially apparent in the abhorrent practice of pederasty. We also see this truth in the fact that homosexuals are not content to practice their behaviour in private but in fact wish to wring from the rest of society approval for their lifestyle. This is prime evidence of a *guilty conscience* — their own soul cries out from within that they have pursued actions and attitudes contrary to the way we are hardwired.

In spite of an apparent concern for social justice, homosexuals are chief among *those promoting social injustice*, because at the heart of the community in which they live they fail to establish a covenant relationship that mirrors the being of the creator God. This, of course, assumes that they have the same partner for life — a situation that is extremely

rare. The reality is that men and women are different, and that relating to the opposite sex is redemptive. That is, it brings you out of yourself. You have to give up your own interests in a way that two males or two females can never experience. And so, on another level, they fail to develop a *covenant* relationship, a truly *human* relationship.

This essay, of course, assumes the biblical teaching as axiomatic. If one begins from merely a human point of view and seeks to understand the Trinity, it is like trying to solve an impossible mathematical puzzle. If, however, one begins from the biblical teaching about the Trinity, only then can one explain all the phenomena in the creation / world satisfactorily. The perspective adopted here is also limited. The approach in ancient Hebrew literature is to take up a topic and develop it from a particular perspective. The author then stops and takes up the same theme again from another point of view. This pattern is holographic and is pursued recursively at both the macro and micro levels. One begins a conversation on a

topic and then closes that conversation down and begins another. Taken together, both conversations are like the left and right speakers of a stereo sound system: each differs slightly, and together they produce 3D Dolby Surround Sound or a 3D holographic image. Thus, in order to develop a full-orbed discussion on the biblical instruction concerning marriage even from the creation account, one has to recognise that Genesis 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–3:24 constitute left and right speakers. One has to *hear them both* to experience the fullness of surround sound, a figure of speech for full-orbed understanding. Here we have emphasised only the covenantal aspect of marriage and ignored the divine purpose of reproduction.

In conclusion, a definition of humanity and sexuality derived from Genesis 1 and 2 show that practices apart from a one-man-one-woman-covenant-of-marriage-relationship result in experiences that dehumanise and acts of social injustice: the people practising them are decreasing and diminishing the divine image. ➤

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Karl Barth, Natural Revelation, and Its Implications for Ethics



Historically, natural or general revelation has played an important role in Christian theology and the grounding of a normative ethic. For example, appeal has been made to God's creation order to warrant such important "natural law" truths as the sanctity of human life and the normativity of heterosexual, monogamous marriage. Although in the best of theology, natural revelation, and its corollary natural laws drawn from creation order, was never viewed as completely independent of special revelation, it has played a significant role in establishing the moral content that all people know and have access to. Thus, appeal to natural revelation is important on a number of fronts, especially the doing of Christian ethics, a point I will return to below.

However, for a number of reasons, the role that natural revelation has served in theology, especially in ethics, has come under severe

criticism. Since the Enlightenment our age has grown more secular as it has experienced various worldview shifts away from historic Christian theology and morphed from views associated with modernism and now postmodernism.¹ In these shifts away from theology, there has been a corresponding loss of the epistemological warrant for a normative ethic. Much of these shifts are also linked to the embrace of an evolutionary view of origins, which has directly undercut the ground for universal moral norms.

In theology, there have also been shifts away from historic Christianity and the place natural law has served in theology and ethics. Specifically, Karl Barth's influence has been strong.² For a variety of reasons, Barth introduced skepticism regarding the ability of humans to know God from nature and through natural means. Barth famously affirmed a strong,

"Nien!" to natural theology, and he argued that humans have no inherent or "natural" capacity to know God apart from God's free and gracious decision to reveal himself to us in Christ. As such, Barth denied that humans, especially fallen humans, have any direct epistemic access to God and universal laws of morality by our observation of the world. As people have accepted Barth's view, appeal to natural revelation and natural law to establish a normative ethic has fallen by the wayside. In this article, I reflect on Barth's rejection of natural revelation in three steps. First, I describe why he rejected natural revelation, given his overall theology. Second, I offer some reasons why Barth's view ought to be rejected. Third, I conclude with some

reflections on the importance of natural revelation for theology and especially Christian ethics.

KARL BARTH AND HIS REJECTION OF NATURAL REVELATION

Barth is a complicated theologian. One cannot understand his rejection of natural revelation and aversion to natural theology apart from grasping his overall theology, theological method, and the context in which he lived and wrote. In what follows, I briefly sketch a few key themes from Barth's theology in order to explain why he rejected natural revelation and went in a different direction from previous Christian thought on this issue.

¹See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

²On Barth's influence for the unfavorable use of natural theology and law, see Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 3–7, 21–53.

Barth’s Theological Approach

Barth’s theology has been construed as a Christocentric theism.³ For Barth, God’s being is revealed in his acts. Specifically, God’s being is revealed in the various acts that comprise the life and ministry of Jesus Christ,⁴ historically what has been associated with special revelation. So in common with historic theology, for God to be known he must reveal himself. However, what is different than previous theology is that Barth denies that natural/general revelation is also God’s revelation of himself, and that both are necessary to know God, the self, and the world. In many ways, Barth’s theology is the reversal of Immanuel Kant — as “reason within the limits of revelation alone,”⁵ but for Barth, it is only special revelation. For Barth, there is no knowledge of God without faith, and conversely, no faith without knowledge.

In this regard, Barth was influenced by the work of Anselm, although Anselm allowed for the reality of natural revelation.⁶ For Anselm, theology was “faith seeking understanding,” but not as a matter of requiring proof but rather desiring to understand what we already believe. In Barth’s application of Anselm, faith begins by hearing God’s Word, especially God’s Word identified with Christ. Apart from the special revelation of God’s Word, theology is not possible. But thankfully, Barth affirms, God has found a way to us in Christ.

Barth’s more mature understanding of theology is a development from the “early Barth.”⁷ Although there is debate regarding how much development occurred, Barth’s earlier theology is characterized by a

“dialectical theology of crisis.”⁸ In other words, God could only be spoken about in a paradoxical fashion so that each affirmation about God must be balanced with a negation to account for God’s “wholly otherness.” Humans, in and of themselves, have no natural capacity to know God and are thus incapable of making direct assertions about him since God is “wholly other” and hidden.

However, in his work on Anselm, Barth found a way to view theology as saying something more positive about God in light of God’s unique act in Christ.⁹ Theology’s task, then, is not to establish the object of inquiry on rational and common grounds independent of God’s Word; instead theology begins with God’s free and gracious initiative to reveal himself to us in Christ. In fact, all that we know about God’s action in creation and providence is due to God’s self-revelation in Christ.¹⁰

Barth’s theology was a marked contrast from classical liberalism.¹¹ Instead of thinking of some natural or common “point of contact” between God’s revelation and humans, God must first initiate to speak to us. Theology is not warranted because it establishes truths from religious experience, world history, or the natural order. We do not know God from a cognitive ability in us; we only know God because he has spoken to us by his Word.¹² As John Webster notes, instead of working from “abstract metaphysical or anthropological foundations for theology”¹³ — an “analogy of being” — Barth moves from Christ to speak properly about creation and humans.

However, Barth’s view not only differs from liberalism but also from Protestant orthodoxy. In denying that humans have

any direct knowledge of God from creation due to our lack of any “natural” or “innate” capacity to know God, Barth also rejected a legitimate role for God’s revelation in nature and creation.¹⁴ Unlike Reformation theology that insisted on the importance of both natural and special revelation for our knowledge of God, humans, and the world, Barth rejected this for his understanding of God’s Word given to us in Christ.¹⁵

But what exactly did Barth mean by God’s Word? Historically, God’s speech and revelation is given to us in creation (natural revelation), Scripture and Christ

(special revelation). However, for Barth, the Word of God takes on a different cast, which helps explain some of his aversion to natural revelation. For Barth, God’s Word “is no mere thing; it is the living, personal and free God,”¹⁶ who not only communicates to us but who is never available to us directly. In other words, God’s Word, as Webster reminds us, “is not a deposit of truth upon which the church can draw, or a set of statements which can be consulted. The Word of God is an act which God undertakes. God’s Word is that complex but unitary event in which God has spoken, speaks and will speak, an event

³See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “God’s Mighty Speech-Acts,” in *A Pathway into Holy Scripture*, ed., Philip E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 163.

⁴George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 30, calls this “actualism” in Barth’s theology. Hunsinger contends that actualism is “the most distinctive and perhaps the most difficult of the motifs.” But so pervasive is this motif that “Barth’s whole theology might well be described as a theology of active relations.” For example, when Barth wants to describe God, he says that God’s being is always a being in act. “Negatively, this means that God’s being cannot be described apart from the basic act in which God lives. . . . Positively, the description means that God lives in a set of active relations. The being of God in act is a being in love and freedom.”

⁵Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 49. Hunsinger labels this “rationalism” in Barth’s theology (see pp. 49–64).

⁶See Barth’s work on Anselm: *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1960). Barth described his work on Anselm as “the one written with the greatest satisfaction.” Yet in America, Barth laments, “it is doubtless not read at all and in Europe it certainly is the least read of my works” (see Barth, *How I Changed My Mind* [Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1966], 43).

⁷There is a lot of debate on this point. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992) argued for an “early” and “later” Barth. By contrast, Bruce L. McCormack denies this shift in Barth (*Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1995]). For a similar view to McCormack yet more nuanced, see John Webster, *Barth* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 22–24; cf. idem., “Barth, Karl (1886–1968),” *New Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Martin Davie, et al. (Downers Grove: IVP, 2016), 103–7.

⁸See Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God: Protestant Theology in the Twentieth Century* (London: Collins, 1969), 21–34.

⁹See Webster, *Karl Barth*, 22–24, 51–53; cf. David F. Ford, “Barth’s Interpretation of the Bible,” in *Karl Barth: Studies in His Theological Method*, ed. S. W. Sykes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 58. One implication of Barth’s more constructive method is that instead of moving from the general (philosophical systems tied to natural reason) to the particular (theology), Barth now does theology from the particular to the general. Cf. Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 32–35; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. 4 vols. in 13 parts (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936–1975), II:1, 602 (hereafter CD).

¹⁰See CD, I:1, 150.

¹¹Barth’s early theology stood in direct opposition to the classic liberalism he had been taught. On Barth’s thought and time period, see Eberhard Jungel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 22–104. Barth argued that classical liberalism had reduced theology to anthropology, and turned divine revelation into natural theology. Liberalism’s theology began “from below” instead of “from above.” Barth, however, in his reading of Romans discovered the self-revealing God in the strange world of the Bible (see Karl Barth, “The Strange New World Within the Bible,” in *The Word of God and the Word of Man* [Pilgrim Press, 1928]). As a result, Barth no longer focused on man and *his* belief, *his* piety, *his* religion, and *his* culture. Instead, Barth focused on God, the *totaliter aliter* (to borrow a phrase from Kierkegaard), and *his* revelation. But in this early stage, Barth viewed theology more negatively—as the “impossible possibility” (see Jungel, *Karl Barth*, 61) — due to God’s “otherness” and human’s finitude and fallenness.

¹²See Webster, *Karl Barth*, 53–55. Also see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 198–208.

¹³Webster, “Barth, Karl,” 105.

¹⁴On this point, see Steven J. Duby, *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 108–12.

¹⁵See Keith L. Johnson, “Natural Revelation in Creation and Covenant,” in *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: An Unofficial Catholic-Protestant Dialogue*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack and Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 141–44; cf. Duby, *God in Himself*, 110.

¹⁶CD I:1, 198.

¹⁷Webster, *Karl Barth*, 55.

¹⁸See CD I:1, 88–124.

which encounters us through the human means of Scripture and its proclamation in the church.”¹⁷ In fact, God’s Word has three forms: the Word revealed, the Word written, and the Word preached.¹⁸ Let us look at each of these in turn.

Barth’s Conception of the Word of God

First, there is God’s Word *revealed*, namely Jesus Christ, who is God’s direct and objective revelation, the Word made flesh.¹⁹ In this sense, revelation is both a historical and unrepeatable event²⁰ and “once-for-all.”²¹ “Revelation in fact does not differ from the person of Jesus Christ nor from the reconciliation accomplished by Him,”²² and it is to him that Scripture witnesses.

Second, there is God’s Word *written*, namely Scripture, which is an *indirect* revelation that bears witness to Christ.²³ Scripture is not directly God’s Word since it is only a witness to Christ. Barth insists: “A witness is not absolutely identical with that to which it witnesses. . . . In the Bible we meet with human words written in human speech, and in these words, and therefore by means of them, we hear of the lordship of the triune God.”²⁴ However, even though Scripture is distinguished from God’s objective Word, namely, Christ, the Bible can *become* revelation by God’s sovereign and free choice in the event of witnessing to Christ.²⁵ For Barth, then, Scripture is a human, fallible word that consists of human attempts that indirectly witness to Christ. Not even the Bible can recollect God’s past revelation. Only as God acts, only as God causes the Bible to be his Word, only as he speaks through it, can we say the Bible *is* God’s Word.²⁶

Third, there is God’s Word *preached*,²⁷ which like Scripture, is also an *indirect* revelation. In our proclamation of Scripture, God acts and bears witness to Christ. And when God acts to do so, we not only hear the preached word as God’s Word but also experience God with us.

