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PURPOSE STATEMENT

To foster scholarly discussion of ideas among evangelical scholars relevant to the defense of the historic Christian Faith in accordance with the Doctrinal Statement of the Society.

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An Answer for Orual
C.S. Lewis as Defender of the Faith

Donald T. Williams¹

*“You are yourself the answer.
Before your face questions die away.”*

Many have taken pen in hand to discuss the validity of C. S. Lewis’s apologetic arguments. I have been one of them.² But here I would like to address what we can learn practically about apologetics as a part of Christian ministry from Lewis’s approach to defending the faith. Lewis was not a pastor, though Providence gave him an informal pastoral role in many lives which is often on display in his letters. He was an evangelist of sorts as well as perhaps the most effective apologist the church has known. A fresh look at his approach to these two areas of ministry and how they fit together could be useful to both evangelists and apologists in the Twenty-first Century.

EVANGELISM

C. S. Lewis did not talk a lot about evangelism. He just did it. He often did it indirectly, but it got done. There is no direct appeal for conversion in the Broadcast Talks that became *Mere Christianity*, but there is an exposition of the Christian faith designed to elucidate its attractiveness as an answer to the problems of fallen man as well

¹ Donald T. Williams, PhD, is R. A. Forrest Scholar at Toccoa Falls College, an ordained minister, prolific author (<http://lanternhollowpress.com>). This article was delivered as the Presidential Address to the International Society of Christian Apologetics on April 11th, 2016.

² E.g. in *C. S. Lewis’s Apologetics: Pro and Con*, ed. Gregory Bassham (Leiden: Brill/Rodopi, 2015), 171-89, 201-4.

as to underscore its truth. And conversion was often the result, as famously with Charles Colson. But while Lewis's approach to evangelism may have been indirect, it was not unintentional. When Sherwood Eliot Wirt of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association asked Lewis whether he would say that the aim of his writing was "to bring about an encounter of the reader with Jesus Christ," Lewis replied, "That is not my language, yet it is the purpose I have in view."³ He said elsewhere that "Most of my books are evangelistic, addressed to *tous exo* ["those outside"]"⁴

Lewis did not feel he had the gifts for the "direct evangelical appeal of the 'Come to Jesus' type," but he thought that those who could do that sort of thing should "do it with all their might."⁵ Lewis not only practiced evangelism by writing, but also in his speaking on the radio, speaking for the RAF in World War II, and in personal letters and other contacts. Lewis's commitment to evangelism and the price he paid for it at Oxford are covered brilliantly in the book edited by David Mills, *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, especially in the late Chris Mitchell's essay, "Bearing the Weight of Glory."⁶

Through all of these varied experiences, Lewis came to have a good understanding of some of the problems with doing effective evangelism in the modern world. One thing he noticed was that "The greatest barrier I have met is the almost total absence from the minds of my audience of any sense of sin. . . . We have to convince our hearers of the unwelcome diagnosis before we can expect them

³ C. S. Lewis, "Cross Examination," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 262.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 181.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 99.

⁶ Christopher W. Mitchell, "Bearing the Weight of Glory: The Cost of C. S. Lewis's Witness," in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 3-14.

to welcome the news of the remedy.”⁷ This was a new situation without precedent in the history of the church. “When the apostles preached, they could assume even in their Pagan hearers a real consciousness of deserving the Divine anger. . . .Christianity now has to preach the diagnosis—in itself very bad news—before it can win a hearing for the cure.”⁸ This means, not an adjustment to the message, but more work for the evangelist, who can no longer do his work effectively without help from the apologist. “Christ takes it for granted that men are bad. Until we really feel this assumption of His to be true, though we are part of the world He came to save, we are not part of the audience to whom His words are addressed.”⁹ There is no hint of the idea that we have to adjust the message to make it more palatable to this new, tougher audience. Rather, we must gird up our loins and do the work required to gain a hearing for this unwelcome diagnosis and the joyous cure that can only make sense when it follows it.

APOLOGETICS

The evangelist increasingly needs help from the apologist because the diagnosis is no longer self-evident, and it is no longer self-evident partly because the Christian world view is now a foreign country to most modern people. They must be *persuaded* (the apologist’s job) to try the experiment of looking at the world and their own hearts very differently from the way they habitually do if they are even to understand the relevance of the Gospel to their lives, much less accept it as Good News that is true. The “liberal” approach to this dilemma is to try to accommodate the Gospel to the modern (or now, post-modern) world view, to make it more palatable to the audience that exists. But this approach begs the

⁷ C. S. Lewis, “God in the Dock,” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 243-4; cf. “Christian Apologetics,” op. cit., 95.

⁸ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (N.Y.: MacMillan, 1967), 43.

⁹ Ibid, 45.

question. If the Gospel is not *true*, then it is not Good News for anyone; and if it is true, then the modern world view must at points be false. Lewis does not seem to have been tempted at all by the liberal cop-out. He was fully prepared to accept the challenge that, in order to present the Good News today, we must, to an extent that was never necessary before, convince people that not just their behavior and their beliefs but their *thinking* has been mistaken at crucial points.

Apologetics is how we do this job. It is the defense of the faith, that branch of theology which asks of the Gospel, “*Why* should we think it is *true*?” It is the one branch of theology in which Lewis was recognized as an expert, if not a professional. His broad and deep learning, classical, philosophical, and literary, which kept him in touch with the best products of both the human mind and the human heart; his rigorous training in logic and debate by W. T. Kirkpatrick; and the fact that his own conversion was facilitated by reasoned arguments from Chesterton and Tolkien¹⁰: All these factors combined to make Lewis one of the greatest apologists we have seen. What can he tell us about apologetics as a form of practical theology?

The Need for Apologetics

Apologetics is needed for many reasons. In the first place it is a biblical mandate: “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15, NASB). The word translated “defense” is (*apologia*), from which we get the English word *apologetics*. It is a courtroom term which refers to the kind of reasoned case a lawyer would make in defense of his client. Lewis was in tune with a number of the reasons why that mandate exists.

¹⁰ See. Donald T. Williams, “G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*,” in *C. S. Lewis’s List: The Ten Books that Influenced Him Most*, Ed. David Werther and Susan Werther (N.Y.: Bloomsbury, 2015), 31-48.

One is the very nature of the faith to which the Gospel calls us. Many modern people, Christians included, treat faith as a kind of strange mystical way of knowing unconnected to reason or evidence. They treat it as a zero-sum game in which, the more reason and evidence you have for any given belief, the less of a role is left for faith to play. The New Testament, however, knows nothing of such ideas. For the New-Testament writers, faith is simply trust, and salvation is granted to people who put their personal trust in Christ as God's messiah. "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Rom. 10:9 NASB). In Greek, the noun *faith* and the verb *I believe* are built on the same roots (*pistis*) and (*pisteuo*). You could conceivably have that trust for good reasons or bad reasons or no reasons. It is better to have good reasons. Luke says that Jesus offered "many convincing proofs" of his resurrection (Acts 1:3 NASB), and early preachers like the Apostle Paul were constantly giving reasons and evidence to back up their message. So we could say that apologetics is based on a biblical precept (Peter's command), biblical precedent (the example of the Apostles), and a biblical principle (that the Gospel is *truth* that should be addressed to the whole person, including the mind).

Lewis accepted this biblical perspective fully. This acceptance is shown by his teachings on the nature of truth,¹¹ by his practice of apologetics, and by direct statement. "My faith is based on reason. . . . The battle is between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination on the other."¹² The idea is not that emotion and imagination are inherently opposed to faith (one factor leading to Lewis's conversion was the "baptism" of his imagination by George MacDonald), but that in fallen human beings they often are opposed to it. When reason appears to be opposed to faith, on the other hand, this opposition is illusory, because if the Gospel is true, then true reason must support it. We practice apologetics in

¹¹ See Donald T. Williams, "C. S. Lewis on Truth," in *Reflections from Plato's Cave: Essays in Evangelical Philosophy* (Lynchburg: Lantern Hollow Press, 2012), 103-28.

¹² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (N.Y.: MacMillan, 1943), 122.

our evangelism then because of the nature of the Gospel as truth and the nature of human beings as whole people who have minds as well as hearts that need to be reached.

The nature both of the Gospel and of human beings then makes apologetics a necessary part of our theology for every generation. The times in which we live can make the need even more pressing. Lewis lived in such times, and the needs he saw have not diminished since he saw them. A skeptical age will have its effects even on people raised in Christian homes. Lewis describes those effects graphically. He wrote to a Mrs. Lockley on 5 March 1951, that “Skeptical, incredulous, materialistic *ruts* have been deeply engraved in our thought.”¹³ As a result, even committed Christians like Lewis have moments when Christian truth claims look implausible. What then will be the case for those without his apologetic defenses? In such an age, apologetics is essential equipment for believers wanting to preserve and strengthen their faith just as much as it is when they are proclaiming it to others.

The ruts have not only been dug; they are systematically reinforced. Lewis gives an accurate analysis of the spirit of the age:

As long as this deliberate refusal to understand things from above, even where such understanding is possible, continues, it is idle to talk of any final victory over materialism. The critique of every experience from below, the voluntary ignoring of meaning and concentration on fact, will always have the same plausibility. There will always be evidence, and every month fresh evidence, to show that religion is only psychological, justice only self protection, politics only

¹³ C. S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, 3 vols., ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: HaperSanFrancisco 2004), 3:393.

economics, love only lust, and thought itself only cerebral biochemistry.¹⁴

The mindset Lewis is describing here is called *reductionism*: Every aspect of reality is reduced to one other thing that is held to explain it exhaustively. For the Marxist, everything is really economics, for the Freudian everything is really just sex, etc. For the materialist everything is only atoms in motion, so in a materialist age various forms of reductionism will be the default setting for understanding any aspect of human experience. The reason you can always find real evidence that seems to support reductionism is that thought, for example, does involve cerebral biochemistry. If you only look at it “from below,” biochemistry is all you will see. But there has to be more to it than that, because if thought is reduced to brain chemistry then there is no reason to believe the thought that thought is only brain chemistry. A scientific age only accepts looking “from below” as valid looking. (Looking *from below* here would correspond to looking *at* as opposed to looking *along* in Lewis’s essay “Meditation in a Toolshed.”¹⁵) We are pounded by this mentality so consistently that it becomes one of the “ruts” Lewis spoke of. We have to make a special and concerted effort to counteract the prejudices that result from such habits of how we look at things in order to be reminded that it cannot be the whole story. Apologetics is how we make that effort.

Our age remains as skeptical as Lewis’s was, and to that challenge we have now added the ruts of pluralism and its offspring multiculturalism. Lewis’s ruts have been worn deeper and new ones have been added. Neither evangelism nor Christian nurture can be conducted effectively without help in navigating around, smoothing out, or bridging over those ruts. Therefore, Lewis’s advice is even more pertinent today than it was when he gave it:

¹⁴ C. S. Lewis, “Transposition,” sermon preached in the chapel of St. Mansfield College, Oxford, 28 May 194, in. *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1980): 114-115.

¹⁵ C. S. Lewis, “Meditation in a Toolshed,” in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970: 212-15.

To be ignorant and simple now—not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defence but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.¹⁶

Apologetic Method

Modern Christian apologists tend to group roughly into three camps in terms of methodology: Classical, Evidentialist, and Presuppositionalist. Classical apologists argue first for the existence of God, and then turn to the evidence for the resurrection of Christ to identify who that God is and how He can be known.

Evidentialists differ as to how valid the classical arguments (cosmological, teleological, moral, etc.) are but agree that they only point to an abstract God, not the God of the Bible, and so would prefer to cut to the chase and establish the historicity of the resurrection as pointing to Jesus being God incarnate.

Presuppositionalists say we cannot argue *to* God, but only *from* God. In other words, our philosophical assumptions (presuppositions) determine how we are going to evaluate the evidence, and non-Christians' secular world view and rebellious hearts will not let them hear the evidence objectively and conclude that Christ is Lord. So we have to start by showing that all starting points save one (the existence of the God of the Bible) lead to contradiction. Only after we accept God as God do we have a basis for using reason to evaluate the evidence.

Increasingly people are coming to see these approaches as complementary and indeed mutually interdependent, rather than as

¹⁶ C. S. Lewis, "Learning in Wartime," sermon preached at St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford, 22 Oct. 1939, in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1980), 58.

alternative options. Unless you have reason to believe that a creator God exists, the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus only leads to the conclusion that something really weird might have happened. Unless you see the strength of the evidence for the resurrection, the God of the classical arguments remains only an abstract theory, not a personal savior. Analyzing the world view options and seeing the contradictions of secularism provides a context in which the evidence becomes meaningful. Presenting evidence alone surely does not lead to conversion, but presuppositionalism alone is susceptible to a charge of circularity—and no methodology is successful unless it is blessed and used by the Holy Spirit to bring about conviction and faith. And, despite the purists on all sides, the Spirit has managed to use all three approaches in that way.

C. S. Lewis was not a part of the conversation I've summarized in the last two paragraphs, and he does not discuss the advantages and disadvantages of those approaches. He is best understood as a classical apologist who sometimes argued in ways more typical of evidentialists and presuppositionalists. He was, in other words, an eclectic realist with some common sense. Purists in the three approaches will not find an ally in Lewis, but practical apologists will find much good advice in how to approach their task.

Lewis followed what Groothuis calls the “cumulative case approach.”¹⁷ Lewis uses many types of arguments: classical (the moral argument, the ontological argument¹⁸), evidential (the trilemma), presuppositional (the argument from reason), and existential (the argument from desire¹⁹). His case is not ultimately dependent on any one of them so much as on the fact that they all point to the same conclusion. He explains,

¹⁷ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case for Biblical Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 59.

¹⁸ See Donald T. Williams, “Anselm and Aslan: C. S. Lewis and the ontological Argument,” *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity* 27:6 (Nov.-Dec. 2014), 36-39.

¹⁹ See Donald T. Williams, “The Argument from Desire Revisited,” *The Lamp-Post of the Southern California C. S. Lewis Society* 32:1 (Spring 2010), 32-33.

Authority, reason, experience; on these three, mixed in varying proportions, all our knowledge depends. The authority of many wise men in many different times and places forbids me to regard the spiritual world as an illusion. My reason, showing me the apparently insoluble difficulties of materialism and proving that the hypothesis of a spiritual world covers far more of the facts with far fewer assumptions, forbids me again. My experience even of such feeble attempts as I have made to live the spiritual life does not lead to the results which the pursuit of an illusion ordinarily leads to, and therefore forbids me yet again.²⁰

Authority, reason, experience: When they agree, one can proceed with a certain amount of confidence.

Practical Apologetics

There are then a number of arguments pointing to the truth of the Christian faith, some of them quite strong. But Lewis realized that having good arguments is not enough. We also need to influence the general climate of opinion. In a secular age, unexamined attitudes and ideas influence our minds in ways that do not affect the validity of the reasons we have always had for believing in God, but may have a powerful effect on their plausibility. For example, Ransom insists that “What we need for the moment is not so much a body of belief as a body of people familiarized with certain ideas. If we could even effect in one per cent of our readers a change-over from the conception of Space to the conception of Heaven, we should have made a beginning.”²¹ Space is a vast unpopulated

²⁰ C. S. Lewis, “Religion: Reality or Substitute?” in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 41.

²¹ C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (NY: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1996), 154.

emptiness in which life is an anomaly; heaven is a vibrant matrix of being pulsating with life and light. How we imagine the world has an influence on how we think about it, the kinds of arguments we will be drawn to, and the kind of conclusions we will draw about it.

Lewis's arguments were effective then partly because he knew that more than argument was needed. In Lewis's apologetic they were supplemented by attempts to imagine what the world would look like if Christianity were true as well as arguments that were not directly about apologetic issues. Lewis wanted Christians to pursue intellectual excellence in general in order to create a situation in which people were not so unused to seeing things from the perspective of the Christian world view as they were already becoming in his generation. "What we want," he said, "is not more little books about Christianity, but more little books by Christians on other subjects."²² When the best available treatments of art, literature, politics, philosophy, ethics, science, etc. all speak as if Christianity were true (without directly mentioning it), then when the time comes to make the case for its truth directly, a receptive audience will have been created. We have much work left to do in this area.

Lewis was also an effective apologist because he was winsome and intelligent. One of my favorite passages is one in which he slyly turns the tables on the skeptics. As an atheist Lewis had had to believe that the great majority of the human race was wrong; "When I became a Christian," he remarks, "I was able to take a more liberal view."²³ Here he steals a favorite buzz word, "liberal," and a favorite stance, that of tolerant open-mindedness, from his opponents, and stands them on their heads to be used against them. Who is really open minded? Lewis makes his point, but he doesn't rub it in; he makes it and moves on. We could learn a lot from him in manner as well as in message.

Lewis had a unique gift for being able to express the most profound Christian ideas that apologetics needs to defend in

²² "Christian Apologetics," op. cit., 93.

²³ *Mere Christianity*, op. cit., 43.

language that normal human beings can understand. This was a gift, but it is also a skill that can be cultivated. Lewis wrote to John Beddow on 7 Oct. 1945, “It has always seemed to me odd that those who are sent to evangelise the Bantus begin by learning Bantu while the Church turns out annually curates to teach the English who simply don’t know the vernacular language of England.”²⁴ He also stressed that you do not really even understand a concept if you cannot translate it into the vernacular. He thought such translation ought to be a compulsory paper for every ordination examination.²⁵ It was good advice for the apologist as well as the pastor and the evangelist. Sadly today in Academia there is a prejudice to the effect that writing cannot be intellectual if it is intelligible. Lewis’s entire corpus gives the lie to that erroneous notion. It would be good if a host of theologians and apologists following his example could give the lie to it too.

Lewis was also careful not to claim too much. He gives multiple arguments to the best explanation and does not typically claim to have a slam-dunk proof. He wrote to Sheldon Vanauken on 23 Dec. 1950, “I do not think there is a *demonstrative* proof (like Euclid) of Christianity, nor of the existence of matter, nor of the good will & honesty of my best & oldest friends. I think all three are . . . far more probable than the alternatives.”²⁶ Not only does this approach relieve us of the burden of trying to prove more than we can, it is also consistent with the nature of the response we are looking for. As Lewis further explained, God does not give us a demonstrative proof because a response of mere intellectual assent is not what He is after. “Are *we* interested in it in personal matters? . . . The very fairy tales embody the truth. Othello believed in Desdemona’s innocence when it was proved; . . . Lear believed in Cordelia’s love when it was proved: but that was too late.”²⁷ Faith—personal trust—is not indifferent to evidence. But we do not value faith very highly when it is given only if there is no

²⁴ *Collected Letters*, op. cit., 2:674.

²⁵ “Christian Apologetics,” op. cit., 98-99.

²⁶ *Collected Letters*, op. cit., 3:75.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

intellectual alternative, or when it wavers with every fluctuation in the ebb and flow of circumstances.

The Final Apologetic

Lewis would have agreed with Francis Schaeffer that “the final apologetic” is a life lived as if the Christian message were true.²⁸ Lewis noted, “If Christianity should happen to be true, then it is quite impossible that those who know this truth and those who don’t should be equally well equipped for leading a good life.”²⁹ Christians so equipped should indeed be leading a life that not only exhibits human thriving from the application of Christian truths but also a sacrificial commitment to showing the love of Christ to each other and to the world. Without this “final apologetic,” no argument will be compelling to people from whom we are asking not just intellectual assent but life commitment. And to some, it will be the only argument that can speak. As Lewis wrote to a Miss Gladding on 7 June 1945, “When a person . . . has lost faith under so very great and bewildering a trial, no intellectual approach is likely to avail. But where people can resist and ignore arguments, they may be unable to resist *lives*.”³⁰

The final practical point is the realization that apologetics is a form of spiritual warfare, and not one without casualties. The best way to be one of those casualties is to ignore the danger. Lewis did not. He realized that “Nothing is more dangerous to one’s own faith than the work of the apologist. No doctrine of that faith seems to me so spectral, so unreal, as the one I have just successfully defended. .

²⁸ Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There: Speaking Historic Christianity into the Twentieth Century* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1958, 152; cf. *The Mark of the Christian* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970).

²⁹ C. S. Lewis, “Man or Rabbit?” in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 109.

³⁰ *Collected Letters*, op. cit., 2:659.

. . . For a moment, you see, it has seemed to rest on oneself.”³¹
Therefore it is indispensable that we have a serious reckoning with the fact that intellectual preparation is necessary but not enough. The apologist must be a person who walks with the Lord in such a way that he cannot forget on Whom things truly rest.

CONCLUSION

Why do we need apologetics? We live in a world filled with people who think like Trumpkin: “I have no use for magic lions which are talking lions and don’t talk, and friendly lions though they don’t do us any good, and whopping big lions though nobody can see them.”³² The only cure for that attitude was for Trumpkin actually to meet Aslan. Well, we are all of us constitutionally unbelieving Narnian dwarfs. “You see,” said Aslan. “They will not let us help them. They have chosen cunning instead of belief. Their prison is only in their own minds, yet they are in that prison; and are so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out.”³³

Only the Holy Spirit can take us out of ourselves, out of those internal prisons, to the point that we can hear the evidence for Christ and respond to it with faith. But the Spirit wants us to be ready and able to present that evidence when He does so. Lewis’s friend Austin Farrer put it well: “Though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief can flourish.”³⁴ Lewis, in other words, well understood that the goal of apologetics is not just to win arguments. It must be what he allowed to Sherwood Eliot Wirt was the goal of all his writing: “to bring about an encounter of the reader

³¹ “Christian Apologetics,” op. cit., 103).

³² C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (NY: HarperCollins, 1979), 156.

³³ C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (NY: HarperCollins, 1984), 185-6.

³⁴ Austin Farrer, “The Christian Apologist,” in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (NY: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1965), 26.

with Jesus Christ,” the kind encounter Lewis described so well: “There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion (‘Man’s search for God’) suddenly draw back. Supposing we really found him? We never meant it to come to that! Worse still, supposing he found us?”³⁵

The purpose of apologetics then is to help people channel the shock of that encounter into a serious consideration of the claims of Christ. It is to ensure that this encounter is with the Christ of history and not a counterfeit, that it is an encounter of the whole person with that Christ, and that the faith we hope these people will put in Him will be a rational and well-considered and well-grounded faith. It is to help believers whose faith is more fragmented and superficial grow into that rational, well-considered, and well-grounded faith themselves so that they may be preserved in it. It is to remind them in their inevitable moments of doubt that faith is “the art of holding onto things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods.”³⁶

The goal is not just to win arguments. It matters little that we persuade people that theism is true in the abstract unless this enables them to meet God. Lewis reminds us, “We trust not because ‘a God’ exists, but because *this* God exists.”³⁷ We want to get people to the place where “What would, a moment before, have been variations in opinion, now become variations in your personal attitude to a Person. You are no longer faced [simply] with an argument which demands your assent, but with a Person who demands your confidence.”³⁸ For if indeed they can be brought to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, they will be ready to

³⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (N.Y.: MacMillan, 1947), 96-7.

³⁶ *Mere Christianity*, op. cit., 123.

³⁷ C. S. Lewis, “On Obstinacy in Belief,” in *The World’s Last Night and other Essays* (N.Y.: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1960), 25.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

say with Orual, “You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away.”³⁹

³⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold* (Harcourt Brace & World, 1956; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 308.

Quantum Physics and Its Alleged Threat to the Principle of
Sufficient Reason

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INTRODUCTION

The principle of sufficient reason (or “PSR”) has had a long and illustrious career,² having been recognized by many to be crucial to such disciplines as metaphysics, natural theology, and Christian apologetics. Put simply PSR is the thesis that for *anything* that exists or occurs there is a sufficient explanation for its existence or occurrence.³ PSR taken straight entails that there are no brute facts, no constituents of reality (including the whole of reality itself) that are even partially inexplicable. On the face of it, this might appear to be an unassailable principle of common sense. Yet, many today reject PSR for one reason or another. One popular current objection to PSR is that contemporary particle physics (quantum mechanics) has falsified it. At the root of this claim is the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle (“HUP”), according to which the behavior of

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² For an historical overview of PSR, see Yitzhak Melamed and Martin Lin, “Principle of Sufficient Reason,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/sufficient-reason/>. These authors, following Aristotle, claim that the use of PSR goes back at least to the ancient pre-Socratic philosopher, Anaximander.

³ Often PSR is formulated in terms of truth: for any true proposition, P, there is a sufficient reason/explanation for the truth of P. Note that on either formulation PSR is a metaphysical principle, not an epistemological one. PSR does not make any claim about the knowability or rational accessibility of any explanation.

elementary particles⁴ is characterized by a measure of uncertainty or indeterminacy. According to the argument from quantum physics, the establishment of HUP is supposed to disprove PSR. In this brief essay, I wish to contend that it is impossible for PSR to be successfully refuted by the argument from quantum physics.

MULTIPLE INTERPRETATIONS OF HUP

As we begin, we should note that the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle is subject to multiple interpretations. First, one might take the uncertainty in quantum mechanics to be apparent only, to characterize the way things seem only rather than also the way things are. Call such an interpretation of HUP an “epistemological” interpretation. So, for example, one might construe HUP as follows: With respect to any particular elementary particle, P , at a particular time, t , it is impossible that both a determinate spatio-temporal position and a determinate momentum for P be detected at t .

We can distinguish between strong and weak versions of the epistemological interpretation of HUP. A strong version of HUP would take it that the impossibility of detecting both a determinate spatio-temporal position and a determinate momentum for P at t is a matter of causal (or nomological) impossibility — i.e. impossible given the laws and characteristics of our universe. It is in principle impossible to detect simultaneously both location and momentum of a particular elementary particle, given the way we and our universe are constructed. Contrary to the strong version, a weak version would claim that this impossibility is just a contingent matter of fact and perhaps only temporary. For example, a proponent of a weak epistemological interpretation of HUP might claim that we currently don’t have the means to detect both position and momentum of an elementary particle simultaneously, but such detection is not in

⁴ In this essay, “elementary particle” is used to mean a truly fundamental physical entity, such as a quark or a photon. In keeping with its use in contemporary physics, “particle” is in no way intended to suggest that such basic physical objects are actually particles in the strict sense.

principle impossible, given the laws of our universe. It's just impossible *for us now* — practically impossible, we might say.

Note that an epistemological interpretation of HUP, as I've construed it, whether of the strong or weak variety, presupposes that in fact, contrary to appearance, there is no real indeterminacy at the quantum level. But most physicists and other interested parties in the discussion have not embraced an epistemological interpretation of HUP. Many have adopted an antirealist interpretation of HUP, taking an agnostic stance with respect to the issues of whether theoretical entities such as quarks are real and whether there is real indeterminacy at the most fundamental level in the physical world. As the antirealist sees it, HUP is the thesis that the alleged indeterminacy is true in the model(s) that scientists have found to work best in theorizing (e.g., generating reliable predictions) about phenomena/events at the fundamental level, but might or might not be true of the actual phenomena. Unlike those who adopt an epistemological interpretation of HUP, antirealists are quite happy to leave open the question of whether there really is indeterminacy at the quantum level.

Still others have adopted realist interpretations that we might call "metaphysical." These take it that the indeterminacy that emerges in quantum physics characterizes the way things actually are at the level of fundamental particles, not just the way things seem to us from the observations and experiments undertaken by physicists. A sample instance of a metaphysical interpretation of HUP might go as follows: With respect to any particular elementary particle, P , at a particular time, t , it is not the case that P has both a determinate spatio-temporal position and a determinate momentum at t . The question here is not one of how things seem but of how things actually are. On a metaphysical interpretation, HUP is the thesis that the indeterminacy is objectively true of the world at the quantum level — that is, that things really are the way they seem to be from the experimental data of quantum mechanics.

Now, our interest in considering HUP is the challenge that it is alleged to pose for the truth of PSR. On which interpretation(s) of HUP is HUP supposed to spell trouble for PSR? The antirealist sort

of interpretation, which most physicists seem to accept in some form or other,⁵ is logically compatible with PSR, since strictly-speaking the antirealist version of HUP is agnostic or non-committal about whether the indeterminacy in the models reflects indeterminacy in the underlying physical phenomena; so there's no genuine threat to the truth of PSR there. Moreover, it should be obvious that the epistemological interpretation of HUP in either of its varieties poses no threat to the truth of PSR, since PSR is a metaphysical claim and HUP on this sort of construal is an epistemological claim. That leaves only the metaphysical version of HUP as a possible source of worry for the defender of PSR. It is to a consideration of the challenge that is supposedly motivated by this understanding of HUP that we now turn.

THE CHALLENGE TO PSR FROM HUP

First, let's briefly consider the logic of the challenge to PSR that is apparently generated by a metaphysical interpretation of HUP.⁶ Essentially, the structure of the argument against PSR is quite simple — a straightforward instance of *modus ponens*:

- (1) If HUP is correct, then PSR is false.
- (2) HUP is correct.
- ∴ (3) PSR is false.

As to logic, the argument is formally valid. That is, the structure of the argument is such that if the premises are true, the conclusion necessarily follows. So, if the argument is problematic, the problem lies with the truth or rational acceptability of one or both premises, not with the logical form of the argument. With that in mind, then,

⁵ We should note that, for good or ill, most philosophers have not joined physicists in taking an antirealist stance.

⁶ Henceforth all references to HUP will be specifically to HUP understood according to a metaphysical interpretation.

how might a defender of PSR go about trying to undermine the argument from quantum physics?

REBUTTING THE CHALLENGE

One might attempt to defend PSR by challenging premise (1). That is, one might attempt to show that it is *not* the case that if HUP is correct, then PSR is false. Is this a live option? To answer that question, we would have to answer a number of further questions about the content and implications of PSR. For example, what exactly would constitute a sufficient reason or explanation for something? Could there be indeterminate reasons for things?⁷ If so, could such indeterminate reasons constitute or be parts of sufficient reasons? These are important questions, and worthy of pursuit.⁸ However, I propose to bypass treatment of these issues in this essay. It seems to me that there is a way of defending PSR that does not necessitate challenging premise (1) — a way that, as far as I can tell, has been overlooked in the literature on PSR and the objection from quantum physics. In what follows, I want to focus on two countermoves that might be used in tandem to undermine premise (2) and with that the whole objection to PSR from quantum physics. Let's assume henceforth that (1) is true — i.e. that HUP and PSR are logically incompatible.

A. COUNTERMOVE 1: AN INSTANCE OF THE “G. E. MOORE SHIFT”

One way of attempting to defend PSR by challenging the objector's premise (2) would be to employ the “G. E. Moore shift” strategy.

⁷ Obviously, the challenge to the truth of PSR from HUP presupposes that real (as opposed to epistemic) indeterminacy is incompatible with PSR.

⁸ For those who are interested in considering such issues, an excellent place to start would be Alexander R. Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Taking the general formulation of the challenge that I gave above as our reference, the “shift” strategy would work like this. First, one would accept the conditional premise, premise (1), from the objector’s argument. Then, in place of (2), one would assert that PSR is true. This, of course, is just the denial of the objector’s conclusion. From there, one would draw the conclusion that HUP (construed as a thesis about reality) is false. Thus, the structure of the counter-argument would be an instance of *modus tollens*:

- (1) If HUP is correct, then PSR is false.
- (4) PSR is true, not false.
[denial of (3), the conclusion in the objector’s argument above]
- ∴ (5) HUP is not correct.
[denial of (2), the second premise in the objector’s argument]

The question now is whether it’s more rational to accept (4) than to accept (2).⁹ What can be said in support of accepting (4)? The most important thing to say is that PSR enjoys a substantial degree of pretheoretical intuitive force. In fact, it seems to be a kind of common sense first principle. From a rational standpoint, this might well be enough to tip the scales in favor of retaining allegiance to PSR and rejecting the metaphysical interpretation of HUP.

However, from a rhetorical standpoint, the “shift” move might not be sufficient, for as we’ve already noted, some very bright minds, including some physicists and philosophers, accept HUP construed as a metaphysical thesis, and this despite their recognition of the conflict with PSR. Given PSR’s apparent first principle status, it is unlikely that we can proffer reasons in support of the truth of PSR that are more intuitively or rationally forceful as PSR itself. With that in mind, is there any additional good reason *not* to accept (2) — i.e. not to accept the metaphysical interpretation of HUP? I think so,

⁹ If it isn’t at least as rational to accept (4) than (2), then use of the G. E. Moore Shift simply begs the question against the proponent of the argument from quantum mechanics against PSR.

and that reason has to do with limitations of the evidence adduced in HUP's favor.

B. COUNTERMOVE 2: SHOWING THE INADEQUACY OF THE EVIDENCE FOR HUP

Elementary particle physicists tell us that in the crucial experiments used to ground quantum physics, they have identified all the possible physical factors¹⁰ that might help explain the behavior of the elementary particles under investigation. Thus, they tell us, there is no possibility in those cases that there are any hidden variables — i.e. potentially causally significant physical conditions that have not been taken into account. Let's say that such particle physicists make the following claims:

- (A) In our experiments, we have exhaustive knowledge of the initial physical conditions of the elementary particles we study. In other words, we know that there are no hidden physical variables.
- (B) These particles nevertheless exhibit a kind of indeterminacy. That is, the initial physical conditions, along with the relevant physical laws, do not suffice to determine every aspect of the behavior of these particles in our experiments. Those physical conditions determine no more than wave functions — i.e. statistical probabilities for the various possible behaviors of the elementary particles in question.

¹⁰ It's important to remember that contemporary physicists typically restrict themselves in their theorizing to the physical. That is, in constructing their theories about, or explanations of, physical phenomena, physicists usually don't allow themselves to entertain possibilities of nonphysical causal factors. We might call this species of methodological naturalism *methodological physicalism* or *methodological materialism*.

Let's assume that the physicists are right. What can we rightly conclude from this? It seems to me that we can rightly conclude at least two things that are significant for our purposes:

- (C) The initial physical conditions of particular elementary particles, along with the relevant physical laws, underdetermine the specific behavior of those particles.

Thus,

- (D) If the specific behavior of a particular elementary particle in a particular case — for example, the specific path taken by an electron in an instance of the Stern-Gerlach experiment — *is* determined, then whatever constitutes the sufficient explanation for that particle's specific behavior in that case includes more than just the initial *physical* conditions. There must be something beyond the physical — some “hidden” *nonphysical* variable(s) — to account for that behavior.

Thus, given the physicists' evidence, *physical* indeterminacy might well be the case in the sense that the behavior of elementary particles is not fully determined by the relevant physical conditions.¹¹ However, this constitutes no real threat to the truth or rational acceptability of PSR, because physical determinacy is only one kind of determinacy that must be ruled out to refute PSR. The door is left wide open to the possibility that the behavior of elementary particles is causally determined by something more than just the relevant physical conditions. That is, the physical evidence is perfectly compatible with the behavior of elementary particles being wholly causally determined, with some nonphysical causal factor(s) or agent(s), such as God or finite spirits, playing at least a partial determinative — hence, explanatory — role.¹² Because of

¹¹ This suggests still another interpretation of HUP, a more modest physical (as opposed to metaphysical) version.

¹² One who wishes to counter my argument by denying that the nonphysical can have any causal efficacy in the realm of the physical must give us

this, we must conclude that those scientific realists (physicists, philosophers, theologians, etc.) who embrace the metaphysical interpretation of HUP based on nothing more than the evidence of quantum physics go too far. Such a strong metaphysical conclusion is simply unwarranted by the evidence, and *must* be unwarranted given the physicists' methodological constraints.

CONCLUSION

Given the necessarily inconclusive evidence of quantum physics for the robust metaphysical version of HUP on the one hand and the common sense intuitive force of PSR on the other, we have ample reason to reject HUP in its metaphysical form in favor of retaining PSR. The rationality of embracing PSR in the face of quantum physics is intact.¹³ This is not to say that there are no satisfactory objections to PSR. But if there is a problem for rationally embracing PSR, it does not and cannot come from quantum physics.

good reason(s) to think either (a) that there are no nonphysical entities or (b) that even if there are some nonphysical entities, it's impossible for such entities to causally influence physical entities, events, or states. Suffice it to say that, even for the naturalist, based on attempts to find such reasons thus far, the prospects for our objector's meeting the burden of proof in this case do not look rosy. For the Christian theist, of course, it should be clear that the skeptic here is burdened with an utterly insurmountable task.

¹³ Note that if satisfactory, the same argument shows, *mutatis mutandis*, that quantum physics cannot threaten the view (which I take to be biblical) that God's providence is meticulous and universal in scope — a doctrine that precludes the possibility of any genuinely undetermined events. The same can be said (perhaps less controversially) with respect to the supposed refutations by appeal to quantum physics of the law of causality (best understood as a species of PSR, in my judgment), the law of noncontradiction, and the law of excluded middle.

INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of Muslims today think that the angel Gabriel handed down the contents of their holy book, the Qur'an, directly and literally to their Prophet, Muhammad. Pakistani scholar Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdī (1903–1979), for example, in constrasting the Qur'an to other what he calls "Divine Books," claims that:

[t]he Qur'an ... exists exactly as it was revealed to the Prophet; not a word—nay, not a syllable of it—has been changed. It is available in its original text and the Word of God has been preserved for all time ... [I]n the Qur'an we find only the words of God—and in their pristine purity.²

Views like this strike some Western observers as "at times scarcely distinguishable from superstition."³ They are a clear case of the so-called divine-dictation concept of the inspiration of Scripture, which is a concept that ranks on the extreme side of even conservative

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² Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdī, *Towards Understanding Islam* (tr. Khurshid Ahmad; Markfield, U.K.: The Islamic Foundation, 2013) 75. Mawdūdī is by no means an insignificant figure in Islam; see, for example, Maryam Jameelah, "Modern Ideas and Concepts in the Works of Maulānā Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdī," *Islamic Studies* 42 (2003) 347–352, and Abdul Rashid Moten, "Islamization of Knowledge in Theory and Practice: The Contribution of Sayyid Abul A'lā Mawdūdī," *Islamic Studies* 43 (2004) 247–272.

³ L. Bevan Jones, *The People of the Mosque: An Introduction to the Study of Islam with Special Reference to India* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1932) 57.

Christian understandings of scriptural inspiration.⁴ But even though more nuanced Islamic traditions with respect to the early history of the Qur'an are arguably more plausible than Mawdūdī's description, these traditions, too, have been increasingly called into question by modern, especially Western, critical inquiry.

This essay reviews the standard traditional Islamic account of how the Qur'an came into existence, and surveys some of the Western scholarly critiques that dispute this traditional account. Its findings support the notion that (i.) even though the text of today's Qur'an may to some extent follow that of an authorized version established as early as the middle of the seventh century A.D., significant textual variations most likely exist between these two versions; and (ii.) it is even more probable that the text of that authorized version differs significantly from the Qur'anic text as it was initially delivered by Muhammad (d. A.D. 632). These findings would seem to undermine views such as that expressed by Mawdūdī.

THE TRADITIONAL ACCOUNT

The traditional Muslim account of the origin of the Qur'an is not found primarily in the Qur'an itself, but is largely derived from two other primary sources. The first of these is Ibn Hisham's edition of Ibn Ishaq's eighth-century biography of Muhammad, the original of which is no longer extant. The other is Islam's so-called Prophetic Traditions (*Hadith*), in particular those compiled by Muhammad al-Bukhārī (A.D. 810–870) in a work commonly referred to as *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*.⁵ The relevant information from these primary sources is frequently summarized in the applicable secondary literature.⁶

⁴ Hodge and Warfield, for example, in their classic definition of divine inspiration, explicitly “repudiate” the notion that verbal inspiration means “verbal dictation” (A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield, “Inspiration,” *PR* 2 (1881) 232–233).

⁵ E.g. vol. 6, book 60, Hadith 201; vol. 6, book 61, Hadith 507, 509–511 (USC-MSA web numbering system), English translations of which by

In all likelihood, the Qur'an was not composed as a single unified book by Muhammad. Most of its contents was initially delivered verbally by Muhammad in the form of speeches, sermons and other messages. Muhammad's followers may have written down various parts of this material during his lifetime, for example as a means to helping them remember it. Some of it may also have been written down by an amanuensis for Muhammad or scribes during his time in Madina. But by the time of Muhammad's death, no complete collection of all material that would eventually constitute the Qur'an probably yet existed.

