

Foreword by J. I. Packer

REDEEMING  
THE LIFE  
OF THE  
MIND

*Essays in Honor of Vern Poythress*

Edited by

John M. Frame  
Wayne Grudem  
John J. Hughes

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To the glory of our Trinitarian God:  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit



# Contents

Foreword by J. I. Packer .....	11
Preface .....	13
Acknowledgments .....	21
Abbreviations .....	23

## PART 1 SONS OF YESHUA

1 Redeeming Science: A Father-Son Tale .....	27
<i>Ransom Poythress</i>	
2 The Grace and Gift of Differentness .....	35
<i>Justin Poythress</i>	

## PART 2 EXEGESIS

3 The New Testament Background of ἐκκλησία Revisited Yet Again .....	47
<i>G. K. Beale</i>	
4 The Divine Choice between the Offerings of Cain and Abel .....	61
<i>In Whan Kim</i>	
5 Reading the Lord's Prayer Christologically .....	79
<i>Brandon D. Crowe</i>	
6 Psalms Applied to Both Christ and Christians: Psalms 8, 22, 34, 118 and Romans 15:3 // Psalm 69:9 .....	97
<i>Robert J. Cara</i>	



- 7 What Kind of Prophecy Continues? Defining the Differences between Continuationism and Cessationism .....112  
*Iain M. Duguid*
- 8 Christocentrism *and* Christotelism: The Spirit, Redemptive History, and the Gospel .....129  
*Lane G. Tipton*
- 9 What “Symphony of Sighs”? Reflections on the Eschatological Future of the Creation .....146  
*Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*

### PART 3 DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

- 10 The Trinity and Monotheism: Christianity and Islam in the Theology of Cornelius Van Til .....167  
*Camden M. Bucey*
- 11 Language and the Trinity: A Meeting Place for the Global Church .....181  
*Pierce Taylor Hibbs*
- 12 Jonathan Edwards and God’s Involvement in Creation: An Examination of “Miscellanies,” no. 1263 .....198  
*Jeffrey C. Waddington*

### PART 4 WORLDVIEW

- 13 Redeeming the Seminary by Redeeming Its Worldview .....217  
*Peter A. Lillback*
- 14 Presuppositionalism and Perspectivalism .....234  
*John M. Frame*
- 15 The Death of Tragedy: Reflections upon a Tragic Aspect of This Present Age .....251  
*Carl R. Trueman*
- 16 Beholding the Glory of Jesus: How a Christ-Centered Perspective Restores in Us the Splendor of God’s Image .....269  
*Brian Courtney Wood*

## PART 5 HISTORY

- 17 Christian Missions in China: A Reformed Perspective .....291  
*Luke P. Y. Lu*
- 18 Historiography: Redeeming History .....312  
*Diane Poythress*

## PART 6 ETHICS

- 19 Christians Never Have to Choose the “Lesser Sin” .....331  
*Wayne Grudem*
- 20 Perspectives on the Kingdom of God in Romans 14:17 .....360  
*John J. Hughes*

Appendix: Scripture Versions Cited .....	387
Writings of Vern Poythress .....	389
Contributors .....	405
General Index .....	408
Scripture Index .....	420



# Foreword

Among today's senior Reformed theologians, Dr. Vern Poythress may well be identified as the dark horse.

I recall President Edmund Clowney of Westminster Theological Seminary enthusing to me about Vern's arrival on the seminary faculty, dwelling on the gain that Vern's combination of skills in mathematics, linguistics, and biblical disciplines brought to the seminary, despite his hesitant manner as a teacher and his gentle personal style. Dr. Clowney urged me to get to know Poythress, and he was right to do so. Vern is modest and unassuming, but he is a polymath of outstanding quality and has contributed much of importance to evangelical thought at a foundational level. The present Festschrift clearly shows this, and it is a privilege to be introducing it.

A polymath—what is that? Answer: a scholar who is on top of several academic disciplines and for whom questions of correlating and integrating them with each other have perennial interest. In a series of writings on Holy Scripture, Poythress shows himself both true to type as a polymath and true to God as a Christian, and it should not cause surprise when book after book that he writes gets hailed as the best in its class.

Some who shared in the inerrancy debates of the past half century stopped short by offering negations, sometimes facile, of the assertions of others, but what Poythress did time after time was to work the discussions round to some aspect of the quest for God-centered coherence and truth that, according to such a polymath as Abraham Kuyper in his marvelous *Encyclopedia of Sacred Theology*, we all should be seeking all the time. With Poythress, theocentric rationality and enhanced doxology break surface all the time.

Two linked themes on which Poythress has dug most deeply are the theological and cultural frame of biblical inerrancy and God's use of language to communicate with mankind. What he has written on these matters stirs a strong desire for more.

So, on behalf of all who have had anything to do with this book, I wish him many more years of focusing for us the true biblical faith.

J. I. Packer  
Board of Governors' Professor of Theology  
Regent College

# Preface

Westminster Theological Seminary has played a major role in the history of orthodox Reformed theology in America. Upon its founding in 1929, its original faculty affirmed that the seminary would continue the historic position of “old Princeton Seminary.” Princeton had for many decades represented the theology of Calvin and the Westminster Confession of Faith, as opposed to the liberal theology taught after 1929 by many professors at “new Princeton.” But Westminster was not merely a clone of the older school. Although committed to the Reformed doctrinal standards, it quickly displayed a pattern of creative thought within the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy.

Westminster professors produced many books and articles defending orthodoxy against threats that were distinctive to the modern period. The chief founder of Westminster, J. Gresham Machen, brought his great expertise in modern European theology and biblical criticism to the new faculty, as can be seen in his books *The Virgin Birth of Christ*,<sup>1</sup> *The Origin of Paul’s Religion*,<sup>2</sup> and *Christianity and Liberalism*.<sup>3</sup> Cornelius Van Til, professor of apologetics, also attacked liberal theology, but from a new biblical epistemology that became known as *presuppositionalism*. Many Westminster professors also advocated the “biblical theology” of Geerhardus Vos, a Princeton professor who was too much neglected during his years at Princeton. John Murray in systematics focused like a laser on the basis of Reformed doctrines in the biblical texts themselves. So at

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1. New York: Harper, 1930.

2. New York: Macmillan, 1921.

3. New York: Macmillan, 1923.

Westminster, there was a strong defense of the old doctrines by some strikingly new methods.

The 1960s marked significant changes at Westminster. The “boys” that Machen brought with him from Princeton began to retire and go to glory. I studied, largely with this old faculty, from 1961 to 1964, earning my BD degree, which is now called the MDiv. My time at Westminster was a great blessing as I grew in my understanding of the Word of God. But it was also an intellectual treat, and when I went on for graduate work at Yale, I felt well prepared, for Westminster taught me not only to embrace Reformed orthodoxy but also to think carefully and creatively about theology and Scripture. When I returned to Westminster in a teaching capacity in 1968, I was determined to continue for my students both the oldness and the newness that had characterized Westminster’s heritage. In time, that led me to examine American language-analysis philosophy, just as Van Til and Robert Knudsen had studied European philosophy and theology. And it led me to develop a theological method called *triperspectivalism*, about which there will be more references in this book.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was an atmosphere of transition, as new faculty were added and new thoughts entered our corporate discussion: Jay Adams’s “nouthetic counseling,” Jack Miller’s views of how to outgrow the ingrown church, and D. Clair Davis’s Jesus-centered understanding of church history. Discussions in my classes often felt like “passing the torch,” as I taught and learned from many students who turned out to be notable thinkers in their own right, bringing forth in the Westminster tradition ideas old and new. Among those students were Wayne Grudem, later author of a wonderful systematic theology and coeditor of this volume; Greg Bahnsen, who defended theonomy and Van Til’s apologetics with rigor; Dennis Johnson, now a professor at Westminster Seminary California; John Hughes, who taught theology at Westmont College and is coeditor of this volume; Bill Edgar, who now teaches at Westminster; Jim Hurley, who founded the Marriage and Family Therapy program at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi; Dick Keyes, who for many years has directed the L’Abri program in Southborough, Massachusetts; and Tiina Allik, who doctorated at Yale and taught for some years at Loyola University in New Orleans.

Others, too, who attended Westminster at that time later entered the theological profession. Willem VanGemeran taught Old Testament for many years at Reformed and Trinity Seminaries. Moisés Silva was a professor of biblical studies at Westmont College and Gordon-Conwell Seminary. Andrew Lincoln served as Portland Professor of New Testament at the University of Gloucestershire from 1999 to 2013. And Susan Foh later wrote *Women and the Word of God*.<sup>4</sup> There was also a group of academically sharp students who followed and sought to apply the teachings of Herman Dooyeweerd. When I think of having many of these students in the same classroom, I wonder how I managed to survive those years. Yet I remember them as a group that loved Jesus and who sought to dig deeply into the Word of God, following its teaching wherever it led.

Vern S. Poythress fit right in with this group. I remember well the faculty meeting in which President Edmund P. Clowney told us that we needed to have something new, an “experimental honors program.” Clowney had often spoken to students at Harvard, and he had met Vern there, concluding that the present Westminster program would not be sufficiently challenging for Vern. Vern had a PhD in mathematics from Harvard. He had also studied theology extensively and wanted to earn a theology degree. So our faculty voted to establish a program in which especially gifted students would not have to attend regularly scheduled classes (though they could attend any lectures they desired), but would take comprehensive exams and write papers in major areas of theology.