In summarizing Barth’s view, we discover that we only have access to Christ through indirect means: God’s Word written and proclaimed. But even in these two forms, we only have Christ due to God’s free decision to act and reveal him to us. God’s revelation of himself is not ours for the taking; it only comes to us as an event by God’s free decision to act and make it so.²⁸

Barth’s emphasis on divine freedom is important. He is emphatic that God’s revelatory action must be free.²⁹ On the one hand, God by nature “cannot be unveiled to men, self-unveiling means that God does what men themselves cannot do in any sense or in any way.”³⁰ In fact, in Christ, Barth insists, God takes the initiative to make himself the object of human thought and speech by taking form, “and this taking form is His self-unveiling.”³¹

On the other hand, Barth insists that even in the form God assumes in his self-revelation, especially thinking of the incarnation, God is still free to reveal and not to reveal himself. The form does not take God’s place since God’s being is never there for the taking. Instead, it must be actively and graciously given. The alternative, Barth thinks, is a denial of God’s freedom. For if the form is identified with God’s revelation, humanity would then be able to control God since God’s Word would be universally present and ascertainable to man and thus become

a mere object of human inquiry.³² This is why, as Kevin Vanhoozer reminds us, “Barth is reluctant to attach the predicate ‘divine’ to any other creaturely reality, even the Scriptures, for fear of detracting from God’s being in the event of Jesus Christ: to suggest that some worldly object or activity is ‘the same as’ God’s Word is basically to say that it is God.”³³

For this reason, Barth does not identify Scripture *as* God’s Word. He is concerned that such an identification will compromise God’s freedom and sovereignty to act whenever and wherever he so chooses, and thus to place God under our control.³⁴ God as the Lord, Barth insists, has free control over the wording of Holy Scripture. He writes:

He [God] can use it or not use it. He can use it in this way or in that way. He can choose a new wording beyond that of Holy Scripture. What

Holy Scripture proclaims as His Word can be proclaimed in a new wording as His Word so long as it is He Himself who speaks in this wording. Furthermore, the personal character of God’s Word means, not its deverbaling, but the posing of an absolute barrier against reducing its wording to a human system or using its wording to establish and construct a human system. It would not be God’s faithfulness but His unfaithfulness to us if He allowed us to use His Word in this way. This would mean His allowing us to gain control over His Word, to fit it in with our own designs, and thus to shut up ourselves against Him to our own ruin. God’s faithfulness to His Church consists in His availing Himself of His freedom to come to us Himself in His Word and in His reserving to Himself the freedom to do this again and again.³⁵

¹⁷Webster, *Karl Barth*, 55.

¹⁸See *CD* I:1, 88–124.

¹⁹See *CD*, I:2, 1–25.

²⁰*CD* I:1, 116.

²¹*CD* I:2, 12.

²²*CD* I:1, 119.

²³See *CD* I:1, 99–111.

²⁴*CD* I:2, 463.

²⁵On this point, see *CD* I:1, 112–13.

²⁶See *CD* I:1, 109.

²⁷See *CD* I:1, 88–99.

²⁸See *CD* I:1, 149.

²⁹Barth defines the Godhead in terms of freedom. He writes: “Godhead in the Bible means freedom, ontic and noetic autonomy” (*CD* I:1, 307). Also see Barth’s extensive treatment of this subject in *CD* II:1, 297–321. By ontic autonomy, Barth means that God alone is self-sufficient and unique as the source of his own being. That is why God is dependent upon, or in need of, no one. Moreover, by God’s noetic absoluteness, Barth simply means what he has asserted from the very beginning: God cannot be known except by and in his own acts of self-revelation.

³⁰*CD* I:1, 315.

³¹*CD* I:1, 316.

³²For a denial that the Word of God is universally present and ascertainable, see *CD* I:1, 158.

³³Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 207.

³⁴*CD* I:2, 527.

³⁵*CD* I:1, 139. Also see *CD* I:2, 512–13.



Thus, for Scripture to become revelation for us, God must act freely and graciously. Only by God's free decision does Scripture *become* God's Word.³⁶ As to when, where, and how Scripture shows itself to us in this event as the Word of God, we do not decide, but the Word of God himself decides.³⁷ For Barth, to say that God is the supremely free God is to say, as John Frame notes, that "God does not place his words on paper. For God to inspire words in this way would compromise his freedom and sovereignty; God himself could not abrogate such words once he has spoken them."³⁸ Furthermore, because God is the one who acts whenever and wherever he chooses, inspiration is not a unique divine action in the past that guarantees the truth of the text since this too would compromise God's freedom to use or not use the text as his Word. Yes, God has used Scripture in the past to bear witness to Christ, and thus, we believe that God will use Scripture in the future. But to identify God's Word with Scripture would be to displace Christ and to force God to honor a word spoken in the past. Even worse: it would mean that those who "have" the texts in their possession would then have God under their control.

Barth's Rejection of Natural Revelation

Barth's rejection of natural revelation and theology is similar to his rejection of the identification of Scripture *as* God's Word. For Barth, if humans have a "natural" or "innate" capacity to know God, then God's freedom is compromised. Why? Because it assumes that we have a knowledge of God apart from God's free and gracious activity in Christ; it identifies something "creaturely" with God. And if this is so, then revelation is no longer God's gracious and free choice to make himself known in Christ. Instead revelation is a "natural" given that humans can use to control and manipulate God. As Barth asserts, "the logic of the matter demands that, even if we only lend out a little finger to natural theology, there necessarily follows the denial of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ."³⁹ Thus, any revelation, including natural revelation that is not mediated through Christ, is rejected.⁴⁰ Furthermore, given our sin, there is no point of contact in us, other than what God creates by his gracious action in Christ.⁴¹ For Barth, natural revelation and its counterpart, natural theology, is a vain attempt to know God apart from Christ.

Thus, just as Barth has a problem identifying Scripture *as* God's Word due to his concern that such an identification compromises God's freedom and it places God under our control, a similar point is made about God's revelation of himself in creation. Humans do not know God from creation apart from Christ, and God's decision to make creation real in Christ.⁴² This is why, as James Cassidy explains, "creation is not the first word in theology. It is not the first of God's acts *ad extra*. There is a prior work of God: the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ... the covenant of grace has a logical priority over creation, but it can never be separated from creation—or rather, creation from it. In this way, Barth can speak in terms that make Jesus Christ not only the Creator but the creature as well."⁴³ This is also why Barth rejects any idea of a "natural" revelation apart from Christ. All of creation must be viewed in light of humanity's gracious election in Christ,⁴⁴ and as Michael Horton reminds us, "there is no point in eternity or time where we encounter God apart from the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ."⁴⁵ In fact, Barth has problems thinking of humans as ever existing in a pre-fall condition, which is also tied to his rejection of a historic Adam. "To say man," Barth asserts, "is to say creature and sin,

and this means limitation and suffering."⁴⁶ For this reason, as Horton reminds us, "the distinction between pre-fall and post-fall plays no role in his theology."⁴⁷ Given Barth's view, it is not surprising that there is no place for thinking of creation prior to the fall and prior to grace.

As applied to ethics, Barth does not appeal to God's design in the created order to ground ethical norms, but instead "the task of theological ethics is to understand the Word of God as the command of God,"⁴⁸ which at every point is defined in terms of Christ. We cannot appeal to "natural law" as if "nature" is something independent of God's specific revelation in Christ. We cannot speak of natural law as providing universal rights and wrong; ethics must not be built on human reasoning independent of God's revelation in Christ, otherwise it becomes arbitrary, vacuous, and without grounds. To be fair to Barth, as one who opposed Hitler's rise and liberal theology's appeal to natural law to justify German ideology, we can understand how a misuse of natural law needed to be countered. But even so, Barth was very reluctant to speak of creation order independent of God's revelation in Christ, which meant that any appeal to natural law for ethics was rejected.

³⁶See CD I:2, 530.

³⁷See CD I:2, 531.

³⁸John M. Frame, "The Spirit and the Scriptures," in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 222. Also see John Frame, "God and Biblical Language," in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1974), 159–77.

³⁹CD II:1, 173.

⁴⁰See Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 96; cf. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics*, 29–30.

⁴¹On this point, see CD I:1, 236–41.

⁴²See James J. Cassidy, *God's Time for Us: Barth's Reconciliation of Eternity and Time in Jesus Christ* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 55–100.

⁴³Cassidy, *God's Time for Us*, 60. Cf. Michael S. Horton, "Covenant, Election, and Incarnation," in *Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack and Clifford B. Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 115–20.

⁴⁴See David VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 320–24.

⁴⁵Horton, "Covenant, Election, and Incarnation," 119.

⁴⁶CD, IV:1, 131.

⁴⁷Horton, "Covenant, Election, and Incarnation," 134.

⁴⁸CD III:4, 4.

Yet, later in his life, Barth did think that God’s revelation in Christ could come through “secular parables of truth.” As David VanDrunen explains, “True words may be spoken in the world and not merely in the Bible or in the church. Jesus Christ, however, is the only Word of God and hence he delimits all other words, whether in the Bible, church, or world.”⁴⁹ These secular forms of truth must be tested in light of God’s Word in Christ, yet as with Scripture, they are only indirect, and thus never valid for all places and times. By this means, Barth allows for the created order to witness to its Creator as seen in Christ,⁵⁰ but “there is no continuing voice of creation that is independent of God’s work in Christ, so there is no common, preserving grace in the creation that is independent of it.”⁵¹ Where one might expect that Barth opens a door for natural revelation is, in fact, shut. For Barth, the only true point of contact we have with God and creation is due to God’s electing action in Christ to unite creation and redemption in him.

PROBLEMS WITH BARTH’S REJECTION OF NATURAL REVELATION

Barth’s rejection of natural revelation, along with his overall theology, poses a number of problems. Let me offer at least five problems with Barth’s view.

First, it simply does not follow either for Scripture or God’s revelation of himself in creation that a true knowledge of God from these sources would compromise God’s freedom. For example, in relation to Scripture, as Frame correctly notes, surely “there is something odd about saying that an inerrant canonical text places God under our control;”⁵² Scripture never draws any such inference. In fact, Scripture teaches, as Frame observes:

God makes covenant promises, by which he *binds himself*. In Christ, all these promises are Yes and Amen (2 Cor. 1:20). God cannot lie or deny himself (2 Tim. 2:13; Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18). Therefore, his Word abides forever (Isa. 40:8). These divine words constitute a body of truth, a “tradition” (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6), a faith that was “once for all entrusted to the saints” and for which we are to contend earnestly (Jude 3). . . . Moreover, the biblical writers do not reason that these divine promises compromise God’s sovereignty! On the contrary, God’s sovereignty is expressed through the irresistible power of his Word. . . . God’s Word is an instrument of his sovereign rule. It is precisely the case that his sovereignty would be compromised if he did *not* speak such words.”⁵³

The same is also true regarding God’s revelation in creation. Divine freedom does not necessitate that if God chooses to create a world according to his eternal plan, and that knowledge of him is revealed in creation, that somehow God is now under our control.⁵⁴ No doubt, Barth’s concern that natural theology can subsume God under some philosophical scheme of our own choosing is a concern, but it simply does not follow that given God’s free decision to create and act in the world that the world that he made is not revelatory of him. In fact, Scripture teaches the opposite, which leads to the next point of criticism.

Second, Scripture teaches that the triune God who has planned from eternity, created in time, and rules over his world is revealed in what he

has made (Genesis 1–2; Ps. 19:1–6; Acts 17:22–31; Rom. 1:18–32).⁵⁵ From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture teaches that God testifies to himself through the natural world that he created, sustains, and rules (Acts 14:17; Rom. 1:20), and through the human conscience (Rom. 1:32). The knowledge of God in creation is best viewed as an effect of divine revelation, not an independent discovery or deduction of humans.⁵⁶ For this reason, belief in the God of Scripture is inescapable, and all people are held reasonable for not knowing God due to the clarity of God’s revelation of himself in creation (Rom. 1:18–20). All created reality is inherently revelational of God and his moral will. In fact, God created humans to know him and to use our minds and our faculties to glorify him (Prov. 1:7). Even though our sin leads to a suppression of the truth, God is still clearly known from creation, but God must act in sovereign grace to remove our suppression of the truth, to give us new hearts and faith in Christ. Thus, a right use of reason depends on the Spirit-illuminated Word in order to acknowledge the glory of our Creator in his creation. However, rational arguments can and must be made from creation to all people, yet these arguments do not ultimately function independent of Scripture. Yet, appeal

to what we have in common, namely, the created order and our common creation, is important for theology and especially ethics. Despite our sin and suppression of the truth, a knowledge of God’s moral demand is written on the heart regardless of whether we acknowledge it or not.

In fact, if we read Romans 1 properly, the challenge of God’s revelation of himself in nature is that people cannot think in a warranted way without acknowledging God as Creator and Lord. Paul teaches that the created order is a conduit of constant, inescapable, information about God: all people possess an *actual* knowledge of him at the outset of their reasoning, which allows for the possible use of evidence, reason, and accounting for the universal moral sense that all people possess. God’s revelation is everywhere, and apart from him, the basis for a warranted human knowledge along with moral norms becomes difficult to sustain. Thus, in ethics, appeal to what people “know” from creation is not vacuous but crucial since all people in all places (Ps. 19:1–4), even in their sin, know God and something of his moral demand from what God has created. Barth’s view simply does not account for the biblical teaching on natural revelation.

⁴⁹VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 324; cf. CD IV:3:1, 97.

⁵⁰CD IV:3:1, 139.

⁵¹VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 325.

⁵²Frame, “The Spirit and the Scriptures,” 223.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴See Duby, *God in Himself*, 119–20.

⁵⁵For a full discussion of natural revelation, see Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, *Reformed Systematic Theology: Revelation and God*, vol. 1 (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 195–263.

⁵⁶See Duby, *God in Himself*, 72–103.