Bukhārī informs us that after Muhammad passed away in A.D. 632 in Madina, Muslims became interested in preserving a record of his teachings. In the Battle of Yamana in A.D. 633, some of Muhammad's followers who specialized in reciting his teachings were killed. At this rate, Muslims realized, the memory of Muhammad's sayings would eventually die out. Abu Bakr, who succeeded Muhammad as leader of the Muslims, assigned Zaid ibn

Muhammad Muhsin Khan may be found at <http://sunnah.com/bukhari/65> and <http://sunnah.com/bukhari/66>

⁶ E.g. Fred M. Donner, "The Historical Context," *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an* (ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 23–40, esp. 30–33; Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in Light of the Cross*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 91–94; Arthur Jeffery, "The Textual History of the Qur'an," *The Qur'an as Scripture* (New York: R. F. Moore, 1952); Jones, *The People of the Mosque*, 59–62; Hossein Modarressi, "Early Debates on the Integrity of the Qur'an: A Brief Survey," *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993) 5–39, esp. 8–10; Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns* (Göttingen: Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1860) 189; Ibid., "The Koran," *The Origins of The Koran: Classic Essays on Islam's Holy Book* (ed. Ibn Warraq; Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1998) 36–63, esp. 56–57; Peter G. Riddell and Peter Cotterell, *Islam in Context: Past, Present, and Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003) 58–59; Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 80–81; Ahmad Von Denffer, *Ulum al-Qurān: An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qurān*, rev. ed. (Leicester, U.K.: The Islamic Foundation, 2009) ch. 2; W. Montgomery Watt and Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1977) 40–44; Estelle Whelan, "Forgotten Witness: Evidence for the Early Codification of the Qur'an," *JAOS* 118 (1998) 1–14, esp. 1–2.

Thabit, a former amanuensis of Muhammad's, to collect all existing writings of the Prophet's teachings.

Zaid is thought to have said that it was easier to move a mountain than to compile the Qur'an, but he nonetheless succeeded in completing what is today known as the First Recension of the Qur'an, around the time of Abu Bakr's death in A.D. 634. Abu Bakr's successor Umar probably kept the assembled manuscripts until his death in A.D. 644, at which time they came into the possession of Umar's daughter Hafsa, who was one of Muhammad's widows.

In spite of the completion of the First Recension, different textual variants of Muhammad's teachings remained in existence. According to Muslim tradition, the principal reason is that different textual variants were written in different Arabic dialects. But another reason may well be that the First Recension was not published in the form of something akin to an authorized version that would come to dominate all other versions in common usage, and was instead retained in private hands.

Some of these textual differences were substantial enough that they resulted in theological disagreements, settlement of which required more than mere textual pronouncements by scribal copyists. To help reach a resolution, Umar's successor Uthman (r. A.D. 644–656) formed a committee that included Zaid ibn Thabit. The committee was tasked with creating a new version of the Qur'an. Known as the Second Recension, it was completed around A.D. 650.

This Second Recension of the Qur'an was in the Quraish dialect, and had a different sequence of *suras* (Qur'anic chapters) than the First Recension. *Suras* were no longer arranged in what was thought to be their chronological order but by their length.

Scribes made official copies of the Second Recension, which were distributed to the principal cities held by Muslims. Uthman ordered all existing textual variants to be destroyed.⁷ Although this

⁷ Hafsa's manuscript of the First Recension, which no longer exists today, may have been destroyed as part of Uthman's order.

order may not have been obeyed in all instances, the Second Recension nonetheless became the dominant version of the Qur'an used by Muslims, and any earlier Qur'anic manuscripts have largely disappeared.

Many scholars, including Western ones, have historically granted that the text of the Qur'an in use today by and large resembles that of the Second Recension.⁸ But the current Arabic text of the Qur'an was not standardized until the twentieth century. The Egyptian government, unhappy with the textual variants in Qur'anic texts that existed at the time, set out to produce a replacement text for use in religious education.⁹ It did so in 1924, with slight modifications completed in 1924 and 1936. Although the initiative for this text rested solely with the Egyptian government, the new Cairo edition was soon accepted throughout the Muslim world.¹⁰

SCHOLARLY CRITICISM

Although, as noted, this traditional account of the origin of the Qur'an may be more plausible than the view stated by Mawdūdī, it, too, has nonetheless been questioned by, especially Western, scholarship. Arthur Jeffery, for example, calls the standard version of how the Qur'an came together "largely fictitious."¹¹ He adds that Abu Bakr "doubtless[ly]" collected material, but "[t]hat he ever made an official recension as the orthodox theory demands is exceedingly doubtful."¹² W. Montgomery Watt and Richard Bell point out that the standard version leaves many questions

⁸ E.g. James A. Bellamy, "Textual Criticism of the Koran," *JAOS* 121 (2001) 1–6; Donner, "The Historical Context," 31; Jeffery, "Abu 'Ubaid on the Verses Missing from the Quran," 150; Jones, *The People of the Mosque*, 32.

⁹ Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Introduction," *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context* (New York: Routledge, 2008) 1–25, esp. 2–3.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Arthur Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an: The Old Codices* (Leiden: Brill, 1937) 5.

¹² Ibid., 6.

unanswered.¹³ They argue that the account of the First Recension, for example, assumes that prior to Muhammad's death there was no authoritative record, or any attempt to organize whatever Qur'anic material was in existence. They consider this unlikely.¹⁴ In addition, Watt and Bell note that there are different versions of the traditional account, for example with respect to the roles of Umar and Abu Bakr and the reason for the collection. Even prior to the Battle of Yamana, for example, large sections of the Qur'an had already been put into writing, so why would the loss of lives in battle have been the catalyst towards a collection already begun?¹⁵ Furthermore, why was the First Recension not considered definitive and made official and public?¹⁶

One major problem with the traditional account is that it relies on material derived from the Traditions that is not unambiguously clear. The account as described above is not the only one that can be supported by the Traditions. Some material supports a view that the Qur'an was written by Muhammad and/or his scribes during rather than after his lifetime.¹⁷ Revelations were written down as Gabriel communicated them, with subsequent revelations inserted into the ever-growing manuscripts. If over time any material came to be left out, it was because Gabriel instructed Muhammad to tell his scribes to delete it, which, according to Hossein Modarressi, is the original meaning of the concept of abrogation.¹⁸ This version of events is arguably more consistent with the view expressed by Mawdūdī than is the standard traditional account.

¹³ Watt and Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, 40–41.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁶ Ibid., 41.

¹⁷ Riddell and Cotterell, *Islam in Context*, 59; Modarressi, "Early Debates," 6–7n3; Watt and Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, 40–41.

¹⁸ Modarressi, "Early Debates," 6–7; abrogation is the notion that pronouncements by Muhammad in what are thought to be later *suras* were to replace conflicting pronouncements in earlier *suras* (cf. *Sura* 2:106).

Even with respect to the facts of the standard traditional account there is a great deal of uncertainty. For example, the Traditions state that as part of the compilation of the Qur'an, Muslims were asked to produce whatever written records they had of Muhammad's teachings. If two such records matched, they became part of the collection; if not, they were rejected.¹⁹ But it is not clear to all scholars whether this process was part of the creation of the First Recension or the Second, and this particular episode has been associated with the creation of either.²⁰

An important reason for the factual uncertainty of even the standard traditional account is that it is based on sources that date from relatively late after the facts they recount. Ibn Hisham died approximately 200 years after the death of Muhammad, while Muhammad al-Bukhārī lived more than two centuries after the Prophet as well. Thus, the oldest known historical records with respect to how the Qur'an came together date from some two centuries after the fact. Muslims accept these records as reliable, but non-Muslim scholars are more skeptical.

Questions such as these have caused scholars to realize that the history of the Qur'an should be viewed within the context of the history of Islam. Numerous Western scholars have made the case that the content of Islam's historical writings should not always be taken at face value.²¹ They argue that Islam found its origin as a

¹⁹ *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, vol. 4, book 52, Hadith 62, available at <http://sunnah.com/urn/56>

²⁰ E.g. Modarressi mentions it as part of the compilation of the First Recension ("Early Debates," 9), while Jeffery mentions it as part of the compilation of the Second Recension ("Textual History," n.p.).

²¹ Particularly influential in this regard is John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004) and *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), but see also Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Darwin, 1998); Günter Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur'an: Ansätze zur Rekonstruktion vorislamischer christlicher Strophenglieder im Qur'an* (Erlangen: Lüling, 1974);

Judeo-Christian sect, and that Muslims began creating their historical writings in response to the challenges inherent in maintaining an identity as a separate people with a separate religion—Islam—as it was becoming distinct from Christianity and Judaism.²² The objective of the Qur'an, along with other Islamic writings, was to provide a theological apologetic for Arab conquests throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa, along with an account of that faith's religious tenets and historical origin, including the central role assigned to Muhammad.²³ With respect to the origin of the Qur'an, its oral text is said to have been shaped by the verbal interaction between Muhammad and his followers, who constituted—especially in the beginning—a diverse lot rather than a well-defined Muslim community.²⁴ The final shape of the text of the Qur'an did not fall into place until after it had begun to be committed to written form, which was well after the death of Muhammad, perhaps as much as one or two centuries later according to some scholars,²⁵ albeit not to others.²⁶

Even Muslim scholars have argued that some of the Traditions as to how the Qur'an was compiled were written not to reflect history but for the sake of helping resolve sectarian Muslim disputes.²⁷ Sunni and Shī'i Muslims, for example, have historically

Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, eds. *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Karl-Heinz Ohlig, and Gerd-R. Puin, eds., *The Hidden Origins of Islam: New Research Into Its Early History* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2009).

²² E.g. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 125, and *ibid.*, *Muhammad and the Believers: At the Origins of Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) 216–220.

²³ E.g. Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, 81.

²⁴ *Ibid.*; cf. Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*.

²⁵ E.g. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 49.

²⁶ E.g. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 60.

²⁷ M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, "Qur'an and hadith," *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (ed. Tim Winter; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 19–32, esp. 23; Modarressi, "Early Debates," 5.

debated whether the Second Recension of the Qur'an contains all material revealed by Gabriel to Muhammad, or whether there were additional revelations that are not included in today's Qur'an. But these traditions are thought—including by Muslim scholarship—to have been invented in part to bolster claims of caliphate succession by these respective Islamic branches.²⁸

As a result, modern Western scholars have come to view the Qur'an and the Traditions predominantly as literary rather than historical texts.²⁹ It is worth noting that in a post-Enlightenment era, the Christian Scriptures are frequently viewed as literary rather than historical texts as well. But ancient secular writings, such as those by Jewish historian Josephus, as well as archaeological findings exist that to some extent corroborate the historicity of many of the most prominent people and events recounted in the New Testament. By comparison, there is a notable paucity with respect to the discovery of contemporaneous ancient secular writings that corroborate the historicity of the factual contents of the Islamic Scriptures.

A second major problem with the traditional account is that Arab script was not yet fully developed when the First and Second Recensions of the Qur'an were compiled. The script used at the time consisted largely of consonants along with indications for long but not short vowels.³⁰ Combined with the fact that an oral tradition continued even after the Second Recension was completed, over time multiple readings of the Qur'anic material evolved, known as *qirā'āt*.³¹

In the first half of the tenth century, these multiple readings were reduced to seven canonical ones by Abu Bakr ibn Mujāhid,³²

²⁸ Modarressi, "Early Debates," 17.

²⁹ E.g. Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*.

³⁰ Riddell and Cotterell, *Islam in Context*, 60.

³¹ Donner, "The Historical Context," 32.

³² E.g. Muhammad Mustafa Al-Azami, *The History of The Qur'anic Text: From Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 154; Ahmad Ali Al-Imam, *Variant Readings of the Qur'an: A Critical Study of Their Historical and*

but this number was subsequently expanded to fourteen. Even though the differences between most of these readings are not significant, some are, and are not just due to differences in oral recitation but in choice of words.³³ The Muslim scholars who in 1924 in Cairo produced today's standard edition of the Qur'an simply selected one of these readings in existence at the time.³⁴

As a result of an awareness of these historical and orthographical influences, Western scholars have become increasingly creative in exploring the implications of relinquishing Islam's traditional theological presuppositions with respect to the formation of the Qur'an. A few examples may serve to illustrate.

- Christoph Luxenberg has argued that sections of the Qur'an were originally not written in Arabic but in Syriac.³⁵ He famously proposed, for example, that the word translated in today's Qur'an as "virgins" (or "companions") who are promised to Muslim martyrs, should instead be translated as "grapes."³⁶

- There are a number of passages in the Qur'an that have long puzzled Muslim and non-Muslim interpreters alike. James A. Bellamy has examined as many as 29 of these passages and concluded that they can best be explained as textual corruptions, or errors made by scribes when copying the text of the Qur'an from one manuscript to another.³⁷ Bellamy notes that even Muslim

Linguistic Origins (Herndon, Va.: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006); Christopher Melchert, "Ibn Mujāhid and the Establishment of Seven Qu'ranic Readings," *Studia Islamica* 91 (2000) 5–22.

³³ Donner, "The Historical Context," 32.

³⁴ Ibid.; Whelan, "Forgotten Witness," 1–2.

³⁵ Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2009).

³⁶ *Sura* 44:54, 52:20, 55:72, 56:22.

³⁷ James A. Bellamy, "Al-Raqīm or *al-Ruqūd*? A Note on Sūrah 18:9," *JAOS* 111 (1991) 115–117; "Fa-Ummuhu Hāwīyah: A note on Sūrah 101:9," *JAOS* 112 (1992) 485–487; "Some Proposed Emendations to the Text of the Koran," *JAOS* 113 (1993) 562–573; "More Proposed Emendations to the Text of the Koran," *JAOS* 116 (1996) 196–204; "Textual Criticism of the Koran"; "A Further Note on 'Īsā," *JAOS* 122 (2002) 587–588.

observers acknowledged such errors soon after the Second Recension.³⁸ Such errors would presumably not have occurred if, as Mawdūdī would have it, today's Qur'an existed "exactly as it was revealed to the Prophet" in all its "pristine purity."

- Arthur Jeffery and I. Mendelsohn have analyzed the so-called Samarkand Kufic Qur'an, a manuscript discovered in the late 1860s and currently kept in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. Although local lore claims that this manuscript may have been one of the original copies of the Second Recension, palaeographic analysis suggests that it dates to the late eighth century at the earliest.³⁹ Jeffery and Mendelsohn document many ideosyncracies of script, verse division, and especially orthography of this manuscript relative to more standardized Qur'anic texts available at the time when they conducted their analysis.⁴⁰

- Behnam Sadeghi and others have examined an even older Qur'anic manuscript that was discovered in the Great Mosque of Sana'a in Yemen in 1972. Sadeghi has concluded that the manuscript dates from the second half of the seventh century, and that the text type of the manuscript "does not belong to the 'Uthmānic textual tradition, making this the only known manuscript of a non-'Uthmānic text type."⁴¹ Sadeghi believes that it can be derived from the manuscript that the current arrangement of the Qur'an's *suras* predates the Second Recension.⁴²

Western scholars have long sought to compile a critical edition of the Qur'an,⁴³ an effort not always encouraged by Muslim

³⁸ Ibid., "Some Proposed Emendations to the Text of the Koran," 562–563.

³⁹ E. A. Rezvan, "On the Dating of an 'Uthmānic Qur'ān' from St. Petersburg," *Manuscripta Orientalia* 6 (2000) 19–22.

⁴⁰ A. Jeffery and I. Mendelsohn, "The Orthography of the Samarqand Qur'ān Codex," *JAOS* 62 (1942) 175–195.

⁴¹ Behnam Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, "The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qur'ān of the Prophet," *Arabica* 57 (2010) 343.

⁴² Behnam Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, "Ṣan'ā' 1 and the Origins of the Qur'ān," *Der Islam* 87 (2012) 1.

⁴³ Jeffery, Arthur, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an*, vii.

authorities.⁴⁴ Paradoxically, Uthman's destruction of the early source documents on which the Second Recension was based has made the current text of the Qur'an less rather than more authoritative. Compare, for example, the large variety of ancient manuscripts that Christianity has preserved of the New Testament. Even though the texts of no two of these New Testament manuscripts are exactly alike, it is precisely that plurality of textual variants that has resulted in a Biblical text that, except for minor, nonsignificant variations, is considered highly authoritative (i.e. resembling the autograph) by many scholars of various theological persuasions.

This is markedly different for the Qur'an. As the great 19th century textual critic B. F. Westcott has observed,

[w]hen the Caliph Othman fixed a text of the Koran and destroyed all the old copies which differed from his standard, he provided for the uniformity of subsequent manuscripts [but] at the cost of their historical foundation. A classical text which rests finally on a single archetype is that which is open to the most serious suspicions.⁴⁵

At the same time, in spite of the destruction of source documents during the reign of Uthman, enough Qur'anic manuscripts have survived with enough textual variations to consider the view expressed by Mawdūdī that the Qur'an contains "only the words of God—and in their pristine purity" to be demonstrably false.

The discovery of such ancient Qur'anic manuscripts in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has enabled scholars to make as of yet embryonic efforts at compiling a critical edition of the Qur'an

⁴⁴ Ibid., 9–10.

⁴⁵ Brooke Foss Westcott, *Some Lessons of the Revised Version of the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897) 8–9; cf. Nöldeke: "The destruction of the earliest codices was an irreparable loss to criticism; ... it is impossible now to distinguish in the present form of the book what belongs to the first redaction from what is due to the second" ("The Koran," 57).

comparable in scope to the Nestle-Aland edition of the New Testament. Keith E. Small, for example, has recently reviewed Sura 14:35–41 as it appears in 22 early manuscripts along with *qirā'āt* readings.⁴⁶ He observed literally hundreds of textual variations, all of which appear to date from after the time of the Second Recension. From these variations, Small traced a development of the text of the passage. He concluded that none of the versions that currently exist are either the original text as communicated by Muhammad or the Second Recension, and that neither of those two versions can be established from the currently extant versions. This type of study of the textual history of the Qur'an is likely to be aided by the continued discovery of ancient Qur'anic manuscripts.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the notion that the Qur'an was dictated word for word by the angel Gabriel to Muhammad, and has continued to exist in that form ever since, is overwhelmingly refuted by the facts. But even the more nuanced standard traditional account of how the Qur'an came into existence, which is largely based on material found in the Islamic Traditions, triggers too many questions to be tenable.

Instead, the following picture has emerged from scholarly inquiries into the early history of the Qur'anic text. Because much if not all Qur'anic material was initially delivered verbally by Muhammad, and written down in different versions by different followers of Muhammad during and after his lifetime, there was most likely not ever a single document that contained a written *autographical* text. Early versions of Qur'anic material were somehow combined and edited into a *canonical* text that formed what is today known as the Second Recension. At the time the

⁴⁶ Keith E. Small, *Textual Criticism and Qur'an Manuscripts* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2011).

⁴⁷ One such recent discovery was announced in Tübingen in October 2014, and another one in Birmingham in July 2015.

Second Recension was completed, many of the earlier versions on which that Recension was based were destroyed. Even so, at least some of those earlier versions may well have remained in existence at that time. More importantly, many other versions came into existence even *after* the completion of the Second Recension. This occurred in part because Arabic script had not yet been fully developed at the time of the Second Recension, but also because oral recitation continued afterwards. The 1924 Cairo edition is but one of those many versions, and by no means a critical edition of the text. Finally, one cannot help but be left with an impression that even though the study of the early history of the Qur'an is a thriving academic discipline, much of the progress in that discipline has been made by Western rather than Middle Eastern scholars.

Introduction

One of the most important, and yet controversial, apologetics methods of recent times is the method known as Presuppositionalism. It's most important proponent is known as Cornelius Van Til, though other great theologians such as Francis Schaeffer, Greg Bahnsen, Gordon Clark, John Frame, and, more recently, William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint. In this article I will be proposing that there is a fatal flaw in the presuppositionalist position, specifically the position held by Cornelius Van Til. I will begin by giving a brief overview of defining elements of Van Til's version of Presuppositionalism. This will be followed by an argument in which I seek to demonstrate that there is a seemingly insurmountable obstacle that plagues Van Til's Presuppositionalism. I will conclude by noting some consequences that follow if my argument is successful.

An Overview of the principal claims of Presuppositionalism

The *Van Tillian Presuppositionalist* system claims that, in order to know anything truly,² in order to be able to arrive at the conclusion that God exists through a reasoning process,³ in order to ask a

¹ David (MA, Southern Evangelical Seminary) is a PhD Candidate (Université Laval)

²Cf. Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, vol. 5 of *In Defense of the Faith* (1974 Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Co., 1982), 14, 17, 18, 22, 23, 37, 39, 63, 87, 102, 105, 108. Cornelius Van Til *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed., ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 16, 56-57, 66.

³Cf. Van Til, *IST*, 17, 102. Van Til, *DF*, 96.

question about God,⁴ in order to reason properly about nature or man,⁵ in order to create art,⁶ in order for logic to touch reality,⁷ in order for man to be able to intelligently use words to describe reality,⁸ in order to rationally interpret the universe,⁹ and in order to even be able to think truly about innate and acquired knowledge,¹⁰ we must first *presuppose* that God exists as the ultimate ground of all things.¹¹ Unless we presuppose that God (the Triune God of the

⁴Cf. Van Til, *IST*, 102

⁵Cf. Van Til, *IST*, 37, 81-82, 85, 105, 108, 113. Van Til, *DF*, 58, 66, 96, 118, 128.

⁶Cf. Van Til, *IST*, 67.

⁷Cf. Van Til, *IST*, 39. Van Til, *DF*, 18.

⁸Cf. Van Til, *IST*, 102. Van Til, *DF*, 18.

⁹Cf. Van Til, *IST*, 105. Van Til, *DF*, 16, 58, 67, 118. We will come back, at a later point, to the notion of interpretation of the world. It is important to note that Van Til refers here to what might be called “interpretive schemas”. The point of this statement is that, unless an interpretation schema presupposes the truth of the Trinitarian Presuppositionalism of Van Til then it cannot provide a rational interpretation of the world. This last sentence could, of course, be challenged. One might say that Van Til never said that one must adhere to his version of Presuppositionalism in order to be able to properly interpret the world. This response does not take into account the well-known fact that Van Til severely criticized anyone who had a different opinion than that of his own (even if the person in question was a Reformed theologian and a presuppositionalist). People who have fallen under the sword of Van Til include (this list is not comprehensive) Karl Barth (who also claimed implicitly that his version of Christianity was the only true version of Christianity and also criticized any those who do not agree with him), Charles Hodge, C. S. Lewis (who was, according to Van Til, a horrible Arminian! See Van Til, *IST*, 39.), Herman Bavinck, Edward C. Carnell and Gordon Clark (the latter two were reformed theologians and presuppositionalists of sorts, just not Van Tillian enough for Van Til.). For Van Til, other ways of understanding Christianity cannot possibly be true because they accept, as a starting point, the point of view of fallen man.

¹⁰Van Til, *IST*, 197.

¹¹Cf. Van Til, *IST*, 9, 14, 17, 18, 22, 23, 37, 39, 45, 46, 67, 102, 104, 105, 108, 197. We can add to this list that, man must presuppose the truth of Christianity in order to: (a) have true ethical principles (Van Til, *DF*, 82-83.), (b) properly interpret any law of nature (Van Til, *DF*, 118.), (c) properly interpret history (Van Til, *DF*, 118, 137.), (d) account for one’s accomplishments (Van Til, *DF*, 126.), (e) discern any one fact from any other fact (Van Til, *DF*, 137.), (f) avoid ultimate irrationalism and skepticism (Van Til, *DF*, 142.).

Christian scriptures) exists, we will be unable to know anything truly, even the facts of science that may be discovered by a non-Christian scientist.¹²

This primary claim is founded upon the following principles:

1. The presuppositionalist system of Van Til is based on the idea that there is no rational being that ever ceases to interpret the world which presents itself to it. This interpretation is based on a complex interpretative structure that determines how they understand the many phenomena that come into contact with them, including the meaning or significance they give to these phenomena.¹³

¹²Van Til does not deny that a non-Christian scientist may discover truths about our world, in fact, he asserts that they may indeed discover many important truths about our world (Van Til, *IST*, 26, 75, 83. Van Til, *DF*, 13, 15-16, 109, 125.). However, due to their false interpretative schema they are unable to truly understand the meaning of the 'facts' that they discover. It might be useful to note here that Van Til distinguishes between what he calls "metaphysical and psychological facts (MPFs)" and "epistemological and Ethical facts (EEFs)" (see Van Til, *DF*, 190.). According to Van Til the MPFs are common to all men, but they are not known (or knowable?) by unregenerate men (Ibid., 191.). Regenerate and unregenerate men do not have EEFs in common (Ibid., 191, 257.). According to Van Til the unregenerate people can contribute to scientific discoveries not because they presuppose that God exists (in the sense that they accept without evidence, and as a starting point, Gods existence), but because of the fact that MPFs apply just as much to them as to regenerate persons (Ibid., 196.). That said, they cannot really understand their contributions to science due to their false EEFs (Ibid.).

¹³It is interesting to note that there seems to be a link between Van Til's notion of interpretative structures and the hermeneutics of being of Martin Heidegger. There has never been a study showing that Van Til was influenced by Heidegger (and other post-modern existential thinkers such as Kierkegaard), and the frequent cry some presuppositionalists is that Van Til was not influenced by any non-Christian philosophers (In fact, if he had been, this would have been potentially detrimental to his system. Van Til, himself claims that he is not influenced by Idealism, Hegel, Existentialism or Phenomenalism, but only by simple Calvinism (Cf. Van Til, *DF*, 23.)). To this claim there are two comments that I would like to make. First of all, though Van Til *may* have been influenced by the theology of Jean Calvin it is quite evident (to any competent translator of Calvin) that Van Til rejected at least one important element of Calvin's approach

to theology—that unregenerate man can have natural knowledge of the existence of the one true God who revealed himself in scriptures (cf. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (2007; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2012), 4, 9, 10, 16, 20.). Van Til also seems not to have noticed Calvin’s explicit statement, in section 6 of the 5th chapter of the first volume of the *Institutes*, that « Je voulais seulement observer ici qu’il y a une voie commune aux païens et aux croyants de l’église de rechercher Dieu, en suivant ses traces, comme ils sont esquissée dans le firmament et sur la terre, comme les peintures de son image. (Jean Calvin, *Institutes de la religion chrétienne*, t. 1, ch. 5, section 6, nouvelle édition, éd. Frank Baumgartner (Génève : E. Bérout & Cie, éditeurs, 1888). » In English we read, “I only wanted to note, here, that *there is a common way*, to both pagans and believers in the church, to seek God: that is, that they follow the traces, in the heavens and on the earth, that are like portraits of his image. (*Italics are mine*)” (Other references to Calvin’s *Institutes* will refer to Baumgartner’s 1888 version, unless explicitly specified otherwise.) Van Til explicitly denies that there is a “common way” by which both the regenerate and the unregenerate may come to some knowledge of God. It seems, then, that in its most important contention (that which makes it a presuppositionalist approach), Van Til’s apologetical method is distinctly not Calvinist!

Secondly, it is evident, contrary to Van Til’s protests, that Van Til was indeed influenced by different aspects of the popular philosophical systems of his time (Cf. Van Til, *DF*, 137, 19fn80, 137, 113.) The attentive reader cannot help but notice the subtle similarities between Heidegger’s hermeneutics of being, and Van Til’s Presuppositionalism. That there is a probable connection between Van Til’s system and Heidegger’s hermeneutics of being can be shown as follows: It is common knowledge that Van Til was influenced by the Dutch reformed school of philosophy (There is no doubt that Van Til was influenced by Abraham Kuyper, but he was also influenced by thinkers such as Herman Dooyeweerd and Dirk Vollenhoven, both of whom were heavily influenced by Neo-Kantian philosophy, Heidegger, and Husserl (cf. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *Christian Philosophy: A Systematic and Narrative Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2013), 243-244.) Also important for this question is that Van Til was familiar enough with Heidegger’s writings to be able to write a scathing attack on the Heideggerian notion of god (cf. Cornelius Van Til, “The Later Heidegger and Theology”, in *The Westminster Theological Journal*, 26:2 (May 1964), 121-161. Interestingly enough, Van Til’s Presuppositionalist system shares, with Existential Phenomenology and Relativism, some basic foundational doctrines, namely the Kantian critique of knowledge (without going into too much detail we can note Van Til’s use of the Kantian distinction between the phenomenal world and the noumenal world (Van Til, *IST*, 83, 113. Cf. Van Til, *DF*, x, 32fn15, 71fn46, 91.)), and the hermeneutics of being (which is essentially the notion that all people necessarily interpret the world that presents itself to

2. Another foundational principle of Van Tils presuppositionalist system is the claim that there is no *neutral, common, or unbiased position/ground*, from which human-beings may (1) interpret the phenomena we find in this world,¹⁴ and (2) dispute among themselves in order to discover the truth.¹⁵ There is not, therefore, some common (or neutral) ground between (or aside from) the different interpretative schemas from which we could judge these interpretative schemas. It follows, therefore, that human-beings must always, and necessarily, interpret everything from within some interpretative schema.¹⁶

them through categories that they inherit in one way or another). For example, we find the influence and combination of Heidegger's hermeneutics of Being, and of the Kantian critique of knowledge, in the works of a well-known Canadian post-modern theologian, Myron Bradley Penner, "In one sense, of course, hermeneutics is a kind of epistemology—at least insofar as it is a reflection on the nature and limits of human knowledge. (Myron Bradley Penner, *The End of Apologetics: Christian Witness in a Postmodern Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2013), 70. Cf. *Ibid.*, 11, 29, 67-68, 127, 147.) Let it be noted that to claim that Van Til's dependence on the works of Kant and Heidegger therefore falsifies his system would be a genetic fallacy. However, if it turns out that the positions of Kant and Heidegger run into serious difficulties, then it *may be possible* that Van Til's system falls prey to these same problems.

¹⁴Van Til, *IST*, 3. Van Til, *DF*, 57, 122, 180, 191, 193, 198, 199, 158, 288, 294. For a contemporary presuppositionalist who also states that there is no common ground sees K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 208, 238.

¹⁵Van Til, *DF*, 10, 15, 82, 90fn2, 91, 105, 116-117, 120, 121. This means that we cannot reason with them in order to recommend Christianity as both true and verifiable. The only possibility could be the *divinitatus sensus* which is deeply rooted in the hearts of all men.

¹⁶We are not speaking here of simple *presuppositions* that might taint our understanding of the phenomena of this world in which we find ourselves (which are not, according to Oliphint in one of his comments in the footer notes in Van Til's *Defense of the Faith*, equivalent to a "paradigm" (see Van Til, *DF*, 121fn5.), but to what Van Til refers to as a "life-and-world view (Van Til, *DF*, 103, 118.)", an interpretational system (*Ibid.*, 137-142.), a consciousness (*Ibid.*, 72-73.), etc. The general idea that Van Til expresses through these, and many other terms, is resumed by the term we use above—*Interpretational System* or *schema*. The idea of an interpretational system can be illustrated, as Van Til himself says, as

A Potential Problem with Presuppositionalism¹⁷

Before considering the problem with Presuppositionalism, it would be appropriate to note some of the important contributions that have been proposed by presuppositionalist apologists. Presuppositionalist have, among other things: (1) emphasized several arguments of an apologetic nature that are useful for the defense of the Christian faith (such as the transcendental argument for God's existence,¹⁸

follows: “every sinner looks through colored glasses. And these colored glasses are cemented to his face. (Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R publishing, 1969), 295.)” A *presupposition* on the other hand, according to Oliphint, is “that which is true and provides for the truth or falsity of another proposition. A presupposition in the way that Van Til uses it need not be confined to propositions, but includes the objective ‘state of affairs’ as well. (Van Til, *DF*, 121fn5.)”

¹⁷In unofficial conversations that I have had with some people, as well as in unguarded comments made by certain speakers, there seems to be some people who are starting to think that to be Calvinist one must be presuppositionalist (or close). It should be noted that the refutation of the presuppositionalist system is not the refutation of Calvinism; and the defense of Presuppositionalism is not the defense of Calvinism. There is no relationship of entailment, neither necessary nor sufficient, between Presuppositionalism and Calvinism. Rather, Presuppositionalism, as we shall see, is simply a philosophical doctrine (drawing its inspirations from the philosophical systems of the great German philosophers such as Kant, Hegel and Heidegger) that is imposed on Calvinism. So the way in which we should approach Presuppositionalism is not to attempt to support, or refute, it with biblical evidences, but, rather, to ask if it describes things as they are. In other words, does Presuppositionalism give a true description of reality? Presuppositionalism cannot garner more biblical support than any other philosophical doctrine that has been predominant in Christian theology, and as far as I am concerned, much less. Rather than finding a relationship between Presuppositionalism and Calvinism, he who studies the writings of the great Calvinists such as Francis Turretin, B. B. Warfield, Charles Hodge, Augustus H. Strong, J. Gresham Machen (all of whom were scholars, theologians and apologists), and even the writings of John Calvin himself, will conclude that these great theologians would never have agreed with the philosophical foundations of Presuppositionalism.

¹⁸Guillaume Bignon pointed out to me, in his comments on a previous version of this argument, that the “transcendental argument [used by

arguments against other interpretative schemes, and interesting defenses against attacks against Christianity), (2) emphasized the place of presuppositions in research and discussion, and (3) noted, rightly, that we will better understand the universe in which we are (including ourselves) if we understand it (and ourselves) in its (and our) relationship with God as its (and our) creator.¹⁹ None of these elements are new to Presuppositionalism, though Presuppositionalism has rightly reacted to modern philosophy by reaffirming these elements. Despite its important contributions to Christian apologetics, we think that this method, especially as explained by Cornelius Van Til (though these problems may also be found in the writings of some of the contemporary proponents of Presuppositionalism), creates more problems than solutions.

The biggest problem for Presuppositionalism is not found in its commitment to Calvinist theology,²⁰ but, rather, in the

presuppositionalists] is a valid proof of the existence of God, but in no case is it *necessarily* the Triune God of the Bible."

¹⁹This point, which is a necessary element of any natural theology that is inspired by Christian theology, was already raised in the early days of Christianity by Augustine in his *De Trinitate*. This point is noted by Matthew Levering in his recent book, *The Theology of Augustine: An Introductory Guide to His Most Important Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 175.

²⁰An exception to this point might be found if one holds to an extreme understanding of the Reformed doctrine of total depravity, for which it would be impossible for man to know something of God until God regenerates him. Regeneration, would be, in this interpretation, the change, by divine act, of the interpretative structures by which God would allow a man who was caught in the interpretive structure of the fallen man to come to God. However, it is a fact of history that the majority of Calvinists, prior to that period of history when modern philosophy became predominant in the thoughts of philosophers and theologians, would have fundamentally disagreed with Presuppositionalism. According to Francis Turretin, it is simply the case (and this in opposition to the heresies of the Socinians, who denied that the unregenerate could gain some limited knowledge of God from nature alone by way of human reasoning, "that does not allow that there is a type of theology, or knowledge of God, which is natural (Francisco Turretino, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (Edinburgh: John D. Lowe, 1847), 1: 7).") that "The Orthodox, on the contrary, firmly teach that there is a natural theology, partly innate (taken out of the book of consciousness through common notions [*koinas ennoias*]) and partly acquired (from the book of creatures

philosophical presuppositions that are, according to Van Til, fundamental to the reformed system.²¹ The Achilles heel of Van Til is his commitment to the idea that all rational beings observe, necessarily, the phenomena of this world through an interpretative schema by which they interpret everything, and from which they cannot escape; and, that there is, therefore, no common ground.²² These two claims, together, cause significant problems for Presuppositionalism.

We suggest that the greatest difficulty for Presuppositionalism is that if these claims constitute the foundation of Presuppositionalism,²³ then it would seem that there is no way to know, with any measure of certainty, that Van Til (and, therefore,

discursively). (Ibid., 8.)” It would seem, then, according to Francis Turretin, that at least some of the claims of Van Til (specifically those that are fundamental to Presuppositionalism) are all simply heretical—unorthodox. It seems obvious, and experience shows us that this is the case, that we can be reformed without being a presuppositionalist (Van Til would say that someone who is Christian but who is not a reformed presuppositionalist, is not consistent), but we cannot be without a Presuppositionalist without being reformed. That said, it remains that a theological authority such as Turretin seems to declare as heretical those who deny (such as Van Til) that unregenerate man is able to know something of the true God from nature by reason alone. Translations of Turretin are mine. For an excellent English translation of Turretin sees Francis Turretin, *Elencitic Institutes of Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1992-97).

²¹If these philosophical presuppositions are indeed fundamental to the reformed system; and if we discover that these philosophical claims are false; then the reformed system will be seriously handicapped.

²²Note his claim concerning the need for an “absolute system (Van Til, *DF*, 137-142.)”. The similarities between Van Til Presuppositionalism, the absolute system of Hegel, and the hermeneutics of Being of Heidegger, are very interesting, and it seems that these systems are burdened by the same problems.

²³We have seen, above, that these two claims are the two fundamental pillars of Presuppositionalism. Someone might say, “But the idea of interpretative schemes and no common ground is based on the biblical doctrine of total depravity.” This statement is an enormous exaggeration of the facts. It is my humble opinion that those who see Presuppositionalism in the Bible are reading, whether they know it or not, Sacred Scriptures through the lens of Contemporary German philosophy.

his particular school of reformed Christianity) is telling the truth, and that all other views say false.²⁴ If we accept the Reformed

²⁴I have been working on this argument for a couple of years. About a year after I developed the basic argument I stumbled upon a similar argument, used against other philosophical positions, in two different books. I first discovered it being used against the coherentist approach to truth in the book of James K. Dew Jr. and Mark W. Foreman, *How Do We know? An Introduction to Epistemology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 110. Here they say, “A third problem is the problem of plurality: It is possible to have two coherent systems that are logically incompatible. How do I judge between them? How do I decide which system is the right one when the only way I can justify my belief is by appealing to a system? I need to step outside the system in order to judge them. But step into what? Another system? How do I know it is right? Again, we have a bit of an infinite egress here.” I also recently stumbled across a similar argument in R. Scott Smith’s excellent work on Moral knowledge, *In Search of Moral Knowledge: Overcoming the Fact-Value Dichotomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 277, 328fn1. Smith uses this approach as a manner of responding to the systems of Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre. Smith notes that, « If all experience is interpreted, then even our experience of ourselves, as well as of the language, culture and rational resources of that second way of life (even from its own standpoint) would be interpreted. It seems then that we would interpret this alien way of life according to our primary way of life, which could well involve translation and mistranslation. (Ibid., 277)” He notes, a little later, that “Accordingly, when we are learning a second culture’s language, even as a native among them, we cannot shed our first community’s way of seeing, lest we suddenly not have an aspect from which to have experiences...Hence, as we saw above, the second culture’s features always remain beyond our abilities to know. (Ibid.)” He later notes that this argument seems to apply even to Presuppositionalism, “Let me address a concern that *some* (but not all) presuppositionalists may raise. They may object to evidential, natural theological arguments on the basis that we always access reality by way of our presuppositions. That is, as James K. A. Smith suggests, presuppositionalists agree with his (and Derrida’s) point that everything is interpretation, i.e., that all experience is aspectual, or conceptual...I think we end up with the same kinds of problems as we saw for others, such as MacIntyre and Hauerwas. (Ibid., 328fn1.)” Smith also seems, in this quote, to agree with my claim that Presuppositionalism is nothing but the application of contemporary German philosophy to reformed theology. John Warwick Montgomery arrives at similar conclusions as those that follow from the argument that I present here. I would highly recommend that anyone interested in the difficulties related to Presuppositionalism read Montgomery’s article and Van Til’s response found here: « Once Upon an A Priori, » in *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussion on the Philosophy and*

theology of Van Til, then we are walking in obscurity. There are no reasons that can be given either to defend his system or to attack his system;²⁵ and this would also be true of all those beliefs that fall within interpretative systems of fallen man. The difficulty that we are raising against Presuppositionalism could be presented as follows (the references for the following premises can either be found in the previous section that summarizes Presuppositionalism, or they follow necessarily from the other premises):

1. The interpretative schema of each person includes all the claims that are accepted as true by that person, and which are used to understand and interpret the world in which this person finds themselves.
2. In order to know that his interpretive schema is true²⁶ a person must be able to have unmediated and uninterpreted access (in one way or another),²⁷ to reality, in order to compare the statements of his schema with the way things really are.
3. If a person interprets all of reality, always, through his interpretative schema, then he cannot have unmediated

Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til, ed. E. R. Geehan, 380-392 (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1971).

²⁵To do that one would have to be able to step out of his own system, to some common ground, in order to compare it with reality.

²⁶That is to say, to know that all the statements that are part of his interpretive schema are true.

²⁷This is the case even with the reading of the Bible. If I believe that the Bible says in John 1: 1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.", then, in order to know that my belief is true I must be able, in one way or another, to open some Bible, turn to John 1: 1, and really read John 1: 1. If I cannot confirm (having access in one way or another to the real text) that John 1: 1 really says "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.", then how could I possibly say that it is either true or false that John 1: 1 indeed says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."? If one cannot confirm my believe about what the Bible says, then one falls, necessarily, either into absolute skepticism, or absolute relativism (think whatever you want, there is no way to know for sure that one person is telling the truth and that another speaks falsely).

and uninterpreted access to reality in order to compare the proposed truth claims of his schema with the way in which things really are (in other words, there is no common ground or objective position from which a person could accomplish the unmediated and uninterpreted comparison that he must accomplish, according to the second premise, in order to know the truth or falsity of his schema.).²⁸

²⁸This is the foundational principle: *No common ground*. There are two important comments that must be made about this premise: First of all, for Van Til this premise is not only philosophically true (as shown above), but also theologically true. As has already been noted, the only way to get out of the fallen scheme is by a divine act (Cf. Van Til, *DF*, 73, 78, 87, 99, 105, 112, 127.). Once in the regenerate scheme, there is no return (eternal security). Therefore, there is no way to step outside of one's own interpretative schema so as to know if it is true or false. It should be noted that this premise is essentially the claim of no neutral viewpoint.

