

IS COMPLEMENTARIANISM
A MAN-MADE DOCTRINE?

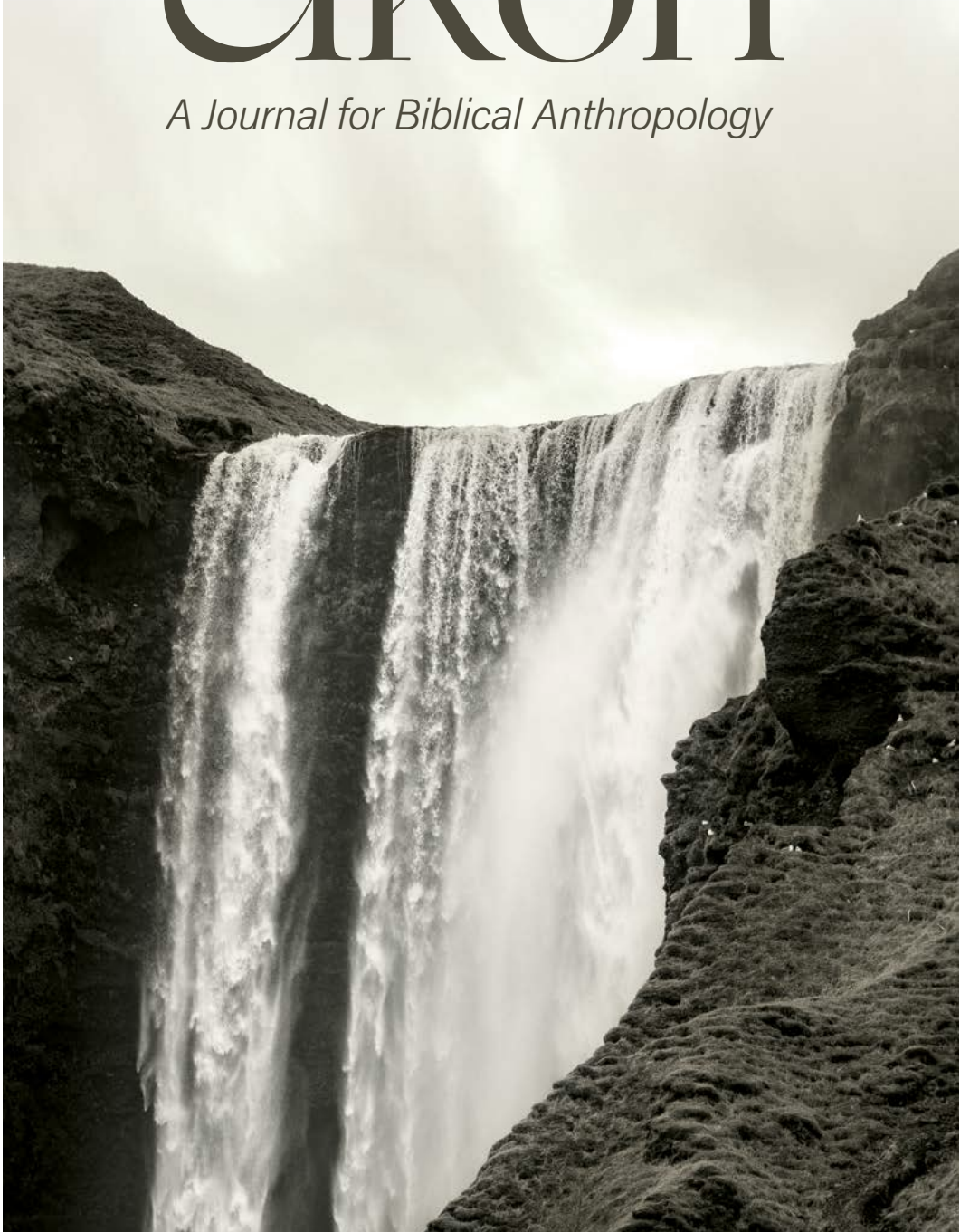
Denny Burk

INSTRUMENTS OF
UNRIGHTEOUSNESS: HOW
PORNOGRAPHY OFFENDS
MALE EMBODIMENT *Joe Rigney*

JESUS AND JOHN WAYNE: HOW
WHITE EVANGELICALS CORRUPTED
A FAITH AND FRACTURED A NATION
Reviewed by Anne Kennedy

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A Cultural History of Fatherhood & Its Retrieval

Over the past few years, voices in the evangelical world have decried the emasculation of men in the West, particularly within the Church. This concern has been laid at the foot of gender confusion and the rise of a militant feminism. But it strikes me that the central issue for men in the Western world is not so much emasculation (which seems to assume a Darwinian concept of life as struggle), as the diminishment of fatherhood and the loss of male friendship. These are huge topics. Allow me to tackle the first here, and the latter in a future column.

Over the past two centuries, there has been a steady recession of the social role of fatherhood. Fathers have either gradually moved or been moved from the heart to the margins of family life. Overall, the cultural

story of fatherhood in the West has been essentially downhill since the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But at the outset of the long eighteenth century, fathers were regarded as primary and irreplaceable caregivers in the family.

The central role that fathers played in the nurture and flourishing of their children can be seen in five distinct ways:

- (1) Throughout the eighteenth century, child-rearing manuals were generally addressed to fathers, not mothers.
- (2) Until the early nineteenth century, when there was a divorce, it was the established custom to award the custody of children to their fathers.

- (3) Throughout this period, it was fathers, not mothers, who were the chief correspondents with any children who lived away from home.
- (4) Fathers were regarded as the primary influencers of the marital choices of their children and were responsible for the entry of children, especially sons, into the world outside the home.
- (5) And most importantly, fathers had the primary responsibility for what was seen as the most essential of parental tasks: the religious and moral education of the children. As a result — rightly or wrongly — it would be the father who was praised or blamed for the eventual outcome of a child's life.

Running an eye over this list, it does not require sociological smarts to realize that there has been a fundamental contraction of the concept of fatherhood in the past 300 years. Industrialization and the emergence of the modern economy led to the physical separation of home and work (though this current pandemic may well reverse this trend in part). No longer, as the neo-Freudian thinker Alexander Mitscherlich (1908–1982) once put it, could children typically acquire skills “by watching one’s father, working with him, seeing the way he handled things, observing the degree of knowledge and skill he had attained as well as his limitations.”¹ The absence of the father for much of the day led to a steady feminization of the domestic sphere.

Accompanying this radical change were a fistful of new ideas about the nature of gender and family life. Childhood, for example, came to be seen as a special

stage of life that women were designed to supervise. Their nurturing capabilities were seen in distinct contrast to the outside world that was the sphere of men. As early as the 1830s, child-rearing manuals, now more often addressed to mothers, began to deplore the father’s absence from the home.

Of course, this contraction of the paternal sphere did not impact the Western world uniformly, yet the overall trend of the nineteenth century is clearly toward the shrinking of fatherhood. “Paternal neglect,” warned a New England pastor in 1842, was causing “the ruin of many families.”² By the twentieth century, many men were looking outside the home for the meaning of their maleness. In the words of David Blankenhorn, “masculinity became less domesticated, defined less by effective paternity and more by individual ambition and achievement.”³ The fatherhood of men was reduced to one role: that of breadwinner. And this was challenged by the increasing number of women entering the workforce after World War II.

In fine, an eighteenth-century father would not recognize his counterpart in the twenty-first West. Our pressing challenge is to retrieve true fatherhood — and in this way rediscover a key element of masculinity. ✕

¹Alexander Mitscherlich, *Society Without the Father: A Contribution to Social Psychology*, trans. Eric Mosbacher (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & World, 1969).
²Cited David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 14.
³Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 15.

Orb-Weaving Spiders, Elephant Seals, Men, and Women: A Biological Survey and Theological Reflection on Sexual Dimorphism



INTRODUCTION

We seldom appreciate the biologic diversity and complexity of our world. Our lives, and even much of the biblical narrative itself, grow upon a lattice of biology. A survey of this fascinating biological framework allows for reflection on the specific ways God ordered living things and how this shapes our understanding of the universe, reality, and even the Godhead itself. In considering the diverse processes in which life survives, interacts, and reproduces, we realize the ways in which life *can* do these things are quite broad. In judging mankind's place in this diversity, men and women seem more specific, peculiar, and interesting. Why

did God create life *exactly* the way he did? Why did God create humans as male and female *and not in other forms*? Why did he create these genders *specifically* as we find men and women, and not something different altogether?

After a brief survey of the biology of reproduction and gender, we will consider humanity's place within this biological spectrum, the specific nature of sexual dimorphism¹ in humans, and reflect theologically on the peculiar nature in which men and women are created, how they relate, and how this dimorphism reflects the image of God.

LIFE CREATED TO REPRODUCE

Before considering the *ways* life reproduces, it is fascinating to consider at a more fundamental level that *God intended life to replicate*. Surely, the need for reproduction stemmed from a desire to fill an earth devoid of life, and to replace organisms that would pass away through events proceeding from the Fall (e.g., disease, trauma, aging, and even being consumed by other organisms for food). Beyond this, however, the biological cycle of reproduction, growth, and death is essential to understanding the nature of God and his redemption of mankind. When we witness new life created, we are amazed at the complexity of life that

¹Sexual dimorphism will be defined as the presence of two forms of an organism — male and female — differentiated based upon their secondary sexual characteristics (i.e. differences beyond their genitalia and reproductive tracts).

could only proceed from a Creator. Death reminds humans of ultimate judgment for sin. Our biological constraints are in sharp contrast to a God who never suffers change or death. Our very conception contrasts with a God who was never created. Biology provides the language for Paul to refer to our unregenerate state as being “*dead* in the trespasses and sins” in which we walked (Eph. 2:1) and allows for Jesus to describe our regeneration as being “*born again*” (John 3:3). Indeed, it would be impossible for us to understand the theological canvas of the substitutionary death of Jesus on our behalf and our resurrection from death to everlasting life, without the *pre-existing biological “paint strokes”* of life and death, procreation and passing, conception and expiration. Biology provides a lens that allows us to comprehend the nature and revelation of God, consequences of sin, and our redemption to a new creation through Jesus Christ. It seems impossible for us to comprehend God without the language of biology.

ASEXUAL REPRODUCTION

Male and female forms do not exist in all living things. Most prokaryotic organisms (i.e., those without an organized nucleus, such as bacteria) reproduce without the uniting of two different sexual cells (gametes) such as an egg or sperm. The organism doubles its genetic information and divides into two similar organisms, each an exact genetic replica of the original. This has contemporary application in the field of medicine. If a surgeon obtains a bacterial sample from a diseased organ, this small culture can be analyzed for resistance to different antibiotics. Antibiotics can

be chosen based upon this analysis. It is assumed that any remaining bacteria will have similar resistance patterns because the bacteria have reproduced *asexually*. A single colony of bacteria will have a more homogeneous genetic pool than, for example, a single flock of turkeys. Interestingly, through a process known as *conjugation*, even prokaryotic cells may still share genetic information by sharing genes through structures on their surfaces known as pili. All prokaryotic organisms reproduce in this manner, as well as some eukaryotic organisms (i.e., those with an organized cell nucleus) such as some types of fungi.

Beyond bacteria, multicellular life (such as invertebrates) can also reproduce asexually. *Budding* is a process where smaller offspring may grow from larger “parent” organisms. These offspring may detach from their parent organism or remain attached and form large colonies, common with species of coral. In a process known as *fission*, a larger animal may split down the middle into two separate, similarly-sized organisms with the same genetic makeup. Sea anemones (e.g., *Anthopleura elegantissima*) reproduce in this manner. *Fragmentation* is still a different method whereby an animal broken or cut into pieces may regenerate portions of its body, and thus under certain circumstances produce multiple new individuals. Certain species of worms and starfish can reproduce by fragmentation.²

ASEXUAL AND SEXUAL REPRODUCTION

Before considering the more familiar biology of sexual reproduction, incredibly, some organisms can produce in both asexual *and* sexual manners.

Chlamydomonas is a green algae which can reproduce in an asexual manner in absence of biological stress. However, in harsh conditions such as a lack of nutrients or adequate water, the algae will form two identical gametes and undergo sexual reproduction. When reproducing sexually, the two identical gametes fuse to form a new organism which can develop a durable coat, protecting the organism from harsh conditions. This coat does not develop when the organism reproduces asexually.³

PARTHENOGENESIS

In a process known as parthenogenesis (*παρθένος*, “virgin” + *γένεσις*, “creation”), offspring may develop from an egg that has not been fertilized by sperm. Some invertebrates such as the small freshwater crustacean *Daphnia* produce two types of eggs, one which may be fertilized by sperm and another which may produce offspring without fertilization. Different eggs may be produced depending on the season or occur during different times of stress, with asexual reproduction more common in stable conditions and sexual reproduction dominating during times of environmental stress. Adults produced from parthenogenesis may be haploid (containing only one full set of chromosomes), or diploid (two full sets of chromosomes, where the egg combines with a polar body or another nucleus).⁴

Parthenogenesis is essential in forming the hierarchical structure of social insects

such as bees, wasps, and ants. Male honey bees develop via parthenogenesis from unfertilized eggs, while both female “worker” bees and queens develop from fertilized eggs. Thus, males carry only one set of genes, and females carry two sets, similar to humans. Females that are fed a special food known as “royal jelly” will become queens.

Certain species of whiptail lizards of the genus *Cnemidophorus* reproduce *only* through parthenogenesis. All members of these species are female, and though offspring grow from unfertilized eggs, members of the species still imitate courtship and mating with some lizards adopting a “male role.” Females with higher levels of estrogen during ovulation will be mounted by lizards with lower levels of estrogen. Mimicking lizards who reproduce sexually, this stimuli seems essential for reproductive success, as isolated lizards lay fewer eggs than those who engage in this role playing behavior.⁵

Finally, some animals which do not usually reproduce through parthenogenesis may be seen to do so in circumstances where they are isolated from a mate. Termed “facultative parthenogenesis,” this phenomenon has been seen in some species of sharks, Komodo dragons, and various other species, with some famous examples in zoos where females had given birth to offspring despite having been isolated from males of their species for an extended period of time.⁶

²Neil Campbell, Jane Reece, and Lawrence Mitchell. *Biology, 5th edition*. (Melo Park: Benjamin/Cummings, 1999), 913–14.
³Campbell et al., *Biology, 5th edition*, 541.
⁴Campbell et al., *Biology, 5th edition*, 914.
⁵Campbell et al., *Biology, 5th edition*, 914.
⁶See for example Phillip Yam, “Strange but True: Komodo Dragons Show that ‘Virgin Births’ Are Possible”, *Scientific American*, accessed 3/16/2021, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/strange-but-true-komodo-d/>

SEXUAL REPRODUCTION

Most eukaryotic⁷ organisms reproduce exclusively through sexual reproduction, which occurs when two specialized sex cells (or gametes) containing half of the genetic information within an organism’s genome combine to give a full complement of genetic material to the offspring.

Some types of sexual reproduction can involve the fusion of two gametes that are identical. This is termed *isogamy*, as opposed to the much more common (and familiar) *anisogamy* where the two gametes are different, such as with sperm and ova. Isogamy can be found in unicellular organisms such as the green alga *Chlamydomonas*, mentioned earlier.⁸

PLANTS

Though a survey of plant reproduction is beyond this article, plants are an example of how sexual reproduction can occur without copulation and without separate male and female organisms. The fact that plants cannot move and find mates has not prevented them from reproducing sexually! Most plants contain both “male” and “female” organs, the “male” parts producing pollen that fertilizes female organs of other plants.⁹ In other plants known as dioecious plants, the plants exist in both male and female forms. For example, date palms are dioecious plants, and male plants have flowers with only stamen which produce pollen, and female plants have flowers that contain only carpel organs that then bear fruit.¹⁰ The biology of plant life is incredibly diverse, genetically fascinating, and is interwoven with the animal kingdom in manners of seed dispersal, pollination by insects, and fruit production.¹¹

HERMAPHRODITISM

Interestingly, some animals reproduce sexually, yet *without* distinct male or female sexes. *Hermaphroditism*¹² is a condition where one organism will contain both male and female functional genitalia. Most land gastropods (snails and slugs) are hermaphrodites. Most hermaphrodite species must still mate with another organism, with each animal simultaneously serving male and female roles, donating and receiving sperm, fertilizing and being fertilized. In this manner, each organism will bear offspring, potentially doubling the number of progeny. In some species, self-fertilization is possible.

Some species demonstrate mixtures of hermaphrodite genders and males and/or females. *Gynodioecy* is a term used to describe organisms where both female and hermaphroditic organisms exist in a population. Gynodioecy is found in certain flowering plants. *Androdioecy* describes species that exhibit male and hermaphrodite organisms, common in roundworms and some shrimp. Some roundworms from the genus *Rhabditis* exhibit *trioecy*, where all three forms (hermaphrodites, males, and females) exist. Males seem to prefer mating with females, possibly explaining why the hermaphrodite form does not predominate.¹³

Another incredible process is *sequential hermaphroditism*, in which an organism can change sex during its lifespan. In some species, the individual lives as a female before it becomes a male (protogynous) and in others, may live as a male before it becomes a female (protandrous). In yet other species, such as wrasse species living among coral reefs in the Caribbean, sex

may be determined by size. The largest female wrasse in the group will transform into a male fish in as little time as one week. If this male fish dies, the next largest female will undergo transformation to a male.¹⁴ Many will remember a scene from the movie *Jurassic Park* when the chaos-theorist Ian Malcom (played by actor Jeff Goldblum), was asked how a population of female dinosaurs isolated on an island could breed. He humorously quipped, “*Life, uh . . . finds a way.*” When newly laid eggs are later found on the island, moviegoers are reminded that the damaged dinosaur DNA was repaired in the movie with DNA from West African frogs, which according to the movie exhibit sequential hermaphroditism, thus explaining how some dinosaurs became male in an all-female environment.¹⁵

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FERTILIZATION

Mechanisms of fertilization in sexual reproduction include both *external fertilization*, where eggs are released by the female and fertilized outside the body by

sperm released by the male, and *internal fertilization*, where sperm deposited in or near the female reproductive tract will fertilize an egg within the tract itself. As external fertilization requires an environment suitable for egg survival, it occurs almost exclusively in aquatic or moist habitats. Internal fertilization requires cooperative sexual behavior, specialized genitalia to deliver and accept sperm, and organs to allow fertilized eggs to develop.¹⁶

Though technically still classified as occurring via external fertilization, the male seahorse receives eggs from the female through an ovipositor into a brood pouch in the male, where the eggs are fertilized by the sperm and develop in the pouch until they are released into the external environment. Thus, the *male* of the species carries the fertilized eggs until they are released, not the female!

It may be worth mentioning that we do not have examples of *more than two* sexes contributing to reproduction of life on earth. Even in the example of

⁷I.e. organisms with membrane-enclosed organelles and nucleus in their cells. All multicellular plants and organisms in the animal kingdom are eukaryotic.
⁸Instead of identifying these gametes as male (♂) and female (♀), they are referred to as “+” and “-” gametes.
⁹As a teenager, I worked in the cornfields of southwest Michigan, where a common summer job involved “detasseling.” In order to cross different strains of corn, four rows of one variety of corn were planted between one row of a second variety. By detasseling, or removing the “male” portions of the corn stalk that produced pollen (the tassel), one could ensure that the “female” corn could only be pollinated by the “male” corn, thus ensuring that the two species of corn would be crossed, and that no self-pollination would occur. The middle rows of female corn would then be harvested, leaving the male corn standing in the field after the harvest.
¹⁰Campbell et al., *Biology, 5th edition*, 732.
¹¹One interesting example is the bee orchid *Ophrys apifera*, whose flower looks like a resting bee. Male bees attempt to “mate” with this portion of the flower, facilitating pollination.
¹²Some medical conditions in humans where portions of both male and female reproductive tracts are present were once referred to using this term, but the term “intersex” is now preferred, and there are important differences between intersex conditions in humans and the biology of hermaphrodite animals.
¹³Jyotiska Chaudhuri, Neelanjana Bose, Sophie Tandonnet et al. “Mating Dynamics in a Nematode with Three Sexes and its Evolutionary Implications.” *Scientific Reports* 5:17676 (2015): 1–11.
¹⁴Campbell et al., *Biology, 5th edition*, 915–16.
¹⁵Though some species of African frogs have exhibited sequential hermaphroditism in captivity, this has not been demonstrated to occur in amphibians in the wild.
¹⁶Campbell et al., *Biology, 5th edition*, 916.

roundworms that exist in male, female, and hermaphrodite forms (trioecy), only one or two of the genders are involved in reproduction. One might assume that it would be impossible for *anything other* than one or two sexes to contribute in reproduction because the genomes we are most familiar with (our own) contain two sets of every gene, usually one set from each parent. However, some plants have genomes that are triploid, quatraploid, or hexaploid, with three, four, or six copies of each gene. It would thus be biologically *possible* for three or more sexes to contribute in reproduction, but we do not know of any such organisms. Biological reasons for having only two sexes could relate to the biological simplicity of only two forms of an organism, and the increased difficulty of mating if more than two organisms were needed to create offspring.

The diversity of ways in which life can reproduce, adapt to times of stress, and survive is truly astonishing, as we continue to explore in organisms found in two familiar forms: male and female.

MALE AND FEMALE: SEXUAL DIMORPHISM WITHIN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

The presence of two different genders is almost ubiquitous in multicellular organisms. The biological definition of sex is based upon the different anisogamous sexual cells, the sperm and the egg. In other words, the definition of male and female is not based upon size, external genitalia, presence of secondary sexual organs (e.g., breasts), care for young, etc. The male is instead defined as producing the smaller (often motile) sperm, and the

female producing the larger and most commonly immotile ovum, or egg.¹⁷ Biologists have written extensively about why this difference in gametes may be beneficial to organisms, and it is exciting to know that research will continue to discover more nuances to this design. This difference in gamete production is, however, accompanied by many other differences, forming the basis of the sexual dimorphism which will be considered in the following sections.

DIFFERENCE IN SIZE

One of the most obvious ways that dimorphism is recognized is size. *Female-biased sexual size dimorphism*, where females are larger than males in a given species, is more common in the animal kingdom. Among birds and mammals, however, more species demonstrate *male-biased sexual size dimorphism*, where males are larger than females. Some notable exceptions among birds and mammals include bats (Chiroptera), rabbits and hares (Lagomorpha and the family *Leporidae*), baleen whales (Mysticeti), raptors (Falconiformes) and owls (Strigiformes), where females tend to be larger than males.¹⁸ Extremes of male-biased sexual size dimorphism can be found in the southern elephant seal (*Mirounga leonine*), where males weighing over 7,500 pounds can be up to seven times larger than females. Male cichlid fish from Lake Tanganyika can be twelve times larger than females.¹⁹ However, even greater extremes can be found in female-biased species. The female orb-weaving spider *Argiope aurantia* is hundreds of times larger than male spiders, who die shortly after mating (if they are not eaten first by the female). The most extreme

example of dimorphism in the animal kingdom occurs in the blanket octopus (*Tremoctopus violaceous*), where females are 100 times longer, and up to 40,000 times heavier, than males.²⁰ In some species with such extreme female-biased sexual size dimorphism, the males tend to be nothing more than parasitic sperm donors, permanently attached to females.

In looking over the difference between sexes in the animal kingdom, some general observations emerge regarding size. Aquatic environments tend to demonstrate the most extreme differences between male and female sizes. In warm-blooded mammals, the vast majority of species exhibit males that are on average approximately 1.2x larger than females.²¹

OTHER DIFFERENCES IN APPEARANCE

Of course, dimorphism between the sexes of the animal kingdom is not constrained to differences of overall body size. The Hercules beetle *Dynastes hercules* is famous for the large horn found only on male beetles which can approach four inches in length, making this the longest insect in the world; females lack this horn. Fiddler crabs of the family *Ocypodidae* are famous for their sexually dimorphic claws, with males having a major claw many times larger than their minor claw, with females having claws of the same size. Variations of color are common in the plumage of many birds, with male birds often displaying more colorful or ornate plumage (the peacock serving as one famous example).

The males of some birds will have other differences beyond plumage, such as the male turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) which has a fleshy organ known as the waddle or snood which hangs from the origin of the beak. All male turkeys will have a large beard on their chest, whereas females will have a small beard or none at all. In some species, such as bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*), both male and female sheep grow horns, but the horns of the males are larger and more curved. In other species, such as the white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginians*), only male deer grow antlers. Both African bush and African forest elephants grow tusks, but only male Asian elephants grow large tusks, with females growing short tusks or none at all. The male lion famously displays a mane of fur, which the female lion lacks. Mature male orangutans and gorillas can be distinguished not only by size from females but also by their cheek flanges and silver backs, respectively.

It is interesting to consider that most animals that reproduce sexually will display some kind of sexual dimorphism. In other words, the sexes are distinguishable by their morphology *apart* from differences in genitalia. We also see a pattern emerge as we study this spectrum of biology: as organisms become more complex, there is a distinct trend towards sexual reproduction with sexually dimorphic (but comparatively similar) sexes with male-biased sexual size dimorphism, and with fertilization occurring internally as opposed to externally in the environment.

¹⁷Campbell et al., *Biology*, 5th edition, 913.
¹⁸Daphne J. Fairburn et al. *Sex, Size, and Gender Roles: Evolutionary Studies of Sexual Size Dimorphism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.
¹⁹Fairburn et al. *Sex, Size, and Gender Roles*, 2–3.
²⁰Fairburn et al. *Sex, Size, and Gender Roles*, 3.
²¹Fairburn et al. *Sex, Size, and Gender Roles*, 25.

HUMAN SEXUAL DIMORPHISM

Beyond the differences in genitalia, men and women have many biological differences that distinguish one sex from the other. Differences in genitalia and breast development are obvious, but secondary sexual characteristics are permeating.

Size

At birth, newborn boys and girls are distinguished by their genitalia. However, other differences already exist. Male newborns are, on average, heavier than females,²² although this difference is not so great that the sex of a newborn can be differentiated on weight alone. Different growth curves exist for male and female children as they mature. Upon reaching adulthood, men are on average 7% taller than females,²³ and also weigh more on average than women. Men possess a denser bone structure and more muscle mass on average, and women have a higher proportion of subcutaneous adipose tissue on average. Of course, there is significant overlap of the sexes, such that many women may be taller, have more muscle mass, and have greater body mass than any given man.

Brain

Recent studies have lessened the degree to which men’s and women’s brains were thought to be physically dimorphic. Males, on average, have 11% more volume of brain when controlled for body size. This size increase provides no increase in intelligence. Females have traditionally had a slightly higher ratio of grey matter to white matter and have a higher ratio of connections between

cerebral hemispheres, versus within each hemisphere. Newer research states that some of these differences are not related to dimorphism but are related to the size of the brain alone. Some small differences still remain, such as the amygdala (involved in social-emotional behaviors) being 1% larger in men than in women.²⁴ Earlier research had suggested more widespread differences such as in the caudate, cingulate, hippocampus, parietal, and occipital regions.²⁵

However, even if men and women have brains more structurally similar than previously thought, major differences remain between the function of these brains. In a recent Stanford Medical journal article reviewing these differences, Dr. Nirao Shah remarked,

Women excel in several measures of verbal ability — pretty much all of them, except for verbal analogies. Women’s reading comprehension and writing ability consistently exceed that of men, on average. They outperform men in tests of fine-motor coordination and perceptual speed. They’re more adept at retrieving information from long-term memory. Men, on average, can more easily juggle items in working memory. They have superior visuospatial skills: They’re better at visualizing what happens when a complicated two- or three-dimensional shape is rotated in space, at correctly determining angles from the horizontal, at tracking moving objects and at aiming projectiles.²⁶

There are significant emotional and mental differences between men and women. When shown videos of different emotional states, men and women react differently to

videos of anger, amusement, pleasure, and sadness, but more similarly in terms of horror, disgust, or surprise.²⁷ Other studies have supported that women are more emotionally expressive, can more easily recognize emotions, and more easily express emotion through facial expression, but men show greater responses to dominant, violent, or aggressive cues. Androgen exposure during development of males has permanent effects on neuronal connections and survival.²⁸

Musculoskeletal Structure

The bone structure of men and women differs both in bone density and structure. The greatest difference is in the shape of the pelvis, with the female pelvis being wider to allow for childbirth. The male pelvis is heavier, thicker, and has more prominent bone markings.²⁹ The width of the pelvis also affects the Quadriceps angle, or Q-angle, relating to the angle at which the femur and thus quadriceps tendon align with the knee and patellar tendon. Women also have a greater carrying angle at the elbow compared to men. Men have greater bone density (up to 50% more density) and have differences in the skeletal structure of

bones of the hand. Males have 45–50% of their body weight in muscle, compared to 30–35% for women. A study evaluating the volume of muscles using MRI scans on over 460 individuals over a wide range of ages revealed that, on average, men have 60% more upper body muscle than women, and 50% more lower body muscle.³⁰ Hand-grip strength is an interesting comparison, as one recent study found that 90% of females produced less force than 95% of males.³¹

Voice

On average, men speak at a frequency of 125 Hz, while women speak at a higher frequency of 200 Hz. When exposed to higher levels of testosterone during puberty, the vocal cords of men irreversibly lengthen and become thicker (16 mm average for men and 10 mm average for women). Beyond differences in fundamental frequency, there are important vocal characteristics that also differentiate men and women. Men have less complex overtones in speech than women during speaking and screaming. Though obviously affected by language and culture, men seem to raise the volume of their speech for emphasis, and women raise the pitch of their voice.³²

²²From "Physical Growth of Newborns," <https://www.uofmhealth.org/health-library/te6295>, accessed 3/24/2021

²³Anders Gustafsson et al. "Human Size Evolution: No Evolutionary Allometric Relationship Between Males and Females," *Journal of Human Evolution* 47 (2004): 253–66.

²⁴Lise Eliot, Adnan Ahmed, Hiba Khan et al. "Dump the "Dimorphism": Comprehensive Synthesis of Human Brain Studies Reveals Few Male-Female Differences Beyond Size," *Neuroscience & Behavioral Reviews*, 125 (2021): 667–97.

²⁵Kret, M. E., & de Gelder, B. "A Review on Sex Differences in Processing Emotional Signals," *Neuropsychologia*, 50(7) (2012): 1211–21.

²⁶Bruce Goldman, "Two Minds: The Cognitive Differences between Men and Women," *Stanford Medicine*, volume 34 no.2 (2017): 12–17.

²⁷Yaling Deng, Lei Chang, Meng Yang et al. "Gender Differences in Emotional Response: Inconsistency between Experience and Expressivity", *PLoS ONE* 11(6): e0158666.

²⁸Kret et al., "A Review on Sex Differences in Processing Emotional Signals," 1211–21.

²⁹Keith L. Moore and Arthur F. Dalley. *Clinically Oriented Anatomy, 4th edition* (Baltimore: Lippincott, Williams, & Wilkens, 1999), 336–37.

³⁰Ian Janssen, Steven B. Heymsfield, ZiMian Wang et al. "Skeletal Muscle Mass and Distribution in 468 Men and Women Aged 18–88 yr". *Journal of Applied Physiology* , 89:1 (2000): 81–88.

³¹Leyk, D., et al. "Hand-Grip Strength of Young Men, Women and Highly Trained Female Athletes." *European Journal of Applied Physiology* 99.4 (2007): 415–21.

³²Voice-over and voice recording services have studied some of these tendencies. One example can be found at <https://matinee.co.uk/blog/difference-male-female-voice/>, accessed on 5/27/21.

Hair Distribution

Men and women have obvious differences in hair distribution. Androgen levels affect the growth of terminal hair on the face, chest, abdomen, legs, arms, and feet. Women develop some hair on the legs, arms, feet, and near the areola, but the hair growth in these areas is significantly decreased when compared to males. Among terrestrial mammals, the lack of hair in humans is surprising, which highlights the sexually dimorphic hair distribution among males and females.

Athletic Performance

Men and women have different abilities in athletic performance. At the outset, it is important to realize how much overlap exists between the sexes. Any man who has run a 5K road race can usually find women finishing ahead of him. Men and women can enjoy many sporting events together, and many athletic women will outperform their male peers. In elite athletes, the difference between men and women for running events is 10–12%, while in jumping events is 19%.³³

Flexibility is also an important aspect of athletic performance. Some studies have supported that women are measurably more flexible on average than men in both a deep trunk flexion test³⁴ as well as other joints such as the ankle.³⁵ Many athletic events and hobbies depend as much on flexibility as strength or endurance.

Pregnancy

Though most physiology between men and women is similar, one glaring exception is in the female gender’s ability to support

the conception, development, and birth of another human life within her body. Males are physically and physiologically incapable of this amazing biologic feat. The physiology associated with pregnancy and childbirth finds no corollary in the male gender, and includes several physiologic processes (such as positive feedback loops) that are uncommon elsewhere in human physiology.

Incidence of Disease

Gender plays an important role in the incidence of disease in humans.³⁶ Beyond sex-specific cancers such as testicular and ovarian cancer, men and women display vastly different rates of cancers in almost all cancer types. In all age ranges (even in childhood), males have a higher incidence and worse prognosis for cancer than females. Second malignancies are more common in boys who have survived cancer. Many common cancers have a high male-to-female ratio, such as colorectal cancer (1.35), lung and bronchus (1.52), and urinary bladder (4.0). Kaposi’s sarcoma is 28 times as likely to affect men than women. Some cancers showing a female bias include gallbladder, anus, and thyroid cancers.³⁷ Though both men and women have breast tissue, 99% of all breast cancer is in females. Beyond neoplastic diseases, other medical conditions show a strong disposition towards one gender. Autoimmune diseases are more common in females, as are symptomatic gallstone disease, while gout more commonly affects men.³⁸ These differences are mediated both through genetic factors and differences in environmental exposure to food, alcohol, tobacco, and other environmental exposures.



Longevity

Newborn girls are more likely than boys to survive to their first birthday. Incredibly, females actually demonstrate decreased mortality across all age ranges. Though some of this may be

attributable to differences in risk-taking behavior, alcohol and tobacco use, and participation in armed conflicts, there is nonetheless a biological advantage to being female in terms of longevity. Women outlive males on average by six to eight years.³⁹

³³Espen Tønnessen , Ida Siobhan Svendsen, Inge Christoffer Olsen et al. "Performance Development in Adolescent Track and Field Athletes According to Age, Sex and Sport Discipline". *PLoS ONE* 10(6): e0129014, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0129014>

³⁴Olga Delgado Valdaia, María Angustias Martín Cañada, Félix Zurita Ortega et al. "Changes in flexibility according to gender and educational stage". *Apunts Med Esport.* 161 (2009):10–17.

³⁵Katherine M Hoge, Eric D Ryan, Pablo B Costa et al. "Gender Differences in Musculotendinous Stiffness and Range of Motion after an Acute Bout of Stretching". *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* , 24 (2010):2618–26.

³⁶In my own practice as a surgeon, there are gender distinctions in almost every condition I treat. A cholecystectomy (gallbladder removal) is similar in men and women, yet gallstones form more frequently in women due to interactions between cholesterol and estrogens. The anatomy of an inguinal hernia is different in men and women. Perforated appendicitis rates differ between boys and girls. Even colonoscopies can demonstrate subtle differences in the curvature of the sigmoid colon due to the wider pelvic inlet found in females.

³⁷M. Tevfik Dorak and Ebru Karpuzoglu. "Gender Differences in Cancer Susceptibility: An Inadequately Addressed Issue". *Frontiers in Genetics* no. 3 (2012): 268.

³⁸A. Glücksmann. *Sexual Dimorphism in Human and Mammalian Biology and Pathology*. (London: Academic Press, 1981), v.

³⁹Data from the World Health Organization, available at https://www.who.int/gho/women_and_health/mortality/life_expectancy_text/en/, accessed 3/27/21.

A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON SEXUAL DIMORPHISM

Mankind occupies a unique place within the biology of created life. Mankind is biologically unique but also theologically distinctive as the only organism created in God's image. After a brief survey of the biology of reproduction and sexual dimorphism on earth, we realize the *diversity of what is biologically possible* with reproduction and gender. Life can multiply asexually, with combinations of asexual and sexual replication, sexually but without copulation, without two genders, and with extremes of sexual dimorphism.

To start, when one considers created beings with moral judgement and high intelligence,⁴⁰ humans are distinct from angelic beings in that we have the ability to reproduce.⁴¹ Humans marry and bear children that resemble us physically and emotionally.⁴² This gives humans a unique and firsthand perspective on the relation between a parent and child. When we refer to God as "Father," or when we read that God cared for the Israelites during the Exodus "as a man carries his son" (Deut. 1:30–31), we can thank God from a perspective that angels cannot experience firsthand. If all humans were created at once (as angels likely were), biblical language using parents and children as metaphors would lose their power. We would have no personal concept of a human child and would not understand Jesus well when he said, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it" (Mark 10:15), or Peter when he spoke of longing for "pure spiritual milk" like newborn infants (1 Pet. 2:2). When we celebrate Mother's Day and Father's Day, we celebrate a unique grace withheld from angels, but given to men and women alone.

Why did God create mankind to reproduce sexually? Like many other life forms, we could have reproduced by budding offspring from our limbs, or fissuring our bodies down the middle in two. Yet God desired that children would have a mother and father, with traits from *each* parent passed down to the child. The miracle of the virgin birth would not have been miraculous if we reproduced asexually, or had been capable of parthenogenesis. Our sexual biology allowed the appearance of Christ to be seen as an *incarnation*, allowing him to enter the world through human gestation and birth and yet for his divinity to be displayed through his providential conception by the Holy Spirit.

