BOOK REVIEWS

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Audrey Dawson’s *Healing, Weakness and Power* examines three New Testament writers’ (Mark, Luke, and Paul) attitudes and presentations of healing in Jesus’ life and in the early church. Her study considers their theological perspectives as well as their historical, sociological, and religious contexts in six chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) Background to Jesus’ Healing Ministry, (3) Mark and Healing, (4) Luke and Healing, (5) Paul and Healing, and (6) Analysis of Healing. As a physician, her interest and expertise drives this survey and adequately introduces the reader to the pervasive and complex issue of healing. She concludes that Mark, Luke, and
Paul, in keeping with the diversity of Second Temple Judaism and the Graeco-Roman world, have a variety of views on healing.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the difficulties of defining ancient healing and differentiating it from the concepts of magic or religion. Dawson lists four obstacles in finding a straightforward understanding of healing today: First, healing often has overlapping connections with the supernatural, making it difficult to separate miracle from magic and healing from exorcism. Second, there is a lack of artifacts or texts concerning miracle stories. Third, healing stories, often used as propaganda or for apologetic reasons, have been frequently exaggerated and distorted. Fourth, our contemporary situation with its scientific presuppositions makes it virtually impossible to objectively prove or accept a healing from the first century C.E. In this chapter, Dawson overcomes the obstacles and rightly holds the tension between the overlapping ideas of healing, magic, miracle, and exorcism by finding a base definition to begin her investigation: healing is the physical recovery from illness and the rehabilitation back into society (9, 17).

Chapter 2 is a fascinating section that examines disease in antiquity and describes the social and religious background of New Testament healing miracles in both Jewish and Graeco-Roman contexts. In the first century C.E., sickness facilitated an enormous interest in healing and supernatural powers as it produced severe consequences for the sufferer (i.e., personal and social alienation with a loss of honor, of access to worship, and of societal fellowship). First, Dawson discusses healing in Judaism beginning with the Old Testament writers’ interest in diseases and disabilities as purity laws prevented disabled and unclean people from participating in religious rituals. She lists a number of important concepts of healing that emerged by the first century C.E.: (1) the sins of God’s people could be expiated through the suffering of innocent intermediaries, (2) the belief of an afterlife with God’s judgment after death, and (3) the powers of darkness being responsible for Israel’s suffering and misery. Along this trajectory, Dawson also introduces individual healing figures who are anointed and endowed with the Spirit of God to restore Israel and to heal their suffering (i.e., remove disease, sin, and death). Exorcisms becoming more acceptable as incantations against demons are recorded in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Talmud. Additionally, in some strands of Judaism, physicians and “natural” herbal medicines are acceptable (26–36).

Second within the Graeco-Roman world, Dawson observes four pervasive ideas that influenced the concept of healing: (1) the idea of intermediaries between gods and humans with humanity being able to achieve divine status; (2) Roman cults demonstrating the Greek idea that gods were like humans, but endowed with immortality; (3) the heroic figure of the divine man (Τάθεος ἀνήρ); and (4) sickness was common and its social consequences were severe as people were unable to continue their livelihood (45). Dawson, then, surveys forms
of healing: medicine, healing cults, charismatic healers, and magic. Ancient medicine began with Hippocrates in the fifth century B.C.E. and was characterized by careful observation regarding treatment (drugs and surgery) and the causes of sickness (47). Healing cults and gods included Herakles, Asclepius, and Isis, who were renowned for their healing abilities (49), and who produced centers for worship and healing (e.g., Asclepeions; 51). Charismatic healers, holy men who through asceticism, had power over demons and diseases, and they were often used when physicians failed (51). Magic (magical spells, amulets, charms, tablets, and artifacts used with touch, saliva, and incantations or written words), closely associated with healing, was often perceived dangerous and produced social conflict (e.g., the upper class risked shame if they used a magician; 54–57).

Chapter 3 deals with the healing miracles of Jesus and his disciples in Mark's narrative. Dawson identifies Mark as a theological narrator who portrays Jesus’ crucifixion as the theological climax of the narrative and Jesus’ healings as a prelude to God’s healing miracle—Jesus’ resurrection (66). Dawson, therefore, suggests that Jesus’ healing stories are not peripheral to his teaching, but establish his authority and power in attracting crowds and creating opposition (cf. 1:32–34, 39; 3:10–12; 6:5, 54–56). They also do not seem to fulfill Old Testament prophecies (as does Luke), but encompass a wide range of illnesses that were common in the first century C.E. (81). Surveying Mark’s terms for illness and healing, she depicts healing as a rescue from “unclean spirits,” accounting for the coinciding ideas of healing (the sick) and exorcism (the demon-possessed; 81).