Secondly, this premise is devastating for any type of correspondence theory of truth. Oliphint, in his commentary on Van Til's *Defense of the Faith*, seems to adhere to a correspondance theory: "To the extent that our knowledge reflects the way the world is, our knowledge is true. (Van Til, *DF*, 90fn2.)" Of course if a statement is true in so much as what it predicates (affirmation or negation) of x is an accurate description of the way x actually is, then in order to know truth one must have access to x in order to compare the statement of x and x itself. If there is no way to step outside of an Interpretative scheme so as to observe x itself from a "neutral" or "unbiased" perspective, then either the correspondence theory of truth is itself false, or there is no way to know truth. Perhaps there is a way of escape for a Presuppositionalist. Van Til seems to equate truth and coherence, such that a system would be true if, and only if, it is fully coherent (of course, for Van Til, a fully coherent, non-Reformed, system is impossible). However, if it was possible for there to be more than one fully coherent system of interpretation (a possibility that Van Til is only able to deny if he presupposes—as he does—the truth of his own system), then either there would be no way to know which of the two systems was true, or both would be true. What if we accept both the correspondence theory and the coherence theory? If we add another premise to the argument above, such that a system is true if and only if it is endowed with a perfect interior coherence, and all of its propositions correspond to the way things are, then (always working with the other premises) there is no way to know the truth of any one system (especially if there is more than one fully coherent system). Basically, adding the two theories together only

4. All rational beings interpret, always and with ceasing, the world around them through an interpretative schema.²⁹

It is interesting to note, and this is our main contention, that premises 2-4 force us either to accept an absolute relativism of interpretative schemas or to make self-contradictory claims. Note what happens when these premises (which are proposed as true, as already noted, by Van Til) are put into relationship with each other:

5. Van Til knows that his interpretive scheme (Van Tillian Calvinist Presuppositionalism) is true,³⁰ and (we'll give him the benefit of the doubt) Van Til is a rational being.
6. Based on premises 4 and 5 it follows that Van Til interprets, always and without ceasing, the world around him through an interpretative schema.
7. Based on premises 3 and 6 it follows that Van Til cannot have unmediated or uninterpreted access to reality, in order to compare the proposed truth claims of his schema with the way things really are.
8. Based on premises 7 and 2 it follows that Van Til cannot know that his interpretive schema is, in fact, true.

complicates matters as we end up with the necessary conclusion that both: (a) either there would be no way to know which of the two systems was true, or both (all?) would be true, and: (b) either the correspondence theory of truth is itself false, or there is no way to know truth.

²⁹For Van Til there are, as can be seen from a cursory reading of his works, 3 basic interpretative schemes, including one that no longer exists: pre-fall humanity, fallen humanity, and regenerate humanity. One might object, "But God is a rational being. If this premise is true, then God always interprets the world through an interpretative schema." Keep in mind that according to Van Til it is simply a fact of reality that God is the "ultimate interpreter" of reality, always interpreting the world through an interpretative schema (cf. Van Til, *IST*, 24.). So as such, Van Til would not raise this objection.

³⁰Indeed, if we want to know that something, anything, is true, then we must assume the truth of the reformed presuppositionalist theology of Van Til.

9. But premise 8 creates a contradiction with the claim (premise 5) that he knows that his interpretative schema is true.³¹

It seems, then, that if the fundamental claim of Presuppositionalism (the only premise that really distinguishes the approach of Presuppositionalism from the approach of classical Christian theology apologetics) is true (that there is no common ground—that it is not possible to have access, without mediation or interpretation, to reality in order to compare the truth claims that are proposed by one's interpretative schema to the way things really are), then one

³¹Below is my attempt to show that this argument is logically valid. If the argument is logically valid, and the premises are true (that is, if the premises are an accurate representation of the foundation claims of Van Tillian Presuppositionalism), then the conclusion follows necessarily:

1.	$\forall x (Kx \leftrightarrow Cx)$	A
2.	$\forall x (Ix \rightarrow \neg Cx)$	A
3.	$\forall x (Rx \rightarrow Ix)$	A
4.	$Rv \ \& \ Kv$	A
5.	Kv	4&O
6.	Rv	4&O
7.	$Rv \rightarrow Iv$	3 \forall O
8.	Iv	6,7 MP
9.	$Iv \rightarrow \neg Cv$	2 \forall O
10.	$\neg Cv$	8,9 MP
11.	$Kv \leftrightarrow Cv$	1 \forall O
12.	$Kv \rightarrow Cv$	11 \leftrightarrow O
13.	$\neg Kv$	10,12 MT
14.	$Kv \ \& \ \neg Kv$	5,13 &I

v = Cornelius Van Til

Kx = x Knows that its interpretative schema is true.

Cx = x can have access, without mediation or interpretation, to reality, in order to Compare the truth claims that are proposed by his schema to the way things really are.

Ix = x Interprets through an interpretative schema, always and incessantly, the world around him.

Rx = x is a Rational being.

cannot say that one knows that his interpretive schema is true (no matter who they are: Van Til, Karl Barth, Martin Heidegger, or even Thomas Aquinas); and this is, quite simply, the way things really are.

Is there any way to avoid this embarrassing situation? In order to avoid the pains of self-contradiction we must reject one of the three following premises (2, 3 or 4). The third premise seems to be the most analytical affirmation that is to be found in the postmodern theory that is Presuppositionalism. It is quite simply a fact that, if a person always interprets reality through their interpretive schema, then one cannot have access, without mediation or interpretation, to reality in order to compare the truth claims of said schema to the way things really are. That is to say, if a person always interprets reality through their interpretive schema, then even if they wanted (or attempted) to compare the statements of their schema with "reality", they would be doing this comparison through the interpretive schema that they are attempting to examine. It's like having a pair of colored spectacles (let us say that they are pink) permanently cemented on your face.³² If we cannot deny the third premise, then perhaps we could reject the second premise or the fourth premise?

The fourth premise is absolutely necessary if Presuppositionalism is to be "true." That is, if the fourth premise is not true, then the third premise is, at best, trivially true (which means that it is, at best, analytically true); but, if the fourth premise is false, then the third premise has nothing to say about the way things actually are.³³ If the fourth premise is true, then Van Til can only say that there is no way to verify the truth of an interpretative schema. Indeed, we could say that Presuppositionalism, in relation to its fundamental claims, just is the combination of premises 3 and 4. It follows that if we reject either the third or fourth premise, or both, then we reject at the same time, Presuppositionalism; what we

³²Now where have we heard this illustration?

³³It would be a theory that has no relationship to reality.

accept, however, would be the classical position of orthodox reformed theology, as seen in such great theologians as John Calvin and Francis Turretin. So, Van Til would not readily reject the fourth premise.

We are left with only one premise that we can reject if we want to save Van Til from the pains of self-contradiction: the second premise. But the second premise is nothing other than the application of the correspondence theory of truth to the question of interpretative schemes. If we reject the second premise, then it follows that we could never know that our particular interpretative schema is true, and we are obliged to accept an absolute relativism of interpretative schemas from which we cannot escape. It looks, then, that Van Til must either agree to remain in self-contradiction (it is impossible to know that one of the interpretative schemes is true, but Van Til knows that his schema is true) or he must accept an absolute relativism of interpretative schemes such that no one could ever know which interpretative schema is true. More on this later on.

Perhaps we could reply that, "It is possible to demonstrate the truth of his own interpretive scheme by showing that others are wrong."³⁴ Philosophically speaking, of course, this reply seems

³⁴The idea that we can adopt, in order to properly examine, the position (or beliefs) of another interpretation system is very similar to the presuppositionalist method of apologetics. The presuppositionalist method will try to attempt a *reductio ad absurdum* with the fundamental presuppositions of all other interpretation systems. The reality is that this is a useful method in the toolbox of any philosopher, theologian and apologist, however, it can only function as a *negative* test for truth. In other words, suppose a presuppositionalist managed to demonstrate that all other human interpretation systems known to man are inconsistent. Have they now shown that their interpretative schema is true? No. (1) It is quite possible that a system that they think they have shown to be inconsistent is the only scheme that is true, but, the person who was explaining it included, unknowingly, some incoherencies in his explanation. Correcting those incoherencies, that were pointed out by the discerning presuppositionalist, ensures that this system becomes both consistent and true, and that Presuppositionalism (a different and opposing system) is false. (2) It is quite possible that there is another system that is, for the moment, unknown to man, but is a consistent, and true system. (3) It is a general rule of argumentation that the proof of a mistake either in the premises or in the conclusion of the opponent does not prove the truth of

right. It is a well-known fact in logic that in an argument that is based upon a dilemma with several disjuncts, we are only able to conclude that a single disjunct must be true if we are able to prove the negation of all the other disjuncts. We could certainly proceed to the negation of the other disjuncts by demonstrating that they are, each in turn, incoherent. A major difficulty with this method is that if our list is not exhaustive, then we may never know, even when we have denied all but one (of those known to us), that the remaining option is true. There is, moreover, another difficulty with this method that is specific to Presuppositionalism. If

Presuppositionalism is true (that is to say, that premises 3 and 4 are true), then the answer to this objection must be “No! We cannot demonstrate that the others are false.” This response is necessary because the presuppositionalist analysis of another interpretative schema is never, and cannot be, done without mediation or interpretation. According to Van Til, as we saw above, there is no way to consider the truth claims of any system of beliefs without interpreting them in light of one’s own system of beliefs (remember the pink sunglasses that are cemented to our face). According to Van Til, then, the presuppositionalist must necessarily analyze the fundamental affirmations of any other interpretive schema in light of, and through, the fundamental affirmations of his own

one’s own views (except in the situation where we talking about contradictory positions such as: God currently exists in extra-mental reality and God does not currently exist in extra-mental reality.). Another argument must be used to demonstrate the truth of own positions and statements, and the consistency of one’s own views is *not* a *positive* truth test. To demonstrate one’s own point of view to be true, one must be able to demonstrate that his position accurately represents reality. I have already argued that the method of Van Til does not allow him to test whether or not his system accurately represents reality. Therefore, a presuppositionalist is capable, in theory, to demonstrate the falsity of any other system, but will never be able, in practice, to demonstrate the truth of his own system. The problem for the presuppositionalist, if Presuppositionalism is true, is that the same statement could be said of any other system of interpretation that exists. Therefore, this method, although useful in itself, is useless for the presuppositionalist, just in case the presuppositionalist desires to demonstrate the truth of the system of Presuppositionalism.

interpretative schema. If this is true, then it is obvious that the presuppositionalist will always find the other positions to be false. The only way by which one can critically (and honestly, some might say sincerely) consider another interpretive schema, without being biased by one's own interpretive schema, is to be able to objectively, put aside one's own views and to consider the truth claims of the other interpretative schema as they are in themselves and in comparison to the way things really are. But if we do this (indeed in order to do this properly), we must allow for the possibility that the new schema just might be true, and our former schema (Presuppositionalism) false. This, however, is not possible for a Van Tillian presuppositionalist, and, therefore, this method cannot be used by the presuppositionalist. It would seem, then, that if we use the presuppositionalist method, we are left either in self-contradiction, or in an absolute relativism of interpretative schemes.

Some Corollaries of this Problem

Van Til claimed that all rational beings necessarily interpret reality through an interpretative schema, and that the Christian Reformed interpretation that he proposed was the only true interpretative schema. How he was able to know that all other systems of interpretation (eg the Catholic interpretation, atheistic interpretation or Arminian interpretation, to name a few) were false is a problem that seems to be irresolvable, once we accept his system. Van Til presupposes the truth of his own interpretation of reality, and then says that all other interpretations cannot really understand reality (despite the fact that they seem to be able to explain much, if not all, of the same phenomena, though in a different way).³⁵ However, Presuppositionalism cannot, according to its own principles, know that other interpretations are wrong, even if they first attempt to

³⁵See Norman Geisler's comment in *Christian Apologetics* (1976; repr, Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Book House, 2007), 96.

accept them as true. Let us conclude with a summary of the consequences of this argument.

First, according to the foundational principles of Presuppositionalism, if we accept an interpretation, then we will not only interpret every phenomenon by it (which makes all the other interpretative schemas false for us), but we also cannot use reason to intellectually reject a false interpretation schema, and to accept a true interpretative schema.³⁶

Second, as indicated above, the correspondence theory of truth, in which one might be able to check the veracity of an interpretative schema is unsustainable if it is impossible to get out of our interpretative schemas in order to take a look at our own schema from some common ground or objective stand point. It seems, therefore, that if we accept Van Til's Presuppositionalism, then we are simply unable to know which interpretative system gives the true interpretation of reality.³⁷ Why, then, should we accept an interpretation rather than another?³⁸

Indeed, third, a consequence of Presuppositionalism is that if Van Til is right, then the schema is only one of a huge list of

³⁶This is complicated, quite obviously, by the fact that Van Til thinks, because this is how his interpretative schema understands the phenomena of this world, that all human beings are born in a single interpretive scheme (that of fallen man), and that no man can get out of this schema without divine intervention (coloured eye-glass replacement surgery) of the Holy Spirit.

³⁷It is important to note that if we reply, "Okay, then we'll say that there is common ground, an objective standpoint, where the schemas of interpretation can be examined in order to see which one is true.", then we do not have the Presuppositionalism but either the classical approach to apologetics, or the evidentialist approach.

³⁸Any presentation of "reasons" to accept position X instead of position Y, if it is compatible with Presuppositionalism, will be based upon the personal taste, or desire, of each individual. If one calls upon certain "truths of reality" in order to justify his choice of position X instead of position Y, and if one wishes to argue that this is a valid reason for everyone (which means that it is not a matter of taste but of truth), then it is (a) inconsistent with the claims of Presuppositionalism, and (b) making use of some common ground that is available to all humanity.

different schemas. Why, then, choose Presuppositionalism instead of non-Presuppositionalism? It seems to follow from what was already said, that either the fundamental affirmations of Presuppositionalism are true (premises 3 and 4), and, therefore, Presuppositionalism is just one interpretative schema in a multitude of schemas, all of which could be true (we might never know which one);³⁹ or the fundamental affirmations of Presuppositionalism are wrong (and if that's the case then we can stop talking about it). If we accept the foundational claims of Presuppositionalism, as mentioned above, then it is quite possible that several interpretative schemas can explain, consistently, the world before us. One could even say that all facts that are coherently interpreted by Van Til can also be interpreted, coherently, by John Calvin, Jacobus Arminius, Thomas Aquinas, or even, Muslim thinkers, Buddhist thinkers or Atheist thinkers. If this is the case, then how can we say, consistently, that any of them is, or is not, right? For Van Til, there are no unbiased (in fact not interpreted or un mediated) facts, which could lean in favor of any one interpretative schema; and even if there were, we could not access them (or even observe them) without interpreting them through some interpretative schema. It would seem, then, that if we accept Presuppositionalism, we are caught in an absolute relativism of interpretative schemas. The result, then, is that Presuppositionalism leads necessarily to absolute skepticism regarding the possibility of giving a true interpretation of reality.⁴⁰ There is, therefore, if the Presuppositionalism is true, no reason to

³⁹We have no way of finding out which one is true. There could not be any reason to choose one rather than another, it is, therefore, really a matter of taste.

⁴⁰If Presuppositionalism is true, and if we want to maintain our Christian beliefs, then we are forced either into a form of postmodern Christianity (“we cannot know that it's true, but we can *make* it true”), such as we see in the works of contemporary postmodern Christian theologians such as Myron B. Penner (*Op cit.*); or we are forced into a form of fideistic dogmatism (which is just another way in which contemporary theologians have retreated from the overconfident claims of modern thinkers, and the postmodern rejection of this confidence), such as we see in Karl Barth and Cornelius Van Til (“we cannot know that it's true, but has to be true, therefore we must simply believe that it is true”).

accept the claims of Christianity as true (including the version of Van Til), instead of any other interpretative schema that can be found in the world.⁴¹

Fourth, if our argument works, then the system of Van Til suffers from internal incoherence,⁴² because it affirms not only that his schema is true, but also that other interpretative schemas found in the world (including the positions of other Reformed theologians,⁴³ of Arminians,⁴⁴ Roman Catholics,⁴⁵ and specific thinkers such as C. S. Lewis,⁴⁶ Augustine,⁴⁷ and Aquinas⁴⁸) are false.⁴⁹

In addition, it follows that we have no reason to accept the presuppositionalist division of humanity, into three different interpretative schemas (pre-fall, fell, and regenerated). If

⁴¹Perhaps presuppositionalists would agree with this statement? See Montgomery, *OAU*, 387.

⁴²Which is very ironic because presuppositionalists think that the only way to demonstrate that other interpretative schemas are wrong is to demonstrate that they have internal inconsistencies. The result of their own method is the demonstration that their position is false.

⁴³Van Til, *IST*, 31-42, 43-61.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 16, 19, 39, 70.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 12-13, 16, 19, 39, 44, 48, 84, 160, 260.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 16, 39.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 160.

⁴⁹Furthermore, it would seem, by the fact that several different authors have different viewpoints (even within the Calvinist camp), that each thinker holds a different interpretation schema. Which one is correct? In order to know the truth must we adhere to the interpretative schema of Van Til? If we differ from Van Til on *one single point* do we, or can we, change interpretative schemas? What does this mean for the Arminian schema, or the 4 point Calvinist schema? We know, because of the many dogmatic critics of Van Til about these views, that, according to Van Til, they are, one and all, prostitutions of truth with error. (See Van Til, *DF*, 29.) For Van Til, Calvinism (and specifically the presuppositionalist Calvinism of Van Til) is simply true Christianity, and all others positions are false (see Van Til, *IST*, v, 39. Van Til, *DF*, 29). What does that mean for contemporary presuppositionalists who differ with Van Til on various claims?

Presuppositionalism is true, then this division is nothing other than one of the truth claims of the interpretative schema of Van Til's Presuppositionalism, and we have no reason to accept this presuppositionalist schema. Perhaps other schemes have other lists with more or less categories of schemas? What if they are right? How would we know?

A sixth difficulty with Presuppositionalism, which should be important enough for those who think (1) that it is important to remain faithful to the theology of John Calvin, and (2) that the claim that there is no common ground between regenerate men and unregenerate men goes against the spirit of Calvinism (the theological system to which Van Til claims to adhere). For John Calvin, as evidenced by his *Institutes*, the fact that we can know God through his creation is just is common ground between the regenerate and the non-regenerate. In fact, Calvin explicitly states, "I just wanted to note here that there is a way to seek God that is common to pagans and to believers of the church, by following in his footsteps, as they are outlined in the heavens and on earth, as paintings of his image."⁵⁰

Finally, if we want to speak of the existence, or even possible existence, of interpretative schemes, then we are necessarily either (a) only expressing a claim that is part of our own interpretative schema, an claim that cannot be proved (as we have already seen), or (b) taking up a position (at least theoretically) that puts us outside of all interpretative schemas. Consider, in conclusion, an example that might illustrate this point.

Let us say that there is a warehouse that is full of 500 metal sound proof boxes. Suppose that there is also a person who was born, through some form of incubation, inside one of the metal boxes, and who has been living inside that box their entire life, with no way of escape, or contact with something that is outside of his

⁵⁰Calvin, *IRC*, t.1, c.5, s. 6. My translation. In French we read, « Je voulais seulement observer ici qu'il y a une voie commune aux païens et aux croyants de l'église de rechercher Dieu, en suivant ses traces, comme ils sont esquissée dans le firmament et sur la terre, comme les peintures de son image. »

metal box. Such a person would be unaware that there is something outside of his metal box. He would not be able to know that what he was in *was* a metal box.⁵¹ He would not be able to know that there was anything else in existence aside from himself and the inside walls of his metal box. As such, it is evident that he would also be incapable of telling us how many metal boxes there were in the warehouse. In order to be able to talk about how many metal boxes are in the warehouse, that they are metal, and that they are in the warehouse, one must necessarily take up a position that is outside of the metal boxes, and, indeed, outside of the metal boxes. It seems, then, that unless one takes a position that is outside of all interpretative schemes, one would be entirely unable to talk about the existence, nature, and content of any interpretative schemas.⁵² One might argue: “But God is the ultimate interpreter, and, therefore, if God tells us how many schemas there are, then that is how many there are.” The difficulty with this objection is that the claim that God has communicated such information would have to be part of an interpretative schema. There is, therefore, no way to know that there is a God, nor that he has communicated (one can only blindly accept an interpretative schema in which this is a truth claim). You either accept that interpretative schema or you do not. There is no way of knowing, however, whether or not it is true. Therefore, either it is possible for us to step outside of all interpretative schemas, to at least a limited degree, implying that we can then talk objectively about them (perhaps even demonstrating the truth or falsity of some of them); or it is not possible, and talking about the truth of interpretative schemas is self-contradictory.⁵³

Ultimately, if Presuppositionalism is true, then Van Til is like that person who is caught in a metal box trying to talk about

⁵¹How could he even possess the concept of a metal box?

⁵²It so happens that in Van Til’s metal box there are 3 interpretative schemes. The floor manager of the warehouse passed him a message?

⁵³Van Til simply proves that in his interpretative scheme, all other interpretative schemes are false. Which says nothing about whether or not Van Til’s scheme is true.

what actually exists. Unfortunately, as he is caught in a metal box, he does not realize that his little world is only a small part of reality, and that he has wrongly interpreted the elements of reality that are presented to him.

John Frame's Contribution to Presuppositional Apologetics
His position within the broader group of presuppositional thinkers

H.G. Stoker and J.J. Barber¹

Introduction

For the presuppositional apologist John Frame (1939–) apologetics is evangelistic apologetics. Evangelism raises questions such as “What are we to say to the unbeliever?” “And how do we say it?” Implicit in these practical questions are theoretical and foundational questions such as “What can the missionary apologist presuppose about the unbeliever’s knowledge of God?” Answers to these types of questions are invaluable for apologetic interaction and mission work, for with them Christians know how best to witness to unbelievers.

The epistemological rethinking of any science cannot take place without a description of the foundations of that specific science and the paradigm in which the scientific work is worked out. The importance of presuppositions in apologetics is already stated in the descriptive name of this form of apologetics, namely *presuppositional* apologetics. One of the builders of this branch of Reformed apologetics is the American theologian, John Frame.

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John Frame and Apologetics

The presuppositional approach in apologetics became known as a description of the work of Cornelius van Til – one of the foremost Apologists of the twentieth century – and of those that followed in his footsteps. Frame is one of those especially noted for his work on presuppositional apologetics. In the epistemological focused book *Five Views on Apologetics* (2010) it was Frame who was asked to be the mouthpiece of the presuppositional approach.

Apart from apologetics, Frame is also known for his thorough books on a broad range of disciplines within the field of systematic theology.² In his Theology of Lordship series, which includes *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (1987), *The Doctrine of God* (2002), *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (2008), and *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (2010), Frame has developed a synthetic system that presents a broad outline of Reformed dogmatics, ethics, hermeneutics, and apologetics.

The Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28 is, according to Frame (2008:307), embedded in the Lordship of the Triune God over everything and everyone. An important part of proclaiming the gospel is to give an answer to those that question what we believe (1 Pet. 3:15). Christians have the important obligation to defend their certain hope in the world of ideas (Frame, 1994:4) – not against people that don't know, but against people that don't want to know. Those that do not recognize God as Lord of their lives, suppress the truth. Similar to other presuppositional thinkers, Frame's approach to apologetics is not only dictated by the point of departure that the Lord "is", but also (based on Rom. 1:18) that non-Christians practice *suppressio veri* – suppression of the truth (Frame, 1987:102).

² For Frame's biography, see <http://www.frame-poythress.org/about/john-frame-full-bio/>.

Apologetic Epistemology Based on Three Perspectives

Christian *apologia* necessarily involves epistemology. Frame's epistemology can be summarized in the tri-partitioning of the norm, the subject and the situation (Frame, 1987:62-63). The *norm* is God's authoritative revelation, the *subject* is the person who lives in the face of God, and the *situation* is the world as God has made it and controls it. The task of the apologist is to uphold God's authoritative norm within a given human situation comprised of people who are uniquely created in God's image. Take away any one of those three (norm, subject, situation), and there is no basis for knowledge at all, with the logical result that apologetics also falls to the ground.

We may put the matter this way. In the normative perspective the apologist asks the question, "What do God's norms direct the unbeliever to believe?" In the situational perspective we ask, "What are the facts relevant to his or her belief?" In the existential perspective the question is, "What belief is most satisfying to a believing heart?" The normative perspective calls the unbeliever to faith on the norm of Christ and his gospel. The situational perspective seeks to contextualize the gospel according to the situation within which people live. The existential perspective takes into account the relationship of the gospel to the internal temperament and proclivities of those to whom we are engaging. To Frame (2005)³ the three perspectives provide the general shape of a biblical apologetic. Explained according to Scriptural quotations, the three perspectives are outlined accordingly:

- Norm: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1:7) ... indeed, wisdom and knowledge are summed up in Jesus Christ."

³ These three points are adapted from John M. Frame, "Apologetics" retrieved from http://www.frame-poythress.org/frame_articles/2005Apologetics.html Date of access 14 March 2012.

- Existence: “Though God is known through his creation, people repress this knowledge (Rom. 1:18) until God’s grace renews their minds (Rom. 12:2).”
- Situation: “The apologist should press upon the non-Christian the evidence that God is clearly revealed in nature ... in the context of a biblical worldview ... and should present the Gospel ... using Scripture’s own arguments as (1 Cor. 15:1-11 and other arguments) that follow scriptural leads.”

Fear of the Lord and Transcendental Argument

Frame’s apologetic epistemology rests on the fact that God is Lord over everything and everyone. “Lord” includes for Frame (2002:37) not only “Kurios”, the word in the Greek New Testament that is translated Lord, but also the Old Testament Hebrew word “Jahweh” (JHWH) that is also mostly translated as Lord⁴. To him, apologetic concern therefore begins with the fear of the Lord as he is revealed throughout the whole of Scripture. In Frame’s thought (2002:37) JHWH especially, is equivalent to Lord and serves to unite all biblical passages regarding God’s lordship attributes of control, authority, and presence.

Even though Frame’s thought is altogether covenantal, the transcendence of the Lord is always preclusion to his nearness to his people. In line with the Bible and the Reformed confessions, Frame’s apologetic views insist that “there is no continuum between God and creation. There are no degrees of divinity: God is divine, and we are not” (Frame, 2002:217). God’s transcendence therefore serves as the supreme basis for the axial proof of God in Frame’s apologetic: the transcendental argument for God (TAG). The

⁴ The title ‘Lord’ is a rendering of the work *kurios* which the New Testament authors used to render the Hebrew JHWH. However, in chapters two and three of the Doctrine of God, Frame goes to quite a bit of length to correlate Jahweh with Lord.

argument remains a standard point of departure for presuppositional Reformed apologetics.

The proof of God begins with the presupposition that the self-existent God of Scripture is wholly different from us and is the source of all reality, truth, knowledge, meaning, actuality and possibility. In an apologetic discussion TAG can be presented by way of exclusion, to be exact, according to what cannot exist without God: “Without God there is no meaning (truth, rationality, etc.); therefore, God exists” (Frame, 1994:70). In the style of deductive argument one can therefore say (Frame, 1997:70-71):

- 1) Reality, truth, knowledge, meaning, actuality and possibility are not possible without God.
- 2) Reality, truth, knowledge, meaning, actuality and possibility exist.
- 3) Therefore God exists.

Even the possibility of rational predication is impossible apart from God “because without him it would not be possible to reason, to think or even to attach a predicate to a subject (predication.)” (Frame, 1994:70-71). This is in line with the thinking of Van Til who expressed this proposition using the analogy of a child slapping her father in the face while sitting in his lap.⁵ Just as the child’s attack on its father is made possible only by the support of the Father, so also the atheist is only able to deny God because God gives the atheist life and breath. The striking correlative conclusion is that atheism presupposes theism.

Since Gotlob Frege (1848-1925) and his early work in the role of presuppositions in semantics,⁶ the phenomenon of

⁵ Van Til used this illustration many times in his classes.

⁶ According to Frege, “If anything is asserted there is always an obvious presupposition. The simple or compound proper names used have a reference. If one therefore asserts ‘Kepler died in misery,’ there is presupposition that the name ‘Kepler’ designates something.” First published in *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*, Philosophie und philosophische Kritik, 100:34. English translation of the article is *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of*

presupposition has been proposed in modern, analytic philosophy by P. F. Strawson and Bas van Fraassen, and others, to say not only that A presupposes B, but also not-A implies B. According to the original proposal presented by Strawson: S presupposes a statement S if and only if the truth of S is a precondition of the truth-or-falsity of S” (Strawson, 1952:49).⁷ The Strawsonian presupposition is typically considered in the literature in the subsequent form: (1) P presupposes Q if and only if Q is true provided P is true or P is false. Applied to apologetic argument God’s existence is implied (or proven) either by the assertion or the denial of causality. In modern, Reformed circles, Van Til was the first to put forth TAG.

Frame and Van Til on the Transcendental Argument for God (TAG)

According to Van Til (1961:13) the argument for Christianity achieves certainty⁸ only if it is tenaciously transcendental or

Gottlob Frege (1952) ed. Peter Geach and Max Black (this piece translated by Max Black) (Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 56-78). For a general review of Frege’s theory, see Theo M.V. Janssen, “Frege, Contextuality, and Compositionality” in *Journal of Logic, Language and Information* 10(1), pp. 115-136.

⁷ Also helpful are P. F. Strawson (1964) “Identifying Reference and Truth-Values.” *Theoria* 3, pp. 96–118, Bas van Fraassen, “Presupposition, Implication, and Self-Reference” (1968) *Journal of Philosophy* 65, pp. 136–152, Bas van Fraassen, B. “Truth and Paradoxical Consequences,” (1970) In *The Paradox of the Liar*, ed. R. L. Martin, New Haven: CT: Yale University Press, and D. Wilson (1975) *Presuppositions and Non-Truth-Conditional Semantics*, London: Academic Press.

⁸ Van Til used “certainty” against the backdrop of the impossibility of a proposition being false. He stressed that Christian truth is certain and should be presented as certain, not as merely probable. Frame, however, is willing to use the language of “probability,” not in reference to the certainty of God, but to the nature of our arguments, which sometimes fall short of absolute certainty (See Frame, 1994:86 and 1987: 136).

presuppositional.⁹ He was inclined to think this way because to him TAG was the only argument that avoided *neutrality*.¹⁰ Van Til's strong reprimand of E. J. Carnell and J. Oliver Buswell demonstrates his position (Van Til, 1949:218-228). It is not that Van Til was wholly against the use of Christian theistic evidences. He opposed their use in the sphere of rational impartiality. Presenting Christianity before the natural logic of fallen man as reasonable and probable—a choice among other possible options—was to present evidence as a *brute fact*.¹¹ Deeper still, it forces the apologist to reduce one of the horns of the dilemma: God's incomprehensibility and sovereignty, or man's finite knowledge and total depravity. One is sacrificed to the other when one ventures from transcendental polemics and introduces irrationalism and rationalism into the Christian apologetic. The apologist can introduce irrationalism into Christian teaching by falsely assuming that the unbeliever has some determinative power to understand the workings of the universe when in fact autonomous reason cannot decipher any part of the universe definitively.¹² The apologist can inject some rationalism

⁹ In his enduring exposition of Van Til, John Frame (1995:131-138) makes a critical distinction between the Presuppositionalism of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and more, pointing to the fact that Van Til's presuppositions were not hypothetical, but categorical. In this sense, the "pre" in presuppositional really meant "pre-eminent" to Van Til.

¹⁰ For both Van Til and Frame, the word "neutrality" represents an area of dialogue with the unbeliever that assumes God's absence; a sphere of argument that does not presuppose the living God. Frame (1995:178) says that Van Til was not against all use of evidence, but only on the basis of neutrality.

¹¹ For both Van Til and Frame (1987:28-29; 117-118), a "brute fact" is something that exists in time and space independently of God or man's interpretation. Van Til especially thought that other apologists, such as Carnell and Buswell cited above, had treated evidence this way, as existing independently from God and therefore as a means to lead non-believers to the knowledge of God.

¹² This tendency typically happens when the apologist answering the charge that Christianity is guilty of rationalism i.e., that the Christian faith is an extension of one's opinion.

into the discussion when he looks outside Scripture to reason and history to answer detractors of Christianity.¹³

Van Til circumvented the irrationalist/rationalist pitfalls of apologetics by insisting that theory meet practice, i.e., that apologetics not serve as prologue to theological study. We should not establish the *reasonableness* of theism before presenting theism but present the claims of theism as a challenge to non-Christian thinking *in toto* from the start. Instead of striving to establish the authenticity of theism first, and then advancing arguments in support of it, Van Til (1978: i) says “it is Christian theism *as a unit* that we seek to defend. We do not seek to defend theism in apologetics and Christianity in evidences, but we seek to defend Christian theism in both courses” (italics added).

The earlier period of Frame’s academic career saw him in agreement with his mentor Van Til. In time, however, his view grew and changed. Mainly Frame’s problem was that, in Van Til’s hands, TAG follows only a negative line of reasoning. More specifically is his concern with the words *as a unit* from Van Til’s argumentation cited just above. Viz., Frame (1994:71-75) questions the practicality of presenting TAG as a *complete* defense of Christianity. He does not believe, as did Van Til, that the whole of Christian theism can be proven by a single, theistic argument regardless of how well it may articulate the whole of the biblical doctrine of God. Now it is not Frame’s goal to cast doubt on TAG but to sharpen it. He does so by enlisting the assistance of supplementary arguments of a more traditional kind in the belief that their use does not kowtow to the secular mind.

Closely consociated with this evolvement is the Framian distinction between *presupposition* and *premise*. Van Til (1960:99) held that the presupposition of any defense of Christianity must match the premise of the specific argument in view, or else one’s orthodox position would be emasculated by one’s pragmatism. No

¹³ This can happen when the apologist attempts to answer the charge that Christianity is guilty of irrationalism i.e., that Christian take everything on faith, etc., minus science.

longer willing to marry presupposition to premise, the latter Frame (1994:80) embraces a more expansive set of positive or direct expostulations. Using the argument from design as an example, the premise “There is design in the universe” does not *necessitate* the presupposition that the God of Scripture is responsible for its design.¹⁴ However, the use of the premise does not infer inescapably that one is guilty of autonomous reasoning.¹⁵ Rather, a Christian can exploit the *premise* that the universe displays design on the basis of the *presupposition* that God is responsible for its design, and remain on safe ground. The same can be said for any positive argument for God.

Frame’s readiness to enlist supporting argumentation, beyond what Van Til was willing to do, is the result of his great knack at recognizing that the practice of evangelistic apologetics often requires extemporaneity. According to Frame (1987:347) the utterance of the gospel is not straight-jacketed, but *person-variable*.¹⁶ By that phrase Frame means that the apologist is to be protean in a creative sense when declaring the lordship of Christ over specific areas of people’s lives. As Frame (1994:67) says, “Since proof is ‘person variable,’ we are particularly interested in choosing an argumentative approach that makes contact with the individual or group we are talking to.”

Frame’s difference with Van Til is further motivated by his *normative* perspective of apologetics. The person-variability of TAG is forcefully applied to the extent that the apologist/evangelist bears in mind specific, spiritual strongholds in the lives of his listeners. Or as Frame says (1994:64, 67) “[Jesus] didn’t specifically describe all the areas of his lordship to every inquirer; he restricted himself to

¹⁴ As seen in Antony Flew’s original rejection of the argument, but then his acceptance of it.

¹⁵ E.g., “We have seen that Van Til is wrong to disavow direct arguments on the ground that they presuppose an autonomous understanding of the premises. A direct argument can, as easily as an indirect one, spring from the conviction that nothing is intelligible except through God.” (1994:86).

¹⁶ Frame admits his indebtedness to George Mavrode’s *Belief in God* (1970) New York: Random House, for his concept of person-variability.

mentioning those areas which were of particular temptation to each individual.” The classical arguments for God may also be employed in the person-variable nature of apologetics. Some, in the illusions they entertain in their self-absorbed autonomy, may need to hear the cosmological argument, while God may use the teleological argument as a means to cause others to pause and think. Alertness to specific barricades in people’s lives where lordship is of particular offense, combined with use of the traditional apologetic arguments when needed, affords the evangelist a full arsenal that he can wield with creativity and flexibility.

Van Til (1978:193) may well reply to Frame that the use of person-variability in apologetics is not coeval with the conjunction of theory and practice.¹⁷ Frame’s honing of TAG is however not in the least a call to cater to autonomous reason or to use the *blockhouse method* of apologetics.¹⁸ Rather, he seeks to follow the model of evangelistic apologetics exemplified by Jesus of Nazareth (Frame, 1994:83). Seen from this angle, the use of *both* transcendental argument *and* classical evidences is not mutually exclusive.

¹⁷ “If we cater to the Romanist view [for example] of reason in the doctrinal realm we shall also do it in the apologetical realm. If we cater to the Romanist view of reason in the apologetical realm we shall do it in the doctrinal. The result is a failure to challenge modern man with the full gospel.” Van Til (1978) *Christian Theistic Evidences*, vol. V In *Defense of the Faith*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, p. 193.

¹⁸ The “blockhouse method” is what Van Til called any apologetic methodology that starts with beliefs thought to be held in common between believers and unbelievers, and then attempts to supplement that common ground with additional ideas. We have demonstrated that Frame is not open to an apologetic that would begin with supposed commonly held beliefs. Rather, he accepts that the theistic argument should have a transcendental starting-point and goal. Thinking evangelistically, and with biblical example before him, he is allowing for some latitude in the presentation of theism as a unit.

Frame and Francis Schaeffer

Francis Schaeffer is another well-known student of Van Til, and part of the group of Christian apologists that use a presuppositional approach in their apologetics. In an article, Schaeffer (1948) viewed himself as a bridge between the apologetics of Van Til and the more traditional/classical apologetics, mainly that of Buswell.¹⁹ The Schaeffer article had a profound effect on Frame. It facilitated his acceptance of the justifiable use of reasonable arguments as a means to waylay the unbeliever's inconsistency e.g., "So you believe in logic, but if you really believed in logic you'd be a Christian theist." Thus, he says, "[Schaeffer's] emphasis on *both* presuppositions *and* verifications is important".²⁰ For Frame, verification includes all presuppositions "by tests of coherence,²¹ factual adequacy, and practical life." (Frame, 2010).²²

The process of verification is triperspectival, "Epistemologically, it goes like this: (1) We presuppose the norms or standards for knowledge, (2) we apply these to the evidences and facts, and (3) we adopt those conclusions which we believe are warranted, (1) is normative, (2) situational, (3) existential ... These are perspectively related: error on one of these will lead logically to error in the others" (Frame, 2010). The *antithesis* between the

¹⁹ More on this debate is available in Francis Schaeffer, "A Review of a Review," in *The Bible Today* 42/1 (October 1948). Now available at <http://www.pcachistory.org/documents/schaefferreview.html>. Frame calls Schaeffer's middle road "Modified Presuppositionalism."

²⁰ Date of access 24 Aug. 2012.

²¹ The test of coherence seeks to know whether or not consistency is present in the Christian defense. This is the most basic verification, behind which are tests for factual adequacy i.e., fact-claims made by Scripture. For example, skeptics may ask, "What of the variant accounts of the same event recorded in the Bible?" How many women visited the empty tomb?" A question based in practical adequacy may ask "Does Christianity work for us?"

²² Accessed 24 Aug. 2012.

believer and the unbeliever (or between the non-believer and God) is something that Frame is thus willing to exploit.²³

On the other hand, Frame differs from Schaeffer's idea that Plato and Aristotle embraced objective truth versus falsity, and that this antithesis was the accepted distinction in philosophy until the emergence of Hegel.²⁴ According to Frame, Schaeffer's idea gives indication to a neutral idea of truth, apart from Scripture. Moreover, because people are capable of entertaining the Greek idea of antithesis, Schaeffer does not eschew that fact that the natural mind cannot discern *fully* right and wrong. In other words, "Schaeffer does not make explicit the natural man's rejection of all legitimate standards of verification" (Frame, 2010).²⁵ Schaeffer contends that before people can rightly understand the gospel the apologist must practice a type of *pre-evangelism*: to help people see the antithesis as the Greeks saw it; to accept the necessity of absolute truth, and from that reconstructed foundation, apply the gospel.²⁶

²³ In Van Til and Frame, "antithesis" represents the opposition between Christian and non-Christian thought. See John M. Frame (1995) *Cornelius Van Til: an Analysis of His Thought*, Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, pp. 187-213. Van Til resisted the use of verification as a point of contact with unbelievers. However, it is Frame's belief that Van Til would have approved of his use of verification if he understood its use in the area of "broad circular" argumentation which, for Frame, can in fact avoid the pitfalls of impartial appeals to logic.