Third, Barth's Christocentric focus is admirable, but reductionistic in scope. For example, one cannot make sense of who Christ is apart from the backdrop of natural revelation. In many ways, Christ is presented to us in Scripture in light of God's revelation of himself in creation and human nature. This is why it is best to say that God intended for natural and special revelation to function together. In fact, even before the fall, Adam could only interpret nature aright in connection with and in the light of divine speech, as evidenced by the divine command given to him (Gen. 2:15–17). Adam, as a creature and image-bearer, needed to hear God's direct speech that supplemented and interpreted God's revelation in nature. And especially after the fall, Adam needed a saving promise (Gen. 3:15) — a promise that could never have been deduced or inferred from natural revelation. Redemption required a divine Word and divine actions. Nevertheless, natural revelation, rightly understood through the "spectacles of Scripture" is not only of tremendous value but absolutely necessary to understand special revelation since it serves as its backdrop. This is why there is a mutual relationship and inter-dependence of natural revelation and special revelation. One without the other is insufficient.

Furthermore, even in thinking about God's revelation in Christ, Scripture presents the incarnation by placing Jesus within the OT narrative that begins with God the Creator and humans as image-bearers and covenant creatures (e.g., Heb. 2:5–18; cf. use of Psalm 8). For example, when Paul speaks of Christ at Athens, he starts with the Creator-creature distinction given in creation (Acts 17:24–

26) and then unpacks who humans are in Adam, thus illustrating how natural revelation undergirds special revelation.⁵⁷ As Vanhoozer nicely reminds us: "Jesus Christ reveals God neither *de novo* nor *ex nihilo* since his identity is 'inextricably tied up' with the identity of the God of Israel,"⁵⁸ that is first given in creation. Or, as Keith Johnson observes, Barth's view leads to the unfortunate conclusion that, if words and concepts derived from the created order have "no intrinsic connection between their normal use and their use with respect to God, then there is no way to know what creaturely words and concepts actually *mean* when they are applied to God."⁵⁹ In other words, apart from some intrinsic connection between concepts from creation (natural revelation) and then applied to Christ, "human talk about God is functionally equivocal,"⁶⁰ which is a serious problem.

Fourth, Barth fails sufficiently to distinguish Christ as the eternal Son, the second person of the Godhead, who is the Creator and Lord, from the incarnate Son. As the divine Son, he is the Creator of the universe along with the Father and Spirit (John 1:1–3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:15–17; Heb. 1:1–3). As such, as Steven Duby reminds us, "there can be no separation of Christ's work in nature and in supernatural grace."⁶¹ What this entails is that the Son, along with the Father and Spirit, is the source of natural revelation as well, so that the knowledge we receive from nature and Scripture is grounded in the initiative of the triune God in and through the Son.⁶² Barth is simply mistaken to appeal to the knowledge of God by grace and through special revelation as different from the knowledge of God through nature, or not mediated by the Son. Both

forms of revelation are from the triune God, mediated through the Son, and the knowledge of God in creation is not "independent" of Christ, although both forms of revelation are necessary.

On this point, Barth stands against historic theology, especially Reformation and Reformed orthodoxy.⁶³ In Reformation theology, a distinction is made between God's work of creation and his work of redemption, even though Christ is Lord of both in relation to the Father and Spirit (Col. 1:15–20). However, Barth flattens these two orders, thus denying the reality of natural revelation tied to the triune God's work of creation in and through the divine Son. As a result, he dismisses the reality of an independent existence of the creation order prior to sin, which even precipitates the need for the work of the incarnate Son. He also dismisses any notion of natural law based on creation order prior to redemptive grace, and instead collapses creation and providence under the category of redemption, hence his rejection of natural theology. But Barth's view is untenable according to the Scriptural teaching, which leads to the last point.

Fifth, Barth cannot account for the Bible's overall biblical-theological storyline of creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. For Barth, creation is not a biblical category in its own right that was created good and revelatory of God. As

Duby notes, "it seems that in the logic of Barth's framework creation as such is not good without the help of salvific grace."⁶⁴ Since creation is viewed in light of the incarnate Son and redemptive grace, creation is brought into being and upheld by saving grace, but this is not what Scripture teaches. Again, as Duby observes, "the scriptural narrative of creation, sin, and redemption, together with the emphasis that God's gracious work has a restorative character (e.g., Acts 3:21; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10), requires us to confess an original goodness of created being as such, a fall into sin that is not ingredient in human nature as such, and a redemptive recovery of something (i.e., human nature rightly ordered to God) that once existed and was good in its own right."⁶⁵

However, Barth's view undercuts all of this since it does not distinguish properly between creation order, a historic fall into sin, and God's work of redemption centered in Christ. Barth has no way of thinking of creation as revelatory of God, along with a creation order prior to the fall and independent of redemption. As such, he loses the ability to think of God's ordering of creation as a norm or standard for ethics in terms of what God created humans to be, what is for our good, and how God expects us to live as his image-bearers. Horton nicely captures the problem of Barth's view: "In this view

⁵⁷On this point, see my *God the Son Incarnate* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 79–146.

⁵⁸Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 418.

⁵⁹Johnson, "Natural Revelation in Creation and Covenant," 142–143.

⁶⁰Johnson, "Natural Revelation in Creation and Covenant," 143.

⁶¹Duby, *God in Himself*, 169.

⁶²See Duby, *God in Himself*, 169–72.

⁶³On this point, see VanDrunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms*, 343–47.

⁶⁴Duby, *God in Himself*, 272.

⁶⁵Duby, *God in Himself*, 272–73.

[Barth's], history — in fact, creation itself — cannot be the theater in which a genuine drama unfolds, because creation, fall, and redemption are not successive events but different aspects of the same event.”⁶⁶ By subsuming everything under God's self-revelation in Christ — including natural revelation and the creation order — Barth has undercut the Bible's storyline and missed how Scripture distinguishes between the original creation order, the impact of sin, and God's plan of redemption to restore what was lost in the fall. By doing so, Barth's view has undermined the concept and need for natural revelation, and made problematic the concept of natural law.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL REVELATION FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Given that natural revelation is a reality, what, then, is its importance for theology and especially Christian ethics? As we reflect on this question, it is important to never artificially separate natural from special revelation. As already noted, in Christian theology they go hand-in-hand. Both before and after the fall, Adam was to interpret nature and himself dependent on divine speech (Gen. 2:15–17). Adam, as a creature and image-bearer, needed both God's revelation in creation and God's direct speech to understand God, self, and the world correctly. And this is especially true after the fall since Adam (along with all humanity) not only now suppresses the truth of creation, but also needs a saving promise which does not arise from nature but instead God's sovereign initiative and action to redeem us.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, natural revelation is necessary to know God and ourselves. Natural revelation is not sufficient in itself, nor is it sufficient for salvation (Rom. 1:18–32). But natural revelation is important to reveal clearly who God is and his moral demands on all people. Natural revelation, then, because it reflects God's eternal plan that he has enacted by creating the world, is truly revelatory of him and as such it carries with it divine authority, hence the reason why it leaves us without excuse (Rom. 1:20). As such, what is known from natural revelation and Scripture is foundational for establishing a normative ground for ethics and human obligation.

As God's demands are known from natural revelation, they also require the truth of special revelation to make them cogent; they are not sufficient in themselves. For example, it is difficult to make an argument for birth control merely on the natural connection between sexual relations and reproduction since as Frame notes, “[t]hat connection obviously exists, but the moral conclusion is not a necessary one. Indeed the argument (like many natural-law arguments) is a naturalistic fallacy, an attempt to reason from fact to obligation, from ‘is’ to ‘ought.’”⁶⁸ In the end, persuasive moral reasoning requires more than what we observe from nature alone. Yet this does not minimize the importance of natural revelation since special revelation requires it and cannot be understood apart from it.

In addition, Scripture grounds moral obligation, and thus, natural law, in the norm of creation tied to natural revelation. As Michael Hill notes, it is the original creation with its revealed goals or purposes which “provides us with the basis for determining what is morally good.”⁶⁹ This

point is especially significant today in ethical discussions over the nature and dignity of humans, the proper use of our sexuality, marriage, the value of labor, and so on. Since all people are creatures of God, living in the world God has made and surrounded by God's revelation of himself in nature, we can appeal to what is known from nature to warrant what is good, true, and beautiful. Despite human sin, there is still a point of contact with people because of our common creation and living in God's world. And what is in common with all people, despite our sin, is God's created order that still retains something of its original purpose even post-fall. No doubt, natural revelation is never enough on its own since it requires a Christian theistic understanding of the world. This is evident in how evolutionary theory has taken hold in our society thus rendering implausible a natural law ethic. But this simply reminds us that as we argue for moral norms on the basis of natural law, we must also argue for an entire Christian view of the world. As we do, we continue to appeal to people as image-bearers who know the truth, despite their sin and suppression of the truth. We can appeal to what they already know with the hope that God will use our arguments to lead them to faith in Christ.

Let us think about some examples. First, think about arguments for the sanctity of human life. Given our common creation as image-bearers, we can appeal to people's intuitive sense that human life is precious. From here we can argue for the sanctity of human life and offer reasons to oppose abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia. Or, think of a

second example related to sexual ethics. We can observe how humans are designed along with the complementarity of the sexes. From here we can argue for a proper use of our sexuality functioning within the permanent, covenant relationship of heterosexual marriage. We can argue that all misuses of our sexuality, whether it is fornication, adultery, divorce, homosexuality, bestiality, and even polygamy are distortions of who humans are as designed as male and female, and what we know is best for a well-functioning human society. Obviously, none of these arguments stand alone. But for even those who reject them, we can appeal to what they know despite their rejection of the truth, and the sad consequences that often result when people depart from the natural design of humanity.

As the church, we live in challenging days. One of the challenges we face is confronting a society that finds itself in moral and ethical confusion. As the church, we are called to proclaim the truth of our triune God as he has revealed himself both in nature and Scripture. In our proclamation and defense of the gospel, natural revelation has a vital role to play in this task, especially in our establishing of a normative Christian ethic. The rejection of natural revelation by theologians like Karl Barth is unwarranted, so the church needs to return again to thinking through and expounding the truth of God from God's work in creation and redemption. ✕

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⁶⁶Duby, *God in Himself*, 272–73.

⁶⁷Horton, “Covenant, Election, and Incarnation,” 133.

⁶⁸On this point, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2008), 951–52.

⁶⁹Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 954.

⁶⁹Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2002), 66.

ADELINE A. ALLEN

On Being Fitted Together

“It doesn’t matter who you click with,” declared a 2017 tweet from KLM Royal Dutch Airlines in 2017. Accompanying the tweet were three pairs of rainbow-colored seat belt ends: the first pair had two female ends facing each other, the second two male ends, and the third a male end and a female end. The tweet was fired off with the hashtag “Happy #PrideAmsterdam.”

Natural law has a *res ipsa loquitur* quality to it that, paradoxically, can make articulating it challenging. That is, articulating common sense or truth-accessible-to-all-by-reason can be difficult. But here is a try.

To begin with the tweet under consideration, one does not need to be a Christian to see that only *one* combination of seat belt ends will do. Special revelation through Scripture is not required to know no “click” is possible for any other combination. One end is made for the other — fitted

together, just so — and that arrangement is exclusive. This we can know through natural law.

Natural law is accessible to every human being because each person is made in God’s own image as a reasoning being. Man participates in the awesome powers of reason and creativity of God the *Logos* when he exercises and cultivates *his* faculty to reason.¹ Every human being has this root (Lt. *radix*) and radical capacity for reason, even the smallest or sickest among us — those whose mental faculties are not yet

mature or whose mental faculties have deteriorated.² “Thus God made man in his own image,” St. Augustine says, “by creating for him a soul of such a kind that because of it he surpassed all living

creatures, on earth, in the sea, and in the sky, in virtue of reason and intelligence; for no other creature had a mind like that. God fashioned man out of the dust of the earth and gave him a soul of the kind I have described.”³

Thomas Aquinas teaches that natural law is man’s participation in God’s eternal law.⁴ It is our sharing in the truth woven into the fabric, or “deep grammar,” of the created order.⁵ It is law “written on [the] hearts,” about which the Apostle Paul writes, while the “conscience also bears witness,” knowable to the Gentiles apart from special revelation.⁶ Jewish midrash has a wonderfully telling expression: “If you are told, ‘There is wisdom [*hokhma*] among the nations,’ believe it. If you are told, ‘There is Torah among the nations,’ do not believe it.”⁷ Thus the Jewish category of *hokhma*, translated as wisdom or prudence, is understood by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks as “the universal heritage of mankind.”⁸ Wisdom’s universality makes sense because each person is an image bearer, and thus capable of understanding truth in the created order.⁹ *Hokhma* is a different category than Torah.¹⁰ But of course the truths in *hokhma* and the Torah do not contradict each other. In fact, they are consonant with each other.

¹Robert P. George, “Natural Law, God and Human Dignity,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Natural Law Jurisprudence*, eds. George Duke and Robert P. George (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 63–68; Samuel Gregg, *Reason, Faith, and the Struggle for Western Civilization* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2019), 40–41; Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation: Genesis* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2009), 290.

²See George, “Natural Law,” 63–68.

³Saint Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 503.

⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2009), I–II, Q. 91, A. 2.

⁵I borrow this lovely phrase “deep grammar” from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks’ commentary on prayer. Sacks, *Genesis*, 188.

⁶Romans 2:15; Gregg, *Reason*, 41.

⁷Sacks, *Genesis*, 290.

⁸Sacks, *Genesis*, 290.

⁹See Sacks, *Genesis*, 290.

¹⁰Sacks, *Genesis*, 290.



Neither do reason and revelation in Christ Jesus contradict each other.¹¹ There are surely limits to reason, especially when we remember that we are fallen, sinful beings.¹² The truths in special revelation do exceed the limits of reason — but they are *consonant* with reason.¹³

Reason is ordered toward good, away from evil.¹⁴ What, then, might reason tell us about marriage and family, and their orientation toward the good and human flourishing?