As it turned out, many of the lectures that Vern chose to attend were in my courses, so he joined the group to which the torch was being passed. In fear and trembling, I presented my triperspectival method in these classes with Vern and the others listening carefully; and, somewhat to my surprise, Vern found this approach fascinating and consonant with his own thinking. He had studied linguistics with Kenneth Pike, the inventor of “tagmemics,” the theory of linguistics that governed the Bible translation work of Wycliffe Bible Translators. Vern found that my triperspectival triad of normative, situational, and existential perspectives was congruent with Pike’s distinction between

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4. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1978.



particle, field, and wave, as well as the other concepts of Pike's linguistic theory. Then in 1976 Vern wrote a book called *Philosophy, Science, and the Sovereignty of God*,<sup>5</sup> in which he correlated these triads and many others, developing doctrines of ontology, methodology, and axiology. Throughout the 1970s, he worked with Wycliffe Bible Translators and earned a DTh degree in biblical studies at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. From 1976 to the present, he has been a professor of New Testament at Westminster.

Throughout his career, Vern's work has illuminated many fields of study, as the bibliography in this volume will attest—from biblical theology and mathematics, to sociology, philosophy, logic, theory of chance and determinism, hermeneutics, and biblical authority. Many of us will testify that his character is equally inspiring. Vern believes that the work of the scholar must be done not only from God's Word and in God's name but also in the *presence* of God.<sup>6</sup> Vern is God-centered in the workplace and in his family. Many of us have been moved by the way he has taught his two sons, Ransom and Justin. Both boys attended public school, but Vern and his wife, Diane, understood that a secular education was not enough. Students from Christian families needed to be untaught a great many things to make sure their own thinking would reflect biblical presuppositions. So Vern and Diane taught Ransom and Justin intensively in biblical content and theology. They prepared both boys for what they called Bar Yeshua ceremonies. These were similar to the Bar Mitzvah ceremonies of the Jewish people, but full of gospel content. You will learn some of the results of this from the Poythress sons themselves in the first section of this book, "Sons of Yeshua." And in those essays you can find some beautiful testimonies of Vern's godly character.

In this volume we also seek to honor Vern by presenting to him essays from his fellow scholars on topics of concern to him through the years of his ministry. Following "Sons of Yeshua," part 1 of our book, we present groups of essays on biblical exegesis, the doctrine of the Trinity, worldview, history, and ethics.

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5. Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976.

6. See especially his *Reading the Word of God in the Presence of God: A Handbook of Biblical Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

In part 2, on biblical exegesis, Greg Beale, Vern's Westminster colleague, presents in chapter 3 "The New Testament Background of ἐκκλησία Revisited Yet Again," a study of the term in Scripture. Beale argues that the main background of this term is to be found in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, not in secular Roman usage. He concludes that the church of the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament are the same church.

In chapter 4, In Whan Kim, president and vice chancellor of Swaziland Christian University in Mbabane, Swaziland, contributes his essay "The Divine Choice between the Offerings of Cain and Abel," arguing that what differentiates the offerings of the two brothers is not something in the offerings themselves but whether the brothers were moved to act from hearts of faith: Abel sought above all to please God, and Cain did not.

Brandon Crowe, another of Vern's colleagues, in his essay "Reading the Lord's Prayer Christologically" (chap. 5), teaches us how to do what the title of his essay communicates. Like his colleagues, Vern has always taught that Christ is the center of the Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testaments. Crowe shows how a Christological focus sheds light on all the petitions of the Lord's Prayer.

Then Robert J. Cara, vice president in charge of academic affairs at Reformed Theological Seminary, who has studied with Vern, continues the Christological theme, considering in chapter 6 "Psalms Applied to Both Christ and Christians" in the New Testament. As in Vern's teaching, Christological exegesis not only gives us facts about Christ but also applies Scripture to our own lives in the most helpful way.

Next, Iain Duguid, who teaches Old Testament at Westminster, in his contribution "What Kind of Prophecy Continues? Defining the Differences between Continuationism and Cessationism" (chap. 7), takes up "cessationism," the question of whether and in what form the charismatic gifts of the New Testament (tongues, prophecy, healing) continue today. He follows Vern's own treatments of this controversial and difficult issue with a careful, nuanced discussion. Duguid believes that we should give more consideration to the variations in the biblical concepts. This carefulness will lead to the conclusion that the cessationist Richard Gaffin and the continuationist Wayne Grudem (who both

have essays in this volume) are not as far apart (or as far from Vern) as they might initially appear.

Lane Tipton, who teaches New Testament at Westminster, addresses in “Christocentrism *and* Christotelism: The Spirit, Redemptive History, and the Gospel” (our chap. 8) a recent controversy within the seminary faculty. He helpfully employs Vos’s distinction between symbol and type, yielding two ways in which Christ is the theme of the Old Testament: the symbols point to Christ as the substance of Israel’s present life, and the types point to him as the future consummation of Israel’s hope. Neither of these requires an explanation in terms of “Second Temple hermeneutics.”

Richard B. Gaffin is a longtime (and recently retired) colleague of Vern’s at Westminster. His essay “What ‘Symphony of Sighs’? Reflections on the Eschatological Future of the Creation” is our chapter 9. Gaffin draws on his recent work of translating the *Reformed Dogmatics* of Geerhardus Vos, and develops cogent reasons for seeing the new heavens and new earth as a purification of the old, rather than an annihilation of the old and replacement with something totally different.

Part 3 of our book is dedicated to the doctrine of the Trinity, one of the major areas of theological discussion in evangelicalism today. Vern has taken a great interest in this doctrine. In the context of his triperspectivalism, he sees the Trinity as the root of all the unity and diversity of the creation. Camden Bucey begins this discussion in chapter 10 with his contribution “The Trinity and Monotheism: Christianity and Islam in the Theology of Cornelius Van Til.”

Combining in chapter 11 Vern’s concern with the Trinity and his interests in language and linguistics, Pierce Taylor Hibbs writes “Language and the Trinity: A Meeting Place for the Global Church.”

In chapter 12, Jeffrey C. Waddington contributes his “Jonathan Edwards and God’s Involvement in Creation: An Examination of ‘Miscellanies,’ no. 1263.” There has long been controversy over Edwards’s “occasionalism.” Some have suspected Edwards of pantheism or panentheism, since for him everything in nature immediately depends on God, making Edwards an advocate of “continuous creation.” At the end of his essay, Waddington makes comparisons between Edwards’s

views and Vern's essay "Why Scientists *Must* Believe in God," the remarkable apologetic that begins his book *Redeeming Science*.

Part 4 of our collection deals with worldview, a central concern of Vern's writings, inherited from Van Til. In chapter 13, Peter A. Lillback, president of Westminster, presents "Redeeming the Seminary by Redeeming Its Worldview." My essay in chapter 14, "Presuppositionalism and Perspectivalism," discusses two matters of central concern to Vern and me. I try there to show how presuppositionalism, an apologetic focused on worldview (developed by Van Til), is quite compatible with triperspectivalism and indeed inseparable from it. Chapter 15 is the deeply stimulating essay "The Death of Tragedy: Reflections upon a Tragic Aspect of This Present Age," by the Westminster church historian Carl Trueman. In chapter 16, Brian Courtney Wood brings part 4 to an inspiring conclusion in his "Beholding the Glory of Jesus: How a Christ-Centered Perspective Restores in Us the Splendor of God's Image." Here the emphasis on Christian worldview combines with the emphasis on Christ-centered exegesis, reminding us that Christ-centered exegesis of Scripture *is* the Christian worldview.

Part 5 deals with history, a somewhat neglected area of Christian philosophy. The essay by Luke Lu in chapter 17 is "Christian Missions in China: A Reformed Perspective." Vern's wife, Diane, has long had a special concern with China. She speaks fluent Mandarin, and she and Vern have had a special ministry to Chinese students on the Westminster campus, as well as to other international students. Diane herself brings her missions interests to bear on the philosophy of history in chapter 18, "Historiography: Redeeming History." Diane is herself a working historian, and in this essay she supplements her husband's "Redeeming" books, adding another important realm to the discussion of Christ's lordship over all realms of life. She shows that in the Christian worldview, God is in control of time as well as space. So there can be no religious neutrality in the way we interpret history.

Part 6 concludes our volume with a question Francis Schaeffer asked: "How should we then live?" Two of the book's coeditors (and good friends of Vern's) here contribute essays on biblical ethics. In chapter 19, Wayne Grudem presents "Christians Never Have to Choose the 'Lesser Sin.'" And in chapter 20, John Hughes presents

a triperspectival analysis of some ethical terms in Paul's letter to the Romans: "Perspectives on the Kingdom of God in Romans 14:17."

We trust God that this collection will honor Vern and, above all, as Vern certainly would wish, honor the Lord Jesus Christ. May it promote Vern's vision among God's people, a vision to glorify Christ's lordship over all areas of human life, redeeming all realms of human thought.

John M. Frame

# Acknowledgments

It has been our pleasure to work with Vern's family—Diane, Ransom, and Justin—and with so many of his friends to produce this Festschrift in his honor.

Special thanks go to Diane for the many ways she helped us from start to finish.

To this volume's many contributors, we express our thanks for their labors and contributions in Vern's honor.

We also would like to thank Justin Taylor at Crossway for supporting this project, for encouraging us, and for his flexibility with the deadline.

Finally, we would like to thank Crossway's Thom Notaro for the professional copyediting skills he has brought to our project.

May our Trinitarian God be glorified by this book.