²⁴ Francis Schaeffer (1968) *The God Who Is There*, Downers Grove, Ill: Intervarsity Press, pp. 1-29. Perhaps Schaeffer made too much of irrationalism and not enough of the rationalism in modern culture. Frame balances both, as seen in his Square of Opposition (see chapters on Framian ethics).

²⁵ Date of access 24 Aug. 2012

²⁶ "Before a man is ready to become a Christian, he must have a proper understanding of truth, whether he has fully analyzed his concept of truth or not. All people, whether they realize it or not, function in the framework of some concept of truth. Our concept of truth will radically affect our understanding of what it means to become a Christian. We are concerned at this point, not with the *content* of truth so much as with the *concept* of what truth is." Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, p. 143. Clark Pinnock took a similar position to Schaeffer in *Set Forth Your Case* (1968) Nutley, New Jersey: Craig Press, p. 3. Pinnock's suggestion is that apologetics is a means of validation, the presentation of "compelling reasons to the mind for receiving Christ as Savior." *Set Forth Your Case*, p. 3.

Although Frame agrees with Schaeffer that verification is useful, he critiques Schaeffer for entrusting to natural reason the ability to verify tests of coherence, factual adequacy, and adequacy for practical life, apart from God's lordship over all minds as revealed in Scripture.²⁷ As Frame sees it, verification must be used cautiously *only* as we presuppose the standards or norms for knowledge from Scripture. According to William Edgar (1995) "Schaeffer's system requires us to submit Christianity to natural theology, rather than affirm it as self-authenticating."²⁸ Frame wants us to seek verification *presuppositionally* and also in the realm of *broad argumentation*. In other words, to reason in such a way that is compatible with the conclusion.

Frame and Greg L. Bahnsen

Comparing and contrasting Frame and Bahnsen on TAG is much like doing the same with Frame and Van Til. Throughout his

²⁷ Per Schaeffer, "[T]ruth is not *ultimately* related even to the Scriptures." Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, p. 157. Bryan A. Follis notes that Schaeffer is not denying the high role of Scripture but is saying that it is related to something behind it, namely the nature of God. "For Schaeffer the final screen of Christian truth is that which is in relationship to what exists and ultimately to the God who exists." Bryan A. Follis (2006) *Truth with Love: The Apologetics of Francis A. Schaeffer*, Crossway Books, Wheaton Illinois, p. 91. William Edgar is not so gracious to Schaeffer. "Curiously, Schaeffer does not strictly equate either the Scripture or God with the truth. The truth, in fact, is not '*ultimately* related' to the Scriptures. God himself is what he calls 'the final screen of truth.' Thus, God is 'behind' the truth, but is not equated with truth itself." <http://www.chaleteagle.org/cybershelter/Study/95040A.htm> Date of access; 3 Aug. 2012. Originally published: William Edgar (Spring, 1995) "Two Christian Warriors: Cornelius Van Til and Francis A. Schaeffer Compared" *Westminster Theological Journal*, 57(1), pp. 57-80. Edgar is perhaps pressing Schaeffer's position too far when he says that Schaeffer does not equate God with truth or else to what "final screen" would Schaeffer be referring?

²⁸ Date of access: 3 Aug. 2012. On the self-authenticating nature of the voice of God in Scripture, see Greg L. Bahnsen (1998) *Van Til's Apologetic: Reading and Analysis*, Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, pp. 209-19; 715.

teaching ministry, Bahnsen followed Van Til closely (see 2008). Bahnsen was also the man that took over the apologetic chair of Van Til at Westminster. The important areas of continuity between Frame and Bahnsen are that both claim the presuppositional heritage together with TAG. The differences between the two thinkers are, according to Frame, a matter of degree, though Bahnsen viewed the differences with Frame more disapprovingly.²⁹

From Frame's perspective, the difference in degree can be summed in two points. First, whereas Schaeffer underestimated the antithesis between believer and non-believer, Bahnsen overestimated it. On propositional knowledge, Frame asks if the unbeliever "can never utter a true statement, such as "the sky is blue?" He answers "On that question, I do not believe that Van Til ever arrived at a clear answer, nor did Bahnsen" (Frame, 2014:182).³⁰ Second, Bahnsen holds to a narrow view of what constitutes transcendental argument. He is not willing to accept any supplemental argumentation out of his belief that the premise of say, any traditional argument for God, must be based on autonomous thinking. For him, any inference from the world to God, directly or heuristically, cannot be properly transcendental.

In dialogue with Don Collett, Frame makes some points that are equally appropriate for Bahnsen. Collett joins Van Til and Bahnsen in the assumption that the traditional apologetics of Aquinas,³¹ Joseph Butler, and William Paley fall short of TAG in its

²⁹ On the eve of Bahnsen's last visit to the hospital, just before his death, he replied to an email from Frame, in which Frame wished him well. Bahnsen ended with the words, "I still disagree with you on the transcendental argument." Frame (2014) "Review of Greg Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*," in *John Frame's Selected Shorter Writings*, vol. 1, Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing.

³⁰ Van Til, in fact, admitted that the antithesis with respect to the unbeliever is a hard point to clarify. How can an unbeliever "know" God but not "know God? He admits that the unbeliever is simply a mixture of truth and error. See Cornelius Van Til (1974) *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, pp. 26-27.

³¹ In one place Frame purports a more open posture toward Thomas Aquinas. Contra Van Til, he did not think that Thomas was attempting to make

lead thesis that God is the transcendental condition of predication. Instead, Collett claims, that these men present being, causality, or purpose, and then on the strength of autonomous reasoning, strive to prove the God of Scripture. Van Til, Bahnsen, and Collett hold that a god who can be reached by independent reason is not the God of Scripture. Collett, et al. looking to Strawson and van Fraassen, encourage a very limited use of *modus ponens* (if A then B) and *modus tollens* (if not-A, then B) in the use of TAG.

Frame individuates himself from Collett in two ways. To begin with, he does not limit *modus ponens* so narrowly. He joins Collett in the propriety of the argument from cause. But he also insists that such reasoning avoid tautology. Should an unbeliever sniff at the causal argument, Collett wants us to repeat TAG until it hits its mark. But here is where the primacy of the Great Commission reveals itself again in Frame's thought. He worries that the committed opposition will not be persuaded by the recycling of an argument when they are steadfastly against the first premise: God. With that problem in mind, Frame (2009:965) asks, "How do we prove that God is the transcendental ground of causality? We need to establish the first premise. How do we do that? By showing that it is meaningless to speak of causality unless God exists. How do we do that? Perhaps by showing (with traditional apologists) that an infinite series of causes is unintelligible, and that to deny that

causality perfectly knowable as a precondition to knowing God. Rather, Frame takes from Thomas the exact opposite point: that causality is unintelligible without a first cause and that only God is that first cause. See *Speaking the Truth in Love*, (Frame, 2009:962-963). But this point is confusing, for elsewhere Frame is critical of Thomas. He quotes Robert Dabney, who observes of Thomas' thought, "For faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature and perfection the perfectible. It involves reasoning from God's effect to his nature, without the aid of revelation, and under the assumption that God's effects are better known to us than he is." Robert L. Dabney (1878; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972) *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 1,2,2, Reply, Obj. 1. "In other words," Frame concludes, "Aquinas is recommending autonomous reasoning, which is self-consciously removed from the authority of God's Word, enabling us to argue from the same premises of Plato and Aristotle" (Frame, 2002:225).

infinite series is to affirm God.” Frame is saying that it is possible to use traditional arguments to reach a transcendental conclusion *as long as* God’s lordship is sustained in all argumentation.

In the contrast with Collett, Frame finds an analogous point of comparison with Strawson. Not only does Frame, like Strawson, hold that “logic implies God, but that logic presupposes God (Frame, 2003) but also Frame can show that God is the presupposition of logic with more force to the extent that we draw out further implications from the first premise e.g., Bahnsen’s argument that logic implies God’s existence.³² As long as the apologist remains in the line of reasoning that is consistent with the conclusion he can use an infinite series of arguments, which will only enhance the transcendental nature of his stance. But should he move away from his fundamental presupposition he will lose his way.

Frame and Ligonier

An important aspect of this article is the question of what epistemological baseline can rightfully be presupposed in the unbeliever in an apologetic encounter, as well as how this presuppositional approach informs our dialogue with such a person – also in the light of the metaphysical/ethical dilemma posed by the fall. Frame nuanced position to these ideas and his stance in the context of his defense of Cornelius Van Til before a group of writers associated with Ligonier Ministries,³³ will now be explored.

³² Or more fully, “Start with Bahnsen’s argument that logic implies God’s existence. Then argue that without logic, no predication is possible. Then we can use something like this syllogism: If predication is possible, then logic is reliable. If logic is reliable, then God exists. This syllogism shows . . . that without God neither logic nor anything else is intelligible, a transcendental conclusion.” Frame, “Reply to Collett on Transcendental Argument.” Date of access: 26 Aug. 2012.

³³ This is an international multimedia outreach started by a Reformed theologian, R. C. Sproul in 1971 in Ligonier, Pennsylvania.

In an article titled “*Van Til and the Ligonier Apologetic*,” Frame seeks to defend Van Tilian apologetics against a host of charges levied by the Ligonier group, who maintain the classical form of apologetics: evidences and logic aimed at showing the rational necessity of God. A full synopsis of the article is not our point. The cardinal issue at hand is that on one essential issue Frame takes a point midway between the classical position of the Ligonier apologetic (TLA) and the transcendental method as espoused by Van Til. This matter is especially important regarding what Frame thinks unbelievers *know* about God in a state of self-deception.

TLA submits that in coming to know the God of Scripture we must begin with ourselves, or what some have called “the primacy of the intellect” (Frame, 1985:285)³⁴ while Van Til wants us to start with God. What does this divarication mean? The issue centers on what natural reason can understand properly in the light of evidences. In saying that we must begin with ourselves, TLA wants us to appeal to the unbeliever’s reason, for “One simply cannot start outside himself. To begin outside oneself, one would first have to depart from himself” (Frame, 1985:283).³⁵ Per Frame, (1985:284)³⁶ TLA claims that “Van Til abandons apologetics, refusing to reason with unbelievers” and that Frame is unwilling to enter rational discourse with any unbeliever. But the marginalization is not correct. The actual difference between Van Til and Frame verses TLA on this subtle point is not over the *use* of reason, but over the *role* of reason. The presuppositionalists demand that reason remain subservient to the *standard* of evidences whereby God’s voice binds the selection of the criterion of truth the apologist uses

³⁴ The entire article is reprinted in (1994:219-43). The “primacy of the intellect” is a term first coined by Herman Bavinck. “Aristotle already affirmed that God was the Blessed One, because he was the unity of thinking and thought and completely above all craving, striving, and willing.” Herman Bavinck (2009) *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol 2, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 211.

³⁵ Frame quoting R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley (1984) *Classical Apologetics*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, p. 212.

³⁶ Frame quoting Sproul, *Classical Apologetics*, p. 227.

while TLA encourages argument outside that standard, and as a means to build a case for God.

From the vantage point of the presuppositionalists, the divide focalizes on the fact that the unbeliever suppresses not only the proofs for God, but also the criterion of the proofs. It is not that the unbeliever lacks the psychological faculties to hear and to negotiate the demands of a multiplicity of different systems of logic. He lacks the *will* to respect each point, and the end-point, of syllogistic logic leading to true knowledge of God. He *cannot* even admit that logic itself is part of the world God has made because he *will* not. This does not infer that Van Til emasculates the self or reason. “[T]he self is the ‘proximate,’ but not the ‘ultimate’ starting point” (Frame, 1985:283). The “ultimate starting” point is God, before whom the unbeliever must be called to account. Like Frame, then, Van Til presents presuppositional apologetics as an *ethical* necessity.³⁷

TLA responds that to present an apologetic that sets the discussion in such a way that asks the unbeliever to think about God as the ultimate standard of knowledge before he can know God is contradictory, for he cannot recognize God as the ultimate standard *until* he knows that he exists. We must therefore adopt some temporary, provisional standard in our apologetic as a means to reason with the unbeliever about the reality of God; after which point the provisional standard, like the third stage of Apollo 16, can be dropped, leaving the unbeliever to ride the heights of true knowledge of God. The provisional standard includes the law of noncontradiction, the law of causality, and the basic reliability of sense perception.

The call for an *ad interim* standard of verification is out of accord with Paul’s point in Romans 1:18-20 that the unbeliever has already arrived at a decision—one against the God of the covenant.

³⁷ Quite fairly, Frame cites the Ligonier group’s affirmation that the “The intellectual problem is caused by the moral problem, not the moral problem by the intellectual one.” Frame, 1985:292, quoting R. C. Sproul, *Classical Apologetics*, p 5. But he goes on to say that the group does not stress the intellectual deficiency in man strongly enough.

Evidences may be presented, but as K. Scott Oliphint (2013:46) has said, “The problem is not with the *evidence*, but with the ‘*receptacle*,’ (i.e., the sinful person) to which the evidence constantly (through creation) comes.”³⁸ So the *whole man*, his entire direction, his whole way of interpreting facts is subverted, darkened, so that man is now *non posse non peccare*. This is what Van Til means by “starting with God” (a point TLA misses). Frame clarifies that the “pre” in presuppositional is not a reference to temporal precedence i.e., something one should believe about God before one believes anything else about God. Rather, the prefix “should be understood mainly as an indicator of ethical eminence (e.g., *preeminence*)” (Frame, 1994:13:n16) in the defense of the faith.

This leads us to Frame’s “nuanced position.” Frame is less critical than Van Til of the ability of the fallen intellect to arrive at true conclusions about God. In reply to the Ligonier group, he states:

In any case, I grant what I think they want me to, that people sometimes reach true conclusions about God without the witness of the Spirit. Van Til’s writings do pose some difficulty here. He does clearly recognize that unbelievers know the truth (Rom 1:21) and that they sometimes reach true conclusions ‘in spite of themselves,’ i.e., in spite of their unbelieving presuppositions. However, there are points at which he seems to say that unbelief always leads to intellectual error and that no propositional truth is possible apart from the Spirit’s witness (Frame, 1985:291).

Frame’s Distinctive Standpoint – True propositional statements

What does Frame mean when he says that unbelievers can arrive at true conclusions about God without the Holy Spirit?

³⁸ Italics are his.

When I make statements like this I usually have the Pharisees in mind . . . The Pharisees believed such propositions as “God exists,” “God revealed himself to Moses,” “God’s law is normative for our lives,” “Sin must be atoned by blood sacrifice,” “There will be a general resurrection on the last day.” But the general judgment of the Gospels is that most of these were unregenerate. That leads us to consider that Satan himself is doubtless even more orthodox.³⁹

So the statement refers to “propositional truths”—the very thing Van Til has in view when criticizing even natural man’s ability to know properly the flowers of the field.⁴⁰ Frame make this same point with Bahnsen when he asks if unbelievers cannot say properly that the sky is blue (see pt.6). If unbelievers cannot so much as say rightly that $2+2=4$, then all possible lines of communication with them are broken. For Frame the propositional conclusions of non-Christians can thus be “true”. It is therefore not clear why Frame has been so roundly criticized by R. C. Sproul and the Ligonier group as a Fideist.⁴¹

The results of the fall have affected men *in toto*, not only ethically, but also metaphysically and epistemologically. Now a proposition is a philosophical term used in formal logic to describe the content of assertions that are understood to be non-linguistic

³⁹ In an email to Dr. J.J. Barber, dated 9 Dec. 2012.

⁴⁰ Van Til’s full quote is, “This implies that [the unbeliever] knows nothing truly as he ought to know it . . . the “natural man” is not only basically mistaken in his notions about religion and God, but is as basically mistaken in his notions about atoms and the laws of gravitation . . . Now it may seem as though it is straining at a gnat to insist on the point that the natural man does not even know the flowers truly, as long as it is maintained that he does not know God truly. The point is, however, that unless we maintain that the natural man does not know the flowers truly, we cannot logically maintain that he does not know God truly. All knowledge is inter-related.” Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*, p. 26.

⁴¹ See R. C. Sproul, *Classical Apologetics*, pp. 299, 301.

abstractions drawn from sentences that can be evaluated as either true or false. For instance, “All water is wet” is a common proposition. When we use the term “propositional truth” we are working with truth claims that can be stated and analyzed in forms that fit into what we call in logic: propositional-form. But some categorical syllogisms can be problematic. For example, according to Aristotle’s term logic a proposition refers to a kind of sentence, in which one affirms or denies the predicate of a subject. An illustration would be “All men are created mortal.” The conclusion would then follow that “Socrates is a man,” thus “Socrates is mortal.” Now if we say “All men are mortal” and “Jesus of Nazareth is a man” where does this proposition lead us? To theological error.

Propositional logic should therefore seek to express *complete propositions*, or TRUE truth, as Francis Schaeffer said. We are inclined to see in Van Til (and Bahnsen) this sort of reasoning. Flowers and gravity are interrelated to the God of flowers and gravity. In that Jesus *is* the truth, true propositions are such because the subject and the predicate of any sentence find meaning in him. Did the Pharisees and Satan make “true” propositional statements as Frame indicates?

Frame is correct that Christian and non-Christian agree $2+2=4$. However, when lambasting the Pharisees, Jesus decried, “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). This statement comes after Jesus’ encounter with Satan in the wilderness, in which the evil one quoted the Old Testament *accurately* (Matthew 4:1-11). Yet Jesus says of him (and by way of inference the Pharisees) that he “does not stand in the truth because there is *no* truth in him” (italics added). We may elicit from this statement of Jesus’ that for one to speak the truth requires one to “stand” in the truth; to stand in the Son of God, something an unbeliever cannot do.

Considering this fine distinction, is there a better way to propose Frame’s idea that non-Christians can reach true conclusions

about God without the enabling of the Holy Spirit? Perhaps we can say it this way: That although men can say $2+2=4$ in a way that is *right*, they cannot say it in a way that is *true* i.e., TRUE truth. Bearing this principle in mind may permit us to *both* reason with the unbeliever in the context of evidences *and* do so from a wholly presuppositional point of view.⁴² We think that Frame would agree with our noetic distinction otherwise why would he agree with Edgar against Schaeffer? Explicative of this very distinction is also his statement that “If a person is a non-believer, then evidently he needs to be born again by God’s Spirit before he can apply the Word of God to his life.” (Frame, 2010:32)⁴³. Thus, it is that the witness-bearing power of the Spirit that operates conjointly *fides quae creditor* i.e., with the content of the faith. But the Holy Spirit also imparts *fides qua creditor* i.e., the faith by which the content of the gospel is believed.

Frame’s position within the broader group of presuppositional thinkers

In summary, the quintessence of Frame’s apologetics his Lordship principle (CAP). Not only does lordship lay claim to all peoples of the earth, but also the obligation of the Christian to bear the glad tidings of salvation to the world. More so than the apologists heretofore compared and contrasted with Frame, Framian apologetics is grounded in the inspiration, infallibility, and authority of Scripture. In Frame, all apologetics must therefore demonstrate pistil reliance on Scripture, and any proofs of the faith must be in service to that final authority.

⁴² The Puritan Divine, John Owen, expressed the same thought. “The difference between believers and unbelievers as to knowledge is not so much in the *matter* of their knowledge, as in the *manner* of their knowing.” John Owen (2004) *The Mortification of Sin*, Banner of Truth; abridged edition, p. 98.

⁴³ Cf., *DKG*, p. 143. In addition, cf., Frame’s response to William Lane Craig (2002) in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed, Stanley N. Gundry and Steven B. Cowen, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, pp. 74-81.

Justification by Faith in Christ Apart from Works of the Law:
Galatians 2:16

William C. Roach¹

Introduction

Historically the nature and truthfulness of justification by faith alone has been viewed as an essential element of the Christian faith. The apostle Paul clearly states, “Now I remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the words I preached to you—unless you believed in vain” (1Cor. 15:1–2). No book of the Bible, except maybe Romans, communicates better the necessity to have a clear understanding of the gospel better than Galatians. Thomas R. Schreiner reminds us that, “Paul is engaged in a battle for the gospel in this letter [Galatians], and his words still speak to us today. . . . Paul unpacks the heart of the gospel. One can see the meaning and the centrality of justification by faith, which Luther rightly argued was the article by which the church stands or falls.”² With this caveat in place, the following paper is going to argue that Galatians 2:16 teaches that justification is by faith *in* Christ *alone* apart from works of the law. This thesis will be established by discussing: (1) The historical context of Galatians; (2) The literary unit and structural context of Galatians 2:15–21; (3) The nature of the gospel taught in verse 16; in particular, (A) The concept of faith *in* Christ; (B) The nature and function of “works of the law”; and (4) Practical application and conclusion.

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² Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 21.

Historical Context of Galatians

In their book, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown*, authors Andreas Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles (from here on, KKQ), discuss the variety of scholarly opinions regarding the letter to the Galatians. KKQ argue that the book of Galatians was written by Paul around the time of AD 48 or 49. They also affirm a southern Galatian theory of composition maintaining the letter was written prior to the Jerusalem Council.³ Due to the fact it is not the purpose of this paper to provide substantiating details to evidentially secure each of these contextual claim, the view of KKQ will be assumed for the sake of argument. In addition, the chart provided below by KKQ offers the presuppositions governing the historical context used for this paper.⁴

Event	Likely Date	NT Passage
1. Famine relief visit to Jerusalem	47	Acts 11:30 = Gal 2:1–10
2. First missionary journey	47–48	Acts 13:4–14:28
3. Paul wrote Galatians	48/49	Galatians
4. Jerusalem Council	49	Acts 15:1-20

Moises Silva cautions his readers to not downplay the significance the timeline of events surrounding the composition of Galatians has for the theology of Paul's epistle. Silva notes, "The dating of Galatians relative to the Jerusalem Council is not a trivial question. Something important is to be gained if one decides that the epistle

³Andreas J. Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 407–429.

⁴Ibid., 418.

deals not simply with the specific question settled at the council but with a variation on it.”⁵ In addition, he warns his readers that commentators ought not overplay the significance of the dating of events because, “. . . the force of the apostle’s argument is sufficiently clear to compensate for our relative ignorance of other factors.”⁶ For the purposes of this research, however, the outline offered by KKQ will be used and this paper will presuppose that Paul’s challenge of Peter and the Judaizers predates the Jerusalem Council.⁷

Excurses: Exegetical and Interpretative History

Commentators must also recognize that aside from the historical context of Galatians, one’s interpretation of any biblical book is also affected by the interpretive history of the book. Regardless of whether they like it or not, contemporary readers are the recipients of exegetical debates from previous centuries. Consequently, for the purposes of this paper, it is important to mention briefly the exegetical and interpretative context as well. Timothy George in his commentary on Galatians provides a brief overview of the interpretive history of Galatians. Two important debates from his list are especially important to any study of Galatians 2:15–21: (1) The Reformer’s and the Roman Catholic Church; and (2) Advocates of the New Perspective on Paul.⁸

While each position will be fleshed out in greater detail later; however, for the sake of brevity, it ought to be noted that Roman Catholics criticize Luther and Calvin for reading wrongly “works of the law” upon the magisterial declarations of the Catholic Church.

⁵Moses Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 138–139.

⁶*Ibid.*, 139.

⁷This will bear exegetical consequences for this paper. Namely, when interpreting Galatians 2, it will attempt to understand the debate occurring prior to the Jerusalem Council. Consequently, one cannot read the events and theological declarations from the Council back upon the text of Galatians.

⁸Timothy George, *Galatians* (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 66–73.

They claim “works of the Law” do not apply to the Catholic Church’s notion of faith plus works.⁹ In addition, advocates of the New Perspective on Paul claim: (1) Present-day evangelicals have wrongly read the debates between the Reformers and the Roman Catholics back upon the books of Romans and Galatians; and (2) The Reformers misunderstood Paul and his message of justification; consequently, there needs to be a new understanding of Paul’s writings in lieu of new discoveries in Second-Temple Judaism; and (3) The Reformers insufficient exegesis caused them to misunderstand the notion of justification by faith *in* Christ and *apart from* “works of the law.”¹⁰

The Literary Unit and Its Structure

When determining the literary unit and structure of Galatians 2:15–21, Schreiner claims, “The first question to be asked is where Paul’s words to Peter, which began in 2:11, end.”¹¹ The point Schreiner is trying to make is that since the original text lacked quotation marks, it is difficult to know if the previous verses actually end in 2:14, 2:15, 2:16, 2:18, or 2:21.¹² In other words, Schreiner and others are trying to determine if and/or how much of 2:15–21 ought to be considered a continuation of Paul’s analysis of his rebuke of Peter. John Calvin believes the rebuke continues to 2:16; whereas, Hans

⁹Alistair McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); James R. White, *The God Who Justifies: A Comprehensive Study: The Doctrine of Justification* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 181–203.

¹⁰N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol. 1. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1996); *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N.T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007); Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspective on Paul: A Review and Response* (Phillipsburg: R&R, 2004).

¹¹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 150.

¹²*Ibid.*

Betz believes the new section consists of 2:14.¹³ Schreiner on the other hand, believes it makes most sense to view 2:14–21 as an address to Peter, for the following reasons:

[First], verse 15 is not clearly set off from 2:11–14. [Second], the first person plural pronouns in 2:15–17 most naturally refer to Jewish Christians and would speak to such people in Antioch. [Third], verse 17 may reflect the charges against Peter. [Fourth], a new subject commences in 3:1, where the Galatians are addressed directly. As Matera notes, the lack of a reply from Peter also plays a rhetorical role, showing he has no answer to Paul’s gospel.¹⁴

In other words, Schreiner agrees with Betz that in this section, “Paul addresses Cephas formally, and the Galatians materially.”¹⁵ Douglas Moo on the other hand, does not want us to make such a dogmatic claim in defense of a particular outline.¹⁶ However, Moo does agree with Schreiner and Betz, and goes so far as to agree with I. Scott, quoting him favorably, claiming, “Paul wants ‘to lay the situation in Antioch alongside the situation in Galatia, to see the crises as parallel and the true solution as the same in both cases.’”¹⁷ In summary then, regardless of the academic debate over the actual transitional verse, general evangelical scholarship provides enough evidence to warrant the conclusion that the literary structure of Galatians 2:15–21 ought to be viewed as either a continuation of

¹³Ibid. See also: Hans D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 139–140; John Calvin, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 70.

¹⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 150.

¹⁵Ibid. See also: Betz, *Galatians*, 114.

¹⁶Douglas Moo, *Galatians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 154.

¹⁷Ibid. See also: I. W. Scott, *Implicit Epistemology in the Letters of Paul: Story, Experience and the Spirit* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 180.

Paul's rebuke, or at least a parallel situation strongly mirroring Paul's rebuke of Peter.

The Nature of the Gospel

Since space does not permit a detailed exegesis of the whole section of 2:15–21, and because most of this debate in this section centers around the concepts of justification by faith in Christ and apart from works of the law, this portion is going to defend the thesis of my paper (e.g., that Galatians 2:16 teaches that justification is by faith *in* Christ *alone* apart from works of the law), by focusing upon the fact that individuals are justified: (1) Apart from works of the law; and (2) By faith *in* Christ *alone*. It ought also be clear this section is going to defend the classic Reformed position over and against the Roman Catholic view and the New Perspective on Paul. It will do this by quoting (a) The Passage Under Consideration; and discussing: (b) Individuals Under Consideration; (c) The Nature of Justification; (d) Faith in Christ; and (e) Works of the Law.

Passage Under Consideration

Galatians 2:16 (ESV)

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Galatians 2:16

εἰδότες [δὲ] ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ

πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ.

Individuals Under Consideration

Paul starts out by clearly arguing that no human being or (ἄνθρωπος) is justified by “works of the law” (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου). In keeping with the immediate context of the passage, the referent “no human being,” ought to be understood as referring to both Jews and Gentiles. Schreiner elaborates upon the total context of this verse, claiming, “Such a statement clearly does not reflect the standard Jewish point of view (cf. 1:13–16!), for not all Jews agreed that people were justified by faith in Jesus Christ.”¹⁸ He goes on to claim, “The conjunction ‘but’ (δε), though disputed textually, is probably original, and it should be interpreted as signifying an adversative relation between [vs.] 15 and 16.”¹⁹ Schreiner’s point is that Paul is appealing to the “common ground” between him and Peter.²⁰ In other words, Schreiner rightly notes that the old covenant is “insufficient” and that righteousness for *all kinds of people* (e.g., both Jew and Gentile) does not come by “works of the law” but through faith in Christ Jesus.²¹

The Nature of Justification

The second thing that ought to be noticed in this passage is Paul’s use of the word justified (δικαιοῦται). Paul uses the term “justification” throughout Galatians (cf. 2:17; 3:8, 11, 24; 5:4) and his other literature (Rom. 2:13; 3:4, 20, 23). There is one problem with these references though, at least to the average English speaking individual who is attempting to interpret his Bible. Namely, it is the problem of the English language and the fact that

¹⁸Schreiner, *Galatians*, 154.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*

the way it uses the word “justify” or “justification” does not match the Bible’s use of the term. James White notes that for most English speaking individuals they naturally believe, “. . . that ‘righteousness’ has a *moral* character about it. For us, to be righteous is often defined as a state in which one lives.”²² In addition, he states, “. . . in common opinion ‘justification’ speaks of something *legal* in character. Justification, it is often said, is something done *for* us, while righteousness is something done *in* us. Righteousness is moral, justification is legal. Or so the English usage commonly goes.”²³ However, White rightly notes these ideas do not correspond to the correct *biblical* meaning of the terms. Therefore he writes,

The fact of the matter is, there are not two different terms used in the Bible (the New Testament, primarily) that are translated as ‘righteousness’ and ‘justification.’ There is only one term or, perhaps better, one family of terms, *dikaïos* (the adjective), *dikaïosune* (the noun), and *dikaioō* (the verb). It is the translator’s decision whether to render *dikaïosune* as ‘righteousness’ or as ‘justification.’ Normally, the choice is made upon the basis of context—it would be rather awkward to use one or the other terms in certain situations. For example, it is easier to say, “Therefore, having been justified . . .” than it is to say, “Therefore, having been made righteous . . .” Similarly, it flows better to speak of receiving righteousness than it does receiving justification.²⁴

White does not want to downplay the fact that at times the terms do speak of moral or ethical qualities. But Protestants do not want to insist upon the idea that “righteousness” and “justification” *always*, in every lexical and textual instance, refer to the divine act whereby

²²White, *The God who Justifies*, 74.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 74–75.

God legally declares the sinner to be righteous.²⁵ However, there are clear instances in the Old Testament in which the Hebrew equivalent of the term “justify” (דָּלַץ), is used in a legal or forensic sense. Moo notes, “Paul’s use of this verb [*sdq*] [in Gal. 2:17; 3:8; 11, 24; 5:4] reflects the use of the Hebrew verb in the OT, which, in its Hiphil form, refers to a forensic, or judicial, declaration that a person is ‘just.’ There is very good reason to think that Paul consistently uses the verb in this sense.”²⁶ Schreiner agrees with Moo and White, and he goes on to list the following examples of Judges declaring the righteousness innocent and condemning the wicked (Deut 25:1; cf. 2 Sam 15:4; 1 Kings 8:31–32; 2 Chr 6:23; Prov 17:15; Isa 5:23).²⁷ Schreiner concludes by noting that, “Judges do not ‘make’ anyone righteous. They pronounce on what is in fact the case—if they are righteous judges. In other words, the verbal form belongs in the forensic realm, and Paul does not use the verbal form to denote a righteousness that transforms us or ‘makes us’ righteous.”²⁸

²⁵Ibid., 75.

²⁶Moo, *Galatians*, 161.

²⁷Schreiner, *Galatians*, 155.

²⁸Ibid., 155–156. Schreiner also adds four more reasons why this must be understood forensically: “(1) the law-court background of ‘justify’ is clear in Rom 8:33 (ESV): ‘Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.’ On the last day some may bring charges against God’s chose at the divine tribunal, but all charges will be dismissed because God has declared believers to be in the right before him. As the Judge he has declared that they are innocent of all the accusations leveled. (2) Paul often says that human beings are righteous by faith. In such contexts Paul contrasts righteousness by faith with righteousness by works. Righteousness by faith refers to the *gift* of righteousness given to human beings by God. Human beings are not righteous by virtue of doing but believing. The righteousness given to believers, then, is alien since it is not based on anything they have done but on God’s work in Christ. This suggests that righteousness as a gift is granted to those who believe. (3) That righteousness is a forensic declaration is also supported by the link between righteousness and forgiveness. Paul slides easily from justification to forgiveness in Rom 4:1–8. David’s forgiveness of sins is another way of speaking of his justification—his being in the right before God (4:6–8). The idea is not that David is transformed by God; the text calls attention to David’s sins and his forgiveness by God, for he blots out his sins and declares him to be in the right. (4) The idea that righteousness is counted (λογίζομαι) to believers indicates that righteousness is

Therefore, up to this point in the argument, it can be assumed Paul is arguing that a person is not “declared righteous” by “works of the law.”²⁹

Faith in Christ

A third issue in this passage worth considering is the notion that one is justified “through faith in Jesus Christ.” Commentators do not agree over the proper translation and interpretation of the phrase, “πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.” There are two main interpretations, one advocated by traditional Reformed theologians who argue it should be translated “faith *in* Jesus Christ.” The other advocated by adherents of the New Perspective of Paul, who argue the phrase should be translated “faithfulness *of* Jesus Christ.”³⁰ The former translates the phrase as an objective genitive, whereas the latter translates it as a subjective genitive. In order to understand this distinction, David Alan Black defines the two uses of the genitive in the following manner, claiming: “**Subjective Genitive.** Linked with an “action noun,” the genitive indicates the subject or producer of that action. The action noun is what distinguishes this genitive from the possessive genitive. **Objective Genitive.** Connected with an “action noun,” the genitive indicates the object or recipient of that action.”³¹ To illustrate the difference, Daniel Wallace provides his

not native to human beings, that it is granted to them by God (Rom 3:28; 4:3–6, 8–11, 22–24; 9:8; Gal 3:6). This argument is strengthened when we add that righteousness is counted to those who believe—not to those who work. God does not ‘count’ sins against those who have put their faith in Christ (2 Cor 5:19). This is a strange reckoning or counting indeed when those who have done evil are considered to be righteous. This fits with the notion, however, that believers have received ‘the free gift of righteousness’ (Rom 5:17 ESV).” Ibid.

²⁹See also: Piper, *The Future of Justification*, 73–116.

³⁰Schreiner, *Galatians*, 163.

³¹David Alan Black, *It’s Still Greek to Me: An Easy-To-Understand Guide to Intermediate Greek* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 49, emphasis in original.

readers a syntactic and semantic diagram.³² Wallace claims the subjective genitive argues that “God loves X.” But the objective genitive would argue that “X loves God.”³³ In short, George summarizes the syntactical debate claiming that according to the traditional view, Jesus Christ is the object of the action; whereas, according the New Perspective, Jesus Christ is the subject or producer of the action.³⁴

While there are good reasons to translate some of Paul’s passages using the subjective genitive construction, and while a variety of scholars believe there are good reasons to use the subjective genitive in 2:16; Schreiner believes it is still permissible to translate this passage as an objective genitive (e.g., faith *in* Jesus Christ). He offers the following seven reasons:³⁵

1. The genitive object with “faith” is clear in some instances (Mark 11:22; Jas 2:1).
2. A genitive object with other verbal nouns shows that an objective genitive with the verbal noun “faith” is normal grammatically: e.g., “knowledge of Jesus Christ” τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, Phil. 3:8). Therefore those who claim that the genitive must be subjective fail to convince.
3. The texts that use the verb “believe” in a verbal construction and the noun “faith” with the genitive are not superfluous but emphatic, stressing the importance of faith to be right with God. Readers hearing the letter would hear the emphasis on faith in Christ, and thus this interpretation is to be preferred as the simpler of the two options.
4. Paul often contrasts works and human faith in his theology. Therefore, seeing a polarity between works of

³²Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 118.

³³Ibid.

³⁴George, *Galatians*, 133, 195–196.

³⁵Schreiner, *Galatians*, 165–166.

law and faith in Christ—both *human activities*—fits with what Paul does elsewhere.

5. Nowhere does Paul in speaking of Jesus Christ use the word “faith” (πίστις) to describe his “obedience.”
6. The salvation-historical argument fails to persuade well. Certainly, Gal 3:23, 25 refer to the coming of faith at a certain time in redemptive history. But such an observation hardly excludes faith in Christ, for faith in Christ becomes a reality when he arrives and fulfills God’s saving promises. We should not pit redemptive history against anthropology.
7. Nor is the emphasis on faith in Christ somehow Pelagian, as if it somehow detracts from God’s work in salvation. A human response of faith does not undercut the truth that God saves, particularly if God grants faith to his own (Eph 2:8–9).

One final argument in favor of translating 2:16 in favor of an objective genitive, comes from KKQ, who claim:³⁶ “However, this statement ‘we have believed in Christ Jesus’ (2:16); the references to ‘hearing with faith’ (3:2,5); the example of Abraham’s faith (3:6–9); and the reference to Christ as the object of faith (3:26) all support the traditional interpretation.”³⁷ In short, since other passages in Galatians recognize that Christ is the object of faith, the entire literary construction of the book and flow of Paul’s argument favors interpreting 2:16 as an objective genitive (e.g., faith *in* Christ).³⁸

³⁶It ought to be noted that earlier in the paper the acronym KKQ refers to: Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles.

³⁷Kostenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown*, 426.

³⁸Silva, *Interpreting Galatians*, 64–68.

Works of the Law

The fourth and final issue in this passage investigates Paul's use of the term "works of the law" (ἔργων νόμου). Unsurprisingly, commentators also differ over what Paul is trying to communicate by this phrase. Some believe the apostle is strictly referring to the Old Testament Torah or the law of Moses.³⁹ Moo believes, "The Reformers may have moved too quickly from this phrase to general theological conclusions about 'works.'"⁴⁰ Schreiner claims there are three broad understandings of the phrase. The first refers to a legalistic understanding, where the term "works of the law" suggests deeds done to merit God's favor.⁴¹ The second view claims that "works of the law" refers to boundary markers.⁴² This is the view affirmed by E. P. Sanders and N. T. Wright. Schreiner notes that according to Sanders, "The common pattern in Jewish religion . . . was covenantal nomism, in which God's people become members of the covenant by God's grace, and they maintained their place in the covenant by obedience."⁴³ Schreiner's third view suggests that "works of the law" refers to the works prescribed by the Mosaic law.⁴⁴ This is the traditional view and classical interpretation of the phrase, which argues that Paul is referring to the whole or totality of the Mosaic law, not just segments or notions of it. This third view is maintained by individuals such as the Protestant Reformers, classic evangelicalism, and commentators such as Douglas Moo, Thomas Schreiner, and John Piper.⁴⁵ There is a final view not mentioned, affirmed by Roman Catholics, which according to John Calvin claims, "The Papists, misled by Origin and Jerome, are of the

³⁹Moo, *Galatians*, 160.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*

⁴¹Schreiner, *Galatians*, 159.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 160.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 161.

⁴⁵Piper, *The Future of Justification*.

opinion, and lay it down as certain, that the dispute relates to shadows; and accordingly assert, that by ‘works of the law’ are meant ceremonies.”⁴⁶

While each position deserves meaningful interaction, space will only permit a positive defense of the view that claims “works of the law” refers to the Mosaic law. This view seems best for the following reasons. First, the notion of law in the Scriptures can be understood in a tripartite fashion: (1) Judicial; (2) Moral; and (3) Ceremonial. That being said, there seems to be no warrant to claim Paul is referring to one of these notions, apart from the other notions (e.g., like the Roman Catholics who believe Paul is merely referring to the ceremonial notion of the law). Paul also uses the phrase “works of the law” in Galatians 3:10. There Paul quotes from the book of Deuteronomy where it claims, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” The use of the term “all the things written in the Book of the Law,” is Paul’s way of referring to the totality of the law, not just segments or aspects of the law.⁴⁷

Second, the claim that Paul is referring to one aspect of the law in 2:16 and the totality of the law in 3:10, lacks justification because there are no exegetical or linguistic reasons to suggest Paul uses the term “law” in two different senses. Therefore, consistency demands that Paul uses the terms univocally; hence, “law” in both instances refers to the whole law. In addition, Paul uses the term “law” again in 5:3, where he warns the Galatians they are to keep the “whole law.” Therefore, consistency again demands that Paul uses the terms univocally; hence, in all three instances it refers to the whole of the law.⁴⁸ Third, Schreiner offers compelling reasons with Paul’s other letters to warrant that he is referring to the whole law. Schreiner writes:

⁴⁶Calvin, *Galatians*, 67. See also: John Calvin and Jacopo Sadoletto, *A Reformation Debate*, ed., John C. Olin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966).