The design of our bodies tells us that man and woman are made — *fitted*, even — for each other (a point missed, nearly unbelievably, in the KLM tweet).¹⁵ The design of our bodies also tells us that the union of man and woman is toward the procreation of children who, across cultures and millennia, have been welcome as a good thing: a blessing, a sign of divine favor. Special revelation underscores this: the psalmist proclaims in happy confidence that “children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward.”¹⁶

Perhaps it would be good to examine briefly the complementarity of man and woman as father and mother to their children. In an age where fathers (and mothers!) are increasingly absent from their children’s lives through divorce, a break-up following cohabitation, a one-night stand, intentional single parenting, same-sex parenting, “donor” conception, and surrogacy, fathers and mothers have been made to be interchangeable. The distinctives of fathering and mothering have seemed to disappear, reduced flatly to “parenting.”

But research shows that a child needs *both* his father and mother in order to thrive. Fathers and mothers bring different things to the table. Mothers are more likely to parent their children in a safe and nurturing fashion,¹⁷ while fathers are more likely to encourage their children to take healthy risks, like how to roughhouse safely.¹⁸

Children who grow up without their fathers in the home are more likely to be impoverished, to be obese, to struggle academically, to abuse drugs and alcohol, to be disciplined in school, to be sexually active as adolescents, and to end up in jail.¹⁹ Looking at girls and boys a little more closely, a girl’s onset of puberty, for example, is about a year later when she is raised by her biological father.²⁰ Boys, though, seem to be particularly harmed by absent fathers.²¹ A boy needs to learn how to be a man primarily from his father, who needs to be faithfully present in his life. As Glenn Stanton explains, the naturalness of womanhood stands in stark contrast to the *unnaturalness* of manhood: girls’ maturing bodies lead them naturally into womanhood, but the “transition into manhood can only come into being with significant, intentional work by other men. As a behavior, manhood must be *learned*, proven, and earned. As an identity, manhood must be *bestowed* by a boy’s father and the community’s larger fraternity of men. His mother can only affirm it. She cannot bequeath it.”²² Whereas women “must be taught, with great political and ideological pressure, to ignore their womanhood and abandon their children,” manhood for boys, quite the opposite, must be taught, modeled, and embodied.²³

Not only that, a child needs his biological father and mother to be *married to each other* to thrive best.²⁴ Forty years of robust evidence from social science research bears this conclusion.²⁵ Any other arrangement of adult(s) who is/are parenting the child (single, cohabiting, two of the same sex, more than two [as in a “throuple” or an open relationship], etc.) yields a sub-optimal development of the child — not to the child’s good or flourishing, but away

from it.²⁶ This is unsurprising though increasingly against the orthodoxy of our age. Truly, the deep and innate need and longing to be known, raised, and loved by those who gave us life is written into our being.²⁷ We need our biological parents to be with us, to raise us, to discipline us, to form us, to love us.²⁸ Our identity, our making sense of who we are, our very *selves*, can be fragmented and incoherent without our parents’ faithful presence and love.

¹¹Robert Royal, “A Delicate Tapestry,” review of *Reason, Faith, and the Struggle for Western Civilization*, by Samuel Gregg, *Claremont Review of Books*, Spring 2020; see Gregg, *Reason*, 46–51.

¹²See George, “Natural Law,” 66.

¹³Royal, “Delicate Tapestry”; see Gregg, *Reason*, 46–51. Josef Pieper says, “[B]elief has the extraordinary property of endowing the believer with knowledge which would not be available to him by the exercise of his own powers.” Josef Pieper, *An Anthology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2011). Thus R. R. Reno comments, “Faith enlarges our capacity for truth.” R. R. Reno, “While We’re at It,” *First Things*, August/September 2020.

¹⁴Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, Q. 94, A. 2; see also John Finnis, “Aquinas and Natural Law Jurisprudence,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Natural Law Jurisprudence*, eds. George Duke and Robert P. George (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 17, 18–19; George, “Natural Law,” 57, 59.

¹⁵An excellent natural law account of the good of marriage as the conjugal union of one man and one woman, *What Is Marriage? Man and Woman: A Defense* by Robert P. George (who is a contributor to the present issue of the Journal), Sherif Girgis, and Ryan T. Anderson, is worthy of every reader’s serious study. (New York: Encounter Books, 2012).

¹⁶Psalms 127:3.

¹⁷See Anthony Esolen, “The Boy Genius: Finding Him Again Through the Patriarchal Group,” *Touchstone Magazine*, accessed July 18, 2020, <https://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=32-02-029-f>, for a remarkably insightful observation of how this safe and nurturing quality in mothers are not unrelated to women’s tendency as a sex not to fall on the extreme end of the spectrum of genius, for example, because being a genius also likely means taking no heed of danger while being utterly lost in thought — which nature cannot afford, because it would mean that small children under the care of mothers would be in grave danger or perish. “Nature is conservative with females, because to them is given the whole biological future of the race. She is devil-may-care with males, because they are demographically expendable.” Esolen calls the teaching style of female teachers, for example, “a safe space, the walled garden.”

^{18a}The Importance of Fathers (According to Science),” *The Art of Manliness*, accessed July 18, 2020, www.artofmanliness.com/articles/the-importance-of-fathers-according-to-science/.

^{18b}The Art of Manliness, “The Importance of Fathers.”

²⁰Ryan T. Anderson, *Truth Overruled: The Future of Marriage and Religious Freedom* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2015), 151.

²¹See Kay Hymowitz, “Disentangling the Effects of Family Structure on Boys and Girls,” Institute for Family Studies, accessed August 4, 2020, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/disentangling-the-effects-of-family-structure-on-boys-and-girls>.

^{22a}Manhood Is Not Natural,” Public Discourse, accessed July 18, 2020, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/12/20272/>; see also Anthony Esolen, *Defending Boyhood: How Building Forts, Reading Stories, Playing Ball, and Praying to God Can Change the World* (Charlotte: TAN Books, 2019), 26–27.

²³Public Discourse, “Manhood Is Not Natural” See also Esolen, *Defending Boyhood*, 13–37, 81–97; *Touchstone Magazine*, “The Boy Genius.”

²⁴Anderson, *Truth Overruled*, 148–52; Alysse ElHage, “How Marriage Makes Men Better Fathers,” Institute for Family Studies, accessed July 18, 2020, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/how-marriage-makes-men-better-fathers>; David C. Ribar, “Children Raised Within Marriage Do Better on Average. Why?,” Child & Family Blog, accessed July 27, 2020, <https://www.childandfamilyblog.com/child-development/children-marriage-do-better-why/>; Ana Samuel, “The Kids Aren’t All Right: New Family Structures and the ‘No Differences’ Claim,” Public Discourse, accessed July 18, 2020, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2012/06/5640/>.

To say this is not to diminish the heroism and selflessness on the part of parents who adopt their children, but to work out the implications of data that show that children do best when raised by their married biological father and mother. Anderson, *Truth Overruled*, 151. A special word is warranted about a rising trend: Especially in contrast to adoption, wherein adoptive parents step in and redeem an *already* broken situation for the child, increasingly other parenting schemes *intentionally* deprive the child of one or both of his biological parents, as in the case of, for example, donor conception, same-sex parenting, and surrogacy. See, for example, Anderson, *Truth Overruled*, 148–52, 152–72; Adeline A. Allen, “Surrogacy, Love, and Flourishing,” Public Discourse, accessed July 18, 2020, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/09/56158/>; Alana S. Newman, “What Are the Rights of Donor-Conceived People?” Public Discourse, accessed July 18, 2020, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2013/08/10511/>.

²⁵Anderson, *Truth Overruled*, 149.

²⁶Anderson, *Truth Overruled*, 148–58.

²⁷Melissa Moschella, *To Whom Do Children Belong? Parental Rights, Civic Education, and Children’s Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 21–48; Melissa Moschella, “The Wrongness of Third-Party Assisted Reproduction: A Natural Law Account,” *Christian Bioethics* 22, no. 2 (May 2016): 104–21, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cb/cbw008>; “My Daddy’s Name Is Donor,” Institute for American Values, accessed July 20, 2020, https://canavox.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/American-Values_Donor.pdf, 5–14.

²⁸Moschella, *To Whom Do Children Belong?*, 21–48; Moschella, “Wrongness of Third-Party Assisted Reproduction,” 104–21.

If in their children's lives fathers and mothers have a particular *fit*, each unique and necessary, the good of marriage as enjoyed by the children a union begets brings us back to marriage itself. C. S. Lewis, grieving the death of his wife, reflected that "[t]here is, hidden or flaunted, a sword between the sexes till an entire marriage reconciles them. . . . Marriage heals this. Jointly the two become fully human. 'In the image of God created He them.' Thus, by a paradox, this carnival of sexuality leads us out beyond our sexes."²⁹

This "reconciliation" between man and woman in marriage — this becoming "fully human," as Lewis calls it, including how the two "shall become one flesh"³⁰ — also points us beyond our natural state. Marriage between man and wife is taught in Scripture as a picture of Christ and the church. There is a mystery there: a peering behind the veil, a seeing through a glass darkly. But if I may be so bold, might we think of yet another passage from C. S. Lewis where he contemplates the relationship between God and the individual soul, and apply it to Christ and the church as the body of Christ *consisting of* those souls? Might what we know about marriage and family through reason — and all the wonderful ways in which marriage and family *befit us and fit us together* — point us to the *telos* of man as revealed in Scripture?

This signature on each soul may be a product of heredity and environment, but that only means that heredity and environment are among the instruments whereby God creates a soul. I am considering not how, but why, He makes each soul unique. If He

had no use for all these differences, I do not see why He should have created more souls than one. Be sure that the ins and outs of your individuality are no mystery to Him; and one day they will no longer be a mystery to you. The mould in which a key is made would be a strange thing, if you had never seen a key: and the key itself a strange thing if you had never seen a lock. Your soul has a curious shape because it is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the Divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions. For it is not humanity in the abstract that is to be saved, but you — you, the individual reader, John Stubbs or Janet Smith. Blessed and fortunate creature, your eyes shall behold Him and not another's. All that you are, sins apart, is destined, if you will let God have His good way, to utter satisfaction. The Brocken spectre 'looked to every man like his first love,' because she was a cheat. But God will look to every soul like its first love because He is its first love. Your place in heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, *because you were made for it — made for it stitch by stitch as a glove is made for a hand.*³¹ ✕

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²⁹C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Harper One, 2001).

³⁰Genesis 2:24.

³¹C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Harper One, 1996), 151–52 (emphasis added).

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An Interview with Oliver O'Donovan and Andrew T. Walker on the Natural Law

Oliver O'Donovan is Professor Emeritus of Christian Ethics and Practical Theology at the University of Edinburgh.

Andrew T. Walker is Associate Professor of Christian Ethics at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the Executive Editor of Eikon.

ATW: The Christian faith today seems to be challenged most immediately in the domain of theological anthropology. Is this your assessment?

OOD: A challenge to faith may come from within or from without, as an objection presented by unbelief or doubt nursed within belief itself. It may take the form of a pressure to conform in practical ways rather than as a challenge directly presented to thought, and for that reason may need to be thought about all the more carefully. And it may present itself in one place where the real heart of the problem is in another place, for faith is all of a piece. It can be said, perhaps, that the one and the only perpetual challenge of faith is to think rightly about God. Yet if we do seek to think rightly about God, there is a great deal else that we shall need to learn to think about, too. Faith in God certainly requires us to think about the glory of his creation and the particular dignity and responsibility assigned to our human race within it.

There are immediate, short-term challenges -- viruses, wars, and so on. There is a long-term problem of the future of the human race itself under the judgment and mercy of God. And in between the two, there are problems of civilization, peculiar to a given epoch in human existence. The manipulation of the human genome, the technicization of human numbers of men and women over their personal sexual histories and endowments, are symptoms of a problem of civilizational scope, peculiar to an epoch in which technical control has taken over from reflective knowledge. Robert Spaemann wrote that it seemed that the concept of "the person" was in danger of being forgotten. It is not the only important category to suffer that fate. Future generations, if God gives them, will look back on our ways of handling these things with something like the moral horror that we look back on slavery -- as a kind of stupidity about ourselves affecting the way we see and interpret everything else. How can the church be faithful in such an epoch? It has above all to maintain a witness to an alternative way of thinking, a different evaluation of human nature, given it in Christ. Sometimes there is a place for a well-argued and well-targeted protest; but being noisy and strident is not a long-term strategy. What is needed above all is good teaching, and a community in which good understandings are kept alive in practice, by different and more humane ways of handling problems.

ATW: Where should evangelicals turn for a theology of the body?

OOD: I first learned to think about the human body from the writings of my teacher, Paul Ramsey of Princeton and from the writings of Saint Augustine. These taught me to think of the unity-in-difference of body and soul. About the meaning of technology for the human body, I learned a great deal from George Grant. Those three influences shaped the short book I wrote forty years ago about reproductive manipulation called *Begotten or Made?* Later I learned about the meaning of "the person" from Robert Spaemann. There are many other things to be learned, many other places to begin learning. But these were good ones, and I recommend them.

ATW: What makes Christian ethics distinct? How does a properly Christian ethic interface with general and special revelation?