John M. Frame  
Wayne Grudem  
John J. Hughes



# Abbreviations

- AB Anchor Bible
- ANF *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 1885–1887. 10 vols. Repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994
- BDAG Bauer, Walter, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
- BECNT Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
- EBC Expositor's Bible Commentary
- ESV English Standard Version
- GKC *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910
- GTJ *Grace Theological Journal*
- HCSB Holman Christian Standard Bible
- ICC International Critical Commentary
- IJST *International Journal of Systematic Theology*
- Institutes* Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. 2 vols. The Library of Christian Classics 20–21. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960
- JASA *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*
- JBMW *Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*
- JETS *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
- JSNT *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
- KJV King James Version
- LXX Septuagint
- NA<sup>28</sup> *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Nestle-Aland). 28th ed. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlos M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012



NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NET	NET Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NPNF <sup>1</sup>	<i>The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , Series 1. Edited by Philip Schaff. 1886–1889. 14 vols. Repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PTR	<i>Princeton Theological Review</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TNIV	Today's New International Version
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
UBS <sup>5</sup>	<i>The Greek New Testament</i> (United Bible Societies). 5th ed. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlos M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WJE	Edwards, Jonathan. <i>The Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> . Edited by Paul Ramsay et al. Vols. 1, 3, 6, 17, 21, 23, 26. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957, 1970, 1980, 1999, 2003, 2004, 2008
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

Part 1

# SONS OF YESHUA



# Redeeming Science

*A Father-Son Tale*

RANSOM POYTHRESS

Many people have a love-hate relationship with the sciences. They see them either as the bedrock for life and the proper understanding of the universe or as some enigmatic intellectual pursuit they escaped from after that one required college course. People can talk with polarizing, emotionally charged language about their feelings on the sciences, the way they might speak about politics, the Yankees, or dark chocolate.

Some think only a certain type of person has what it takes to thrive in the sciences. This person must have a certain type of brain, a particular personality, and a special genetic predisposition to really enjoy the sciences. They believe the sciences are not for everyone.

This mistaken view can be used to ill effect by people on either side of the divide. Those who have embraced the sciences can sometimes see themselves as elite and superior. They are above and beyond the huddled, ignorant masses. They wield intellectualism as a weapon to intimidate others by using scientific language, like a password to a

secret society, to exclude and diminish their peers. “You don’t understand what I’m saying when I spout a long list of complicated scientific terms? You poor soul. Just trust that I know what I’m talking about and believe that I’m smarter than you and know truth better than you.” They set themselves up as arbiters of truth in order to achieve power and position. This is science at its worst, used to confuse instead of clarify, to subjugate instead of serve.

On the flip side, those not drawn to the sciences will sometimes try to separate themselves through a different kind of derision. They portray scientists as awkward, geeky, and introverted. To them, scientists are people who sit in dark, windowless labs poring over data because they’re too antisocial to form functional human relationships. These individuals laugh at the pocket protectors and the frequently parodied inability of scientists to perform in the “real” world. To them, scientists are like that out-of-place kid brother they condescendingly tolerated and begrudgingly assisted when he was out of his depth. Alternatively, some feel like they are the kid brother, and science is the scary, inaccessible older brother. So, they distance themselves to avoid potential embarrassment and rejection.

At times, these differing stances can set up invisible battle lines, trying to disparage one another in order to elevate themselves. I regard these two prevailing positions as fatally flawed because the battle line creates a false dichotomy. The tension rests on the presupposition that some gifts are better than others. Although some may have more aptitude in the sciences, that doesn’t make them inherently better (or worse) than anyone else. Job description doesn’t make you superior. The CEO in a penthouse office isn’t better than the janitor who cleans his office. Putting value on ability isn’t biblical—it’s cultural. Although there may be real, ordained differences in authority, there is no inherent difference in the value of the work. All work done to the glory of God is glorious.

God created work for his glory and for love of neighbor, not for societal standing, monetary advantage, or selfish gain. As a result, I believe everyone can appreciate the fundamentals of any job or task, from changing diapers to leading a country. This includes the sciences as well. If we can’t explain our work in a way that is accessible to every-

one, it's a failure on our part rather than a reflection of the inadequacy of the hearer. Owing to our human nature as image bearers, not only are the sciences understandable to everyone—they are also potentially enjoyable by everyone. Even if some individuals may not gravitate toward the sciences, they can praise God as they discover what science reveals about “his eternal power and divine nature” (Rom. 1:20).

I have my father, Vern Sheridan Poythress, largely to thank for my perspective on science and, more generally, all facets of creation. It was he who taught me from an early age to search out how God is revealed in all aspects of life. Whether through Old Testament law pointing forward to Christ, redemptive themes abounding in film, or bare winter branches demonstrating God's artistry, my father pointed out God's revelation and how we, in relationship, respond to him. This vision of the world became most apparent to me as I journeyed through the sciences. My understanding matured with time as my father helped open my eyes to a more expansive vista of creation.

I don't recall exactly when or how my interest in the sciences originated, though my parents tell me it was from a young age. I do remember that my father actively nurtured those early feelings. I recall my excitement upon receiving what was, at the time, a fairly expensive oil immersion compound light microscope. With my primitive tools and technique, I eagerly dissected small insects or birds that had perished in our backyard, and mounted samples on microscope slides. I pored over books on animal behavior and watched National Geographic documentaries on repeat. Those early years of uninhibited exploration provided much of the groundwork for my future interest in the sciences.

However, the rigor and routine of school and the pressure of grades soon infiltrated my carefree revelry. During those teen years, my father stoked the fire as he patiently and painstakingly held my hand through science fair projects. His contagious excitement reignited in me those wonder-filled moments that made the sciences so appealing. I'll probably never truly know exactly how many hours he dedicated as he explained, re-explained, and further explained endless sheets of mathematical equations. Yet through it all, there was no concealing the pleasure he got from being involved.

The flat, disinterested style of the public schools seemed to almost intentionally disfigure the sciences into a set of lifeless obstacles to be surmounted on the way to some nebulous idea of comfort and success. My schoolteachers reduced science to pragmatic tools, meaningless rules, and rote memorization. But at home, I watched my father come alive expounding on the beauty of consensus and cooperativity in creation. The sciences took on new life for me under his tutelage. He delightedly tried to explain a new system of annotating, describing, and manipulating very large numbers; he got carried away teaching me how to use exponential regression to compare evolutionary models with typological-cladistic arrangements of animal phyla, and I found myself caught up in the fervor with him.

Eventually, I went off to college, and although I persevered, much of the zeal dried up. Science lost its sheen, its spark fading beneath mounds of droning professors, stuffy classrooms, and inane paperwork with only the occasional flash of what I knew must be hidden somewhere below the surface. Where was that thrill of discovery? Or being gleefully astonished by two disparate ideas joining together in harmony? I knew something was missing, and I graduated confused and disheartened. Science, real science, was entombed somewhere beneath my feet. I could feel that it was there. I could see the headstone, yet it felt beyond my power to unearth the captive realm.

My time of study at Westminster Theological Seminary finally exhumed the precious jewel of science. Through my work there and hours of conversations with my father, I started to see the wellspring of my zeal for the sciences. He helped me see not just that I love science but also where that love came from, something I had not been able to grasp until then. He wasn't just encouraging a love of science, but explaining and showing *why* I love science in the first place—because I love God. In showing me why I love science, by extension, he showed me why I had lost science. When anything displaces God as the focal point, you no longer see it through the light of the Son, and its gleam is lost. It's like trying to use the moon for light after you've removed the sun from the sky.

When you love God, by extension you love everything about him, everything that proclaims him, everything that is brought forth by him,

everything that reminds you of him. If you enjoy anything in life, it's because first and foremost you see God in it (although non-Christians would deny it—Romans 1). Pleasure of any kind is a shadow of the fulfillment we find in relationship with God. It's all meant to point and drive us toward him. So I am excited by science because my heart sees God there and delights in God's revelation of himself. The experiments I do with my hands and the results I see with my eyes reveal God's beauty, organization, sovereignty, care, power, tenderness, inscrutability, and a host of other attributes. Those flashes of majesty I glimpsed throughout my life in science fully reveal themselves when they're connected to the majesty and worship of the one true Creator God.

Furthermore, humans are the only creatures capable of this connection. As image bearers, we are able to enter into a personal relationship with God in a way that nothing else in creation can. A human soul is more significant than all the marvels of science because of this likeness. Therefore, as our understanding of science grows in scope and grandeur, by association our worship of God for the special place of humankind in creation expands proportionally.

These truths struck me with irrepressible clarity on one particularly memorable occasion. In my early years of graduate school, my father came to Boston University to give an open lecture on science and faith. There were about a hundred people in the audience ranging from freshman music majors to the senior president of the atheist club on campus. Many people were drawn by my father's reputation for superior academics and a sharp theological mind. I remember sitting in the front row nervously preparing my introductory comments and watching him off to the side. His physical presence isn't particularly commanding—tall and lanky, always lecturing in a full suit, seemingly unaware of the definition of "relax." A brief summary of his résumé intimidates. You quickly realize the magnitude of his genius accompanied by wisdom, maturity, and a degree of solemnity that comes from years of world experience. Yet, there is none of the pride or abrasive confidence that often accompanies such knowledge. He possesses a quiet, gentle, and inspiring humility. I sometimes notice the slightly awkward way he stands, a little too stiff, a little too uncomfortable, with his hands clasped strangely, looking off into a corner, his mind



traveling at light speed. It's endearing, and—without disrespect—I'd almost describe it as adorable, like a sweet, absent-minded professor.

Once I survived the nerve-wracking ordeal of introducing the greatest man I know, I settled down to listen to his talk. I had heard several versions of it in bits and pieces through the years—at the dinner table and scattered throughout chapters of his books. Although the content itself wasn't new, it was the presentation that gripped my attention. Being personable and sociable isn't one of my father's strongest traits, but he knows it's a way of demonstrating love for others, so he works hard at it. This adds to his adorable quirkiness, but it also means his lectures can be didactic and dry, relying more on audience interest in material than on charisma and panache. However, as his talk wore on, the entire audience pulsed in rapt attention. For a large group of college-age students, this was no small feat. Every day hundreds of professors across the country fail to keep students awake, let alone attentive. How was this possible? It became all the more remarkable as the subject material increased in complexity to the point where I was sure no one in the audience had the faintest clue what he was talking about. There is no way a freshman business major could have the slightest idea how drawings of boxes connect to four-dimensional symmetries and Maxwell's equations of light, yet everyone was transfixed.