⁴⁷Schreiner, *Galatians*, 161.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

We should also bring in Rom 3:20 at this point, where Paul affirms that ‘no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.’ Here Paul summarizes the arguments of Rom 1:18–3:20 as a whole and emphasizes that all deserve judgment since all have sinned and violated God’s law (cf. 3:23). It is hardly credibly to claim that the Jews were condemned for their bad attitude of excluding Gentiles. They were liable to judgment because they had not kept the entirety of God’s law.⁴⁹

Schreiner recognizes that Paul’s other letters warrant understanding the term “law” as a unit, not a segment. John Calvin recognizes the weakness of segmented approaches, in particular, he employs a *reductio ad absurdum* form of argumentation against the Roman Catholic claim that this passage merely refers to the ceremonial aspects of the law. Calvin writes, “But the context clearly proves that the moral law is also comprehended in these words; for almost everything which Paul afterwards advances belongs more properly to the moral than to the ceremonial law. . . .”⁵⁰ Calvin goes on to note that Roman Catholics appeal to Paul’s criticisms against the keeping of ceremonies (Gal. 4:10–11) to justify their claim that Paul is merely referring to the ceremonial law.⁵¹ While it might be true that Paul refers to ceremonies in certain passages, it ought to be recognized that he refers to the totality of the law elsewhere (2:16; 3:10; 5:3). For that reason, after someone consults the larger corpus of Paul’s use of the term “law” in Galatians and his use of it in Romans, one cannot conclude he is merely referring to the ceremonial law. Therefore, it ought to be determined that the broad context of Paul’s use of “law” overturns the Roman Catholic objection.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Calvin, *Galatians*, 67.

⁵¹Ibid., 68.

Conclusion

Although this study has not dealt with every exegetical issue presented in Galatians 2:16, it may serve to shed light upon the doctrine of justification taught by the apostle Paul. The thesis of this paper argues that: Galatians 2:16 teaches that justification is by faith *in Christ alone* apart from works of the law. This thesis was defended by maintaining Paul wrote his epistle prior to the Jerusalem Council; hence, it interpreted the debates over the function of the law without consulting the conclusions from the Council in AD 49. Second, it placed the passage in its historical and interpretive context to properly bring in the historical exegetical debates concerning the book of Galatians and the doctrine of justification. Third, the paper presented the literary context of the book arguing that 2:15–21, and 2:16 in particular ought to be understood as a continuation of Paul’s rebuke against Peter and a parallel to the apostolic confrontation. Fourth, this paper argued that justification must be understood in a legal and forensic sense, for that is the proper Old and New Testaments use of the term (e.g., hence, justification is a legal declaration *alone*). Fifth, this paper argued that it is best to understand the notion of “faith in Christ” in the traditional sense as an objective genitive (e.g., justification is by faith *in Christ*). Finally, this paper argued that “works of the law” must be understood as referring to the whole law, not just segments or notions of the law (e.g., “works of the law” refer to any human effort of righteousness, whether they be judicial, moral, or ceremonial).

The Eight Spectres of Karl Marx in the 21st Century

Christopher T. Haun¹

A SPECTRE is haunting Europe — the spectre of Communism. All the Powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre. ... Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution.

– *The Communist Manifesto*

The spectre Marx warned about possessed the Bolsheviks to invade Russia in 1917. This then is a 100th year anniversary that no one should celebrate. That same spectre proceeded to haunt not just Europe but Asia, Africa, and the Americas. To this day and by a wide margin, revolutionary Marxism still holds the record for having deceived, enslaved, terrorized, imprisoned, tortured, and murdered more millions of people than any other ideology. The Leninist and Maoist interpreters of Karl Marx sacrificed *over 160 million* civilians on the altar of equality. And that's the conservative estimate. But the Marxist attempts to create their vision of heaven on a godless earth produced such unsustainable conditions that every large experiment in Marxism collapsed toward the end of the 20th century. Contrary to the popular assumption, however, Marx's spectre was never truly exorcised from the world. If it departed at all, it did so only to return soon after to its old haunts with seven other spirits like it (cf. Mt.12:43-45).

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The Failures of Eastern Implementations of Marx

It is true that the hardline forms of Marxism in the East proved to be abject failures. They failed economically and morally.

Throughout the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping made the reforms in China that allowed it to become an economic giant. He encouraged the practices that were anathema to Marx, Lenin, and Mao—foreign investment, global market capitalism, and private competition. When he said, “It doesn’t matter if the cat is white or black so long as it catches the mouse,” he was implying that China would embrace more capitalistic-styled freedoms if doing so would end the starvation and deprivation fostered by the Marx-inspired policies of his predecessor, Chairman Mao.

As soon as it was clear that Gorbachev was not going to enforce the terrible Brezhnev doctrine, Poland, Hungary, and Romania sloughed off their miserable Marxist yokes without hesitation. They set up free elections in 1989. Between 1990 and 1991 a dozen other Eastern European countries did the same. The Germans tore down the nasty Berlin Wall. In 1992, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics dissolved and Russia turned away from their Marxist-Leninist Communism. All the big experiments in socio-politico-economic Marxism had failed. The smaller experiments in Marxism also failed. Every single one of the *kibbutzim* of Israel became at least partially privatized by 2012.²

Now that we can look back at a century of empirical testing among many people groups in many nations, it is clear that the Marx-inspired systems never ultimately delivered upon their promises of equality, justice, and better conditions for “the people.” When prosperity did occasionally flow to some it was either at the expense of thousands—sometimes millions—of others or it was when Marxist constrictions were relaxed. Lenin himself was forced by circumstances to return Russia to a limited form of capitalism in

² These farming communities in Israel were among the first pioneers of primitive and hardline strains of Marx-inspired Communism. Until recently some Marxists would argue that they proved that Marxism was succeeding in the micro level and therefore could theoretically still be made to work on the macro level.

1922. He also had to accept several tons of wheat from the USA to prevent mass starvation. Lenin tightened and loosened the economic tourniquet as needed. Stalin tightened it. Khrushchev loosened it and Brezhnev tightened it. Gorbachev loosened it until it untied itself.

The Marxist penchant for moral bankruptcy was even more terrible than their penchant for economic bankruptcy. They proved more oppressive to “the people” than the yokes of oppression they had “liberated” the people from. The toll in bloodshed finds no close parallels in all of human history. The number of victims murdered and purposefully starved in the Soviet Union by its Marxist-Leninist leaders is estimated to be *over sixty million*. They killed ten million Ukrainians in the year 1933 alone. The Marxist victim tally in Mao’s China is *over eighty million people*. Cambodian Marxists sacrificed *ten million* victims on the altar of Utopia. Marxism in Vietnam, North Korea, and Yugoslavia has put over *four million* people to death. These figures do not include the hundreds of thousands put to death in the other countries that had the misfortune of becoming victims to hardline Marxist revolutions,³ the bloodshed in the nations where revolutions were attempted but failed,⁴ the hardships experienced by the countries that dabbled with Marxism for years before rejecting it, the lives of soldiers spent by the freer nations to defend against the Marxist plans for world domination, or the millions of infants aborted by Marxist policies in the last 100 years.⁵

³ Aden, Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Benin, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Congo, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Ethiopia, Hungary, Laos, Mongolia, Mozambique, Namibia, North Korea, Poland, Romania, Somalia, South Yemen, Soviet Union, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia.

⁴ The Paris Commune (1871), Finnish Civil War (1918), German Revolution (1918), Hungarian Soviet Republic (1919), Mongolian Revolution (1921), Salvadoran peasant uprising (1932), Spanish Revolution (1936), Indonesia, Malaysia, etc.

⁵ In 1917 the Bolsheviks legalized abortion in Russia. There were an estimated 6-7 million abortions *per year* in the USSR. That adds *300 million* unborn victims to the tally. There are more than *13 million* abortions per year in China. China reported *336 million* abortions in the last 40 years. In the US, the secular humanists (with Neo-Darwinian and Neo-Marxist leanings) legalized

It is difficult to find other atrocities in human history that compare with the slaughters perpetrated by Marx's interpreters. For comparison, Genghis Khan's ruthless soldiers murdered an estimated forty million people during the expansion of the Mongol empire. Four centuries of ugly European Colonialism cost the world an estimated 50 million lives. World War I killed nine million and wounded twenty-three million. World War II killed twenty-five million soldiers and thirty-five million civilians. As tragic as each of these empire expansions and wars were, they still somehow pale in comparison to the billion or so lives that were ended in connection with the spectres unleashed by Marx.

In hindsight, Marx was a misguided Messiah, a perjured prophet, an inhumane humanist, a pseudo-scientist, a revolutionary religionist, and a saboteur—not a savior. Not surprisingly then there are few leaders, intellectuals, and academics today who openly admit to being disciples of Marx. The university professors who are intoxicated by Marx's vision and who repackage Marx for their students admit that Marx must have been wrong on at least one point. They may even argue that Lenin, Mao, Stalin, etc., were not faithful interpreters and consistent implementers of true Marxism. So when we define Marxism as a rigid economic theory that only applies to the long-gone age of the Industrial Revolution, it is true in a technical sense that Marxism is dead and that there are no real Marxists today. But when we consider Marxism as a family of several other “-isms” that were inspired by and heavily influenced by Marx's writings, Marxism arguably remains the most dominant clan of philosophies at work in the world today. The death of Dictator Fidel Castro⁶ in 2016 does not then mark the end of Marx's

abortion in 1973, and approximately 60 million unborn Americans were sacrificed. Between China, the USSR, and the USA, there were *close to a billion* children that were not permitted to set foot on the earth.

⁶ Marxism in Cuba under the brutal leadership of the Castro brothers has so far led to the directly execution of an estimated 140,000 Cuban citizens (not including the thousands who were starved), caused 78,000 more Cubans to die at sea as they tried to escape, and caused 1.5 million desperate Cubans to emigrate to the USA as political refugees.

progeny. Many of Marx's followers in the Western nations—many of whom gave glowing eulogies for Castro—have come to occupy positions of prominence in the fields of education, entertainment, journalism, and government in the countries that blend socialism and capitalism in various ratios. While they may speak and act more mildly than their eastern brethren did, they too are still seeking a revolution that will replace the fabric of society. And they are at war with the faith and practice of the Christian churches that refuse to modernize.

The Marxist Approach to Revolution in the West

Marx was the sort of impatient fellow who much preferred the idea of bloody revolutions to bloodless reforms. But when faced with the challenge of the freedom-loving nations in the industrialized West, Marx and Engels (perhaps more Engels than Marx) made provision for a gradual strategy of reforms that lead to revolution:

The first step in the revolution by the working class, is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class ... Of course, in the beginning, *this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production. ... These measures will of course be different in different countries.* Nevertheless in the most advanced countries the following will be pretty generally applicable. . . .⁷

They realized that the despotic measures of revolution that would be effective later in the war-torn, pre-industrialized countries (Russia, China, Korea, Vietnam, Angola, Afghanistan, etc.) would not be likely to work out as well in the “most advanced countries”—the countries that had already industrialized and

⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 44-45. Italics added.

were enjoying the prosperity that came from it. Professor Ebenstein suggested that Marx “occasionally referred to England and the United States as two possible exceptions to the principle of social change through communist revolution and dictatorship.”⁸ Here it becomes helpful to divide Marxism roughly into eastern and western interpretations. For the “advanced countries” in the West, Marx-Engels recommends ten planks for revolutionaries to use as waypoints in a gradual revolution. The steps include the abolition of property, a heavy income tax, abolition of all right of inheritance, confiscation of the property, centralization of credit in a centralized bank, centralization of the means of communication and transport, factories and instruments of production to become owned by the State, equal liability of all to labor, forced labor, and free education (indoctrination) for all children in public schools.

The Reformed Marxism of Kautsky

The first gradualist approach to Marxism was developed by Karl Kautsky. Kautsky met personally with Marx and Engels more than once and was one of their most ardent followers. On some matters he diverged from them and became the leading theoretician of what would later be called “evolutionary democratic socialism.” Lenin lambasted Kautsky for his rejection of some of Marxism’s nastier features—impatient and bloody revolution, unwillingness to compromise, and the dictatorship of the industrial working class.⁹ Kautsky’s socialism has since influenced or dominated the policy of the majority of nations around the world. Whereas the countries that

⁸ William Ebenstein, *Great Political Thinkers: Plato to the Present*, 3rd edition. (NY: Hold, Rinehard, and Winston, 1964), 747.

⁹ At the beginning of the Russian Revolution, Kautsky could not imagine that his former associates would allow atrocities to occur. He wrote, “They know that terror can never uproot ideas.” War Minister Trotsky replied, “Mr. Kautsky, you do not know what terror we will apply.” Cited by Richard Wurmbrand in *Christ in the Communist Prisons* (NY: Coward-McCann, 1968), 83.

became victims of Leninistic and Maoistic implementations of Marxism have been hobbling away from Marxism, the nations of Western Europe, North America, and South America have become increasingly influenced by Marxism through this “third way” that synthesizes elements of capitalism, socialism, freedom, and controls together.

The Reformed Marxism of the Fabian Society

Soon after Marx died, another western interpretation of Marxism began to flourish in England and New England. The Fabian Society named themselves after Fabius Maximus, a Roman General whom military historians recognize as the father of guerilla warfare. In the Second Punic War, General Fabius prudently refused to send his soldiers to meet the Hannibal’s superior forces on the open battlefield in direct conflict. Instead, he practiced a patient and cautious strategy of hit-and-run warfare, ambushes, constant harassment, and a war of attrition. Inspired by this form of warfare, the motto of the Fabian Socialists was,

For the right moment you must wait, as Fabius did patiently, when warring against Hannibal, though many censured his delays; but when the right moment comes you must strike hard, as Fabius did, or your waiting will be in vain, and fruitless.¹⁰

The historian Plutarch wrote that Fabius’ “tactics were slow, silent, and yet relentless in their steady pressure, [Hannibal’s] strength was gradually and imperceptibly undermined and drained away.”¹¹

¹⁰ Edward R. Pease, *The History of Fabian Socialism* (NY: E.P. Dutton & Company Publishers, 1916), 19. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13715/13715-h.htm>. Also William Ebenstein, *Great Political Thinkers: From Plato to the Present*. 3rd edition. Hold, Rinehard, and Winston. 1964. 752.

¹¹ Martin Cowen, *Fabian Libertarianism: 100 Years to Freedom* (XLibris, 2016), Kindle location 274.

Although the Fabian Marxists remained revolutionaries in the spirit of Marx, they differed from Marx on at least three important points. First, they differed on the matter of by whom and to whom. Whereas Marx forecasted the *proletariat* (largely the factory workers) would and should be the class that should lead the revolt, the Fabians realized that revolution would only have a chance of success when led by a highly-educated class. George Bernard Shaw, one of the better-known Fabians, wrote,

Marx's *Kapital* is not a treatise on socialism; it is a gerrymand against the bourgeoisie. It was supposed to be written for the working class, but the working man respects the bourgeoisie and wants to be a bourgeoisie. Marx never got a hold of him for a moment. It was the revolting sons of the bourgeoisie itself, like myself, that painted the flag red. The middle and upper classes are the revolutionary element in society. The proletariat is the conservative element.¹²

¹² George Bernard Shaw. *Who I Am and What I Think: Sixteen Self Sketches*. (Constable, 1949). Shaw cofounded the London School of Economics, won a Nobel Prize for literature, and wrote sixty plays which helped popularize socialist views and values on education, marriage, religion, government, health care, and class conflict. In the preface to the *Communist Manifesto*, Engels seems to address the Fabian variant:

Yet, when it was written, we could not have called it a Socialist Manifesto. By Socialists, in 1847, ... professed to redress, without any danger to capital and profit, all sorts of social grievances, in both cases men outside the working class movement, and looking rather to the "educated" classes for support. Whatever portion of the working class had become convinced of the insufficiency of mere political revolutions, and had proclaimed the necessity of a total social change, that portion, then, called itself Communist. ... Thus, Socialism was, in 1847, a middle-class movement, Communism a working class movement. Socialism was, on the Continent at least, "respectable"; Communism was the very opposite. And as our notion, from the very beginning, was that the emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself there could be no doubt as to which of the two names we must take. Moreover, we have, ever since, been far from repudiating it.

Shaw makes an interesting point: Neither Marx nor Engels were products of the working classes. Marx was the son of a lawyer. Engels' father owned considerable amounts of property. Lenin came from a wealthy family. The working class rarely produces the intellectuals and poets whose pens are mighty enough to inflame hearts and unsheathe swords. Shaw was also prescient: it would be young and gullible students—boys and girls who never had to work with their hands to feed their families—who would be the most susceptible to revolutionary propaganda.

While the Fabians further developed the idea of a gradual revolution they added a dimension of deep deceptiveness to it. Whereas Marx and Engels stated that Communists are very transparent about what they want to take, who they want to take it from, and how they plan to take it,¹³ the Fabian Marxists, knowing all too well that Marx was wrong about the revolutions happening naturally as if by scientific law, knew the revolutions had to be forced to occur artificially. They also knew that their agents of change could not succeed if they were honest and transparent about their ends and means. The Fabian strategy for the Western nations was, as the name *Fabius* implies, quite *fabian*—gradual, cautious, guerilla, covert, sneaky, unconventional, deceptive, indirect, and asymmetrical.

The Fabians would focus on university professors and students rather than factory workers. They would indoctrinate their agents of change through schooling and scholarship. In the words of one of its founders, the Fabian Society was “founded in 1884 as an educational and propagandist centre. . . It furnishes lecturers in considerable number to all meetings where Socialism, in any guise

¹³ In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels famously wrote, “The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions.” The Fabians who helped fund the Russian Revolution preferred to conceal their aims. Lenin would later admit, “We have to use any ruse, dodge, trick, cunning, unlawful method, concealment, and veiling of the truth. The basic rule is to exploit the conflicting interests of the capitalist states.”

whatsoever, can possibly be introduced. . .”¹⁴ As of 1885 their motto was,

“EDUCATE, AGITATE, ORGANIZE.”¹⁵

By starting with an intellectual revolution in the minds of academics the revolution would naturally bleed into all other arenas of public policy and public opinion. Unable at first to infiltrate the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the Fabians established the London School of Economics. They would also create the Labor Party in the United Kingdom, publish journals, and established beachheads in several influential American universities. Meanwhile some of its foremost members also continued to spread propaganda in favor of the Marxist-Leninist State in the 1930s.¹⁶

Reformed Marxism in the Humanist Manifestos

There are strong echoes of Kautskian-Fabian variants of Marxism in the manifestos and declarations produced by humanists. The pendulum tends to shift more towards the communist side of the Marxist spectrum in the early manifestos and then as the economic failure of communism becomes more undeniable, the later manifestos seek to balance their socialism with a little capitalism.

John Dewey, the co-author of the first Humanist Manifesto and reformer of the American public school system, was a member

¹⁴ Sidney Webb, *Socialism in England* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1889), 26-27. George Bernard Shaw also wrote, “The Fabian Society was warlike in its origin. ... in 1885 ... we denounced the capitalists as thieves..., talked of revolution, anarchism, ... and all the rest of it, no the tacit assumption that the object of our campaign, with its watchwords, ‘EDUCATE, AGITATE, ORGANIZE’ was to bring about a tremendous smash-up of existing society, to be succeeded by complete Socialism.” *The Fabian Society: Its Early History* (The Fabian Society, 1892).

¹⁵ Pease, 26.

¹⁶ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* (NY: Scribner’s Sons, 1936).

of several Marxist front organizations. He was also one of the leaders of the American branch of the Fabian Society. The fourteenth affirmation of his *Humanist Manifesto I* (1933) is unabashedly Marxist. It has nothing but condemnation for the “acquisitive and profit-motivated society.” Its insistence on the need for “radical change” and its hope of establishing a “socialized and cooperative economic order” that would forcibly distribute “the means of life” equitably are all hallmarks of economic Marxism. Western intellectuals still had the luxury of imagining that Marxism might work out well.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, the leading secular humanists in the West could see the need to steer away from the inhumane means and tragic ends of the Soviet Union, China, and the Warsaw Pact countries. They toned the Marxist jargon down in subsequent manifestos and redrew their vision of controlling all people as something that could somehow coexist with liberty for all people. Writing in 1999, Paul Kurtz, the framer of *Humanist Manifesto II*, explained:

Humanist Manifesto II was released in 1973 to deal with the issues that had emerged on the world scene since [1933]: the rise of fascism and its defeat in the Second World War, the growth in influence and power of Marxism-Leninism and Maoism, the Cold War ... Many Marxist humanists in Eastern Europe had attacked totalitarian statism and welcomed a defense of democracy and human rights. *Humanist Manifesto II* no longer defended a planned economy, but left the question open to alternative economic systems. Thus, it was endorsed by both liberals and economic libertarians, who defended a free market, as well as by social democrats and democratic socialists, who believed that the government should have a substantial role to play in a welfare society. It sought to democratize economic systems and test them by whether or

not they increased economic well-being for all individuals and groups.¹⁷

Kurtz then shows their Marxist stripes when he advocates the forcible redistribution of wealth through an irresistible global government:

We recommend an international system of taxation in order to assist the underdeveloped sectors of the human family and to fulfill social needs not fulfilled by market forces. We would begin with a tax levied on the Gross National Product (GNP) of all nations, the proceeds to be used for economic and social assistance and development. This would not be a voluntary contribution but an actual tax. ... Extreme disparities between the affluent and the underdeveloped sectors of the planet can be overcome by encouraging self-help, but also by harnessing the wealth of the world to provide capital, technical aid, and educational assistance for economic and social development.¹⁸

The third humanist manifesto, titled *Humanism and Its Aspirations*, was adopted in 2003 by the American Humanist Association and supersedes the first two manifestos. It attempts to put some distance between itself and the classic economic Marxism. The Marxist jargon (“cooperatively,” “interdependence,” “global community,” “minimize the inequities,” “just distribution of resources”) was toned down such that Marxists would have no problem recognizing it and kind-hearted non-Marxists might also find its phrasing attractive. The Amsterdam Declaration of 1952, which was updated in 2002 and adopted by the World Humanist Congress, somewhat vaguely tries to recommend a balance between personal liberty and social responsibility. *The Secular Humanist Declaration* (1980)

¹⁷ Paul Kurtz. *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1999), 2.

¹⁸ Ibid, 20.

similarly seems to recommend a synthesis of Marxism and Capitalism where it says:

a free society should also encourage *some measure* of economic freedom, subject only to such restrictions as are necessary in the public interest. This means that individuals and groups should be able to compete in the marketplace, organize free trade unions, and carry on their occupations and careers without undue interference by centralized political control.¹⁹

The Cultural Marxism of Antonio Gramsci

By perceiving one of its greatest obstacles to adoption and devising strategies to overcome it, Antonio Gramsci may be the greatest interpreter of Marx. A member of the Italian Socialist Party in 1913 and founder of the Italian Communist Party in 1921, Gramsci fled to Lenin's Soviet Socialist Republic under threat of the rise of Italian Fascism. Experiencing life in Russia made it obvious to him that the revolution Marx had predicted still hadn't occurred naturally. Life there also made it clear to him that their "workers' paradise" was maintained by propaganda, lies, secret police, and fear.

While he never became disillusioned with Marx's vision of revolution of the workers followed by the rise of a utopia from the ashes, he became disillusioned with all the artificial attempts to create the revolution in Russia, China, and elsewhere. Afraid of the insanity and cruelty Stalin had a reputation for, Gramsci returned to Italy to take his chances among the less frightening Fascists. During nine years in an Italian prison he managed to cobble together nine

¹⁹ *A Secular Humanist Declaration* (The Council for Secular Humanism, 1980). <http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php/11>. Accessed January 14th, 2017.

volumes of writings that could help achieve a Marxist world. Roman Catholic historian Malachi Martin summarizes:

Gramsci—intellectually a product of the Roman Catholic society of Italy—was far more advanced than either Hegel or Marx in his understanding of Christian metaphysics in general, of Thomism in particular, and of the richness of the Roman Catholic heritage. ... What was essential, insisted Gramsci, was to *Marxise* the inner man. Only when that was done could you successfully dangle the utopia of the “Workers’ Paradise” before his eyes, to be accepted in a peaceful and humanly agreeable manner, without revolution or violence or bloodshed. ... What Marx and Lenin had got wrong, Gramsci said, was the part about an immediate proletarian revolution. His Italian socialist brothers could see as well as he did that, in a country such as Italy—and in Spain or France or Belgium or Austria or Latin America, for that matter—the national tradition of all the classes was virtually consubstantial with Roman Catholicism. The idea of proletarian revolution in such a climate was impractical at best, and could be counterproductive at worst. ... Gramsci had a better way. A subtler blueprint for Marxist victory. ... Use Lenin’s geopolitical structure not to conquer streets and cities, argued Gramsci. Use it to conquer the mind of civil society. Use it to acquire a Marxist hegemony over the minds of the populations that must be won. ... they must join in whatever liberating causes might come to the fore. . . . Marxist must join with women, with the poor, with those who find certain civil laws oppressive. ... they must enter into every civil, cultural, and political activity in every nation, patiently leavening them as thoroughly as yeast leavens bread. If there was any true superstructure that had to be eliminated, it was the Christianity that had created and still pervaded Western Culture in all its forms, activities, and expressions. ... Marxist action must be

unitary against what he saw to be the failing remnant of Christianity. And by a unitary attack, Gramsci meant that Marxists must change the residually Christian mind. He needed to alter that mind—to turn it into its opposite in all its details—so that it would become not merely a non-Christian mind but an anti-Christian mind. ... everything must be done in the name of man's dignity and rights, and in the name of his autonomy and freedom from outside constraint. From the claims and constraints of Christianity, above all else. Accomplish that, said Gramsci, and you will have established a true and freely adopted hegemony over the ... thinking of every formerly Christian country. Do that, he promised, and in essence you will have Marxized the West. The final step—the Marxization of the politics of life itself—will then follow.²⁰

Other Marxists were saying similar things. Christian Rakovsky, a leader in Trotsky's brand of Marxism, for example, reportedly said:

Communism cannot be the victor if it will not have suppressed the still living Christianity. ... In reality Christianity is our only real enemy, since all the political and economic phenomena in the bourgeois States are only its consequences. Christianity, controlling the individual, is capable of annulling the revolutionary projection of the neutral Soviet or atheistic State by choking it and, as we see it in Russia, things have reached the point of the creation of that spiritual nihilism which is dominant in the ruling masses, which have, nevertheless, remained Christian: this obstacle has not yet been removed during twenty years of Marxism.²¹

²⁰ Malachi Martin. *The Keys of This Blood: The Struggle for World Domination between Pope John Paul II, Mikhail Gorbachev, and the Capitalist West*. (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 247-251.

²¹ J. Landowsky, *The Red Symphony* (Christian Book Club of America: 2002).

The Cultural Marxism of the Frankfurt School

In the 1930s, a group of professors at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt in Germany (“the Frankfurt School” for short) developed their own unique strains of Western Marxism. While they preferred to call their theory “the critical theory of society” their work has become more commonly known as “Cultural Marxism.”

They were keenly aware of the fact that the German workers did not revolt as Marx had predicted. But the fact that Marxism had failed its first and biggest test wasn’t enough to make them abandon Marx. They remained Marxist at the core and sought to salvage Marx’s vision for the dissolution of the evil “capitalist” systems that dominated Europe and the United States and plagued the world. Max Horkheimer defined their critical theory of society as (1) “a theory dominated at every turn by a concern for reasonable conditions of life,” (2) a theory which condemns existing social institutions and practices as “inhuman,” and (3) a theory which contemplates the need for “alteration of society as a whole.”²² In harmony with Marx, the Frankfurt School theorists taught that everything in Western society is so evil that every facet of it needs to be ruthlessly criticized, weakened, and destroyed.

The rise of Nazi movement in Germany forced these professors to flee their German homeland. The National Socialists were competing with Marxist Socialists and the Frankfurt theorists were definitely recognizable as Marxists. They were also all Jewish. So in 1935 they fled Germany and made Columbia University of New York their base of operations.²³ They did not flee to Stalin’s

²² Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory.” Cited in Marcuse, Feenberg, and Leiss, *The Essential Marcuse: Selected Writings of Philosopher and Social Critic Herbert Marcuse* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).

²³ Columbia University was also where Fabian Marxist John Dewey was training thousands of teachers in “progressive education.” Interestingly, the USSR

Moscow because they were critical of his dystopian implementation of Marx. They enjoyed the safety, liberty, opportunities, wealth, and honor the United States offered them during World War II. After WWII ended, some of the Frankfurt Professors returned to Germany. But others stayed to indoctrinate university students with their ideas about cultural revolution and criticism. The USA had emerged from WWII as the most powerful nation in history. In taking Germany's place, they inherited the ire of those who target and harass the powerful.

Although sympathetic to Marx's war on inequality among socio-economic classes, these "cultural Marxists" instead focused on other cultural areas where people groups encounter inequality. They saw power inequalities in the clash of cultures (particularly where traditional "Western culture" dominated non-western cultures), of races (European races having dominated non-European races), or religions (where peoples practicing various forms of Christianity have subjugated and oppressed people of other religions), of family (parents often dominate their children and adults oppress the youth), of gender (men often dominate women), and sexual orientation (heterosexual communities oppress people in LGBTIQ²⁴ categories). Why didn't the workers of Europe unite and revolt as Marx had predicted? This was one of the main problems these Neo-Marxist theorists were also trying to solve. Perhaps Marx had been right about most everything but had underestimated the grip that the European cultural heritage (chiefly from the Greek, Roman, Celtic, Germanic, Roman Catholic, and Protestant Reformation influences) had upon the hearts and minds. If these cultural barriers to Marxism could be eroded away, the revolution could proceed.

The chief weapon in their ideological arsenal was criticism. The Frankfurt School made it academically fashionable to subject every old truth claim to "new criticism" or "critical theory." Quite in harmony with Marx, every established authority and every

eagerly translated Dewey's pro-collectivist books and used them in their own educational systems.

²⁴ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Questioning.

established belief must be questioned, challenged, critiqued, doubted, ridiculed, marginalized, weakened, subverted, destroyed, and replaced. Beginning with criticism Marx's spectre can proceed to liberate all the peoples of the world from the oppression of Classical civilization and Judeo-Christian culture.

Herbert Marcuse was one of the most influential and best known theorists of the Frankfurt School. He taught his brand of cultural Marxism into the 1970s at Columbia University, Harvard, Brandeis, and the University of California, San Diego. He is now widely regarded as the father of the New Left movement, the most influential "radical philosopher" of the 1960s, and a major inspiration for the Hippie Movement, the student movement, and the civil rights movement. Rather than fomenting discontent among the working class he focused on turning the youth against their heritages and the civilization they were born into. While critiquing both capitalism and communism, he recommended a "cultural revolution in the sense that the protest is directed toward the *whole cultural establishment*, including the morality of the existing society."²⁵ He also called for:

radical change, revolution in and against a highly developed, technically advanced industrial society. This historic novelty demands a reexamination of one our most cherished concepts. . . . First, the notion of the seizure of power. Here [in the United States], the old model [of Marxist revolution] wouldn't do anymore. That, for example, in a country like the United States, under the leadership of a centralized and authoritarian party, large masses concentrate on Washington, occupy the Pentagon, and set up a new government. Seems to be a slightly too unrealistic and utopian picture. We will see that *what we*

²⁵ Herbert Marcuse. "Reflections on the French Revolution." Quoted in Michael Walsh, *The Devil's Pleasure Palace: The Cult of Critical Theory and the Subversion of the West* (NY: Encounter Books ,2015), 46.

*have to envisage is a type of diffuse and dispersed disintegration of the system.*²⁶

Like their Fabian forbearers, Cultural Marxists infiltrate and undermine the western cultures from the inside—from the universities in particular. In harmony with Marx’s dictum that, “Communism abolishes eternal truth, it abolishes all religion, and all morality,”²⁷ Frankfurt professors Marcuse and Reich commissioned their disciples to destroy Western concepts of morality. This is also reminiscent of the threat made by Communist Willi Munzenberg: “We will make the West so corrupt that it stinks.” Gramsci challenged his students to take the revolution into every educational institution and into newspapers, magazines, radio, film, television, journalism, and other forms of mass media. Gramsci and Lukacs encouraged the destruction of the traditional family unit, the basic building block of every tribe and civilization. Lukacs encouraged criticism of literature. Adorno and Schoenberg even sought to try to overturn western ideals for music. The Frankfurt Neo-Marxists also encouraged their students to take over the government gradually from the inside. When trying to understand how American culture began to change so radically after 1950, one must consider cultural Marxism as a major catalyst.

The Revolutionary Means and Ends of Saul Alinsky

Western Marxists sometimes lost patience with the slow pace of “progress.” During the 1960s, several revolutionaries in the “New Left” movement began to drift away from the gradual strains of Marxism and towards the more overtly violent (Maoist) end of the Marxist spectrum. Some leftist radicals began calling for armed conflict with police in city streets to create “liberated zones.” Others

²⁶ Herbert Marcuse, “On the New Left.” Cited by Walsh, 46.

²⁷ *Communist Manifesto*, 44

organized riots. Some even called for students to kill their parents. Saul Alinsky challenged this drift.

Alinsky was an effective worker's union organizer, a talented community organizer, a radical political leftist, a Communist sympathizer, and a Marx-inspired revolutionary. He helped turn the tide of the New Left away from the violent approach back to a gradualist approach. It was not their *ends* that he disapproved of—he too fantasized about the destruction and overthrow of the USA. It was rather their *means* that he criticized:

They [the New Left radicals] also urge violence and cry 'Burn the system down!' They have no illusions about the system, but plenty of illusions about the way to change our world. It is to this point that I have written this book.²⁸

When he rebuked the calls for violence by the New Left it was not because he held that such violence would have been morally unjustifiable; he rebuked them because they were doomed to fail. He was just being pragmatic about it. A few thousand citizens armed with pipe bombs and pistols had no chance of successfully bringing down the most powerful nation in the world from the inside. That just couldn't work. But a gradual acquisition of power could succeed if a more patient, subtle, deceptive, and effective strategy were used.

What follows is for those who want to change the world from what it is to what they believe it should be. *The Prince* was written by Machiavelli for the Haves on how to hold power. *Rules for Radicals* is written for the Have-Notes on how to take it away.²⁹

He encourages organization and agitation for helping revolutionaries use what little power they had to gain more power. His famous

²⁸ Saul Alinsky. *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (NY: Random House, 1971), xiii.

²⁹ Ibid, 3.

thirteen rules for radicals have been used for many different causes, but ultimately the overall thrust is towards one end: gaining power. By listening to people who really want something (the “have-nots”) that the powerful (the “haves”) are withholding from them, by further agitating them and organizing them into communities committed to social change, teaching them to provoke³⁰ the powers that be to overreact against them, and taking advantage of public sympathy, they can gradually take what they want. His methodology of organizing the powerless and agitating the powerful helped shift the balance of power in the United States. When you cannot be a wrench in the gears of the machine, be sand in it. Eventually the sand will bring the machine to a halt. Meanwhile don’t telegraph your plans to your enemy.

The Prevalence of Marxism Today

Despite having allowed some non-Marxist freedoms in, Communist Marxism remains the official and dominant political-economic force in China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam today. There are also governments in other countries—such as the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa—who do not self-identify to the public as either Marxist or Communist but who historically had strong ties with the Soviet Union, have had many Communists in the highest echelons of their leadership, and exhibit strong Leninist tendencies today. Between 1998 and 2015 there was a resurgence of popular hope in Marxist principles in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

³⁰ While preferring nonviolent approaches over violent approaches to socio-political change, Alinsky’s methods are nevertheless hardly commendable. He agrees with Mao that power comes from the barrel of a gun but realizes that those who do not have ‘the guns’ must exploit other means of gaining power over those who hold the guns. Once the Alinskyites gain enough power there is no reason in their system to continue with a nonviolent and gradual approach to social change. Once they begin to believe they can get away with it, they will be free to revolt like Maoists.

This so-called “pink tide” ended with a popular rejection of most of the Marxist leaders and policies.

Despite the fact that it sits above the largest oil deposit in the entire world and the second largest natural gas deposit in the Americas, Venezuela is presently collapsing in every way. It should be one of the most prosperous nations in the world. But with rampant violence, empty food stores, and collapse, its cities have become one of the most politically, socially, and economically uninhabitable places on earth to live. And why is this? One of the main reasons is that they have over the last fifteen years slid deeper and deeper into Castro-styled Marxism under the leadership of Hugo Chavez. Before he was given power, he would answer, “*I’m a humanist,*” when journalists asked him if he was a Communist.³¹ Later, after coming to power, Chavez admitted that he was actually “a convinced follower of Marxist-Leninist ideology.” He and Nicolas Madura, his successor, led Venezuela into severe hyperinflation, deep economic recession, terrible food shortages, an elimination of the middle-class, a greater number of poor, and some of the highest crime and murder rates on earth as they progressively implemented Marx’s ten planks.

While the Marxist countries have been forced to sacrifice some of their control for freedoms, the freer countries have sacrificed some of their freedoms for Marxist controls. The “Western Marxists” sometimes compete with and at other times cooperated with the “Eastern Marxists.” Likewise, the Eastern Marxists sometimes competed with and at other times cooperated with the Western Marxists. Blurring the lines further, many of the families who made their fortunes as capitalists provided funding for Communist front organizations. Carrol Quigley, professor of history at Georgetown University was a mentor to Bill Clinton long before he became the 42nd President of the United States. In his history textbook *Tragedy and Hope*, Quigley posits an international network of bankers who operate in fabian ways, work towards Western

³¹ This is the same deceptive answer his mentor Fidel Castro gave sixty years ago before completing Cuba’s Marxist revolution.

Marxist goals of global control, and were not averse to fund and cooperate with Eastern Marxist organizations:

There does exist, and has existed for a generation, an international Anglophile network which operates, to some extent, in the way the radical Right believes the Communists act. In fact, this network, which we may identify as the Round Table Group has no aversion to cooperating with the Communists, of any other groups, and frequently does so. I know of the operations of this network because I have studied it for twenty years and was permitted for two years, in the early 1960's, to examine its papers and secret records. ... Since 1925 there have been substantial contributions from wealthy individuals and from foundations and firms associated with the international banking fraternity. ... The chief backbone of this organization grew up along the already existing financial cooperation running from the Morgan Bank in New York to a group of international financiers in London ... there grew up in the twentieth century a power structure between London and New York which penetrated deeply into university life, the press, and the practice of foreign policy. ... It was this group of people, whose wealth and influence so exceeded their experience and understanding, who provided much of the frame-work of influence which the Communist sympathizers and fellow travelers [Soviet sympathizers] took over in the United States in the 1930's.³²

³² Carroll Quigley, *Tragedy and Hope: A History of the World in Our Time*. (NY: MacMillan, 1966), 950-955.

A Few Prominent Marxists Today

Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States of America, has denied allegations of being a socialist and a Marxist. But his views do fit well in the socialist spectrum and he has been very strongly influenced by Marx and Alinsky. He also has a very strong Marxist background, ties, and orientation. His legal father, Barack Obama, Sr., was a socialist with communist leanings. His ideological father, Frank Marshall Davis, was a card-carrying member of the Communist Party with a passionate desire to destroy the American system. His mother, Anne Dunham, was a radical leftist, a devotee of the Frankfurt School's "critical theory," and a Communist as well. Another one of his mentors, Jeremiah Wright, a revolutionary Marxist and Muslim turned pseudo-Christian preacher, gained some fame for preaching a sermon insistent upon the need for God to damn the USA rather than bless it. Wright is also a fount of Black Liberation Theology.³³

Barack Obama attended Columbia University, one of the chief fountains of both Fabian and Frankfurt strains of Marxism,³⁴ and, as a political science major there, he learned the nuances of the Cloward-Piven strategy—a plan to increase the burden of the public welfare system to create an overwhelming crisis in the evil

³³ Liberation Theology is invariably Marxist in orientation and, if the Communist defector Ion Pacepa is correct, was originally created as a disinformation campaign by the Russian and Romanian KGB agencies during the 1960s. It would reword Marxism in Christian vocabulary in order to help spread the revolutionary memes through the minds of Latin Americans in particular. Variations were made for other people groups.

³⁴ Attending Columbia University is not necessarily a guarantee of Marxist indoctrination. The famous economist Milton Friedman, for example, studied statistics at Columbia in the 1930s and became one of the greatest critics of Keynesianism, Socialism, and Marxism. Similarly, economist F.A. Hayek, who is famous for dialogues with Keynes and for his anti-socialism book *The Road to Serfdom*, spent most of his career on the faculty of the London School of Economics—the same school that was started by the Fabian Society. Columbia was rife with Marxism in the 1980s however.

capitalistic system and cause the rise of a Marx-inspired government that would end poverty by the forceful redistribution of wealth.