As childhood friends have grown up, it is wonderful to see their physical features and personality traits passed down to their sons and daughters. It is incredible to think that DNA molecules too small to see can give the shape to the eyes of the child that recalls his mother, or a way of walking that mimics her father, or a smile that can be traced to a grandparent. Paul referred to Timothy as "my true child in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2) and spoke to the Corinthian church reminding them that he was not just their spiritual guide, but father in the faith (1 Cor. 4:15). We know that things are passed down from a parent to a child because we see this displayed through the genetics of our sexual reproduction.

Moreover, sexual reproduction, and the timespan that human children take to mature, help to form and reinforce the social ties of a family. It would be hard to imagine the concept of family if humans were fertilized from eggs and sperm in an outside environment, never knowing our mother nor father personally.⁴³ This is

why it was so striking when Jesus himself remarked, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50), and when the writer of Hebrews states that Jesus "is not ashamed to call (us) brothers" (Heb. 2:11). As Jesus welcomes us into his family as brothers and sisters, we can be grateful for such intimacy with our Savior.

We can also reflect on why God made sex such an intimate act between two human beings. We could imagine a sexual act that occurred without copulation or that did not involve the intimacy that we find in human sexual expression. Not only is the act intimate, the act's exclusivity was prescribed by God to be within the bounds of marriage (Matt. 19:5–6), something never reproduced throughout the rest of creation.⁴⁴ Though humans reproduce through sexual means, human children are not conceived in the manner of plants or even amphibians with gametes randomly combining with others in the environment. Instead, human fertilization occurs internally, through copulation.⁴⁵ God describes the sexual act as the man and woman becoming "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Human reproduction is no dispassionate biological process, and God uses the metaphor of marriage and intimacy to describe not only his own desire for intimacy with his people (Hos. 2:20), but also uses the language of promiscuity to describe the Israelites when they chased after other gods (Hos. 1:2).

We could also imagine a universe in which God created us as sexual creatures, reproducing through an intimate sexual act, yet created only one gender. Other organisms are hermaphroditic, and it is not biologically impossible for us to imagine that the case could be so with mankind. Yet, God stated in Genesis 2:18 that it was not good for man to be alone, and created a "helper fit for him." Thus, the male gender was specifically created with a deficiency that it could not fill by another male. As a gender, man needed *another kind of human*, which would be taken from, and named from, his own body.

Even if sexually dimorphic, we could imagine God creating men and women with different genitals and reproductive tracts, but otherwise having identical stature, physique, brain function, voice, and other characteristics. We could even imagine both sexes having functional breasts to nurse young. When we meet Eve (woman) in Scripture and in life, we find this is not the case! We see in Genesis 1:27 that God created *both male and female* in his image. We can infer from this statement that without both genders, something of this *imago Dei* would be obscured. The reflection of the character of God was best served through both women and men. God in his wisdom created men and women with pervasive biological differences, and pronounced that both men and women were made in his image (Gen. 1:27).

⁴⁰Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 397.

⁴¹It is unlikely that the biblical account of the Nephilim refers to angels that had relations with human women. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 413–14.

⁴²See Matt. 22:30 and Luke 20:34–36

⁴³This of course does not diminish those who did not personally know their father and mother, and were raised by other means, such as adoption. The point is that our very concept of family is dependent upon our peculiar reproductive biology.

⁴⁴Even in animals that are thought to "mate for life," they display *social monogamy* by mating and raising young together, but do not demonstrate *sexual monogamy*.

⁴⁵Reproductive technologies have allowed other methods such as *in vitro* fertilization, yet this is not the way the vast majority of humans were conceived.

"The strengths and nature of each sex have in some ways woven the two sexes together in mutual dependance."

WHY DID GOD CREATE MEN AND WOMEN IN THIS WAY?

First, as we have seen in some extreme examples of dimorphism from the animal kingdom, we should remark at how *similar* men and women actually are. When we consider the average size of men and women, we certainly see a variety of different sizes and shapes, and yet set against the wide backdrop of biology, we find that men and women are in fact quite similar sizes. No doubt, this helps to remind us that both men and women were created in the image of God, but it also helps us to enjoy life with one another. Men are not dwarfed by women many times larger as with an orb-weaving spider. Women are not dwarfed by men many times larger than them as the elephant seal. We can ride in the same cars, sit together in the pews of a church, enjoy many different activities together, and can care for and serve one another. We can play basketball together, run together, and enjoy many other activities as friends, couples, and family. Adam could truly say that Eve was "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23), instantly recognizing her form

as his equal human companion. The voices of men and women are distinct, and yet we still communicate in similar frequencies of sound and tone. Bass, baritone, tenor, alto, and soprano voices complement one another in song. The strengths and nature of each sex have in some ways woven the two sexes together in mutual dependance.

There is much to our sexual dimorphism — our masculinity and femininity — which cannot be captured in biological analysis. The arts better convey the reality of the romantic attraction found between the two genders, which surpasses all other living things in its complexity, intensity, and expression. No other organism listens to songs or reads books out of the need to find expression to romantic love. No other form of life travels thousands of miles to interact with one specific individual when other suitable mates are closer.⁴⁶ No other species feels the pain of a broken relationship, or grieves like humans when a spouse dies.⁴⁷ This attraction between the sexes is used by God to describe his love and care for the church, and to display his horror when men and women are not faithful to him (see Ezek. 16 or Hosea 1–2).

Finally, the New Testament states that marriage has the power to display the love of Christ for his bride the church, as men lead and care for their wives as Christ would nurture and cherish the church (Eph. 5:22–33). The highest calling of marriage is to display this mystery to the world as we await the marriage between the body of the church and her head, Jesus Christ. We would do well to reflect upon the differences between men and women and celebrate these distinctions. We should also celebrate the union that we enjoy as equal partners in our redemption through the cross of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28). God is glorified not only in our distinctions as men and women, but also our friendships, family relations, and marriages. We should be humbled by the wisdom of God who designed not only the incredible diversity of life on earth but also our particular biological and theological place within it. As biblical wisdom describes the roles of men and women, we should seek to understand, obey, and glorify

God through our embodiment of our gender and personhood. This preserves not only healthy ideas about men and women, but also the biblical narratives that are predicated upon them as we await a wedding supper with our bridegroom, who promises to love us and care for us in his family without end. ✕

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⁴⁶Many animals migrate long distances to mate, but are not seeking out a *specific individual* to court or mate.

⁴⁷Some animals are capable of grieving (the most famous example being elephants), yet there is no argument that human expressions of grief in the context of romance and relationships are significantly more intense, prolonged, and complex.



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DENNY BURK

Is Complementarianism a Man-Made Doctrine?

In 2019, I contributed an essay to this journal titled “Mere Complementarianism.”¹ I wrote the article in part to confront an idea that seemed to be gaining traction within evangelical discussions about gender. A growing chorus of voices had been making the claim that complementarianism is a doctrinal innovation invented by Baby Boomer evangelicals in the late twentieth century. They claimed it was a theological novelty that would peter out when the Baby Boomers are no more. In his newsletter, Aaron Renn makes this case at length, writing that...

The future of complementarianism looks grim, because it was developed as a response to a specific set of cultural circumstances in the late 1980s that no longer exist, and because it's a theology of the Baby Boomers, especially the early half of that generation, that seems likely to fade away along with them.²

In Renn's essay, the term “complementarianism” reduces to a sociological descriptor rather than a theological one. This basic stance toward complementarianism has been extended in a spate of recent books which treat the doctrine as if it were created out of whole cloth by white men who wish to assert and maintain a destructive patriarchy.³ In an April 2021 social media thread, Beth Moore apologized for ever having supported such a man-made doctrine and admonished anyone who treats complementarianism as a first order doctrine.

Let me be blunt. When you functionally treat complementarianism—a doctrine of MAN—as if it belongs among the matters of 1st importance, yea, as a litmus test for where one stands on inerrancy & authority of Scripture, you are the ones who have misused Scripture. You went too far.⁴

¹Denny Burk, “Mere Complementarianism,” *Eikon* 1, no. 2 (2019): 28–42.

²Aaron Renn, “Complementarianism Is a Baby Boomer Theology That Will Die with the Baby Boomers,” *The Masculinist* (New York, NY, February 14, 2019), <http://www.aaronrenn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Masculinist-30-Complementarianism-Is-a-Baby-Boomer-Theology.pdf>. To be clear, I do not regard Aaron Renn as an opponent of complementarianism, but forms of this thesis have been used by others who are.

³E.g., Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liverlight, 2020); Beth Allison Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021).

⁴Beth Moore, Twitter Post, April 7, 2021, 9:25am, <https://twitter.com/BethMooreLPM/status/1379787363270991874>.

I beg your forgiveness where I was complicit. I could not see it for what it was until 2016. I plead your forgiveness for how I just submitted to it and supported it and taught it. I trusted that the motives were godly. I have not lost my mind. Nor my doctrine. Just my naivety.⁵

The Religion News Service published a report with reaction to Moore's thread from historian Kristin Du Mez, who is even more pointed:

This whole complementrian[sic] ideology is a historical construction... All the packaging that comes with it — what it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman — that's a historical and cultural creation, even as it's packaged and sold as timeless, inerrant and biblical.⁶

Historian Beth Allison Barr weighs-in similarly, saying that Moore's words are like the war-cry of Joshua and the Israelites at Jericho and will cause the complementarian walls to crumble: "She just shouted. This is going to be the beginning of the end of complementarianism."⁷

I will resist the urge to rewrite my 2019 essay. If you want to read my more fully formed thoughts on this, I direct you to that earlier work.⁸ Having said that, it is worth making several observations about the claim that complementarianism is a doctrinal innovation.

1. I take the "man-made doctrine" charge seriously. Jesus directed one of his harshest rebukes against scribes and Pharisees who had elevated man's opinion to the level of God's revelation:

"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 'This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men'" (Matthew 15:7-9, emphasis mine).

The implication of Jesus' words is clear. No one should ever elevate a man's opinion over Scripture. Anyone who does such a thing would rightly fall under this censure from the Lord himself. Applied to the current discussion, this means that if the claims about complementarianism being a man-made doctrine were true, then you should not believe in the teaching. Indeed, you would be morally obligated to expose the false teaching for what it is along the lines that Jesus reproved the scribes and Pharisees. Have the courage of your convictions, and let your flag fly. What you should *not* do is go quiet about your convictions. Thankfully, some people are now voicing their dissent, and it is clarifying indeed.

2. The claim that complementarianism is a man-made doctrinal innovation is a myth. The word "complementarianism" is indeed a relatively new term. But it is a new term coined to refer to an ancient teaching that is rooted in the text of Scripture. On the contrary, egalitarianism is the doctrinal innovation, not the biblical idea that men and women are created equally in God's image with distinct and complementary differences. Indeed, some version of what we now call "complementarianism" is what the church has assumed for its entire 2,000-year history.⁹ Recent attempts to flip this script amount to unserious historical revisionism.

Complementarianism is not a "man-made" doctrine. It is a summary of what

the Bible has always said about manhood and womanhood. In fact, the term was designed as a shorthand for the doctrine articulated in the Danvers Statement. If you haven't read Danvers, you won't really understand what complementarianism *is* as a theological proposition. The Danvers Statement says things like this:

- Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18).
- Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen. 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor. 11:7-9; 1 Tim. 2:12-14).
- Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen. 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor. 11:7-9).
- The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen. 3:1-7, 12, 16).
 1. In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.

2. In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.

- The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal. 3:28).
- Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen. 2:18; Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim 2:11-15).
- Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
 1. In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-19; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).
 2. In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation;

⁵Beth Moore, Twitter Post, April 7, 2021, 9:30am, <https://twitter.com/BethMooreLPM/status/1379788676297846792>.

⁶Yonat Shimron and Bob Smietana, "Beth Moore Apologizes for Her Role in Elevating 'complementarian' Theology That Limits Women Leaders," *Religion News Service* (blog), April 7, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/04/07/beth-moore-apologizes-for-complementarian-theology-women-leaders/>.

⁷Shimron and Smietana.

⁸Burk, "Mere Complementarianism."

⁹In its broad central tradition and practice, the church—East and West and in a multiplicity of cultural and social settings—has consistently maintained that to men alone is it given to be pastors and sacramental ministers." See William Weinrich, "Women in the History of the Church: Learned and Holy, but Not Pastors," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 343.

"These differences bear witness to the most precious gift of all — the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 11:2–16; 1 Tim. 2:11–15).

- In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission-domestic, religious, or civil-ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan. 3:10–18; Acts 4:19–20, 5:27–29; 1 Pet. 3:1–2).¹⁰

Anyone who reads these bullets and concludes that these are “man-made” doctrines is deeply mistaken. This is a faithful summary of what is taught in Holy Scripture, and our consciences are bound to Scripture as God’s inerrant and unchanging word. God’s truth is good for us. His special and distinct design of male and female image-bearers is all for our blessing and flourishing. These differences bear witness to the most precious gift of all — the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:32).

3. Complementarians have always held this teaching as a second order doctrine, not as a first order doctrine. It is on the level of baptism in our doctrinal hierarchy. It is not on the level of the deity of Christ or the Trinity. To be wrong on a second order issue does not mean that someone is not a Christian. Having said that, there are two important caveats to add to this observation.

Caveat One: This does not mean that second order issues are unimportant. They certainly are *very* important, for they define who we can do church with. A church will either baptize babies, or it won’t. A church will either be congregational, or it won’t. There are no “in between” positions on these questions. Likewise, a church will allow female pastors, or it won’t. It will either hold husbands accountable as heads of their home, or it won’t. There is no “in between” position. That is why these second order doctrines are rightly a part of our church confessions. It is why denominations like my own have undertaken to define these issues as a

doctrinal basis for our work together. A big part of our mission work together involves church planting. Those churches will either have female preachers, or they won’t. That is why it has been absolutely right and necessary for denominations like my own to define confessionally second order issues like complementarianism.

Caveat Two: History has proven that complementarianism is a second order doctrine that frequently implicates first order doctrines. In this way, complementarianism isn’t like other second order doctrines (e.g., baptism). Historically, we don’t see a lot of evidence for differences over baptism being a gateway to denial of first order doctrines. The same is not true of people who depart from biblical teaching on biblical manhood and womanhood. Those departures are often followed or accompanied by more serious departures. Perhaps Lig Duncan has said it best:

The denial of complementarianism undermines the church’s practical embrace of the authority of Scripture (thus eventually and inevitably harming the church’s witness to the Gospel). The gymnastics required to get from “I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man,” in the Bible, to “I do allow a woman to teach and to exercise authority over a man” in the actual practice of the local church, are devastating to the functional

authority of the Scripture in the life of the people of God.

By the way, this is one reason why I think we just don’t see many strongly inerrantist-egalitarians (meaning: those who hold unwaveringly to inerrancy and also to egalitarianism) in the younger generation of evangelicalism. Many if not most evangelical egalitarians today have significant qualms about inerrancy, and are embracing things like trajectory hermeneutics, etc. to justify their positions. Inerrancy or egalitarianism, one or the other, eventually wins out.¹¹

I know that this latter charge is difficult for egalitarians to hear — especially those that remain committed to evangelical faith (and there are many!). This is not a universal statement about all egalitarians. Nevertheless, the existence of egalitarian evangelicals does not mitigate the dangers of egalitarian approaches to Scripture over the long haul, and that is Lig’s point. And we have seen those potentialities played out so many times in history.

Several years ago, Mark Dever published an article in which he compared the relative weight of the complementarian issue to that of baptism and church polity. In doing so, he invoked his continuing love and admiration for his mentor Roger Nicole, who was an egalitarian. Dever’s remarks are worth quoting at length:

¹⁰“The Danvers Statement” (Danvers, Massachusetts: The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, December 3, 1987), <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>.

¹¹J. Ligon Duncan, “Why ‘Together for the Gospel’ Embraces Complementarianism,” *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 13.1 (2008): 25.

"Well then," you might say, "why don't you leave this issue of complementarianism at the level of baptism or church polity? Surely you cooperate with those who disagree with you on such matters." Because, though I could be wrong, it is my best and most sober judgment that this position is effectively an undermining of — a breach in — the authority of Scripture. . .

Dear reader, you may not agree with me on this. And I don't desire to be right in my fears. But it seems to me and others (many who are younger than myself) that this issue of egalitarianism and complementarianism is increasingly acting as the watershed distinguishing those who will accommodate Scripture to culture, and those who will attempt to shape culture by Scripture. You may disagree, but this is our honest concern before God. It is no lack of charity, nor honesty. It is no desire for power or tradition for tradition's sake. It is our sober conclusion from observing the last 50 years.

Paedobaptism is not novel. . . . But, on the good side, evangelicals who have taught such a doctrine have continued to be otherwise faithful to Scripture for 5 centuries now. And many times their faithfulness have put those of us who may have a better doctrine of baptism to shame! Egalitarianism is novel. Its theological tendencies have not had such a long track record. And the track record they have had so far is not encouraging.

Of course there are issues more central to the gospel than gender issues. However, there may be no way the authority of Scripture is being undermined more quickly or more thoroughly in our day than through the hermeneutics of egalitarian readings of the Bible. And when the authority of Scripture is undermined, the gospel will not long be acknowledged. Therefore, love for God, the gospel, and future generations, demands the careful presentation and pressing of the complementarian position.¹²

I think Dever is right. Wisdom is vindicated by her children, and you will know them by their fruits (Matt. 7:16–20). A quick glance at the historical record shows that the offspring of egalitarianism have not fared well over the long haul. I recently finished reading yet another book in which an embrace of egalitarianism goes hand-in-hand with a denial of inerrancy.¹³

More and more this embrace goes hand in hand with an affirmation of LGBT. These trajectories are not new. They are well-worn paths that discerning Christians will be wise to avoid and that faithful pastors will lead their flocks away from.¹⁴ Colin Smothers wrote a discerning article two years ago explaining these trajectories. He writes,

We should acknowledge that many egalitarians don't believe the Bible condones homosexuality. But generally speaking, the ability to maintain those commitments is more a function of doctrinal precommitments, not hermeneutics. While defending their position, many egalitarians employ the same hermeneutical method used to affirm same-sex relationships.

Interestingly, you'll be hard-pressed to find a complementarian church that endorses homosexuality. In fact, if a church affirms homosexuality, you can be sure that the church is also *already* thoroughly egalitarian.¹⁵

Our culture's current focus on intersectional grievance is only making these ruts even deeper. Faithful Christians will need to be vigilant against these temptations.

4. A wise friend once said to me that complementarians often run the risk of minding the fences while ignoring the field. What she meant was that we can be so focused on boundaries that we forget the wide places in between. And it is in those spaces that there is great freedom and opportunity for both men and women to have meaningful ministries within the church. Yes, there are clear boundaries in Scripture for men and women in ministry, but this does not negate the opportunities for ministry that God gives to men and women. No Christian — male or female — should ever feel they are without a ministry. There is plenty of room to roam in the field, and the boundaries help us to see that. I still believe that with my whole heart.

My sincere pastoral concern, however, is that the wide places in between are not wide enough for some. Certain complementarians are making a bee-line for the fences to see how sturdy they are or perhaps even to see whether they can straddle the boundary. Some wish to gather momentum and numbers to make a full scale assault on the boundary. These kinds of challenges to the biblical teaching are underway right now.

Faithful pastors and ministry leaders who care about the Bible's functional authority within the church are going to have to prepare themselves and their congregations for these challenges. These conflicts are only going to get worse in the days ahead. That means we are going to need more discipleship and more biblical grounding for God's people. More instructing husbands about how self-sacrificially to lead, protect, and provide for their families. More exhortation to wives to affirm and support that leadership. More encouragement for singles to embrace the calling God has given them and to spend their singleness for the glory of Christ and to be fully assimilated into the life and ministry of the church. More instruction for children about what it means to be male and female image-bearers and God's design for each. More teaching God's people to do everything that Jesus has commanded us, not just the things that go with the grain of the ambient culture (Matt. 28:19–20; Gal. 1:10).

The biblical vision of manhood and womanhood is under assault right now. Contrary to what the critics are saying, the Bible's complementarian vision of male and female is the most beautiful, life-giving, culture-reforming, gospel-inculcating vision on offer. If we are going to be faithful to Christ in our generation, we must model and declare that vision anew in the face of new challenges. I'm in for the long haul. I hope and pray you will be too. ✕

¹²Mark Dever, "Young vs. Old Complementarians," *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 13, no. 1 (2008): 23–24.

¹³Barr, *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth*.

¹⁴Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism: A New Path to Liberalism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).

¹⁵Colin Smothers, "Is the Slippery Slope Actually Slippery? Egalitarianism and the Open-and-Affirming Position," *9Marks Journal*, December 2019, 169.

The Beautiful Meaning of Marital Sexual Intimacy

In light of all the church has to oppose these days with respect to matters of marriage and sexuality, it seems useful to spill some ink in an attempt to paint the very positive portrait of what, in fact, the divine design of marital sexual intimacy is meant to express. It is true, of course, that as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, we withstand worldly ideologies (*a la* Col. 2:8) that undermine the gospel and trample upon the meaning and dignity of human personhood. And yet, it is not merely the case that we are opposed to worldly ideologies in the abstract. Rather, we stand opposed to such ideologies, because what God has designed us for and called us to, in

matters of marriage and sexuality, is more compelling, more beautiful, and more humanizing than what the world offers.

The problem, in short, with the sexual revolutionaries is that they simultaneously ask too much and too little of sexuality and gender. On the one hand, they expect too much, in that they ask sexuality to bear nearly the entire weight of our personhood to the point that persons, by this definition, are reduced to patterns of appetite. On the other hand, they settle for far too little, because they fail to see and delight in the robust and holistic meaning of sexual intimacy.¹

While it is true that these worldly ideologies concerning human sexuality serve to short-circuit and diminish the divinely ordained meaning of sexual intimacy, I have found that shortcomings in grasping the meaning of marital intimacy sometimes come from more well-intentioned sources as well. My wife and I have done a fair bit of pre-marital counseling over the years, and the topic of sexual intimacy is always a part of those discussions. As we try to communicate wisely and biblically with these couples, we have found that there is no shortage of Christian literature on sex in marriage. Much of this literature, while well-intentioned, seems to revolve around the topic of sexual technique.

To be clear, technique as a consideration in marital sexual intimacy is not irrelevant; godly couples will desire to serve and please one another physically, so those matters warrant our attention too. But what often gets overlooked with reductionistic emphases on technique is

the defining feature of God’s design for sex, which should ground subsequent considerations of technique. And so, over the years, we have tried to respond to this need by starting further back, in a much larger context than a mere discussion of technique would allow.

I. THE *TELOS* OF MARITAL SEXUAL INTIMACY

Because God instituted marriage (Gen. 2:18–25), it follows that there is a divinely designed *telos* that anchors and governs every aspect of marriage, including sexual intimacy. In order to enjoy sex as a gift of God, we must understand this foundational purpose. Since marriage was designed to reflect the gospel (Eph. 5:31–32), we need to come to terms, in particular, with exactly how it is that sexual intimacy in marriage points beyond itself to display the believer’s everlasting delight in God achieved through union with Christ (e.g., Phil. 4:19).²

¹C. S. Lewis has perhaps put the latter of these points best: “If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.” C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Macmillan, 1949; repr., New York: Touchstone, 1996), 26. Of course, seeking too much and settling for too little from our false gods expresses the fallen condition of all people following Genesis 3.

²I should specify at the outset that I am not attempting to articulate a comprehensive theology of sex in this article. For example, I am not broadly addressing the procreative function of marital sexual intimacy even though I do believe that procreation is one of the fundamental goods of sex in marriage. Though there is room to elaborate, I agree with the *Westminster Confession’s* statement that “Marriage was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the Church with an holy seed; and for preventing of uncleanness.” (*The Westminster Confession*, XXIV:ii.) Procreation in marriage is announced as a pre-Fall good (Gen. 1:22, 27-28), and is reiterated as a blessing throughout Scripture (Gen. 9:1, 7, 28:3, 35:11; Ps. 127:3, 139:13-16; 1 Tim. 5:14). The marital good of procreation fits the *telos* I seek to describe herein. To anticipate the language I will use below, in the sexual union of diverse excellencies, the covenant renewing love of husband and wife has the capacity, as part of God’s design, to usher forth new image-bearing life, which is itself reflective, albeit in a minor key, of God’s creative agency. As such, the other goods of marriage are meant to be enjoyed alongside, instead of being isolated from, the gift of procreative capability. In my view, the fact that the goods of marital sex are intended by God as a “package deal,” helps couples to enjoy the goods of sex holistically, without isolating and worshipping them. For an excellent treatment of procreation as one of the goods of marriage see, Christopher Ash, *Marriage: Sex in the Service of God* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 157-84.

"Biblically speaking, covenants are one of the primary structures God uses to advance redemptive history."

A. Marital Sexual Intimacy: A Covenant Renewal Ceremony

So, what is the *telos* of lovemaking in marriage? Well, foundationally, sex in marriage is a type of Covenant Renewal Ceremony.³ Biblically speaking, covenants are one of the primary structures God uses to advance redemptive history.⁴ When God, in his mercy, condescends to covenant with his people, he establishes his covenant with a sign.⁵ For example, when God covenants with Noah, the sign of the Noahic covenant is the "bow in the cloud" (Gen. 9:9–17), while the sign of the Abrahamic covenant is circumcision (Gen. 17:11). And, of course, the sign of the Mosaic covenant is the Sabbath (Exod. 31:12–17).

To be sure, the covenant relationships as a whole are not reducible to their signs. Rather, the sign of a given covenant symbolizes and reminds the participants of the broader covenantal reality. As W. J. Dumbrell put it, while commenting on the sign of the bow, "Divine signs are most often used in Scripture in this way, namely

not to capture the attention of the viewer, but to indicate to him that he must pass from the sign to the substance of the sign."⁶

What does this mean for marital intimacy? Well, Scripture makes it clear that marriage between a man and a woman is itself a covenant relationship (Mal. 2:14–15, Prov. 2:17, Gen. 2:24), and is thus attended by a covenant sign. More accurately, we should say that the covenant relationship of marriage is, like the New Covenant itself, attended by two signs.

The New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:22–32; Heb. 8) is attended by a sign of initiation, i.e. baptism (Rom. 6:3–4; Col. 2:11–12), and a sign of on-going participation, i.e. communion (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26). Similarly, the marriage covenant is attended by a sign of initiation, in this case, the wedding ceremony. Akin to baptism, this sign occurs publicly, and just once at the outset of the covenant relationship. But there is also the second sign of the marriage covenant, the sign of ongoing

participation which, in this case, is sexual intimacy. Not surprisingly, akin to communion, this sign continues to be celebrated throughout the marriage as beautiful reminders and renewals of the continuing covenantal commitment between husband and wife.

Consider a few more parallels between communion and sexual intimacy. First, it is clear in the case of the Lord's Supper that this celebration is a form of covenant renewal, i.e. of declaration that one is continuing in communion with Christ amidst both the progress and setbacks attending one's growth in grace. We might say that observing the Lord's Supper is an *embodied* means of saying,

"I still do," in response to Christ's "I still do" over us. We can (and should) say the same concerning sex in marriage. Despite the progress and setbacks of married life, when the husband and wife continue to enjoy sexual intimacy together as the years go by, they are saying to one another with their bodies, "I still do."⁷ They are, in other words, renewing their covenant vows to one another. Just like we do not tire of taking the Lord's Supper "often," neither do couples consummate their marriage on their wedding night and decide that one occasion should "hold them" for the next 50 years. No, in healthy Christian marriages, there is desire to share sexual intimacy time and again "til death do us part."

³We note Israel's practice of covenant renewal ceremonies in passages like Deuteronomy 31:1–13, where Moses prescribes a regular renewal practice of the public reading of the Law in the presence of all the people, every seven years, even after they are in the land. See also, Joshua 8:28–35 and Nehemiah 8–9.

⁴See, e.g., Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017).

⁵Mark Dever, Michael Lawrence, Matt Schmucker, Scott Croft, "Sex and the Single Man," in *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, eds. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 137.

⁶W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1984), 30.

⁷Sometimes couples will participate in vow renewal ceremonies on milestone anniversaries, such as the 25th or 50th anniversary. That can be a great experience for those couples. It is worth remembering that the covenant sign of their vow renewal is marriage-bed intimacy.

Now clearly, marriage is not reducible to sex, and intimacy may not be shrunk to the confines of erotic love. Sex is not the totality of the marriage covenant, but sex is its sign. In this respect, becoming “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) is the physical/sexual sign of marital oneness that points beyond itself to the marriage-wide intimate oneness of husband and wife.

In yet another important parallel with communion, we see why committed sexual intimacy *inside* marriage alone is God’s requirement. In God’s economy, we do not celebrate the sign of the covenant where the reality of the covenant isn’t received. Those who do not trust in the gospel provision of Jesus ought not celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Indeed, Paul very specifically warns about taking the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner, on account of which some of the Corinthians had gotten sick and even died (11:27–30).⁸

Similarly, we are not to partake in the sign of sex where the covenant of marriage does not exist. As David Clyde Jones put it, “The essential moral problem with nonmarital sexual intercourse is that it performs a life-uniting act without a life-uniting intent, thus violating its intrinsic meaning.”⁹ And so it bears reiterating: sex points beyond itself. It is no mere uniting of bodies. It symbolizes and sings of the total and holistic union of the married couple’s lives.

These parallels are difficult to ignore because they are divinely intended. And I believe that is so because human marriage — let’s call it “little ‘m’ marriage” — was designed from the very beginning to mirror and reflect something superior — what we can call “capital ‘M’ Marriage,” namely the relationship between Christ

and the church. This is precisely Paul’s point in Ephesians 5:31–32, when he quotes Genesis 2:24 and declares that the “mystery” of marriage “refers to Christ and the church.”¹⁰

B. Marital Sexual Intimacy: A Unification of Diverse Excellencies

When sexual intimacy follows this pattern of covenant-renewing, it is an inherent display of beauty and the glory of God’s wisdom. If we may borrow a phrase from Jonathan Edwards, one of the chief ways that intentional covenant renewing sexual intimacy displays beauty and divine wisdom is in its inherent capacity to unite “diverse excellencies.”

In his sermon on Revelation 5:5–6 entitled, “The Excellency of Christ,” Edwards explains this crucial facet of his theology of beauty, in which he reflects at length on how Jesus is simultaneously described as a Lion and a Lamb. In Revelation 5:5–6, we read,

And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals.” And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Edwards’s commentary on this passage is worth quoting at length:

John was told of a Lion that had prevailed to open the book, and probably expected to see a lion in

his vision; but while he is expecting, behold a Lamb appears to open the book, an exceeding diverse kind of creature from a lion. A lion is a devourer, one that is wont to make terrible slaughter of others; and no creature more easily falls a prey to him than a lamb. And Christ is here represented not only as a Lamb, a creature very liable to be slain, but a ‘Lamb as it had been slain,’ that is, with the marks of its deadly wounds appearing on it.”

Edwards continues,

That which I would observe from the words, for the subject of my present discourse, is this, *viz.* — “*There is an admirable conjunction of diverse excellencies in Jesus Christ.*”

The lion and the lamb, though very diverse kinds of creatures, yet have each their peculiar excellencies. The lion excels in strength, and in the majesty of his appearance and voice: the lamb excels in meekness and patience, besides the excellent nature of the creature as good for food, and yielding that which is fit for our clothing and being suitable to be offered in sacrifice to God. But we see that Christ is in the text compared to both; because the diverse excellencies of both wonderfully meet in him.¹²

From there, Edwards elaborates at yet more length upon a multitude of diverse excellencies that are united in Christ. To give just two further examples, he proclaims that, “There do meet in Jesus Christ infinite highness and infinite condescension,” as well as “infinite justice and infinite grace.”¹³ And on and on his rehearsal of Christ’s diverse excellencies goes.

From this stunning portrait of Jesus, we may conclude that the capacity to unite “diverse excellencies” is a key feature at the heart of Christ’s beauty. For it is not only lion-likeness and lamb-likeness that Jesus unites, but so also the union of divine and human natures, which itself displays the union of majesty and meekness. We may further think of the cross itself as the place where “righteousness and peace kiss” definitively (Ps. 85:10), or of the union of transcendence and immanence on display in the character of God (Deut. 4:39; Isa. 57:15).

And if we are beginning to wonder what the union of diverse excellencies in the beauty of Christ has to do with marriage-bed intimacy, the answer is absolutely everything. For in light of the fact that unifying diverse excellencies would appear so very precious in the eyes of God, the image-giver, we ought not at all be surprised at his intentional patterning of that beauty in the lives of his image-bearers. Marital sexual intimacy, in this

⁸To be sure, it is important to consider in context what Paul means by taking “in an unworthy manner.” Suffice it to say for our purposes that celebrating the “sign” where there is no corresponding faith in what the sign symbolizes would seem to qualify as an application of taking “in an unworthy manner.” See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.41–42.

⁹David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 158.

¹⁰As John Piper put it, “The meaning of marriage is the display of covenant keeping love between Christ and His people.” John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 15.

¹¹Jonathan Edwards, “The Excellency of Christ,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, ed. Edward Hickman (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 680.

¹²*Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

¹³*Ibid.*, 680–81.

light, is a complementary, embodied display of the union of diverse excellencies by image bearers (Gen. 1:27).¹⁴ In the moment of private marital intimacy, as husband and wife bodily renew their vows, so too are they declaring the wisdom of God as they unite diverse excellencies in the beauty of marital oneness.¹⁵

**II. PRACTICAL APPLICATION, PART 1:
INTIMATE UNION**

The implications here are deep and profound in their declaration of the glory and wisdom of God. Summarizing to this point, we have argued that theologically speaking, the *telos* of marital lovemaking is the uniting of diverse excellencies in what, most profoundly, amounts to a covenant renewal ceremony. With that foundation in place, we may now consider what some of those aforementioned practical implications call for. In the first place, it becomes clear that the bullseye of marital lovemaking shifts, practically speaking, from the worldly preoccupation with physiological technique to the theological and personal preoccupation with intimate union.

The chief practical goal of marital sexual intimacy, to put it bluntly, is not the pursuit of the ultimate orgasm. Rather, it is the delightful opportunity for husband and wife to partner together in pursuing intimate covenant renewing union first and foremost. When this is their goal, all of their sex will be “good” sex in the most important sense of the term. Worldly sex, by contrast, is reductionistic as it looks past intimate, covenantal union, and limits itself to the category of physical fulfillment as the sole determiner, subjectively assessed no less, of the “goodness” of sex.

To put it differently, where the pursuit of physiological gratification is the sole priority, the sex can only be deemed “good” if the hoped-for degree of satisfaction is achieved. But the sad irony is that, in real life (as opposed to fantasy), where that kind of expectant pressure is applied, the experience of physical satisfaction frequently suffers. Those kinds of disappointments are often followed by deceptive expressions of pleasure, relational hurt, and an eventual tendency to back away from one another where it concerns the newly found emotional ache of sex that springs from disunity.¹⁶

What bitter disappointment when that happens! What was meant to produce closeness and union has been co-opted and misdirected into the experience of hurt and suspicion. We should not be surprised, however, to find that the practices of sexual intimacy are misdirected, where the meaning of marital, sexual intimacy has been misunderstood.

To be clear, the Scriptures are in no way opposed to the erotic joys of physical pleasure in marriage. The point is that we must desire and pursue more than just those pleasures. For those given the proverbial “eyes to see,” we discover that our sex drive is meant to call each spouse to holistically loving the other well, and not merely loving to make love with that person. The former is obviously harder to do. It is also far better.

Now, here’s the good news. Generally speaking, as marriage-wide intimacy, union, and closeness go up, unnecessary psychological pressure to achieve a certain threshold of physical satisfaction actually goes down. And as feelings of

pressure are diminished and displaced by feelings of closeness and communion, physiological fulfillment (unsurprisingly) tends, over time, to get in line.¹⁷ This is how it should be. There is an atmosphere of secure intimacy in knowing the “til death” covenant provides the context for the covenant sign.¹⁸

So, for couples desiring to move beyond sexual embitterment and angst in favor of intentional covenant-renewing, excellent union, thankfully, the means for that pursuit isn’t new toys and risqué behaviors. The answer, instead, is simply to pursue intimacy in the marriage bed, and even more broadly in all the facets of their marriage.¹⁹ To be more specific, one way to improve sexual intimacy

is to pursue a humble prayer life with your spouse. Why? This builds intimacy between the husband and the wife, as their hearts together reach for intimacy with God. Go on dates and have fun together. Why? This builds companionship and enjoyment of each other. Confess your sins to one another and receive confession wisely. Why? This builds the spiritual intimacy born uniquely from humbling confession and forgiving as we have been forgiven.

Of course, this can be difficult. It takes work. At times, it will require saying “no” to other good things to create the space to foster these forms of intimacy. And even when it is going well, the presumption of operating on “auto-pilot” is always a near danger.²⁰

¹⁴The beauty of sexual intimacy is inherently complementary. As we noted above, sex is the sign of the marital covenant — a sign which points beyond itself to the entire marital union. We may and should conclude, then, that sexual intimacy symbolizes in a single act of unified difference the complementarity meant to attend the entire marital relationship.

¹⁵While it isn't the primary point of this article, this point does also answer the question about same-sex marriage. If it is true that the covenant of marriage requires the union of diverse excellencies — a oneness of unity born of a twoness of diverse excellency, then it is apparent that same-sex marriage can never renew a covenant because the diverse excellency necessary to unite that covenant is lacking. Sam Andreaes makes a compelling argument that Jesus argues as much, by his juxtaposition of Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, in his teaching on divorce. Sam A. Andreaes, *enGendered: God's Gift of Gender Difference in Relationship* (Wooster, Ohio: Weaver, 2015), 52.

¹⁶Consider, for example, the tragedy of pornographic messaging and consumption. Pornography is its own kind of discipleship curriculum. And while its message is soul-crushing, its “curriculum” is very effective in its “disciple-making.” When the expectations of sex are set by that kind of “curriculum,” and real marital sex is then experienced as falling short of those expectations, it is not difficult to see how the situation can be ripe for relational bitterness and hurt that may lead to a withdrawal from intimate companionship.