Then I saw it. My father was overjoyed with what he was saying. He didn't just think intellectually that God was revealed in all creation; he felt it. In his talk, he actively worshiped God for the beautiful harmonies revealed in creation. He glorified God for the way he revealed himself. Here was a man with two PhDs enamored and animated, rocking back and forth, hardly able to contain his giddy enthusiasm! He was full of child-like amazement, and it was infectious. We all wanted that. We all wanted to be so captivated and entranced by our studies, our work, our lives, that we couldn't contain our joy. I finally felt like I understood what Jesus meant in Matthew 18:2–3: "And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'" Here was a man who didn't use tips from the latest book on presentation style, or techniques from pop psychology on how to keep people engaged. He used no flashy PowerPoint tricks

or catchy animations to elicit a cheap laugh. There was no mask, no artificially constructed barrier between him and what he articulated; he lived his love of God. It was uncontainable and utterly desirable. I can imagine him and King David dancing together, their hearts singing,

The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. (Ps. 19:1)

I finally realized I had an example to help me embody my joy and interest in the sciences. But this was not limited to how my love of science provides a clear avenue for glorifying God personally. When you are filled to overflowing with awe and exuberance, you can't help but want to share that. Now I want to communicate my joy to others so they might experience the same delight, as in the parable of the woman who lost her coin. She gave all her time and energy to find it and, when she found it, called others to celebrate with her (Luke 15:8–9). I “found” God in the sciences and want everyone else to see the splendor of the Creator with the same clarity. The way my father and I get excited about science, the way a child gets excited about a new toy, or a college graduate celebrates his first job, or parents cherish their first child, all of this points us to God and his care, sovereignty, love, and grace. Yet, as praiseworthy as these things are, they are but small shadows, pale reflections of the enthusiasm we should feel for the gospel of Jesus Christ. We should all be so moved by the gospel that our exuberance is uncontainable (Matt. 5:14–16).

This joyful response isn't just limited to the sciences. By extension, this same gospel connection applies to every area of work, study, or play. Art, sports, politics, insurance, Wall Street, custodial services, parenting—they can all be done in connection to, pointing toward, and to the glory of the one true God. God, by his Spirit, has revealed the truth of himself and his once-for-all salvific work through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ, as an atonement for sin. This is an astonishing truth. Seeing God's glory revealed in Scripture and in creation should elicit such responses as joy, fear, awe, and worship. Like the disciples during the transfiguration, when we see God displayed specifically in our daily lives, we should fall on our faces before his majesty (Matt. 17:6). Then we reflect the image of his glory as we ourselves are

transformed. “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18a). Glimpses of glory in work done in accordance with God’s will reveal what a magnificent, astounding God we serve. John Piper says this beautifully in his book *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God*:

All branches of learning exist ultimately for the purposes of knowing God, loving God, and loving man through Jesus. And since loving man means ultimately helping him see and savor God in Christ forever, it is profoundly right to say all thinking, all learning, all education, and all research is for the sake of knowing God, loving God, and showing God.<sup>1</sup>

In June 2014, I had the amazing honor of standing beside my father as we gave presentations on science and faith and answered questions on a panel. For more than twenty years I had witnessed and experienced the wondrousness of God through my father, and now, for the first time, I shared it with others in a large public setting. For me, this felt like a momentous induction and commissioning. My father trained me in word and deed. He passed on his excitement rooted in the truth, and the time has come to share what I’ve learned. I’ll never be my father, but I hope by God’s grace that, like him, I can embody the truth of creation as revealed by God. I pray that I can manifest a genuine exhilaration that comes from the full realization of the overflowing mercy and grandeur of God. I aspire to pass on to future generations what I have learned by the Holy Spirit through my father. Abraham Kuyper once said, “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: Mine!”<sup>2</sup> Vern Poythress, my father, has helped me realize that not only is this true, but it’s a truth worth celebrating and proclaiming with all my heart.

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1. John Piper, *Think: The Life of the Mind and the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 175.

2. Abraham Kuyper, inaugural address at the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam, October 20, 1880, quoted in Abraham Kuyper, “Sphere Sovereignty,” in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 488, emphasis original.

# The Grace and Gift of Differentness

JUSTIN POYTHRESS

“So how much will it be, total?” my dad asked.

“Well,” the man shifted, looking up and stroking his chin. “I think I said three thousand. But when we go to get the paperwork done at the DMV, we can just write it down as a gift, and that way you don’t have to pay any taxes.”

I was lost. It was the first time I’d ever been involved in a vehicle transaction, and because of the last-second nature of getting this teaching job in Tennessee, we had found, sought out, and were now buying a 1997 Crown Victoria in the space of twenty-four hours.

“No,” my dad said softly, and with a gentleness that betrayed his distaste for any sort of confrontation. “I don’t think that’s the right way.”

“No, no, it’s fine!” the man assured us. “I’m happy to do it. I do it all the time for people I sell to, and it just saves you the taxes, is all.” He was a little irritated that we would be refusing his warm generosity, more than that, refusing his willingness to put himself on the line for our benefit.

“I understand,” my father said doggedly, his voice now rising in its steadiness and firmness. “But see, we are followers of Jesus Christ, so we want to obey the law; we’ll pay the full taxes on it.”

“Ah, oh yes, of course, I get that,” the man shuffled and sputtered. “Wanting to help you all out was all, but I understand.”

The seller was not the only one out of sorts.

“Followers of Jesus Christ”? The phrase was echoing in my own head. Who says that? “We don’t want to break the law”? You don’t phrase it like that to someone who is trying to do you a favor. If you must, you let him down gently. And why bring Christ into it? A person can just be honest without having to say it’s because of Jesus. Good grief. And to top it all off, I was going to have to pay back my dad for the vehicle. So, yeah, maybe the whole no taxes thing wouldn’t have been so bad. After all, both my dad and I were on the same page against big government, so why did we have to make such a fuss about giving them more money?

This was my father, though, and this story exemplifies one of the many ways in which he is—there’s no other word for it—*different*. That word can come with a lot of baggage, but I intend to show primarily, as in the above case, how it describes him with the best possible nuances of that word. We as Christians are called to be different. We are sojourners and exiles in this world. And no matter what I might have thought about how my father chose to phrase that particular refusal of tax evasion, I could not help but feel, even in that moment, the thawing warmth of gospel reverence so manifest in my dad’s character. There was something so solid, so unshakeable, so unflinching in his unashamed embrace of the shame of Christ.

It will not come as a surprise to anyone reading this collection that Vern Poythress is a godly man. One simply cannot live the sort of life he has, with the career path he has chosen, and the works he has contributed, without an accompanying measure of authentic faith. Yet this is perhaps the area where I can best provide illumination, seeing as my father has not been one to maintain an extensive social circle. It is within a man’s private life, in the refuge of recreation, in those “unseen hours,” where his character is most laid bare. And so it is there that I wish to speak on behalf of his “differentness.”

One of the first areas where I encountered this different godliness was in his Bible knowledge. Every seminary professor or man in ministry knows his Bible, or at least would like to appear to know his Bible; so such a statement can seem a truism. Yet my exposure to this reality was more organic and thus made a stronger impression. We did morning and evening devotions as a family, and I knew my father read his Bible in the morning. But I also remember other occasions, such as Saturday afternoons, or evenings, or during vacation times, hearing—of all things—a sanctified hissing noise.

The noise would come from his bedroom, the door slightly ajar, and I discerned the cause of the hissing to be my father's voice as he read the Bible to himself at a volume just above a whisper. The result, audible to someone outside the room, was a series of *s* sounds echoing faintly in the hallway. When I peeked in, he would sometimes raise his eyes and offer the faintest smile before returning to the Scripture. He was always willing to be disturbed, but if left alone, he would proceed for long durations, reading large chunks in a sitting.

Slowly, as I grew in my own Bible education, I became aware that Daddy could serve as a biblical encyclopedia. And not just to answer questions about any and every theological term, or church structures, or clarifying how to interpret a tricky passage. He knew where every story or doctrine was in the Bible. I still remember being stunned at about age ten when my mother revealed to me that you could quote or read any selection from the Bible and my dad would be able to tell exactly what chapter and verse it came from. Naturally, I had to test this a few times and soon discovered that my dad had indeed mastered this neat little party trick, though I saw little more value to it at the time.

When I got into college and seminary, that's when I started hearing the stories. A seminary employee recounted the following to me: Upon seeing Vern Poythress eating his lunch in the Machen dining hall by himself, the man observed that my father was whispering over a Bible.

"What are you doing?"

"Memorizing the book of Habakkuk," Dad replied.

"Why Habakkuk?"

"Because it's the next one."

There's not much one can say after a response like that. Eventually,

I was able to goad out of Dad more precisely how much of the Bible he had memorized: the entire New Testament, the Psalter, the second half of Isaiah, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, all the Minor Prophets, Ruth, and other select portions of Old Testament narrative. That adds up to about half the Bible, at least as far as direct memorization is concerned. I then discovered that in order to keep it from fading, he tries to make a daily practice (who knows where he finds this time) to review six chapters of memorized material, in addition to his daily review of Hebrew vocabulary flashcards.

So when Dr. Poythress gives his plug each year in his hermeneutics class for really “knowing your Bible” and, during sermon preparation, memorizing the passage, it’s not empty counsel, though he’d never willingly give his credentials.