Obama got his start in politics as a community organizer under the auspices of two organizations Saul Alinsky founded. He became a trainer in Alinsky's methods and used some of the Alinsky methods to help his presidential campaign succeed. He graduated from Harvard Law School in 1991—a time when many of the professors were still optimistic about Soviet Communism. Also many of them were pundits of “critical legal studies,” a NeoMarxist revolution against American jurisprudence that assumes law is about power rather than justice. Roberto Unger, one of Obama's professors during his years at Harvard Law, is not ashamed to admit that he is Marxist revolutionary in the Frankfurt School tradition. Obama also studied the Marx-inspired “critical race theory” (CRT) under Derrick Bell at Harvard and went on to teach it as a lecturer at the University of Chicago. As President, Obama appointed one self-described Maoist Communist to an important role in his cabinet. While enjoying upper-class wealth, Obama's deleterious attempt to socialize health care, his refusal to speak out against the violence associated with various movements under the MoveOn.org umbrella, and his promotion of several other global governance agendas are indicative of a generally Marxist orientation. Now that his second term as President has ended, Obama plans continue to lend his talents for organizing and agitating to the insurgency movement.

Bill Ayers, the co-founder of the Weather Underground, a communist organization that openly called for guerrilla warfare and the overthrow of the US government, was also one of Obama's mentors in Chicago. In acts of terrorism, and largely in protest of the military involvement in Vietnam, Ayers' group planted bombs at the New York City Police Department headquarters in 1970, the United States Capitol building in 1971, and the Pentagon in 1972. Ayers

served no prison time for his terrorism.³⁵ He went on to become a professor in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Although he officially denied any significant association with Barack Obama, Ayers later claimed to have written Obama's autobiography *Dreams of my Father* (1995) prior to Obama's bid for the presidency.

In 2017, Bill Ayers, along with Carl Dix, a founding member of the Revolutionary Communist Party USA, recently helped create the RefuseFascism.org movement.³⁶ This movement seeks to organize and agitate with "massive protest and resistance from tens of millions of ordinary people" to oppose the inauguration of the 45th President, to create "a crisis of rule," to "have the effect of figuratively stopping society in its tracks," create "a political eruption from below," "bring DC to a halt," foster "non-violent direct action disrupting business as usual, occupying public spaces ... strikes ... in cities around the country."³⁷ This echoes Marx's writings, resembles some of the propaganda and strategies used by Lenin, and is textbook Alinsky. While the Refuse Fascism organization calls for non-violent protest out of one side of their mouth, they also are calling for militant fighting out of the other:

In short, should we hold back now it will almost certainly become immeasurably more difficult to *fight* back once Trump-Pence are in power and using the vast state power at their disposal to implement their program. The path of holding back, of waiting and seeing, of calculating odds is *littered with corpses. Far better to fight as hard as we can*

³⁵ Officially no people were actually killed by the bombs. Ayers has since publicly condemned all forms of terrorism—including Obama's extensive use of drone aircraft attacks in other nations.

³⁶ <https://refusefascism.org/about-contact/initiators/>. Accessed January 9th, 2017.

³⁷ These are all direct quotes from <https://refusefascism.org/faqs-on-stopping-trump-pence/>. Accessed on January 9th, 2017. Similar militant language ("Hundreds of thousands of people will be storming the streets across the US," "we need massive resistance in the streets," and "Let's fight for the revolution we really need") is used by the J20Resist movement at <http://www.workers.org/j20/>.

now, however difficult the circumstances, fostering an ethos and framework of *resistance* as we go for *victory* and *going all out* in a telescoped period of time for what is indeed our best shot. There are, of course, no guarantees of *victory* for people who have right on their side. The only guarantee that has ever existed is that if you don't *fight for justice* you will certainly not get it. *Let us fight*.³⁸

Hillary Rodham Clinton has served the US as a Senator and as the Secretary of State. When including the votes of three million illegal aliens and questionable results from several districts in five states, Hillary won the popular vote for the election of the 45th President of the United States. But she failed to earn the electoral vote. While she is certainly not a consistent Marxist, she was converted to a Marxist viewpoint in her college days. The 92-page thesis she wrote as a political science major was titled “There is Only the Fight: An Analysis of the Alinsky Model.” Although she did offer some criticisms of his work, she clearly defended Alinsky’s means and, in agreeing that there is ultimately one fight, she agreed with his ends. That fight is at heart of the Marxist worldview; it is the lens through which everything must be viewed to be understood properly. She looked up to Alinsky at one time as a model and mentor. She interviewed him in person and kept a personal correspondence going with him. While her views on “the fight” have matured over the decades, Mrs. Clinton remains a leftist radical and an Alinsky-inspired revolutionary.

Jorge Bergoglio, better known now as Pope Francis, the 266th and current Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, is one of the most influential people in the world today. At least a billion people are listening to him. Officially he supports neither Capitalism, Marxism, nor Marxist Liberation Theology. Bergoglio preaches that the main problem of the world needs to be “radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality.” He sounded so

³⁸ Ibid. Italics added.

much like a Marxist so often that many began to ask whether he was in fact a Marxist. Bergoglio answered, “Marxist ideology is wrong. But I have met many Marxists in my life who are good people, so I don’t feel offended.” Bergoglio set the locus of his social doctrine in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) rather than in Marx. But Francis is not talking about the old RCC and its old traditions; he is talking about the new RCC created by the Second Vatican Council. Prior to that council, the RCC and Marxist-Leninism were bitter enemies and irreconcilable competitors. After the council ended (1965), the enmity cooled and the RCC began to move in Marxist directions. According to RCC historian and former Jesuit professor Malachi Martin:

Within five years of the end of Vatican II, by the dawn of the 1970s, the whole of Latin America was being flooded with a new theology—Liberation Theology—in which basic Marxism was smartly decked out in traditional Christian vocabulary and retooled Christian concepts. Books written mainly by co-opted Catholic priests, together with political and revolutionary action manuals, saturated the volatile area of Latin America ... Liberation Theology was a perfectly faithful exercise of Gramsci’s principles. It could be launched with the corruption of a relatively few well-placed Judas goats. Yet it could be aimed at the culture and the mentality of the masses. It stripped both of any attachment to the Christian transcendent. It locked both the individual and his culture in the close embrace of a goal that was totally immanent: the class struggle for socio-political liberation. Swiftly, the linchpins of Vatican and papal control were replaced by the action-oriented demands of the Roman Church—Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, Maryknollers—all committed themselves to Liberation Theology.³⁹

³⁹ *Keys of this Blood*, 260-261.

Interestingly, Bergoglio is the first Jesuit in history to ever become a Pope. His words resonate with the stream of NeoMarxist thought that has been infiltrating the Jesuit order since the 1950s through the work of Jesuit-Marxist thinkers like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (also considered to be the founder of the New Age Movement), Karl Rahner, and a cadre of Liberation Theologians.⁴⁰ After having their own revolution the Jesuits in turn caused a revolution in the RCC during and after the Second Vatican Council.

Quoting Francis frequently, the Vatican recently started pushing the agenda of creating a global government (“create a world political authority,” “the creation of a public Authority with universal jurisdiction,” “creating a world political Authority,” “arrive at global Government”⁴¹) that controls “peace and security; disarmament and arms control; promotion and protection of fundamental human rights; management of the economy and development policies; management of migratory flows and food security; and protection of the environment.” This system of control would of course include a “central world bank that regulates the flow and system of monetary exchanges.” This world government is to be “geared to the universal common good,” “aimed at achieving the common good on the local, regional and world levels,” is about “global social justice,” and “aimed at achieving free and stable markets and a fair distribution of world wealth.” There is nothing here that cannot be found in the writings of Eastern and Western interpreters of Marx. Nor is there anything here that can be achieved without the authoritarian and totalitarian power.

Ironically, while the Pope and the new RCC Church talk in increasingly Marxist tones about the plight of the poor, the evils of greedy capitalism, and the need for other people’s investments to be

⁴⁰ Malachi Martin, *The Jesuits: The Society of Jesus and the Betrayal of the Roman Catholic Church* (NY: Touchstone, 1987).

⁴¹ The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. “Towards Reforming the International and Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority.” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20111024_nota_en.html. Accessed January 9th, 2017.

controlled, they continue to take in billions of dollars every year from their 1.2 billion subjects. Vatican City, which has a population of just 800 people, receives no less than 300 million dollars' worth of wool per year from its flock. Although no one knows how much wealth the RCC really has, it is known that they manage 6 billion euros worth of assets, have 700 million euros of equity, and keep over 20 million dollars in gold in the vaults of the US Federal Reserve. One also can wonder why they haven't started auctioning the many priceless treasures (gold, ivories, textiles, illuminated manuscripts, mosaics, tapestries, paintings, sculptures, frescoes, etc.) kept in the Vatican. It is a piquant irony that the Apostle Peter was able to say, "I have no silver or gold..." (Acts 3:6) but the church that he supposedly founded is worth countless billions—or perhaps even trillions—of dollars and euros.

Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th and current *Dali Lama* of Tibetan Buddhism, is another religious leader with considerable influence around the globe. Given the Maoist invasion and oppression of Tibet, we might expect the Dali Lama to be very critical of Marxism. However, while addressing an American audience in 2011, he explained, "I consider myself a Marxist . . . but not a Leninist." Also, in a 2015 lecture entitled "A Human Approach to World Peace," Tenzin went on record as saying, "As far as socioeconomic theory, I am a Marxist. . . . In capitalist countries, there is an increasing gap between the rich and the poor. In Marxism, there is emphasis on equal distribution." Tenzin is right in saying some of the best-known Marxist countries (China) are practicing capitalism now. But he fails to mention the fact that all of the "capitalist countries" have in the last 100 years become a mixture of capitalist, socialist, Marxist, and Keynesian⁴² economic practices. He seems to have missed the fact that the gulf between "the 1%" and "the 99%" was felt more acutely in the extreme Marxist experiments. Eastern Marxism purged the upper-class,

⁴² John Maynard Keynes, a member of the Fabian Society, is often portrayed as the savior of capitalism or the synthesizer of capitalism and socialism. Since his solution requires increases in government spending and intervention it arguably fits more on the Leftist end of the spectrum.

created a new upper-class, eliminated the middle-class, and enlarged the lower-class. The gulf between rich and poor in Western countries grows proportionately to the adoption of Western Marxist theory.

Reasons to Reject All Forms of Marxism

The Heart of Marxism is Conflict

While the impulse to rebel and revolt and quarrel has been with mankind since the beginning, Marx may have been the first to make it the kernel of a philosophical worldview. With its emphasis on equality and justice for all, Marxism sounds quite appealing in the abstract. But in the real world, terror, slavery, misery, mass murder, injustice, inequality, and even genocide are its inevitable fruit; it's built into the system. While posing as the system of cooperation and the antidote to the system of competition, Marxism is founded on the assumption that history can only properly be understood as a competition, a fight, a conflict, a war. Just as never-ending competition between species in the Darwinian model of evolution supposedly produces biological progress, so too does social progress supposedly happen through conflict between people groups.⁴³ The revolutionaries seek to help the weaker people groups cooperate to revolt against the stronger group.

Marxism is anti-Christian

Marx's antipathy for religion in general ("the opiate of the masses") and for Christianity in particular (considered to be nothing more than a tool of oppression) is not in dispute. In the Warsaw Pact

⁴³ In a letter to Ferdinand Lassale in 1861, Marx wrote, "Darwin's book [Origin of the Species] is very important and serves me as a basis in the natural sciences for the historical class struggle."

countries, church leaders that complied with the revolutions were rewarded while church leaders that opposed the revolution were removed. The satanic, anti-Christian roots start with Marx, who after abandoning the Christian faith, wrote, “I wish to avenge myself against the One [God] who rules above,”⁴⁴ “I shall howl gigantic curses upon mankind,”⁴⁵ and, “With disdain I will throw my gauntlet full in the face of the world and see the collapse of this pygmy giant ... then I will wander godlike and victorious through the ruins of this world. ... I will feel equal to the Creator.”⁴⁶ When writing in positive tones about the bloody revolutions in 19th century France and the overturning of their progress by Napoleon, Marx seems to have concluded that “in the name of the people ... ‘All that exists deserves to perish.’”⁴⁷

By age eighteen Marx had rejected Christianity and embarked upon an anti-Christian and pro-Luciferian path. One of his early poems tells of how “that enthroned Lord,” “the Almighty,” has “snatched from me my all” and how “nothing but revenge is left to me,” “revenge I’ll proudly wreak on that being,” and “I shall build my throne high overhead. ... defiant.”⁴⁸ One of Marx’s former early partners, Mikhail Bakunin, wrote in ways which harmonize well with the spirit and words of Marx:

The Evil one is the satanic revolt against divine authority, revolt in which we see the fecund germ of human emancipations, the revolution. Socialists recognize each

⁴⁴ Richard Wurmbrand, *Marx and Satan* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1986), 5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7. See also Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1988), chapter 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 18. A slightly different translation can be seen in *Early Works of Karl Marx: Book of Verse* at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1837-pre/verse/verse20.htm>. Accessed January 1st, 2017.

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1346/pg1346.txt>. Accessed Jan. 1st, 2017.

⁴⁸ *Early Works of Karl Marx: Book of Verse*. “Invocation of One in Despair.” <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1837-pre/verse/verse11.htm>

other by the words, ‘In the name of the one to whom a great wrong has been done.’... In this revolution we will have to awaken the Devil in the people, to stir up the basest passions. Our mission is to destroy, not to edify. The passion of destruction is a creative passion.⁴⁹

The “one to whom a great wrong has been done” refers to Lucifer, the great cherub who attempted to depose God and was in turn cast out by God. Luciferians (i.e., Satanists) see Lucifer as the victim—the righteous rebel—and God as the unjust King who needs to be overthrown. Both the ends and the means of the purer forms of Marxism (and the revolutionary ideologies that preceded it and fed into it) are ultimately satanic. They originate from men who were in rebellion against the God of their parents. They also fit the Bible’s descriptions of Satan as a deceiver who “disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14), a thief who “comes to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10), and an adversary who “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8), and the ultimate rebel. Alinsky essentially dedicated his book *Rules for Radicals* to Satan with these words:

Lest we forget at least an over-the-shoulder acknowledgement to the very first radical: from all our legends, mythology, and history (and who is to know where mythology leaves off and history begins—or which is which), the first radical known to man who rebelled against the establishment and did it so effectively that he at least won his own kingdom—Lucifer.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Marx and Satan*, 16.

⁵⁰ Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (Random House: 1971). This nod to Lucifer is found on the page prior to the table of contents. It is not clear whether he regards Lucifer as a real being whom he admires or whether he takes Lucifer as a great symbol of rebellion. For the complete text see https://archive.org/stream/RulesForRadicals/RulesForRadicals_djvu.txt.

The Question of Compatibility

It could be argued that most of the people who hunger, thirst, and work for a more equitable and just world prefer to avoid the bloodshed, terrorism, and other evils that tend to go along with Marx's spectre. They're interested in a soft revolution, constructive reforms, an effective but unoppressive yoke, and a milder, sanitized, reformed, kautskian version of Marxism. Indeed many western Marxists work with sincere and noble aspirations in peaceful ways towards constructive reforms of highly imperfect systems.⁵¹ And it may have been the criticism and work of moderate western Marxists that helped temper some of the abuses that western governments would otherwise have continued to wallow in. Perhaps if Christians in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries had been more sensitive to and vocal about unjust labor practices, imperialism, colonization, slavery, consumerism, unjust wars, racism, persecution, inequalities, predatory lending, greed, and the ubiquitous Old Testament themes of justice and righteousness for the powerless, the vacuum that secular Marxism filled wouldn't have been empty. Secular Marxist humanists are following a desupernaturalized version of the Judeo-Christian vision of justice that both Israel and the Church lost.

Pressing the point further, perhaps many modern Christians have already proved that the Christianesque aspects of Marxism can

⁵¹ The non-Marxist and less-Marxist systems are highly imperfect too. New Left historian and former Boston University professor Howard Zinn wrote *A People's History of the United States* (<http://www.historyisaweapon.com/zinnapeopleshistory.html>) to portray the American story through a Marxist lens as one of exploitation and oppression of the weak by the strong. Despite valid complaints by other historians about its lack of objectivity, the book cannot be dismissed simply as a work of fiction. Real injustices and inequalities fuel Marxist aspirations. Zinn's book became a best seller and is used as a textbook in many colleges and high schools. According to files released by the FBI in 2010, Zinn had been a very active member of the Communist Party USA and a member of several Communist front groups. While recommending Zinn's book only as an example of effective Communist propaganda, many of his complaints about the abuses of power are not wholly without merit.

be adopted while the materialistic, violent, and antichristian elements are filtered out. Marx's vision of justice may partially be inspired by and harmonious with the many Old Testament passages on justice, Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount ("blessed are the poor" and therefore "condemned are the wealthy/powerful"), writings about controlling greed found in the Talmud and other rabbinic writings, and some of the writings of the Anabaptist Christian radicals who were persecuted and murdered by Protestants and Roman Catholics alike. Perhaps Isaiah and Jesus were the first embryonic Marxists and as society evolved Marx was offering an evolved application of true Christian principles. Class conflict is real and perhaps lies at the heart of the social gospel of how we need to build the kingdom of God on earth. Perhaps Marxism provides a helpful way to break with misguided Greco-Roman interpretations—the Western Captivity—of the Bible that occurred after the Constantianian Shift. Perhaps Marx offers an important part of the Reformation that Luther and Calvin didn't get around to. A large percentage of the Christian Churches in the West are already heavily influenced by Marxism and contribute to Marxist causes.

There are many admixtures of Christianity and Marxism in various ratios. Surely some blends are better than others. But should they be blended at all? While the Marxist critiques of the wealthy and powerful often show areas where improvement is needed, the Marxist vision is ultimately neither constructive nor reformative. In so far as they are possessed by Marx's spectre, the leaders of the new Marxisms will content themselves with gradual and peaceful reform only as a means to weaken and replace the incumbent powers. When the system is sufficiently weakened, the reforms end and the attempt the revolution begins. As thousands of kind-hearted socialists discovered during the early days of the Russian Revolution, their work as mild revolutionaries helped the more heartless revolutionaries accomplish the Revolution—the very bloody, nasty, evil revolution. Those who hunger and thirst for Marxist righteousness are working towards that same end. They may do so in ignorance and in good conscience, but eventually it leads towards large quantities of blood and many tears. Although it is

denied, it seems that following the money trail of the World Council of Churches⁵² (WCC), the National Council of Churches (NCC), the United Methodist Church, and the United Presbyterian Church, and other Marx-intoxicated Christian groups shows millions of dollars sent to finance propaganda, weapons, ammunition, and pay for several Marxist “liberation armies” on at least two continents. If this is true then it offers a poignant example of the work of the nonviolent Marxist revolutionaries being something that can be untangled from violent revolutionaries.

While encouraging efforts towards truly constructive and peaceful reforms, we must discourage any support of all destructive and revolutionary movements.⁵³ In so far as Marxism is directly or indirectly revolutionary, it has no continuity with the Scriptures. The expectation of support for the established government runs through all the books of the Old and New Testaments. Members of the Tribes of Israel and members of the global Church were both encouraged to not revolt against the established authorities—even when those authorities were very abusive. When their slavery was unbearable and when their baby boys were being murdered, Moses and the Israelites did not rise up in armed revolution against Pharaoh and Egypt. They endured suffering, they groaned, and they left when Pharaoh asked them to. When Moses became the leader of the Israelites, he carried a shepherd’s staff—not a spear, sword or bow. But the Israelites themselves never killed or harassed their Egyptian

⁵² From the WCC’s website: “The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour ... The WCC brings together churches, denominations and church fellowships in more than 110 countries and territories throughout the world, representing over 500 million Christians and including most of the world’s Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches. ... There are now 348 member churches.” <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us/about-us/>. Accessed January 12th, 2017.

⁵³ See Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Contemporary Issues and Options*, 3rd edition (IL: Baker Academic, 2010), 252-259.

oppressors.⁵⁴ David refused to oppose King Saul even though Saul had gone insane, was trying to murder David, and deserved no such mercy. Even though his people had been slaughtered, kidnapped, and held against their will, Daniel faithfully served and blessed the kings of the Babylonian and Persian Empires—despite the fact that they were guilty of many injustices.

Unlike most of the Jews of their day, Jesus and his Apostles never raised their voices or their ink quills—much less the sword—against either Caesar or the Roman Empire. They were supportive of the Roman Empire despite the fact that it was a kingdom that they knew would “devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces” (Daniel 7:23). Contrary to the liberation theology perspective, while Jesus and most of his apostles were executed by Roman order, they had not acted as subversives or revolutionaries. When Jesus told his eleven remaining followers to purchase swords and heard that they had a total of two, he said, “It is enough” (Luke 22:35-38). Two swords among eleven men is no way to start of a revolution. As Jesus was being arrested, when Peter asked if he should “strike with the sword” Jesus answered in the negative and did damage control (Luke 22:49-51). Jesus chided the armed mob by asking, “Am I leading a rebellion that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me” (Luke 22:52-53).⁵⁵ Jesus was

⁵⁴ The one recorded exception to this serves to reinforce my point. In Exodus 2:11-12, Moses, as a young man, did kill an Egyptian whom he had seen beating a Hebrew slave. The question of “who made you a prince and judge [rescuer] over us?” (2:15) suggests that his act of vigilante justice could have been seen as an attempt to start a revolution of some type. If that was the beginning of Moses’ short career as a revolutionary it was also the end of it.

⁵⁵ C.f., Matt 26 and Mark 14. The older English translations translate *ἁγιστής* as having revolutionary or insurrectionist connotations. Translators of some of the newer translations see this usage as developing later and prefer to translate it more along the lines of a robber. Luke, for example, uses the same word for the highwaymen who attack travelers in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30). With the older translation, it is simply clear that Jesus was obviously not a revolutionary while those arresting him thought he might be.

the greatest revolutionary in world history. But he was not a destructive or violent revolutionary in the Marxist tradition. He sent his disciples out as “sheep among wolves” who were to be “as wise as serpents but as harmless as doves” (Mt. 10:16). While on trial with the regional Roman authority Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting [to prevent my arrest but] my kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). His judge had no concerns about him as a threat to Rome and said, “I find no guilt in him” (18:38).

While Marxist criticism may occasionally be useful for showing Christians where they are being hypocritical and need improvement, the blending of Marxism and Christianity will invariably produce doctrines that are contrary to the knowledge of God. For example, Marxist Christians tend to replace a theistic view of a transcendent and infinite God with an immanent and finite view of God. God becomes little more than the march of history, the outworking of class conflict in history, or an algebraic variable for the desire for social change. Non-Marxist Christians believe that while Christ’s kingdom is not of this world in this present age, someday Christ himself will return and create his own geopolitical kingdom on earth. Marxist Christians invariably replace that hope with an emphasis on an earthly kingdom that we must create ourselves. The gospel of salvation by grace, through faith, not by works, but for good works (Eph. 2:8-10) gets replaced by a social gospel of salvation through revolutionary works—either the sand-in-the-machine works of Alinsky or the bullet-to-the-head works of Mao. It is not those who are “poor in spirit” whom God blesses but those who are poor in material goods. The hope of eternal life and resurrection of the body are minimized at best and eventually lost.

The ideological evolution of John de Gruchy, Professor Emeritus of Christian Studies at the University of Cape Town, may serve as an unfortunate example of how Marxism transmogrifies a Christian’s faith. In his book *Confessions of a Christian Humanist*

If we go with the newer translation the idea that Jesus was a revolutionary was so far from the truth that it never even entered the minds of his adversaries.

de Gruchy outlines his journey away from a God-centered Christianity to a Marx-intoxicated Christianity. He describes the “evangelical-fundamentalism” of his younger days as supporting the status quo of an ethically inhumane apartheid in South Africa, of supporting misguided sexual guilt, patriarchy, and “saving souls.” He rejoices over his conversion to what he believes to be a superior theology—one that integrates darwinism, feminism (NeoMarxist), liberation theology (NeoMarxist), black theology (NeoMarxist), commonalities with Hinduism, and the Eastern Orthodox notion of divinization. He credits Dietrich Bonhoeffer, several semi-Christian Marxists (Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Teilhard de Chardin, Karl Rahner, Desmond Tutu), and even the Hindu philosopher Savrepalli Radhakrishnan as helping him on his journey to become a proper Christian Humanist. DeGruchy explains:

Being a Christian *humanist* implies that one is committed to human dignity, rights and freedom, and has some real hope for humanity; and being a *Christian* humanist suggests that these commitments and this hope are inseparable from one’s faith in Jesus Christ.⁵⁶

But when answering the question about the real hope that is within him, de Gruchy believes that the traditional view of eternal life and resurrection has been misunderstood by orthodox Christians for two thousand years. He reinterprets them as follows:

... ‘eternal life’ . . . refers to a quality of life rather than to endless quantity; it is life lived under the reign of God, in the ‘kingdom of heaven’ here and now. Part of what we are saying in proclaiming the ‘resurrection of the body’ is that we are part of a web of human life, for Christians, ‘the body of Christ’, that has been raised to newness of life. . . the ‘resurrection of the body’ suggests something organic,

⁵⁶ John W. de Gruchy, *Confessions of a Christian Humanist* (MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 30.

it has to do with the interconnectedness of life of which death is an inevitable and indispensable part. This might not give much comfort to those who wonder about the whereabouts of their loved ones who have died, or about their own destiny, but it may well provide a fresh perspective from which we can look at the reality of death and ‘the life everlasting’. The ‘resurrection of the body’ is not to be understood in a crude, literal sense; it refers to the reconstitution of our personhood in relation to others in ways that we cannot even begin to imagine.⁵⁷

It should be obvious that de Gruchy has parted company with Jesus and his Apostles on this crucial doctrine. Or, to borrow a phrase from the Apostle Paul, he has “shipwrecked his faith” (1st Tim. 1:19) on the reef of Marxism. He is also blowing the faith of his students and readers towards the same reefs with the winds of his teaching. Ironically, while de Gruchy self-identifies as a theologian in the Reformed-Evangelical tradition, none of the Protestant Reformers would have had any tolerance for his secularized view of eternal life or his purely this-worldly social gospel. He has completed the process of becoming a secular humanist who self-identifies as a Christian but who may very possibly not be identified as a Christian by Jesus Christ himself.

Conclusion

Regardless of whether or not Marx’s original spectre has departed the world scene or not, there are several other Neo-Marxist spectres around to take its place. They have achieved prominence in many of the fields that shape peoples’ worldviews and attitudes. The implications are far reaching in individual, regional, and global scopes and in political, economic, cultural, moral, and ideological

⁵⁷ Ibid, 208.

arenas. Morally it tends to lead toward rebellion against every imperative in the word of God.

Even the push for social justice tends to end in social unrest. The means and ends of Marxism tend towards bloodshed and tragedy. For example, in this day when the Pope, billionaires like George Soros⁵⁸, and many of the most powerful political leaders of the day are sending hundreds of thousands of Muslim migrants from Africa, Asia, and the Middle-East into Europe and North America, it is done ostensibly in the name of compassion for the dispossessed, global equality for the oppressed, and multiculturalism. Painted as a “love your neighbor as yourself” it sounds like something Christ might have said. But in the Marxist matrix, the current migrant crisis⁵⁹ is a method of pitting one group against another group, of creating shifts in power and class conflicts, and of course for creating economic, social, cultural, and moral crisis, and fostering conditions that are ripe for “the Revolution.”

Marxism is not simply a philosophy of overthrowing governments and controlling the machinery, the workers, and the economies of the world. Eastern-styled Marxism starts with worldly warfare (guerilla warfare and revolution) and then, once established,

⁵⁸ George Soros graduated from the London School of Economics, became the 27th most wealthy person in the world, is chairman of the Open Society Foundation (which has given several billion dollars to left-wing groups), is a major funder of MoveOn.org, and was a major contributor to the Obama and Clinton campaigns. Since communism and socialism have been “thoroughly discredited” he now devotes his fortune toward working against the threat of “global capitalism.” In the process of advancing his “open societies” he has funded organizations that champion social justice—and sometimes clash with police and riot in the streets of cities like Ferguson (2014), Baltimore (2015), Charlotte (2016), Chicago, Portland, Oakland, San Francisco, and Washington D.C. (2017).

⁵⁹ Since 2015 hundreds of thousands of people from Syria, Afghanistan, Albania, Iraq, Eritrea, Pakistan, Nigeria, Somalia and several other countries have poured into Germany, Hungary, France, Sweden, the UK, and other European countries. This is enabled by adoption of the “open borders” doctrine and fueled by the invasion of Syria and Iraq by the jihadis of Islamic State. The Islamic State and the Muslim Brotherhood seems to have had support from some Leftist groups in the West.

leads to ideological slavery in opposition to the knowledge of God. Western-styled Marxism engages in ideological and cultural warfare first and then leads to worldly warfare second. If the factors of theft, rebellion, constant conflict, and totalitarian controls are not enough to compel the defenders of the Christian faith to declare war against it, Marxism has always been a humanistic philosophy that “suppresses the truth ... about God” (Rom. 1:18-19). It wages war against the knowledge of God and therefore it deserves an apologetic response. When the Apostle Paul described his earthly mission he did so in militant terms:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to Christ... (2 Cor. 10:3-5)

For our earthly mission to have continuity with the apostolic mission, we should not participate in the bloody wars waged with bombs, bullets, and blades; we should instead be militant, strategic, tactical warfighters in the *ideological war* for the knowledge of God our Lord and Christ.

Christianity—in all of its pre-Marxist forms—are Marxism’s chief enemies. The fact that both Marx and Engels both went through strong Christian phases in their earlier days (before biblical criticism turned them against the God of the Bible, against Christian churches, and even against Western Civilization itself) is part of what makes Marxism extra deceptive and dangerous. It has a knack for replacing Christianity as a purely secular counterfeit. It also has a knack for infiltrating Christian worldviews, hybridizing with them, retooling and secularizing them. Marxism invariably drips the acid of criticism onto everything it touches. That’s part of the bargain.

We may be seeing some signs that one of Marx’s spectres has begun to haunt the evangelical Christian academy. The current era is one where several esteemed evangelical scholars will, for example, praise and defend a book with a subtitle of “A New

Historiographical Approach”⁶⁰ despite the fact that New Historicism is a school of thought which is rooted in some of the theories of Karl Marx (as filtered through Michael Foucault, Lynn Hunt, and Stephen Greenblatt) and despite the fact that the book criticizes pieces of the historical gospel narrative. When other evangelical scholars criticize this type of criticism they become criticized and ridiculed for having been critical. This too seems to resonate with the spirit of Marx and the Frankfurt theorists. This may also show which direction the compass needle is pointing. Instead of heading in the “Christian Humanist” direction that Professor de Gruchy took, let us instead learn how the guerillas wage their ideological wars and then proceed to destroy the arguments and lofty opinions they have raised against the knowledge of God.

⁶⁰ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010).

A Critical Review of Michael R. Licona's *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography*

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A Critical Review of Michael R. Licona's *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn From Ancient Biography* (Oxford Press, 2016). ISBN = ISBN-13: 978-0190264260. 336 pages. List Price \$35.00.

INTRODUCTION

Michael R. Licona, Professor of Theology, Houston Baptist University, has produced another volume in his efforts to apply the ancient historical genre of Greco-Roman biography to the text of the canonical Gospels as a means of explaining differences among the Gospels. The work is titled, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn From Ancient Biography* (Oxford, 2016).

Background to Licona's New Work: classical historiography and its Greco-Roman *Bioi* postulation.

This work may be considered a follow-up to his volume titled, *The Resurrection of Jesus, A New Historiographical Approach*, wherein he initially set forth his thesis that the key to understanding the Gospel account is to consider the Gospels as influenced by ancient Greco-Roman biography. In this prior volume, Licona contended, echoing classicist Richard Burridge, that "Although the Gospels do

¹ F. David Farnell, PhD, is Professor of New Testament at the Master's Seminary and co-author of *Vital Issues in Inerrancy*.

not possess all of the internal or external features of ancient biography, they do not differ from the genre 'to any greater degree than other [works belonging to the genre of biography]; in other words, they have at least as much in common with Graeco-Roman [bioi] as the [bioi] have with each other. Therefore, the gospels must belong to the genre of [bios]."² This growing opinion among evangelical scholars that the Gospels are *bios* recently created a storm of controversy Licona, in this work *The Resurrection of Jesus A New Historiographical Approach*,³ used *bios* as a means of de-historicizing parts of the Gospel (i.e. Matthew 27:51-53 with the resurrection of the saints after Jesus crucifixion is non-literal genre or apocalyptic rather than an actual historical event). Licona argued "*Bioi* offered the ancient biographer great flexibility for rearranging material and **inventing speeches . . . and they often included legend**. Because *bios* was a flexible genre, **it is often difficult to determine where history ends and legend begins.**"⁴ He called this "poetical," a "legend," an "embellishment," and literary "special effects."⁵

Licona further suggested that the appearance of angels at Jesus' tomb after the resurrection is also legendary. He wrote: "**It can forthrightly be admitted that the data surrounding what happened to Jesus is fragmentary and could possibly be mixed with legend**, as Wedderburn notes. We may also be reading poetic language or legend at certain points, such as Matthew's report of the raising of some dead saints at Jesus death (Mt 27:51-54) **and the angel(s) at the tomb** (Mark 15:5-7; Matt 28:2-7; Luke 24:4-7; John

² Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010) 203. Licona's quote is inclusive of a comment of Richard A. Burridge, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*. Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004 [1992], 250. See also: Michael R. Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³ Licona, *The Resurrection*.

⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁵ Ibid., 306, 548, 552, 553.

20:11-13.”⁶ (185-186, emphasis added). This extends the infiltration of legend beyond Matthew to all the other Gospels as well. What is more, Licona offers no clear hermeneutical way to determine from the text of Scripture what is legend and what is not. Calling a short unembellished Gospel account with witnesses “weird,” as Licona does,⁷ is certainly not a very clear hermeneutical test, especially when the passage is directly associated with the resurrection of Christ (as Matthew 27 is). Many New Testament scholars think the bodily resurrection of Christ is weird too. The late Rudolf Bultmann, the Dean of liberal New Testament scholars in the Twentieth Century, called the resurrection and all such miraculous events in the Gospels as “the mythical event of redemption”; “origin of the various themes can be easily traced in the contemporary mythology of Jewish apocalyptic”; “pre-scientific” “incredible,” “senseless,” “irrational”; “unintelligible”; and even “impossible” to the modern mind.⁸ As a result, a roundtable discussion was formed by the Southern Baptists, of which Michael Licona is a member, for vetting of his views.⁹

An apparent syllogism for Licona's *The Resurrection of Jesus*

A syllogism for Licona's work, the Resurrection may be stated as follows:

PREMISE ONE: Greco-Roman *Bioi* presents a mixture of history (facts) and legendary material that are hard to distinguish

⁶ Ibid., 185-86 (emphasis added).

⁷ Ibid., 527.

⁸ Rudolf Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” in Kerygma and Myth A Theological Debate (London: SPCK, 1953) 2-5.

⁹ “A Roundtable Discussion with Michael Licona on The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach,” Southeastern Theological Review 3/1 (Summer 2002) 71-98.

PREMISE TWO: The Gospels are an example of Greco-Roman *Bioi*

CONCLUSION: The Gospels presents a mixture of history (facts) and legendary material that are hard to distinguish.

Discernment of where history ends and legend or non-history, i.e. symbolism, begins is not really specified by Licona, indicating an acute thesis to this work, for he offered no clear hermeneutical principles beyond terms like "apocalyptic;" "weird," etc.¹⁰ Licona makes such decisions a personal, subjective decision that lacks clear analysis.

Licona's work on the resurrection did exhibit many commendable items, such as a strong stance on the historical basis for Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead. One might be encouraged that in light of historical criticism's assault on the miraculous since Spinoza and the Enlightenment, Licona has maintained the historical, orthodox position of the church. However, similar to Robert Gundry before him in 1983 who used a midrashic (non-historical approach) to the infancy narratives in Matthew 1-3, Licona (2010) uses genre issues in historical criticism to negate portions of Scripture that have always been considered historical by orthodox Christianity from the earliest times. The same ideological thought process by which Licona was dismissive of the resurrection of the Saints and the appearance of angels could well be applied to Jesus' He has stirred up much controversy that parallels that of the

¹⁰ For further analysis, see Norman L. Geisler, "Michael Licona Admits Contradiction in the Gospels." <https://www.jashow.org/articles/bible/mike-licona-admits-contradiction-in-the-gospels/>; idem., <https://www.jashow.org/articles/bible/brief-comments-on-the-licona-dialogue/>; idem., "On Licona Muddying the Waters of the Chicago Statement of Biblical Inerrancy and Hermeneutics; idem. And William C. Roach, Methodological Unorthodoxy" in *The Jesus Quest The Danger from Within* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2014) 181-210.

Gundry/ETS circumstance that resulted in the ICBI documents of 1978 and 1982. Being influenced by historical criticism, Licona has now firmly accepted a "scholarly consensus" that has emerged among critically-trained historical-critical scholars that the Gospels are a form of ancient "*bios*."¹¹

Influence of Talbert and Burridge

By way of further background to the reader of this review, Licona affirms much of the predecessors of Greco-Roman historiographical postulation. The stimulus to these ideas may be traced in recent times to Charles H. Talbert, Distinguished Professor of Religion Emeritus, at Baylor University, taught at Baylor since 1996. Prior to this, he taught at Wake-Forest University from 1963 till his transfer to Baylor. Talbert received his bachelor of arts from Howard College (now Samford University), master of divinity from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and doctorate from Vanderbilt University. He was mentored by Leander H. Keck (1928-) at Vanderbilt University. Talbert was also Professor of Religion at Wake Forest University, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina before transferring to Baylor. He served on the editorial boards of *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, *Perspectives in Religious Studies* and the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*. Talbert also served as President of the Catholic Biblical Association from 1999-2000 and delivered the presidential address at its sixty-third annual meeting on "Paul, Judaism, and the Revisionists." Talbert stimulated the view that the Gospels should be viewed as a genre of Greco-Roman *bioi*.

Talbert has written many works, but key to this discussion is his essay titled, "The Concept of Immortals in Mediterranean Society," where in he asserted that the certainty canonical Gospels were influenced by mythology of the era, "It would seem, therefore,

¹¹Bock also accepted this basic genre classification, see Darrell L. Bock, "Precision and Accuracy: Making Distinctions in the Cultural Context," in *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012) 368.

that the early Christians were aware of the Mediterranean concept of the immortals and utilized it in one way or another in their proclamation of Jesus. During the first one hundred and twenty-five years of Christian history this mythology functioned initially as a significant Christological category and then as an apologetic tool."¹² In another work, "the Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity," he purposed to identify the background for the early Christian picture of Jesus as a descending-ascending redeemer. He argued that although such a myth is also found in Gnosticism and in Greco-Roman paganism, it is the Hellenistic-Jewish myth of a many-named descending-ascending redeemer that is closest to the early Christian one.¹³

Perhaps more directly influential on Licona's thought and work, as well as approach, is that of Richard Burridge, a British classical scholar and Anglican priest who popularized the idea that the Gospel genre, in the latter's work *What Are the Gospels? A comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*. Burridge is an Anglican Priest and the Reverend Canon Professor at Dean of King's College London since 1994, and received a personal Chair in Biblical Interpretation in 2008. After obtaining a first-class honors degree from the University of Oxford in classics, and training as a teacher at the University of Nottingham, his first post was as a Classics teacher at Sevenoaks School. He then combined theological training for ordination with a doctorate on Gospel genre (also from the University of Nottingham, 1989), and was ordained to the Anglican priesthood in 1986. After working as a curate in a parish in Bromley, Kent, Professor Burridge spent seven years as Lazenby Chaplain at the University of Exeter, where he also lectured in Theology and Classics. In 2013, Burridge was awarded the Ratzinger Prize for Theology by Pope Francis, in recognition of his work on the Gospels.

¹² Charles H. Talbert, "The Concept of Immortals in Mediterranean Antiquity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94/3 (September 1975) 436.

¹³ Charles H. Talbert, "The Myth of a Descending-Ascending Redeemer in Mediterranean Antiquity," *New Testament Studies* 22/4 (July 1976) 418-440.