¹⁷At times, of course, there may be biological difficulties, for which a physician can be consulted. But even then, marriage-bed difficulties are meant to serve as invitations to partner together in addressing the difficulty rather than polarizing into combative postures against one another.

¹⁸We should specify that growth into being good lovers takes time. This is also as it should be. As we sometimes tell couples in premarital counseling, “God forbid that honeymoon sex was the best sex a couple ever enjoyed, only to diminish from there.” No, if marriage-wide intimacy is cultivated in the strength of God's grace over the years, the depth, meaning, and satisfaction of their intimacy, having come together through “many dangers, toils, and snares,” will be so much the richer as they press on in covenant renewal.

¹⁹To be sure, some couples reading this may have gotten themselves into a very difficult place, wherein many years and multiple layers of selfish ambition and intimacy-absent behaviors have eroded trust and made the marriage-bed a place of suspect motives. Two quick comments here. One, may that possibility alert younger couples to the urgency of understanding and delighting in the theological meaning of sexual intimacy, before negative patterns begin to take root. Two, as followers of Christ, we would do well to remember that we worship a God who delights to “restore the years the locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25). So, while it may entail repentance, hard work, counseling, and the very intentional pursuit of new patterns, God's grace is sufficient to bring forth beauty from ashes (Isa. 61:3).

²⁰Paul Tripp put this danger memorably, “Your marriage may be good. It may even be great. . . . But there is one thing that you need to accept: your marriage may be great, but it is not safe. No marriage this side of eternity is totally problem protected. No marriage is all that it could be. This side of heaven daily temptations are constant threats to you and your marriage. This side of heaven the spiritual war goes on. This side of heaven good marriages are good marriages because the people in those marriages are committed to doing daily the things that keep their marriages good. Things go wrong when couples think they have reached the point when they can retire from their marital work and chill out, lay back, and slide. Perhaps the greatest danger to a good marriage is a good marriage, because when things are good, we are tempted to give way to feelings of arrival and forsake the attitudes and disciplines that have, by God's grace, made our marriage what it has become.” Paul Tripp, *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 237–38.

Now, here's the even better news. The pleasure of sexual intimacy as we know it now points beyond itself to the reality that we were made for intimacy and union of a far greater kind. Even as the gospel awakens us to those delights in the present, there is yet to come, for the believer, an enjoyment of intimate union so great in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that when we are ushered at last into the full and everlasting experience of that non-sexual love (Matt. 22:30), the best lovemaking your marriage has ever known will pale in comparison to the intimacy, unity, safety, and joy we will feel when faith becomes sight.

Believe it or not, when that day comes, we won't miss marital sexual intimacy. Seem unlikely? It is true that, as Jesus indicates in Matthew 22:30, there will not be what we have already called "little 'm' marriage" in heaven. But that is not because there will be no marriage in heaven. Rather, in the age to come, "little 'm' marriage" will give way to "capital 'M' Marriage" (Rev. 19:7-9, 21:1-4). "Little 'm' marriage" foreshadows what "capital 'M' Marriage," the relationship between Christ and the church, fulfills.

When biblical foreshadowing like this gives ways to fulfillment, we do not pine for the days of anticipation. Consider the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, which pointed to the fulfillment to come in the person of Jesus, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29; see also Heb. 8-10). The sacrificial system was a gift and a blessing, but when Christ is seated after the completion of his priestly service, bringing the sacrificial system to its appointed end (Heb. 10:14-15), none of us yearns to return to life under the former arrangement. So too will it be when "little 'm' marriage" gives way to the glorified experience of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

III. PRACTICAL APPLICATION, PART 2: COMPLEMENTARY, INTIMATE UNION

So, how ought the husband and wife pursue this very practical goal of intimate, personal union, reflecting the theological *telos* of marital, sexual intimacy? The answer, of course, is that they should do so as complements. In order to pursue the same goal of enjoying intimate sexual union, the husband and wife, as diverse excellencies, must do so in a complementary, not identical, manner.

Consider first the husband. His unique role in pursuing intimate sexual union with his wife calls on him to pursue his wife's enjoyment above his own and in a manner that she perceives as intimate and not objectifying.²¹ The husband, whose sexual rhythms are generally more quickly awakened and more easily satisfied, must pursue intimacy with his wife by learning to defer his fulfillment for the sake of preferring her enjoyment.²² Learning to do that well is a "project" that progresses over the course of a marital lifetime but, buoyed by the heartbeat of Ephesians 5:28, what a delightful "project" it is.²³ Conversely, if he is consistently characterized by not eagerly desiring her intimate enjoyment, then she will not find their diversity (and in this case his selfishness) to be intimate or excellent!

Allow me to add a quick observation about the generally differing rhythms of sexual passion between husbands and wives. I do not believe those differing rhythms are themselves a product of the Fall. Their corruption into selfish and divisive expressions certainly is. But I do not think the same should be said of the differing drives and rhythms in and of themselves. The maleness of the husband and the femaleness



of the wife are diverse excellencies from the outset of creation. The complementary diversity of husband and wife, including that of their biological drives, is a pre-Fall good, not a pre-Fall problem.

Therefore, I believe those diverse drives would have called on Adam and Eve in their pre-Fall sexual intimacy to do what would have been very natural to them at that time, namely to unite and align their diverse rhythms in a manner that ushered in sexual delight for both. And if it was a marital good at that time, then so too now should we be grateful for, and not bitter about, diverse sexual rhythms. God designed it such that couples must draw close to one another in the pursuit of intimate union for sex to unite complementary difference in manner that is fulfilling to both husband and wife.

Now, if the husband's goal is to prioritize pursuit of his wife's enjoyment, the wife must respond, by doing her complementary part in this project of marital sexual intimacy. Very specifically, she must be honest about the nature of her enjoyment. Put differently, she must avoid expressions of pleasure that she is not genuinely experiencing. In most cases in which a wife would express pleasure that isn't genuine, her motives are quite pure. There's a desire to be sensitive to her husband's ego, as it were, and not discourage him.

Remember, however, that the couple is in it for the long haul. Their desire is to enjoy increasingly their lovemaking as the years go by. They ought not assume (as Hollywood might have them assume) that covenant renewing skill in sexual intimacy is immediately and intuitively grasped.

²¹To be clear once again, erotic joy is a gift of God to married couples. And yet each couple comes to the marriage bed bringing, at times, some of their own unique baggage. While there are other principles to consider, that couple-specific baggage needs to be taken into consideration as they communicate about what is intimate and fulfilling. The husband's desire, at all times, should be that his wife feel like his wife and not an object.

²²Of course, it should come as no surprise that when he prioritizes her enjoyment, his own fulfillment will be increased as well.

²³Tasteful discussions of technique, like that of Ed and Gaye Wheat's classic, *Intended for Pleasure*, have a valuable place, when building upon this more encompassing foundation. Pastorally speaking, I imagine that some of the men reading this might have room to grow in this matter. Perhaps there are patterns of regret and missed opportunities that come to mind. Maybe even the cultivation of some bitterness? All you can do is start where you are right now and take the next step. Maybe that's making a confession of previous selfishness to your wife. Maybe it would be an invitation to make this a matter of regular prayer together, even in the moments before lovemaking. Maybe it would include the simple question, "How could I become a better pursuer of your intimate enjoyment inside and outside of the bedroom?"

²⁴Doing so inevitably requires open and caring communication before, after, and even during sex.

Frankly, the husband cannot do his part of putting her enjoyment first if he is receiving “mixed signals” about her enjoyment. If the target is moving, so to speak, the husband may feel that he is succeeding in learning to prefer his wife, when in fact her experience may be very much the opposite. For him to do his part, it requires that she do her part, not his. And for her to do her part, it requires that he do his part, not hers. And so, from the outset, the husband and wife must explicitly unite in the commitment for each to make the complementary contribution necessary to place her intimate enjoyment ahead of his ego over the course of the long run.²⁴ In this, each is helping the other, by doing his and her unique part, to avoid unilaterally depriving one another as Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 7:1–5.²⁵

**IV. PRACTICAL APPLICATION, PART 3:
HOLISTIC, COMPLEMENTARY, INTIMATE
UNION**

One more application point: we need to reiterate that the pursuit of intimacy in marriage is a marriage-wide pursuit, not just a sexual one. Whereas sex is the sign of their covenantal intimacy, its capacity is diminished to the degree that it is either the only expression of their intimacy that is sought, or a neglected expression of intimacy.

In that sense, we could say that the marriage bed can serve as a barometer of the overall health of the relationship. Since marital intimacy is holistic, the marriage bed can offer a good indication of how the marriage-wide intimacy is faring. Where there is an overall climate

of marital intimacy, it is quite natural for the husband and wife to express their marital enjoyment in sexual passion. On the other hand, where there is distrust, divisiveness, and embittering frustration in the marriage bed, you can almost guarantee those frustrations originated in a deficiency of union in some other facet of the marriage. So, the maturing husband will not only value the pursuit of his wife’s intimacy needs in the marriage bed, but throughout the entirety of their relationship. And the maturing wife will delight to respond to her husband’s intimate leadership with her own expressions of covenant-wide intimacy.

V. FINAL THOUGHT

In the end, the beauty of complementary, life-uniting intimacy should progressively develop in quality and skill over the fifty years or more after saying “I do.” Fifty years later, not only will the gospel reenacting husband and wife have become more skilled covenant renewers, their whole lives and not just their creaking bodies will display the marks of years and years of the intertwined unification of diverse excellencies that testify both to their sanctification and the beauty of God’s design.²⁶



²⁵Keep in mind that in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul is not unpacking his theology of marriage *in toto*. Rather, he is applying that broader theology of marriage to a very specific belief on the part of at least some of the Corinthians that things like marriage and marital sex are compromising their spiritual maturity (7:1). Hence, some Corinthians were contemplating refraining from sex in marriage (7:5) and possibly even divorcing to get out of those marriages altogether (7:10–16). And all of this in pursuit of presumably becoming more spiritual. While Paul agrees that there is a valuable gift of singleness (7:7–8), he rejects the hypothesis that sexlessness in marriage and getting divorced are more spiritual options than growing in marriage. The anchor of his argument is that no change of life station can make a believer more “in Christ” than he or she already is at the moment of conversion (7:17–24). Of course, it is not inherently wrong to change stations in life, but believers are not to seek a change of station on basis of the belief that doing so will make them intrinsically more pleasing to the Lord. So, when Paul instructs husbands and wives to give one another their “conjugal rights” (7:3) and “not deprive one another” except for agreed upon, brief periods of mutual devotion to prayer (7:5), he is affirming, on the one hand, that sex is not ultimate, since it may be deferred for this reason. And, on the other hand, he is also affirming that God’s design for marital sex is inherently good, and not spiritually compromising, such that each spouse should be eager to serve the other in their sexual intimacy. Of course, there will be times when the husband and wife are not experiencing precisely the same degree of eagerness about the prospect of making love. To be sure, Paul’s admonition in 1 Corinthians 7:2–5 does not authorize the making of sexual demands, in those situations, but instead ensures a disposition towards sexual servanthood. [Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), 135–36.] Given the broader theology of sexual intimacy that we have been detailing, husbands and wives that are partnering together in a complementary pursuit of marriage-wide intimacy, will find it far easier to count the interests of the other as more significant than one’s own (Phil. 2:3–4). When we pair Paul’s point in 1 Corinthians 7:2–5 with his point in Ephesians 5:25–28, we see that, even as both strive to serve the other, the accent of servant leadership in sexual intimacy is assigned to the Christian husband, and that leadership is exercised in the pursuit of learning to prefer his wife’s needs and rhythms.

²⁶See Timothy Keller with Kathy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 45–47.

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An Interview with Carter Snead on the Body and Bioethics

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Notre Dame.*

1. What led you to write a book focusing on the “case for the body” as a distinct mode of argument?

I began my career in public bioethics as General Counsel to President Bush’s Council on Bioethics in 2002, under the directorship of the extraordinary Dr. Leon R. Kass. From the beginning I was struck by how the law so frequently fails to protect the weakest and most vulnerable. After studying the matter closely, I came to the view that the problem was at the root of the law’s assumptions about human identity and flourishing. All law exists to protect and promote the flourishing of persons. Accordingly, it must be grounded in baseline assumptions about who and what persons are that are true to lived reality. If it gets that essential question wrong, then the entire edifice of the law will be fatally flawed. In my book I examine these underlying “anthropological” assumptions in the law of abortion, assisted reproduction, and end of life decision-making, and find that the law and policy in this domain fail to take seriously our individual and shared lives as

embodied beings, with all the challenges and gifts that entails. The legal landscape is, to use Alasdair MacIntyre’s phrase, “forgetful of the body.” To repair the law, we must remember the body, and what it means for our identity and our obligations to one another.

2. Your arguments against expressive individualism were powerful. But that raises the question of a viable alternative. What do you see as the pathway for alternative public bioethics?

I argue that we should build a public bioethics that is genuinely responsive to the needs of embodied human life. As fragile, corruptible bodies in time, human beings are vulnerable, dependent, and subject to natural limits. Thus, to survive and flourish we need what MacIntyre calls “networks of uncalculated giving and graceful receiving” composed of people willing to make the good of others their own good, without seeking anything in return. In other words, by virtue of our embodiment, we are made for love and friendship. To build and sustain these networks we must practice the virtues of uncalculated giving and graceful receiving, namely, just generosity, hospitality, misericordia (accompanying others in their suffering), gratitude, humility, openness to the unbidden, solidarity, respect for intrinsic equal dignity of all human beings, and truthfulness. We should make law and policy designed to support and strengthen these networks, and we can measure the success of law and policy to the extent that it achieves these goals.

3. You are a Catholic, but your book is not reliant upon Catholic teaching for its arguments (though neither are they inconsistent with Catholic teaching). Can you talk a little bit about the strategy of why you framed your arguments the way you did?

I chose to make an argument grounded in the universal experience of life as a being composed of the dynamic unity of body and mind. Regardless of one’s beliefs or faith tradition, I think he or she can identify with the premises of this framing. Though, as you say, the claims of the book are consistent with the normative claims of Christian teaching about human identity and flourishing.

4. Why should a non-Christian accept your arguments about the nature of the body and public bioethics?

The claims of the book are a proposal, made in the spirit of friendship, to all readers of good will. I think that all readers can agree with the baseline premises about the gifts and challenges of embodied human life, and can identify with the claims made about who we are, and what we owe to one another. None of it depends on accepting or affirming a particular faith tradition.

5. You talk frequently about an “openness to the unbidden,” which I found to be profound. Can you explain for our audience what you mean by this idea and how central it is to your overall thesis?

Theologian William May (of the President’s Council on Bioethics) used this expression a lot, and I found it arresting. It relates to the gratitude for the giftedness of life and the humility in recognizing that we did not create ourselves, don’t deserve what we have, and that gifts are not distributed equally throughout the human family. These realizations should incline one to be open to what comes, to be tolerant of imperfection, and to work to share what one has with those who have less. But the concept has special application in the context of parenthood and bioethics. Nowhere is openness to the unbidden more important than in regards to one’s children. As Leon Kass says, “a child is a mysterious stranger to be welcomed and loved unconditionally.” A child is a gift. Not a project or a vessel for one’s own aspirations. The fitting response to a child is gratitude and unconditional love. Not rational mastery, manipulation, or worse. To make matters concrete, the current American law concerning abortion and assisted reproduction allow parents to eliminate children in the womb or in the petri dish because they fail to meet pre-conceived standards, including for sex selection and selection for children free of disabilities. This is a grave and shameful failure of the law and indulges a vision of human identity, flourishing, and parenthood that is, I argue, profoundly inhumane and unjust.

6. How has your book been received by the secular academy?

I have been very grateful for the positive reaction to date.

7. Were there any other issues you wanted to highlight in your book that time and space prevented? If you had that time and space, what else would you have addressed as an urgent matter in bioethics?

Given more space it would be interesting to explore more concretely what types of laws and policies genuinely promote human flourishing in light of the complexity of life as embodied beings in time.

8. What writing projects are you working on next?

I’ve just begun work on a book that will explore (in light of “the anthropology of embodiment” sketched out in my previous book) how best to think about the so-called “boundary” question of who counts as a member of the human family in light of recent developments involving the creation of (i) human-animal chimeras and hybrids; (ii) human beings made by cloning or “synthetic human embryos with embryo-like features” (SHEEFs); and (iii) human cerebral organoids and related entities. ✕

An Interview with Rod Dreher on Soft Totalitarianism

Rod Dreher is a senior editor and writer at *The American Conservative* and the author of several books, including *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* and *Live Not By Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*.

1. Can you explain what Soft Totalitarianism is?

When people think of totalitarianism, what comes to mind is gulags, secret police, torture — basically, Stalinism, or Orwell’s “*Nineteen Eighty-Four*.” This is understandable, because that was the twentieth century experience. But if we are looking out for the KGB agents to come roaring down the street to haul us off to prison, we’re not going to see it, and we’re going to miss the softer ways totalitarianism is emerging in our society.

Totalitarianism is a political system in which only one political ideology is allowed, and everything in society becomes politicized. An *authoritarian* government only wants you to obey politically. A *totalitarian* system wants your soul. When you see something as absurd as Oreo cookies celebrating LGBT Pride with rainbow-colored fillings, you know that you are dealing with a totalitarian mentality. After the Russian Revolution, the Soviet chess society tried to keep politics from infiltrating the game. They put out a statement saying that they wanted to keep “chess for chess’s sake.” The Communist government chastised them, saying that all things, even chess, must be made to serve the revolution. This is the same mentality that makes Oreos woke. Hard totalitarianism depended on inflicting terror and fear of pain on people to force them to conform. Soft totalitarianism, by contrast, depends on people being afraid of losing comfort, status, and at worst, employment, to force conformity. Nevertheless, because so few people today will be willing to suffer for the truth, it will achieve by softer means what the earlier version achieved through harsh means. What’s more, I think that the enforcers won’t need to resort to hard tactics to enforce their ideology. They will use sophisticated surveillance technology, like the Chinese social credit system, to regulate consumer privileges and access to jobs. Nobody will be sent to prison for their faith. They will simply not be able to buy or sell if they are judged by the algorithms to be bad citizens. China is well on its way to implementing this kind of control.

Finally, the softness of soft totalitarianism is also a reference to the fact that we are building a total control society for the sake of compassion, in order to create a “safe space” for favored minorities. The other day I was dressed down on my blog for “cruelly misgendering” a transgender man — this, because I called her a “she,” which, biologically, she is. This totalitarianism is therapeutic, you see.

2. You talk a lot about why you were reticent at first to accept the claim that Western society was experiencing waves of Soft Totalitarianism. What was the moment where it finally sank in that this was really happening?

There were two clarifying moments, tied to the same event: the 2015 failure of the Indiana Religious Freedom Restoration Act. All that act would have done would have been to give religious people an affirmative defense in court if they were sued for discrimination. It wouldn't have guaranteed a win, but would have evened the odds somewhat. We have had this same law at the federal level since 1993. When the state passed the law and the governor signed it, Big Business came down like a ton of bricks on the state, denouncing the law as bigoted against LGBTs. The state backed down. That was a sign of how weak social conservatives are, and how Big Business was decisively coming down on the side of progressives in the culture war.

Around that same time, I began to hear from people who grew up under Communism, but who had emigrated to America, that the things they were seeing here reminded them of what they had left behind. That seemed alarmist to me, but the more I talked to them, the more I began to see their point. They were talking about the way people had to fear for their jobs over opinions they held that violated leftist ideology, and how the standards were rapidly changing. One emigre from Hungary said that he was seeing leftists here smear those they targeted as enemies, without the slightest compunction — just as had been done in the country from which he and his wife escaped. These people all told me that people were forced to say things they didn't believe — usually having to do with race and gender ideology — for the sake of keeping their jobs, and their friends. I finally realized that they were onto something, and that we Americans were the fools for not listening to them. We really are heavily invested in the idea that it can't happen here. We are lying to ourselves for the sake of keeping calm in the face of a cultural revolution.

3. To what extent is Soft Totalitarianism related to debates over gender, sexuality, and human embodiment?

To a great extent. It's all about identity — racial identity, sexual identity, and gender identity. There is a bizarre paradox here: the racialists insist that your biology is your fixed identity. The sexual revolutionaries believe that biology is entirely a matter of will — that having male genitalia is only incidental to whether or not you are a man. Don't expect logic from any of these people, though. In any case, to the extent that Christians buy into modern ideas about the Self — and many of us do — we are vulnerable to the claims of so-called gender ideology. It is hard for ordinary Christians to know how to resist this stuff, because it is so radical, and has come upon us so fast. Whoever thought we would have to explain what it means to be an embodied creature, with maleness and femaleness a given?

Yet here we are — and overall, the churches are doing next to nothing to prepare the faithful to understand this phenomenon, much less resist it. From what I see, most pastors, like most parents, seem to be hoping that if they just sit quietly and wait, this curse will go away. This is a foolish strategy. Transhumanism is coming next. There are very powerful people in this culture — many of them in Silicon Valley — who believe this to be a good thing. If you accept the transgender understanding of human sexuality, then you have in principle accepted transhumanism. It all has to do with the refusal to accept limits, and the belief that the human person is entirely a creation of the self. I'm telling everybody to get Carl Trueman's new book, *The Rise And Triumph Of The Modern Self*, to help them understand how we got here.

"It all has to do with the refusal to accept limits, and the belief that the human person is entirely a creation of the self."

4. As an Orthodox Christian, can you help our audience understand what Orthodox Christians believe about the complementarity of male and female?

Orthodoxy teaches that “male and female He created them,” as Genesis teaches. What that means is that our maleness and femaleness are irreducible elements of our ontology as creatures of God. St. Maximus the Confessor, back in the seventh century, said that maleness and femaleness are “energies” of human nature. This language means that masculinity and femininity are not chosen, they are given. True, we can individually have trouble living them out, due to our own fallenness, or cultural reasons. But maleness and femaleness are written into the nature of human reality, and cannot be denied or revoked. And the story of salvation makes no sense without the gender binary. It matters that Christ was born of a woman. It matters that the Messiah was, and is, a man, and that the church is the Bride of Christ. The fruitful encounter of the Bridegroom with his Bride creates new life. Salvation is not simply a matter of holding the correct opinions about who Jesus is, but is also about being integrated into reality, out of our fallenness. It is about dying to self so that Christ can live within us, and restore us. If our masculinity or femininity is broken for whatever reason, then Jesus will heal it, though we might have to carry the cross of that brokenness through this life, only experiencing full restoration in the next life. The point is that for the Orthodox, masculinity and femininity are fundamental categories of human existence. We experienced the fall as males and females, and we will be restored in Christ as males and females. The traditional family — one man, one woman, and their children — are an icon of Christ and his church. We live in iconoclastic times.

5. You are not an evangelical, but your work is tied closely to their public ethics. When you see criticisms of evangelicalism being called “patriarchal” for its stances on complementarity, as a member of a tradition that is far older than Protestantism, how do those criticisms land with you?

We Orthodox call our most senior bishops “patriarchs,” and we constantly refer to the Fathers of the Church. Patriarchy is a great thing! Patriarchy is part of the God-given hierarchy that structures reality. I do not believe — nor do I think evangelical complementarians believe — that men are innately superior to women. Rather, I believe, and Orthodoxy teaches, that men and women have particular roles to play in society according to their natures. Please don’t hear me saying that women can’t be doctors, or anything like that. That’s not what I believe. I am glad that women have more opportunities in society to follow their gifts into the professions. At the same time, men and women are not interchangeable, either in jobs or in social roles. I am the father of three children, now growing older, and believe me, there are things that my wife has given them in their childhood that I simply could not have done, because she is a woman, and brought certain gifts to the nurturing of our children. And there are things I gave the kids that she could not, because I am their father. God made men and women to work harmoniously for the greater good of our children and the community. This requires patriarchy, but it cannot be a harsh and cruel patriarchy. This is not the biblical model. Anyway, Orthodox Christianity is so saturated with positive associations with patriarchy that it is bizarre to see how completely modernist egalitarian evangelicals are. This is a total break from Christian tradition.

6. You wrote a provocative essay years ago called “Sex After Christianity.” Can you re-state some of the themes from that essay and whether, since its original publication, you think your thesis still stands?

The idea is that sexual morality was not peripheral to Christianity, but near its core. Christianity brought a radical new way of understanding sex and sexuality, one that challenged pagan models, and that demanded justice for women and those sexually vulnerable people exploited by Greco-Roman power dynamics. The secular Jewish social critic Philip Rieff saw in the 1960s that Christian sexual teaching was inseparable from its binding social model, but now that was rapidly being lost. In that essay, I argued that it is going to be very difficult to hold on to Christianity if we reject what the Bible tells us about sexuality. Christianity gives us an anthropology, a particular understanding of what a human person is — and within that anthropology, sex takes on a new meaning. In Christian understanding, what people do with their sexuality cannot be separated from what the human person is.

Many Christians today think of the changing mores of sexual behavior are merely about revising sexual ethics. I argued back then that it’s actually about replacing Christian cosmology with a rival one. I published that essay in 2013. Everything that has happened since then has only made my thesis more clear, and confirmed it. We see so many young Christians wanting to revise the church’s teaching to assimilate the sexual revolution — and we see the same thing from older Christians, desperate to keep the church “relevant.” This is going to be the death of Christianity wherever it is tried. At a meeting in 2015, I heard a successful middle-class evangelical woman express frustration that Christians were too hung up on the culture war, and that she wanted us all to “get past this obsession with homosexuality so we can start paying attention to evangelism.” That’s a perfectly gnostic view of what Christianity is. I get why this middle-class woman was frustrated and impatient with the teachings of the Bible, but the cheap grace she wanted to free her from the cost of discipleship was a poison pill.

7. Do you see any course correction on the horizon?

Not in the short term. Ours is a profoundly decadent society. I think we are going to see a mass apostasy — and in fact are seeing it. Too many of our people want to be their own gods. The best thing we in the faithful churches can do is to build thick communities of discipleship within which the faith can survive what’s here, and what’s coming. That’s a hard thing for evangelicals to hear, but it’s true. What does evangelism mean in a world in which we can’t even hold on to many of our own children? We desperately need to evangelize ourselves, and to place more emphasis on discipleship. We cannot give the world what we do not have.

8. What advice would you give to Christians to prepare for the perpetual onslaught of hostility to be directed against them?

My last two books take up this question. In *The Benedict Option*, I argue that we Christians have lost the culture, and our inability, or our refusal, to face that hard fact is leaving us undefended in the face of this onslaught. My contention is that we have to form thick communities of faith and practice committed to countercultural living. Anything less than that, and we will be assimilated. People who didn’t read *The Benedict Option* assumed that I was saying to head for the hills. I don’t say that, though I really wish there were hills to head to! There’s no escape from this crisis, but there are things we Christians can go to make it more endurable without losing our faith. My more recent book, *Live Not By Lies*, is based on the warnings the people who grew up under Communism are sounding. It is a lot like *The Benedict Option*, but more direct. Based on my interviews with Christian dissidents in former Soviet bloc countries, the most important thing we Christians today can and should be doing is preparing ourselves to suffer for the faith, and for the truth. There is no other way out. An old Russian Baptist pastor told me, as we stood in the snow on a Moscow street corner, that I needed to go back to America and tell the churches that if they aren’t prepared to suffer for the faith, then their faith is nothing but hypocrisy.

9. What should Christians and Christian parents be doing right now to catechize their children when it comes to facing challenges from an increasingly secularized culture?

Well, I think we have to emphasize how being a follower of Jesus makes us different, even weird by the standards of this culture — and why that is fine. We also have to prepare them to suffer for the faith. That's a tall order when dealing with kids, but I don't know what else to do. You have to be age-appropriate, obviously, but you shouldn't shelter them. In *Live Not By Lies*, I tell the story of the Benda family, a Christian family in Prague, and how the parents raised their kids to be faithful during Communism. They were too young, the kids were, to really understand what Communism was about, and what their parents, and their parents' friends, were doing to resist it in the dissident community. What their mom did was read them stories — *The Lord of the Rings* was huge — and their dad showed them movies; "High Noon" was a big one for that family. The kids gained a knowledge through stories of what good men and women were supposed to do when put to the test. They couldn't understand Communism, but they could understand that good and faithful people should bind together in a fellowship to serve the good, no matter what evil throws at them. They couldn't grasp what their parents were doing to fight totalitarianism, but they could grasp that the "High Noon" sheriff played by Gary Cooper stood up to the bad guys even though none of the cowards in the town would stand with him. This is the kind of indirect catechesis that is so effective, or at least the Bendas found it to be so.

"...we have to emphasize how being a follower of Jesus makes us different, even weird by the standards of this culture — and why that is fine"

10. You are often criticized for hyperbole and doomsday analysis. Is that a fair criticism of you?

You know who says that? People who are desperate to believe that everything is going to be fine, despite all the evidence. Maybe my prescriptions for how to meet this crisis are mistaken. If so, then please help me see my mistakes so I can correct them. I've got kids, and I want to be preparing them for the world as it is, not the world that I hope is coming. But I have no patience at all for people who dismiss my warnings because they want to preserve their peace of mind. The world as we Christians have known it is collapsing fast. Now is not the time to tell ourselves pleasing lies. Now is the time to prepare to resist.

I dedicate *Live Not By Lies* to a Catholic priest named Tomislav Kolakovic, who died around 1990. He escaped the Gestapo in his native Croatia in 1943, and settled in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, and taught in the Catholic university there. He told his students that the good news was that the Germans were going to lose the war. The bad news, though, was that the Communists were going to be running the country when it was all over, and that the first thing they would do is come after the churches. Father Kolakovic started a network of prayer groups to prepare people spiritually and otherwise for resistance. The Slovak bishops chastised him for being alarmist. They said that it would never happen there. But Father Kolakovic had studied the Communist mindset in seminary, because he wanted to do missionary work in Russia. He could read the signs of the times. Sure enough, when the Iron Curtain fell over that country, a harsh persecution befell the church. Father Kolakovic's followers were ready. The priest and his confederates had prepared the underground church for just this moment.

I believe we are in a Kolakovic moment in America today. Let he who has ears to hear, hear. ✕

Mugged by Reality¹

They continually try to escape
From the darkness outside and within,
By dreaming of systems so perfect
that no-one will need to be good.
- T. S. Eliot²

In the Spring of 2020, as fear of COVID-19 gripped whole populations, Sophie Lewis, author of *Full Surrogacy Now*, argued that the crisis posed an opportunity to get rid of the family:

. . . the private family *qua mode* of social reproduction still, frankly, sucks. It genders, nationalizes and races us. It norms us for productive work. It makes us believe we are 'individuals.' It minimizes costs for capital while maximizing human beings' life-making labor (across billions of tiny boxes, each kitted out - absurdly - with its own kitchen, micro-crèche and laundry) . . . We deserve better than the family. And the time of corona is an excellent time to practice abolishing it.³

Lewis thinks the world would be a better place when the family is "unthinkable."⁴ Babies need to be "universally thought of as anybody and everybody's responsibility, 'belonging' to nobody."⁵ She stands in a long line of thinkers who have set out to attack the natural family. Plato's *Republic* recorded the thoughts

of Socrates about the collectivisation of childrearing.⁶ After the revolutions in both France (1789)⁷ and Russia (1917), there were attempts to abolish the traditional married family. Both social experiments ended in disaster. The "reforms" were hastily reversed.⁸

Some intellectuals continue to attack God's design for family. By the second half of the twentieth century, many universities taught psychologists, social workers, health workers, and educationalists to regard the nuclear family as the source of psychiatric dysfunction, the likely location of abuse, the place where children were victims of either over-controlling or over-indulgent parenting, and where women were kept in economic dependence on their overbearing husbands. Radical feminists attacked the "heterosexist" norm of family life. Susan Moller Okin argued in 1989 that social justice was impossible to achieve while traditional family life was the norm, as it was based on gender (i.e., "the deeply entrenched institutionalisation of sexual difference").⁹ "A just future would be one without gender."¹⁰

¹This phrase taken from Roger Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019), 113. Sections of this article appear in my book *God's Design for Women in an Age of Gender Confusion* (Evangelical Press, 2019), chapters 2 and 4. Other sections are taken from chapters 2, 3 and 4 of my forthcoming book, *The Lies we are Told: The Truth we Must Hold* (Christian Focus Publications), to be released March 2022.

²T. S. Eliot, Choruses from *The Rock*, 1934.

³Sophie Lewis, "The Coronavirus Crisis Shows It's Time to Abolish the Family," *Open Democracy* (March 24, 2020), accessed online September 9, 2020: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/coronavirus-crisis-shows-its-time-abolish-family>.

⁴Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism Against Family* (Verso, 2019), 167.

⁵Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*, 168.

⁶Plato, *The Republic*, Book V, 449a-472, c. 375 BC.

⁷M. C. Henrie, "Divorce, Communitarian Style," *First Things* (January 1993), accessed online March 21, 2021: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/1993/01/divorce-communitarian-style>

⁸"No-fault divorce," The Christian Institute (March 2020), accessed online March 22, 2021: <https://www.christian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Divorcebrief.pdf>.

⁹S. M. Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family* (Basic Books, 1989), 6.

¹⁰S. M. Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family*, 171.

But how have these ideologies worked out in the lives of those who promoted them?

In this article, we'll look at some of the pioneers of liberation: eight who challenged biblical morality (including God's design for family), and eight who challenged sexual complementarity. How were they impacted by the effects of their own ideology?

The Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). Nor should we. But the Bible is clear that bad ideas result in bitter fruit:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn-bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. (Matthew 7:15-20)

When we see people suffering the disastrous effects of sin, we should grieve. We are thankful that God's mercy is extended to those who defy him, and sometimes to those who teach others to defy him too. Maybe some of those we will look in this article repented at the last. If so, they will have found grace. But their lives show that defiance of God's moral law has consequences (Jer. 2:13).

1. REJECTING DIVINE AUTHORITY

We look first at some of those whose lives were driven by a mission to deliver humanity from the constraints of Christian morality. They believed that real freedom would come, and humans would flourish, once God's commandments had been relegated to history.

1.1 Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) has been described as the "first of the modern intellectuals."¹¹ Rejecting the old order, he claimed the right to redefine educational and social norms according to his own thinking. He convinced himself that he had a genuine and deep love for humanity and that his wisdom could be of benefit to all — especially the young. *Emile* (1762) is regarded as a seminal work in the formation of progressive educational thinking. But how did he treat his own children?

Rousseau's mistress for 33 years was Therese Levasseur. He never married her, and treated her abominably. When he had dinner guests, she was expected to serve them, but not sit down with them.¹² Their first child was born during the winter of 1746-1747. Rousseau persuaded Therese, against her will, that the infant should be deposited at a Foundling Hospital (where two-thirds of babies died in their first year). The same happened to the next four children. None of them were given names. So much for the champion of children and the friend of humanity!¹³

Rousseau achieved celebrity status, but fell out with most of his "friends." That was unsurprising, given his self-absorption. His *Confessions* opens with these lines:

I have entered upon a performance which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow-mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself. I know my heart, and have studied mankind; I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence . . . Whenever the last trumpet shall sound, I will present myself before the sovereign judge with this book in my hand, and loudly proclaim, thus have I acted; these were my thoughts; such was I.¹⁴

There could be few more terrifying expressions of human arrogance before the Almighty God.

1.2 Karl Marx (1818-1883) claimed that the theory of the Communists could be summed up in the single sentence: "Abolition of private property."¹⁵ That, of course, would mean an attack also on the private family.

Abolition [Aufhebung] of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists. On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form, this family exists only among the bourgeoisie.¹⁶

The only way to eliminate noxious inequality would be to:

. . . transform the relations between the sexes into a purely private matter which concerns only the persons involved and into which society has no occasion to intervene. It[Communism] can do this since it does away with private property and educates children on a communal basis, and in this way removes the two bases of traditional marriage – the dependence rooted in private property, of the women on the man, and of the children on the parents.¹⁷

Marx was passionate about justice for "The People" in general, but individuals were dispensable in light of his grand vision of the future. He exploited the one worker he had first-hand contact with. Helen Demuth, known to the family as "Lenchen," entered service at the age of just eight in his wife's family. When Marx married Jenny in 1845, Jenny's mother "gave her" Helen, (by then aged 22), as a servant/housekeeper. Helen worked for the Marx family until her death in 1890. She was only given board and lodging, never a wage. She gave birth to Marx's son in 1851, but was forced to foster him out to a poor family.¹⁸

Famously, Marx spent most of his time in the British Library; he didn't bother to visit mills, factories, mines, or other

¹¹Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals: From Marx and Tolstoy to Sartre and Chomsky* (Harper, 1988), 2.

¹²Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 20.

¹³Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 21.

¹⁴Rousseau, *Confessions* (completed in 1769, published in 1782), accessed online March 24, 2021: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3913/3913-h/3913-h.htm>.

¹⁵Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* 1848, accessed online March 24, 2021: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>, 22.

¹⁶Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 25.

¹⁷Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 52, emphasis mine.

¹⁸Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 79-81.

industrial workplaces.¹⁹ Profligate in spending money, terrible at managing it, and incapable of earning very much of it — Marx’s mother apparently said bitterly that she wished her son would spend less time writing about capital, and more time trying to earn some. He lived beyond his means: his income never fell below £200 a year (three times that of an average skilled workman), but he refused to live in a “proletarian” way.²⁰ The main victims were his wife and children. Two of his daughters ended up committing suicide. When he died, only eleven people attended his funeral in Highgate Cemetery, London. He had fallen out with most of his colleagues.

1.3 Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), the celebrated Norwegian playwright, is remembered as “the father of realism.” He could, equally, be remembered as a “father of permissiveness”:

He taught men, and especially women, that their individual consciences and their personal notions of freedom have moral precedence over the requirements of society . . . he precipitated a revolution in attitudes and behaviour [and] long before Freud, he laid the foundations of the permissive society.²¹

Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879) was still the world’s most performed play in 2006. It depicts the plight of Nora, a wife trapped in a conventional marriage to Torvald Helmer. She ultimately realizes that to be true to herself will necessitate leaving her family:

Helmer: Can you neglect your most sacred duties?
Nora: What do you call my most sacred duties?