That’s another part of what has made my father different: his humility. I don’t know if I’ve ever encountered a more thoroughly gospel-humble man. If you ever want to see Vern Poythress become uncomfortable, I can offer you a tried and tested way to do so: Without warning, launch into how much you appreciate his work, or how God has used him in your life, or how remarkable you’ve found a book or teaching of his. Immediately, he will begin squirming, shuffling, and grimacing, as if you were jabbing at him with a red-hot poker. So fearful is he of pride, and of allowing a foothold for conceit, that if ever the conversation turns around to congratulating him on his achievements or character, it produces an immediate shutdown. He revealed on multiple occasions, much to my disbelief, that his greatest fear and greatest weakness was his pride. So he would never engage in talk that openly lent itself to building his acclaim.

The same could be said about gossip. I’ve heard my father engage in gossip approximately the same number of times I’ve seen him get angry, which is to say, never. This doesn’t mean that he would never have strong opinions or feel the weight of folly or injustice, which would stir him up to agitation; but if he ever sensed that a conversation was descending to mudslinging, he clammed up. And being sinfully inclined toward gossip and dirt myself, I remember trying to lob him softballs. People who stood against him, who attacked him, or whose foolishness paraded itself and worked to his detriment—I would try

goaded him to attack them, yet without success. I never witnessed such perseverance in guarded understatement. I never perceived in my father, by deed or word, any ill will toward another human being. He forgave anyone in our family so effortlessly that I always found it nearly impossible to harbor resentment toward him, even if I chafed at some decision he made.

I think his ability to forgive and reconcile relations is an outworking of his genius of multiperspectivalism. That lens of perception is not merely an abstract theological theory used to peel apart multiple layers of symphonic biblical truth, but it applies to how he deals with people in the real world. My father has an uncanny ability, which frequently served him in his efforts as peacekeeper within our house, to see, understand, and sympathize with every person's perspective in turn, while not necessarily agreeing with it. He can slip from one man's shoes into another's with such remarkable alacrity that you must often wait a long time hoping to hear his own personal opinion.

Such deference and desire to see the best in others reflects my father's "differentness" in godliness worked out in humility. That humility is so deeply rooted within his character that it routinely overflows in a simplicity that structures and pervades his entire life.

It is in relation to the subject of simplicity that we find a sharp irony that surfaces when exploring the contours of my father's worldview. On the one hand, he is a marrow-deep academic. If one ever wished to paint a caricature of the consummate scholar—the professor squirreled away in his office, hunched over massive tomes in the solitude of his ivory tower, poring over the obscure thought of specialized internal academic debates, perfectly content to sail for days through the mental waters of writing, thought, and logic, with nary a human interaction—Vern Poythress could serve well as your model.

Yet, on the other hand, I don't believe I've ever encountered someone who so derides, disparages, and deconstructs the very academic world he orbits. He is only too eager to thrust aside the scholarly blinders. He observes with disgust how so many of his colleagues clutch these blinders, believing they guide them into a more distinguished, loftier focus. In doing so, however, my father, in Kuyperian fashion, sees them rejecting the fullness of the manifestation of God's glory as it appears



in things like children's cartoons and McDonald's, just as much as it appears in symphonies and foreign delicacies. Instead of bequeathing a subscription to the snobbery of academia, he steadfastly cultivated in us a deep reverence for the ordinary, for the unassuming, for the simple. He would regularly direct us to observe how, more often than not, it was the lowly and meek and simple to whom God granted his Spirit of understanding and faith. Oh the joy that he takes in simplicity! He continues eschewing every form of extravagance, finding peace in not being haughty, but always associating with the lowly (cf. Rom. 12:16).

Two examples serve as illustrations. The first occurred while we awaited the opening curtain of a high school musical we attended to support the child of a family friend. I was complaining about the definitive lack of quality we were about to witness. My father chided me about such an attitude. He warned that our ease of access to the cream of the crop in all branches of entertainment had numbed our ability to appreciate the amateur arts. Yet these stand, in God's sight, as equally pleasing artistic expressions of his glory and thus should be enjoyed as such. My father has helped me seek, incrementally, to become a person who, like him, does not despise the day of small things (cf. Zech. 4:10).

Another example would be football. It is not so "different" in modern America to enjoy football (often to excess). But it is different for someone like my father. For a man who himself has only ever been tangentially athletic to be introduced (through his wife) to football, and to then develop a passion for the grind of the gridiron, is quite unusual. On New Year's Day, he can contentedly join with, and even lead, the family in watching a full day's worth of unbroken bowl games. He is different in the way he watches football. He steadfastly demurs to root for any team as his favorite, being willing to side with those closest to him, but preferring most to watch the game for the game itself. He watches for the artistry, and the drama, and the chess match of coaching.

It was on account of his Kuyperian "every inch is Christ's" mentality that I was inundated, willingly or not, with explanations of how everything I did or enjoyed pointed to Christ. Playing Pokemon was patterned after a healthy exercise of dominion over the created order. Batman and Superman, as defenders of the oppressed, upholders of

justice, and deliverers of redemption were types of Christ. We practiced good table manners because God is a God of order, and structure, and respect. I loved football because it displayed the exercise of Christ-given talents in analogical patterns to the Christian life of competing, strategizing, and striving until the end. There was no escape. However, God used those truths to break in when I least expected it. The transforming of one's mind is a lifelong process. I still remember how revolutionary it was when my father explained that God made the sun as the sustaining force of all life on Earth, and created the very phenomenon of light so that we could understand better who God is. Not only are these objects helpful resources that God permits us to use in making imperfect analogies, but God actually created everything, including the sun, primarily for the purpose of better knowing who he is. That is a Copernican notion to our human understanding.

This Christ-centeredness went far beyond merely sucking the fun out of comic book heroes and video games. It has characterized all of my father's life, and it came through in the holistic way my parents thought about and structured home life. We always had morning and evening devotions. Church, Sunday school, and youth group were non-negotiables. Our conversations with friends or public school lectures were dissected and then reconstructed and guided by a biblical framework. Both my brother and I went through a Christian rite of passage to manhood, which they termed a Bar Yeshua. This was totally different, and completely new cultural territory, but in matters of Christian living, navigating new and different waters was never something my parents shied from. One of the things I recall and respect dearly about my mom and dad, as I reflect back on their Christ-centered parenting, is how intentional and diligent they were in discharging this duty. They did not stray or waver from their plans, no matter how different, strange, and unfruitful their efforts at fulfilling Deuteronomy 6:6–9 might appear at a given time.

The stark, bold differentness my father maintains has been protected and reinforced by his different personality as it pertains to relationships. It's not that he does not love and appreciate the warmth and intimacy of family and friends. He does. However, because of his intellect and disposition, God has enabled him to hold these things

more loosely. So once you extend outside his immediate circles of family and friends, it is not the slightest overstatement when he tells me that he doesn't care what others think of his work. This has freed him to pursue the topics, thought, and writings he feels God is leading him toward, without concern about reception.

Yet he balances that with a level of appropriate concern for how his efforts will land. He warns against the vanity of seeking to be different for the sake of being different. He has always striven to work in ways that will make an eternal impact. For him, this has meant honest reckoning with his own gifts in his place and time in the world. He rarely travels. He does not seek speaking engagements. He doesn't blog. His writings are almost never reactionary, but instead he embraces the power of the positive. The apologetic work of deconstruction must be done ten times over for any one error, and then will have to be repeated and modified to fight a slightly different strain of the same virus one generation later. However, if he contributes something positive, if he sets himself to the vastly more challenging task of blazing a new trail, if he builds something the right way, not out of hay or straw, but out of gold, that particular construction may never have to be laid again, but only added on to.

As I reflect personally on the most lasting impact of my father's legacy in my life thus far and into the future, it has been his character. Through all his brilliance, his thoughts, his biblical understanding, and his orchestrating of family life, what has been most enduring to me is the differentness of his godly character as a father. As any Van Tilian knows, there is a pretty wide Creator-creature distinction. God is different—fundamentally, innately different and peculiar. God is different down to the level of substance, of *ousia*. And so, when I give thanks for my earthly father's differentness, the most significant and lasting mode in which this has appeared to me has been in the way he has reflected and displayed God as Father.

Perhaps one of the most glorious, personal, and uplifting revelations of the New Testament is its new and different focus on relating to God as our Father through Jesus Christ. This is one of the most meaningful paradigms through which God intends for us to view him. And the longer I have known my own father, the more I have come to appreci-

ate my own spiritual blessing in this regard, especially when compared with others who may have to work their entire lives to push past the damaged, broken, or absent images that represent all they have ever known of fatherhood. God created fatherhood, like he created the sun, not because of any creational necessity, but in order that we could better understand his character. Our dependency on human fathers; our reverence and fear of them; their love, compassion, wisdom, strength, justice, and mercy—all these things give us an abundance of tangible displays through which God wants us to grasp our way toward comprehending the one relationship that will shape our lives for eternity.

My father, Vern Poythress, will not be with me forever, but he has left me something far more significant than any legacy, inheritance, book, or even life lesson. He has laid before me, as a human model, a grid or a matrix through which I can continue to move forward in seeing and loving my heavenly Father, who is very different.

God promises to transform our entire character in Jesus through his Spirit—which makes it impossible, when I reflect on my father's legacy as a living portrayal of *the* Father, to identify clear boundary lines of where that begins and ends. So also, in the Christian life, the dynamic of fatherhood, or relating to God as Father, does not fall within neat boundaries. It pertains to all aspects of our life, and though it will change in expression, our Father-son relation with the Lord will have no end throughout eternity.