Dawson adeptly relates Kahl’s three possible sources of divine power to Mark and identifies Jesus as the bearer of healing power: (1) the healer may be a bearer of numinous power (healing in his own power), (2) he may be a mediator of numinous power (mediating the bearer’s power to heal), or (3) he may be a petitioner of numinous power (activates the bearer’s power through prayer). In Mark, Jesus does not have to petition God in order to heal, but establishes his authority over the powers of darkness (Satan). Jesus in the healing stories and the passion narrative is presented as possessing enormous power (as authoritative healer), but as dying in weakness (willing sufferer) to save the world (99–100).

Chapter 4 examines Luke and compares it with Mark and Acts. The differences between Luke and Mark accentuate Luke’s presentation of Jesus as the Son of God and as a mediator of God’s healing power, which is evident in Jesus’ obedience, his subordination to God, and the significance of prayer in refreshing Jesus’ power from God. Moreover, Luke’s healings are portrayed as fulfilling Old Testament prophecies with healing often regarded as being released from demonic powers and resulting in forgiveness and salvation to Israel (114). In Acts, although there are fewer accounts of healings, they are paralleled with Luke and they advance the narrative as the church takes the Gospel to the nations. Acts, therefore,
deliberately emphasizes Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation, which becomes the source for apostolic healings as “signs and wonders” to attract believers (149).

Dawson raises an interesting discussion concerning Luke’s identity as a physician. She is not convinced that Luke should be identified as a physician because his narrative does not exhibit the precision and the knowledge of anatomy found in traditional Hippocratic training (153–54). This is important for her because Luke–Acts can then be read without a physician’s bias, that is, the first-century importance of the supernatural portrays Jesus’ healing as fulfilling Old Testament prophecy and spreading the Gospel (155–157).

Chapter 5 investigates Paul’s undisputed letters and identifies the significance that Paul attaches to healing in the early church (Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, and 1 Thessalonians). Paul has a somewhat ambiguous portrayal of healing. He does not deny healings and miracles (signs or gifts of the Spirit), but consistently emphasizes transformation and conversion (the fruit of the Spirit) above it (165). Dawson lists three possible reasons for Paul’s lack of interest or of examples of healings: (1) the nature of letters and their occasion to respond to specific situations, (2) minimizing healing as his strategy for Gentile mission, and (3) social and geographical factors in urban centers (179). More importantly, Dawson identifies Paul’s unhealed “thorn” as another reason for his indifference and for the significance he placed on weakness: weakness, rather than healings, provides Paul’s impetus and power to spread the Gospel. Dawson, here, raises the discussion of Paul’s thorn in the flesh and identifies it as a significant illness that plagued most of his adult life (198).

Chapter 6 is a fitting conclusion to Dawson’s book as it examines the similarities and differences in healing between Mark, Luke–Acts, and Paul. In comparing Mark and Luke, it becomes apparent that the two evangelists share many common points regarding healing: both emphasize Jesus’ compassion, both depict the prevalence of healing and its capacity to engulf Jesus’ time, and both portray Jesus’ healings as being divisive. However, Mark, more than Luke, emphasizes Jesus’ healing relating to his divinity; Luke, more than Mark, stresses the social identity of Jesus’ healings and ministry (poor and sinners); Luke, contrary to Mark, emphasizes Jesus’ healing as fulfilling Old Testament prophecies; Mark balances Jesus’ power of healing and his weakness in death, while Luke emphasizes the power of God in Jesus’ resurrection and ascension; and Mark depicts Jesus’ own authority to heal, while Luke stresses that Jesus healed through God’s power. In comparing Acts and Paul, one notices Paul’s reservation concerning healing miracles: (1) Acts depicts Paul physically healing Gentiles, while Paul’s letters underscores the grace of Jesus Christ as the spiritual healing agent that allows him to carry out his Gentile mission; (2) Acts emphasizes Jesus’ resurrection and ascension and minimizes his suffering and death; and (3) Acts, compared with Paul’s letters, has little ethical
teaching. In comparing Mark and Paul, both identify their theological highpoint as Jesus’ weakness and death as a substitution for the world’s sin: Mark’s emphasis on Jesus’ vulnerability on the cross and Paul’s message of vulnerability (God’s love is made accessible in weakness), resulting from his own weakness and allowing him to spread the Gospel.