Helmer: Do I have to tell you? Your duties to your husband, and your children.
Nora: I have another duty which is equally sacred.
Helmer: . . . What on earth could that be?
Nora: **My duty to myself** . . . I don’t want to see the children. . . . As I am now I can be nothing to them.²²

Dr. Theodore Dalrymple (b. 1949) comments:

. . . with these chilling words, she severs all connection with her three children, forever. Her duty to herself leaves no room for a moment’s thought for them. They are as dust in the balance. When, as I have, you have met hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people abandoned in their childhood by one or both of their parents, on essentially the same grounds (“I need my own space”), and you have seen the lasting despair and damage that such abandonment causes, you cannot read or see ‘A Doll’s House’ without anger and revulsion.²³

Ibsen’s own life was troubled. At age 18, he had an affair with a housemaid, who bore his son, Hans Jacob. He was legally compelled to pay maintenance until the boy was 14, but he had no other contact with mother or son. Eventually the mother went blind, and died in destitution. When Hans Jacob, penniless, appealed to his father for money, Ibsen gave him a desultory sum and shut the door in his face. Hans Jacob would die, destitute, in 1916.²⁴

Ibsen’s marriage was unhappy. He cultivated numerous emotionally intense relationships with very young women, which one could regard as a shocking abuse of trust.²⁵

1.4 Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) was born near Leipzig, Germany (then Prussia). His father, a Lutheran minister, died when he was four. He was brought up by his mother, grandmother, sister, and two aunts. Nietzsche had the grand vision of cleansing Western civilisation of any idea of the transcendent. He rejected any idea of God or an externally defined morality:

What defines me, what sets me apart from all the rest of mankind, is that I have **unmasked** Christian morality.²⁶

He set out to prove that morality is a human construct, created in response to particular social contexts and events. Reason and conscience should be subject to the human will alone. He despised the Christian virtues of compassion and kindness:

What is more harmful than any vice? [It is] Active sympathy for the ill-constituted and weak — Christianity.²⁷

Nietzsche suffered constant ill-health. By the age of 45 he was failing physically and mentally (possibly due to syphilis).

He had always disparaged women, but his illness forced him to rely on care from female relatives. Tragically, he died aged 56, having lost touch with reality.

His proud independence did not serve him well in his hour of need, and his repudiation of care and compassion had been “mugged by reality.”

1.5 Margaret Sanger (1879–1966) was the pioneer of contraceptive provision and the founder of Planned Parenthood. She viewed sexual freedom as salvation. In her grandly-titled book, *The Pivot of Civilization*,²⁸ she argued that the “magic bullet” to tip humanity towards a better future was not Marxist revolution but contraception (and the sexual freedom it would facilitate). Sex had to be liberated from the restraint of lifelong faithful monogamy (Christian morality) and the burden of having children. Sanger used Planned Parenthood to promote her racist vision of a superior society.²⁹ In 2020 Planned Parenthood removed Sanger’s name from their Lower Manhattan clinic, because of her connections to the eugenics movement.³⁰

¹⁹Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 60.
²⁰Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 73–77.
²¹Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 82–83.
²²Helen Ibsen, *A Doll’s House* (1879), accessed online March 24, 2021: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2542/2542-h/2542-h.htm>, emphasis mine.
²³Theodore Dalrymple, “Ibsen and His Discontents,” *City Journal* (Summer 2005), accessed online September 11, 2020: http://www.city-journal.org/html/15_3_urbanities-ibsen.html. Theodore Dalrymple is a pseudonym for Dr. Anthony Daniels, a physician who spent many years as a prison doctor in a deprived area of Birmingham, UK.
²⁴Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 92–93.
²⁵Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 100–101.
²⁶Friedrich Nietzsche, *Why I am So Wise* (1889), translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Penguin Books, Great Ideas, 2004), 66, emphasis original.
²⁷Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale (Penguin Classics, 1990), 128. Note that the German title might more accurately be understood as *The Anti-Christian*.
²⁸Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* (published 1922, reprinted Pergamon Press, 1950), accessed online July 2, 2020: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1689/1689-h/1689-h.htm>.
²⁹G. Grant, *Grand Illusions: The Legacy of Planned Parenthood* (Adiot Press, 1988/1992), 96.
³⁰Samantha Schmidt, “Planned Parenthood to Remove Margaret Sanger’s Name from N.Y. Clinic over Views on Eugenics” *Washington Post* (July 2020), accessed online July 23, 2020: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/history/2020/07/21/margaret-sanger-planned-parenthood-eugenics/>.

Sanger devoted her life to the abolition of Christian morality and the promotion of sexual liberation. Her own life was a mess: failed marriages, neglected children, numerous affairs, attempts to cover up her complicity with the Nazi regime, and desperate attempts to find meaning *via* occult activities.³¹

1.6 Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) is regarded by many as the father of the sexual revolution. An Austrian doctor, he believed that a free society would only be possible when all could enjoy sexual “rights.” He wanted “self regulation” to replace Christian morality (everyone should choose their own morality and fulfil their own desires). He called this “sexual hygiene,” or “natural morality,” and argued that infants and children would be freed from inhibitions if they were used to seeing adults naked and making love.³² His thinking has contributed to the industrial scale of child sexual abuse today, fuelled by online pornography.

In common with other architects of the sexual revolution, Reich’s personal life was troubled. He married three times (and divorced three times as well). He spent years making and selling “orgone accumulators,” machines supposed to collect “life energy.” He also constructed “cloud buster machines” purporting to harness “life energy” to manipulate weather. He was convicted of fraud and died in prison in the USA in 1957.

1.7 Michel Foucault (1926–1984), a French philosopher and author, celebrated “transgressiveness,” and regarded Christian morality as toxic and repressive. Liberation was to be achieved by discrediting all truth claims. He (and

other deconstructionists) claimed that knowledge is a cultural construct, used to keep the privileged in positions of power. Foucault:

... devoted his work to unmasking the bourgeoisie, and showing that all the given ways of shaping civil society are reducible in the last analysis to forms of domination ... The unifying thread in Foucault’s earlier and most influential work is the search for the secret structures of power. Behind every practice, every institution, and behind language itself lies power, and Foucault’s goal is to unmask that power and thereby to liberate its victims.³³

Famously, Foucault argued that authorities exert domination through the “gaze,” whether of the warder in the prison, or the medics in a hospital or mental asylum. He condemned such institutions as authoritarian.³⁴

But, when he was dying of AIDS, Foucault was admitted to *La Salpetriere*, a hospital

he had condemned. He received there “the compassion that he needed and which he had dismissed twenty years earlier as one of the masks of bourgeois power.”³⁵ Theory had been “mugged by reality.”³⁶

1.8 David G. Cooper (1931–1986), a British psychiatrist, was a radical who demanded the abolition of the traditional family, sexual freedom, legalisation of drugs, and communal child rearing. His book *The Death of the Family* was published in 1971, wherein he presents the nuclear family as the enemy of sexual and social independence.

Before he had finished writing the book, Cooper suffered a mental and physical breakdown. His regular abuse of drugs,

no doubt, contributed to his illness. He testified in the Dedication:

During the end of the writing of this book against the family, I went through a profound spiritual and bodily crisis . . . The people who sat with me and tended to me with immense kindness and concern during the worst of this crisis were my brother Peter and sister-in-law Carol and their small daughters. Just as a true family should.³⁷

At that point he should have trashed his book. But he went ahead and published a demand for the deconstruction of the very institution to which he had turned in his hour of need.

³¹G. Grant, *Killer Angel: A Biography of Planned Parenthood’s Founder Margaret Sanger* (Ars Vitae Press, 1995), 10.

³²W. Reich, *The Sexual Revolution* (1936), accessed online July 14, 2020: https://www.wilhelmreichtrust.org/sexual_revolution.pdf.

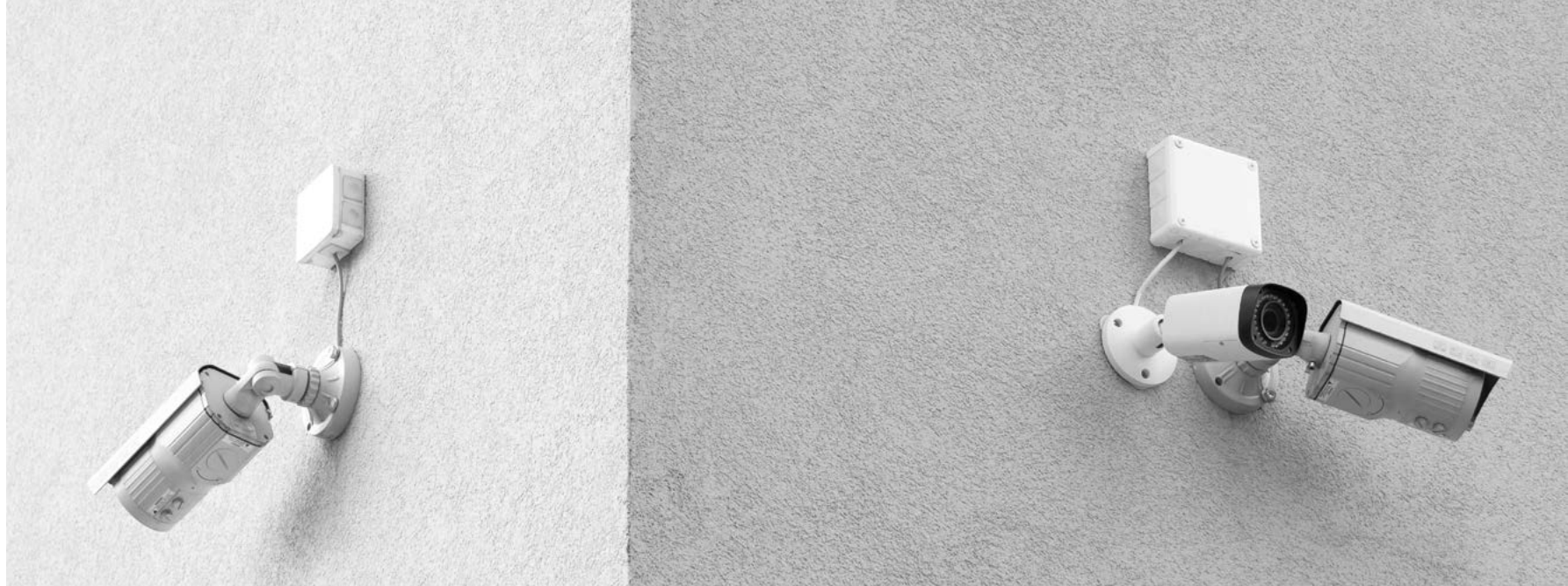
³³Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*, 99.

³⁴Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*, 105.

³⁵Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*, 105–6.

³⁶Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands*, 113.

³⁷David Cooper, *The Death of the Family* (Penguin, 1974), 157.



2. REJECTING DIVINE DESIGN

We turn now to eight trailblazers in the feminist movement.

2.1 Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), is celebrated as a founding thinker of feminism. This book, in her words, distilled “thirty years of rage,”³⁸ and became a best-seller.

Wollstonecraft set out to defy conventional moral codes. But unrestrained liberty didn’t work out well in her life. She had two miserable and short-lived affairs (and had one child), before she married William Godwin, a promoter of radical ideas. She died at the age of 38, shortly after giving birth to her second child, Mary, who, as Mary Shelley, would become famous as the author of *Frankenstein*.

Modern feminists celebrate Wollstonecraft, who argued that women should be educated. They fail to mention that she did nothing to help poor girls access education. By contrast, the evangelical writer Hannah More (1745–1833) not only wrote a best-selling apologetic for female education (*Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*, 1799), but *also* put words into action. More gave sacrificially of her own time and resources to establish schools for poor girls as well as boys. Her life and writings resulted in great social good.

2.2 Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) wrote *A Room of One’s Own* (1928), regarded as a landmark feminist text. Her novels are studied worldwide. She was part of the “Bloomsbury group” in London in the early twentieth century. This elite group of intellectuals and artists despised

convention, religion, and traditional morality. They lived a bohemian existence of unbridled sexual profligacy.³⁹ One member of this group, the economist John Maynard Keynes, wrote:

We repudiated entirely customary morals, conventions, and traditional wisdom. We were, that is to say, in the strict sense of the term, immoralists. The consequences of being found out had, of course, to be considered for what they were worth. But we recognized no moral obligation on us, no inner sanction, to conform or to obey. Before heaven we claimed to be our own judge in our own case.⁴⁰

Woolf was viciously snobbish, anti-Semitic, and cruel, notably to her servants.⁴¹ Possessed of huge privilege, she was continually dissatisfied. Theodore Dalrymple describes her “classic” work, *Three Guineas*, as:

. . . a locus classicus of self-pity and victimhood as a genre in itself. In this, it was certainly ahead of its time, and it deserves to be on the syllabus of every department of women’s studies at every third-rate establishment of higher education . . . The book might be better titled: ‘How to Be Privileged and Yet Feel Extremely Aggrieved’⁴²

Virginia Woolf suffered intermittent mental illness. In March 1941, she filled her coat pockets with stones and walked into the River Ouse near her house in Sussex, England. A tragic end to a tragic life.

2.3 Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), a French philosopher, wrote the landmark feminist text, *The Second Sex*, in 1949.

It appeared in English in 1953. Women are the *second sex*, she argued, because they are always defined in relation to men (taking the name of their husband in marriage), and exist for their good (caring for their husbands and children). For women, marriage is no better than slavery. De Beauvoir was equally hostile to motherhood:

The female organism is wholly adapted for and subservient to maternity, while sexual initiative is the prerogative of the male. The female is the victim of the species.⁴³

She believed there can only be genuine relationships between men and women when the woman is self-sufficient economically. To be trapped at home is degrading. If women *say* that they are happy at home, it means that they have been brainwashed. They should be liberated, forcibly if necessary, from the family. *The Second Sex* portrayed women throughout history as sad, misled, victimized, and stupid. The author seemed to imagine that if only they listened to her, they could find liberation and enlightenment.

De Beauvoir’s own life was hardly an advertisement for her grandiose claims. She referred to herself as “an obedient Arab wife” in a letter to an American

lover, and promised, “I will do the washing up, I will sweep the floor, I will buy the eggs and rum cakes myself . . .”⁴⁴ She spent much of her life in a humiliating relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre. They could be brutally cruel to each other and to others. De Beauvoir callously procured young female students for Sartre in an effort to cement their own relationship. For her, he was the centre of the universe but, as they were both committed to free love, he never married her, and she never had children. Sartre overlooked her in his will, leaving everything he owned to a younger mistress.

2.4 Betty Friedan (1921–2006), an American journalist, published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. She painted a sensationally shocking picture of American suburban women. The book began with a description of the “problem that has no name”:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries . . . she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question — “Is this all?”⁴⁵

³⁸Quoted in M. Phillips, *The Ascent of Woman: A History of the Suffragette Movement and the Ideas Behind It*, (Abacus, 2004), 8.

³⁹G. Himmelfarb, “From Clapham to Bloomsbury,” accessed online March 4, 2021: <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/gertrude-himmelfarb/from-clapham-to-bloomsbury-a-genealogy>.

⁴⁰Quoted in Himmelfarb, “From Clapham to Bloomsbury.”

⁴¹Himmelfarb, “From Clapham to Bloomsbury.”

⁴²Dalrymple, *Our Culture, What’s Left of It: The Mandarins and the Masses* (Ivan R. Dee, 2005), 63.

⁴³Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated and edited by H. M. Parshley (Picador, 1988), 52.

⁴⁴Simone de Beauvoir, Letter to Nelson Algren. Original letters preserved at Ohio State University. Report by Ben Macintyre, *The Times*, February 21, 1997. Now published as *A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*, New Press, 1999.

⁴⁵Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (Penguin Books, 1992) 13.

The problem, Betty concluded, was that they were not out at work. Home was a comfortable concentration camp: “forbidden to join men in the world, can women be people?”⁴⁶ To be a housewife was unspeakably demeaning. Friedan co-founded the National Organisation of Women (NOW) in America in 1966. They campaigned for affirmative action to get equal numbers of women in the work place, universal (twenty-four hour) childcare, and free access to abortion.

Like de Beauvoir, Friedan regarded herself as the one who would liberate women from unhappiness. And, like de Beauvoir, her own life was a poor advertisement for her ideas. In 1947 she married Carl, a theatre producer, and they had three children. They divorced in 1969. He later claimed that she “tottered on a thin line just this side of insanity” and that she was the most violent person he had ever known.⁴⁷ Fellow feminist Germaine Greer found Friedan to be egoistical and selfish, observing that she would become “breathless with outrage if she didn’t get the deference she thought she deserved.”⁴⁸ This was the woman who believed that her ideas would change the world for the better.

In 1963 Friedan had hurled *The Feminine Mystique* like a grenade into suburban American homes, telling wives what a raw deal they had. A subsequent book, *The Second Stage* (1981) complained, with total lack of self-awareness, that feminism had done a lot of damage by attacking the family.

2.5 Adrienne Rich (1929–2012) wrote *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* in 1976. She argued that

all women are naturally lesbian and that heterosexuality is conditioned into women by a patriarchal society. They need to be liberated from that conditioning. Heteronormativity (the idea that heterosexuality is normal), she claimed, is an oppressive aspect of patriarchy, and must be abolished. *All* women should separate themselves from men.

Adrienne did so literally. Having married Alfred Conrad in 1953, she left him in 1970. Shortly afterwards he shot himself aged only 45.⁴⁹ His tragic death left their three children fatherless.

2.6 Kate Millet (1934–2017) was a brilliant, but deeply troubled young American graduate student who decided in 1970 that she had discovered the *real* problem for women through the ages. It was *patriarchy* (a word derived from the Greek words *pater* for father, and *arche* for rule).

In *Sexual Politics*, Millet used this term to describe societies where men rule over women. She argued that the *means* by which men rule is the traditional heterosexual married family. Her own background helps to explain her hostility to “father rule.” Born in America in 1934, her father was an alcoholic who beat her; he abandoned the family when she was 14. Kate was fiercely intelligent and would be the first American woman to get a first class degree from St. Hilda’s College, Oxford University.

She was also mentally ill, violent, and abusive. Her older sister Mallory witnessed the beginnings of the radical feminist movement, and described Kate’s destructive energy:

It was 1969. Kate invited me to join her for . . . a “consciousness-raising-group,” a typical communist exercise, something practised in Maoist China. We gathered at a large table as the chairperson opened the meeting with a back-and-forth recitation: “Why are we here today?” she asked. “To make revolution,” they answered. “What kind of revolution?” she replied. “The Cultural Revolution,” they chanted. “And how do we make Cultural Revolution?” she demanded. “By destroying the American family!” they answered. “How do we destroy the family?” she came back. “By destroying the American Patriarch,” they cried exuberantly. “And how do we destroy the American Patriarch?” she replied. “By taking away his power!” “How do we do that?” “By destroying monogamy!” they shouted. “How can we destroy monogamy?” . . . “By promoting promiscuity, eroticism, prostitution and homosexuality!” they resounded. They proceeded with a long discussion on how to advance these goals by establishing The National Organization of Women. It was clear they desired nothing less than the utter deconstruction of Western society.⁵⁰

The revolution they wanted was the end of “men-rule,” Women’s Studies courses sprung up all over America, using Millet’s books as the texts. Those joining these courses were to be persuaded that the family oppresses women. Stay-at-home mothers are economically dependent on their husbands, which put them (it was claimed) in a similar position to prostitutes. If women were to take control of their own lives, they had to separate themselves from the interests of men.⁵¹ They would only be liberated with the end of the traditional family. “Consciousness raising” groups were formed in America, and elsewhere, to help women understand that they needed to assert their own interests. If family interfered with their fulfilment, they should leave.

What did this mean at a grass-roots level? Family breakdown. Kate’s older sister Mallory recalls that over the years she has heard over and over again:

“Your sister’s books destroyed my sister’s life! . . . She was happily married with four kids and after she read those books, walked out on a bewildered man and didn’t look back.” The man fell into despairing rack and ruin. The children were stunted, set off their tracks, deeply harmed . . .⁵²

⁴⁶Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 44.

⁴⁷J. Langton, “Feminist Writer Betty Friedan ‘Brought Terror to Marriage,’” *Daily Telegraph* (July, 6, 2000), accessed online July 31, 2018: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1348841/Feminist-writer-Betty-Friedan-brought-terror-to-marriage.html>.

⁴⁸G. Greer, “The Betty I Knew,” *The Guardian* (February 7, 2006), accessed online July 31, 2018: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/07/gender.bookscomment>.

⁴⁹Michelle Dean, “The Wreck: Adrienne Rich’s Feminist Awakening,” *The New Republic*, accessed online July 31, 2018: <https://newrepublic.com/article/132117/adrienne-richs-feminist-awakening>.

⁵⁰Mallory Millet, “Marxist Feminism’s Ruined Lives,” *Frontpage Magazine* (September 1, 2014), accessed online September 13, 2018: <https://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/240037/marxist-feminisms-ruined-lives-mallory-millet>.

⁵¹J. Magezis, *Teach yourself Women’s Studies* (Hodder, 1996), 14–15.

⁵²Millet, “Marxist Feminism’s Ruined Lives.”

Another family smashed. Another brick knocked out of the structure of “patriarchy.” A triumph for Kate. A disaster for that family. A weakening of those social bonds which make for strong, stable, and happy communities. Mallory reflects on the tragic life of her sister; a life blighted by mental illness and family conflict. She hesitated to speak out openly, but she needed to expose the price paid by innocent families for the false ideology pedalled by Kate:

If you see something traitorous in this, a betrayal of my sister, I have come to identify with such people as Svetlana Stalin or Juanita Castro; coming out to speak plainly about a particularly harmful member of my family . . . I am [sick to my soul] over the mass destruction . . . So much grace, femininity and beauty lost. So many ruined lives.⁵³

2.7 Germaine Greer (b. 1939), an icon of modern feminism, also had a troubled childhood. Her father was absent for her earliest years. Once home from the army, he failed to protect his daughter from her mother’s abuse. He never gave her the love she yearned for.

Raised as a Catholic, Greer lost her faith during her first year at university, and later wrote:

One of the sources of conflict . . . was the collapse of my Catholic faith and my unwilling arrival at the conclusion that there was no god. Once that had been decided, there were no rules about anything else either.⁵⁴

In 1969, Greer launched a pornographic magazine entitled *Suck*. It was so graphic that she had it published in Amsterdam

to evade censorship. The following year, her book *The Female Eunuch* became an international best-seller, and quickly translated into eight languages. It has never been out of print, and it had sold over one million copies in the United Kingdom alone by 1988.

The cover of the first edition was sensational: an image of a female torso as meat hanging from a rail. The title alluded to Greer’s conviction that women had been “made eunuchs” (emasculated) by societal expectation. The central theme was unmistakable: sexual liberation. Greer invited women everywhere to join her in throwing out the rules. “I would prefer to be called a whore than a human being” she declared.⁵⁵

Marriage, Greer asserted, is the central way in which men kept women suppressed:

If women are to effect a significant amelioration in their condition, it seems obvious that they must refuse to marry. No worker can be required to sign on for life.⁵⁶

Despite this dogmatic claim, she got married. The marriage lasted only three weeks.⁵⁷ Later, fed up of “being an individual without any real ties” she decided she wanted a baby. Years of promiscuity and two abortions had made this impossible.⁵⁸

By 1984, Greer had seen a bit more of the world, and come to accept that many women love their families. She complained in *Sex and Destiny* that the West was imposing anti-children birth control and sterilization onto traditional societies. She would eventually even admit:

The biological family of mother and child is vulnerable; it needs protection and support. Mothers need sustenance, physical, mental and spiritual.⁵⁹

In 1997, she raged that young women now “have a duty to say yes to whatever their partners may desire,” they are “enslaved by the penetration culture.”⁶⁰ But she failed to take any responsibility for her own part in the promotion of unlimited sexual freedom — which has offered women an almost infinite variety of ways in which to get hurt, an ever-increasing risk of disease, and, for many, ongoing feelings of guilt and regret. Total individualism in relationships leads to total insecurity. With a breathtaking disregard for her own promotion of sexual liberation (and broken relationships), Greer lamented in 1999 that women were even worse off than they had been when she wrote *The Female Eunuch*:

On every side we see women troubled, exhausted, mutilated, lonely, guilty, mocked by the headline success of the few.⁶¹ As more and more women work outside the home, as more and more women walk out of oppressive marriages, we might expect the quantum of female malaise to diminish. The evidence seems to

be that it is getting worse. Thirty years ago we heard nothing of panic attacks, or anorexia, or self-mutilation. Now the icons of female suffering are all around us . . .⁶²

Revolutionary movements tend to implode. Greer, the High Priestess of radical feminism, has now been no-platformed and vilified as transphobic. In 2016 a trans-feminist activist insisted that:

If you believe that trans women are women, as you should because they are, then what Germaine Greer is espousing in her campaign against them is misogyny and surely no feminism should include any form of misogyny. The safety of trans people outweighs the right of cis women to question the validity of their gender expression.⁶³

Greer has relentlessly promoted sexual “liberation,” which has led to countless lives being wrecked. Has she ever encountered living Christianity, which alone brings true liberation? Jesus Christ came “that they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10, ESV). We can pray that she would encounter the living Lord before it is too late. Greer, sadly, didn’t receive love from her own father. But the finished work of Christ offers free access to forgiveness, and the never-failing Father love of God.

⁵³Millet, “Marxist Feminism’s Ruined Lives.”

⁵⁴C. Wallace, *Germaine Greer: Untamed Shrew* (Richard Cohen Books, 1999) 148.

⁵⁵Wallace, *Germaine Greer*, 208.

⁵⁶Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (Paladin, 1971), 319.

⁵⁷Greer and Paul du Feu married in 1968, separated after three weeks, and divorced in 1973.

⁵⁸Greer interview with Hilary Roots, “Why I want a baby,” accessed online July 31, 2018: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/45650403/4794001>.

⁵⁹Greer, *The Whole Woman* (Anchor Books, 1999), 204.

⁶⁰Germaine Greer, “On Sex, Angst and the Millennium,” Special Event, Melbourne Festival 1997. Reported in *The Times*, October 17, 1997.

⁶¹Greer, *The Whole Woman*, 14.

⁶²Greer, *The Whole Woman*, 174.

⁶³P. Quinn, “Why I Believe No-Platforming Germaine Greer Is the Only Option,” *Huffington Post* (October 23, 2016), accessed online March 24, 2021: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/payton-quinn/germaine-greer_b_8366838.html.

2.8 Shulamith Firestone (1945–2012)

decided in 1970, with all the wisdom of her twenty-five years, that pregnancy was barbaric. Nature had made men and women unequal, so that women throughout history had been forced to bear and rear children. Scientific advances now meant that the tyranny of the biological family could be broken.

The Dialectic of Sex (1970) argued that women *as a class* would be liberated by means of contraception, abortion, artificial reproductive technologies, and collective child-care:

. . . to assure the elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of control of reproduction: not only the full restoration to women of ownership of their own bodies, but also their (temporary) seizure of control of human fertility . . . the end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male privilege but [the elimination] of the sex distinction itself . . .⁶⁴

Firestone believed that children should be raised collectively; that it was wrong to think that children “belonged” to their own parents. Women should be freed from the burden of bearing babies, and having their children depend on them. Many women would testify that having a baby was the most significant event in their life. Firestone believed they would be happier if the embryo were placed in a cow or a machine.

In 2012, after years of mental illness and increasing isolation, Shulamith died alone in her New York apartment. Firefighters eventually broke in, only to find her badly decomposed body.⁶⁵ A tragic and wretched outworking of her radical ideal of “complete independence.” Susan Brownmiller remembers the last time she saw Shulamith:

I remember the last time I saw Shulie. I was working on “Against Our Will,” and I had gone across the street to this health food bar, and there was this little waif standing there. “Shulie?” I said. “Is that you?” She recognized me. “Look what you’ve turned me into,” she said. “Look what I’ve become.” She blamed feminism for what had happened to her.⁶⁶

⁶⁴Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (William Morrow and Company, 1970), 11. First chapter available online: <https://www.marxists.org/subject/women/authors/firestone-shulamith/dialectic-sex.htm>.
⁶⁵L. Anderson, ‘Obituary of Shulamith Firestone,’ (August 30, 2012), accessed online September 13, 2018: <http://thevillager.com/2012/08/30/shulamith-firestone-radical-feminist-wrote-best-seller-67>.
⁶⁶R. Cooke, “US Feminist Susan Brownmiller on Why Her Groundbreaking Book on Rape is Still Relevant,” *The Guardian* (February 18, 2018), accessed online August 1, 2018: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/18/susan-brownmiller-against-our-will-interview-metoo>.
⁶⁷George Orwell, *Notes on the Way* (1940), quoted in V. Mangalwadi, *The Book That Made Your World* (Thomas Nelson, 2012), 3.
⁶⁸G. K. Chesterton, *St Thomas Aquinas* (1933), accessed online: <https://d2y1pz2y630308.cloudfront.net/15471/documents/2016/10/G.K.Chesterton-Saint%20Thomas%20Aquinas.pdf>, 39.
⁶⁹P. S. Johnson, *500 Years of Female Portraits in Western Art*, accessed online March 23, 2021: <https://vimeo.com/1456037>.
⁷⁰In biblical terms, “fool” has reference to moral blindness rather than intellectual incapacity.

GOD IS NOT MOCKED

Freedom without boundaries ends up in dystopia, not utopia. In 1949, novelist and journalist George Orwell (1903–1950) commented:

For two hundred years we had sawed and sawed and sawed at the branch we were sitting on. And in the end, much more suddenly than anyone had foreseen, our efforts were rewarded, and down we came. But . . . The thing at the bottom was not a bed of roses after all; it was a cess pit full of barbed wire.⁶⁷

Sexual complementarity, and marriage and family, are part of the Creator’s good design. When that design is defied, ideology hits up against nature and against biology. The results are disastrous. God’s design for his creation works for human flourishing. Defying God’s design is as futile as trying to kick a mountain down; as stupid as trying to stop the tide coming in. The great medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas insisted:

Because the Faith was the one truth, nothing discovered in nature could ultimately contradict the Faith. Because the Faith was the one truth, nothing really deduced from the Faith could ultimately contradict the facts.⁶⁸

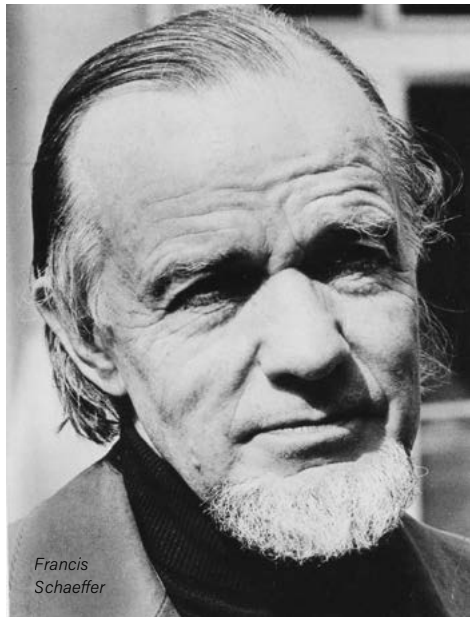
At a time when there is a high degree of awareness about the environment, there is a collective denial of the devastation to the *social ecology* of family life and gender complementarity. Women have been betrayed by the denial that there is anything special about being female. That betrayal is captured in a haunting artistic survey of “500 Years of Female Portraits in

Western Art.”⁶⁹ For around four hundred years there was respect for the mystery and beauty of femininity and modesty. Then a collapse into ugliness and brutality reflected a shift in worldview. If we have just evolved, humans are no different than animals; and sex is merely a physical function. Why respect women? They are just pieces of meat.

The Roman lyric poet, Horace (BC 65–8) observed that, “You may drive out Nature with a pitchfork, yet she still will hurry back.” Those who defy God’s design don’t always see the consequences of their folly in this life (cf. Ps. 73). Sometimes, however, we do see, even in this life, the disastrous results of defying our Maker and leading others into wilful defiance as well (Prov. 28:10). The intellectuals and feminists we have considered claimed to be wise; their own lives revealed their folly (Rom. 1:22, 28).⁷⁰ We are to live within our Creator’s boundaries, and in fellowship with him, if we want to know real happiness. ✕

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The Mannishness of Man and the *Imago Dei*: An Analysis of Francis Schaeffer's Anthropology and Apologetic Methodology

Francis
Schaeffer

INTRODUCTION

Much has been made in recent years of Francis Schaeffer's apologetic approach, especially in light of his theological influences.¹ While questions persist as to the framework of his methodology, Schaeffer's apologetic continues to influence and intrigue. Many have sought to place Schaeffer in a variety of different apologetic categories. To note, those who evaluate apologetic approaches have often focused on one's cognitive faculties and epistemology. These various taxonomies include theological and philosophical discussions about the noetic effects of sin, and how optimistic or pessimistic one should be about the capabilities of human reason.² While these discussions are important, if one focuses only on mental capacities, the discussion will inevitably be reductionistic towards the whole human person. Instead, one should embrace a holistic view of man, grounded in a theological anthropology and demonstrated in both the theory and practice of apologetics. While this approach can be done with a variety of apologetic methods, Francis Schaeffer's approach is persuasive in its nearly inimitable focus on the human person. Schaeffer was well-known for his care and compassion of people, which was ultimately rooted in his biblical-theological conviction. Therefore, I argue in this article that Francis Schaeffer's understanding and conception of theological anthropology had direct implications for his apologetic methodology.

¹See Kenneth Dale Boa, "A Comparative Study of Four Christian Apologetic Systems" (Ph.D., New York University, 1985); Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005); William Edgar, "Two Christian Warriors: Cornelius Van Til and Francis A. Schaeffer Compared," *Westminster Theological Journal* 57.1 (1995): 57–80; Bryan A. Follis, *Truth with Love: The Apologetics of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006); Joshua D. Chatraw, Benjamin K. Forrest, and Alister E. McGrath, eds., *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020); E. R. Geehan, "The Presuppositional Apologetics of Francis Schaeffer," *Themelios* 8.1 (1972): 10–18; Brian K. Morley, *Mapping Apologetics: Comparing Contemporary Approaches* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015); Thomas V. Morris, *Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics: A Critique* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976); Bill Nyman, "Francis Schaeffer's Relevance to Contemporary Apologetics," *KOERS: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship*, 85.1 (2020): 1–18; David Outlaw, "An Overview of Francis Schaeffer's Worldview," *Integrity: A Journal of Christian Thought* 3 (2006): 141–57; Jack Rogers, "Francis Schaeffer: The Promise and the Problem," *Reformed Journal* 27.5 (1977): 12–15; Ronald W. Ruesegger, ed., *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); John E. Voss, "The Apologetics of Francis A. Schaeffer" (Th.D., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984); James Emery White, *What Is Truth?: A Comparative Study of the Positions of Cornelius Van Til, Francis Schaeffer, Carl F. H. Henry, Donald Bloesch, Millard Erickson* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006).

²For various taxonomies, see: Boa, "A Comparative Study of Four Christian Apologetic Systems"; Boa and Bowman, *Faith Has Its Reasons*; Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Five Views on Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2000); Gordon R. Lewis, *Testing Christianity's Truth Claims: Approaches to Christian Apologetics* (New York: University Press of America, 1990); Morley, *Mapping Apologetics*; Bernard L. Ramm, *Varieties of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976); Bernard Ramm, *Types of Apologetic Systems: An Introductory Study to the Christian Philosophy of Religion* (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1953).

SCHAEFFER'S ANTHROPOLOGY

Schaeffer wrote on a variety of subjects in his more than twenty books, including epistemology, art, culture, theology, and even Bible commentary. That said, his views are not always consistent across all his works. Therefore, much of what is offered here is an attempted synthesis of his writings across his literary corpus.³ To be clear, whether his apologetic logically began with an anthropology or not, he understood Christianity as a system that begins with a few basic truths, which include, “the existence of the infinite-personal God, man’s creation in His image and a space-time Fall.”⁴ He often referred back to the inherent nature of man, human personality, sin’s effect on mankind, and man’s responsibility in the universe. He believed a theological anthropology to be fundamental to the Christian message.⁵ While Schaeffer spoke at length about the nature of man, it may be helpful to address his framework according to particular components and terms.

“*The Mannishness of Man*”

At the center of Schaeffer’s anthropological understanding is what he calls the “mannishness of man.” By this term, Schaeffer generally means the personality of man.⁶ He writes, “Man has a ‘mannishness.’ You find it wherever you find man — not only in the men who live today, but in the artifacts of history.”⁷ By “mannishness” Schaeffer does not offer a negative descriptor, but instead highlights man’s true humanity. This “mannishness” is something man can never escape because it is inherent in his nature. This quality is the touchstone for man’s experience with reality. Schaeffer writes, “It is true that . . . man has touched something, not nothing, but what he has touched is not God, but the objective reality of the external world and the ‘mannishness’ of man that God has created.”⁸ He speaks here of man’s created nature placed there by his Creator.

Schaeffer understands this “mannishness” to be intentional, and not the product of blind, mechanistic chance.⁹ He speaks of this expression in relation to Romans 1 and the appeal to human experience that is manifested in man.¹⁰ Further, it is this truth of man’s inherent nature that is so critical in demonstrating the truth of the Christian faith.¹¹ The existence of this inherent nature is the reason Schaeffer

argues man is able to do certain things even though he is affected by sin. He posits that man is still able to love, and still able to make things that are beautiful. He writes, “it is because they can still do these things that they manifest that they are God’s image-bearers or, to put another way, they assert their unique ‘mannishness’ as men.”¹² Further, this “mannishness” includes a longing for significance, love, beauty, and much more.¹³ This longing culminates throughout Schaeffer’s work as a longing for meaning.