Part 2

# EXEGESIS



# The New Testament Background of ἐκκλησία Revisited Yet Again

G. K. BEALE

I am happy to write an essay in honor of my colleague Vern Poythress. He has been gracious and helpful to me since I came to Westminster Theological Seminary. Vern's interests and skills are wide-ranging. He is as comfortable with systematic theology, philosophy, linguistics, logic, and math as he is with exegesis and biblical theology. I have enjoyed our many conversations about exegesis and biblical theology. Vern is truly a man without guile.

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In 2015 the *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* published my article titled “The Background of ἐκκλησία Revisited.”<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the article was to enter into the recent debate about whether the

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1. *JSNT* 38 (2015): 1–18.



background for Paul's use of ἐκκλησία was primarily Greco-Roman or from the Greek Old Testament. The article attempted to provide further evidence that, while there may be some influence from the use of ἐκκλησία as a civil assembly in the Greco-Roman world, the Septuagint was the main background for Paul's use of the word, especially for his multiple uses of "church [assembly] of God" (ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ).<sup>2</sup> Nehemiah 13:1 is the only place in all of the Septuagint where the phrase ἐκκλησία + θεοῦ occurs. In this case, not only is there a unique combination of words in the very same order, but there is almost the exact verbal expression: "They read in the book of Moses in the ears of the people; and it was found written in it [Deut. 23:3–5] that the Ammonites and Moabites should never enter *the assembly of God* forever."<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the clear verbal correspondence, the thematic similarity of Nehemiah 13:1 to the New Testament occurrences is evident, since it is the only passage in the Old Testament where the word is directly related to "reading in the book of Moses." Here "the people" are to be identified with the "assembly" (ἐκκλησία), so that the "assembly" is the place not only where unclean people are to be kept out, but also where the Scripture is read as part of worship. (Note also Neh. 8:1–2, where "the law of Moses" was read and explained in the area of the Water Gate to the "assembly" [ἐκκλησία].) Likewise, an aspect of worship by the church in Acts, in Paul's letters, and in Revelation included teaching, which involved instruction founded not only on apostolic tradition but also on the Old Testament, which was clearly part of the apostolic doctrine (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:1–3) and was read in early church worship.<sup>4</sup> This likeness between Nehemiah and the Pauline churches in their reading and teaching of Scripture could have been part of what sparked Paul to allude to "the assembly of God" from Nehemiah 13:1.

2. Except for translations from the Septuagint, Scripture quotations in this chapter are from the New American Standard Bible, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

3. In the LXX of Nehemiah, only the article τοῦ is missing before θεοῦ, though it is included before the divine name in some LXX manuscripts of Neh. 13:1 (A &c.a). The Hebrew text of Neh. 13:1 indeed includes the definite article before "God" (בְּקִהְלֵי הָאֱלֹהִים), although it is not to be translated into English. Paul may well be alluding to the Hebrew text, since he includes the article τοῦ before θεοῦ, but he may be alluding to some of the significant LXX manuscript traditions of Neh. 13:1 that include the article, or he may have merely inserted the article, since it is implied in the LXX because "God" is certainly "definite" with or without an article.

4. On which see Beale, "Background of ἐκκλησία Revisited," 4.

The conclusion of my earlier article was that the early Christian “assembly” (usually translated “church”) was the continuation of the true Israelite “assembly of God” in the new covenant age<sup>5</sup> and *implicitly* stood in contrast to the pagan civic “assemblies of the world.”

In the 2015 article, except for Acts 19–20, I did not address uses of ἐκκλησία outside Paul in the New Testament and how some of them might relate to the Old Testament. As far as I am aware, such a study has not been done. It is this to which we now turn. The purpose of this study is to see whether or not other kinds of allusions to a Greco-Roman background or to other Old Testament allusions are linked with the uses of ἐκκλησία. If other allusions to a pagan background are detected, then this would point to a greater probability of a civic background for New Testament uses of ἐκκλησία. On the other hand, if other Old Testament allusions are found directly linked to New Testament uses of ἐκκλησία, then the Old Testament background of ἐκκλησία would be seen as predominant in those uses.

The remainder of this essay does not address all the other uses of ἐκκλησία outside of Paul in the New Testament, but only those in Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy,<sup>6</sup> Hebrews, and Revelation (excluding, e.g., Matthew, Acts [outside of chaps. 19–20], James, and 3 John). The reason for this limitation is that the only allusions we have found directly linked to ἐκκλησία are Old Testament allusions in these five New Testament books. Beyond these references, I have not observed other uses of ἐκκλησία in this extra-Pauline corpus to be linked with any allusions to a Greco-Roman background or to the Old Testament. We proceed to examine these other relevant New Testament uses.

### Uses of ἐκκλησία in the Later Pauline Epistles

Of course, there are many who would not hold to Pauline authorship of Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Timothy. I accept these epistles as

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5. For this conclusion, see, among others, not only P. Trebilco, “Why Did the Early Christians Call Themselves ἡ ἐκκλησία?,” *NTS* 57, no. 3 (2011): 440–60, but also earlier works by I. Howard Marshall, “The Biblical Use of the Word ‘ἐκκλησία,’” *Expository Times* 84, no. 12 (1973): 359–64, and Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC 44 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 57–61, all of whom also argue for a predominate LXX influence.

6. Though I did address 1 Timothy briefly in the 2015 article.

authored by Paul. There is not space here to argue for this, but that has been done well by others.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, even if these three epistles were not written by Paul, they would still give evidence of a developed Pauline tradition later in the first century. We will see that the use of ἐκκλησία in direct linkage with the Old Testament in these epistles coheres with the same kind of usage elsewhere in Paul, especially in 1 Corinthians and 1 Thessalonians (discussed in the earlier article). This observation will point further to the genuine Pauline nature of Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 Timothy. Because of the direct connection of ἐκκλησία to Old Testament allusions and quotations in the following references, that term should be seen to have some link itself to the Old Testament rather than to a Greco-Roman concept of the civic assembly. Furthermore, if the following Old Testament citations and allusions about Israel or her king are fulfilled in the Christian covenant community (whether as direct or typological prophecies), is it not natural that ἐκκλησία would be applied to that community, since that was one of the main words for the Old Testament covenant community?

1. Ephesians 1:22 begins with an acknowledged quotation of Psalm 8:6, “He put all things in subjection under His feet,” which is applied to Christ’s ruling position at God’s right hand (Eph. 1:20–21). In the psalm David sees that Israel’s hope is in an ideal Adam, who will rule over all the earth (Ps. 8:6–8). This hope has begun fulfillment in Christ, which is immediately related to and explained as Christ being the “head over all things to the church” (Eph. 1:22). Christ rules over the entire earth in fulfillment of the psalm, and this rule is for the advantage of the “church” (ἐκκλησία), the continuation of authentic Israel, whose hopes have begun to be realized in Christ’s inaugurated rule.

2. In Ephesians 3:9–10, Paul says that grace was given to him so that “the manifold wisdom of God,” which “has been hidden” in a “mystery,” “might now be made known through the church [ἐκκλησία] to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.” This

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7. E.g., see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 479–97 (on Ephesians), 516–31 (on Colossians), and 571–77 (on 1 Timothy).

continues the discussion of the revealed “mystery” from verses 3–8. The revelation of the “mystery” is not that the concept of the church (Jew and Gentile in Christ) is now revealed for the first time, nor that Gentiles can be saved, nor that Gentiles form part of true Israel with believing Jews in Christ, but *how Gentiles (together with believing Jews) become part of the true Israel*: by submission only to and identification only with Jesus the Israelite King, not submission to and identification only with the ethnic identification marks of the Mosaic law (circumcision, dietary laws, Sabbath laws, etc.), though there is not space here to argue this.<sup>8</sup>

An allusion in Ephesians 3 to the book of Daniel affirms this thought. Through ten significant parallels, Caragounis ties the revealed mystery in Ephesians 3 with the mystery in Daniel 2.<sup>9</sup> The expression “by revelation there was made known to me the mystery” (κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν ἐγνώρισθῃ μοι τὸ μυστήριον) in Ephesians 3:3 is a literary allusion to Daniel 2:28 (Theodotion), which reads, “There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar . . .” (ἔστιν θεὸς ἐν οὐρανῷ ἀποκαλύπτων μυστήρια καὶ ἐγνώρισεν τῷ βασιλεῖ Ναβουχοδονοσορ).

What added significance could the Daniel background contribute to what we have concluded thus far about the unveiled mystery, especially as this bears upon the use of “church” in Ephesians 3:10? As in Daniel, the Ephesian mystery concerns the Messiah establishing Israel’s kingdom after he defeats evil rulers in the end time (see Eph. 1:9–10, 20–22; cf. 3:5, 10 [“now”]). In this light, the divulged mystery in Ephesians 3 explains the new entrance requirements for becoming citizens of the Israelite kingdom prophesied in Daniel 2: namely, identifying the kingdom’s head, the Messiah, as the only identification tag of being a true Israelite and not identifying with the marks of the old Torah. Recall that the “stone” in Daniel 2 smote the statue (representing evil kingdoms), and the parallel with the “stone” in Daniel 7 is the “Son of Man” (7:13), who rules over evil kingdoms. Furthermore,

8. See, further, G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 159–73; see further secondary sources cited therein in support of various aspects of the argument here and below.

9. Chrys Caragounis, *The Ephesian Mysterion: Meaning and Content*, *Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament* 8 (Lund: Gleerup, 1977), 123–26.

Matthew 21:42–44 identifies the “stone” of Daniel 2 with Christ, who will judge unbelievers. Recall that the “stone” of Daniel 2 “filled the whole earth” (2:35), indicating that the Israelite kingdom led by the Messiah would include some Gentiles who would willingly submit to him. The “church” composed of believing Jews and Gentiles, which is the fulfillment of this Israelite kingdom, is the vehicle through which the content of God’s wise mystery about the “church” is proclaimed (Eph. 3:10).