**The Premise of *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?*
Acceptance of Historical-Critical Ideologies, Especially Greco-Roman *Bioi* as the Explanation for Gospel Material Differences**

The premise of Licona's newest work, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, is that to understand the kind and nature of historiography (writing of history) that is present in the canonical Gospels one must investigate and be familiar with Greco-Roman biographies of the times in which they were written, for the Gospels are directly linked to these types of ancient literature as a product of their times in which they were written. The publisher summarizes the work's intention by noting,

Anyone who reads the Gospels carefully will notice that there are differences in the manner in which they report the same events. These differences have led many conservative Christians to resort to harmonization efforts that are often quite strained, sometimes to the point of absurdity. Many people have concluded the Gospels are hopelessly contradictory and therefore historically unreliable as accounts of Jesus. The majority of New Testament scholars now hold that most if not all of the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography and that this genre permitted some flexibility in the way in which historical events were narrated. However, few scholars have undertaken a robust discussion of how this plays out in Gospel pericopes (self-contained passages). *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?* provides a fresh approach to the question by examining the works of Plutarch, a Greek essayist who lived in the first and second centuries CE. Michael R. Licona discovers three-dozen pericopes narrated two or more times in Plutarch's *Lives*, identifies differences between the accounts, and analyzes these differences in light of

compositional devices identified by classical scholars as commonly employed by ancient authors. The book then applies the same approach to nineteen pericopes that are narrated in two or more Gospels, demonstrating that the major differences found there likely result from the same compositional devices employed by Plutarch.¹⁴

The key term in the above quote is "flexibility" and "compositional devices" for reading Licona's work makes the word "flexibility" cover a large range of assertions that many would find troubling. Importantly, Licona rejects classical forms of harmonization as "misguided," instead preferring to explain the canonical gospels from the perspective of the historiography of ancient writers, especially Plutarch and his work *Lives*. The publisher continues on the back flap of the book cover,

Showing both the strained harmonizations and the hasty dismissals of the Gospels as reliable accounts to be misguided, Licona invites readers to approach them in light of their biographical genre and in that way to gain a clearer understanding of why they differ.¹⁵

Dismissal of Grammatico-Historical Hermeneutics

This rejection of classical grammatico-historical harmonization is very evident in Licona's work and such rejection is also reinforced in the foreword when Craig Evans, Distinguished Professor of Christian Origins and Dean of the School of Christian Thought Houston Baptist University, and colleague of Licona, starts an immediate negative tone in the Foreword of the book, wards of

¹⁴ https://www.amazon.com/dp/0190264268/ref=rd_r_ext_tmb
introduction by Oxford on website as well as cover of book.

¹⁵ https://www.amazon.com/dp/0190264268/ref=rd_r_ext_tmb
introduction by Oxford on website as well as cover of book.

criticism from "naïve conservatives who rely on simplistic harmonizations and pat answers that really do not do justice to the phenomena."¹⁶ Apparently, evangelical critical scholars like Evans brands anyone who raises concerns regarding Licona's analogy of the Gospels to the phenomena of Greco-Roman biography as somehow lacking in scholarship in daring disagree with Licona's approach, or for that matter, evangelical critical scholarship's growing assessment that the Gospels are patterned after the genre of Greco-Roman *bioi*. Furthermore, he wants the readers of the book to have an "open and teachable mind"¹⁷ even though Evans's mind is clearly closed on the issue. Such pathetic name calling is also done by Licona when he remarks that he was "scolded on the Internet by ultra-conservative Christians" who disagreed with his approach. He also indicates that many evangelical critical scholars "who regard the Gospels as inspired and trustworthy, but are troubled by their apparent discrepancies, should be encouraged by Dr. Licona's careful, informed study."¹⁸ One wonders about Evans statement that appears contradictory that "inspired and trustworthy" Gospels cause some of these scholars to be "troubled by apparent discrepancies."¹⁹ In response, the evidence shows that those who are confident in the Gospels trustworthiness will be vastly more troubled by Licona's approach to resolving alleged discrepancies through the application of the genre of Greco-Roman *bioi* than any "apparent discrepancies" that one may find troubling.

The views of Licona also have a circle of support from other evangelical critical scholars. Licona writes that the following New Testament evangelical critical scholars have assisted him in the development of the book in the "Acknowledgements" section,

I likewise wish to express my thanks to the following New Testament scholars for their part in this work: to

¹⁶ Greg Evans, ""Forword," in Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, x.

¹⁷ Evans, "Foreword," x.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Darrell Bock and Craig Keener for reviewing the entire manuscript except for chapter 5 and the conclusion; to Craig Blomberg and Darrell Bock for reading a paper I presented in 2015 at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, which became the basis for chapter 5, and for providing papers to it, which provided helpful ideas; to Craig Blomberg, Darrell Bock, Lynn Cohick, Gary Habermas, Randy Richards, and Dan Wallace for showing an interest in the thesis of this book while providing critical feedback to ideas they allowed me to run by them.²⁰

Licona also mentions apologist "William Lane Craig . . . who encouraged me to push forward with this research . . . and to Craig Evans, Craig Keener . . . Dan Wallace, all of whom encouraged me to pursue truth no matter where it led when my observations made me uncomfortable."²¹ The latter word "uncomfortable" used by Wallace would imply that even Licona had reservations about his own approach contained in the book as to its impact on Gospel trustworthiness.

Licona's Approach Specified

Licona describes the purpose of his book noting,

This volume will pursue the identification of several techniques employed in the writing of ancient history and biography that can be gleaned from compositional textbooks and inferred from observations of the differences in how Plutarch reported the same events in nine of his *Lives*. We will also observe how the employment of these techniques by the evangelists

²⁰ Ibid., xiii.

²¹ Ibid.

would result in precisely the types of differences we often observe in the Gospels Its aim is rather to investigate *compositional devices* that are often inferred by classical scholars and by some New Testament scholars in order to see if the existence of those devices may be more firmly established and provide insights into many of the differences in the Gospels.²²

He continues, "For our purposes, we only need to recognize that the New Testament Gospels bear a strong affinity to Greco-Roman biography. Accordingly, we should not be surprised when the evangelists employ compositional devices similar to those used by ancient biographers. In fact, we should be surprised if they did not."²³ He continues,

[A]ncient authors took fewer liberties when writing histories than when writing biographies. However, there are plenty of exceptions when even the more careful historians of that era engaged in writing history using the same liberties we observe in biographical writing. A history was meant to illustrate past events whereas a biography was meant to serve as a literary portrait of its main character. Accordingly, if an adopting or bending of details would serve to make a historical point or illuminate the qualities of the main character in a manner that rendered them clearer, the historian and the biographer were free to do so, since their accounts would be 'true enough'" and "Ancient historians and biographers varied in their commitment to historical accuracy."²⁴

²² Ibid., 3 (italics added).

²³ Ibid., 5.

²⁴ Ibid., 6.

Licona imposes this idea upon the Gospels in his debate with Ehrman reflects this idea when he tweeted the following "Tweet this! The Gospels paint literary portraits of Jesus that are 'true enough.' @MichaelLicona."²⁵ What is disturbing is the expression "true enough." This phrase is rather ambiguous and set forth without any real content by Licona. Furthermore, who is to decide what is "true enough" and when or where the Gospels are "true enough." To describe the Gospels as being "true enough" lends to the idea that apparently in places the Gospels are deficient in their information, perhaps falling short of common standard of truth.

Licona chose Plutarch's Lives because this work is alleged to be similar to the Gospels (especially the Synoptics Matthew, Mark and Luke) in that in its several biographies, they frequently cover the same ground, creating a number of parallels or "synoptic" accounts. One wonders about Licona's entirely arbitrary decision to find in Plutarch the Gospels' "standard" for accuracy of the Gospel accounts. After all, hundreds of ancient forms of Greco-Roman *bioi* have been survived to the present day, each one differing in historical accuracy and reportage. In the 1990s Darrell Bock touted the Gospel records as comparable to the Greco-Roman Historical Tradition of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War in his chapter on "The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?"²⁶ Which one of these ancient authors is the standard? How are those standards chosen? Which evangelical critical scholar(s) decide or is such a decision arbitrarily based on the consensus of these evangelical scholars' hubris in deciding the standard for the canonical Gospels. What if some other ancient writer is chosen who has a different historical level of alleged accuracy. Such decisions to compare the Gospels to Greco-Roman *bioi* are subjective and fleeting based on some nebulous form of

²⁵ <http://www.thebestschools.org/special/ehrman-licona-dialogue-reliability-new-testament/licona-major-statement/>

²⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus Under Fire Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*. Eds. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 74-99 (note especially p. 78-79).

consensus. In 1999, Daniel Wallace also has touted Thucydides as a standard for the Gospels, claiming,

Now, regarding ancient historiography: Commentators on Luke or Acts routinely note that Luke patterned his historiographical method after that of Thucydides. Thucydides has been called the greatest historian that ever lived" (Macauley). "Thucydides can be seen, even today, as a historian's historian." He learned from the master, Herodotus, and bettered him in his diligence and accuracy. Demosthenes, the great orator, copied out Thucydides' *History* eight times; Dio Cassius, Philistus, Arrian Procopius; Tacitus, and Sallust all emulated him. His translator offers this praise: . . . We are accustomed to admire among Thucydides' great qualities as historian, his impartiality his trustworthiness, vivid description, sense of contrast, conciseness, epigrammatic sententiousness, reserve, pathos. . . . Historians sometimes criticise his attitude, but they all accept his statements of fact." Thucydides is by no means the typical historian; he reached the pinnacle of his discipline and became a model for historians to follow, though few attained the high mark that he epitomized.²⁷

Licona, Bock and Wallace all seem to think by "consensus" of critical scholarship as well as revealing how arbitrary these standards can change direction. Which all of these evangelical critical scholars that subjective consensus changes as to which ancient writer is the "standard" for the Gospels. All these proponents of Greco-Roman *bioi* as the standard for the Gospels

²⁷ Daniel B. Wallace, "An Apologia for a Broad View of Ipsissima Vox," 51st Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, MA (18 November 1999) 3. For the quote within Wallace declaring Thucydides as the "historian's historian" see Robert E. Frykenberg, *History and Belief: The Foundations of Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 187.

actually do is relegate the Word of God, especially the canonical Gospels, to mere human standards of reportage. The Gospel record promise that "the Spirit of truth" would bring all things to the Apostolic writers' memory hardly finds this comparison adequate (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:4-6). This latter point reflects a greatly changing consensus among this group as to what inspiration and inerrancy mean. The definition and character of these vital doctrines is clearly undergoing radical modification by these evangelical critical scholars who would compare divinely inspired Gospels to mere human standards of historiography.

Another disturbing factor is that Plutarch is not always considered even to be an accurate historian. This is a matter of subjective judgment fraught with subjective analysis as to who would be the "consensus" for historical accuracy to form a basis to compare the Gospels. Who is to decide? Bart Ehrman insightfully noted the following in his debate with Licona that constitutes a devastating reply to advocates of the Gospels being compared to Plutarch or, for that matter, any form of Greco-Roman *bioi*:

Even if Matthew's account of Jesus were as good as Plutarch's of Romulus—that wouldn't make it reliable.—@BartEhrman

I should point out that if even if Matthew's account of Jesus were as good as Plutarch's account of Romulus, that would definitely not make it very reliable! Many of Plutarch's *Lives* are notoriously unreliable, historically. It's kind of like saying that I must have been a good tennis player because I was at least as good as everyone else in my high school. But what if no one in my high school was any good in tennis? We can't say that Matthew must be reliable because he is at least as good as skilled Plutarch — which by the way, he is not, as

any classicist will tell you — unless we know how reliable Plutarch is.²⁸

Ehrman continues to highlight the difficulty of any comparison of the Gospels to standards of Greco-Roman *bioi*,

But does that mean that we can then conclude that these books [the Gospels] *are* accurate? That seems to be Mike’s position — that if the Gospels are as accurate as Plutarch or Suetonius, then they can be seen as accurate. I think a lot of readers will think that this is somewhat skirting the real issue and changing the terms of our debate. Most readers, when they want to know if the Gospel accounts “tell it like it was” — that is, that the Gospels narrate events that actually happened in the way that they are described — they are not asking whether the Gospels are “as good as” some other books. They simply want to know: Did this event happen? And did it happen in the way the Gospels say it did? They do *not* want to know if Matthew’s account of Jesus is about as good as Plutarch’s account of Romulus. Most people don’t know that Plutarch *wrote* a *Life of Romulus*. Why would they care if Matthew’s Gospel is as good as a book they’ve never heard of? They want to know whether Matthew’s account accurately describes what happened in Jesus’s life.²⁹

Once a comparison is made of the Gospels to any ancient Greco-Roman writer, that standard is immediately subject to marked speculation as to his or her reliability as well as the legitimacy of any comparison.

²⁸ <http://www.thebestschools.org/special/ehrman-licona-dialogue-reliability-new-testament/ehrman-detailed-response/>

²⁹ <http://www.thebestschools.org/special/ehrman-licona-dialogue-reliability-new-testament/ehrman-detailed-response/>

Licona's Operating Premise: A Syllogism

Since Licona anchors his hermeneutical assumptions for interpretation and understanding of the text of the Gospels ("differences in the manner in which they port the same events") in Greco-Roman biography, especially Plutarch's *Lives*.³⁰ A syllogism for his thinking may be presented as follows:

Premise One: Ancient biography [e.g. Plutarch] is a mixture of truth, fact but also legend, creative [made-up] embellishment, historical accuracy and inaccuracy, imprecision, confusion etc. etc.

Premise Two: The Gospels are ancient biography [on the level of Plutarch's *Lives*]

Licona chose Plutarch's *Lives* because this work is assumed to be similar to the Gospels (especially the Synoptics Matthew, Mark and Luke) in that in its several biographies, they frequently cover the same ground, creating a number of parallels or "synoptic" accounts.

Conclusion: The canonical Gospels [e.g. like Plutarch] is a mixture of truth, legend, creative [made-up] embellishment, historical accuracy and inaccuracy, imprecision, and confusion, etc.

A couple of preliminary remarks here are important. Licona cannot claim inductive logic for his premise but he has *a priori* assumed that the Gospels are to be interpreted in the grid of Greco-Roman *bioi* and then the data derived in the Gospels comes from this already assumed premise. In other words, he sees with "Greco-Roman colored" glasses even prior to his study. While he presents his interpretation of the data in the Gospel, his *a priori* assumption

³⁰ Ibid., 6-8.

drives him to see in the Gospels similarities to Greco-Roman *bioi*. He dismisses traditional harmonization of his selected passages in the Gospels as non-relevant.³¹ Even more troubling in his comparison of the canonical Gospels is his admission that "liberties" were taken by ancient authors,

Generally speaking

Second, the question of whether the Gospels are truly an instance of the genre of Greco-Roman biography is highly questionable. In spite of Licona's speculative approach, as will be seen, data can be demonstrated that would cast grave suspicion on this opening premise. His major support for this assumption is scholarly assumption. Willard Swartley, in his *Israel's Scripture Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels*, presents an excellent case for the Gospels as anchored to "common structures and themes rooted in the Israel's stories about itself. Common to the synoptic stories are traditions about Israel's past that defined it throughout the centuries: Exodus and Sinai, Way/Conquest, Temple, and Kingship."³² Strategically, Licona's fatal flaw is he has anchored his hermeneutical approach to the wrong pattern. Instead of Greco-Roman *bioi* the Gospels, as will be seen in this review, stem from the theme of promise (prophecy in the OT) and fulfillment in Jesus in the New Testament.

Licona's Consensus Thinking is Subjective and Fleeting

Another troubling aspect to Licona's thinking in both *The Resurrection* and *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?* is his background philosophical approach for accepting the concept of Greco-Roman *bioi* in the Gospels. His acceptance of this thinking regarding the Gospels as *bioi* revolves around "consensus." "Today,

³¹ For instance, many of these data points in Licona may be resolved without any assumption of Greco-Roman Bio

³² Willard M. Swartley, *Israel's Scripture Traditions and the Synoptic Gospels Story Shaping Story* (Peabody, MA: Hendriksen, 1994). Quote from back cover of the book.

a growing majority of scholars regard the Gospels as Greco-Roman biography."³³ In his previous work, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (2010) he has a predominance of a similar thinking track that involves "The Role of a Consensus."³⁴ Although he appears aware of the danger of "consensus" noting that "a consensus can be reached due to shared biases, convictions, objectives and a lack of knowledge" and "while a scholarly consensus can have the positive impact of keeping creativity from going off the deep end, a fear of losing respect from a large segment of the academic community can be a hindrance to breakthroughs in knowledge,"³⁵ his own acceptance of Greco-Roman *bioi* appears largely driven by his own acceptance of the consensus of current scholarship rather than any objective evidence that the Gospels present the characteristics of *bioi*. He argues, "the consensus of scholarship has shifted significantly from the opinion held by the Jesus Seminar; This shift was initiated by Charles Talbert's work followed by the more comprehensive and influential work by Richard Burridge."³⁶ Consensus thinking is even in his mind about Jesus's miracle working:

If the nearly universal consensus of scholars is correct that Jesus's earliest followers remembered him as a miracle-worker and exorcist, he very likely performed acts that led to these memories. Of course, that is not to say we can know those acts were divine miracles and exorcisms. Nor is it to say the events occurred precisely as described in the Gospels. It is to say that there are probably historical events that lay behind many of the stories of miracles and exorcisms we read in the Gospels. Even many of those holding that some of the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Licona, *The Resurrection*, 64.

³⁵ Licona, *The Resurrection*, 54.

³⁶ Ibid., 202.

stories have been substantially revised and embellished maintain that historical kernels lay behind them."³⁷

Consensus is in his mind regarding his own synoptic hypothesis that undergirds many of his conclusions: "a majority of scholars hold the Two-Document Hypothesis" Most hold the *Two-Source Hypothesis*, or Two-Document Hypothesis, which states that Matthew and Luke used Mark as their primary source and supplemented Mark with at least one other source . . . I assume Markan priority in this study and that Matthew and Luke often use Mark as their source I often use Two-Source terminology."³⁸

Why is "consensus" so disturbing? In the history of theological scholarship, the "consensus," especially among historical, critical scholarship has been vastly in error for millennia. Often the majority consensus is overturned. Many times the consensus is swept away by another theological "consensus" that usurps its place. What happens when this consensus is replaced by another?

Frankly, the Two-Source Hypothesis is fraught with difficulties that Licona apparently ignores or is unaware of. No one in early church history ever stated that Mark occurred first; it was the most neglected Gospel among church fathers; its alleged "Q" document has never existed except in hypothetical postulation to save the hypothesis from rejection.³⁹ Strong evidence exists to show that modern synoptic theories arose from a low- or no-view of inspiration of the Gospels.⁴⁰ A significantly large portion of Licona's assertions regarding the comparisons of the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke rest precariously on a tenuous

³⁷ Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 118.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 113, 118.

³⁹ For further information, see F. David Farnell, "The Synoptic Gospels in the Ancient Church: A Testimony to the Priority of Matthew's Gospel," *MJS* Spring 1999 10/1 (Spring 1999) 53-86.

⁴⁰ For further information, see F. David Farnell "How Views of Inspiration Have Impacted Synoptic Problem Discussions 13/1 (Spring 2002) 33-64.

proposal. As will be seen, if that proposal has no substance, then neither does Licona's attempts at linking the Synoptic Gospels to Greco-Roman *bioi* have substance. If this majority rule in his mind is wrong, especially in terms of Greco-Roman *bioi* and the Two-Source hypothesis that stimulates his observations, then his entire work is cast into grave doubt. Moreover, one wonders if his conclusions are centered in his thinking habit of current "consensus" rather than in any objective analysis of data. A significance weakness that correlates with this is that he too readily dismisses other alternative theories as the motivation for Gospel composition, while marching on to see in the Gospels what he has already determined to be his pre-arranged conclusions.

According to Licona, the Gospels share the following characteristics with Greco-Roman *bioi*. He asserts that "The Gospels contain many of the characteristics of Greco-Roman biography."⁴¹ He cites the following examples:

1. They are written in continuous prose narrative.
2. Stories, logia, anecdotes, and speeches are combined to form a narrative.
3. The life of the main character is not always covered in chronological sequence.
4. Attention is focused on a main character rather than on an era, event, or government as in a history.
5. Little to no attention is provided for psychological analyses of the main character.
6. We learn something of the main character's ancestry and then move rapidly along to the inauguration of his public life.
7. Ancient biographies were of the same general length, with shorter works being under 10,000 words, medium length between 10,000 and 25,000 words, and longer length over 25,000 words. Because a scroll would normally hold a maximum of 25,000

⁴¹ Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 3.

- words, most biographies fell in the medium length category so they could be read in a single sitting.
8. 25 to 33 percent of the verbs are “dominated by the subject, while another 15 to 30 percent occur in sayings, speeches or quotations from the person.”
 9. Lives of philosophers and teachers are usually “arranged topically around collections of material to display their ideas and teachings.”
 10. The main subject’s character is illuminated through his words and deeds as a model for readers either to emulate or to avoid.⁴²

Several responses can be made to these assertions. First, these characteristics are so broad as to be meaningless or at least lacking in enough data to make any tight connection of the Gospels to Greco-Roman *bioi*. They are so general that a large variety of historiography from various periods of time could be used to make an alleged link to Greco-Roman historiography. Second, these characteristics describe cited, especially 1-6, 8-10 fully describe the pattern of the Old Testament writings. For example, Genesis-Deuteronomy, Judges, Joshua, Judges, Ruth 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, Daniel, Ruth, etc. all could be cited to contain "continuous prose narrative" (Genesis 1-11 as it covers the times from creation to Abraham; Exodus as it covers the time of Israel's foundation as a nation to its entrance into the Promised Land; Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy as they cover narrative of Israel's progression and failure), "stories, logia, anecdotes, speeches to form a narrative (Genesis 12-50 as it covers testimony to the Patriarchs stories, logia, anecdotes [Genesis 12, 15, 22; Joseph's descent and experience in Egypt and his conversations and adventures [Gen. 37-45]); Moses experience in Egypt [Ex. 1-2] at the burning Bush [Ex. 3], his conversation with God [Ex. 3-Deuteronomy]. Daniel would be a book whose life is "not always covered in chronological sequence [Daniel 1-6 vs. 7-12]; Ecclesiastes is focused on a main character,

⁴² Ibid., 3-4.

i.e. The Preacher, rather than on an era, event or government as in a history. Ezra and Malachi pays "little attention . . . "for psychological analysis of the main character" to name only a few in the OT. The life of Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, Solomon, Sampson, Gideon etc. "all exhibit "something of the main character's ancestry and then move rapidly to the inauguration of his public life."

Furthermore, similar statistics could be generated in the characteristics of the Old Testament as to percentage of "verbs" "dominated by the subject, while another similar percentage occurring in "sayings, speeches or quotations from another person" (Genesis-Deuteronomy with main characters; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, etc. all fit these characteristics. Lives of teachers or philosophers "arranged topically around collections of material to display their ideas and teachings" is readily seen in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Job, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Isaiah, Ezekiel.

Most of the books in the Old Testament "illuminate" the main subject's character, words, and deeds as a model for readers to emulate (Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Daniel) as well as to avoid, with the Old Testament providing ample examples in their history books of the tragedy of main characters that failed to live a life of obedience and faith (1 Samuel has Saul; 1-2 Kings as well as 1-2 Chronicles with, for example, Manasseh and many other lives of failed Kings of both the Southern and Northern Kingdom. Furthermore, these characteristics are more on the nature of any historical or moral writing that draws lessons from the characters covered or the nature or purpose in the writing rather than being a unique characteristic especially of Greco-Roman biography.

As to the length limitations of Greco-Roman biography, the physical nature of the materials used to upon limited all forms of writing of that day rather than being special to Greco-Roman biography. Luke-Acts naturally would be divided because scrolls became unwieldy if too large simply because of the writing materials rather than uniqueness of the subject of the writing.

A second reason that Licona cites is that "no clear examples of biographies of Jewish sages" existed around the time of Jesus. He asserts that "there are no Rabbinic parallels to the Gospels."⁴³ One may respond simply that the abundance of connection of the Gospels to the examples in the Old Testament materials cited render the necessity of rabbinic parallels mute. Furthermore, Second Temple Judaism in its characteristics with the oral law that violated the Old Testament teachings ("teachings of the elders"—see Matt. 15:9) render any rabbinical teaching hardly an example that the New Testament should emulate. In the thinking of the Gospels, clearly Jesus is viewed as the fulfillment of the Messianic promises of the Old Testament. Their model would have been the Old Testament, therefore, rather than the corrupt state of rabbinics in terms of promise (Old Testament) and fulfillment (Messiah Jesus in the Gospels).

This promise and fulfillment theme dominates the New Testament Gospels. Licona readily admits that (1) Plutarch was wealthy: "born into a wealthy family in Chaeronea" and (2) because of that wealth was provided with the opportunity to study rhetoric and then "became a philosopher of the Academy founded by Plato."⁴⁴ One would hardly be able to speak of the writers of the Gospels in such a manner, nor were such educational opportunities available to the Jewish writers of Matthew, Mark and John.

The pattern of the many Old Testament writings would have been readily familiar in Acts when Peter and John appeared on trial before the Sanhedrin to answer for the healing of the lame man. In Acts 4:13, "Now as they observed the ^aconfidence of ^bPeter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and *began* to recognize them as having been with Jesus." Here the terms "uneducated" (ἀγράμματοί) and "untrained" (ἰδιῶται) would hardly raise any confidence in ideas that Galilean fishermen would have been skilled in the Greek art of literature or be able to compose the Gospels (i.e. John) in a similar form to

⁴³ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 15.

Hellenistic works of the time period. The observation of "uneducated" would be suggestive of men who had little formal training in Jewish methods, let alone Greek literary style, for it strongly implies that the impression Peter and John on the judging body was that their speech as well as appearance lacked any formal education familiar to this elite group, i.e. Peter and John were rather from common Jewish class. Here is a rather insulting observation that the original Apostles (i.e., John) were hardly from the upper class of Jewish society who composed the Gospels! While hardly unintelligent as individuals, a strong implication exists that these Jewish followers of Jesus demonstrated marked dissimilarity with the culture of the upper crust, for they had been blue collar hard laborers most of their life (e.g. Matt 4:18-22; Luke 5:10) most likely with little time to enjoy Jewish, let alone, Greek literary culture. Jesus chose men to write the Gospels who were clearly without wealth, standing or means to appreciate the wider literary field or more refined literary nuances of Greco-Roman *bioi* (1 Cor. 1:18-31—"not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God." Moreover, even with the more literary accounts of Luke-Acts admittedly, the more educated Luke's writing were firmly anchored to the Old Testament prophetic revelation and eyewitness accounts of Jews whose culture had little standing with the Roman world as a whole.⁴⁵

Furthermore, because "Greco-Roman was a broad and flexible genre" with its admitted "hybrid" form, makes any assertions of similarity or particular uniqueness quite precarious. In essence, the most natural motivation and pattern for the Gospels was not Greco-Roman *bioi* but the pattern found in the Old Testament

⁴⁵ This thought will be developed further in a forthcoming book by this author titled, *Battle for the Gospels*.

writings. Licona's assertion that "[f]or our purposes, we only need to recognize that the New Testament Gospels bear a strong affinity to Greco-Roman biography" is at the very least a hasty generalization as well as fraught with difficulties. Similarity does not prove origin.

A graph⁴⁶ representing the connection of the Gospels to the Old Testament to the Gospels may be suggested:

MAJOR ELEMENTS COMMON TO OT/NT WRITING PATTERN CORRESPONDENCE	OLD TESTAMENT PATTERN FROM HISTORY, PROPHECY, and TYPOLOGY	NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN OF FULFILLMENT FROM OT HISTORY, PROPHECY, AND TYPOLOGY
Recording of Deeds and Words of God— Pattern of Jewish Memorization	Deuteronomy 6:4-6--SHEMA "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. Great Discourses of Moses (Pentateuch, e.g. Exod 33:12-23; 35:1-20)	Luke 1:1-4-careful reporting of Jesus's Deeds and Words as the Son of God; Mark 1:1—"beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God" Matthew/Luke centers on Great Discourses of Jesus (e.g. 5-7 Sermon on the Mount) John centers on Great teachings of Jesus (e.g. John

⁴⁶ Once again, this graph will be further developed further in a forthcoming book by this author titled, *Battle for the Gospels*.

		17—Jesus High Priestly Prayer)
Emphasis on Eyewitness Testimony to confirm matters	Deuteronomy 17:6-7; 19:15-20	Prologue of John 1:1-18; 1 John 1:1-3; Luke 1:1-4—"many who were eyewitnesses and servants of Word"; Acts 1:3—"many infallible proofs" John 12:41 cf. Isa 6—Isaiah saw His Glory
Emphasis on Selective, not Exhaustive, History	Number 15-19—38 ½ years of history summarized (Num. 20:1—"Then" restarts historical details; Between Ezra 6:22 and Neh. 7:1 is the period of Esther (493-474 BC); 1-2 Samuel; 1-2 Kings; 1-2; Chronicles	John 21:25—"Many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which were written; Jesus infancy covered (Matt. 1-3; Luke 1-3); Mark starts out with Jesus's ministry as adult, John details start with John the Baptist Ministry
Emphasis on Great Men of Faith KEY PEOPLE IN SALVATION HISTORY	Abraham in Gen. 12-50 (and his family) progeny); Exodus-Moses; Ruth; Esther; 1-2	Jesus as Son of God—John 1:1-3 Jesus as Davidic King and Messiah (Luke 1:32; 18:38)

	Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther	who fulfills OT promise of a Davidic Heir (Acts 2:29-36)
Emphasis on Predictive Prophecy	Multitude of Predictions of Future King of Israel and His Kingdom; Deut. 19: Isaiah 53	Jesus seen as Fulfilment of OT prophecies; Matthew—"In other that the words of Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled" Acts 6:
Emphasis on Words of Old Testament Saints formed pattern for Words of Jesus in New Testament	Abraham, Moses Samuel, David, Solomon, Ezra, Nehemiah, Major and Minor Prophets	Teaching and Preaching of Jesus (Sermon on Mount, Sending out of the Twelve and 70;
Covenants of Old and New Testament	Mosaic Covenant as Preparation for New (Jer. 31:31-33; Ezek. 36:25-27)	Fulfilment of New Covenant Predictions in Jesus (Luke 22:20);
Emphasis One and Importance of OT Genealogy	Old Testament Emphasis Genealogy from Adam (Gen. 11:27) through Abraham to David () and his scions (Ezra)	Emphasis on Jesus's Genealogy as Promised King of Israel (Matt. 1; Luke 3)

Another Fatal Flaw of the Greco-Roman *Bioi* Comparison

Licona, in analyzing Plutarch, states that the following "compositional devices" are seen in his writings. The following quote is lengthy but necessary to cite to demonstrate the weakness of Licona's position:

[C]lassical scholars have recognized a number of compositional devices that are "practically universal in ancient historiography." Although not always identified by the same terms, the following are some of the compositional devices we will observe in Plutarch's Lives, at least the nine Lives we will be considering.

1. *Transferral*: When an author knowingly attributes words or deeds to a person that actually belonged to another person, the author has transferred the words or deeds.
 2. *Displacement*: When an author knowingly uproots an event from its original context and transplants it in another, the author has displaced the event. Displacement has some similarities with telescoping, which is the presentation of an event as having occurred either earlier or more recently than it actually occurred. Plutarch displaces events and even occasionally informs us he has done so. In *Cat. Min.* 25.5, having told the story of Hortensius's request of Cato that he be allowed to marry Cato's wife, Marcia, Plutarch adds, "All this happened later, but as I had mentioned the women of Cato's family it seemed sensible to include it here."
 3. *Conflation*: When an author combines elements from two or more events or people and narrates them as one, the author has conflated them. Accordingly, some displacement and/or transferral will always occur in the conflation of stories.
 4. *Compression*: When an author knowingly portrays events over a shorter period of time than the actual time it took for those events to occur, the author has compressed the story.
- Spotlighting: When an author focuses attention on a person so that the person's involvement in a scene is clearly described, whereas mention of others who were likewise

involved is neglected, the author has shined his literary spotlight on that person. Think of a theatrical performance. During an act in which several are simultaneously on the stage, the lights go out and a spotlight shines on a particular actor. Others are present but are unseen. In literary spotlighting, the author only mentions one of the people present but knows of the others.

5. *Simplification*: When an author adapts material by omitting or altering details that may complicate the overall narrative, the author has simplified the story.
6. *Expansion of Narrative Details*: A well-written biography would inform, teach, and be beautifully composed. If minor details were unknown, they could be invented to improve the narrative while maintaining historical verisimilitude. In many instances, the added details reflect plausible circumstances. This has been called “creative reconstruction” and “free composition.”
7. *Paraphrasing*: Plutarch often paraphrased using many of the techniques described in the compositional textbooks. I had initially considered creating a synopsis of Plutarch’s parallel pericopes that we will be examining in the next chapter, which would be arranged in a manner similar to Kurt Aland’s *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*. However, I decided against including a synopsis because Plutarch paraphrases so often; plus we do not observe in his *Lives* anything close to the near “copy and paste” method that is very often employed by Matthew and Luke.⁴⁷

Based on this comparison, Licona then proceeds to describe the following phenomena to the Gospel writers because they are found in Plutarch: “New Testament Gospels bear a strong affinity to Greco-Roman biography . . . we should not be surprised when the evangelist employ compositional devices similar to those used by

⁴⁷ Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 19-20.

ancient biographers"⁴⁸ However, as always the proverb of the DEVIL IN THE DETAILS of compositional devices, is very evident.

Because of this comparison to Plutarch and *Bioi* as a whole, Licona characterizes the Gospels as "true enough." In his debate with Ehrman online, he tweeted,

Tweet this!

The Gospels paint literary portraits of Jesus that are "true enough." @MichaelLicona⁴⁹

One wonders how such statements square with John 14:26; 16:13 or 1 John 4:4-6 that the New Testament writers would be led to remember "all things" in Jesus's ministry, as well as the Holy Spirit teaching them "all things" as well as "reminding" them of "everything" Jesus taught. The promise of Spirit-energized minds does not match any description of the Gospels being on a level of "true enough."

The same may be said when Licona characterizes Plutarch or Greco-Roman *bioi* as a whole in doing the following:

The historical accuracy of ancient literature may be viewed in a manner similar to what we observe in movie theaters today. Some movies claim at the beginning to be "based on true events" while others claim to be "inspired by true events." The latter will involve more dramatic license than the former. Even in the former, however, we expect reenacted conversations to be redacted to varying degrees for clarity, dramatic impact, and artistic improvement.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁹ <http://www.thebestschools.org/special/ehrman-licona-dialogue-reliability-new-testament/michael-licona-interview/>

⁵⁰ Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 6.

Licona, using Plutarch's *Lives* as the basis of his comparison of Gospel phenomena, asserts that "Plutarch willing to sacrifice precise historical truth in order to provide greater illumination of his main character's moral qualities."⁵¹ At another place, Licona describes Plutarch as having "made factual errors on occasion" and "less than perfect understanding of the Roman political system and faulty memory. While we should not make light of the errors, the importance of their presence should not be exaggerated."⁵² Again, Plutarch "occasionally bends the facts to support the portrait he is painting—a portrait that is largely true though not always entirely so in the details. He does not bend to mislead his readers but rather to emphasize an important deeper truth about his main character that readers can now grasp more fully and emulate." Again, "he had no commitment to present the facts with photographic accuracy or legal precision; nor would his intended readers have expected that of him or of any biographer."⁵³ Again, Plutarch's commitment to the truth in his *Lives* is genuine but qualified.⁵⁴ "Plutarch takes liberties with his sources that would make us uncomfortable in modern biography, adding details or scenes in order to construct what must have happened, or to emphasize a quality that may not have been as matured in the main character as he portrays, or to improve the story for the delight of his readers. This mixture of history and conjecture presents a challenge for historians who desire to get behind such 'improvements' to the *real* person or event."⁵⁵ He then concurs with other classicists on Plutarch when he notes,

There are limits to the extent Plutarch would go to accomplish his biographical objective. Conjecture is present, but it is "never very extensive." While Plutarch felt free to invent an occasional scene, he did not invent entire episodes. He does not engage in lying by

⁵¹ Ibid., 16.

⁵² Ibid., 17.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 18.

attributing to the subject of his Life behavior that would have been foreign to that person. He does not engage in deliberate falsehood. When compared to other biographers of his day, Plutarch is less concerned than some to preserve precise historical truth and more concerned than others. Pelling observes, 'On the whole Plutarch seems to belong with the more scrupulous group; and we can certainly see him operating in a similar way to the great historians who survive.'

In sum, ancient biographers, including Plutarch, did not always write as we would today because their objectives of writing biography differed somewhat from the objectives of modern biography. They would sacrifice a degree of precise historical truth in order to accomplish their objectives. Accordingly, modern readers must be prepared to recalibrate their expectations when reading ancient biography and history. There are similarities, but there are also important differences.⁵⁶

In reply to Licona's description of Plutarch's characteristics as a biographer, it is NON-SEQUITUR to say if Plutarch did it, or Greco-Roman biographers as a whole, then evangelists would have employed such tactics. Plutarch could not claim inspiration. Of course this is putting a hedge around NT Gospels as many evangelical, critical scholars would reply. The patent truth is that such characteristics would relegate the Gospels to a very imperfect faulty record of Jesus's life and sayings, unless of course, Licona is implying this already to the Gospel record.

But Licona does not stop with these characteristics, for he clearly states regarding these alleged "compositional devices" that, "literary conventions in place for reporting speeches that were almost universally adopted by those writing history and biography. For the most part, the author did not provide a transcript of a speech

⁵⁶ Ibid.

but rather the gist of what was spoken on the occasion. If the content was unknown . . . license to creatively reconstruct what must have been said given the occasion and the person. Historians were expected to depict the spirit of the actual message or, at the very minimum, narrate a speech that was likely to have occurred on such an occasion with historical verisimilitude."⁵⁷ "Compositional devices that are practically universal in ancient historiography."

He relates the following regarding his purpose:

Various biographers of the era in which Plutarch and the evangelists wrote varied in their commitment to accuracy. The sole objective of this research is to identify various compositional devices employed by Plutarch that resulted in differences in the periscopes he reported in two or more Lives and to examine the possibility that the evangelists employed similar devices. Accordingly, I am making no suggestion that the evangelists were more or less accurate than Plutarch.⁵⁸

A Summary of Plutarch's Historiography Characteristics in *Lives*

A "grocery list" of Plutarch's characteristics as a writer also reveal Licona's low view of the canonical Gospels as he describes Plutarch's writings, especially as listed in the summary sections of the periscopes he analyzed in Plutarch. The following are merely a small part of Licona's perception of the historiography of Plutarch and/or Greco-Roman *bioi* (the numbering reflected is the reviewer's and not Licona's) if Plutarch, or any Greco-Roman biographer of choice, is indeed the "standard" for the Gospels:

⁵⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 25.

1. "displaced events"; "faulty memory"; "the gist" "bends the facts to support the portrait he is painting—a portrait that is largely true though not always entirely o in the details."⁵⁹
2. "transfer action and/or counsel from one person to the other"⁶⁰
3. "narrative chronologies . . . that are in conflict"⁶¹
4. "Plutarch has numerical errors on two occasions"⁶²
5. "Plutarch has displaced events, conflated them, transferred what one person said to another, and shined his literary spotlight on occasion"⁶³
6. "redacted a statement in Caesar in a manner that is less favorable to its main character"⁶⁴
7. "Plutarch inverts the order of events, displaces them, and transplants them in Pompey"⁶⁵
8. "Plutarch transfers or inflects"⁶⁶
9. "Numerical differences are present"; "How many did Caesar conquer?"⁶⁷
10. "[E]rrs in the spelling of a name"⁶⁸
11. "[O]mitting details in order to cast a different and slightly distorted picture pertaining to why Caesar fought Ptolemy"⁶⁹
12. "[C]hanges a statement to a question (or vice versa)"⁷⁰
13. "Plutarch portrays motivations differently and in a manner that favors the main character of a Life"⁷¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., 17, 20, 44, 67.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 50.

⁶¹ Ibid., 51.

⁶² Ibid., 57.

⁶³ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 72-73.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 75.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 77.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 83.

⁷¹ Ibid., 83.

14. "[D]isplaces an element of one event from its original context, whether known or unknown, and transplants it in another context to which it is conflicted"⁷²
15. "[A]ncient historians and biographers may craft peripheral details in a narrative and connect events synthetically in order for to produce a narrative that flows smoothly. This may especially be present when numerous details were unknown."⁷³ [i.e., concocted events]
16. "Plutarch may have transferred the action of one character to another in order to avoid confusion in Caesar"⁷⁴
17. "[R]edacts elements of a story in order to support the portrait he is painting"⁷⁵
18. "[N]umerical differences exist in Cicero, Brutus, and Antony" [two hundred vs. three hundred, so would be error.]⁷⁶
19. "[P]rovides differing reports" [that conflict with other reporting he has done].⁷⁷
20. "transferral" one way reported in conflict with another way; "Brutus ordered Hortensius to execute Gaius, whereas in Ant. 22.4, Brutus does the deed"⁷⁸
21. "In light of instructions for good literature writing by Lucian and Quintilian, we determined that historians were permitted to craft peripheral details and connect events synthetically in order to produce a narrative that flows smoothly. We deduced that this might have been practiced especially when numerous details were unknown, and we suspect that this may be the reason behind many of the differences that

⁷² Ibid., 91.