Man’s inherent nature as described in “the mannishness of man” is the internal truth that is then related to the form and existence of the external universe. He often reminded his readers that all of reality is connected. It is this conjunction of internal and external that he uses so well to demonstrate man’s existential longings and subsequent satisfaction.¹⁴ The personal nature of man, the personal beginning of the universe, and a personal God, all walk hand-in-hand in Schaeffer’s theology and worldview. Connecting all of these aspects together is Schaeffer’s concern for the metaphysical, focusing on the nature of being, both in God and in man.¹⁵ All of life is personal.

While he generally uses the term consistently, at times Schaeffer can convolute the “mannishness of man.” He is largely referring specifically to the inherent, internal aspects of man. However, at least once he explicitly states that the “mannishness of man” is simply what it means to be made in the image of God.¹⁶ At times, it seems Schaeffer

³It should also be noted that this is not an exhaustive examination of Schaeffer’s theological anthropology. What is offered here are the dominant ideas found throughout Schaeffer’s work. While not nearly as prominent as the terms and concepts mentioned here, Schaeffer does address sin’s effect on human affections, the noetic effects of sin, man’s desire for community, and more.

⁴Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 1:122.

⁵Interestingly, William Edgar states that Schaeffer believed Randal Macaulay and Jerram Barrs’ book *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998) to fully reflect his major views on anthropology. William Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life: Countercultural Spirituality* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 105.

⁶Morris, *Francis Schaeffer’s Apologetics*, 26.

⁷Francis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 2:11.

⁸Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:25.

⁹Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:120.

¹⁰He mentions in a footnote regarding Romans 1:18–20 that ‘The context shows that this ‘holding the truth in righteousness’ is related to the ‘general revelation’ of the ‘mannishness’ of man and the external universe. See Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 389n2.

¹¹Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:123.

¹²Francis Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 2:267.

¹³Follis, *Truth with Love*, 42.

¹⁴Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason*, 1:267.

¹⁵Follis, *Truth with Love*, 42.

¹⁶Francis Schaeffer, “The Purpose of Our Creation Fulfilled,” PDF, *L’Abri.org*, n.d., http://www.labri.org/england/resources/05052008/FS01_Purpose_Creation.pdf.

can be referring to longings beyond man, rather than certain inherent characteristics. In the end, though, when Schaeffer refers to man's "mannishness," he is appealing to his readers to recognize what it means to be fully and completely a human person.

The Image of God

Connected to this term of "mannishness" is the biblical phrase, "the image of God." The image of God plays a significant role in Schaeffer's understanding not only theoretically, but also practically. Jerram Barrs writes, "The conviction that all human persons are the image of God was not simply a theoretical theological affirmation for him, nor was it just a wonderful truth to be used in apologetic discussion."¹⁷ Since Schaeffer refers to various elements that may be included in the image of God, it may be best to understand Schaeffer's anthropology as an integrated approach, utilizing and combining various components. When writing specifically on the image of God, he generally places a high emphasis on two functions: rationality and relationship. These two capacities serve his apologetic arguments well. However, he does include other facets as well, including dominion. Yet he argues for the inclusion of these elements not on man's ability, but rather because of man's role as a creature reflecting attributes of his Creator.¹⁸

*"I am made in the image of God.
This being so, I am rational
and I am moral; thus there will be a
conscious and responsible behavior."*²⁵

To be clear, these components should not be understood as strictly functional. William Edgar argues that "it is clear from his statements that the image of God is constitutional more than functional."¹⁹ Edgar argues that for Schaeffer, the image of God is summed up in four attributes within man: morality, rationality, creativity, and love.²⁰ In other places Schaeffer includes in this list "significance."²¹ For Schaeffer, these attributes seem to be a part of man's design. These are attributes placed within man as creatures made by his Creator; they are part of what it means to be human. While Schaeffer never writes systematically on this issue, these attributes seem to be grounded in man's constitution.²²

Some of Schaeffer's clearest formulations on the image of God are found in his work *Genesis in Space and Time*. He writes, "What differentiates Adam and Eve from the rest of creation is that they were created in the *image of God*."²³ Schaeffer couches this language of distinction in contrast to naturalistic understandings of man, a common dichotomy found throughout his writings. Instead of a more mechanistic beginning, Schaeffer argues the Christian knows who he is, having a right understanding of his origin. Here Schaeffer implies that the image of God manifests itself in the possibility of fellowship and personality. He states, "because I am made in the image of God and because God is personal, both a personal relationship with God and the concept of fellowship as fellowship has validity."²⁴ He also argues that the image of God makes communication possible, and that God can reveal propositional truth to those who are made in his image. He writes elsewhere, "I am made in the image of God. This being so, I am *rational* and I am *moral*; thus there will be a *conscious* and *responsible* behavior."²⁵ Clearly, much is included in Schaeffer's understanding of the *imago Dei*.²⁶

¹⁷Jerram Barrs, "Francis Schaeffer: His Apologetics," in Bruce Little, ed. *Francis Schaeffer: A Mind and Heart for God* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2010), 35.

¹⁸See John F. Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny: Humanity in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); John F. Kilner, *Why People Matter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017).

¹⁹Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life*, 89.

²⁰Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life*, 89.

²¹Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Finished Work of Christ: The Truth of Romans 1-8* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), 38.

²²Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life*.

²³Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, 2:31.

²⁴Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, 2:32.

²⁵Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 3:329.

²⁶This approach is similar to Kevin Vanhoozer's. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Putting on Christ: Spiritual Formation and the Drama of Discipleship," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 8.2 (2015): 147-71.

However, these comments concerning fellowship, personality, and communication are somewhat peripheral in his commentary on the image in *Genesis in Space and Time*. Instead, Schaeffer places an emphasis in this volume on man's role in exercising dominion. He states, "Dominion itself is an aspect of the image of God in the sense that man, being created in the image of God, stands between God and all which God chose to put under man."²⁷ Schaeffer picks this theme up in a later work, calling the practice of dominion mankind's "lordship" over all creation — drawing a connection to Christ's Lordship for the redeemed believer.²⁸ Even by implication, this understanding of man being engaged in the cultural mandate is seen throughout Schaeffer's work, not least of which in his writings on art and cultural engagement.²⁹ He argues that to be made in the image of God "means he can make moral choices. Also, man is rational. This means he can think. It also means that man is creative — we find that men everywhere make works of art. It is also the reason man loves."³⁰

For Schaeffer, the image of God contains man's "personality" in which man has freedom and ability to influence history. He understands man to be a causal agent, able to influence the course of history with the choices set before him. Schaeffer states that even though man is a sinner, before any redemptive work of Christ is applied to him, he still has ability to do tremendous works and is not subject to the "wheels of determinism." Thus, while Schaffer is certainly faithful to his Presbyterian and Calvinistic theology, he does not seem to subscribe to some form of meticulous providence or fatalistic determinism. Instead, his understanding of man is more akin to Anthony Hoekema's conception of a "created person."³¹ Man is both dependent upon his Creator, and responsible for his own decisions.

Thus, Schaeffer's understanding of the image of God is manifold. He does not seem concerned with an overly systematic approach here, and thus does not explicitly analyze the congruency between these various attributes. For Schaffer, though, all of the various components of the image of God are rooted in man's personal nature, which is designed by a personal God, and has the potential to live in harmony with a personal universe. In other words, man was designed for harmony, both internally and externally.



²⁷Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, 2:34.

²⁸Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 2:376.

²⁹This would include not only *Art and the Bible*, but also the works found in volumes four and five of *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*.

³⁰Francis A. Schaeffer, *Basic Bible Studies* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 2:329.

³¹Hoekema writes, "[T]he human being is both a creature and a person; he or she is a *created person*... To be a creature... means absolute dependence on God; to be a person means relative independence... To be creatures means that God is the potter and we are the clay (Rom. 9:21); to be persons means that we are the ones who fashion our lives by our own decisions." Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 6.

The Effects of Sin

While Schaeffer had a strong focus on the image of God, he had an equally robust understanding of the effects of sin on man. As was his practice, Schaeffer gave this theological concept his own term: “the dilemma of man.” However, John Voss argues that there is some confusion here, stating, “There is a certain amount of ambiguity in Schaeffer’s use of the term ‘dilemma of man,’ but it is essentially this: man has moral motions, yet he consistently fails to meet the expectations of his own standards. The short-fall between man’s ‘nobility,’ or morality, and his ‘cruelty,’ or immorality, is man’s dilemma.”³² To put it in more theological words, man’s dilemma is the existential tension he experiences that is rooted in an objective, true reality due to his sinful actions. He also refers to this tension and consequence as “man’s abnormality.”

The subject of man’s sinfulness and dilemma is present in much of Schaeffer’s apologetic. He states,

Christianity says man is now abnormal — he is separated from his Creator, who is his only sufficient reference point — not by a metaphysical limitation, but by true moral guilt. As a result he is now also separated from himself. Therefore, when he is involved in cruelty, he is not being true to what he was initially created to be. Cruelty is a symptom of abnormality and a result of a moral, historic, space-time Fall.³³

Man’s abnormality is not intrinsic to the “mannishness of man.” If his abnormality was intrinsic, then man would have always been this way and there would be no hope for a solution.³⁴ For Schaeffer, man’s sinfulness maintains two prevalent themes: (1) true moral guilt before God and (2) separation in man’s fundamental relationships.

First, Schaeffer often stressed the importance of understanding man’s true moral guilt and not just mere psychological guilt. Schaeffer challenges the notion that man simply has “guilty feelings” without standing truly and legally guilty for his sin before God. Of course, man’s true guilt manifests itself in real psychological guilt, but his moral standing precedes the emotions. Man’s abnormality is not simply metaphysical finiteness or psychological conviction, but a real moral and

legal problem which requires an actual solution. Schaeffer writes, “Because man is guilty before the Lawgiver of the universe, doing what is contrary to His character, his sin is significant and his is morally significant in a significant history. Man has true moral guilt.”³⁵ Man, then, is a fundamentally moral creature made in the image of his Creator.

Second, Schaeffer often conceptualized man’s sinfulness as “separation.” Schaeffer listed four different divisions that take place because of man’s sin.³⁶ First and foremost was man’s separation from God by his sinful actions which results in his true moral guilt. From this separation comes all other divided relationships and leads to repercussions for the rest of reality. Second, man is separated from himself. This division is the reason for man’s psychological problems, which includes his psychosis and self-deception. In this category, consisting of man’s internal separation, Schaeffer not only includes epistemological implications, but sexual and physical effects as well.³⁷ Third, man is separated from his fellow man, which leads to sociological problems. Interestingly enough, here Schaeffer discusses the existence of two humanities: a godly (redeemed) humanity and an ungodly (unredeemed) humanity. Those who have been redeemed can experience the restoration of this division and live within in a new, restored community. Lastly, man experiences separation from nature itself. Here man has lost his full dominion and now nature often rules over him. Schaeffer writes, “The simple fact is that in wanting to be what man as a creature could not be, man lost what he could be. In every area and relationship men have lost what finite man could be in his proper place.”³⁸ Contrary to more reductionistic construals of man’s sin, Schaeffer understood man’s sin to have personal, psychological, sexual, physical, sociological, and even ecological implications — all because of the primary division between God and man due to the Fall.

³²Voss, “The Apologetics of Francis A. Schaeffer,” 75.

³³Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:114.

³⁴Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent in The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 1:301.

³⁵Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:115.

³⁶Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:164.

³⁷Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, 2:69.

³⁸Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, 2:70.

In contrast to other views, Schaeffer argues that humanity still retains something of the image of God after the fall.³⁹ He argues that the fall does not affect man's unique distinction from other things in creation.⁴⁰ Further, he contends that man retains the "mannishness of man" after the Fall. He still retains the image of God, although it is "twisted, broken, abnormal."⁴¹ He also comments on Romans 1:23, asserting that by sinning, man who was made in God's image is now making God in his own image.⁴² He did not believe the effect of sin to be some kind of philosophical abstraction. Instead of merely an existential lostness or hopelessness, he articulates man as a rebel against his Creator, with real moral guilt and responsibility.⁴³ Schaeffer understood sin to have real consequences in space and time.

Regenerate Humanity

Schaeffer is clear that the solution to man's dilemma does not come from man; it comes from God. The solution rests upon Christ, the God-man, who through his death on the cross in space and time rectifies man's true moral guilt with the infinite value of Christ's life.⁴⁴ He understands participating in the Christian life, as a regenerate believer, to be a "restoration" of what one is meant to be — that to be a Christian is to live out the intended purpose of an image bearer. Christians experience something similar to the original order of creation, though now under a different covenant and dependent on Christ's mediatorial work.⁴⁵

Schaeffer understood the finished work of Christ to not only bring healing to man's true moral guilt, but to bring substantial healing to all four fundamental relationships. That is, Christ's work will bring "healing which will be perfect in every aspect when Christ comes again in history in the future."⁴⁶ He understands our justification to be immediate upon regeneration, and all other healing to be taking place and to be fully realized in the eschaton. Summarizing much of Schaeffer's thought on the topic, Udo Middlemann writes,

Only in the Bible is the human person addressed, valued, and respected as a thinking, responsible individual. Here are the roots for a genuine humanism, i.e., a concern for the human being who, having been made in the image of God, is now fallen and

in need of God's reliable information about all of life and redemption. This includes an explanation of the mandate for man to live, work, and create. Only in the Bible do we have enough information to know that the world is no longer what God meant it to be. We now live after the fall of man. God is not found in every aspect of history. We live by his word, not by what we find in nature. Neither earth nor nature is our model. They are also in need of redemption.⁴⁷

Schaeffer understood the redemptive work on the cross to have multiple implications for Christian living. While the focal point is on Christ's work, Schaeffer understood it to be the responsibility of redeemed humanity to partake in restorative work. Schaeffer believed that much of this healing work is done through the visible and transformational work of the church, the new humanity.

Holistic Anthropology and Man's Responsibility

While not excessively, Schaeffer does mention man's constitution in his work. In agreement with much of the historic Christian church, he states that God made man both body and soul, and that redemption reaches the whole of man. Interestingly, it is in his short work *Art and the Bible* that Schaeffer discusses this element of anthropology. Schaeffer bases much of his discussion on the importance of art for the Christian on the fact that God made the whole of man, and that when God saves the whole of man, Christ is Lord over the whole of his life.⁴⁸ God created the whole man, and therefore God is interested in just that: his work of dominion, his ability to communicate, his love, his fellowship, his influence on history, and much more. Schaeffer pushes against a theological reductionism that may understand man as merely a soul to be saved. Man is both body and soul, and Christ's work and lordship extends to both parts.

"...when God saves the whole of man, Christ is Lord over the whole of his life."

³⁹See Kilner, *Dignity and Destiny*, 27.

⁴⁰Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, 2:34.

⁴¹Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, 2:70–71.

⁴²Schaeffer, *The Finished Work of Christ*, 38.

⁴³Schaeffer, *The Finished Work of Christ*, 67–71.

⁴⁴Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:116.

⁴⁵Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life*, 105.

⁴⁶Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:164.

⁴⁷Udo W. Middlemann, "The Unusual Francis A. Schaeffer," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6.2 (2002): 45–56.

⁴⁸Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible*, 2:376.



In light of his constitution, Schaeffer argues that man's redemptive relationship with God is the only thing that can integrate the whole of the human person.⁴⁹ He states, "It has got to be the whole of man coming to know this is truth, acting upon it, living it out in his life, and worshipping God."⁵⁰ The application of the gospel, in Schaeffer's understanding, was comprehensive for the entirety of man and the whole of reality. Much of his ministry was focused on the reconciling nature of the gospel, and how the good news brought peace both relationally, spiritually, and existentially to the human person.

In synthesizing Schaeffer's view, there are two related elements that highlight the internal-external dynamic: (1) man's significance and (2) man's responsibility. Man is the pinnacle of God's creation, reflecting in his own personality a personal God "who is there." Yet, man is also culpable for his actions, and maintains real moral guilt before God for his sin. The interplay between these two elements is a fundamental theme throughout Schaeffer's apologetics.⁵¹ Schaeffer, like much of the Christian tradition, understands man to be both the greatest creative work of God and also the agent of the historic Fall. This tension certainly speaks to the existential crisis Schaeffer often addresses. He writes about the universality of this crisis, stating, "Thus, when you face a twentieth-century man, whether he is brilliant or an ordinary man of the street, a man of the university or the docks, you are facing a man in tension; and it is this tension which works on your behalf as you speak to him."⁵² While each person is unique, they share a universal problem.

Man, then, is designed to pursue his fundamental goal, which applies to the entirety of his life. This purpose has in scope a holistic view of man. Schaeffer, clarifying man's purpose in the world, writes,

⁴⁹Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 3:335.

⁵⁰Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:186.

⁵¹Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life*, 115.

⁵²Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:133.

[T]he Bible speaks of the purpose of our creation when it says to love God with all our heart and soul and mind. Yet this must be understood in the Scriptural framework. It is not to love God in the concept of a Kierkegaardian... leap. It is not to love God as though faith were something in itself. The answer, according to the Bible, is not a faith in faith, but a faith in one who is there and, therefore, it is a living relationship with him. It is to love God with all our heart and soul and mind, but definitely in the Biblical sense.⁵³

Thus, for Schaeffer the end goal of man is to fulfill the greatest commandment. Just as Scripture commands, this is a love that includes our thoughts, affections, and will. This understanding of purpose, much like the rest of his anthropology, is not particularly unique, though he writes about these themes in a compelling manner.

Across these different aspects of anthropology Schaeffer does not depart from a historic, fundamental view of Christian theology. While his views are not always systematic, Schaeffer holds to a fundamental, and theologically orthodox understanding of man. That said, few apologists seem to spend as much time on the image of God and man's inherent nature as Schaeffer does. He wrote with a particular concern for his fellow man. Thus, it is not Schaeffer's theology that is unique, in and of itself. Instead, what may be particularly unique is Schaeffer's faithfulness to apply this theological anthropology and his genuine love for people.

Methodology in Light of His Anthropology

As demonstrated, Schaeffer has a thoroughly orthodox anthropology found throughout his writings. In Schaeffer's various apologetic arguments, whether they be metaphysical, epistemological, or moral, he places man's personality as a central component to his thinking.⁵⁴ When a new issue would present itself in culture, Schaeffer's main concern was often the place of the human being in the discussion.⁵⁵ The question, then, is how Schaeffer's anthropology was brought to bear in his approach to apologetics. That is, how did his theology affect his methodology? One

author posits the answer clearly, "His entire apologetic method was driven by compassion for every person whom he saw as created in the image of God."⁵⁶ Much is made of Schaeffer's epistemology, and his connection to Cornelius Van Til, J. Oliver Buswell, E. J. Carnell and others. Yet, these assessments too often offer a limited view of Schaeffer's apologetic. In light of his thoroughly biblical anthropology, Schaeffer has a multi-layered approach that is both Scripturally faithful and culturally compelling.⁵⁷ In conceptualizing Schaeffer's person-sensitive method, it may be helpful to think about two major components that are interrelated and complementary. Schaeffer's anthropologically-informed methodology can be assessed by his (1) argumentation, and (2) his ministerial and personal practice.

First, while Schaeffer certainly avoided any formulaic approach to his own apologetic, he did write about apologetics in a variety of capacities. Discussing the differences between Buswell and Van Til, Schaeffer's first point of agreement between the two apologists is that "Both sides agree that the unregenerate man cannot be argued into heaven apart from the Sovereign Call of God."⁵⁸ Additionally, he concludes the article arguing "we should never forget either that none of us will be completely consistent until we are fully glorified."⁵⁹ Schaeffer offered to his two former teachers a methodology with a theological focus on man. His unifying approach began with man's situatedness in the universe.

⁵³Schaeffer, "The Purpose of Our Creation Fulfilled"

⁵⁴Morris, *Francis Schaeffer's Apologetics*, 79.

⁵⁵Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life*, 28.

⁵⁶Nyman, "Francis Schaeffer's Relevance to Contemporary Apologetics," 11.

⁵⁷Bill Nyman argues that Schaeffer's approach is made up of five aspects, "firstly, the centrality of the Bible; secondly, the reasonableness of the Christian faith; thirdly, the importance of cultivating and nourishing relationships; fourthly, the conversations he was able to have with those who struggled; and lastly, the demonstration of the Christian life that served to show the truth of the Christian faith." Nyman, "Francis Schaeffer's Relevance to Contemporary Apologetics," 9.

⁵⁸Francis Schaeffer, "A Review of a Review," *The Bible Today*, October 1948, <https://www.pcahistory.org/documents/schaefferreview.html>.

⁵⁹Schaeffer, "A Review of a Review."

⁶⁰Schaeffer's "trilogy" includes *The God Who Is There*, *Escape from Reason*, and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*. These can be found in the first volume of his complete works, or Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy: Three Essential Books in One Volume*, First Printing edition. (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990).

While Schaeffer certainly had an epistemological emphasis in his apologetic, specifically seen in his “trilogy,” this epistemic conflict was not dealt with in the abstract.⁶⁰ Instead, Schaeffer argued that man senses this divided field of knowledge even at an existential and psychological level.⁶¹ Whether or not Schaeffer better fits in a presuppositional or evidential school is still unclear.⁶² What is clear is that Schaeffer sought common ground with the skeptics and doubters with whom he interacted.⁶³ He understood knowledge to be prior to salvation, and it is to be the whole person that understands the truth of the Gospel. Therefore, for the apologist to rightly engage in this kind of apologetic, he or she must be committed to the rationality of the Gospel.⁶⁴

As Schaeffer held to a strong belief in the rationality of Scripture and man’s need to embrace its truth holistically, he also conceptualized his apologetic methodology with an understanding of each individual man’s “situatedness.” Following Schaeffer’s approach, one should seek to understand a person’s thought-forms and worldview in order to communicate to them clearly.⁶⁵ According to Schaeffer, each person comes to the Gospel within their own unique context, feeling the weight of man’s universal dilemma. As Colin Duriez mentioned, Schaeffer’s approach “was shaped in... context and hence was person-centered.”⁶⁶ Each man is unique, and yet, all of mankind shares the same inescapable questions of life.⁶⁷

Schaeffer saw his anthropology being grounded in the special revelation of God. Rooting this demonstration of love for all people in the authority of Scripture, Schaeffer writes,

We who stand for the Word of God as without mistake not only when it speaks of salvation matters but also when it speaks of the cosmos, history, and moral norms, must be careful to live under the Word we say we hold so dear, and that very much includes love to those (many of whom are certainly brothers and sisters in Christ) who we think are making a dreadful and destructive mistake in their view of the Bible.⁶⁸

"Schaeffer realized if the Christian faith were to be compelling, then Christians would have to live consistently with their stated beliefs."

He staunchly believed that if one is to hold to the truth and veracity of Scripture, then that truth has immediate and sustaining implications for the Christian’s life—not least of which includes demonstrations of love towards other believers. Schaeffer realized if the Christian faith were to be compelling, then Christians would have to live consistently with their stated beliefs. Additionally, if the Scriptures were true then it meant Christ’s Lordship extended to all of man’s person and work.

Further, Schaeffer understood his entire schema within the conceptual framework of a personal God and a personal universe. Personality is central to Schaeffer’s entire approach. He understood the answer to all of man’s longing, and ultimately the solution to man’s dilemma, to be found within a “personal infinite God and a personal unity and diversity in God... Christianity has this in the Trinity.”⁶⁹ A personal universe with a personal beginning from a personal God is the foundation for morality, epistemology, and metaphysics. Again, this is not an apologetic approach in concept only. Ultimately, this is the foundation upon which Schaeffer builds his Christian worldview.

⁶⁰Louis Markos, *Apologetics for the Twenty-First Century* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

⁶²It may be helpful to think of Schaeffer as a “soft presuppositionalist” according to Chatraw and Allen’s paradigm. They understand a soft approach to not be “sealed off” from other approaches, but to emphasize the epistemic starting point regarding the potential of human reason. Joshua D. Chatraw and Mark D. Allen, *Apologetics at the Cross: An Introduction for Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018) 106–107, 117–121.

⁶³Louis Markos writes, “[D]espite his presuppositional background, [Schaeffer] was at least half an evidentialist at heart... Schaeffer the apologist devoted much of his time and energy to engaging young bohemian skeptics at L’Abri. With great passion and vigor, he sought common ground with the dispossessed hippies by working to understand their countercultural art, literature, and film and trying to get to the root of their often rootless yearnings for truth.” Markos, *Apologetics for the Twenty-First Century*, 106.

⁶⁴Follis, *Truth with Love*.

⁶⁵Follis, *Truth with Love*.

⁶⁶Colin Duriez, *Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 246.

⁶⁷Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:177.

⁶⁸Francis A. Schaeffer, “Foreword” in James Montgomery Boice, ed., *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 19.

⁶⁹Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, 1:283.

Schaeffer demonstrates his intellectual approach in his writings, especially in his trilogy. Yet, it bears repeating that Schaeffer never explicitly laid out his own apologetic approach. While he gives enough in his writings for future apologists to emulate, it may be better to understand Schaeffer's approach more in terms of how he did apologetics, rather than what he has said about apologetics. That is, to rightly understand Schaeffer's apologetics, it is crucial to see how he operated his ministry throughout his life. As Follis suggests, "his approach was as much a part of his apologetics as was his argumentation." Schaeffer, to his credit, seemed to live in harmony between what he wrote and what he did.

This leads to the second element of Schaeffer's apologetic method, his practice. He demonstrated his methodology in consistent habit throughout his life. Jerram Barrs articulates this synthesis incredibly well, "The truth that we are the image of God, a truth that is at the heart of all his apologetic work, was for Schaeffer, a reason to worship God. This conviction of the innate dignity of all human persons had many consequences for Schaeffer. He believed, and he practiced the belief, that there are no little people..."⁷⁰ This commitment was demonstrated practically through his ministry and throughout his lifetime. He invited people into his home, consistently emphasizing and exemplifying grace-filled community. One of Schaeffer's greatest legacies is his establishment of the L'Abri community. As Barrs himself observed, "He took a conversation with one damaged and needy young person as seriously as when he was talking with the president or lecturing before an audience of thousands."⁷¹ Schaeffer avoided the sin of partiality, understanding that the image of God in man was a reason to respect and dignify all people of every background.

The negative effects of not capturing this biblical vision for mankind were also on Schaeffer's mind. Adam Johnson writes, that according to Schaeffer, "...when human beings are reduced to the mechanics of physics and chemistry, the person, as well as all personal significance, disappears."⁷² This flattening of the human person led to a dehumanization that had far reaching implications. Schaeffer had a particular concern regarding the naturalistic worldview, "whose view of reality reflects a materialist understanding of man in which he is merely the chance product of matter

in motion. In short, man lives in an impersonal universe, according to the materialist, and hence personality is not intrinsic to existence. But then how does one explain man's personality from the impersonal beginning, plus time, plus chance?"⁷³ He was concerned with the view of an impersonal, mechanistic universe that sees the world only in terms of utility. He believed, rightly it seems, that there would be myriad implications for man and his place in the universe if all was framed only in terms of matter and chance.⁷⁴ Schaeffer held a beautiful, dynamic understanding of man, even in light of man's sinful, moral guilt. To him, naturalism flattened man's significance and purpose.

Follis clarifies that while Schaeffer's approach was not person-centered, it was person-sensitive.⁷⁵ He consistently kept his theological focus upon God, His work, and the reality of His existence. However, Schaeffer sought to make sure that the human person was taken into account when engaging apologetically. His "final apologetic" is a perfect example of this concern. This final apologetic is rooted in John 17:21 and is demonstrated in the visible unity of the church—which necessarily includes sacrificial, Christ-like love.⁷⁶ This final apologetic was not a hypothetical concept Schaeffer posited, but a practice he embodied. At the center of his work at L'Abri was "grace extended to everyone there. It was not a formless grace, but one structured by the intellectual and biblical teaching that pervaded."⁷⁷ This final apologetic is mentioned throughout Schaeffer's corpus, and is fleshed out in *The Mark of the Christian*. Echoing the sentiments of 1 Corinthians 13, Schaeffer argued that apologetics is useless if it is not driven by love—specifically a love for God and fellow man. Further, this is to be demonstrated in tangible ways, exhibited in substantial individual and corporate healing.⁷⁸ Schaeffer sought to demonstrate love and unity to all made in the image of God.

⁷⁰Barrs, "Francis Schaeffer: His Apologetics," 36.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Adam Lloyd Johnson, "Created to Know: A Comparison of the Epistemologies of Michael Polanyi and Francis Schaeffer," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 79.1 (2017): 47.

⁷³Eduardo J. Echeverria, "The Christian Faith as a Way of Life: In Appreciation of Francis Schaeffer (on the Fiftieth Anniversary of L'Abri Fellowship)," *Evangelical Quarterly* 79.3 (2007): 250.

⁷⁴Stephen J. Wellum, "Francis A. Schaeffer (1912-1984): Lessons from His Thought and Life," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 6.2 (2002): 15.

⁷⁵Follis, *Truth with Love*, 154.

⁷⁶Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 4:189.

⁷⁷Edgar, "Francis A. Schaeffer," 518.

⁷⁸Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:165.

Schaeffer realized that being relational was a fundamental part of man, especially for Christians. Thus, his theology implicated his methodology in a communal way, as well. He modeled this relational focus at L'Abri. He wrote,

There must be communion and community among the people of God: not a false community that is set up as though human community were an end in itself... This is the real Church of the Lord Jesus Christ—not merely an organization, but a group of people, individually the people of God, drawn together by the Holy Spirit for a particular task... The Church of the Lord Jesus should be a group of those who are redeemed and bound together on the basis of true doctrine. But subsequently they should show a substantial 'sociological healing' of the breaches between men which have come about because of the results of man's sin.⁷⁹

Schaeffer, understanding man as a relational creature, sought to emphasize and practice the collective longings inherent in man. He not only understood this to be emblematic of what it meant to be a Christian, but also understood redeemed community to offer restorative work at a societal level.

One should recognize that Schaeffer's concern for the human person extended beyond his explicitly apologetic enterprises. Even when Schaeffer was not seeking to share the Gospel with an unbeliever, his anthropology had practical implications. Consistently, as he was engaging the broader culture on a variety of issues, he prophetically spoke on a variety of issues that are still in discussion today: euthanasia, abortion, pollution, etc. In both *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* and *A Christian Manifesto*, Schaeffer engages heavily in critiquing the practices of abortion and euthanasia as atrocities against human worth and dignity, while also thinking through possibilities for social action. In *Pollution and the Death of Man*, Schaeffer seeks to address ecological concerns that have implications for mankind. These issues were rooted in Schaeffer's theological anthropology, many of them directly tied to man's four basic relationships.

Schaeffer was not only concerned with easier cultural issues, given his cultural environment. Relatively unique within his more fundamentalist context, Schaeffer engaged in a level of racial reconciliation that was rooted in his theological anthropology. His wife, Edith, records that during segregation Schaeffer consistently sought to meet and fellowship with African Americans. Likewise, Schaeffer continually met with an older African American man who had worked as a janitor at the Schaeffer's college. He would visit him up until his death, reading the Bible and praying with him.⁸⁰ Similarly, Barrs observed how the Schaeffers welcomed people of all races into their home at L'Abri, and how Schaeffer performed marriages for interracial couples, even to the dismay of his critics.⁸¹ In his writings he points out the atrocities of the slave trade, and the need for social action that is grounded in the basis of Christian faith and willing to stand against social injustices.⁸²

A biblical-theological anthropology was key to Schaeffer's practice and certainly contributes to his continued relevance. Put succinctly, "Mankind as significant being, created in the image of God, stood out in Schaeffer's theology; it is the Christian message of meaning and love and the clarifying biblical worldview that Francis Schaeffer stressed, which makes his apologetic so relevant in the twenty-first century."⁸³ Schaeffer's anthropology was interwoven throughout his apologetic arguments in a variety of ways. Further, his anthropology necessarily led him to certain social action. Suffice to say, on the topic of the image of God Schaeffer lived consistently with his stated beliefs.

⁷⁹Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 1:166.

⁸⁰Edith Schaeffer, *The Tapestry: The Life and Times of Francis and Edith Schaeffer* (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1985), 123.

⁸¹Jerram Barrs, "Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message," *Reformation 21: The Online Magazine of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals*, 2006.

⁸²Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 5:328.

⁸³Nyman, "Francis Schaeffer's Relevance to Contemporary Apologetics," 5.

CONCLUSION

While Francis Schaeffer was admittedly not an academic and saw himself as more of an evangelist than an apologist, he remarkably leaves behind a rich legacy concerning a theological vision for apologetic practice. Schaeffer's views on anthropology are well within the confines of orthodoxy, and very much represent the confessional traditions to which he subscribed. In no demonstratable way does Schaeffer depart from the historic Christian understanding of man, whether in regard to the image of God or effects of the Fall. Instead, Schaeffer utilized a thoroughly biblical-theological anthropology in both his argumentation and practice. While he did not hold to overly unique views on the nature of man, Schaeffer is distinctive in the way in which he rightly manifested these beliefs into compelling argumentation and action. Because of this consistency, Schaeffer has influenced numerous apologists, philosophers, and Christians-at-large.

Yet, these are not just influences that offer lip-service to this man. Charles Colson, Os Guinness, Nancy Pearcey, and many others count Schaeffer as the primary influence on their theological and apologetic thinking. Further, L'Abri communities across the world continue to thrive. The Francis Schaeffer Institute at Covenant Theological Seminary, Francis Schaeffer Foundation in Switzerland, and the Schaeffer Collection at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary all proclaim the lasting influence of this man.⁸⁴ Yet, one may inquire as to the uniqueness of his approach. The uniqueness, as it were, is found in the harmony between what he taught and what he lived. In his writings he clearly held the image of God in high regard. However, that belief affected both his written arguments and ministerial/personal practice. He was simply focusing on the “mannishness of man” and bringing “true truth” to bear in the reality in which man lives. Simply, Francis Schaeffer sought to see man as God sees him, and to respect the inherent dignity found in the image of God. ✕

⁸⁴Edgar, “Francis A. Schaeffer,” 518-19.



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Is My Body Me? An Excerpt from *What God Has to Say About Our Bodies*

It is not a question we might have considered even just 15 years ago, but rest assured it is increasingly being asked by a younger generation today.

Here are three foundational truths the Bible shows us about identity and our bodies.

1. *You don't just have a body; you are a body.*

Consider the creation of Adam:

The LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Gen. 2:5-7)

This is the opposite of how many people today view themselves. God doesn't make a soul called Adam first, and then look around for something physical to put that soul into, as though the soul is the *real* Adam, and his body is like Tupperware container to store it in. No. God actually starts with matter. He forms a body from the ground which is then brought to life. Your body is not fundamentally a soul that's been shoved into the nearest lump of flesh, as if any body would do.

Or take these words of Paul to the Corinthians:

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Cor. 6:18-20)

Notice how this passage reinforces the importance of the body. Paul uses "you" and "your body" interchangeably here:

Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within *you*, whom you have from God. *You* are not your own, for *you* were bought at a price. So glorify God in *your body*.

However much we might privilege the mind or soul over the body as the "real" us, we know deep down that the body is an essential part of who we truly are. When someone hurts your body, we know that they have not just damaged some of your property; they have violated *you*. What you do to someone's body, you do to a *person*, not just to some flesh. We cannot escape our embodied-ness.

2. *Your body is not everything*

In the account of creation, we see that Adam is not *just* a body. God made him, but then had to breath his own life-giving breath into the matter for Adam to come alive. On its own, unanimated by God, the body cannot be a living creature. A body without God's life is only a corpse. And what was breathed into us will one day be breathed out of us. Our bodies will return back to the dust from which humanity was first created. How our lives end reflects to us how they began.

So your body is not the sum total of who you are. Bodies may be essential, but on their own they are not sufficient.

We also see that God looks *beyond* them.

"Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." (1 Sam. 16:7)

We look at outward appearance. We size one another up. But whereas we tend to begin and end with outward appearance, God sees into what is inward. He looks on the heart.

There are a host of reasons we might not like the body we have. Your body, in all its glory and limitations, is you. But it is not the totality of you. Looking only at the physical gives us a very limited and incomplete picture of someone.

3. *Your body is not nothing*

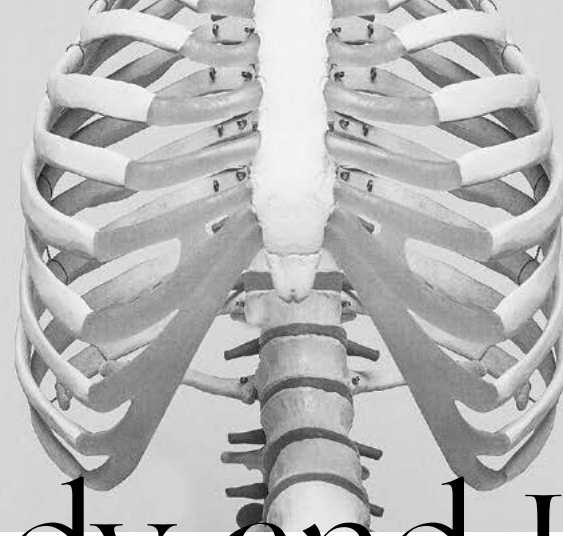
If one mistake is to think about the body as if it is the sum total of who we are, another is to think of it as if it has no bearing at all on who we are. This seems to be more and more prevalent in the West today -- we increasingly see our *real* self as who feel ourselves to be deep down inside.

This has become the basis for much of our ethical thinking. Whatever this true self wants and desires is self-justifying. We have to be authentic, and this legitimates virtually any kind of behavior. The longings and yearnings we find deep within ourselves have to be granted in order for us to be truly authentic. It is not uncommon now to hear of even leading Christians justifying abandoning biblical ethics on the basis of having to be "true to who I really am."