OOD: Christian ethics understands practical and moral thought within the context of the good news of the gospel. It is, in the literal and proper sense of the word, an “evangelical” ethics. It speaks of the norms of practical reason and human conduct as implied by the proclamation of God’s determination to rescue our human lives from the power of sin in Jesus Christ. It is therefore a theological enterprise, drawing deeply, as theology must, on the witness of Scripture. At the same time, it is a fuller understanding of our common vocation to live as human beings in God’s world. We do not depend on the message of the gospel to know that we are human beings with human powers, including the power to dispose of ourselves in actions decisive for our world. Yet without this message, we shall not understand what we know in a vague outline, and therefore we shall not be able to grasp that knowledge effectively. The logic of “revelation” and “reason” in ethics is essentially the logic of “new” and “old” in conversion. Conversion is re-birth; it involves a deep reorganization of our practical thinking in the light of what God has done. We have to come to doubt what seemed self-evident to us, to entertain possibilities that seemed impossible to us, to learn the meaning and fruitfulness of sacrifice, repentance, obedience, discipline, and many other patterns of conduct that were simply unintelligible to us. At the same time, what it gives us is still a human way of living a human life -- before God -- a more human life, in fact. It teaches us to make sense of what was simply puzzling, to recognize beauty and splendor where we had no idea of it. “An old commandment that you had from the beginning,” said St. John, and yet “at the same time a new commandment.” This two-sided logic of conversion applies not simply to ways in which we act, but to the categories in which we think, for acting is, in the end, the working out of thinking. Revelation allows us to think and talk about a “natural law,” certainly; but it does not allow us to think and talk about our “nature” in just the way that we would have thought about it otherwise. Human nature becomes an idea reborn in Christ.

ATW: Can you state your general disposition to natural law and natural theology?

OOD: The concepts of “natural law” and “natural theology” need distinguishing. Natural Theology (as we use the term today) undertakes to distinguish what may be known of God by unaided reflection on experience from what can be known only by revelation. This may serve one of two purposes, revisionist or apologetic. The reconstruction of theology on natural and later scientific lines was a project of Enlightenment anti-Christianity, aiming to rid theology of revelatory, and therefore Christian, features. The apologetic approach seeks to illustrate how revelation does in fact speak to natural experience, interprets it, and answers its unresolved questions. This is simply one dimension of the theological task of understanding what is believed, receiving with intelligence what a historical revelation discloses to us.


Natural Law has a longer pedigree within theology. It seeks to link together two notions that at first glance might be thought to have nothing in common: nature and its regularities, law and its moral norms. It highlights the normativity of natural structures and the foundations of law in the given reality of human nature. It explores the relation between the “is” and the “ought,” which meet in the “good.” As such, of course, Natural Law is merely a program of thought, not a set of doctrines or assertions. There is no “data” of Natural Law. It cannot tell us where “nature” ends and “freedom” begins, or draw sharp lines between what is variable and what is fixed; it can only remind us that we discover these things by looking more closely. It does not close questions, but keeps them opened up in necessary directions. We can always question a given application of it to a given practical matter. But even in questioning this or that claim for the normativity of natural process, we are required to take seriously the fact that there is no such thing, for us created human beings, as a sheerly positive law, which has no grounding, however remote, in human nature.

ATW: In your view, would Protestantism benefit from greater interaction with the natural law tradition, or should it be more biblicist in nature?

OOD: Any invitation to Protestant theology to broaden its horizons historically is, of course, welcome. All theology needs this discipline. If the horizons are narrow, the hold we have on the center is weak, and the horizons of the Christian past are the first to shrink and deprive us of the opportunity of thinking in communion with past Christians. The present tense is always with us; the past drops out of sight almost as soon as it is no longer the present. No branch of Christian thought is so much in need of a conceptual memory, perhaps, as ethics. Moral thinkers are eager to prove their usefulness and be up with the unfolding present. It is a good ambition, but to be useful to the present moment we have to have something solid to bring with us to it. The special problem of our culture, which affects Christian thinkers as well as all others, is that we write a lot, and have forgotten how to read!

The center of the theological enterprise is the reading of the Bible -- not merely by not saying anything contrary to Scripture, but by articulating a faithful and living echo from our own new day to the mercies of God that are new every morning. But let us distinguish, once again. "Biblical" and "Biblicist" do not mean the same. As I use these terms -- there may be other conventions -- the one names a virtue of theology, the other a vice. All well-ordered theological reflection hopes to be "biblical" in a decisive and formative sense. The term "biblicist," on the other hand, suggests the refusal of conceptual forms that are not textually evidenced in the Bible, narrowing the theological task down to exegesis of Scriptural words and concepts either in running commentary or in systematic reformulation. Scriptural studies which have no view beyond exegesis are of essential service to theology, but they require an answer in the living thought of the obedience of thought, to block the way of faithful discipleship that leads from receiving what is given to accomplishing a witness yet to be borne. Faithful witness requires to be thought about and when we think together as a church, we think in company with the past

generations of Christians who have thought faithfully and well. To ignore them is to deprive ourselves of the support God will give us. Protestants of the Reformation era freely engaged with and made use of the concept of natural law. Protestants did not become suspicious of natural law until the twentieth century, and then only because of some quite specific uses of the idea that they were right to be on guard against. We need to engage with both sides of that argument -- and of course with non-Protestant theologians, very often tackling comparable questions in comparable ways. And theologians need to engage with them, wherever possible, by reading their own words, not merely at arm's length through summaries in encyclopedias and textbooks.

Care is needed, on the other hand, over the idea of a "natural law tradition." Natural Law is not a "tradition" in that sense. It is a category that fueled a set of wide-ranging discussions and interacted constantly with other Christian categories of thought: creation, law, grace, gospel, freedom, etc. If we go back to the great texts that talk most about natural law, both Catholic and Protestant, we shall find ourselves constantly led to take up other themes as well. If we persist in trying to isolate this one notion and construct a tradition around it, we shall seriously misunderstand what the texts of the past meant by it. For a long time, Thomas Aquinas's ethics suffered from this treatment, and the Protestant thought of Hugo Grotius in the seventeenth century has been constantly misunderstood both by supporters and opponents. At the end of that road lies the Enlightenment project of using the natural as a way to "reinvent" religion and ethics along post-Christian lines. If we go down it, we have only ourselves to blame for not reading our predecessors more carefully and respectfully! 

BOOK REVIEWS

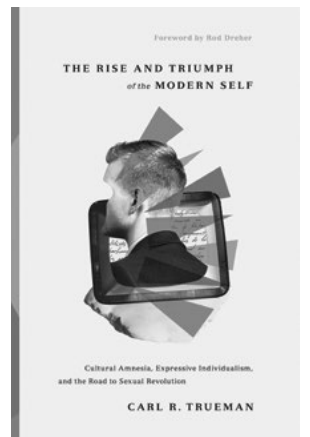
REVIEWED BY BOBBY JAMIESON

The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution.

“Born this way.” “Love is love.” “Equality is not a sin.”

The LGBTQ+ vanguard of the sexual revolution has an aura of normalcy and inevitability. Who could object to love? And who wants to be found on the wrong side of history? This aura of normalcy and inevitability is a powerful cultural force — one could even say weapon.

For those who want to resist this revolution, the question is how. Carl Trueman’s outstanding new book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, offers one essential piece of the answer. Postmodern deconstructionists learned from Nietzsche to undermine dominant moral paradigms by unveiling their genealogy: showing where they came from and whose interests they serve. In this thorough, measured, perceptive, and crisply-written work of intellectual history, Trueman offers a genealogy of his own.



Carl R. Trueman. *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.

In essence, this book is a genealogy of a single sentence: “I am a woman trapped in a man’s body.” Even a couple generations ago, such a statement would have been widely regarded as nonsense. “And yet today it is a sentence that many in our society regard as not only meaningful but so significant that to deny it or question it in some way is to reveal oneself as stupid, immoral, or subject to yet another irrational phobia” (19). In order for this statement to become widely plausible, a series of key shifts had to take place in popular beliefs regarding the relation of mind to body and gender to sex, as well as in applying notions of civil rights and individual liberty to newly conceived identities and orientations. Trueman’s book tells the story of those shifts.

The two chapters of Part 1 set out basic concepts that Trueman uses in his historical narrative. These are drawn principally from Philip Rieff, Charles Taylor, and Alasdair MacIntyre. Trueman compares and coordinates Rieff’s description of modern “psychological man” with Taylor’s analysis of the “expressive individualism” that defines our modern “social imaginary.” In both conceptions, the key to a meaningful life is discovering one’s authentic self within and enacting that inner self’s desires despite external opposition from tradition, authority, or religion.

Another especially important category that Trueman critically deploys is Rieff’s concept of a “third-world” culture. This refers not to economic development, but to broad historical shifts from societies whose morality was justified by appeals to the gods and fate (first world, as in ancient Greece), to faith in God’s

objective revelation (second world, as in medieval Christendom), to a purely immanent moral order, one not grounded in anything transcendent (third world: the modern West). From fate to faith to feeling: in our social imaginary, feeling is final. To skip to Trueman’s conclusion: “The long-term implications of this revolution are significant, for no culture or society that has had to justify itself by itself has ever maintained itself for any length of time” (381).

Parts 2 and 3 tell the historical story of how this social imaginary took shape. As Trueman pithily summarizes the narrative in a few places, first the self was psychologized, then psychology was sexualized, then sex was politicized. Key figures in the first step include Enlightenment and Romantic intellectuals and poets, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Percy Bysshe Shelley, who fostered a cult of authenticity and viewed monogamy as a repressive shackle. Key to the second step, the sexualizing of psychology, was Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis. And key to the politicization of sex is the trajectory from Marx through the critical theory of the New Left, which treats sex as a “constitutive element of public, social identity” (239) and seeks to liberate society from the tyranny of traditional sexual mores and their nursery, the family.

Part 4 narrates three triumphs of the sexual revolution: the triumphs of the erotic, the therapeutic, and “the T,” transgenderism. In these chapters Trueman sticks the landing. Each chapter compellingly shows how the trends traced earlier have come to define life in the modern west, from the ubiquity of

pornography to the “mystical approach” to personhood enshrined in the 1992 Supreme Court decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. The book concludes by glancing at possible futures and gesturing toward how Christians can best respond to this brave new world of plastic identity. And this rather full summary barely scratches the surface.

The only criticism of the book I am tempted to offer, but will not, is that its strict focus on intellectual history could obscure the indispensable role of material circumstances, especially exponential advances in technology, in fostering the fictions that to be human is to be self-made, and that one’s sex is included in the scope of that self-making. The reason I do not offer this criticism is that Trueman acknowledges the crucial role of technology in enabling these shifts (38–39), and grants that his narrative needs to be supplemented by one about “how the liquidity of our age intensifies this plasticity—the transient, temporary, and ephemeral nature of the institutions and the technology that shapes our identity” (384).

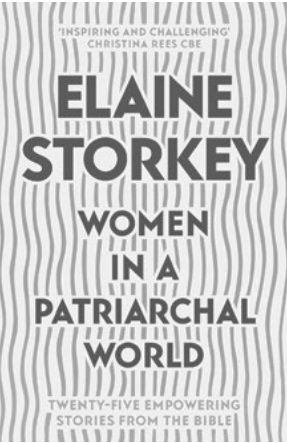
Perhaps the highest compliment I can pay the book is this: during the two weeks in which I read it, there were four or five times when, in the course of fairly routine teaching and counseling and conversations with church members, insights from the book sharpened my perception and enabled me to offer a better answer than I otherwise would have. Why has victimhood been weaponized, such that free speech is now more a problem than solution? Because harm and oppression are now regarded as primarily psychological categories

(55, 63). Why does it seem that every issue in our society has been politicized? Because “once one side in the political debate chooses to politicize an issue, then all sides have to play that game” (334–35). Trueman’s book explains the intellectual, cultural, and political waters we all swim and fish and bathe in.

More than that, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* explains how the water got to be this way. That our cultural waters are so contaminated by plastic notions of sex and identity is neither normal nor inevitable. And recognizing the sheer contingency of so much that the sexual revolution wants us to take for granted is one crucial step for resistance. ✕

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Women in a Patriarchal World: Twenty-five Empowering Stories from the Bible



Elaine Storkey. *Women in a Patriarchal World: Twenty-five Empowering Stories from the Bible*. London: SPCK, 2020.

INTRODUCTION

Elaine Storkey is an older stateswoman of British Anglican evangelicalism. Trained in philosophy and theology, her career has been long and influential. She has taught in Church of England seminaries (Oak Hill and Wycliffe Colleges), has served as President of TearFund, the UK's largest evangelical poverty relief charity, been Director (following John Stott) of the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity, and currently is President of Fulcrum, a group which represents the "centre ground of Anglican Evangelicalism."¹ Described in the press as an "open...liberal" evangelical, she has published on Christianity and feminism, amongst other topics, and is a familiar voice in the secular and Christian media.² This book is based on regular columns featured in the UK magazine *Woman Alive*. It is worth noting that on the front cover of this paperback Elaine Storkey's

name is significantly larger than the title; it seems that her reputation, rather than the content, is what will immediately attract readers.

SUMMARY

Women in a Patriarchal World has a simple formula. There are twenty-five short chapters, each telling the story of a woman or women from the Bible and then in a distinct unit, applying this to the contemporary world. At the end, two discussion questions are posed. The choice of women is interesting; arranged in canonical order, we start with Shiphrah and Puah, the Hebrew midwives who resisted Pharaoh's command to kill male babies, and conclude with Euodia and Syntyche, the quarrelsome women of the Philippian church. These last two are

the only women who are presented as a warning. All the others are offered as examples to be emulated, and sometimes, as victims deserving sympathy. Along the way we meet familiar faces, like Deborah, Ruth, Mary Magdala and Martha, but there are also some surprises, such as Pharaoh's daughter who adopted Moses, the wise woman of Abel Beth Maakah, who advised Joab and the people in 2 Samuel 20, and Pilate's wife.

Neither a devotional book nor a commentary, the purpose of *Women in a Patriarchal World* seems, as one reviewer has noted, to "blow open wide the all-too common assumption that women in the Bible always bowed to a patriarchal system," and to encourage contemporary women to follow their lead (i).

¹<https://www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/about/aims/>, accessed 8/10/2020.

²Charles Crow, quoted by Fran Bellow in <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/christian-broadcaster-dr-elaine-storkey-sues-church-college-jdqbp0zt5g5>, accessed 8/10/2020.