⁷³ Ibid., 91.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 104.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 104.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 108.

appear when Plutarch reports the same pericope in multiple *Lives*."⁷⁹

22. "On occasion, Plutarch errs. Only rarely do his accounts disagree on so many details that we are left puzzled and entirely unaware of what he was doing (e.g., pericope #23)."⁸⁰
23. "The differences we observe almost always could have resulted from Plutarch's use of the compositional devices that have been noted by classical scholars for some time and who have contended that these were standard conventions for writing history and biography of that day and were practiced by virtually all. Moreover, these differences appear to occur only in the peripheral details. And we must consider the possibility that, in many instances, the differences result from Plutarch's recalling the story from memory rather than checking his source(s) and even what he had written earlier in another *Life*.

With these observations in mind, we will now turn our attention to the Gospels in the New Testament and assess a number of pericopes that appear in two or more of them."⁸¹

24. We will look for differences in how they report the same story and assess whether it seems likely that the authors were using compositional devices similar to those employed by Plutarch."⁸²

Application of "Compositional Devices" found in Plutarch *Lives* to the Data of the Gospels

After identifying the canonical Gospels as having a similar historiography to Plutarch's *Lives* and identifying these

⁷⁹ Ibid., 90.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 110.

⁸¹ Ibid., 110-11.

⁸² Ibid., 111.

"compositional devices" that he has discovered in this work, Licona then imposes this framework upon "parallel periscopes in the Canonical Gospels."⁸³ He analyzes what he alleges are "nineteen periscopes that appear on two or more occasions throughout the canonical Gospels" that, to his perspective, display "the same type of compositional devices described in the compositional textbooks and from the periscopes we [e.g., Licona] examined in Plutarch's *Lives*." Unsurprisingly, Licona marked bias for his endeavor "finds" the same type of compositional devices in the Gospels that he has presumed were there. His analysis offers little in any objective basis for his conclusions, for he assumes what he is so confident in finding, i.e., he begs the question and assumes that these compositional devices are really there without objective analysis as to whether the Gospel writers actually did use these assumed devices.

One of the primary bases for his discovery of these compositional devices is his operation from the perspective of the Two-Source hypothesis. If, however, as has been discussed, the Two-Source hypothesis is dubious, then much of the substance of Licona's alleged similarities becomes highly suspect.

None of these nineteen examples that Licona cites require or need to be explained at all by any of these alleged compositional devices that he has discovered in Plutarch. The distinct impression given in his book is that Licona is so overzealous to prove his thesis of the similarities of the phenomena of the canonical Gospels to Greco-Roman *bioi* like that found in Plutarch's *Lives* that he frankly discounts any other possible explanation. All of them are well capable of being explained by simple, as well as traditional views, of harmonization that Licona summarily dismisses.

Due to length limitation, only a few strategic examples need be cited that overturn Licona's case of "discovering" such Greco-Roman *bioi* devices. Regarding the Gospel of John, however, based in his Synoptic approach of the Two-Source hypothesis, Licona is dismissive of the historical substance of the Gospel of John as a

⁸³ Ibid., 112-184.

whole. He asserts that "John often chose to sacrifice accuracy on the ground level of precise reporting, preferring to provide his readers with an accurate, higher-level view of the person and mission Jesus."⁸⁴ This is immediately in conflict with the orthodox position on John from the early nascent church that John as an eyewitness to Jesus gave accurate historical reportage of the events, nor would the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy statement endorse such a view when it asserted in Article XVIII, "We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teachings or rejecting its claims to authorship." Furthermore, history is wedded to theology (Rom. 5:12-14). If the history is suspect, then any theological conclusions, no matter how "higher level," the view is, such "theology" cannot be true in any acceptable biblical sense.

A natural question to Licona's reasoning must be that if his assertion is true, then how does sacrificing accuracy on precise reporting produce accurate higher level view of person? What is interesting is that Licona places a footnote reference for this last statement to Richard Burridge's discussion of the Gospel of John. Burridge characterized John's Gospel with the terms "The High-Flying Eagle" reflecting the idea of "divine symbol" whereby John gives deeper spiritual "truth" or "John brings in the vertical—Jesus is above and beyond all that."⁸⁵ It was Burridge, the popularizer of this "Greco-Roman" imposition on the Gospels, as well a British classicist in his undergraduate at Oxford who treated the Gospels more like the substance of mythological stories than that of historical documents. He did so because he too read the Gospels through the eyes of a classical perspective from the influence of his undergraduate education. Burridge said this about John 18:38 as he labeled the substance John's "high-flying" material as "myth,"

Even today, with all our technology of cameras and recorders and verbatim transcripts, there is still debate among

⁸⁴ Ibid., 115.

⁸⁵ Richard A. Burridge, "The High-Flying Eagle—John's Jesus," in *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 133-164.

academics about the meaning of historical truth, and differences in media between docu-drama and documentary, fiction and faction. We must not transfer these modern concepts to the ancient texts without considering their understandings of truth and myth, lies and fiction. To modern minds, "myth" means something untrue, a "fairy-story"; in the ancient world, myth was the medium whereby profound truth, more true than mere facts could ever be, was communicated. Unfortunately, the debate between so-called "conservatives" and "liberals" about authenticity is often conducted in twentieth century terms. As one student asked me, "Why does John keep fabricating material about Jesus despite his expressed concern for the "'truth'?" However, the negative connotation of fabrication is modern."⁸⁶Licona operates from this basis of Burridge, for he alleges that John may well have made up or "created" the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate in John,

The discussions between Jesus and Pilate are described in much greater detail in John (18:33–38; 19:8–11) than in the Synoptics. It could be suggested that much of the dialogue between Pilate and Jesus is a Johannine creation, since the Synoptic narratives do not suggest that anyone else was present to overhear the exchanges, much less any of Jesus's disciples. Of course, this suggestion can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed.⁸⁷

One is left wondering whether the whole substance in John's record is imaginative creation since if one possibility is allowed, why not the whole?

This thinking then goes over into his discussion of Luke, when Licona comments,

⁸⁶ Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?*, 169.

⁸⁷ Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 116.

[I]t is worth observing what Luke 23:3–4 says: “Pilate asked Jesus, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ And Jesus answered, ‘Yes.’ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, ‘I find no cause for guilt in this man.’” Luke’s report seems implausible if read independently of John. Would the Roman governor respond in such a manner after Jesus had just affirmed himself as a king?¹⁷ Yet Pilate’s response to Jesus’s claim to be a king is entirely plausible if a dialogue had occurred between the two that was at least somewhat similar to what we read in John. Since John was probably written after Luke and is largely independent of Luke, both evangelists must have known a tradition such as we read in John. Whether John received detailed information from someone who had been present at Jesus’s dialogue with Pilate or whether he knew a very basic gist of what was said and creatively reconstructed the dialogue with literary artistry is impossible to know.⁸⁸

Complicating this profess bias that lies latent in Licona and others who advocate Greco-Roman *bioi*, is his need to support his thesis by postulating hypothetical documents behind the Gospels,

"In many cases it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine if an evangelist has altered his source or is using another. We must also be open to the possibility that there were multiple recensions of the Gospels and that Luke used an earlier or later recension of Mark than one possessed by Matthew"

He invents multiple recensions out of a hat to make his hypothesis work: subjectivity of sources!,

⁸⁸ Ibid.

In many cases it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine if an evangelist has altered his source or is using another. We must also be open to the possibility that there were multiple recensions of the Gospels and that Luke used an earlier or later recension of Mark than the one possessed by Matthew. Different recensions may have existed for a variety of reasons, such as multiple drafts or authorial redaction to accommodate a different recipient.

Where is autograph? What happened to these drafts. No textual evidence whatsoever. When his textual theory cannot explain phenomena in Gospels, he resorts to allowing hypothesis of multiple editions or drafts of gospels or authorial redaction to "accommodate" a different recipient."

Allows for possibility that John may have used creative dialogue creation from basic "gist":

It is also possible, perhaps probable, that some differences may carry the appearance of being in greater tension with one another than is actually the case because the Gospel narratives are not exhaustive. The discussions between Jesus and Pilate are described in much greater detail in John (18:33–38; 19:8–11) than in the Synoptics. It could be suggested that much of the dialogue between Pilate and Jesus is a Johannine creation, since the Synoptic narratives do not suggest that anyone else was present to overhear the exchanges, much less any of Jesus's disciples. Of course, this suggestion can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed. However, it is worth observing what Luke 23:3–4 says: "Pilate asked Jesus, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' And Jesus answered, 'Yes.' Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no cause for guilt in this man.' " Luke's report seems implausible if read independently of John. Would the Roman governor

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Complicating this treatment of the Gospels historical material, Licona allows for "displacing of periscope from its original context, redacting it, transplanting it placed where thought fitting or what he terms "cross pollination"—taking elements from one area and adding to another part of the Gospel:

When a story with striking similarities appears in different contexts and contains differences, it is often difficult to discern whether (a) we are reading about two similar but different events and a few of the details from one have cross-pollinated to the other; (b) one of the evangelists displaced the pericope from its original context, redacted it, and transplanted it in another; (c) the pericope was free-floating outside of any context and each evangelist planted it where he thought fitting; or (d) we are reading a "stump speech" that Jesus gave on many occasions.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Ibid., 117.

He admits to conjecture, "much of what an ancient author did and why he did it will remain in the realm of informed guesswork for modern historians . . . I am only surmising some of their compositional techniques, given what we have learned from the compositional textbooks, a few other sources, and the rare opportunities where we can compare how an ancient author redacted the source we know he used."⁹⁰ Again, one is left in grave doubt as to the historical nature of the only four accounts of Jesus's life.

Licona also alleges that his approach maintains "largely neutral of partisan theological and philosophical commitments."⁹¹ Yet, his entire approach is replete with philosophical elements that apparently Licona is ignorant of, especially since he approaches through historical-critical ideologies that stem from a hostile, philosophical takeover of the Gospel text or unwilling to admit.⁹² He goes on to argue that "I will rarely offer comments pertaining to the historicity of an event or logion and/or its possible theological implications."⁹³ Yet, his whole proffering of "compositional devices" being used in the Gospels like Plutarch's *Lives* brings massive doubt as well as suspicion on the historical substance of the Gospel material. Licona admits he is in the camp that "tend to view miracle reports appearing in the Gospel narratives with more confidence in their historicity" and that "I have unashamedly chosen membership in the later account." His method and approach, however, again contradicts such an association.

His tepid affirmation of the possibility of miracles in the Gospels is reflected in the following statement, being based once again in "consensus" thinking,

If the nearly universal consensus of scholars is correct that Jesus's earliest followers remembered him as a

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 118.

⁹² See F. David Farnell, "Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism," *The Jesus Crisis*, 85-131; idem. "How Views of Inspiration Have Impacted Synoptic Problem Discussions."

⁹³ Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 118.

miracle-worker and exorcist, he very likely performed acts that led to these memories. Of course, that is not to say we can know those acts were divine miracles and exorcisms. Nor is it to say the events occurred precisely as described in the Gospels. It is to say that there are probably historical events that lay behind many of the stories of miracles and exorcisms we read in the Gospels. Even many of those holding that some of the stories have been substantially revised and embellished maintain that historical kernels lay behind them.⁹⁴

He then hedges his proposal with the following caveat, "My proposed solutions are tentative."⁹⁵ However, even his "tentative" solutions to the Gospel phenomena have profoundly negative impact on the trustworthiness of the Gospels' records of Jesus lie.

Perhaps more strategically, every one of these nineteen pericopes cited by Licona that allegedly display "compositional devices" are well capable of being explained without presupposing any such creative devices. Simple harmonization explains every last one of them. The following examples are not exhaustive but merely representative of Licona's attempt at "compositional devices" as applied to the Gospels. One is encouraged to read Licona's work and determine whether any alleged "compositional devices" are need, or, for that matter, even valid.

Examples of Licona's Approach Solved Through Simple Harmonization

The first example, #1 (#13–16, 18), is John the Baptist and Jesus at Jesus's Baptism (Mark 1:2–11; Matt. 3:1–17; Luke 3:1–18, 21–22; John 1:19–34). Licona asserts that "[t]here are numerous differences within this pericope, and it will quickly become apparent that the

⁹⁴ Ibid. (underlining added).

⁹⁵ Ibid., 119.

evangelists employed many of the devices found in the compositional textbooks discussed in chapter 1."⁹⁶ Licona argues, "Whereas the Synoptic authors tell their readers that John the Baptist is the messenger of whom Isaiah spoke, John 1:23 narrates John the Baptist claiming he is the messenger of whom Isaiah spoke. All four Gospels give the same message while John offers it as the words of John the Baptist. Perhaps John transferred the message of Isaiah to the lips of John the Baptist. It is impossible to know. And there is no reason why John the Baptist could not have made such a claim about himself."⁹⁷ One is left wondering whether John actually said this or not as recorded in John, especially since John "answered them saying" in 1:25. The simple harmonization is that the Gospel writers and John both made this claim for John. No compositional device is needed.

Again, "Matthew 3:7 or Luke 3:7 changed the recipient being addressed." In Matthew 3:7 it is addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees, while in Luke 3:7 it is addressed to the multitudes. No change creatively in recipients is needed. The natural explanation is that Matthew focused attention particularly on John's condemnation of the Pharisees and Sadducees, while Luke was aware that John's condemnation was, at times, more broad.

In the third example, #3—Man with Withered Hand (Mark 3:1-6; Matt 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11), Licona alleges, "It is possible that Matthew locates this event on a different day than Luke."⁹⁸ While it is true that Luke uses "another [ἐτέρω σαββάτῳ] Sabbath" the other Gospels do not provide enough specificity to make any such conclusion that there is a conflict on which Sabbath this occurred. Both Matthew and Mark have no clear markers to supply such a dislocation or factual error. No such conclusion is necessary since the information supplied in Matthew or Mark. The context of Matthew 12:1-14; Mark 2:23-3:6 and Luke 6:1-11 gives primary focus on a series of Sabbath controversies (plucking grain and

⁹⁶ Ibid., 120.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 121.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 129.

healing) rather than on identifying any specific Sabbath such conflicts occurred.

Licona alleges that "Matthew converts Jesus's one-sided address to the Jewish leaders into a dialogue." No such creative conversion is necessary at all. Matthew focuses his attention the style of rabbinic debate that actually took place between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees—question and counter-question, while Luke focuses more on Jesus interaction, rather than on the Pharisees. No such conversion need to be postulated as taking place. Gundry noted this when he commented, "Jesus following question becomes a counter question in the style of a rabbinic debate . . . Matthew . . . juxtaposes the counter question alongside the Pharisees question."⁹⁹

The dialogue can be simply harmonized as follows, reflecting this rabbinic style of questioning that actually, historically occurred—no creation needed of dialogue. Each gospel writer is giving a supplementary description from varying but not conflicting perspectives:

1. The Pharisees and their scribes institute a rabbinic questioning dialogue with Jesus, anticipating Jesus's action of about to heal the man with the withered hand: "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath so that they might accuse him." (Matt. 12:9). Jesus has a habit of doing such things on the Sabbath and this irritates them (as seen in the previous periscope of Matt 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5 when he and his disciples violated the rabbinical rules of the Sabbath)
2. Jesus knows their thoughts against him that they were trying to seek an occasion to accuse him (Luke 6:7-8) and defiantly tells the man to come to him and stand in Mark 3:3 and Luke 6:8.
3. Jesus then uses the rabbinical style and directs their question directly back onto them, saying "What man of you, if he has

⁹⁹ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution*. 2nd Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 226.

one sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matt. 12:11-12) and gives back their question again and repeats also "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or do harm?" thus repeating their original question to him (Matt. 12:12b) as also reflected in Mark 3:4 and Luke 6:9).

4. The Pharisees and scribes will not answer Jesus's same question in rabbinical style of back and forth that they had posed to Jesus; they remain silent (Mark 3:4). They expect him to answer, but he wants them to answer their own question to highlight their inconsistency.
5. Jesus then tells the man to stretch out his hand and heals him (Matt 12:13; Mark 3:5; Luke 6:10).

No creative "compositional" dialogue like Plutarch need be proffered. The whole conversation took place, with no Gospel writer making up conversations necessary.

Another example is Licona's take on the Gadarene Demonaics (Mark 5:1; Matt :28-34; Luke 8:26-39). Licona notes, "Matthew may have used a different source or illustrated multiple demons through creating an additional person or conflated two stories."¹⁰⁰ Here Licona posits a compositional device where he believes that since Mark has one demon, while Matthew has two, that Matthew made up another demon creatively. The obvious replies to this are: (1) Licona is driven by his Two-Source theory. Since he believes Matthew used Mark and Mark has one demon, then Matthew has made up another for some purpose. However, if Markan priority is not true, and it is not, then Mark has merely left out one demon and focuses instead on the action of the leading character who was possessed living among the tombs, i.e. there were two demons. It is merely a matter of perspective of each writer, with one supplying additional supplementary information that two demons existed in this story. Nothing need be made up. Yet,

¹⁰⁰ Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 132.

Licona asserts that "Furthermore, for reasons unknown to us, Matthew doubles up elsewhere when the other Gospels present one figure. A blind beggar in Mark 10:46–52 and Luke 18:35–43 becomes two beggars in Matt. 20:29–34.¹⁰¹ A donkey in Mark 11:1–11 // Luke 19:29–34 // John 12:12–15 becomes a donkey and her colt in Matt. 21:1–11.¹⁰¹ The simple answer is that this is no mystery: there were two of each and Matthew includes that information. Since he assumes Markan priority one would guess that for some reason, Mark only mentions one as a habit!

Carson's comment here is relevant, "the best explanation is that Matthew had independent knowledge of the second man. Mention of only one by the other Gospel writers is not problematic. Not only was one sufficient for the purposes at hand, but where one person is more remarkable or prominent, it is not uncommon for the Gospels to mention only that one."¹⁰²

However, Licona does not stop there. He relates, "[t]here is another possible solution. Matthew is prone to abbreviate stories found in Mark . . . Perhaps Matthew has doubled up the demoniac in order to compensate for not telling the story of Jesus healing another demoniac mentioned earlier in Mark 1:21–28."¹⁰³ One is left wondering whether the Gospels are able to convey any real substance of what actually happened when Licona allows for the possibility of stories being combined. Why did not Matthew tell the story in Mark 1:21–28? While ultimate reasons are unknown, the most patent answer is that Matthew was NOT using Mark, nor is he required to include any such story. The reasons for inclusion or exclusion of stories are left to the unknown thinking and/or purposes of an author that is immaterial to this discussion nor can ultimately be determined. Another example of "compositional creativity" is Licona's take on Jarius's Daughter in Mark 5:21–43; Matt 9:18–26; Luke 8:40–56). He asserts that

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 132.

¹⁰² D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 217.

¹⁰³ Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 132.

In Mark 5:30, Jesus asked, “Who touched my garments?” In Luke 8:45 he asked, “Who touched me?” In Mark 5:39, Jesus said to those mourning, “Why the commotion and weeping? The child did not die but is sleeping.” In Luke 8:52, he said, “Do not weep. For she did not die but is sleeping.” Luke changed Jesus’s question in Mark to a statement. In Matt. 9:24, he said, “Leave. For the girl did not die but is sleeping.” Matthew likewise changed Jesus’s question in Mark to a command.¹⁰⁴

A simple harmonization may be offered as a reasonable explanation without any such creativity or change: both question and statement are natural. Jesus said both. In the situation of mourning, Jesus's interruption of the process and the crowd's focus on grief ("tumult"—Mark 5:38) may well have resulted in Jesus's catching their attention in this manner. The incredulity of the crowd in that they "laughed at him, knowing he was dead" (Luke 8:53) may well have required Jesus to both question them and make statements that are similar. They frankly didn't believe what he was saying. Furthermore, such speculation on Licona's part is being driven by his synoptic hypothesis of the priority of Mark and postulating that Mark is original so Matthew or Luke has changed it. If his synoptic hypothesis is wrong, so is his speculation ill-founded as to the others changing Mark's presentation into something else.

Licona also allows for the possibility of "doublets" that he defines as "[o]ne original tradition appears in two different settings within the same book as though occurring on separate occasions."¹⁰⁵ In the story of the two Blind Men—Mark 10:46-52—he proposes the possibility that this is a doublets,

The most striking difference, however, pertains to the number of blind men in this pericope. There is one in Mark and Luke, whereas there are two in Matthew. Thus, Mark and Luke have the beggar cry out, “Son of David, have mercy on me,” and Matthew has, “Have

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 133-134.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 267.

mercy on us, Son of David!” As we observed in the preceding pericope, Matthew, who was given to abbreviating Mark, may have doubled up on the number of blind men in order to include another story from Mark 8:22–26 of Jesus healing the blind that Matthew will not otherwise mention.”

Licona believes in doublets as a possibility in another place,

But Matthew 20:29-34 may have a doublet in 9:27-31. In that context, Jesus healed a leper (8:1–4), healed a paralyzed man (8:5–13), healed others and cast out demons (8:14–17), healed two demoniacs (8:28–34), healed another paralytic (9:1–8), raised a dead girl (9:18–26), healed two blind men (9:27–31), and healed a demoniac who was mute (9:32–34). John the Baptist was imprisoned and appeared to be in doubt about Jesus. So he sent a few of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we wait for another?” (11:3). Jesus told them, “Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame are walking, lepers are cleaned and the deaf hear, even the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them” (11:4–5). John the Baptist could thus be assured Jesus was the Messiah, since he was doing the very things expected of the Messiah (Isa. 61:1; 4Q521). Accordingly, Matthew may have included the doublet (although with variations) he would repeat later in 20:29–34 to provide an example of Jesus healing the blind as evidence for Jesus being the Messiah.⁴⁹ If the healing of two blind men in Matt. 9 is a doublet, it could weaken the proposal that Matthew added another blind man to Bartimaeus in order to account for another story of Jesus healing the blind man mentioned in Mark but not covered in Matthew. But there was no need to do so if Matthew

twice narrated this story of Jesus healing two blind men.

Once again, such speculation depends on the validity of his speculative synoptic theory. Also, one wonders about his concept of the historical integrity of the Gospels in proposing that the writers would present an event as if it happened in this way and yet it did not by placing it in different contexts as if one event were two.

Licona also asserts an alleged chronological imprecision on Luke's part: "Luke shows a disinterest in chronological precision and inverts events as he does elsewhere (Matt. 4:5–11 // Luke 4:5–13; Matt. 12:41–42 // Luke 11:31–32; Matt. 27:50–51 // Luke 23:45–46).¹⁰⁶ He continues,

In Mark 10:46, Jesus had come to Jericho and was now leaving the city when the blind beggar cried out to him. In Matt. 20:29, he was also leaving Jericho. But in Luke 18:35, Jesus was approaching Jericho. Various solutions to this difference in Luke have been proposed. If Luke is using Mark as his primary source at this point, which he appears to be doing given the order of the preceding events, he may have preferred to narrate the event prior to Jesus entering Jericho and then include a story unique to Luke about a tax collector in that city named Zacchaeus. Of course, Luke could have narrated Jesus healing the blind beggar after the story of Zacchaeus in order to maintain chronological accuracy with Mark. However, as we have observed elsewhere, chronological precision does not appear to have been very important to ancient biographers, including Luke.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 136.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 134–35.

In reply, it should be noted that (1) this again is based on Licona's use of Mark as the other Synoptics' primary source; (2) Luke's prologue suggests an interest in chronology otherwise 1:2-4—"it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught; (3) while the Gospel writers did not have to write exacting chronology at times, depending on the purpose, it does not mean that they were careless either; (4) The differences in these accounts argue strongly for separate, eyewitness accounts and their differing perspectives that are most likely complementary rather than conflicting.

The story of the feeding of the five thousand and the events surrounding it also highlights Licona's thinking (Mark 6:31-56; Matt 14:13-36; Luke 9:10b-17; John 6:-1-25). In one video, Licona "probably Mark is confused" regarding the chronology of the events.¹⁰⁸ After this event, Licona back-tracked and related that "we sometimes make statements that do not necessarily reflect our thinking precisely and that, given more time to think about our wording carefully, we'd say things differently. That is what you heard in that McLatchie interview with my comments related to Mark being confused. So, please go with what I wrote in the article as a more precise articulation of my view."¹⁰⁹

Licona also faults the memory of the apostles regarding the events of the feeding. For him, in trying to reconcile the differences in the movements of Jesus and his disciples during the feeding of the multitudes, he argues "[either John slightly compresses or one or more of the evangelists artistically weave elements into their narrative that were not remembered in a precise manner."¹¹⁰ He argues that in this account, "The largest difference concerns the location where Jesus fed the five thousand"¹¹¹ He continues,

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5UPg-QpBxq8>.

¹⁰⁹ <http://freethinkingministries.com/inerrancy-debate/>

¹¹⁰ Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 139.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

Harmonizing the accounts in order to reconcile the differing details pertaining to the location of the feeding is difficult. Luke places it at or very close to Bethsaida, whereas Mark places it anywhere but Bethsaida, since after the feeding Jesus tells his disciples to cross over to Bethsaida. Matthew, Mark, and John tell us they landed on the west side of the lake, and John tells us that is where they had intended to land. Accordingly, it will not work to harmonize the accounts by asserting the disciples intended to go to Bethsaida but were blown off course and landed in Capernaum."¹¹²

Yet, one wonders about Licona's view of inspiration when he can posit "confusion" on the part of the Gospel writers. Very reasonable harmonizations can solve any alleged confusion on the part of the four-fold account of the Gospels.¹¹³

Furthermore, even evangelical critical scholar Stanley Porter seems to have no trouble harmonizing this account when he notes, "In conclusion, I argue that the apparent contradiction of Luke 18:35 with Mark 10:46 and Matt 20:29 is caused by a failure to appreciate the semantic range of Luke's use of ἐγγίζειν. This may be a verb of motion for Luke, but it seems much more likely that it is primarily a verb of location. Thus Luke 18:35 should be rendered "when he was in the vicinity of Jericho."¹¹⁴

Evangelical critical scholar Gundry also supports standard harmonization when he observes,

Mark writes 'toward Bethsaida' after 'to the other side.' Bethsaida causes a difficulty in that the other side turns out to be Gennesaret, a plain south of Capernaum on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, rather than a

¹¹² Ibid., 138-39.

¹¹³ See <http://defendinginerrancy.com/was-mark-confused/>

¹¹⁴ Stanley E. Porter, "In the Vicinity of Jericho": Luke 18:35 in the Light of its Synoptic Parallels," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992) 91-104 (quote from p. 104).

Bethsaida, a town on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee (see Mark 6:53). Mark's text may imply that after the disciples set out from a deserted place on the western side and gone some distance toward Bethsaida, the storm blew them backward--"the wind was against them' (Mark 6:48)--so that after Jesus calmed the storm they finally landed at Gennesaret.¹¹⁵

One observation is necessary here: to posit the potentiality of "imprecise memory" or confusion on the part of the Gospel writers on Licona's part is highly dubious as to his assertions that he stands on the side of "confidence" in the Gospel accounts.

Another take on Licona's part for compositional device usage is that found in the periscope on the question of who is greatest among the disciples (Mark 9:33–37; 10:13–16, 35–45; Matt. 18:1–6; 19:13–15; 20:20–28; Luke 9:46–48; 18:15–17; 22:24–30). Here Licona imposes a compositional device that asserts Matthew transfers [dialogue] by having the disciples initiate the discussion rather than Jesus, "Matthew transfers by having the disciples initiate the discussion rather than Jesus." In Mark 9:33–34, Jesus initiates a discussion of what they were discussing along the journey about who is greatest, while Matthew 18:1–5 has Jesus ask about "who is the greatest." From Licona's perspective, the Gospel writers apparently felt free change the reportage of the dialogue from one person to another as a creative composition. Yet, Carson has an excellent harmonization of these two places without any need for a Greco-Roman compositional device,

Mark 9:33–38 says that the disciples were disputing along the way, and when challenged they fell silent. Luke (9:46–48) says Jesus discerned their thoughts. It is not difficult or unnatural to support that Jesus detected their rivalry (Luke), challenged them, and thereby silenced them (Mark), and that they then

¹¹⁵ Gundry, *Matthew*, 296.

blurted out their question (Matthew) or "alternatively Matthew uses this brief question to summarize what was on their mind."¹¹⁶

Harmonizing this through simple logic, the following may have likely occurred,

1. Mark has disciples disputing along the way about greatness—Jesus asks them, "What were you discussing along the way?" But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest.
2. Jesus detects rivalry in Luke 9:46—Jesus perceived the thought of their hearts.
3. In Matthew 18:1—the disciples finally ask Jesus the question. The silence lasts only for a while reflected in Mark 9:34, then they blurt out "Who is greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?"

The conclusion that naturally can be reached through simple harmonization is that no transference occurred. No need exists to postulate any compositional device, unless, as is in Licona's case, he is reading back into the Gospels what he must see in order to support his thesis.

Licona also allows for such a discussion of humility among the disciples to have been placed in areas of the Gospels where it did not actually occur. On this humility and greatest discussion, Licona argues, "we should expect that Jesus would have said it on many occasions It is unnecessary to suggest each evangelist redacted the tradition and placed it where he thought fitting, although such a solution is plausible and equally possible."¹¹⁷ He allows for this possibility of displacement because of Mark 10:35-37, with the occurrences of this a week earlier than the dispute along the way over greatest with the dispute of James and John about greatness as

¹¹⁶ Carson, *Matthew*, 396.

¹¹⁷ Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 141.

well as in Luke 22:24-27 when Jesus countered the disciples' argument over greatness at the Last Supper. Licona argues that "[i]f Mark is Luke's source for this tradition, Luke's redaction of and displacement of the tradition to a different context gives us an idea of Luke's flexibility with the tradition."¹¹⁸ Again, simple harmonization and common sense must come into the discussion. Due to the denseness of the disciples, such a dispute was experienced several times not just one (e.g., Matt 16:7; Mark 8:17-20).

In Licona's take on the cleansing of Temple, he allows for a compositional "displacement" whereby one cleansing becomes two, "John may have displaced the temple cleansing to the beginning of Jesus's ministry."¹¹⁹ Yet, even Licona admits wording differences in the story of the cleansing: "Jesus's words to those he drove out differ slightly among the Synoptics and even more in John."¹²⁰ Once again, Carson presents a very reasonable case for two temple cleansings. No need for "The great majority of contemporary scholars believe there was only one cleansing of the temple and debate about whether the Synoptists or John put it at the right time in Jesus ministry. Although some argue that the event occurred early in Jesus ministry (John), more side with the Synoptics in placing it late. Certainly, we have ample evidence that the evangelists arranged some material topically; yet there are, in this instance, numerous reasons for the possibility, indeed the likelihood, of two separate cleansings—something most commentators never seriously consider."¹²¹ He then goes on to list the following very reasonable evidence for two,

1. Leon Morris (John, pp. 288ff) has shown the striking differences between the details John provides and those the Synoptics provide. If there was but one cleansing, some of

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 145.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 144.

¹²¹ Carson, *Matthew*, 441.

these differences became surprising, if two cleansings, they became quite reasonable.

2. Those who hold that John's placing of the cleansing is topical usually assume that he does so to lead up to the saying, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19), part of his "replacement theme"—viz., that Jesus himself replaces much of the Jewish cultic milieu. But this view fails to provide any reason for shifting the temple's cleansing so as to make it an *early* theme in Jesus' ministry. Moreover, in this particular case the temple-replacement theme is reflected in the trial of Jesus in two of the Synoptics (Matt 26:61; Mark 14:58).
3. If the Synoptics fail to mention the earlier cleansing, this may go back to their omission of Jesus' entire early Judean ministry.
4. Some hold that if Jesus had inaugurated his ministry by cleansing the temple, the authorities would not have let him do it a second time. But two or three years have elapsed. The money changers and merchants, protected by the temple police, doubtless returned the day after the first cleansing. But it is doubtful that tight security would have been kept up for months and years. This second cleansing took a few dramatic minutes and could not have been prevented, and its prophetic symbolism spread throughout Jerusalem.
5. It is difficult to tell from the Gospels how much the cleansings(s) of the temple contributed to official action against Jesus, and to overstate the evidence is easy But a second cleansing as Passover drew near was far more likely to have led to the authorities' violent reaction than the first one."¹²²

Licona also asserts that the Gospels present differing days of when the cleansing occurred, that is they conflict on the day it occurs: "The chronology of the events differs. All four Gospels narrate

¹²² Ibid.

Jesus's triumphal entry on Sunday. In Mark, Jesus's temple cleansing occurs on the following day, Monday, while in Matthew and Luke, it appears to have occurred on Sunday. If Matthew and Luke have Sunday in mind, they or their source have probably compressed the story. This apparent discrepancy may be solved in noting that two trips on Jesus's part occurred to the temple in this time period—Mark makes these two clear, while Matthew and Luke compress. Even Licona must admit "It is grammatically possible to read Matthew (with Mark) as having Jesus cleanse the temple on Monday." A harmonization may be presented as follows, Mark, however, used more detailed, chronological language. On the first day, Jesus went into Jerusalem and the temple (Mark 11:1-11), then later that day He and His apostles departed for Bethany. "Now the next day, when they had come out of Bethany" (11:12, emp. added), Jesus again went into Jerusalem and into the temple. Unlike His trip to the temple the previous day, this time Jesus entered the temple "to drive out those who bought and sold in the temple" (Mark 11:15-18). Thus, Jesus actually made two trips to the temple: once on the day of His triumphal entry (Mark 11:11), then again "the next day" to cleanse the temple (Mark 11:12,15-18). In this instance, Mark's account is more sequential, while Matthew's is more of a summary.¹²³

And again,

Keep in mind that neither Matthew nor Mark was mistaken in his account. We often report events with the same variety. Sometimes we speak more chronologically, while at other times more generally. Consider the family that returns home to tell friends about a trip to Disney World. One family member may summarize everything they did while at Epcot, while another family member may speak more specifically about how they actually went to Epcot parts of two

¹²³ <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=2813>

different days and were able to see all sorts of things. No one would be justified in alleging that either family member was mistaken. Likewise, Matthew and Mark's accounts are complementary—not contradictory.¹²⁴

The end result of this sampling is that no example that Licona provides of these compositional devices alleging paralleling Plutarch's *Lives* and the canonical Gospels are necessary, or even likely, conclusions.

Licona's Conclusions

Licona's "Conclusion"¹²⁵ section in his book is especially a must read for every Bible-believing person who is evaluating Licona's comparison of the Gospels with Plutarch's *Lives* and Greco-Roman biography. For the sake of summary, here are some quotes that should be listed from this section, that identifies alleged parallels between the Gospels and Greco-Roman *bioi* that he believes that have been established by his work and others (the numbering is the reviewer's, not Licona)

(1) "BY THE BEGINNING of the twenty-first century, a paradigm shift had occurred. No longer viewing the Gospels as *sui generis* (i.e., of a unique genre), the majority of New Testament scholars had embraced the view of Richard Burridge and others before him that the Gospels belong to the genre of Greco-Roman biography, as noted in our introduction. This genre permitted a degree of elasticity in how stories were reported."¹²⁶

¹²⁴ <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=2813>

¹²⁵ Licona, *Why are There Differences in the Gospels?*, 197-202.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

REPOSE—The pattern of the Gospels is NOT Greco-Roman *bioi* but the Old Testament. The Old Testament pattern contained in its 36 books of promise and fulfillment fully explains the writings found in the Gospels.

(2) Very little to date has been written pertaining to how reading the Gospels in view of their biographical genre can shed light on the multitude of differences in their reports. We sought in chapters 1–2 to identify specific compositional devices employed in ancient biographical literature."¹²⁷

RESPONSE—The canonical Gospels' usage of such devices has not been demonstrated by Licona. These compositional devices are easily explained by simple harmonization without any need for postulating of any such Greco-Roman compositional devices.

(3) We then turned our attention in chapter 3 to nine of Plutarch's *Lives*, which provide modern historians with a rare opportunity to examine how one author narrates the same story differently in different contexts. Like the Gospels, these *Lives* belong to Greco-Roman biography, were written in the same language, Greek, and were written within only a few decades of the Gospels. We identified thirty-six pericopes Plutarch narrates in two or more of the nine *Lives* and then observed that Plutarch compresses stories, conflates them, transfers what one character said to the lips of a different person, inverts the order of events, rounds numbers, simplifies, and displaces a story or an element of a story from its original context and then transplants it in a different one, occasionally using a synthetic chronology. The most common device we observed Plutarch using was literary spotlighting. Plutarch often

¹²⁷ Ibid.

adapts his narrative in accordance with the law of biographical relevance. He paraphrases logia and larger blocks of content. On most occasions, his paraphrasing appears to have no objective behind it other than to follow the literary conventions of his day. He occasionally crafts peripheral details in a creative reconstruction when they were unknown in order to move the narrative along smoothly or perhaps to assist him in making a point that was generally accurate pertaining to the situation though not technically precise. Still, even the crafted details are usually not far from the truth. Although Plutarch errs on occasion, the differences we observe almost always seem to result from Plutarch's use of the compositional devices that have been posited by classical scholars as being standard conventions for writing ancient history and biography.¹²⁸

RESPONSE: Plutarch's *Lives* are the WRONG paradigm for the Gospels, as is the whole of Greco-Roman *bioi*. Merely because Plutarch did these things is *non-sequitur* in asserting that the canonical Gospels did the same or similar literary devices. While Plutarch erred, the Gospels do not (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:4-6).

(4) Despite the fact that the evangelists employ many of the same compositional devices that were taught in the compositional textbooks and others that were employed by Plutarch, the extent of editing by the evangelists is minimal by ancient standards . . .

Our analysis of thirty-six pericopes that appear on two or more occasions in Plutarch's *Lives* supports the conclusions of classical scholars that the type of compositional devices we have identified were standard practice in writing biographical literature in that era.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 197-198.

When this background knowledge is added to the fact that the Gospels share close affinity to Greco-Roman biography, the same genre in which Plutarch's Lives fit, and that a significant amount of the differences in the Gospels can be easily understood in light of this background knowledge, it becomes quite plausible that the evangelists were aware of and made use of many of the compositional devices we inferred from Plutarch's Lives as well as those prescribed in the compositional textbooks. Thus, the suspicions of many New Testament scholars that the evangelists used compositional devices similar to those we have identified in this book are correct. Accordingly, we now have some more clearly defined and assured ideas pertaining to how the flexibility of ancient biography impacts our understanding of the Gospels.¹²⁹

RESPONSE: Licona has NOT proven his case whatsoever. He imposes his ideas upon the Gospels by merely refusing to perform simple harmonization, which harmonization provides ample evidence to dismiss any of his hypothetical "compositional devices."

CONCLUSION TO LICONA'S CASE FOR PLUTARCH'S LIVES AND GRECO-ROMAN BIOGRAPHY

Bart Ehrman perhaps sums up best any replies to Licona. In his debate with Licona, he offered some strategic points that cannot be refuted by Licona,

If an author's willing to change the details of one story—why not other stories?—@BartEhrman

¹²⁹ Ibid., 199-200

Greco-Roman *bioi* is the "pandora's box" whereby evangelical critical scholars undermine the historical integrity of the Gospels. Again, Ehrman recognized that Licona does not follow the orthodox understanding of the Gospels as has been maintained through simple harmonization,

*I would like to point out an interesting phenomenon, which I think is probably an empirical fact, that the only people who think the Gospels are absolutely accurate in every detail are Christian fundamentalists who are committed for theological reasons to thinking that the Bible cannot have any mistakes of any kind whatsoever because the authors were inspired to write exactly what happened in every detail. Mike is clearly not in that fundamentalist camp.*¹³⁰

I AGREE WITH BART EHRMAN'S EVALUATION OF LICONA! Ehrman was once part of the "fundamentalist" camp and recognizes aberration from it when he sees it.

Investigating this new "fad" by evangelical, critical scholars of Greco-Roman *bioi* reminded this reviewer of Luke's statement in Acts 17:21, "Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new." Evangelical critical scholars have become the new "Athenians" and join their Society of Biblical Literature friends in assaulting the Gospels' historicity. Evangelical Theological Society should now join with the Society of Biblical Literature, for no real differences exist. While ETS claims they follow inerrancy, and even use ICBI as a guide, such facts are contradicted by practice. Furthermore, a basic seminary dissertation goal of "expressing something new or new discovery" in a dissertation seems to be at odds with the New Testament goal of holding fast to faithfulness to

¹³⁰ <http://www.thebestschools.org/special/ehrman-licona-dialogue-reliability-new-testament/ehrman-detailed-response/> [highlighting added]

the Word as expressed in Titus 1:9, "holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict as well as 2 Timothy 2:2—"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."