But this is a profoundly unbiblical way to think. Our bodies are not incidental, just as they are not accidental. They are a gift and a calling -- and a truly fulfilled life will not be found without regard to the physical body God has given us. ✕

An Excerpt from What God Has To Say About Our Bodies (Crossway, June 2021)

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On the Body and Its Meaning

Charles Taylor argues that modernity has stripped the created world of its meaning: “The cosmos is no longer seen as an embodiment of meaningful order which can define the good for us.”¹ Historian Jacques Barzun lays part of the blame at the feet of the father of modern naturalism: “The denial of purpose is Darwin’s distinctive contention.”² If there is no creator, as Darwin implied, then there can be no purpose to creation. But Christians understand that denying the Creator and thus the Creator’s purposes is as old as sin; that is to say, such denial is almost as old as the world itself, which is why we must go back to the beginning to gain perspective on meaning and purpose of creation, especially the human body.

The human body looms large in Christian thought and life, standing at the beginning, the middle, and the end of a properly Christian accounting of history and theology. In the beginning,

God formed a human body out of the dust of the ground and then animated it with his own breath, after which he built another body out of the side of the first as a natural complement. At the center of Christian history and theology, the Son of God took on flesh by assuming a human body in the form of a tiny babe, inside the body of another; he was born into the world and then grew to full maturity as a man to walk the earth and be crucified bodily on a tree, buried bodily in a tomb, and raised again from the dead bodily on the third day. Christians await the bodily resurrection of all humanity at the end of all things, when the redeemed are re-embodied for immortality and the unredeemed for eternal death.

Because of the prominence of the human body, we would do well to pay attention to its meaning and purpose in a day when such considerations are often not only trivialized, but increasingly subjectivized

and, worse still, categorized out of contemplation altogether by agnostic scoffers. Scripture helps us avoid the twin errors of the world’s approach: neither despising the body through a kind of gnostic, untethered spiritual asceticism, nor worshipping the body through hedonistic or naturalistic materialism.

In this essay, I want to reflect on the meaning of the human body in conversation with the inspired narrative of its origin in the first chapters of the book of Genesis. In this text, we see at least three elements of bodily purpose or meaning: (I) materializing human agency in the visible world and manifesting personal identity; (II) expressing sexual complementarity; and (III) displaying familial and historical congruity.

I. THE HUMAN BODY MATERIALIZES HUMAN AGENCY IN THE VISIBLE WORLD AND MANIFESTS PERSONAL IDENTITY.

In Genesis chapter one, we read that God made man male and female on the sixth day in order to image himself in creation and to have dominion over the material created order — sea, sky, and earth; fish birds, and animals — through the fruitful multiplication in, and the benevolent subjugation of, the world. But it isn’t until Genesis chapter two that we read about the nature of man’s constitution, when the narrative zooms in on the special creation of the first man and woman.

Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature (Gen. 2:7).

¹Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 148–49.

²Jacques Barzun, *Darwin, Marx, Wagner* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 11. I am indebted to Nancy Pearcey for drawing my attention to these two quotes in her excellent book, *Love Thy Body* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018).

After creating out of nothing the earth and everything in it, God proceeds on the sixth day to take some of the created earth and mould it like clay into the body of something not yet seen in the world: a man. It is noteworthy that before God's breath of life comes to animate him, there lying on the ground is not just an ordered pile of dirt, but something God calls the "man of dust." This detail is perhaps intended to signify the priority and irreducibility of man's bodily constitution. God made man a hybrid, a mediating creature with visible (bodily) and invisible (spiritual) attributes, in order to represent the invisible to the visible, and the visible to the invisible — indeed, even to *make visible* the invisible.

Upon receiving the breath of life from the mouth of God, the man awakes a living creature into a creation alive with God's creativity — God's plants and animals and flowing streams and beauty all around. The first words the man hears are from the mouth of God, as God addresses the man as a "Thou," a personal agent distinguished in this divine address from the rest of creation. It is at this point in the narrative that the Septuagint begins to translate the generic word for man, *adam*, with the personal name, *Adam*, in place of the heretofore impersonal *anthropos*. The subsequent events seem designed by God to drive home this point, to punctuate man's personal identity and agency as he acts in the visible world with visible effect.

Looking on Adam in creation, God recognizes the man's place in the world. To access Augustine's tripartite division of the Good, he is a creature with a *measure* and *form* set apart from the rest of creation. In this way, he is recognized to be "alone" by his Creator. Not only is his spirit unlike

the rest of the visible order, but his bodily constitution reflects his elevated status as lord of the material cosmos. But Adam is slower to recognize his unique place. As God brings the beasts of the field to him for names, Adam's bodily and intellectual configuration is set in contrast to that of the animals. Adam is not "alone" among the living or the embodied — there are embodied creatures parading all around. But Adam is "alone" among the self-conscious, the self-determined, and the psychosomatic. Adam's embodied experience teaches him this as he names the different yet complementary pairs of lower creatures passing by. He looks at his own hands, his own feet, his own torso, and in his body and in his spirit he feels himself to be an "I," and to be alone.

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Gen. 2:21–22)

Adam's experience of his own existence was to be a self-aware man in soul and body before he knew himself to be, properly speaking, male. For to be male is to correspond to female, and vice versa (more on this below). This observation may account for why Adam's response to God's special formation of the woman — a divine undertaking intentionally and purposefully distinct from his own — is a declaration of constitutional sameness: "*This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*" (Gen 2:23). Here is one whose bodily existence corresponds to his, another "I" who not only can be addressed eye to eye, but communed with in love and in perfect equality. The Puritan Matthew

Henry eloquently reflects on the symbolic significance of the woman being created from Adam's rib:

[T]he woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.³

The woman stands beside the man in like bodily form and measure, and it is only then that Adam is no longer alone. In this way, the human body manifests not only Adam's, but Eve's personal identity, to be recognized and affirmed visibly and intellectually by one another and manifested in the visible realm as each acts as an independent bodily agent.

II. THE HUMAN BODY EXPRESSES SEXUAL COMPLEMENTARITY.

In God's good providence, mankind is made to image his Creator in two distinct yet complementary modes or forms: "*male and female he created them*." This distinction is most apparent bodily, and less apparent — to the point of inexpressible mystery — in what is invisible in soul and intellect. The human body both makes visible what is invisible and communicates according to its embodied sexual differentiation. The human body's dimorphic differentiation follows the pattern of creation — heaven and earth, sun and moon, land and sea, masculine and feminine — which is perhaps a reflection itself of the pattern of God's two-faceted self-revelation: he is truth and love, *emet* and *hesed*.

Mankind's sexual complementarity is a necessary and ordered reality of creation from the beginning. God makes man male and female for communion and multiplication, man and woman fulfilling complementary roles in relationship toward one another and a unified role toward the invisible and visible realm.

Mankind's sexual complementarity is especially emphasized in the narrative that follows the first chapter in Genesis. The man's body is made, formed, and sculpted from the earth, while the woman's body is constructed, erected, and built around (*oikodomeo*, LXX) the man's rib as a house. Their bodily constitution is not merely different in form and genesis — a paradigmatic reality that persists in men and women today, who issue forth male or female having different sexual organs prompted in development by the genomic donation from the side of man and housed inside the body of a woman — but they reflect a way of being in the world. For example, according to Genesis 4:1, in sexual relations the woman is the one who is known and the man is the one who knows, a fact that points to an interiority and exteriority of bodily person that affects and reflects the male and female personality.

In his *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II refers to the "spousal" meaning of the body with respect to the male and female sexual constitution.⁴ Whether or not "spousal" is the right word to describe the sexual meaning of the human body — I have my own reservations — he nevertheless rightly directs our attention to discerning a meaning and purpose behind God's bodily design for male and female sexual complementarity.

³Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (1706), n.p., <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc1/Gen.i.html>.

⁴John Paul II defines this "spousal" attribute as "*the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence*." *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006, 1997), 185–86.

In the Genesis text, several reasons are apparent for mankind’s bodily sexual differentiation: (1) to address the man’s aloneness; (2) to catechize man in love, that is, in belonging and in self-giving; (3) to provide reciprocal aid.

First, the woman corresponds entirely to the man in a fitting manner — *measure* and *form* — thus rendering him no longer alone. But in addition, through their sexual union, mankind’s potential for being alone diminishes exponentially with each generation as their fruitfulness fills the earth with others who share their like *measure* and *form*.

Second, God creates the woman out of the man’s side and brings her to him to have and to hold, and man’s response is instant recognition of a part of himself in her, part himself already belonging to her: “*bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.*” Then he names her, which itself is an act of authority, giving part of his name, himself, to have as her own: “*she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.*” To know the bodily constitution of man and woman is to know they are not for themselves, but for another. As Oliver O’Donovan states, “To have a male body is to have a body structurally ordered to loving union with a female body, and *vice versa.*”⁵ Ultimately, God’s sexual design for man and woman has its meaning in marriage, which points beyond itself to God’s redemptive work in Christ — the ultimate catechesis in love, belonging, and self-giving.

Third, God’s expressed purpose for making the woman is aid: “*I will make him a helper fit for him*” (Gen. 2:18). The woman is given work that corresponds to and benefits the man, and the man in return does work that benefits the woman. Some of this

work overlaps in conjunction with the man and woman’s corresponding dignity and bodily capabilities, while some of the work is differentiated according to sexual difference. God’s curses in Genesis chapter three may act as a kind of photo negative toward highlighting these differences in vocational emphases; the quintessential work with quintessential differentiation is the work of procreation and familial life.

Suffice it to say, though, that without the meaning and purpose of bodily sexual differentiation — yes, even dimorphic sexual differentiation — monogamous marriage remains ungrounded, familial life is undetermined, and man is no longer naturally directed from birth toward the other, but turned into himself in self-love.

III. THE HUMAN BODY DISPLAYS
FAMILIAL AND HISTORICAL CONGRUITY.

One of the natural realities of bodily existence that isn’t explicit in the Genesis text, but is common to human experience and thus inherently self-evident, is the reality of familial congruity on display through the generations, which gifts humanity with congeniality and historical continuity. When Eve gives birth to her son Cain, she extends the sense of belonging across a generation as she exclaims, “*I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD*” (Gen. 4:1). Cain belongs in a sense to his mother and father, and his physical resemblance bears witness to this reality.

Familial resemblance is not a non-purposeful coincidence, but serves as a reminder of man’s dependence on and place within the human story. Some have experienced the uncanny feeling of looking at a century-old photograph from



a family attic and seeing in the eyes or face shape or expression of an individual long-dead their own child, or brother, or mother. Even those who do not know their biological kin know what it is to discover a people who looks like you, who shares the same bodily features that connect you and another to ancestors long passed.

To be sure, resemblance is a feature of the human race that should be a blessing, but has too often served as a curse. That is, to identify those who look like me is also to recognize there are those who do not. If I treat them differently on this basis alone — an all-too-common source of grave evil in human history — I have committed the sin of partiality. Instead, I should give glory to the Creator who created us not only male and female, but also with recognizable familial resemblance that should serve not to isolate us from one another in consanguine uniformity, but instead cause us to celebrate God’s diversity in creating a beautiful array of familial rootedness — knowing that my grandfather’s grandfather, and his grandfather’s grandfather, and the generations on, share a converging resemblance that binds us

together as sons of Adam. Our bodies should serve to remind us of this as we note our resemblances, resemblances which display continuity with peoples, and these peoples with a common history.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

It is noteworthy that the Apostle’s Creed, this ancient summary of the Christian faith, includes a confession of belief about the human body: “I believe in the resurrection of the body.” The prominence of this eschatological confession reminds us that God created the human body, that the Son of God assumed a body, and that at the end of all things God plans to redeem the bodies of all who are united in the body of Christ, the church, at the resurrection of the dead. And this all for a purpose revealed in Scripture, a purpose that understands our bodies belong to another: “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:20). ✕

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⁵Oliver O’Donovan, *Transsexualism and Christian Marriage* (Cambridge, UK: Grove Books, 1982, 2007), 19.

Dying and Embodiment: The Body in Late Stages of Life



It is not an unfair generalization to say that most people do not like to think or talk about death and dying. Indeed, doing so seems morbid or even macabre. In the modern context, most people rarely witness death and dying, as less than 20 percent of individuals in the United States die at home in the presence of family (this figure was nearly 90 percent at the turn of the twentieth century). Yet, Scripture encourages Christians to engage in introspection about death and dying (cf. Ps. 90:10–12) and the Bible teaches that living and making plans without considering the imminence of death is foolish (cf. Luke 12:16–21; James 4:13–15). Given the inevitability of death, as well as the aforementioned scriptural exhortations, we must learn — or perhaps relearn — to talk and to think about death and dying, and to do so well.

One of the consequences of our reticence to talk about death and dying is that many Christians do not have the theological categories and tools needed to think well about the human body in the late stages of life. Indeed, two common errors related to the body can be seen when believers talk about death and dying. First, some maintain that there exists an absolute moral obligation to extend physical life — that is, to keep the body alive — for as long as is technologically possible. Although this may sound altruistic, it runs the risk of confusing the always-moral divine duty to protect life (cf. Ps. 82:3–4), with the sometimes-sinful human desire to avoid death (cf. Heb. 2:15). While protecting life and avoiding death are not always (or even usually) at odds, when physical life is unduly treasured it can become an idol, which may result in prolonged bodily suffering of one who is irretrievably dying. For believers, death ought not be a technological fight to the finish, but a hopeful resting in Jesus.

"For believers,
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A second error related to the body that arises in discussions about death and dying is the notion that the physical body is just a prosthesis used by the real self. This idea, which has gnostic origins, bifurcates the material and spiritual aspects of human beings, rooting one's identity in the soul or spirit. This is surely an error, however, for Scripture teaches that human beings are psychosomatic in nature, consisting of a body-soul complex (cf. Gen. 2:7; Matt. 10:28). Indeed, by divine design man is a unity of material and immaterial components. It is true that human bodies decay because of sin, eventually resulting in the body and soul being separated at death. This division, however, is unnatural and is, as Paul wrote, equivalent to being "found naked" or "unclothed" (2 Cor. 5:3–4). The prospect of the separation of body and soul ought to cause human beings to long for a resurrected and renewed body "not made with hands . . . [a] habitation which is from heaven" (2 Cor. 5:1–2). The physical body, then, ought not to be viewed as an inconvenient appendage, but as an eternal component of the real self.


Observe that these two misconceptions about the body are essentially opposing errors, for the first idolizes the physical body when it is alive, while the second neglects the physical body when it is dead. Clearly, then, when considering the body in late stages of life, Christians ought to avoid these two mistakes; yet, how can we think and talk well about dying and embodiment? Since death is a unique and varied event, it is difficult to articulate a comprehensive moral framework of dying and embodiment, as there are many variables in each instance of death. However, just as we have identified two general errors to avoid when speaking

about dying and embodiment, so we can identify two broad principles to consider when thinking about the body in late stages of life. These principles are basic and foundational and, as such, can each be applied in individual instances of death and dying, regardless of the practical and moral complexities present in a given scenario.

When considering the body in late stages of life, we must first remember that all human beings are made in the image of God (cf. Gen. 1:26–27). The image of God is a complex theological topic; yet, for the purposes of considering dying and embodiment, we can make the following observation: Since man is a composite unity of body and soul, it may be that in some non-essential way, in part, mankind bears the image of God in a corporal sense. Genesis records that a man found guilty of murder shall forfeit his own life, for, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man" (Gen. 9:6). Note that the rationale for capital punishment in this passage is the fact that man is made in the image of God. Since man "cannot kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28), the aspect of the image of God appealed to here must, at a minimum, involve the physical body. Such a substantive view of the image of God is surely not comprehensive; however, in the late stages of life we dare not overlook the teaching that, in part, the image of God involves the physical body.

Second, in thinking and talking about dying and embodiment, we must consider that human life, which is sacred, is a stewardship from God. Human life is unique, valuable, and irreplaceable once taken or forfeited. Furthermore, the

sanctity of human life was magnified by the incarnation of Christ. Stewardship of the body, then, for which God will hold mankind accountable, entails the idea that life is sacred (cf. Rom. 14:7–8). This means we must protect life and ought not take steps to hasten death. Yet, as was previously discussed, this does not mean that we must prolong life at all costs, nor does it rule out voluntarily laying down one's life, as did Christ. What is more, we should note that the sanctity of life that we steward is not contingent upon the *quality* of life but the *presence* of life. While it is true that the "outward man is perishing" (2 Cor. 4:16), which is often evident in late stages of life, we must keep in mind that human beings never cease to be image bearers of God, nor does human life ever cease to be sacred.

So, as we consider dying and embodiment, we must avoid the twin errors of overvaluing or undervaluing the physical body. In dealing with the host of complex issues that may arise related to the body in late stages of life, we must allow our actions to be governed by the biblical teachings that man is made in the image of God, which includes the body, and our stewardship of human life, which is always sacred. Finally, we must remember that Jesus' incarnation, death, burial, and bodily resurrection made possible the redemption of mankind. Scripture reports that this redemption includes man's physical body (cf. Rom. 8:23), which was purchased by Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20), is now a "member of Christ" (1 Cor. 6:15), is a "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 6:19), and will one day be transformed into the glorious likeness of Christ's risen body (cf. Rom. 8:11, 29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:10, 21; Col. 3:1–4; 2 Thess. 2:14; 1 John 3:2). 

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Manhood, Womanhood, and the History of Doctrine

INTRODUCTION

Over the past thirty years, complementarianism has enjoyed something of a consensus position among conservative churches in North America. Over against feminist arguments that men and women should be treated equally in every respect, complementarians have insisted that God intends for men to exercise leadership in the home and in the church. This consensus has faced an ever-growing challenge from society’s rapidly progressing views on gender and sexuality. Recently, the subject has become controversial also within the Church. At the heart of this controversy are two books by conservative Reformed authors that reexamine complementarianism in order to discern which aspects of it should be kept and which should be discarded.¹ Both books have met with vigorous critique in Reformed and evangelical circles.²

Evaluating this controversy is difficult, partly because Byrd and Miller do not advocate a straightforward feminism. Like feminists, they reject some of the ways that men and women are treated in conservative churches. Unlike feminists, though, they aim to preserve the headship of husbands in the home and male-only ordination in the church (albeit in modified forms). In evaluating these books, the key question is whether their central point has to do with what they reject or with what they keep. Are they mostly aiming to preserve the traditional Christian and Reformed view on manhood and womanhood, with a few proposed reforms argued from uncontroversial first principles? Or are they (even with their arguments for male headship in home and church) mostly aiming to disrupt that traditional view?

The history of doctrine can help us answer this question. Miller and Byrd make extensive use of history to support their positions. They especially rely on a sharp distinction between Greco-Roman philosophy and biblical thought. In this respect, their approach is similar to that of Adolf von Harnack, who analyzed the history of doctrine chiefly as a struggle between biblical and Greek thought. This is captured most famously in

Harnack’s Hellenization thesis, which asserted that “dogma in its conception and development is a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the gospel.”³ This analysis formed a major part of Harnack’s argument for repudiating traditional orthodoxy as unbiblical “dogma.”

By comparing Miller and Byrd to Harnack, I do not mean to suggest that they have relied directly on him. Harnack’s influence may have reached Miller and Byrd in a number of ways, including a conservative Reformed antipathy to Hellenistic “synthesis” modeled by neo-Calvinists like Cornelius Van Til and Herman Dooyeweerd.⁴ However Harnack’s influence was mediated, it is useful to compare him to Byrd and Miller because all three emphasize the opposition between Scripture and Hellenism, and all three make this a central part of their theological proposals. The fact that Byrd and Miller analyze history in way that is similar to Harnack is an important evidence that the basic impulse in their work is to erode rather than maintain the orthodoxy of the Reformed confessions.

MILLER’S HISTORIOGRAPHY

Historiography is prominent throughout *Beyond Authority and Submission*. Aimee Byrd’s foreword draws attention to the

¹Rachel Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission* (P&R, 2019), and Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Zondervan, 2020).

²Steven Wedgworth, “A New Way to Understand Men and Women in Christ? A Review of Rachel Miller’s *Beyond Authority and Submission*,” *Eikon* 1.2 (Fall 2019): 103–15. Andrew Naselli, “Does Anyone Need to Recover from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood?” *Eikon* 2.1 (Spring 2020): 127–36. Mark Jones, “A Review of Aimee Byrd’s, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*,” *The Calvinist International*, May 11, 2020. Claire S. Smith, “Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose,” *Themelios* 45, vol. 3 (December 2020): 695–98.

³Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 4 vols., trans. Neil Buchanan (New York: Dover, 1961), 1:17.

⁴See J.V. Fesko, *Reforming Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), esp. 110 on Van Til and 187–91 on Dooyeweerd.

book’s central question: whether our views of men and women are “biblical traditions” or ideas “picked up from the Greeks, Romans, and Victorians.”⁵ This distinction appears frequently throughout the book.⁶ Miller concludes with the hope that readers are equipped to “recognize the origins of what’s being taught” and thus discern what is truly biblical.⁷

Miller’s interpretation of Christian thought on manhood and womanhood may be summarized in four steps. First, the early Christians decisively departed from prevailing Greco-Roman views of manhood and womanhood.⁸ Second, the Church yielded to unbiblical Greco-Roman attitudes.⁹ Third, the Reformation returned from Greco-Roman ideas to biblical truth. This effort was hindered, though, by the Renaissance interest in antiquity, which led to Greco-Roman thought regaining the upper hand in the Victorian period.¹⁰ Fourth, the modern period is marked by unstable reactions between feminism and complementarianism, so that there is an ongoing need for biblical reformation—hence the need for this book.

Byrd’s Historiography

Byrd adopts a similar approach, though her comments on historiography are less explicit. Like Miller, Byrd emphasizes history as a crucial tool for theological discernment. History enables us, she says, to appreciate the “confessing traditions of the faith,”¹¹ thus avoiding a shallow and arbitrary biblicism. Exegesis should be informed by the Spirit’s “working in the church universal through the centuries, preserving orthodox profession and testifying to the truth of God’s Word.”¹²

Byrd also agrees with the specific steps of Miller’s narrative. She sees a stark alternative between Greco-Roman thought and biblical truth (Miller’s first step). Jesus “didn’t abide by Ben Sira or the ancient philosophers’ teaching on male superiority and sex polarity.”¹³ The early Christians also refused to “cave to the Greco-Roman culture’s expectations of gender.”¹⁴ Byrd’s frequent positive comments about the Reformation confessions¹⁵ suggest that she agrees with Miller’s third step, that the Reformers made significant progress in recovering biblical truth on these matters. In the modern period, up to the present, she sees a need for further reformation on these issues (Miller’s fourth step).

It is more difficult to tell what Byrd thinks of Miller’s second step, that the Church capitulated to Greco-Roman thought during the later patristic or medieval period. Byrd does not discuss this much in her book, but it is a major theme in her online articles following its publication. She reflects that her book was an effort to combat “Aristotelian views” on gender.¹⁶ She maintains that “we desperately need to peel away the Aristotelian mindset of men and woman that still pervades much of the teaching on sexuality in the church today.”¹⁷ She blames those “Aristotelian roots”¹⁸ for the faulty “wide complementarianism” of her critics.¹⁹ Byrd’s focus on Aristotle suggests that she sees the medieval period as the source of an illegitimate synthesis of Greek thought and biblical truth. Byrd is not entirely consistent on this point. She mentions Aristotle only once in her book, and this in an appreciative comment about Thomas’s hylomorphic anthropology.²⁰ Still, the main thrust of her analysis pins the blame on the medieval period.

EVALUATION

This historiography suffers from several serious flaws. First, the early Church did not disagree wholesale with Greco-Roman thought, either in general, or on the specific subject of manhood and womanhood. Miller is correct that Christians departed sharply from prevailing views on abortion, prostitution, and divorce.²¹ She is wrong, though, to imply that Christians disagreed with Greco-Roman views that women should not participate in political office.²² The early Church more or less agreed with prevailing cultural expectations about women’s roles in society.²³

Second, the Reformation was not primarily a rejection of Greco-Roman thought. When Calvin railed against “the scholastics,” he was criticizing particular teachers, not rejecting the entire medieval synthesis of philosophy and theology. Later Protestant theologians brought Reformation theology to full flower in an enormous body of mature scholastic thought, including the Westminster Confession. In order to

hang on to the idea that the Reformation rejected the medieval synthesis, many theologians since the nineteenth century have made a sharp distinction between the early reformers and the later Reformed—a distinction that presents Reformed believers with a vexatious choice between the Bible and their confessions. Thankfully, recent scholarship has relieved this difficulty by showing that Protestant scholasticism was an authentic fruit of the Reformation, and that the Reformation itself was compatible with the best patristic and medieval appropriations of Greek thought.²⁴

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ADOLF VON HARNACK

This faulty interpretation of the Reformation stems from the historiography of Protestant liberalism, which dominated the academy about a century ago. The organizing principle of this historiography was stated most famously in Adolf von Harnack’s Hellenization thesis: that “dogma in its conception and development is a work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the gospel.”²⁵

⁵Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 9.
⁶Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 107, 125, 154, 257.
⁷Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 258.
⁸Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 56, 59.
⁹Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 62.
¹⁰Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 63.
¹¹Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 159.
¹²Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 168.
¹³Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 187.
¹⁴Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 202.
¹⁵Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 176.
¹⁶Aimee Byrd, “Peeling Yellow Wallpaper,” June 16, 2020, <https://aimeebyrd.com/2020/06/16/peeling-yellow-wallpaper/>
¹⁷Aimee Byrd, “The True Sexual Revolution,” June 30, 2020, <https://aimeebyrd.com/2020/06/30/the-true-sexual-revolution/>
¹⁸Aimee Byrd, “I Guess This Time The Woman Has to Open the Door,” July 8, 2020, <https://aimeebyrd.com/2020/07/08/i-guess-this-time-the-woman-has-to-open-the-door-responding-to-denny-burks-review-of-my-book/>
¹⁹For “broad” and “narrow” complementarianism see the helpful comparison tables in Andrew Naselli, “Does Anyone Need to Recover from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood?” *Eikon* 2.1 (Spring 2020): 116–17.
²⁰Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 124.
²¹Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 59.
²²Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 55.
²³John A. McGuckin, *The Path of Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2017), 893.
²⁴See especially Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003). A good introduction to the historiographical issues is Willem J. Van Asselt et al., *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).
²⁵Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:17.

The “gospel,” on Harnack’s view, is the raw material of the original religion of Jesus, and the history of Christian doctrine is the story of how that raw material was transformed under the influence of Hellenism.

This thesis organizes the history of doctrine into the same four steps that we have observed in Miller and Byrd. First, Christianity was purely biblical, untainted by Greek thought. Second, the influence of Hellenism gave rise to “dogmatic Christianity”²⁶ expressed in the creeds.²⁷ Jesus’ apocalyptic religion remained in captivity to Greek metaphysics until, in the third step, the Reformers rejected Roman dogma over a millennium later. This rejection was never fully executed, in Harnack’s assessment. His fourth step, therefore, was the work of modern Protestantism to finish what the Reformation started by fully cleansing Christianity from Greek influence.²⁸ For Harnack, this meant jettisoning Christian orthodoxy altogether, including the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation.²⁹

Historians of the early church have thoroughly debunked the details of Harnack’s historiography.³⁰ Moreover, biblical scholars have demonstrated the inadequacy of the larger “Hellenism vs. Hebraism” construct.³¹ Even so, Harnack’s approach still leavens much theology and exegesis, such that many orthodox students of theology operate with historical assumptions that are at odds with their orthodoxy. Sometimes this incoherence introduces minor flaws into otherwise sound arguments. In this instance the problem is more substantial, since Miller and Byrd rely heavily on historiography to make their case. In the rest of this article, I will point out three serious problems that the historiography of Protestant liberalism has introduced into the arguments of Miller and Byrd.

THE CANON

The first problem has to do with the canon. Harnack’s assumption that the Gospel is strictly incompatible with Hellenism led him to reject the notion of a unified New Testament canon. He recognized that certain parts of the New Testament overlapped with Hellenism, but this did not lead him to conclude that Hellenism and Christianity overlapped in some respects. Instead, he concluded that these parts of the New Testament did not represent authentic Christianity. For example, he thought Luke and Acts represented an “early catholicism” that was already on the way to “dogmatic Christianity.”³² Similar reasoning has led most liberal New Testament scholars to conclude that Ephesians, Colossians, and the Pastoral Epistles are not authentic Pauline letters, on the grounds that their “household codes” and discussions of polity overlap too much with Hellenistic politics and ethics.³³

Miller and Byrd do not reject the canon, but they do share one of the assumptions that led Harnack to do so. This unresolved tension shows itself, perhaps, in their avoidance of texts that are germane to their subject but unfriendly to their position, including Ephesians 5:22-6:9, Colossians 3:18-4:1, 1 Timothy 2:8-3:13, Titus 1:5-9, and 1 Peter 2:18-3:7. Reviewers have already pointed out that these omissions are a major gap in their arguments.³⁴ I would only add that these texts are in the very parts of Scripture that Harnack likely would have identified as early capitulations to Hellenism, and that most liberal New Testament scholars describe as pseudonymous.³⁵ Miller and Byrd may believe in the integrity of the New Testament canon, but they dole out exegetical attention as if Harnack were right.

An inadequate view of the canon also appears explicitly in Byrd’s writing. She correctly disputes the claim that the canon is a “hopelessly patriarchal construction,”³⁶ but the argument she uses in this case reveals a serious weakness in her own doctrine of Scripture. The basic flaw with that feminist claim is the assumption that the canon of Scripture depends on human authority—in this case, deeply flawed human authority. The correct response to this objection is given by Westminster Confession (1.4), which teaches that Scripture derives its authority not from “the testimony of any man, or church” but from “God (who is truth itself) the author thereof.” Byrd makes a different reply to the feminist objection to the canon. Instead of drawing attention to the divine authorship of Scripture as the source of the canon, she merely modifies the liberal view of the canon

as a human creation by insisting that women were involved in the process too.³⁷ For instance, she suggests that the prophetess Huldah authorized the inclusion of “much of what we know” as Deuteronomy.³⁸ There are at least two problems with this suggestion: first, it implies that Deuteronomy did not already possess canonical authority simply because it was a divinely inspired book given by the hand of Moses; second, it seems to make room for the common liberal view of the Old Testament canon (and particularly Deuteronomy) as a creation of religious authorities during the later monarchy (in Huldah’s day) who needed to gain popular support for their religious reforms.³⁹ Putting all of this together, it seems that Byrd disagrees with Harnack about the authority of the books called canonical, but not about the meaning of canonicity itself.

²⁶Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:16.

²⁷Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:17.

²⁸Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:6n1.

²⁹Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:3.

³⁰The best debunking of the “Greek fall” hypothesis is found in Paul Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See my brief discussion of the issues, with notes to more literature, in “The Heart of Our Faith is a Person: Cyril and Protestants Today,” *Logos Academic Blog*, January 2, 2020, <https://academic.logos.com/the-heart-of-our-faith-is-a-person-cyril-and-protestants-today/>.

³¹James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1974).

³²Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:56.

³³For elaboration on the notion of “early catholicism” (*Frühkatholizismus*) in New Testament scholarship, see Carson, Moo, and Morris, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 297, 314–15, 660–62. On the issue of pseudonymity, see their section “Pseudonymity and Pseudepigraphy,” 337–50.

³⁴Andrew Naselli, “Does Anyone Need to Recover from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood?” *Eikon* 2:1 (Spring 2020): 127–36. Steven Wedgworth, “A New Way to Understand Men and Women in Christ? A Review of Rachel Miller’s *Beyond Authority and Submission*,” *Eikon* 1:2 (Fall 2019): 111. Mark Jones, “A Review of Aimee Byrd’s, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*,” *The Calvinist International*, May 11, 2020, “she shows an eagerness to look at the texts that will support her arguments, but I was surprised at the omissions of certain texts that might appear salient to the concerns of the book.”

³⁵Carson, Moo, and Morris, 337, speak of a “broad consensus” that identifies as pseudonymous Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, the Pastoral letters, and 1–2 Peter.

³⁶Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 37.

³⁷Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 45.

³⁸Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 46.

³⁹A brief and accessible summary of the issues can be found in Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Kings: The Power and the Fury* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2005), 316–17.

MISSIONARY HERMENEUTICS

The second problem has to do with hermeneutics. Harnack’s interpretation of the New Testament turned on the significance of Paul’s Gentile mission. According to Harnack’s construction, Paul was a student of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3) who would not have introduced Greek thought into the Gospel of Jesus.⁴⁰ He preached only Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2), not philosophy.⁴¹ Thus he was a true representative of Jesus’ Gospel. However, he also became “all things to all men” (1 Corinthians 9:22) and adopted Gentile modes of speech for evangelism.⁴² Paul appropriated Hellenism so effectively, in fact, that his hearers understood his message in that idiom.⁴³ Thus to interpret Paul correctly today one must see that the Hellenistic aspects of his letters do not truly represent his thought.

Byrd applies a similar hermeneutical approach to 1 Corinthians 14:34.⁴⁴ She argues that when Paul exhorted women to “keep silent in the churches,” he did not actually mean that women must keep silent in the churches. Rather, he meant that they must maintain proper decorum in light of the prevailing cultural norms at Corinth. She does not explain Paul’s citation of “the Law,” or his appeal to creation in related texts (1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 1 Timothy 2:13-14). Byrd’s interpretation of this text is unconvincing, but it is also important to notice that it is just the sort of interpretation we would expect from someone operating on Harnack’s assumption of a strict incompatibility between Hellenism and the Gospel, mediated by Paul’s Gentile mission. Like Harnack, Byrd understands Paul to be clothing his message in Greek

custom and culture, expecting that his most spiritually perceptive readers will see through this superficial Hellenism and grasp the truly biblical point. Ironically, only a select few of Paul’s readers have been succeeded in seeing through Paul’s Hellenism. In this, Harnack and his heirs have achieved an insight that eluded virtually the entire interpretive tradition, including the Church Fathers and the Reformers.

THE GREEK FALL

The third problem has to do with the orthodox tradition of doctrine. Miller and Byrd share partly in Harnack’s assumption that the Church capitulated to Hellenism in the later patristic era. Judging from their commendations and criticisms of various figures, they seem to identify the later fourth and early fifth centuries as the turning point. Miller mentions Tertullian approvingly⁴⁵ and Byrd has appreciative words for the fourth-century Cappadocian fathers (as well as their sister Macrina).⁴⁶ Byrd appreciates Augustine⁴⁷, but he is the earliest figure that she mentions as part of the problem.⁴⁸ The late fourth to early fifth century is the same period that Harnack identified as the crucial moment in theology’s fall into Greek philosophy. Harnack’s critique was much broader than that of Miller and Byrd, however. He rejected all of creedal orthodoxy as Hellenistic, whereas they focus their criticism on issues of manhood and womanhood.⁴⁹

This leaves Miller and Byrd in an awkward spot. They say they are concerned with modern departures from Nicaea, but at the same time they deploy Harnack’s historiography, which plays a major

"...these books are mostly about disrupting rather than preserving the traditional Christian and Reformed view on manhood and womanhood."

role in such departures. If they wish to maintain creedal orthodoxy, they must recognize that it was formed by a long period of reflection on scriptural teachings, elaborated through a critical reception of Hellenistic philosophy. Every major thinker who contributed to the theology of the creeds—Athanasius, the Cappadocians, and Cyril of Alexandria, to name a few—was adept at using Greek thought for expressing Christian doctrine. If Byrd and Miller wish to join Harnack’s lament over the intrusion of Greek thought into the Church, they should know that this will entail rejecting Trinitarian orthodoxy as “Greek” and “unbiblical.”⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

Miller and Byrd do not agree wholesale with Harnack’s liberal theology, but they do rely on some of his key assumptions to make their most important arguments.

This gives rise to a series of internal contradictions in their work. They insist on being biblical rather than Greek, but they find certain biblical texts relatively easy to overlook. They decry the arbitrariness of biblicist exegesis, but arbitrarily distinguish missionary tactics from universal ethics. They defend the creeds, but adopt the assumptions that lead to rejecting them. The fact that these internal contradictions arise from Harnackian assumptions is good evidence that these books are mostly about disrupting rather than preserving the traditional Christian and Reformed view on manhood and womanhood. ➤

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⁴⁰Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:95.
⁴¹Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:57.
⁴²Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:48n1.
⁴³Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 1:96.
⁴⁴Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 193–200.
⁴⁵Miller, *Beyond Authority and Submission*, 59.
⁴⁶Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 220–23.
⁴⁷Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 138.
⁴⁸Aimee Byrd, “Peeling Yellow Wallpaper,” June 16, 2020, <https://aimeebyrd.com/2020/06/16/peeling-yellow-wallpaper/>.
⁴⁹I summarize some of the problems with Harnack’s historiography in “The Heart of Our Faith is a Person: Cyril and Protestants Today,” *Logos Academic Blog*, January 2, 2020, <https://academic.logos.com/the-heart-of-our-faith-is-a-person-cyril-and-protestants-today/>. A more thorough discussion may be found in Donald M. Fairbairn, “Patristic Soteriology: Three Trajectories” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50, no. 2 (June, 2007): 289–310.
⁵⁰For the importance of classical metaphysics for exegesis and theology, see Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), chapter 3, “The Theological Metaphysics of the Great Tradition.”

Puritan Women as Gospel Partners



The Puritans offer a rich vein of example and encouragement we can mine in our own discipleship. They are easy to admire for their doctrinal vibrancy. They are worthy of emulation in their heartfelt piety. And they arrest our temptation toward easy-believism with the testimony of their own suffering. These are a few of the ways our forebears in the faith edify and equip us for a life of biblical faithfulness.