3. Genesis 2:24 is formally quoted in Ephesians 5:31, and then verse 32 refers to the Old Testament quotation as a “mystery,” which pertains not directly to husbands and wives but “to Christ and the church” (ἐκκλησία). There is much discussion of the alternative ways to understand the relation of the Genesis 2 quotation to Christ and the church, which is the key to understanding the “mystery.” Some see various kinds of analogies between Genesis 2:24 and the human marriage relationship, as well as the Christ-church relationship. Others understand Genesis 2:24 as a typological foreshadowing of the Christ-church relationship (though human marriage is not out of mind), though this also has alternative versions. What is clear is that there is some relationship between the Old Testament quotation in Ephesians 5:31 and Christ and the church in 5:32 so that, again, we have the “church” inextricably linked to an Old Testament reference and thus to be understood in some way in the light of that reference.<sup>10</sup>

4. In line with the above uses, the fact that the reference to “the church” in Colossians 1:18 is in an immediate context (1:15–19) that is saturated with allusions to the Old Testament and to Judaism concerning the coming Messiah, and not a Greco-Roman background, shows the likelihood that “church” here, to one degree or another, reflects an Old Testament background: Christ is “head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Him-

10. Note also that several commentators see an allusion to Ezek. 16:9, 13–14 in Eph. 5:26–27: both speak of a bride who is washed by water and thus is made perfect. For example, see NA<sup>28</sup>; Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Waco, TX: Word, 1990), 376–77; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 422–23; Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 543, 546; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 385–86. For instance, compare Eph. 5:26 (ἀγίαση καθαρίας τῷ λουτρῷ τοῦ ὕδατος ἐν ῥήματι) with Ezek. 16:9 (ἐλουσά σε ἐν ὕδατι καὶ ἀπέπλυνα τὸ αἷμά σου ἀπὸ σοῦ καὶ ἔκριά σε ἐν ἐλαίῳ). This is a probable allusion and, once again, connects ἐκκλησία in Eph. 5:27 directly with the covenant community of Old Testament Israel.

self will come to have first place in everything.” In addition, Christ as the “firstborn” who has the supremacy in everything in Colossians 1:18 is directly linked to Christ as the temple in 1:19.

In this regard, some commentators have observed that the combined wording of “well pleased” and “dwell” in verse 19 is traceable to the LXX of Psalm 67(68):17:<sup>11</sup> Colossians 1:19 can be translated “because in him [ἐν αὐτῷ] all the fullness [of deity] was well pleased [εὐδόκέω] to dwell [κατοικέω]” (alternatively, “in him he was well pleased for all the fullness [of deity] to dwell”); and the Psalm 68 passage reads, “God was well pleased [εὐδόκέω] to dwell [κατοικέω] in it [ἐν αὐτῷ, i.e., Zion] . . . the Lord will dwell [there] forever . . . in the holy place [τῷ ἁγίῳ, which renders שְׁכֵן<sup>12</sup>].”

The unique wording shared by Psalm 68(67) and Colossians 1 points to the probability of such an allusion: Psalm 67:17a is the only place in the LXX where the words “well pleased” (εὐδόκέω) and “dwell” (κατοικέω) occur together (“dwell” in 67:17a, as well as “dwell” [κατασκηνόω] in 67:17b and 67:19; and 68[67]:17 is a reference to the temple, as most English translations render the last phrase of the Hebrew and the LXX).

It is perhaps no mere coincidence that ἐκκλησία occurs only a few verses later, in Psalm 67:27 of the LXX (ἐν ἐκκλησίαις εὐλογεῖτε τὸν θεόν), which refers to “praising God” in the context of “the sanctuary,” and that context is explicitly referred to again in 67:30

11. In this respect, see Christopher A. Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians*, Biblical Interpretation Series 96 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 144–56, as well his list of scholars who also see the allusion to Ps. 68(67):17 (on which see *ibid.*, 143). In addition to that list, see also G. Münsterlein, “Die Erwählung durch das Pleroma,” *NTS* 8, no. 3 (1962): 266–70, who sees a clear connection between Ps. 68(67):17 (esp. the Targumic version) and Col. 1:19; N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC 12 (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 78; Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical, 2000), 63, says the wording “calls to mind the Jewish Scripture . . . LXX Ps. 67:17, for example”; M. Wolter, *Der Brief an die Kolosser: Der Brief an Philemon*, Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament 12 (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1993), 85, argues that the wording comes from the Jewish Old Testament background, especially Ps. 68(67):17 (and, secondarily, from Ps. 132:13–14 [131:13–14 LXX]; 2 Macc. 14:35; 3 Macc. 2:16); T. K. Abbott, *A Critical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 219, sees an echo of the Psalm text; G. R. Beasley-Murray, “The Second Chapter of Colossian,” *Review and Expositor* 70, no. 4 (1973): 177, says that Ps. 67:17 (LXX) is a “parallel that is more than a matter of vocabulary.”

12. Most translations render שְׁכֵן as “holy place” or “sanctuary” (ESV, HCSB, KJV, NIV, NJB, NLT, NRSV, RSV; so also 3 En. 24:6–7), though a few translate it as “holiness” (e.g., NASB, NEB). What confirms the rendering of “holy place” instead of “holiness” is that the ׀ preposition is followed by the article “the” (indicated by a short “a” vowel under the ׀ and a dagesh forte in the ש). On the other hand, “in the holiness” would result in a rather awkward rendering.

(“because of your temple in Jerusalem will kings bring presents to you” [= 68:29 in English versions]). The observation that about nineteen of the seventy-three uses of ἐκκλησία (rendering לְהִקָּרֵא) in the LXX are also directly linked to a temple context may show that the link between ἐκκλησία and temple in Colossians 1:18–19 was a natural one to make.

Thus, ἐκκλησία in Colossians 1:18 likely has an Old Testament ring and identifies the Christian church with the covenant assembly of old Israel and her temple.

5. In 1 Timothy 3:15 “the household of God” is further defined as “the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” The phrase οἶκος θεοῦ can be rendered “household of God” or “house of God.” The phrase is used often (about seventy-five times) in the LXX to refer to the temple, and it never refers to a “household.” The phrase “the pillar and support of the truth” also reflects, at least in part, Old Testament temple language. For example, 2 Chronicles 4:11–12 refers to Chiram making for Solomon “in the house of God two *pillars* [στύλους],” referring to the pillars at the entrance of the Holy Place. (See also 1 Kings 7:3: Chiram “cast the two *pillars* [στύλους] for the porch of the house”; so also Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 8.77; Ezra 5:16, “the *foundations* of the house of God,” though θεμελίου is used and not στύλους; Ezra 2:68 refers to people “establishing” the “house of God . . . on its *prepared* [ἐτοιμασίαν] place.”) That “the house of God” is equated with “the church of the living God” in 1 Timothy 3:15 points further to the notion of a temple, since God dwelt in Israel’s temple. We have also seen earlier that about nineteen of the approximately seventy-three uses of ἐκκλησία (rendering לְהִקָּרֵא) in the LXX are also directly linked to a temple context. Of particular interest is Nehemiah 13:1–2, where ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ occurs in association with four repetitions of “house of God” (ὁ οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ) in the following context (Neh. 13:4, 7, 9, 11), and where the two expressions are closely related (see also, e.g., 2 Chron. 23:3 and Ezra 10:1, where “the assembly” of Israel gathers before the “house of God”). Likewise, 1 Kings 8 refers four times to the ἐκκλησία of Israel, which are in close proximity to reference to the temple.

Some commentators acknowledge a reference to the temple in 1 Timothy 3:15,<sup>13</sup> while others argue against it.<sup>14</sup>

### Conclusion to the Uses in the Later Pauline Epistles

Paul's above uses of ἐκκλησία occur in relation to direct or typological prophecies about the Messiah or the Christian community, which favors mainly an Old Testament background for ἐκκλησία rather than a predominant Greco-Roman one. These uses indicate, to one degree or another, that Christians are the continuation of the true people of God, true Israel, with the Messiah as their King, in contrast to Israel according to the flesh or, perhaps, even the ἐκκλησίαι of the pagan Greco-Roman world.

### Uses of ἐκκλησία in Revelation

Another important piece of evidence for the New Testament use of ἐκκλησία against an Old Testament background is the range of uses of ἐκκλησία in Revelation, which are also directly linked to Old Testament allusions and not to Greco-Roman civil assembly uses. Out of eighteen uses of ἐκκλησία in the book, at least eleven are directly linked in the same verse to clear Old Testament allusions. These Old Testament allusions are not greatly debated, so here we can merely give the references and a summary of their content.<sup>15</sup>

1. In Revelation 1:20, the “lampstands” of Zechariah 4:2, 11 (on which see Rev. 1:12) are equated with “the seven churches [ἐκκλησίαι].” Even if this verse were not a specific allusion to Zechariah 4:2, 11, it is still an obvious reference to the temple lampstand in the Old

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13. I. H. Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 507–9 (citing others in support), sees “household” as the focus but with the idea of temple included; similarly Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, AB 35A (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 231; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 220; George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 179–81. Note Eph. 2:19–22, where both ideas of “household” and “temple” are in mind: those in “the household of God” dwell in his “holy temple.”

14. E.g., Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 273. Other commentators do not even mention the possibility that the notion of the temple could be in mind.

15. See, e.g., G. K. Beale, *Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), for discussions of the validity and use of these eleven allusions. Similarly, the NA<sup>28</sup> cites ten of these as allusions (Rev. 1:20 [see 1:12]; 2:7, 12, 17, 18, 23; 3:7, 14; 22:16). Many commentators typically follow suit.