CRITICAL INTERACTION

Elaine Storkey writes very well. Most of her retellings of biblical narrative are fluent, accurate, though spare on detail, and engaging. She is able to show the radical and compassionate way in which Jesus treated several marginalised and vulnerable women, including the Samaritan at the well (John 4), the Canaanite who begged for her daughter to be healed (Matthew 8) and the woman with uncontrolled bleeding (Mark 5), depicting their cultural contexts fairly. The focus, though, in these chapters and in those featuring characters from elsewhere in the New and Old Testaments, is on what these women did, rather than what God did in and through them.

This horizontal hermeneutic, ignoring typological or theological dimensions of the texts, and so side-lining the expressed purpose of the divine and human authors, minimizes Christ. Tellingly, Christ is mentioned only twice in her eleven Old Testament chapters. In the thirteen New Testament chapters He is described as saviour, the one who died for us and rose again, but still the focus is on female action. Almost without exception, figures are commended for their strength. Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah's story is told, with trust and love noted, but it is the idea of commitment that Storkey singles out as the key message we need to hear. Hannah is elevated for her brave prayerfulness, Deborah for her confident leadership, and Rahab for her decisive faith and action.

This thread carries through in Storkey's treatment of New Testament characters. Very often what we are to learn from them is their boldness; the Canaanite

woman is "sassy" and Lydia "takes risks" (106, 117). These are certainly lessons worth teaching: all Christians are urged to be courageous, and Christian women perhaps especially need to hear the call to ambitious and sacrificial service in speaking out against injustice and in proclaiming the gospel.

Storkey does include examples of humility, generosity and trust, and indeed, reminds her readers that God's strength is made perfect in weakness, but she fails to read these narratives first as stories which teach us about God, and so misses the grace which truly empowers change. In neglecting language of personal sin and repentance, Storkey presents a faith which is not sufficient to produce and sustain the radical discipleship she calls for. This is revealed in the discussion questions (perhaps in part explained by the broad intended audience) which at times are very peculiar; on the story of Abigail, for example, we are asked about why women have often led peace protests and if churches should do more to help socially awkward individuals (57).

Driven by story-telling and exhortation, Storkey doesn't at any point give a clear definition of patriarchy, despite it being used on several occasions in the book, as well as in the title. This reveals her perspective; she is right to critique church history for often absorbing secular attitudes which repressed women, but she fails to be critical of the secular viewpoint she herself adopts. The result of this is that she fights against a straw man. Those who would say that Paul does not allow any woman to teach and encourage men to govern, or even those who beat their wives, are

the only alternatives to her evangelical feminism. Storkey neglects the complex relationships in which women most often work out their discipleship. This means that the twenty-five exemplars she chooses are women she sees acting independently, rather than as wives, mothers, daughters and co-workers.

CONCLUSION

Many of the lessons of *Women in a Patriarchal World* are important. It is patently true that today we need Spirit-filled women who will wisely and sacrificially speak the truth in love to those in power and in need. But without a call to come to Christ and be like him, rather than a call to be like his female followers, and without any significant engagement with the Bible's teaching about sex, this book is not empowering. ✕

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Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind

A few decades ago, during the early days of my own theological formation and evangelicalism's renewed interest in theocentric theology, I remember being puzzled by the publicized topic of a local theology conference, "The Doctrine of Man." What could be more "man-centered" than that? I thought.

Of course, as I grew in my doctrinal understanding, I saw not only the value, but also the deep need for a grounded anthropology. For a biblical understanding of man only helps one to see more clearly the God who created man. Thus, in our own day of continued theological confusion, perhaps a right focus on the doctrine of man is still just what we need to reorient our thinking of God and to keep him central. Owen Strachan is convinced of this very thing

and his *Reenchanting Humanity* serves well as a reorienting guide for evangelicals and other interested readers.

Strachan's work presents a "theology of mankind" and is built on the premise that as mankind is held captive under the spell of depravity, humanity needs reenchancement to fix its ailments and maladies — the chief of which is the denial of God and acknowledgement of his existence.

In nine chapters, *Reenchanting Humanity* covers both the traditional *loci* of a doctrinal anthropology and new facets tailored to the contemporary milieu. Strachan bolsters each study with helpful biblical exegesis and contemporary illustrations. A strength of his method is a return to his sturdy theme of reenchancement.

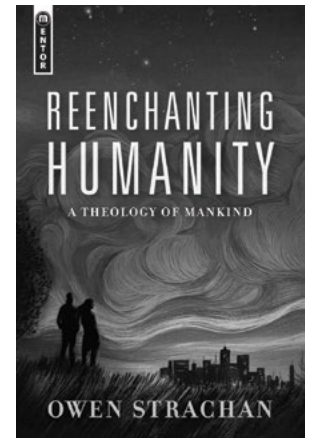
Chapter 1 starts with the *imago Dei* and mankind as a "God-stamped" creature. Strachan relates that these first principles which define the human person serve as the first step in the reenchancement of humanity, as discovery of this biblical foundation allows mankind "to rise from the primordial ooze" (50).

The second chapter pivots to harmartiology and the depths of mankind's depravity. One helpful construction in this chapter is the presentation of the "fourfold death of Adam" Strachan uses to explore the wide and deep effects of the sin of the first man. Adam dies judicially, spiritually, physically, and eternally — and this is just one way this book helps its readers to find reenchancement. By understanding the falseness of mankind, the reader can face "the plain truth of our inherent badness" and see the "one hope for sinful humanity: Christ" (94).

Chapter 3 explores the vocational nature of anthropology and the ways humans are designed for work. Reclassifying the purpose of work and the end for which one works, Strachan revives a healthy perspective that one's approach to work and leisure matters and serves as a vehicle for the glorification of God.

The fourth chapter is the longest, and with ample justification. The greatest area of doctrinal confusion and manipulation in the twenty-first century resides in sexual anthropology. Here Strachan delineates a biblical perspective on gender, marriage, fatherhood and motherhood, transgenderism, homosexuality, and lust and desire. Strachan has written on these topics in a variety of venues, scholarly and popular, and is well-versed in navigating these questions of the day with clarity that is rare among evangelicals.

Owen Strachan. *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind*. Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2019.



"*Reenchanting Humanity* serves well as a reorienting guide for evangelicals."

Chapter 5 examines race and ethnicity with the affirmation that “the Bible-following church cannot see diversity as a problem but as a sign of God’s beautiful creativity” (219). In an era when churches are divided over these issues, Strachan proposes a reenchanting way forward that centers on a Christocentric approach to unity activated by the knowledge that “who we are in Christ, and comprehending afresh just how powerful his cross is, provides us with the only lasting hope of oneness on this planet” (242).

The sixth chapter contributes a novel facet of the doctrine of humanity: technology. Here Strachan looks at the creative capacity of mankind and acknowledges that Jesus “did not lead his followers into a cave” when he began his ministry, but “took the world as it was” (259). With prescience, Strachan addresses the exploratory ideas of transhumanism and posthumanism and asserts with biblical carpentry, “we are not mere matter to be reengineered at a philosopher’s whim; we are an embodied people, and through the temple of the Holy Spirit, our bodies are temples of the living God (1 Cor 6:19)” (282).

Chapter 7 complements the preceding themes through an exploration of justice. Here Strachan directs the reader to remember that “Christianity preaches and promotes true justice, true equity, and true unity” (312). However, remembering why Christianity is able to do this serves as the key for understanding the dependent nature of justice — namely, biblical justice depends on Christ.

The eighth chapter addresses the contingent nature of humanity. Humans are finite creatures bound by the limits of time and a decaying nature. This exploration allows Strachan to present a “theology of death” and herein invites the reader to consider the God-Man and his defeat of death as the only source of hope when facing one’s mortality.

Chapter 9 arrives to tie several recurring themes together and does so through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Strachan gives a teleological anthropology that roots confidence in eternal redemption based on the Second Adam, the eternally generated Son of God who was not made, but who came to reign as King (371). Biblical anthropology “is rigorously personal; it restores humanity to our God-given purpose and design, but more than this it remakes us in the image of Christ, the true man” (382).

A reenchanting anthropology is not only a God-glorifying gift for believers to think anew about their place and position before a perfect God, but also to worship him as the perfect Man, who understands and helps. In *Reenchanting Humanity*, Strachan aims to give evangelicals a biblical anthropology for the twenty-first century, but he has done more than that. This book serves to illumine, to encourage, and, most importantly, to reorient evangelical thinking. By spending time thinking about a biblical doctrine of man, the spell of depravity is broken, and God is seen anew as the center of the universe. ✕

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REVIEWED BY CLAIRE SMITH

The Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are They Related in Any Way?

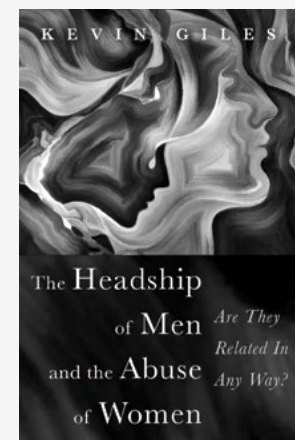
INTRODUCTION

No one could be unconcerned about the scourge of domestic abuse in our communities, and even our churches. One victim is one too many, and the increased stress and isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic has only made the matter more pressing.

It is this sombre reality that makes Kevin Giles’ book, *The Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women* so disappointing. Although it is short, easy to read, and deals with an issue that should concern us all, the most commendable aspect of the book is the author and his wife’s evident concern and practical care for women victims. But as a biblical response to the problem, it falls far short.

SUMMARY

The book’s central claim is that there is a causal connection between domestic abuse and a complementarian understanding of the relationship of men and women.



Kevin Giles. *The Headship of Men and the Abuse of Women: Are They Related in Any Way?* Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020.

However, the most the book proves is that in the hands of “needy and controlling men” the Bible’s good teaching about the different responsibilities of husbands and wives can become toxic, and be used to justify abuse (3, 17, 34, 35, 39) — a sad reality that most complementarians readily acknowledge, but not a reason to reject the pattern of relationships set out in Scripture.

Giles is a long-time advocate for an egalitarian understanding of the sexes and a “sharp critic” of the complementarian view (3). He is also a strong critic of the Anglican Church in Sydney, Australia, which is again a significant feature of this book. However, he says that recent debates at *both* the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) 2019 annual meeting *and* Sydney Anglican 2018 synod, two large complementarian church bodies, prompted him to write.

CRITICAL INTERACTION

I cannot vouch for the accuracy of his account of the SBC. I am certain, however, that his portrayal of Sydney Anglicans is not accurate.

For starters, his account of the synod debate about remarriage after divorce following domestic abuse contains significant errors of fact, which have been acknowledged by those on both sides of the debate.¹ I agree, and I was there and was an appointed minute reader. To be fair, Giles was not there, and has accepted others’ recollections. But he should have known better from the official public records.

These records show that the 2018 debate in question was about *remarriage* after divorce following abuse, not, as Giles frames it, about ensuring the safety of victims or even divorce *per se*.² They show that the debate followed the adoption of the Domestic Abuse Policy by the synod (*unanimously*, as Giles notes, 14), and that the Policy *unequivocally prioritised* the safety of the abused, and explicitly states that “we [Sydney Anglicans] will clearly teach that the Bible does not condone abuse and should not be interpreted to demand a spouse tolerate or submit to domestic abuse.”³ Giles’ claim, then, that 1 Peter 3 was

repeatedly invoked in the debate insisting that women were “to accept abuse and violence at the hand of their husband” is not only implausible but false (15, 70). (Again, I was there.) Similarly, his claim that the 161 members who voted *in a secret ballot* against the resolution did so because “they were convinced that a Christian woman should not divorce her husband no matter how abusive and violent he might be, even if she was in fear of her life and that of her children” (15) is utterly baseless, and an outrageous exercise in mindreading.

There are other problems. Giles does not even mention the Doctrine Commission Report⁴ into the implications of domestic abuse for marriage, divorce and remarriage, which was requested at the 2018 synod prior to the remarriage debate, and released months before Giles finished writing his book; nor does he mention the chapter on domestic abuse in my own book, *God’s Good Design: What the Bible Really Says about Men and Women* (Matthias Media, 2012, 2019), even though the book is on his bibliography, and I am a complementarian Sydney Anglican.

Another curiosity in Giles’ portrayal is that he is scrupulous in giving the Sydney Anglican *men* he mentions their ecclesiastical or academic titles (14, 15, 96, 98, 109) but in the case of Kara Hartley — although he mentions that she was the deputy chair of the committee responsible for the Domestic Abuse Policy — he *never once* mentions her ecclesiastical title as Archdeacon or her role as Archdeacon for Women’s Ministry in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney (4, 14, 96, 97, 101, 106). Personally, I find this omission disrespectful. It is not as if he didn’t know.⁵

I could go on, but, in short, his portrayal of Sydney Anglicans is selective and fanciful.

The same is true of Giles’ portrayal of complementarians more broadly.

Biblical complementarians believe that a husband’s headship is to be modelled on the self-sacrificial love of Christ Jesus for his church. They do not believe, as Giles claims, that the Bible teaches “male privilege” and

¹See the comments in response to both Andrew Katay and Robert Tong: <https://www.facebook.com/scot.mcknight/posts/1637139096451452> (accessed October 27, 2020).

²Resolution 50/18: Synod, noting that it is the prerogative of the Archbishop or a Regional Bishop, in accordance with the laws of this Church, whether or not to approve the remarriage of a divorced person, requests the Archbishop and Regional Bishops to consider approving the remarriage of a divorced person, where that person has been abused physically or emotionally by their former spouse.” This is cited in full by Giles, 14 fn. 36.