There are additional, if less familiar, aspects of their way of life that we can consider with equal benefit as we seek to imitate their faith (Heb. 13:7). The high esteem in which they held the gifts and graces of the women in their midst is a case in point. Puritan minister John Cotton (1584–1652), preaching on the opening verses of John 12 where Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus’ feet to the consternation of his disciples, marked this observation: “Godly women, being attentive to the ministry of the Word, may sometimes understand and be more apprehensive of the mysteries of salvation than the best ministers of the gospel.” It is difficult to think of a figure upon whom the Puritan community lavished more honor than a faithful minister. And yet, with no indication that he was saying anything extraordinary, Cotton reminded his congregation that, as believing women applied themselves to his word, God may grant surpassing spiritual sensitivity.

The aim of this article is to commend the regard Puritans regularly exercised toward women, not only as co-heirs with Christ, but also as vital gospel partners in the work of becoming more like him. We can be instructed by their example. Because Cotton spent decades of fruitful ministry in both England and the American colonies, we can take him as representative

as we explore the collection of his letters to discern four ways he postured himself toward the women in his life.

HOLY HELPFULNESS

In reading Cotton’s letters, it becomes apparent that he made a point of remembering the wives of his male correspondents. Going beyond an appended greeting or brief thanksgiving, Cotton acknowledged the way these women, too — often wives of his ministerial colleagues — were engaged with the situation discussed in the body of the letter. And since the majority of these letters were written to solicit Cotton’s counsel, we can see his recognition of their wives as a gentle reminder for the husbands to be sure and do the same.

To take one example, Cotton wrote to a colleague who had lost his right to preach, and so also his livelihood, because he would not conform to practices required by the Church of England. In closing his letter, Cotton wrote, “commend me (with mine) to your good yoke-fellow; tell her, she must now abound in thankfulness to God, and in comfort to you, especially now when other outward comforters fail. If a friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity, how much more a Christian friend, a beloved sister, a faithful wife?” Noteworthy here is not only Cotton’s reminder that the man’s wife too is peering over the precipice of this loss, but also his affirmation that she is the vital, faithful friend that he needs now more than ever.

A second and more serious example comes in a letter to Stephen Bachiler, who had lost his ministry for soliciting his neighbor’s wife. Cotton opened by calling the older

man to fall on his knees and not get up again until Psalm 51 had become the true cry of his sinful heart. In this process Cotton saw a vital place for Bachiler's wife. He wrote, "Commend my dear love to your good wife, the companion of your labors, travails, and sorrow: the Lord enlarge her heart to holy helpfulness to you under this heavy burden." The assumption behind this commendation was the biblical one that, despite its very real impact on his wife, Bachiler's infidelity was a sin first and deepest between himself and his Lord. In this, Bachiler's wife could, the Lord strengthening her, provide him help. That help was emphatically *not* the kind to indulge, enable, or excuse his sin. Rather, it was to be a "holy" help. She was the means God had appointed to serve his repentance. Even as she carried her own shame and sorrow to the Lord, in other words, she was to call her husband to be reconciled to God.

A VOW TO KEEP

When Cotton counseled men in relation to women, he consistently equated integrity toward them with obedience to God. To take one example, young Richard Saltonstall, Jr., the son of a prominent English family, arrived in New England in 1630. Emigration itself was a drastic step in the pursuit of God-honoring worship, but Saltonstall desired to be more radical still. He took a vow that he would never return to England. Not long after, his wife, Muriel, became ill. Unable to find relief in New England, she sought a cure in England and was effectively treated by physicians there. Richard wrote to Cotton for help to resolve the tension between the two vows he had made; one to God, requiring him to stay, and the other to his wife, obliging him to go.

Cotton's response took each vow seriously and in turn. First, he wrote, "God calls you to a due and serious humiliation of yourself for your vow of continuance here." That vow had been taken with good and pious intent, no doubt. It was nevertheless "unsafe" because it had the effect of "restrain[ing]...God's sovereign right" to (re)position his children as he saw fit for "his best advantage in Christ Jesus." Cotton did not wave the first vow away as if it — and the desire to serve God that it represented — did not matter. But he did require that it now "give place to that solemn vow which you made to God with your wife, in marrying, of cohabitation with her and cherishing and nourishing her health and comfort as your own flesh." In fact, no true tension existed between these two commitments. Richard's obedience to nourish and cherish his wife was now the way he would fulfill his pledge to be sold-out in his service of God; "or else the vow of man might dispense with the moral commandment of God."

THE LORD LEAD YOU IN ALL HIS HOLY TRUTH

Cotton also invested time in corresponding with women directly. This way of putting it is meant to stress both that Cotton was the most eminent preacher in New England, and that the resulting torrent of his correspondence regularly included fellow ministers, colony governors, churchmen from the Continent, powerful advocates — and critics — back home in England, and even Oliver Cromwell himself as Lord Protector. It is telling, therefore, that we do not have a single instance of a woman writing to Cotton without receiving an



answer. Nor did he break off his letters to women with a complaint over his lack of time, as he was often compelled to do with the men. Further, the responses he provided women who wrote him were as rich in Scripture, history, and theology as any he composed for the graduates of Cambridge.

In one example, a "dear sister" wrote Cotton to know whether God had provided parents with the power to bless their children. Cotton dignified this domestic request by working through the breadth of Scripture to discover examples of parents who did "daily

pray to God for a blessing upon their children." He took a similar approach when Lydia Gaunt wrote to ask him a series of questions about infant baptism. It is remarkable to remember, in reading his thorough response, that Cotton had just published a 300-page book detailing his answer to many of these same questions. Yet he was not content to refer her away. Instead, he presented her with a pastoral summary of the strongest arguments detailed in the book, concluding with the prayer that, "the Lord guide and bless you, leading you into all his holy truth fit for you to know."

A CUP OF GOD’S MINGLING IS
DOUBTLESS SWEET

Fourth, and a personal favorite, we are given a glimpse at the affection he exercised toward his own wife. As a leading non-conformist in the England of Archbishop Laud, Cotton was forced in the early 1630s to take refuge in the Puritan underground until he could emigrate to the new world. A letter he wrote his new bride, Sarah, from hiding is worth reading slowly:

“If our heavenly Father be pleased to make our yoke more heavy than we did so soon expect, remember what we have heard, that our heavenly Husband, the Lord Jesus, when he first called us to fellowship with himself, called us unto this condition, to deny ourselves, and to take up our cross daily to follow him. And truly, sweetheart, though this cup may be brackish at the first taste, yet a cup of God’s mingling is doubtless sweet in the bottom to such as have learned to make it their greatest happiness to partake with Christ in his glory, and so in the way that leadeth to it...[I] desire also to see you here, but I think it not safe yet.... For if you should now travel this way, I fear you will be watched and dogged at the heels. But I hope shortly God will make a way for your safe coming....The Lord watch over you for all good and reveal himself in the guidance of all our affairs. So with my love to you, as myself, I rest, desirous of your rest and peace in Him.”

To paraphrase this powerful statement: I love you. I want to see you and see you safe. But most of all, I want us to rest together in the strong arms and the good heart of our heavenly Father, who promises that the way of the cross is the way to glory and joy forevermore! We can walk under that light and easy yoke together.

CONCLUSION

The church, in our current moment, is confronting the question of how best to embody the biblical value women carry. The Puritans, of whom John Cotton stands as a representative, consistently modeled a meaningfully high view of women. For the Puritans, women are means of grace, gifted of God, gospel partners, and therefore necessary goods in marriage, family, church, and society. As we look to the Puritans to discover fresh encouragement in our own discipleship, this is an aspect of their example that we would do well to imitate. ✕

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It’s amazing how frequently the prayers from the little book *The Valley of Vision* show up in our worship services. *The Valley of Vision* is a collection of Puritan prayers. They are thoughtful, reflective, and meditative. They’re even written in a certain kind of cadence, which is probably very intentional, so that they might be used in corporate settings. But they came out of a deep heart of communion with God.

JOHN PIPER



THE VALLEY OF VISION

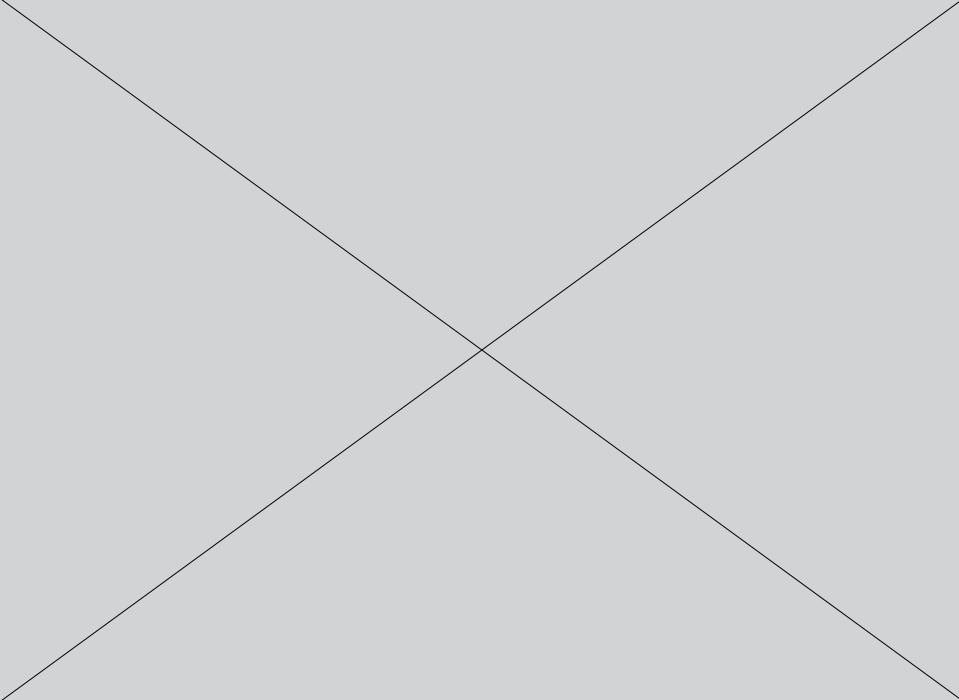


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Instruments of Unrighteousness:

How Pornography Offends Male Embodiment



When confronting an evil, a faithful Christian line of inquiry frequently involves examining the good that lies beneath the evil. Absolute evil is a nullity, a nothingness. Everything created by God is good, and therefore, evil is always a corruption, a perversion of some divinely designed good. This is true even of pleasures. As C. S. Lewis reminds us, God is a hedonist who has filled the world with pleasures. Sinful pleasures are simply those that we pursue at times, or in ways, or in degrees that God has forbidden: “It is the stealing of the apple that is bad, not the sweetness.”¹

The evil I wish to confront in this essay is the evil of pornography, specifically the way in which pornography distorts and corrupts male embodiment. To that end, we must first ask what the male body is *for*, situating it within God’s larger purposes for humanity and the world. Having done that, we can then explore the ways pornography corrupts and distorts this divine design.

¹C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1992), 89. See also Joe Rigney, *Lewis on the Christian Life: Becoming Truly Human in the Presence of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 151-153.

²Alastair Roberts, “Man and Woman in Creation (Genesis 1 and 2)” in *Complementarianism: A Moment of Reckoning (the 9Marks Journal)*. <https://www.9marks.org/article/man-and-woman-in-creation-genesis-1-and-2/>

DIVINE DESIGN

We begin with a brief overview of God’s purposes for humanity as set forth in Genesis 1–3.² God created man in his own image, after his likeness, dividing man into two complementary sexes — male and female. Our sexual differences serve God’s larger purposes for humanity, expressed in the original blessing and commission given to Adam and Eve: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28). Such fruitfulness and multiplication includes the multiplication of families and households, as a man leaves his father and mother in order to cleave to his wife.

Within these larger purposes, we observe different descriptions of the creation and purpose of man and woman. Adam is taken from the dust of the ground and commanded to work the ground and guard the garden. Eve is taken from Adam and is designed to be Adam’s helper. These relations are both complementary and asymmetrical. As Paul says, “Man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Cor. 11:8–9). These asymmetries emerge again after the Fall, as God curses the ground because of the man, increasing his pain in his labor, and God multiplies the woman’s pain in her labor (childbearing) and introduces frustration and conflict into the marital relationship.

The differences between men and women extend to their embodiment. While both men and women are necessary for procreation, they realize their procreative potential in different ways. Fathers *beget* children, whereas mothers *bear* children. Men exercise their procreative potential outside of their own bodies, whereas women exercise their procreative potential within their own bodies. To use the biblical imagery, the woman is a garden in whom the man plants his seed.

And of course, we plant seeds in order that we might bear fruit. These differences between men and women serve a larger purpose. God divides the human race into man and

woman in order to reunite them. God takes woman out of man and then brings her to the man so that they can become one flesh. Sex is the consummation of this union and is designed for fruitfulness. The fruitfulness begins with the couple together as they grow in knowledge of each other. The common biblical euphemism for sexual union is “knowing.” Adam *knew* his wife (Gen. 4:1), and therefore, the marital act is about knowing and being known. The marital act binds husband and wife together and then bears fruit, first in children, which are the fruit of the womb and the glory of the marriage, and then in producing households, and then societies, and then civilizations. Marital intimacy and procreation are the good and proper goals of sex.

So then, to summarize, God designed men to guard the garden and subdue the earth. Taken from the ground, they are oriented to the ground and labor to make it fruitful (even in the face of the curse). A central part of this fruitfulness comes when a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife. In doing so, a man gives his strength and seed to one woman within the covenant bonds of marriage in order that they might form a new household and so fulfill God’s call upon humanity to fill the earth with his faithful image-bearers.

And as we see in the New Testament, these natural purposes for men and women and marriage give way to supernatural purposes. Christian marriage is an enacted parable, a picture of Christ’s relation to his bride, the church. The self-giving of a husband images Christ’s own self-giving, and, like Christ’s, is meant to be spiritually fruitful in the holiness of his wife and the children that they raise together in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. What’s more, this parable is displayed before a watching world as a testimony to the gospel of God’s grace by which he saves sinners who have been lost and ruined by the fall.

THE CORRUPTION

With that picture in mind, we turn to the evil and corruption of pornography (and its implied partner, masturbation). Lewis again is remarkably astute in

identifying the fundamental evil of pornography and masturbation. In a letter to a friend, he notes that these two evils take an appetite designed to lead us outside ourselves (first to a spouse, and then to children and grandchildren) and turns it back on itself. Masturbation “sends the man back into the prison of himself, there to keep a harem of imaginary brides.” And the longer a man lives in this prison, the harder it is for him to escape. A man in the grip of such lusts has enormous difficulty in pursuing and uniting with a real woman. The harem in his head (or on his computer) is “always accessible, always subservient, calls for no sacrifices or adjustments, and can be endowed with erotic and psychological attractions which no real woman can rival.”

In the imaginary film that plays in his head or on his screen, “he is always adored, always the perfect lover.” In fact, the desire to be adored and admired as a “real man” is often as much a motive for pursuing the pornographic as any biological or bodily appetite. But this fantasy makes no demands on his selfishness; “no mortification [is] ever imposed on his vanity.” The imaginary harem, in the end, simply becomes the medium through which a man increasingly adores himself.³

Unsurprisingly, this twisting and perversion includes a corruption of God’s design for sex. Frequent pornography use rewires the brain, molding it and shaping it in destructive ways.⁴ Pornography is a poly-drug, meaning it is both an upper (a dopamine high, like cocaine) and a downer (an opiate release, like heroin). The porn high that builds up to orgasm and the porn crash that follows is a potent drug that creates neural pathways that harden through habitual use. Dopamine is released during arousal, as men search for image after image to sustain the high. This is the pornographic equivalent of foreplay. After orgasm, opiates are released into the body, resulting in the feeling of relaxation. The effect of these chemicals (and others) is that our bodies take a neurological snapshot in order to remember what triggered the euphoric sensation. In doing so, the snapshot binds us to the object that caused it.

Now it’s not difficult to see God’s purposes for this sort of bodily process. Sex is designed as the consummation of the one-flesh union between husband and wife. God intends for that neurological snapshot to be taken as a husband makes love to his wife so that the two of them are more tightly bound together. Orgasms are meant to strengthen the bonds of marriage.

But instead, pornography binds us to the ephemeral images in our minds or on a screen. Whereas the marital act is a part of an enduring relationship and a shared narrative between husband and wife (and the generations begotten from them), pornography is inherently episodic, isolated, and barren. Rather than taking the snapshot in the midst of the marital act, the snapshot occurs alone in the dark while clicking a mouse or swiping a screen. The effect is to habituate a man so that he becomes aroused in the wrong contexts. Porn use rewires the brain so that sin is easy and real relationships are hard.

In fact, more recent forms of pornography seek to offer a false intimacy in the face of the true. Whereas traditional pornography was largely viewed from a third-person perspective, newer forms of pornography such as virtual reality and certain interactive websites are increasingly first-person and involve a false emotional intimacy between the performer and the consumer.

But whether we are talking about older or newer forms of pornography, in both we are, to use the Pauline language, presenting our members as instruments of unrighteousness (Rom. 6:13). And this bodily presentation has an inevitable compounding effect. Offering ourselves as slaves to impurity leads to more impurity and lawlessness (Rom. 6:19). Sin begets more and deeper sin.

This accents the way that pornography use offends male embodiment. The broad shoulders that are meant to carry great weights and to support a household instead sit stooped and hunched over a computer screen. The eyes that are meant to study the works of God, to survey the land and see the unseen potential in God’s world instead flicker over image after perverse image. The bodily member designed to plant seed in a fruitful garden instead spills the seed on the ground, wasting it in a barren place.

³Lewis to Keith Masson, March 6, 1956, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*. Vol. 3, *Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy, 1950–1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 758. For further discussion of Lewis’s view of pornography and the distortion of erotic love, see Rigney, *Lewis on the Christian Life*, 220–29.

⁴I’ve summarized the effects of pornography on the body and brain in chapter 4 of *More Than a Battle: How to Experience Victory, Freedom, and Healing from Lust* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2021). For further reflections, see Joe Carter, “9 Things You Should Know about Pornography and the Brain,” *Christian Living*, May 8, 2013, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-pornography-and-the-brain/>, and William Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009).

⁵See Joe Rigney, *More Than a Battle*, especially chapters 4, 7, and 8.

More could be said about the corruption inherent in pornography.⁵ But this brief exercise demonstrates the simple reality that pornography offends male embodiment because it distorts God's design for the male body. The drives and urges designed by God to push men into the world, to call forth sacrifice and service, and to bind them to wife and children through self-mastery instead become avenues for the barren pleasure of self-worship.

But there is good news, even in the dark room where pornography thrives. If sin has corrupted and distorted the male body, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into the world to restore it (and all things). Grace restores and perfects nature. What sin has wrecked, the love of Christ can and will renew. The call for us as Christians is both to consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ, and then, from that deep confidence in our new identity in him, to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus. This is our spiritual worship, and it is a great and glorious calling. ✕

*"What sin has wrecked,
the love of Christ can
and will renew."*

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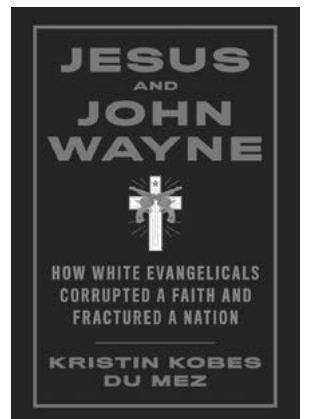
BOOK

REVIEWS

REVIEWED BY ANNE KENNEDY

Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation

“When Rachel Held Evans and Jen Hatmaker ran afoul of conservative orthodoxies related to sexuality and gender...” (9) I stopped and read the line aloud, those two names — Rachel Held Evans and Jen Hatmaker — leaping off the page. Was Kristin Kobes Du Mez, in her bestselling *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*, going to make me unhappily relive the controversies of the last fifty years that rent not only my own denomination, but the whole country? Or, would she be able to effectively untangle the theological, political, and cultural mess that has made life in the church so complicated? I had high hopes, especially as I had just wasted fifteen precious minutes of my too busy day watching Jen Hatmaker unbox the Spring FabFitFun Box,



Kristin Kobes Du Mez. *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*. New York: Liveright, 2020.

“The products
Christians
consume shape
the faith they
inhabit.”

that subscription cornucopia of wellness, beauty, and personal pampering products. After the unboxing video, I scrolled a little further and listened to Hatmaker — tired but cheerful — launch her latest book, *Simple and Free*, a treatise on how to deal with the material excesses of life.

“The products Christians consume shape the faith they inhabit,” writes Du Mez. I couldn’t agree more. It is why, I think, *Jesus and John Wayne* is so popular at

this particular moment. In it Du Mez aggressively articulates the ascendant theological assumptions of the day. In it she apprehends the contours of American religiosity. And in it, she sets forth the new, progressive theological guardrails of moral and philosophical acceptability. If you want to know what to think about the American religious landscape, order in a FabFitFun box, sign up for the online book club, and if you are very lucky, your favorite Christian celebrity might be able to join you on Zoom.

Or course, if you have run across *Jesus and John Wayne*, you will see that I left off Du Mez’s punchline. Here is her point: “Today, what it means to be a ‘conservative evangelical’ is as much about culture as it is about theology. This is readily apparent in the heroes they celebrate” (10). For Du Mez, it is only “conservatives” who fall prey to marketing and celebrity culture. After naming Jen Hatmaker, she mentions her nevermore. In fact, any reader will observe that Du Mez is not prepared to consistently apply her prescient observation. She is able to see the speck in the eye of the white evangelical Trump supporter, but not the degree to which her provocative and energetic style makes for such a culturally advantageous, if not actually fashionable product.

Chief among an *a la mode* undertaking is trying to understand why so many “conservative evangelicals” voted for Mr. Trump. Like Robert Wuthnow in *The Left Behind: Decline and Rage in Rural America*, Du Mez knew there was more to the story than met the eye. How was it that Trump could claim “that Christianity was ‘under siege,’” urging “Christians to band together and assert their power” (1)? How could such a wicked man come to be so embraced by professing Christians? As she considered her task, two epiphanies dawned on her.

First, though we will look at it in a moment, Du Mez discovered that evangelicals are not who they say they are. And second, the evangelical embrace of Mr. Trump was not an anomaly — a strange occurrence to be contextualized by, say, the other candidate being Mrs. Clinton — but was central to their cultural DNA. They loved Mr. Trump because he represented exactly the sort of hero they have always adored. He was the new John Wayne. In her own words:

[E]vangelical support for Trump was no aberration, nor was it merely a pragmatic choice. It was, rather, the culmination of evangelical’s embrace of militant masculinity, an ideology that enshrines patriarchal authority and condones the callous display of power, at home and abroad. By the time Trump arrived proclaiming himself their savior, conservative white evangelicals had already traded a faith that privileges humility and elevates ‘the least of these’ for one that derides gentleness as the province of wusses. Rather than turning the other cheek, they’d resolved to defend their faith and their nation, secure in the knowledge that the ends justified the means. Having replaced the Jesus of the Gospels with the vengeful warrior Christ, it’s no wonder many came to think of Trump in the same way. In 2016, many observers were stunned at evangelicals’ apparent betrayal of their own values. In reality, evangelicals did not cast their vote despite their beliefs, but because of them (3).

Passing over the theologically loaded muddle of pitting a “vengeful warrior Christ” against “turning the other cheek,” Du Mez forcibly begins to assemble her puzzle, fitting the pieces together regardless of their shape and size. Beginning with Teddy Roosevelt and a brief nod to the anxiety about what constituted true masculinity in the dying gasps of the Victorian era, she drives forward to Billy Graham and the tumultuous culture wars of the 60s, 70s, and 80s. For a taste of her muscular style, here is what she says about America’s Evangelist:

For Graham, the stability of the home was key to both morality and security: 'A nation is only as strong as her homes.' In the evangelical worldview, Satan and the communists were united in an effort to destroy the American home. And for Graham, a properly ordered family was a patriarchal one. Because Graham believed that God had cursed women to be under man's rule, he believed that wives must submit to husbands' authority. Graham acknowledges that this would come as a shock to certain 'dictatorial wives,' and he didn't hesitate to offer Christian housewives helpful tips: When a husband comes home from work, run out and kiss him. 'Give him love at any cost. Cultivate modesty and the delicacy of youth. Be attractive.' Keep a clean house and don't 'nag and complain all the time.' He had advice for men, too. A man was 'God's representative' — the spiritual head of the household, 'the protector' and 'provider of the home.' Also, husbands should remember to give wives a box of candy from time to time, or an orchid. Or maybe roses (26–27).

One can't help but notice that this is a rather flat view of how most Christians (and not just evangelical ones) read the Fall of Adam and Eve in the garden. God did not "curse women to be under man's rule." He placed them there as a gracious gift as part of the created order. Adam — *before the Fall* — was to have dominion over the animals and steward the earth. Eve was given to him as help, cut out of his very side so that he was not able to accomplish his task without her. The two together, and the order in which they were created, reflect the image of God in the world. In

other words, the patriarchalism of Adam was baked into the cake itself. The curse of the Fall was not the biblical articulation of headship, but the corruption wrought by Adam's sin. His "headship" devolved into tyranny and her "help" into a grasping coup for power. The result was pain, toil, and the unhappiness that goes along with the work of both men and women as they kick against the goads. Paul recaptures the beauty of the original order in Ephesians 5:21–33, a text fewer and fewer Americans are aware even exists. Of course, so many Christians are not able to express the wonder and glory of this mystery, though that shouldn't absolve Du Mez of the responsibility of fairly articulating the views of those she so decries. At the very least it makes for bad history. She goes on:

Some believed Christ's atonement had nullified any 'curse' placed on Eve in the Book of Genesis, opening the way to egalitarian gender roles; in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, evangelicals in this tradition had been enthusiastic proponents of women's rights. Graham's patriarchal interpretation reflected the more reactionary tendencies of early-twentieth century fundamentalism. He added a new twist, however, by wedding patriarchal gender roles to a rising Christian nationalism (27).

The other way of reading the historical record would be to observe that early twentieth-century Fundamentalism is not the same as the variety found at the end of the century, and that evangelicalism eventually differentiated itself from that movement. Nevertheless, most churches of all kinds were "reactionary" in the face of a turbulent century. As the Age

of Industry gave way to Silicon Valley, contraception became widely accepted, various wars ravaged Europe and Asia, and feminism and Communism cried their siren calls. The chief "sin" of the evangelical, though Du Mez doesn't see it, was that he kept reading the Bible in the way he always had. The philosophical categories held by Christians — in the face of Darwin, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, William James, John Dewey, Bill Hybels, Hillary Clinton, and practically everyone — stubbornly did not change. Biblically formed believers carried on filtering every circumstance and idea through the eminently comprehensible and useful lens of Holy Scripture, which necessarily entrenched them in a hopelessly anachronistic way of living and thinking that eventually produced what are known as the "culture wars."

Wending her way past Elisabeth Elliot, Phyllis Schlafly, Ollie North and into the bygone notoriety of the Moral Majority's Jerry Falwell Sr., James Dobson, and the LaHayes, all the way through into the excitement and controversy of the Young Restless and Reformed, to Doug Wilson and this journal's founding body, Du Mez tries to fit everybody in. The Promise Keepers, she says, "By promising intimacy in exchange for power, servant leadership passed off authority as humility, ensuring that patriarchal authority would endure even in the midst of changing times" (155). John Eldredge's Jesus, she insists "more closely resembled William Wallace than either Mother Teresa or Mister Rogers" (174). And in one of the most underwhelming "gotchas" in the history of Christianity, Du Mez reports that Elisabeth Elliot believed that "God created male and female as complementary opposites" (65).

I must confess that I was a bit surprised by the collusion Du Mez unearthed. For instance, I had no idea that Oliver North — a committed Episcopalian, which is not quite what one thinks of under the banner of "evangelical" — was such an important figure for evangelicals. Nor Phyllis Schlafly. Growing up abroad, I was always bewildered to come back to American life for brief periods and encounter the latest celebrities. Christians had their own, of course, but so did every other subculture. It was possible to see something with Kirk Cameron's face plastered all over it at a youth group meeting, and ten minutes later in the mall be confronted with a poster of Kurt Cobain. As one looking in from the outside, the love affair with celebrity culture seems to me not an evangelical sin so much as an American one. Nevertheless, Du Mez braved the stunning revelation that evangelicals are not so identified because of a coherent theological framework, but because of their consumerist inclinations. She writes:

White evangelicalism has such an expansive reach in large part because of the culture it has created, the culture that it sells. Over the past half century or so, evangelicals have produced and consumed a vast quantity of religious products: Christian books and magazines, CCM ('Christian contemporary music'), Christian radio and television, feature films, ministry conferences, blogs, T-shirts, and home décor. Many evangelicals who would be hard pressed to articulate even the most basic tenets of evangelical theology have nonetheless been immersed in this evangelical popular culture (7).

In other words, consumerist culture is what makes an evangelical. It is not belief in the unparalleled authority of Scripture, in justification by faith alone, or even a commitment to evangelism and discipleship. Rather, it is that everyone read *Wild at Heart* as soon as it came out and, on cue, kissed dating goodbye. It is hard to get around to her theory that white male patriarchy is the root of so much evangelical evil when her estimation of what makes an evangelical is so hackneyed and cartoonish.

By taking sincerely held theological and ethical beliefs off the table as possible motives for voting habits and replacing them with supposedly toxic masculine consumerism, Du Mez doesn't have to deal with what many Christians in America actually believe. Nor does she have to grapple with the fact that Mr. Trump (though it was so astonishing) ran as a pro-life candidate and lived up to his campaign promises on that score. Du Mez apparently heard all evangelicals saying that they believed Mr. Trump was an ideal political candidate, whereas many voters — not just evangelical ones — said in plain English that they merely preferred Mr. Trump to Mrs. Clinton.

In an interview, Du Mez talks about the intentional tenor of her style. She wanted not to defer to those who had so much power, and who regularly abused it. She wanted to be aggressive. She was tired of people privileging a warrior Christ rather than the one that preaches peace. It is a convenient choice. One that, I'm sure, she feels free to make because she will not suffer any loss of social or, tragically, academic credibility. People who believe in a male Christ who died for a Church who is likened to a Bride, who take their theology from a book shaped by a masculinity and

femininity so embedded in the text that the words are rendered insensible when it is excised, who humble themselves before an objective Truth that makes claims on their manner of life, their identity, their sexuality, and the darkest parts of their souls, do not have any power right now. That they ever thought they did is a peculiar hypothesis on the part of Du Mez.

What Du Mez fails to see is that Christians alone (including but not limited to evangelicals) saw the overthrow of God-ordained societal order for the catastrophe that it was — and is. If you want to feel the deeply ruinous dystopic reality in which we now live, consider the meme in which Mr. Potato Head and Dr. Seuss have been X-ed out and two women are posed in an unspeakable (because the Scriptures forbear me to describe it) posture with the name of their hit single emblazoned over them. Or the picture of the man in drag explaining that little girls really do want sexual freedom and should not be shielded by their parents or society from the likes of him.

It is beyond question that many notable evangelicals sinned from the time of Theodore Roosevelt to the death of Jeffrey Epstein. Very often Christians did not appropriately respond to the threats they glimpsed. They sometimes entrenched themselves in the culture wars and even mistook behavior modification for the gospel. Crude commercialism masqueraded as Christianity, even in the pulpit. I have shuddered to watch clips of celebrity preachers and the gimmicks of the megachurch movement. I have been horrified as everyone by the revelations of sexual abuse and cruelty. Evangelicals are sinners too. No reasonable person ever said otherwise. But many, many evangelicals foresaw the gathering storm.

"What Du Mez fails to see is that Christians alone saw the overthrow of God-ordained societal order for the catastrophe that it was — and is."

Towards the end of the book, after assembling her evidence and indicting the totality of evangelical Christianity as White and Patriarchal, she writes:

Driscoll, Mahaney, Patrick, MacArthur, and MacDonald had all risen to prominence through their aggressive promotion of patriarchal power. To those who cared to notice, it was clear that Trump wasn't the first domineering leader to win over evangelicals. Yet what most puzzled observers when it came to evangelical devotion to the president wasn't their eagerness to embrace a brash, aggressive, even authoritarian leader. Rather, it was the apparent willingness of 'family values' voters to support a man who seemed to make a mockery of those values, the willingness of the self-proclaimed 'moral majority' to back such a blatantly immoral candidate (275).

The reader might remember, back in the mid 2010s, that a new organization named The Center for Medical Progress, under the

leadership of David Daleiden, managed to procure footage of Planned Parenthood workers bargaining with those interested in buying the organs of babies. As the story unfolded, it became apparent that millions of dollars could be made on the sale of baby parts. Footage of dismembered children and the sickeningly callous workers, drinking wine and joking, emerged on the internet. At the time, though horrified, I was hopeful. Surely now, I thought, with it right there on the screen, there will be a moral uprising! People will see this cruelly commercial spectacle and move heaven and earth to stop this practice. As Du Mez said, what a person buys reveals his or her very heart.

Instead, if the reader will remember, the state of California prosecuted David Daleiden. The desperation and rage that many Americans felt at the end of eight years of Mr. Obama — not because they were racist, but because marriage as an institution had been blasphemed, because religious protections were eroding right under their very noses, and because the other candidate was someone who was so politically committed to the horrors

of abortion that she never once during her campaign equivocated or moderated her view — were willing to take what they could. When all the other better and more logical candidates had left the stage and Mr. Trump was still standing, they went out and voted for him. And yes, some notable evangelical leaders embraced him with open arms.

It would be fair to continue to debate the wisdom of that vote, to have a political discussion that included the economic and moral considerations that evangelicals hold, whether they be good and holy, or tawdry and foolish. Unfortunately for all of us, the existence of this book — and its whole-hearted embrace even by many evangelicals as “explaining everything” — proves that no such discussion will take place. Like so many progressives, Du Mez, rather than including herself in the cultural malaise that produced the choice between Mrs. Clinton and Mr. Trump, letting us all be indicted together, is unjustifiably confident in her own critique. Though “they” — evangelical Trump supporters — have shaped and been shaped by America as all religions and ethnicities have, yet now they embody a class of people who must take a lower place. Maybe if they will just buy the new Jen Hatmaker book, all will be forgiven. ✕

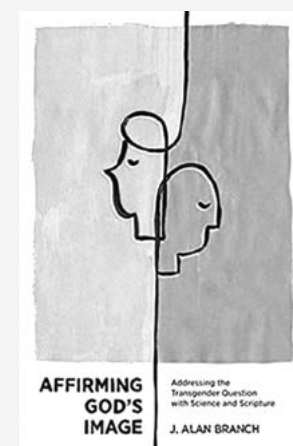
Anne Kennedy, MDiv, is the author of Nailed It: 365 Readings for Angry or Worn-Out People (SquareHalo Books, revised 2020). She blogs about current events and theological trends at Preventing Grace on Patheos.com.

REVIEWED BY CHRISTOPHER YUAN

Affirming God's Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture

“I recommend you support your teenaged daughter as she begins transitioning into a boy...and you should start calling *him* Tom.”

Receiving these words from a psychologist who denies Christ is expected. But when a top Christian expert dispenses this advice to an already confused and broken-hearted mother and father, it must give us pause. How did we get to this point where misguided ministry leaders embrace and celebrate transgender identities over against biological reality? Why are even some leading Christian therapists recommending gender reassignment — even if only starting with the least invasive procedures? And most importantly, what is the good news of the gospel for people who identify as transgendered, experience gender dysphoria, or have loved ones who do?



Alan Branch. *Affirming God's Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019.

In *Affirming God's Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture*, Alan Branch provides biblical, scientific, and practical insight on this complex and relevant phenomenon of transgenderism. This much-needed and important book makes the case that “transgenderism is not a trait like hair or skin color but is in fact an identity rooted in multiple causes and is completely inconsistent with Christian ethics” (9). Additionally, the book raises fundamental ethical and scientific problems with gender reassignment while providing practical suggestions for parents and the church.

SUMMARY

Chapter 1 surveys the history of transgenderism from antiquity until now. Even prior to modern times, transgender-like behavior was present, for example, in ancient Rome with the “Galli” of the Cult of Cybele. The modern transgender movement burgeoned out of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and the literary deconstruction movement in academia.

In order to engage our ever-changing culture with the never-changing gospel, we must continue to learn its ever-evolving language. In Chapter 2, Branch serves the church well by explaining current terminology that Christians must know to understand and engage well on this topic. Some of the vocabulary I used when I identified as a gay man decades ago before my conversion are even inappropriate today; and some of the vocabulary today was not present decades ago.

The Bible and theology — the queen of sciences — is the focus of Chapter 3. A weakness of “go to” Christian resources on

gender dysphoria is a lack of biblical and theological depth with an over-abundant dependence on subjective conjecture from psychology. Dr. Branch does not err in this way. Beginning in creation, the author communicates that male and female is an intricate part of the image of God. There is a unified witness in both the Old and New Testaments which conveys that the inversion of gender roles is sinful. Furthermore, Paul’s robust doctrine of the body in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 confirms that the physical body is important and good, which is inconsistent with gender reassignment surgery and a transgender identity. A minor complaint of mine is that “gender” is called a gift (51). This could be misunderstood that natal sex (male and female) is not. Instead, for precision and clarity, I would rather say that natal sex is a good gift of God’s creation.

Chapters 4 and 5 move to the natural sciences, discussing genetics and the brain. In spite of popular consensus, current research demonstrates that genetics may play a contributing factor, but it is not the cause. In addition, studies have not conclusively demonstrated significant brain differences between transgender and non-transgender people. The following two chapters explain the transition process. Branch reviews hormone therapy for adults, puberty-suppression medications for youth, and their associated health risks in Chapter 6. It must be clearly stated that hormone blockers do not “pause” puberty as parents naively assume, but inflict irreversible damage. Although it may be uncomfortable for some, Chapter 7 describes what occurs in top and bottom gender reassignment surgery. This book does not shy away from the complications, negative outcomes, and even the inconsistencies with medical ethics that are often hidden and suppressed.