Testament (e.g., see Exodus 25 and 37). Thus, the churches are equated with a feature of Israel's temple.

2. In Revelation 2:1, "to the angel of the *church* [ἐκκλησία] in Ephesus"<sup>16</sup> directly associates the "church" with the "lampstands," which Revelation 1:20 has equated with "the seven churches." Christ is the Lord, who "walks" as the sovereign Priest among these lampstands. The reference to "golden lampstands" more precisely identifies these with the lampstand of the Old Testament temple, as in Revelation 1:12, based again on Zechariah 4:2, 11 (and, more generally, Exodus 25 and 37).

3. In Revelation 2:7, the one among "the *churches*" (dative ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις) "who overcomes" will "eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God," the latter expression based on Genesis 2:8–9 and 3:2–3, 22, 24 (LXX).

4. In Revelation 2:12, "the church [ἐκκλησία] in Pergamum" is directly related to Christ, who is portrayed as having "the sharp two-edged sword." This refers back to Revelation 1:16, which says that "out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword." It is a clear allusion to Isaiah 49:2, where God makes the servant's "mouth like a sharp sword." Thus, Christ stands over the church as their kingly Lord, who threatens them with judgment (cf. Rev. 2:16), just as was the case with God's former relationship to the assembly of Israel.

5. In Revelation 2:17, the one "who overcomes" among "the churches [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις]" will be given "the hidden manna," a partial allusion to the manna given to Israel in the wilderness, which is given eschatological significance. Furthermore, any "who overcomes" will also receive "a new name," an allusion to Isaiah's prophecy that end-time Israel would be given a "new name," indicating a new married status of Israel with her God (Isa. 62:2; 65:15). Thus, "the church" is identified directly with Old Testament allusions about Israel's messianic servant and Israel's end-time rewards, respectively, at the beginning and end of the letter to Pergamum.

16. "The angel of the church" addressed here (and in Rev. 2:18; 3:7, 14) could refer to (1) an actual angel who represents the church; (2) a letter carrier to the church, who is to convey the message to the church; (3) a church official (e.g., an elder); or (4) a personification of the church. Options 1 or 2 are most preferable. Whichever among these options is correct, the church in one way or another is being addressed, especially through a representative (and so also in the introduction of the following six prophetic letters).

6. In Revelation 2:18, the “church [ἐκκλησία] in Thyatira” is directly associated with the “Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze.” “Son of God” likely comes from the messianic reference to God’s Son in Psalm 2, which anticipates the full quotation from Psalm 2:8–9 at the end of the letter to this church (Rev. 2:26–27). The reference to the Son’s fiery eyes and feet like bronze comes from Daniel 10:6, which describes an angel. Christ again is portrayed with Old Testament ascriptions of the Messiah and the Danielic angel of God in addressing the church.

7. In Revelation 2:26–27, Christ promises the one “who overcomes” a share in the messianic kingdom prophesied in Psalm 2:8–9, the authority of which he himself has already received: “to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces.” The reference to the “morning star” at the end of Revelation 2:28 is also another Old Testament allusion, this time to Numbers 24:17 (where the future end-time ruler of Israel is called a rising “star”). That believers would be identified with this star enhances further their identification with the messianic kingdom in Revelation 2:26–27. Then, directly after these Old Testament allusions identifying believers with the messianic kingdom, there follows the exhortation, the one “who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις]” (Rev. 2:29). This directly identifies those who “overcome” among the churches with the messianic kingdom.

8. In Revelation 3:7, “the church [ἐκκλησία] in Philadelphia” is addressed by Christ, “who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens.” This is a quotation from Isaiah 22:22, which is a description of Eliakim, who was in charge of the Israelite king’s court. Now Christ is a greater Eliakim in his address to the church.

9. Revelation 3:12 is more saturated with the Old Testament than many other passages in Revelation. There are at least three allusions here: (a) “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore” is a clear allusion generally to the Old Testament temple; (b) “and I will write on him . . . the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem” is a clear reference

to the Old Testament city of Jerusalem; and (c) “My new name,” as we saw in Revelation 2:17, is a specific allusion to Isaiah 62:2; 65:15, Isaiah’s prophecy that end-time Israel would be given a “new name” as an indication of a new eschatological relationship with her God. The first two allusions refer to Old Testament realities that are eschatologically escalated to apply to Christians, so that they are identified with these heightened realities. The “new name” from Isaiah is a prophecy first fulfilled by Christ (note “My new name”) and then identified with Christians, who thus also are part of its fulfillment.

Then immediately in Revelation 3:13 those in “the churches [ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις]” are exhorted to “hear” and identify with the realities described in verse 12, as well as to pay heed to the earlier parts of the letter.

10. Revelation 3:14 says, “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this.” There is general consensus that “the Amen” is an allusion to Isaiah 65:16, where Yahweh is twice called “the God of Amen.” Now Christ is identified with Yahweh of the Isaiah text.<sup>17</sup> Once again Christ addresses the “church” (ἐκκλησία) as her sovereign Lord, just as Yahweh addressed Israel as her sovereign Lord in Isaiah 65:16.

11. In Revelation 22:16 we read: “I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” Jesus “testifies” through his angel to the “churches” (ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις). To state his credentials in doing so, he identifies himself as a “descendant of David” and “the bright morning star,” a repeated allusion to the messianic prophecy of Numbers 24:17, which has already been made at Revelation 2:18 (discussed above). Thus in speaking to the “churches,” he identifies himself with the fulfillment of the hopes of David and of the prophecy in Numbers.

## Conclusion to the Uses in Revelation

In all of the above Revelation texts, two observations can be made: (a) the “church” (or “churches”) is directly addressed by Christ, who

17. In fact, even the following wording “the faithful and true” is likely an interpretative expansion of “Amen” that reflects the multiple witness of the Septuagintal exegetical tradition of Isa. 65:16.

is identified with Old Testament realities and prophecies, and this indicates that the church now stands as the eschatological Israel who is addressed by her Messiah, who is sometimes identified with Yahweh; (b) the “church” (or “churches”) is identified with Old Testament realities or is seen as part of the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, further identifying them with the end-time hopes of Israel. To say the least, the “church” is seen to be inextricably linked with Israel of the Old Testament. We also observed this above in several texts of Paul and in the disputed Pauline letters.

### **Uses of ἐκκλησία in Hebrews**

Finally, the book of Hebrews uses ἐκκλησία twice. Hebrews 2:12 is part of an allusion to Psalm 22:22. The hearers of that epistle would certainly have identified themselves with the “church” mentioned in the Psalm quotation. Likewise, Hebrews 12:22–23 equates Christians who have “come to Mount Zion and to . . . the heavenly Jerusalem” with “the general assembly and the church [ἐκκλησία] of the first-born,” which includes Old Testament and New Testament saints together. These are obvious Old Testament references that equate with the “church.” Then in Hebrews 12:24, Christians are said to have come “to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant,” and they have come “to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel” (cf. Gen. 4:9–10), another clear Old Testament allusion linked to the Christian “church” in Hebrews 12:23.

### **Overall Conclusion**

The above observed combination of ἐκκλησία with Old Testament allusions—and not Greco-Roman background references in Paul, the later Pauline epistles, Revelation, and Hebrews—provides further evidence that ἐκκλησία in the New Testament is more influenced by an Old Testament background than by the Greco-Roman world. Though the word ἐκκλησία does not occur often in the LXX context of the above Old Testament quotations and allusions,<sup>18</sup> it is still clear that

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18. For significant exceptions, note the LXX of Ps. 88:6 in 1 Cor. 14:33; of Ps. 67:17–18 (cf. v. 27) in Col. 1:19; and of Ps. 22:22 in Heb. 2:12, to which may also be added Acts 7:38 and Acts 20:28, where ἐκκλησία is substituted for συναγωγή of the Old Testament texts.

ἐκκλησία in its New Testament contexts is often directly associated with the Old Testament. In his survey of ἐκκλησία in Paul's writings and Revelation, with the exception of Hebrews, Paul Trebilco does not make the above observations of the direct linkage with Old Testament allusions. Had he done so, I believe his overall position that the Greek Old Testament is the background for the New Testament use of ἐκκλησία would have been strengthened.<sup>19</sup>

Some have proposed that the Greco-Roman background of ἐκκλησία, referring typically to pagan civic assemblies or city councils, is the main backdrop for understanding the meaning of the word in the New Testament (to which reference is clearly made in Acts 19:32, 39, 40–41).<sup>20</sup> According to such a view, the church gatherings would best be understood in light of the political civic gatherings in the Greco-Roman world. If this were the case, then one might be able to conclude that the church is the true assembly in opposition to the pagan assemblies of the unbelieving world. If we had found that ἐκκλησία was *often* associated with various kinds of Greco-Roman allusions, then it would have been plausible to conclude that the Greco-Roman civic assembly is the likely backdrop in these cases. But we have not found this.<sup>21</sup> We have found only other Old Testament allusions in direct connection to uses of ἐκκλησία.

Thus, the biblical-theological upshot of this essay is that the Old Testament “church” (“assembly”) and the New Testament “church” (“assembly”) are one and the same organically, the former prophetically anticipating fulfillment in the latter. The New Testament “church” is the inaugurated eschatological Israel.

19. Paul Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 170–80, 183, 201–7.

20. In these verses the city council of Ephesus met because of the disturbance Paul's ministry had caused in the city.

21. See Beale, “Background of ἐκκλησία Revisited,” for more in-depth discussion of the debate about whether the Old Testament Greek or the Greco-Roman use is the main background, and for the conclusion that the former is clearly predominant.

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J. I. Packer, from the Foreword

THEOLOGY