³The policy includes a 4-page document in easy-to-read English titled: ‘Appendix 14: Doctrine Commission on the Use and Misuse of Scripture in regard to Domestic Abuse,’ in Anglican Diocese of Sydney, *Responding to Domestic Abuse: Policy and Good Practice Guidelines* (2018), p. 5: https://www.sds.asn.au/sites/default/files/Responding%20to%20Domestic%20Abuse%20-%20Policy%20Guidelines%20and%20Resources.complete.pdf?doc_id=NTUyOTc=.

⁴A report of the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission. *The Implications of Domestic Abuse for Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage* (2019): https://www.sds.asn.au/sites/default/files/DocComm.Domestic%20Abuse%20Divorce%20and%20Remarriage%20Report%202019.pdf?doc_id=NDQwNjA=.

⁵The title appears in the two articles by Hartley that Giles engages with (32, 120).

“entitlement” (34, 36). They would sharply distinguish the biblical complementarian view of marriage and any concept of “*Christian or biblical patriarchy*” from traditional, hierarchical gender models and power relations usually associated with the word “patriarchy” (28, 37), and would similarly reject any “traditional notions of masculinity” (36, 109) that were contrary to Scripture.

They would likewise consider any ideas of male superiority or that women are second-class as anathema (56, 74). They would not characterise a husband’s headship as making “all the important decisions,” and that a wife must just submit (36, 47). They would dispute the claim that only egalitarian marriages can uphold the equality and dignity of both spouses (38, 43).

And I expect they would respond to the real-life pastoral scenarios that Giles recounts much as he did (54, 57–58) — by prioritising safety, by providing practical support, love, care and compassion to the victim(s), by discipline of the perpetrator, and, where necessary, by involving civil authorities.

No *biblical* complementarian would recognise their view in Giles’ exposition of it. Rather, he has equated the ungodly, misogynistic, controlling behaviour implicated in most domestic abuse with the biblical model of marriage as ordered and complementary relations between equals.

Moreover, his repeated claim that complementarian teaching in evangelical churches *often* leads to domestic abuse, especially in ministry marriages, is never substantiated, and one article cited as evidence (9, fn. 20), published in December 2019, expressly states that “there are *no statistics on the prevalence* of domestic violence in the Australian Christian community.”⁶

As significant as these problems are, more problematic still is Giles’ engagement with Scripture. I include a few examples.

He repeatedly pits Paul’s teaching about headship against Jesus’ words, saying that “Our Lord said not one word on male headship and wifely submission and much to the

contrary” (34, 42, 48, 66, 88). That is, he sets Scripture against Scripture, and places the authority and truth of Jesus’ words above those of the written apostolic word. And yet *all* Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16) and speaks with *one* voice, because it is the living word of the one true God.

He claims that Ephesians 5:22–24 contains “nothing distinctively Christian or countercultural” and that “Paul is speaking specifically of *the fallen ordering of this world*” (60, 67, italics original), despite the fact that Christ and the church are mentioned in these verses, and a Christian wife’s response to her husband is to be modelled on the church’s submission to Christ. Nothing could be more distinctively Christian.

He claims that Ephesians 5:21–33 contains “two contrasting and irreconcilable understandings of marriage standing side by side, a radically new and distinctively Christian one [i.e., 5:21, 25–33], and one that is as old as the fall and which prevails in the world” (67). Paradoxically, he claims to have arrived at this conclusion because of his “high view” of Scripture but observes that most evangelicals — both complementarian *and* egalitarian — will find his approach “very hard” to accept (67). Indeed!

Similarly, he claims that 1 Peter 3:1–6 is not about Christian marriage and that nothing makes this conclusion plainer to him than that “the word ‘love’ is not mentioned” (72). But on that basis how much else of the New Testament (NT) would similarly be sidelined?

He rules out 1 Timothy 2:8–15 as having application to today’s church because it says things that are found “nowhere else in the Bible” and “seem to directly contradict what is clearly taught elsewhere” (75–77). I would argue that many of the once-offs he lists are, in fact, addressed elsewhere in Scripture.⁷ It’s also worth asking: If something in God’s word is said only *once*, is that not enough?

I have mentioned some of Giles’ more idiosyncratic claims. Many of his arguments are familiar egalitarian ones and have already been answered by complementarian scholars (and others). This includes the argument at the

"It's also worth asking: If something in God's word is said only *once*, is that not enough?"

⁶Vicki Lowik and Annabel Taylor, “Evangelical Churches Believe Men Should Control Women: This is Why They Breed Domestic Abuse,” *The Conversation* (December 9, 2019). <https://theconversation.com/evangelical-churches-believe-men-shouldcontrol-women-thats-why-they-breed-domestic-violence-127437>. Italics added.

⁷For example, creational order: Gen. 2:7, 18–24; 1 Cor. 11:3, 7–9; different responsibilities in the church for women and men: 1 Cor. 14:33–35; 1 Tim. 2:11–15; 3:1–7; Tit. 1:5–9.

heart of Giles' book, which is that the NT teaching about the ordered relationship of husband and wife is like its teaching addressed to slaves: it was practical advice about living with a cultural reality that was contrary to the will of God in the first century, and does not belong in the twenty-first century.

Briefly, this claim overlooks the fact that the NT *never* speaks positively about the institution of slavery — except our slavery to Christ — and, in fact, encourages slaves to gain their freedom if possible (1 Cor. 7:21). On the other hand, the NT *only* speaks positively about the institution of marriage and the ordered relationships of husband and wife, and does so, not with *cultural* underpinning, but with *theological* underpinning, referencing both God's creation purposes and the relationship of Christ and the church.

CONCLUSION

Despite these significant criticisms of Giles' book, it would be a mistake to deny the reality that there *are* men who take the Bible's teaching about marriage and twist it to do great harm. They weaponize God's word to terrorise those they should love and protect, just as some parents weaponize Scripture to terrorise their children, and some pastors their flock. In each case, however, the fault is in the sinful human heart not in the Scriptures.

This is why the solution Giles proposes is not a solution at all. It is in obeying the Scriptures and upholding God's good pattern for marriage that true blessing is to be found. However, we must make sure that both our teaching and practice of that pattern could *never* be understood to legitimate the wickedness of domestic abuse. Moreover, we must do everything in our power to advocate, protect, and provide practical care for the vulnerable and abused, and leave no effort unspent in uncovering and acting against the evil of domestic abuse wherever it occurs. ✕

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REVIEWED BY KYLE D. CLAUNCH

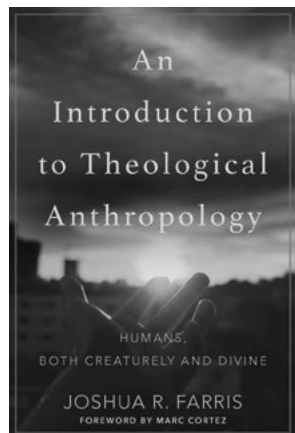
An Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans, Both Creaturely and Divine

INTRODUCTION

Joshua Farris's *An Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans, Both Creaturely and Divine* is written to be a comprehensive introduction to the major theological issues of anthropology. Farris is unapologetic in his commitment to the Scriptures and the broad contours of the Christian tradition. He identifies with a "broadly Reformed" tradition and informs readers early that he intends to construct a clearly Christian account that is informed and guarded by the orthodoxy of the ecumenical creeds of the church catholic as well as the major symbols and thinkers of his own tradition. The result is a lengthy and substantive account of theological anthropology that brings the challenges of this locus of theological inquiry into clear focus for critical engagement.

SUMMARY

Farris approaches the issue of humanity by asking three sets of questions: What are we? Who are we? Why are we? The first *what* question (Chapter 1) addresses human ontology, in particular the constitution of human nature as either material only (monism), material and immaterial (dualism), or some nuanced middle ground (e.g. hylomorphism, emergent physicalism, emergent dualism). Farris opts for a Cartesian version of substance dualism in which human persons are embodied souls, a conclusion that raises pertinent Christological questions, which I will address later. The issue of human origins is another *what* question (Chapter 2) that is made difficult by the prevailing notion of biological evolution and the question of its compatibility with the Christian



Joshua R. Farris. *An Introduction to Theological Anthropology: Humans, Both Creaturely and Divine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2020.

faith. Farris contends for the ultimate compatibility of Christian theology with the biological evolution of the human person (so, a form of theistic evolution) and labors to account for the uniqueness of humanity and the reality of a real primal pair within that framework. Despite his thorough labors, readers who are skeptical about the compatibility of any kind of evolutionary account of human origins will likely remain so at the conclusion of the chapter (more on this later). Other *what* questions take up the issue of the image of God (Chapter 3) and the meaning of human freedom in which Farris prefers a version of Libertarianism as opposed to various forms of compatibilism, another issue taken up later in this review (Chapter 4).

The next set of questions are the *who* questions. The issue of original sin and creaturely failure is considered under the question, “Who am I at Birth?” (Chapter 5). Farris argues for an account of original sin that does not include the heredity (federal or seminal) of guilt. Rather, only the corruption of Adam’s sin is inherited by his posterity. More strictly Reformed/Augustinian readers will take issue with Farris’s “broadly Reformed” understanding on this score. Humanity as redeemed is taken up under the question, “Who am I in Christ?” (Chapter 6). Here Farris discusses the discipline of “Christological anthropology” and argues that Christology is a regulative principle for anthropology. In this chapter he includes a wonderful discussion of the retrieval of a Reformed notion of the beatific vision, which is a resurrected vision of the risen incarnate Son in glory. Another *who* question – “Who are We in Culture?” – takes up the important topics of work and race as well as the pertinent question of disability (Chapter 7).

Under the question, “Who are We as Male and Female,” Farris tackles the tough subjects of gender and sexuality (Chapter 8). Here Farris walks with careful biblical fidelity and philosophical precision through such issues as the relation between biological sex and gender, the meaning of marriage, same-sex attraction, and the fascinating question of gender in relation to the human immaterial soul.

The final section of the book takes up the *why* questions. “Why am I Here?” (Chapter 9) addresses the question of the afterlife with particular attention given to what theologians traditionally refer to as the intermediate state. For Farris, the intermediate state is a state of personal disembodied existence, the existence of the soul, after somatic (bodily) death. This state is characterized by fullness of joy because of the soul’s experience of the beatific vision. However, the joy experienced in this

state includes a hopeful anticipation of bodily resurrection. The book’s final question, “Why Do I Exist?” (Chapter 10) takes up the issue of the afterlife with particular emphasis on the final resurrected state of believers. Here, Farris develops most fully his understanding of the beatific vision, acknowledging as he goes that his emphasis on the priority of the immaterial soul and the immaterial nature of the beatific vision seems at first to make the resurrection of the body rather insignificant. He appeals to John Owen and Jonathan Edwards, however, as theologians who prioritize the immaterial in their understanding of the beatific vision but unite it with corporeal seeing through a resurrected body in a way that parallels the words of Jesus to Philip: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). Thus, the soul’s immaterial vision of the divine essence is concurrent with the body’s corporeal vision of the risen Christ.



CRITICAL INTERACTION

Given the breadth of the topics addressed in this substantial volume, this review will have to be quite selective in its critical interaction. I will begin by addressing a couple of matters for which I commend Farris and his approach. I will follow this with several areas of significant concern regarding his conclusions.

Positive Observations

First, this book is commendable for the sheer scholarly force and breadth of its presentation. While he acknowledges the need to limit the depth with which he addresses each issue, Farris has left few topics unaddressed in these pages. He is clearly an expert in the field of theological anthropology as both his own prior publishing record and the evidence of research in the present volume make clear. He seems to have admirably struck the balance between introducing the major topics in an objective way without being entirely noncommittal in his assessments. On major topics, Farris clearly identifies his own position, but when addressing the finer points of discussion within his broader commitments, he often leaves the reader to consider the options. The result may be frustration for those wanting to pin the author down on particulars. However, the strategy is quite effective for an introductory text because of the way it invites readers to think carefully through potential problems and explore possible solutions more carefully in their own study. Secondly, Farris is to be commended for his strongly held Christian conviction. The field of theological anthropology, perhaps more acutely than any other field of Christian study, is subject to

extreme cultural and intellectual pressure to abandon the classic commitments of the Christian faith as laid down in Holy Scripture. The pervasive influence of secular materialism, the ever-controversial matters of gender and sexuality, the sanctity of the unborn human in tension with the so-called freedom of a woman to choose, the dignity of all ethnicities and the evil of racial injustice – these are all massively divisive issues in our current cultural moment, and all of them are directly related to the topic of theological anthropology. There is no such thing as a truly *Christian* theological anthropology that is going to placate the spirit of the age and find acceptance among its cultured elites. In spite of the enormous pressure this field of study is under, Farris presents a theological anthropology that is clearly and distinctly Christian. While I take issue with a number of the positions he advances regarding matters of no small importance, Farris is to be commended for clinging to a thoroughly Christian view throughout the volume. In an age when all the intellectual momentum is swinging toward materialistic monist accounts of human nature, influencing many Christian theologians in that direction, Farris is committed to a dualist account that acknowledges, with Scripture and the Christian tradition, the concrete reality of the immaterial human soul. In an age when all the intellectual and popular cultural momentum is swinging toward the obliteration of God's sovereign right as Creator to make humans as male *or* female, man *or* woman, Farris is firm in his commitment that God creates gendered humans; we do not create our own gendered identity. In a cultural moment marked distinctly by the demand for sexual autonomy, Farris

defends the clear biblical teaching that sex acts are intended by God only for the covenantal context of sacred marriage, which is only legitimate between a man and a woman. This list could go on.

Areas of Concern

The Christological Problem of Persons as Souls. For all that is positive about this impressive volume, there are a few issues that are of more than minor concerns in my estimation. In his fascinating and insightful chapter on the discipline of "Christological anthropology" (Chapter 6), Farris rightly warns: "If our theories of constitution lack the resources to account for our Christology or have some significant challenges, then we should consider rethinking our anthropologies in light of our Christologies" (165). I could not agree more, yet it is precisely in the area of Christology that Farris's account of human constitution runs into problems.