The final two chapters relay practical advice for the family and the church. The data on childhood gender dysphoria reveal that many cases do resolve after puberty. Branch also provides helpful words for parents of both young children and adult children. It’s important for church leaders and congregations to recognize the difference between a struggle with gender dysphoria and the sin of embracing a transgender identity. Not being swayed by public opinion, Christians must always realize that no surgery can ever change anyone’s sex. These surgeries are more akin to mutilation than therapy. As more and more parents consider hormone inhibitors to delay unwanted sex characteristics, the church must lovingly yet confidently declare that puberty is not a disease and that natal sex is a good gift.

CRITICAL INTERACTION

Branch does an excellent job showing the ethical inconsistency of modern mental health professionals who believe gender reassignment is a viable solution to gender dysphoria. The strength of his critique lies in distinguishing the two antithetical worldviews: Christian and secular. This delineation provides the reader with the correct framework to assess the faulty presuppositions of transgender ideology and its erroneous interpretations of science and ethics. This vacillating view is rightly called “sexual anarchy” (114), and the great tragedy is our next generation’s inculcation of this vastly popular and seemingly compassionate response.

There is a dearth of Christian resources on transgenderism with only a few grounded in God’s truth which do not treat gender identity as primarily a psychological matter.¹ Thus, I am reticent to offer the following critique and constructive criticism on this already good book. The focus of Dr. Branch’s teachings, research, and published works have focused on Christian ethics. His first book, *Born This Way? Homosexuality, Science, and the Scriptures*, is wonderful evidence that Scripture and science are not antithetical. *Affirming God's Image* engages well with the natural sciences. Yet, I believe the book could have been strengthened if Branch had interacted with the social sciences as well and raised the specific question as to why the science of psychology must supersede the science of biology. In essence, this prioritization is the triumph of subjectivity over objectivity.

The chapter on Scripture was well written. It could have also refuted the common myth that the Bible does not address the modern phenomenon of transgenderism. This myth ignores the theological entailments of biblical texts that speak of sex and gender. Whereas there may not be a particular Bible verse that explicitly addresses transgenderism, one finds that through careful theological reflection of the relevant texts across Scripture, the Bible *does* address transgenderism. Transgenderism is not primarily about what sex or gender is. Rather, it is a battle about what is true and what is real. Transgenderism is ultimately about

¹Besides Alan Branch’s book, see also, Andrew Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate: What the Bible Actually Say About Gender Identity* (Charlotte: The Good Book, 2017); and Vaughan Roberts, *Transgender: Christian Compassion, Convictions and Wisdom for Today's Big Questions* (Charlotte: The Good Book, 2016). [Editor’s note: for more book recommendations by CBMW on gender and sexuality, visit <http://books.cbmw.org/>]

epistemology. In other words, how do we know what is true and real? The world says, “If you think something, it is *your* truth.” God says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer. 17:9). And Paul writes, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom. 12:2). Thus, we cannot trust our minds or our hearts. Truth only comes from God.

CONCLUSION

Branch sheds light and encourages Christians to have a deeper knowledge of secular worldviews and beliefs of people outside the church regarding scientific and ethical positions on gender and sexuality. He also provides a clear example of how Christians should think biblically about these issues and how to properly look at science

*The world says,
“If you think something,
it is your truth.”*

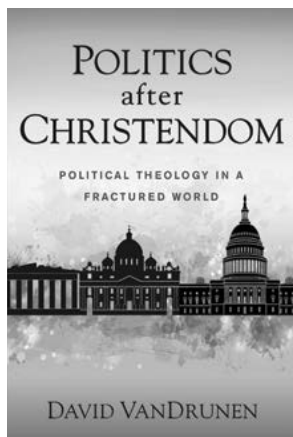
*God says,
“The heart is deceitful
above all things, and
desperately sick;
who can understand it?”*

and morality according to a Christian worldview. If all truth is God’s truth, and scientific discoveries of truth in general revelation are ultimately a revelation of the created order which points to the Creator, then Christians should approach science with such lenses. As believers use special revelation, God’s Word, to respond accordingly to the secular celebration of transgenderism and sexual identities, Christians need to show the world how general revelation agrees with special revelation when providing scientific rebuttals to gender reassignment and genetics.

Branch provides the reader with biblically-grounded material on how the church should respond with scientific data to the prevailing secular ideologies and their distorted understandings of sex and gender. Branch’s book reorients the church to think scientifically and biblically when facing a secular approach to gender dysphoria, which has crept into the church and challenges her sound teachings on sex (male and female), theological anthropology, and epistemology. Everyone should read this book because, ultimately, this impacts us all as we live in a broken world in desperate need of a Savior. ✕

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Politics After Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World



David VanDrunen. *Politics after Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020.

Politics After Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World by David VanDrunen is a work of political theology that advances a robust understanding of human institutions through the framework of the Noahic Covenant. In the past and now into the present, evangelicals have lacked a robust political theology that positively articulates Scripture's conception of government and other human institutions. While VanDrunen does acknowledge the streams in Christian political thought he is attempting to correct, his book is largely a self-attesting work of political theology that relies on careful exegesis and systematic and biblical theology and that locates itself in continuity with the Reformed and Thomistic traditions of Christians seeking to understand the perennial issue of statecraft.

SUMMARY

In the first part of the book, which is dedicated to the theological underpinnings of political theology, VanDrunen begins by laying out a foundational conception of government as having been instituted by God "to be legitimate, but provisional, and to be common, but accountable" (25). In the first couplet of his definition, VanDrunen asserts that government possesses valid human authority over its proper jurisdiction, but this authority is only temporary, as it will no longer exist at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (29). The second couplet summarizes the biblical teaching that God instituted government to be an institution for the inclusion of all peoples regardless of skin color or creed while also

maintaining that government is morally accountable to God for its actions (35). Thus, government must not discriminate against the people it is obligated to govern. It must instead govern according to the objective moral order.

In chapter two, entitled "Nature, Grace, and Biblical Covenants," VanDrunen offers a brief survey of the biblical covenants with their terms and promises. The Noahic Covenant is differentiated from the other covenants in that it has "different parties, different promises, and a different destiny" (72). The Noahic Covenant does not mark off a holy people nor entail promises of salvation. Rather, the Noahic Covenant is the covenant that God made with all humanity for the sake of preserving the human race.

In chapter three, VanDrunen argues that the institutions arising from the Noahic Covenant are essential to Christian political theology, which include familial, entrepreneurial, and judicial institutions. Over the course of chapters three and four, VanDrunen traces how these institutions apply to common political societies in carrying out the goals of the Noahic Covenant in the Old and New Testaments. Throughout all of the major events and biblical covenants, including the covenant instituted by the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Noahic Covenant remains the authoritative and guiding covenant for common political communities since “neither the nature of the political authority itself nor its covenant grounding has changed, but God’s identity in ruling it has” (116). Thus, in line with historic Two Kingdom theology within the Reformed tradition, VanDrunen argues that Christ rules both his special covenant people — the church — while also ruling providentially over all peoples.

In chapter five, VanDrunen argues that political communities and humanity as a whole can “know their moral responsibilities before God through the natural law” in fulfilling the terms of the Noahic Covenant (124). This knowledge does not come through rational investigation, whereby participants arrive at an understanding of discrete rules. Rather, it comes from “experience in the world and a keen eye for circumstances” (138), which directs humanity to “understand which courses of conduct are good and bad and become able to put this knowledge into skillful practice” (139). In sum, people can know what God requires for right and proper

action in familial, entrepreneurial, and judicial institutions without access to special revelation. VanDrunen concludes part one in chapter six by reminding Christians that they are to live as faithful sojourners and exiles who love their neighbors well by engaging in politics with a Christ-like attitude while trusting the promises of God to both preserve “human communities under the Noahic Covenant” and to bring about his redemptive purposes to their fulfillment in the new creation (176).

Part two addresses the issue of political ethics within the Noahic Covenant. One of the primary ethical issues VanDrunen identifies is how people of various worldviews, philosophies, and creeds can exist together in a common political body. In chapter seven, VanDrunen argues that barring people from the full rights of political participation on religious or racial grounds “are not justifiable reasons under the Noahic Covenant” (185). Since a pluralistic society constitutes a fragile and easily ruptured coexistence among various groups, governments ought not to have an ambitious policy agenda but rather approach pluralistic society informed by a “substantive but modest common good” (212). VanDrunen contends in chapter eight that familial and commercial institutions exist to support each other in fulfilling the task of multiplying, filling the earth, and subduing creation. While specific policy goals for familial and entrepreneurial institutions cannot be deduced from the Noahic Covenant, policy ought to reflect the biblical ethic of the family that the Noahic Covenant presents and avoid those that are contrary to it (221–225).



In chapters nine through eleven, VanDrunen posits a conception of the state as an institution that arises naturally from the Noahic Covenant’s commission to do justice. A Noahic conception of justice is retributive and embodies the biblical principle of the *lex talionis* by seeking to be faithful to God’s stipulation

that “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed” (Gen 9:6 ESV; 259–260). To limit the authority of the state and its ministers in order to keep them from perverting this task of doing justice, law should be polycentric and arise from various non-state sources rather than monocentric as advanced by legal

positivists (305). The former conceives of law arising from multiple spheres of authority in society, while the latter maintains that law should only come from one source, viz. the state. Thus, since the jural task of the state is its most expressly given command in Scripture, the state ought to maintain a strict protectionist understanding of this task (332–342). When the state fails, civil disobedience may be warranted when the positive law of the magistrate grossly violates the higher natural law (349).

VanDrunen concludes Part two by locating the political theology established by the Noahic Covenant within the current ideological debate concerning classical liberalism and classical conservatism. VanDrunen frames the ideology of the Noahic Covenant as conservative liberalism, which strives to maintain “a social order marked by pluralism and tolerance” (365) rooted in the “Natural wisdom [that] is the perception of the Natural Law” (369).

CRITICAL INTERACTION

The primary strength of *Politics After Christendom* is its biblical realism in presenting a political theology that seeks the preservation of human institutions by a modest conception of the common good for pluralistic societies. Through his providential care and the Natural Law, God has provided a normative framework for preserving common political communities and other human institutions. While much can be gleaned from the age of Christendom in the study of political theology, the “moral — metaphysical — religious foundation” of Christendom has been replaced by liberal polity (360). VanDrunen believes

this development has brought political communities into closer alignment with the biblical ideal to embody an ethnic and religious pluralism (360). A critic may presume that VanDrunen is bending his political theology to fit the circumstances of the present, but as he rightly notes in the introduction, “Christians do not need a new and special kind of political theology for life after Christendom. Rather, Scripture itself provides a political-theological vision perfectly suited for a post-Christendom world” (16). Thus, in the application of political theology, Christians should not seek to impractically impose vestiges of the past on the present situation nor seek to immanentize the eschaton. Instead, Christians should seek to live in the present with a robust and biblical conception of political theology as VanDrunen presents in this volume.

One weakness of VanDrunen’s work is that it seems to over-realize the framework of the Noahic Covenant in its present applications. While VanDrunen acknowledges that the Noahic Covenant provides only a general framework, the specificity and certainty of the demands of the Noahic Covenant seem to extend beyond this generality. For example, while the book makes a compelling case for a protectionist role of the state while at the same time denying a perfectionist one, it seems that a perfectionist conception of the state may be possible since the Noahic Covenant does not explicitly necessitate civil government but only makes it a “morally plausible ideal” as human society organically develops and deepens institutional bonds (84). Perhaps as human societies flourish under the Noahic Covenant, civil governments may be better developed to act in a perfectionist manner.

CONCLUSION

Politics After Christendom: Political Theology in a Fractured World offers Christians and broader Western society a comprehensive and biblical framework for understanding right political order amidst the current salient divisions in the political realm. As society increasingly rejects any political ethic that resembles the Noahic Covenant and as evangelicals struggle to develop a cohesive political theology, this book will be helpful for pastors and the people in their churches to understand the biblical role of the state and their responsibilities before it. This volume possesses both rigorous biblical interpretation and an acute understanding of present debates around political theory, justice, and legal theory in a manner that presents the Noahic Covenant as a substantive and broad structure for approaching the tasks of statecraft and building thriving human institutions. ✕

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Stumbling on Happiness

INTRODUCTION

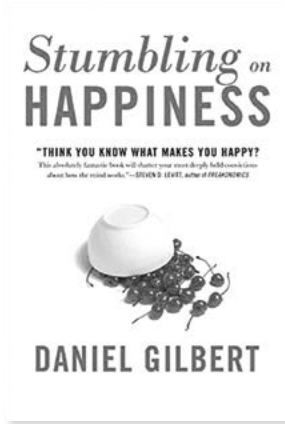
How can a person guarantee future happiness? In a postmodern society where pursuing happiness is the highest good, a book promising answers for predicting happiness has powerful appeal. It comes as no surprise that a relatable book on predictive happiness written by Daniel Gilbert, Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, became a National Bestseller. Gilbert's aim is high as he writes to describe "what science has to tell us about how and how well the human brain can imagine its own future, and about how and how well it can predict which of those futures it will most enjoy" (xvii). Utilizing various scientific, psychological, and sociological studies, Gilbert convincingly argues for the importance of finding meaning and purpose in life. By considering such an intrinsic issue, Gilbert finds broad appeal to a diverse audience.

SUMMARY

The crux of the book is the presumption that happiness is not self-determined or self-actualized but progressively realized. Understanding the shortcomings of subjective self-fulfillment, Gilbert accurately articulates the long-term failures of pursuing personal passions. Rather than blindly chasing happiness, Gilbert's answer on happiness begins in one of the most unique aspects of the human brain — the ability to imagine. Whereas the natural world lives in the present, humans alone possess the ability to positively imagine the future and its emotional impact. And although predictive happiness begins with the human ability to imagine, Gilbert argues that the limitations of imagination require closer inspection.

Gilbert presents imagination's unreliability through three labels — realism, presentism, and rationalization. Realism is our imagination's filling in the gap of the unknown. Instead of painting accurate situational assessments, the human brain supplies context that inevitably are mistaken in response to our imagination's blind spots. Gilbert warns against these brain blind spots concluding, "this tendency can cause us to misimagine the future events whose emotional consequences we are attempting to weigh" (102). The second label is presentism, which is the inescapable projection of present emotion to future situations. Mortal man is limited to present emotion, which serves as a poor predictor of future emotion. Gilbert argues that presentism is why depressed people find it impossible to imagine enjoying the future (137). Because of the present's emotional effect upon the future, presentism becomes a better indicator of the present than an accurate reflection of the future. Finally, imagination proves unreliable because of rationalization, the brain's attempt at emotional stability through personal affirmation of the positives and rejection of the negatives. Though imagination serves a purpose in predictive happiness, rationalization distorts any accurate examination of ourselves. As a result of rationalization, humans neither see themselves nor the world in complete accuracy. "The world is this way, we wish the world were that way, and our experience of the world — how we see it, remember it, and imagine it — is a mixture of stark reality and comforting illusion" (176).

Daniel Gilbert. *Stumbling on Happiness*. New York: Vintage Books, 2005.



"Though imagination serves a purpose in predictive happiness, rationalization distorts any accurate examination of ourselves."

Gilbert concludes that imagination, though helpful in providing emotional expectations, is an unreliable guide to future happiness. Understanding imagination's inaccuracies should instead drive humans to other people's assessment of their current emotional condition. Thus, Gilbert's assessment of accurately predicting happiness is to find a surrogate, someone's experience of the present. By learning from another person's current emotional condition, humans can accurately predict emotions for future similar contexts. According to Gilbert, the most accurate path to happiness is a reliable source currently experiencing your expected future. Rather than guessing future happiness, Gilbert concludes, "the best way to predict our feelings tomorrow is to see how others are feeling today" (251). Ultimately, Gilbert argues that happiness is not a subjective pursuit of the future but an objective shared human experience of the present.

CRITICAL INTERACTION

Stumbling on Happiness happily provides many accurate observations on the human condition. In a society inundated with postmodern pursuits in subjectivity, Gilbert boldly bucks against common psychological thought. In doing so, Gilbert provides helpful anthropological observations. He accurately diagnoses humanity's greatest shortcoming — an inability to find true satisfaction. Through common grace, Gilbert recognizes the fickleness of humanity, "there are times when people seem not to know their own hearts" (60), as well as our innate desire for control, "The fact is that human beings come into the world with a passion for control, they go out

of the world the same way, and research suggests that if they lose their ability to control things at any point between their entrance and their exit, they become unhappy, helpless, hopeless, and depressed" (22). In addition to accurately diagnosing humanity, Gilbert follows Plato's lead by arguing for an objective standard of goodness, "We cannot say that something is good unless we can say what is good *for*" (78). In many ways, Gilbert's assessment of humanity and the pursuit of objective goodness is commendable.

Gilbert's accurate assessments, however, fail to produce answers that are consistent with Scripture. Beginning from an evolutionary framework, Gilbert argues that happiness is humanity's highest aim. By ultimately approving a self-serving mindset, *Stumbling on Happiness* affirms a worldview focused inward rather than upward. By failing to include God in the human equation, the book fails to provide ultimate human fulfillment and purpose. Humanity was not created to pursue happiness — humanity was created to know God and glorify him (1 Corinthians 10:31). Instead of finding purpose in attaining future happiness, Scripture identifies loving God and serving others the highest aims for humanity (Matthew 22:36-40). Though Gilbert rightly desires a standard of goodness, he misses the God of the Bible who "is the only One who is good" (Matthew 19:17; cf. Micah 6:8, "He has told you, O man, what is good."). By failing to include God in his evaluations, Gilbert is unable to provide any true standard of certainty for humanity's problem. Ironically, a book on happiness stumbles away from the only answer to eternal happiness — Jesus Christ.

Though accurate anthropological assessments are made along the way, this popular read is ultimately rendered unhelpful for the Christian walk. By appealing to our natural desire for happiness, Gilbert's humanistic counsel dangerously points to earthly happiness rather than eternal purpose. Inevitably, Gilbert leads his readers away from any sense of the divine and instead finds his answers in mortal man. Gilbert's tragic conclusion, "our happiness is in our hands" (259), finds happiness in man rather than in Christ's death, foolishly dismissed as, "giving his life so that a great idea might live in the centuries to come" (103).

Pastors and laymen alike would be wise to cautiously approach this popular pseudo-self-help book. Instead of providing answers to practical life questions, Gilbert leaves the reader focused on the self instead of growing in Jesus. In Christ, the believer is less concerned about temporal happiness and more focused on fulfillment through kingdom work (Ephesians 2:10). Pursuing happiness is temporal striving, yet pursuing Christ is eternally fulfilling. Scripture calls humanity to pursue objective truth found only in Jesus Christ alone (John 14:6). Life's answers cannot be found in predictive happiness but in intimately knowing and growing in Jesus Christ. Inevitably, pursuing happiness leads to devastating disappointment while pursuing Christ leads to inexpressible satisfaction.

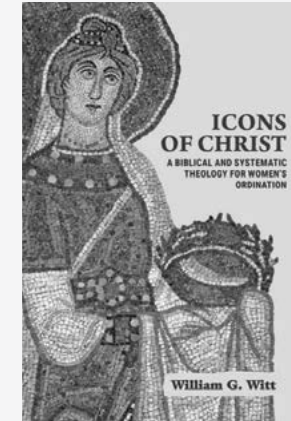
CONCLUSION

Stumbling on Happiness was never intended to find happiness in Christ. Instead of finding answers in Scripture Gilbert finds answers in creation. Inevitably, a humanistic framework

leads to humanistic answers. Rather than leading to true happiness, *Stumbling on Happiness* stumbles to answer humanity's greatest need. Embodying Romans 1:22 of "professing to be wise, they became fools," *Stumbling on Happiness* fails to find fulfilling contentment in the Lord. Though Gilbert gives accurate assessments concerning humanity, his worldview ultimately renders the work unhelpful for those desiring to attain happiness as defined in Scripture. Christians would be better served to spend their time and resources on biblical counsel that leads upward rather than inward. ✕

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William G. Witt. *Icons of Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Theology for Women's Ordination*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020.



Icons of Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Theology for Women's Ordination

The subtitle expresses the book's main thrust: it makes a case for women's ordination. "Icons" in the title signals the conviction developed by Karl Barth (348–49) that "there is no man or woman as such"; they are what they are only relationally. The New Testament's understanding of Jesus Christ as the true image (*eikōn*) of God modifies Old Testament theological anthropology; both sexes "image Jesus Christ as disciples who are 'in Christ' — the image [icon] of God — as they are joined to the risen Christ through the presence of the indwelling Spirit" (341). Being Christian does away with gender distinctions for ministry purposes.

While reading this book, a reverie took me back to grad school. I had determined to specialize in New Testament studies. Excitedly I purchased an assigned textbook that promised to orient me in the history of this enterprise: *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* by famed scholar Werner Georg Kümmel. Everything

prior to the German Enlightenment and its immediate precursors was viewed as pre-history. The real investigation of the New Testament started with Germans like J. S. Semler and J. D. Michaelis, David Friedrich Strauss and F. C. Baur. Significantly, what Semler and the others found in the Bible did not much resemble what all prior ages found. Only much later was I able to grasp how skewed was the view I received.

Icons of Christ is skewed in its starting point of declaring that all views on this topic "represent *new* theological developments in response to cultural changes of the last couple of centuries" (5, italics original). The author, William G. Witt (associate professor of systematic theology and ethics at Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, PA), sets forth four such views: (1) evangelical Protestant, (2) traditionalist Catholic, (3) liberal feminist, and (4) orthodox evangelical and Catholic egalitarian. A key to adjudicating between these positions is the statement: "Too many opponents of women's ordination seem to

think that the question can be resolved by a simple appeal to Scripture or tradition” (7). Evangelical Protestants (view 1) are guilty of “simple” appeal to the Bible, while traditionalist Catholics (view 2) are guilty of “simple” appeal to tradition. Witt resists the liberal feminist label (view 3). The best view, this book argues, is the one held by orthodox evangelical and Catholic egalitarians, the group with which Witt identifies. This book may be seen as a thoroughgoing refutation of the first two wrong views, and (much more briefly) vindication of the fourth, new, and sole true view.

The book does not engage the “liberal feminist” view like it does views 1 and 2. This is a loss for the reader, though a covert gain for the book’s argument, because many of the exegetical warrants presented for view 4 are congruent with exegesis by view 3 proponents. This book contains more “liberal feminist” thought than it acknowledges. Witt anticipates this observation and rejects it by calling it a “non-theological” argument (chapter 2). He could be right about the classification of the argument. But it could still be true to fact: just as Witt (and Richard Hooker; see below) argue rightly that there are truths outside of Scripture, there are truths outside what their methodological frameworks are designed to acknowledge.

The main difference between Kümmel (above) and Witt is that Kümmel devoted little time to explaining and discrediting the views that were in place prior to the rise of his outlook. Here Witt can be thanked for the care with which he seeks to dismantle the church’s fundamental error through the centuries in distinguishing between male and female in the ways it has and especially when it comes to (not) opening the offices of pastor (Protestant) and priest (Catholic) to women.

The first three chapters deal with approach and method. Because Witt can detect new arguments in recent evangelical Protestant and Catholic defenses of the church’s historic tendency not to ordain women, he declares their viewpoints novel. Of course, his own view is too since, as he points out, “the ordination of women to church office is (in terms of the entire expanse of church history) a relatively recent phenomenon, first occurring after the American

Civil War in the late nineteenth century among churches associated with the abolition of slavery” (3). One suspects that if Witt had not found new arguments in views 1 and 2, he would have rejected their views on the basis of their offering nothing but old arguments.

It is also here that Witt conveniently sets an insurmountable bar for “any argument against women’s ordination”: “it needs to make the case that there is something in the very nature of women as a class that makes it inappropriate or inherently impossible to exercise ordained ministry” (17). I was under the impression that Scripture argues, not from a theory of women’s nature, but from God’s wise, redemptive, and revealed will, which we may or may not be able to corroborate by theories of human nature, of which there are many. But I may be guilty here of a simple appeal to Scripture, which Witt disallows.

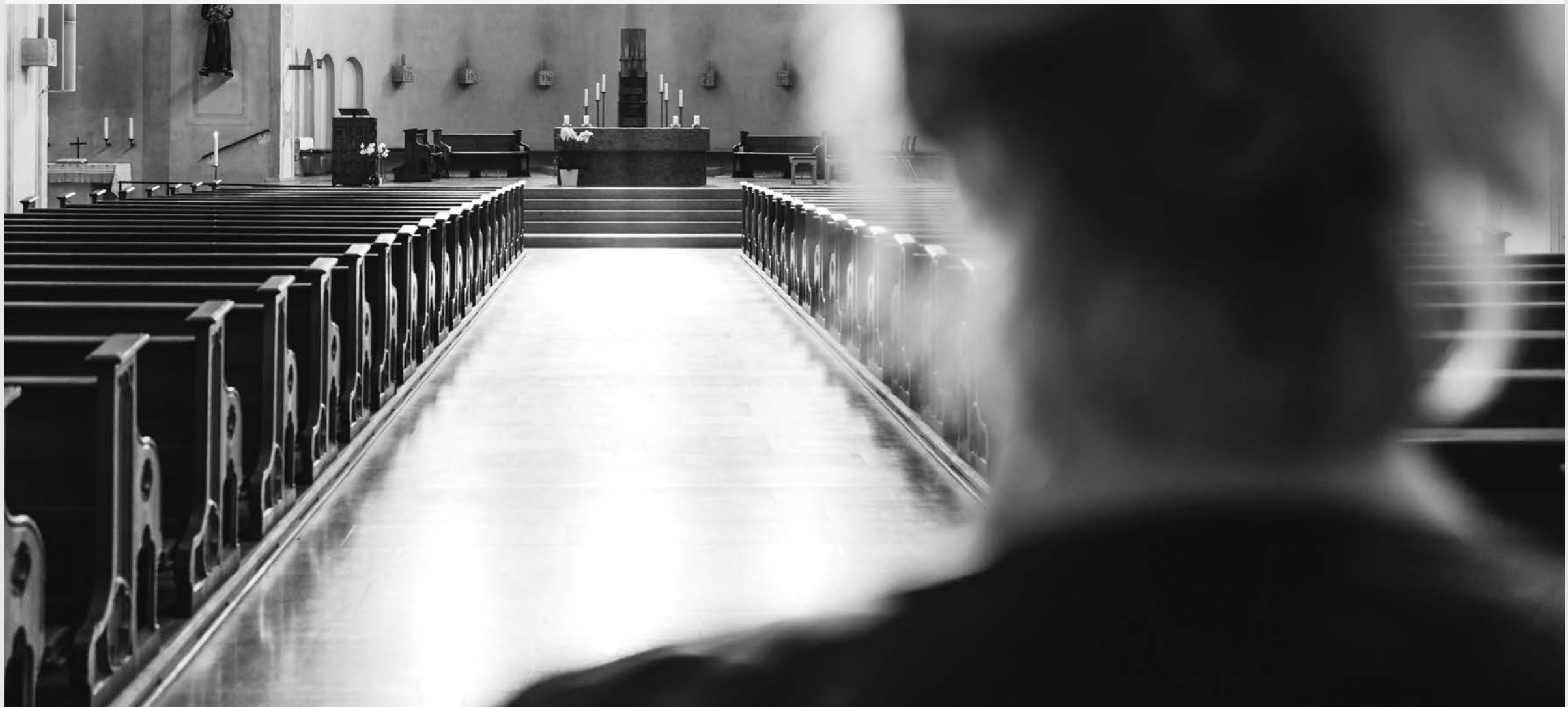
“Protestant Arguments” that Witt wishes to discredit and correct are found in chapters 4–9. Chapter 4 takes up “Hierarchy and Hermeneutics.” Witt appeals to Richard Hooker to prescribe an approach to Scripture that makes room for giving our contemporary setting the privilege it demands in determining what applies now and what does not. Chapter 5 offers a reading of Genesis that declares subordination of women even in the Bible a symptom of a sinful world; we are now in a better place where ordaining women “would be a crucial way in which both men and women serving together can demonstrate the partnership intended by God” (73). Chapter 6 is “Disciples of Jesus.” Witt finds nothing in the Gospels to prevent women’s ordination now, especially since he finds there primarily a Christology of subversion when it comes to the roles of women and men. By ordaining women now we can continue this redemptive trajectory which Jesus established though did not follow through on, leaving it to recent generations among a very small segment of primarily academic Western theologians like Witt to fulfill his intention for the church he founded.

Chapter 7, “Mutual Submission,” argues that complementarian understanding of certain gender-specific roles in church leadership is “simply endorsing either the ‘shame culture’ of the first-century Mediterranean world

or the male-centered values of much Western culture and then reading those values back into the Bible” (120). Naturally, Witt is not doing anything like this in advocating a view which did not begin to be set in place until after the North American Civil War and is still rejected by Catholic church teaching. Chapter 8, “Women in Worship and ‘Headship,’” deals with 1 Corinthians 11 and related passages. Witt finds that men and women’s standings are equalized in Christ. Chapter 9, “Speaking and Teaching,” turns to 1 Corinthians 14:34b–36 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15. By now the reader can predict that egalitarian interpreters of recent generations get these passages right, while those who read them to support church ordination practice for almost all of church history are in error.

Chapters 10–14 take up “Catholic Arguments.” They fare no better against the juggernaut of Witt’s methodology and proposals.

While 291 pages of the book are devoted to showing the superiority, indeed moral necessity of Witt’s “orthodox evangelical and Catholic egalitarian” position against its two main rivals as he presents them, 57 pages present his positive case for ordaining women. The purview is limited to the New Testament; no mention is made of Old Testament patterns of leadership among God’s people, in which prophets, priests, kings, and heads of households are (with few exceptions) men. Presumably this was part of a sinful pattern we are now able to see



through and correct. In “Women’s Ministry in the New Testament: Office” (ch. 15), he finds that in the New Testament period, women exercised ministries “that would later be designated as office” (315). “Women’s Ministry in the New Testament: Bishops, Presbyters, Deacons” (ch. 16) appeals once more to Richard Hooker to argue that because there is no properly “theological warrant” in the Pastoral Epistles “for excluding women from ordination,” the church today in its vastly different cultural setting should be “willing and indeed eager” to stop denying them the opportunities that the Bible properly understood has extended to them all along (327). A “Conclusion” sums up and extends the insights of the book.

with one another and in Christ when it comes to the sexes and their interrelationship. We will be working on this project until Christ returns. But it may be doubted that a revisionist reading of so much of the Bible will result in the redemptive outcomes to which Christ’s disciples are called. These are outcomes that have long blessed both the church and societies surrounding it when biblical communities faithfully replicate in their settings the dynamics between women and men enabled and prescribed by Scripture, Christ, and the Spirit in subsequent times. ✕

¹See, e.g., 329: Current notions “of social liberty and equality means that in all mainline churches—Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Anglican—women are now recognized as having equal ontological status with men. Accordingly, the church has quietly abandoned the historical reasons for opposition to women’s ordination.” This will come as a surprise to Christians worldwide who have always recognized men and women’s ontological parity: they are equally sinful and equally saved only through faith in Christ. Yet most practicing Christians worldwide have not abandoned what they take to be a very historical reason for not ordaining women: it is a church practice, where it is practiced, not authorized by the historical documents Christians call Holy Scripture. Of course Scripture can be parlayed to authorize it, as Witt’s deployment of his method demonstrates.

²<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2016/02/23/the-salzburg-declaration-emphasizes-necessity-of-an-ecumenical-ecology-of-man/>. Accessed April 8, 2021. The article contains a link to the Salzburg Declaration itself, both in German and in briefer English summary.

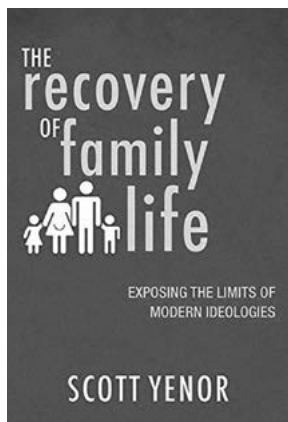
This volume can be commended as a summation and update of egalitarian arguments that have been developed in recent generations. One may question the book’s claim to be “ecumenical” (by George Hunsinger’s definition; 8) when in fact the community of confessing Christians worldwide (where Christians from Africa, Asia, and Latin America vastly outnumber those in the US and Europe) and through history who would agree with it is infinitesimal in size by comparison. Contrary to the view of the book from the outset that not ordaining women to the office of pastor or priest is a new position and cannot be justified by “simple appeal” to Scripture (which appears to mean “primary reliance upon” Scripture, not upon theological method that privileges modern secular conviction¹), I would argue that it is Christ and Scripture that have led the church in the non-practice of women’s ordination. This conviction can be traced from New Testament times when Jesus and the apostles appealed to the Old Testament and in the New Testament writings did not appoint women to be apostles or pastors, to patristic and medieval and Reformation times, down to our era in which so much of the Bible’s theological anthropology is being rejected (as noted by a truly ecumenical group of German-speaking theologians and church leaders, evangelical and mainline and Catholic and Orthodox).²

This is not to claim that either individual Christians or churches have ever adequately conceptualized, lived out, or articulated the fullness of the beauty of life in covenant

“...I would argue that it is Christ and Scripture that have led the church in the non-practice of women’s ordination.”

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The Recovery of Family Life: Exposing the Limits of Modern Ideologies



Scott Yenor. *The Recovery of Family Life: Exposing the Limits of Modern Ideologies*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020.

One of the perennial temptations for social conservatives, it is often said, is the desire to “legislate morality.” This trope was especially on the rise when Supreme Court cases like *Obergefell v. Hodges* and *United States v. Windsor* were top of mind. In the eyes of social conservatism’s critics, what could possibly account for the opposition to arrangements like same-sex marriage except for personal animus or sectarian dogma? As same-sex marriage became the law of the land, swearing not to legislate morality was a way for religious and social conservatives to surrender with dignity. After all, who are they to judge?

The problem with such an approach toward public policy specifically, and the effects of the sexual revolution more generally, is that when it comes to legislation surrounding sex and the family, the action of the political community is, *ipso facto*, to legislate morality. The pretension toward refraining from legislating morality is simply to raise the white flag while the sexual revolution rolls on.

In Scott Yenor’s important new book, *The Recovery of Family Life: Exposing the Limits of Modern Ideologies*, Yenor examines what a new sexual regime might look like if the sexual revolution continues to ramble on unabated. Yenor defines the sexual revolution as a *rolling revolution*, a revolution whose “principles and premises point to a never-ending revolution in marriage and family life . . . this seemingly irresistible revolution continues to advance amidst the ruins of what it has destroyed” (x).

It would seem to be an empirical fact that the sexual revolution of the 1960’s has largely failed. Instead of the promises of fully liberated libidos and deeper, more passionate relations, Western culture faces a steadily declining birthrate, the collapse of marriage as a formative institution, and the disappearance of mores and wisdom that would help to civilize men and women in previous times. Often the communities facing the sting of the new sexual regime are mostly poor and disenfranchised, whereas the prophets of the rolling revolution more often than not “talk Left and act Right,” in Mary Eberstadt’s clever formulation. In the absence of the Old Wisdom, which has been effectively dismantled by the sexual revolution, many young women and men are left with a deep sense of emptiness and loss — for what exactly they don’t know.

Yenor’s book takes up the first principles of the rolling revolution and then what might be done to curb some of its effects. Books on the sexual revolution from social conservatives tend to be heavy on descriptive analysis and light by way of practical prescription. But Yenor’s practical guidance for social conservatives makes his book truly invaluable.

Yenor’s policy proposals are truly interesting and often quite attractive. In addition, his recommendations for thinking through the unfulfilled ambitions of the rolling revolution from first principles is illuminating. The alternate, anti-feminist account sketched in brief by Yenor, a view he labels “womanism,” is a refreshing account of what a post-sexual revolution womanhood might look like. It’s an account that is, in reality, the lived experience of many women who have been disillusioned by feminism’s delusions and failed promises. Yenor’s womanism is a recognition of the real ways in which men and women differ with regard to vocational aspirations, the limits of the body, and the futility of 50-50 splits in areas typically dominated by one gender.

The one caveat I’ll offer is that it’s regrettable Yenor and his editors decided to call this view “womanism,” since womanism has been understood to be a species of intersectional Black feminism since at least the late 1970’s. It’s possible Yenor understood this and didn’t care, but I worry that in using such terms there may be confusion for those less familiar with the ever expanding intersectional glossary.

Yenor's book takes up so much that it's overwhelming to try to do it justice in a short review. Many of the topics Yenor explores would be unthinkable for polite discussion even a few decades ago, but, as Yenor often reminds readers, our society is not so decent. And so these issues must be taken up if we are to fully weigh the unfortunate effects of the rolling revolution's steady progress. For that reason, I would commend this book to policy makers and possibly pastors, but likely not much more than that. Admittedly, I found some of the subject matter to be quite upsetting and would skim over particularly difficult sections.

While I found much to commend in Yenor's analysis, I was struck by the enormity entailed in the task of pushing against this rolling revolution. *The Recover of Family Life* shows both the possibilities and limits of policy. Yenor himself would likely concede that policy is only one tool for creating the conditions for a sustainable family regime after the sexual revolution. Policy alone won't teach spouses what it looks like to extend mercy and grace to one another. Policy alone can't jig a polity into loving the Good or teach what that Good is and where it may be found. Policy can offer benefits to couples for having children, but policy can't fundamentally reorient parental duties toward God and neighbor.

The way we will see change is if we commit to be the types of families and the types of spouses that embody the Old Wisdom and commit to instruct our children in the light of that wisdom. As our little platoons expand from households to neighborhoods and to the broader polity, maybe then will the

refugees of the sexual revolution find hope in the midst of their travails and the Old Wisdom sing loudly from the streets once again. ✕

"Policy alone
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Scott Corbin lives in Fort Worth, Texas with his wife, Jessi, and their four kids.



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*Know that the LORD
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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