In his opening chapter, Farris engages in a helpful and interesting discussion of the constitution of human nature, considering various kinds of monism and dualism that have been advocated by Christian theologians. As already noted, Farris embraces a substance dualist understanding of the human, such that the human soul is an immaterial substance. As the discussion develops, however, it becomes clear that Farris's account of substance dualism is a Cartesian account, meaning that the soul is not only a component part of a complete human nature, but the soul *just is* the human person. Farris states this plainly: "I take it that persons are identical with a soul or an immaterial thing" (36). This Cartesian account of substance dualism

creates a particularly difficult problem for Christology. A Cartesian account of substance dualism entails a kind of Apollinarian Christology or, alternatively, a kind of Nestorian Christology.

Apollinaris of Laodicea (d. AD 382) taught that God the Son, in the incarnation, assumed only a human body but that he did not assume a human soul. Rather, the person of the Son was in the place of a human soul. This understanding of the incarnation was rejected as a heresy in the Fourth Century because it failed to represent faithfully the biblical teaching that Christ is fully human (e.g. Heb 2:14-18). Gregory of Nazianzus, in his refutation of Apollinarian Christology, famously said, "Whatever is not assumed is not healed" (*Epistle 101: To Cledonius Against Apollinaris*). That is, if the Son of God did not assume a human soul in the incarnation, then the human soul is not saved by the Son's atoning work. The church clearly stated its rejection of Apollinarianism in the Definition of Chalcedon (AD 451) with the assertion that the Son of God, who is "consubstantial with us according to manhood" (thus, human in every way), assumed a human "rational soul." Cartesian dualism is in grave danger of the error of Apollinarianism because of its assertion that the soul *is* the human person. Because the person of the Son pre-exists the incarnation, the church has always maintained that the person of Christ is a divine person who assumed a human nature. But if the soul just is the human person, then the pre-existent divine Son could only assume a human body, the material part of human nature. The soul, being a person, could not be assumed because the Son of God is already (eternally) a person.

Another major error comes into view if the Cartesian dualist affirms that the Son of God did in fact assume an immaterial, rational soul at the incarnation. If the eternal divine person of the Son assumes a human soul, which is a person, the result is two persons. This is precisely the error of the Nestorian heresy. Nestorius, an early Fifth Century bishop contended for an account of the incarnation that resulted, conceptually, in two sons – the Son of God and the son of Mary – and thus two persons. The unity of the Son of God as the only redeemer of humanity was lost in his account. The church rejected this notion as heretical, and the Definition of Chalcedon once again gives the definitive pronouncement with its repeated refrain of “one and the same Son” and with its famous negating adverbs that declare the two natures of the Son to be “without separation” and “without division.”

Interestingly, Farris is aware of this problem. In his generally fantastic discussion about the discipline of Christological anthropology, after rightly recognizing Christology as a regulative principle for anthropology, he acknowledges that Cartesian dualism raises the problem identified above: there is a challenge for “dualist accounts that take it that the individual human just is identical to his or her soul or that the core of the individual human is the soul – that is, broadly Cartesian accounts of human nature.” He goes on, “The challenge for this account is that minds or souls just are persons” (175). In response, Farris very briefly suggests two possible solutions without committing to either one. Furthermore, it is not at all clear that either solution does anything to alleviate the problem. One solution makes the human rational mind a property of the material body, thus effectively undermining substance dualism in

the first place. The other solution is an abstractist conception of the incarnation that claims that Christ’s humanity is his possession of sufficient properties to be human without assuming a concrete human soul. But this is just a version of Apollinarianism, thus an example of the problem, not a solution to it.

The only coherent way for a substance dualist to avoid the grave error of Apollinarianism without falling into the equally serious mistake of Nestorianism is to conceive of the rational, immaterial soul as a component part of human nature but to maintain a distinction between human *nature* (as a composite of body and soul) and the human *person*. It is Christology that makes Christian theologians aware of the important need for such a fine distinction. As Farris himself rightly recommends, it would seem that it is time to consider rethinking anthropology in light of Christology.

The Problem with Biological Evolution and a Primal Pair. The next concern pertains to Harris’s embrace of an evolutionary origin of human life. In his second chapter, Farris tackles the thorny question of origins. As one would expect, he recognizes the many different approaches to the question of human origin among Christians, especially in light of the challenge of the theory of biological evolution. He then advances a view of human origin that assumes the biological evolution of the species from lower life forms. He openly acknowledges the difficulty such a view raises for one who (like Farris) remains committed to the uniqueness of humanity over against the animals and the historical reality of a primal pair. Farris entertains several possible strategies for affirming these commitments without committing himself to one view over another. Space does not permit a summary of all possibilities, but they all have in common



the necessity of understanding the account of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2-3 as something other than straightforward historical narrative. Thus, while the strategies he proposes may allow Farris coherently to affirm human uniqueness and a historical primal pair, the hermeneutical entailments of affirming an evolutionary origin for humanity are more costly than he acknowledges.

The hermeneutical commitments necessary to affirm an evolutionary worldview, in my estimation, are detrimental to faithful interpretation of Scripture and thus to the Christian faith. If the story of Adam and Eve as our first parents cannot be taken as narrative history, then the historical reliability of the rest of the Genesis narrative is cast in doubt. Farris himself is committed to the historicity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as is clear from other discussions in the book. But what textual basis is there for affirming the historical character of Abraham and his progeny if the account of Adam and Eve is to be taken in some manner other than narrative history? In fact, one of the key textual clues that identifies Genesis as a historical account is the repetition of the Hebrew word *toledot* (generations) to introduce key figures and their stories. The history of Noah and each of his three sons, the history of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of Esau – all are introduced with the genealogical historical marker, *toledot*. Interestingly, the story of Adam and Eve in Eden is introduced in the very same way in Genesis 2:4, “These are the generations (*toledot*) of the heavens and the earth” (ESV). Furthermore, Adam’s own family history is introduced with a *toledot* in Genesis 5:1. It would seem that

adopting a view of the story of Adam and Eve as something other than historical is motivated exclusively by a commitment to theories of origin that are foreign to the text itself. Once one is compelled to make this move for Genesis 2-3, what is there to stop the move from being consistently applied to the rest of Genesis and beyond?

Libertarian Freedom as Consistent with God’s Sovereignty. Another concern, one that will be shared by most Reformed readers, is Farris’s embrace of a libertarian notion of the freedom of the will. Libertarian freedom, which means “human actions are not determined, but instead humans are able to do otherwise” (112), is the intuitive view and the only one that can coherently account for human responsibility according to Farris. He gives space to discussing compatibilism, the view that true human responsibility is compatible with exhaustive and meticulous sovereignty. Classical compatibilism defines freedom in an entirely different way than libertarians, saying that freedom is the ability to act according to one’s highest desires. But Farris wonders if this is really freedom at all. He ultimately rejects compatibilism as unable to deliver on its promise. Thus, Farris affirms libertarian freedom and accepts the entailment that all actions are not ultimately determined by divine decree.

Farris rightly notes that the greatest challenge for libertarian models of freedom is to maintain the genuine sovereignty of God. He claims that libertarian models are able to do this coherently (115), but he offers no suggestion as to how this is the case. Furthermore, Farris explicitly rejects open theism (the view that the future is unknown, or open, even to God) and affirms divine foreknowledge (115, fn. 5).

Even so, he makes no attempt to explain how a libertarian model of freedom is even remotely coherent in light of perfect divine foreknowledge, which is one of the most trenchant critiques of libertarian models of freedom in the compatibilist literature. It seemed to me that compatibilism did not receive a fair hearing but was presented in a weak form and dismissed without serious consideration, a move uncharacteristic of Farris on other topics.

CONCLUSION

Interested students of theology and seasoned theologians alike will benefit greatly from Farris’s work in this book. It serves as a stimulating and enjoyable foray into the major issues of Christian theological anthropology and opens up countless pathways for further rigorous thought, research, and development. ✕

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*"It serves as a stimulating
and enjoyable foray into the
major issues of Christian
theological anthropology..."*

The True Woman: The Beauty and Strength of a Godly Woman, Updated Edition



Susan Hunt. *The True Woman: The Beauty and Strength of a Godly Woman*, Updated Edition. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019.

INTRODUCTION

The True Woman by Susan Hunt has been accurately regarded as a classic since its publication in 1997. The updated 2019 edition at the very least serves to remind us to revisit this volume. To paraphrase the author, the concepts have not changed but her understanding of them has definitely expanded. Readers who seek to learn from her wise teaching are the beneficiaries of her updated thoughts and illustrations in this new edition. If making the case to be a true woman according to biblical standards was considered countercultural twenty-three years ago, it is off the charts now in the midst of our sweeping societal changes.

SUMMARY

The book is organized into three sections. Part one sets up the thesis well and is titled *The True Woman Versus The New Woman*. Hunt succinctly posits her argument, “the true woman is a reflection of her redemption” (30) and “a reflection of God’s glory” (43). As God’s image-bearers who have been rescued and redeemed, we have the privilege to live our days on this earth as women. We should rejoice in that truth daily as we seek to be true reflections of our wise and good Creator.

Hunt reminds us that the concept of being a “true woman” dates back to the mid-nineteenth century when it was widely understood and needed

little explanation. But that was when most women relied on God’s infallible Word and the indwelling Spirit and not their own experience. Hunt asks a good question: “Is the loss of true womanhood a basic cause for our current cultural poverty and confusion?” (34). The urgency for us to recapture what we lost cannot be overstated. Hunt provides compelling arguments about the responsibility that each of us bears. Our commitment to biblical truth and sound theology cannot be replaced by anything the world has to offer.

In part two, Hunt presents specific characteristics of the true woman and is titled *Her Identity*. Steeped in rich theology and pertinent quotes from



trusted theologians, Hunt walks her readers through the beautiful process of redemption in Christ and shows that our desire to build relationships and community filled with compassion will flow as a result. Part three, titled *Her Virtue*, looks at four key, albeit controversial virtues that the true woman possesses. Careful consideration is given to piety, purity, domesticity, and submission. Each section is chock full of scriptural references as well as illustrations and quotes. The chapters end with helpful summaries and personal reflection questions that could be used by an individual reader, for mentoring, or even in a small group setting.

CRITICAL INTERACTION

Perhaps some younger readers have passed over this work as just another book by a pastor's wife from a complementarian perspective. It is so much more than that. Clearly, it was thrust into the spotlight when Nancy

DeMoss Wolgemuth met with Susan Hunt and others and penned the *True Woman Manifesto* in 2008 that has now been signed by tens of thousands of us. Nancy wrote the forward to the new edition of *The True Woman* and called Susan Hunt "the grandmother of the True Woman movement" (15). Now widowed and in her eightieth year of life, Susan Hunt truly has impacted so many of us, especially by way of this book, but also with her other works including *By Design* and *Spiritual Mothering* among others. I have long recommended the book she wrote with her son, Richie, titled *Big Truths for Little Kids*, for use in catechizing children. We used it with our kids, but as a devout Baptist, I will admit that I had to cut and paste in a few sections.

This book is not a quick read and can feel a bit overly formatted with lots of vignettes and some long quotes. I will admit I prefer some of the "reflecting redemptions" essays by guests, included

at the end of each chapter in the original version, but I understand the author's desire to freshen up this new edition with contemporary entries. I do wish she had devoted at least some ink to the issue of modesty when discussing the virtues. It is certainly a biblical issue and one that is becoming increasingly abandoned in our culture with each passing day, and, sadly, not given enough consideration by many women professing godliness as well. She carefully treats the subject of submission and provides a clarifying definition (215) that flies in the face of so many misconceptions we regularly encounter.

You may want to run out and purchase a copy of John Angell James' *Female Piety* from 1853 after reading so many pertinent quotes from it in this book, including one at the start of each chapter. Or you may reach for the classic *Stepping Heavenward* by Elizabeth Prentiss which is also repeatedly quoted. The addition of the Scripture index to this edition is helpful. Susan Hunt references passages from over forty books of the Bible in her hundreds of quotes. No wonder it is such a great book!

I practically wore out my highlighter as I read this new edition. It is not that the content is brand new to us but it is stated in such a way that rings true and causes the reader to want to remember why the points are so critical. Perhaps my favorite section dealt with pride and purity (178-181). Pride is not exactly what you might think one would highlight from a book that is perceived to be all about biblical femininity. Yet it was particularly compelling and convicting as I daily deal with the tendency to be prideful instead of being filled with humility and gratitude.

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CONCLUSION

Giants of the faith like D. James Kennedy and Elisabeth Elliot highly commended the first edition of *The True Woman*. I am so glad Susan Hunt agreed to update it slightly but left it largely unchanged. Many books on biblical femininity have been published since 1997 and many more are likely in the works even now. Yet this book is one of those unusual and trustworthy works that we as biblical women should make a point to reread annually. It gets to the heart of biblical femininity at the outset but makes a beeline to the gospel with clearly-stated truth backed up by hundreds of Scripture references. There's no time for silly stories or trite comparisons of men and women that try to convince us that we really are better off being female. No fluff here. We really did not need an updated edition to point us to the serious state of the true woman versus the new woman but it's a nice reminder that even with a new cover, this book is like an old friend. Newly treasured quotes yet to be discovered await. Admonitions to be heeded and applied to the climate of the current day will emerge. Encouragement that is desperately needed now more than ever as we walk against the prevailing opinion of our times feels like a soothing balm. The subtitle sums it up well. This book delivers what it promises as it aptly makes the case for us to embrace both the beauty and the strength of a godly woman—a true woman. ✕

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Himself is God;
It is He who has made
us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the
sheep of His pasture.*

PSALM 100:3, NASB



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