The final question that Dawson, from the heart of a physician, raises is a fitting end to her investigation: “Did biblical writers anticipate Jesus’ healing ministry extending beyond the apostolic period?” Her answer is an open-ended yes, suggesting the continuity of God’s compassion to care for the sick beginning with Jesus, extending through the early church, and continuing on to the contemporary Christian, but without diverging how it is to persist.

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With the growing pluralism of our global world, there can be little doubt that the relationship between the Christian faith and other world religions must be a top priority for our theological agenda. Nicholas J. Wood tackles this subject by mining the resources of two great missionary bishops of the 20th century, Kenneth Cragg and Lesslie Newbigin. Wood is a Baptist minister and Fellow in Religion and Culture, and Director of the Oxford Centre for Christianity and Culture at Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford, England. This book is a reworking of his 1996 Ph.D. dissertation at Oxford University.

The book is divided into four parts. Part one sets the background for his analyses of Cragg and Newbigin with a brief survey of the history of a Christian approach to other religions. The first chapter sketches the scene in the late 19th and early 20th century when the fulfilment position was in ascendency with a focus on its most eloquent exponent, John Nicol Farquhar. The second chapter explores the ongoing discussion of Christian mission and world religions after the First World War, when Hendrik Kraemer was the towering figure. I was pleased to read that Wood would not follow the general trend to dismiss Kraemer’s position in terms of a narrow exclusivism. Rather, he writes, “Kraemer’s position is actually much more subtle and complex than is sometimes allowed” (9). A slightly more nuanced interpretation of Kraemer follows but I still wonder whether Wood has captured
the genius of his position. The next two chapters describe the growth of religious pluralism, paying special attention to the position of John Hick in the first chapter and later developments including Karl Rahner in the following chapter. These chapters highlight a shift in the discussion of world religions from missionary circles to secular academic institutions. They further raise urgent questions about how Christians might affirm their faith in a pluralistic world while recognising the truth in other religions. Wood is concerned to address the latter question by returning to mission as a proper entry into the subject.

This introductory section sets up the heart of the book where Wood elaborates the positions of Cragg and Newbigin. He believes a central problem in understanding world religions from a Christian position is the relationship between continuity and discontinuity. He believes that Cragg continues the Farquhar tradition and that Newbigin follows the Kraemer tradition, while both offer refinements of these positions. In part 2, Wood devotes two chapters for an analysis of Cragg’s position, and in part 3, he uses two chapters to critique Newbigin’s argument. Wood is at his best as he digs deeply into Cragg’s writing with evident affection for Cragg and with sympathy for his position. His treatment of Newbigin is somewhat weaker in part because he has not taken sufficient account of the burgeoning secondary literature on Newbigin and even some of Newbigin’s own work on other religions.

In part 4, Wood offers his conclusions first by elaborating a Christology and then by opening up the biblical notion of fulfilment in Matthew and fullness in Colossians and Ephesians. He ends by drawing those insights together with implications for the current debate. The last paragraphs of this section offers Wood’s position of a fulfilment theology: Christ is the fulfilment of the spiritual longings of humankind; fulfilment is also about discontinuity, which Wood interprets (differently than Newbigin) as “radical transcendence”; we need to maintain a creative tension between continuity and discontinuity (187–188). There follows a final chapter on how dialogue should function in the mission of the church given this view of continuity and discontinuity. Curiously, Wood’s concluding section seems to stand alone and does not wrestle with his earlier analysis of Newbigin and Cragg.

There is much insight in this book that will stimulate thinking on the issue of continuity and discontinuity that is important for our missional posture in a pluralistic society. Yet, in the end, I found Wood’s position unconvincing partially because the lack of a tight unifying argument holding the four sections together. Moreover, he does not really find a way beyond Cragg and Newbigin, but he offers a position that appears to be at home in the fulfilment position of Cragg. Alternatively, I find the Kraemer and Newbigin approach to be more cogent. Theirs is not simply a position of radical discontinuity but a fine integration of continuity and
discontinuity within the notion of what Kraemer calls “subversive fulfilment.” He distinguishes between a religious consciousness that expresses the universal religious longings and aspirations of humankind, on the one hand, and the way those religious longings have been given empirical embodiment in the various religions of humankind, on the other. The gospel fulfils the religious longings of humankind but contradicts and subverts the way those longings are concretely expressed in the various religions of the world. Given Wood’s express purpose of resolving the issue of continuity and discontinuity with the notion of fulfilment, it is surprising he does not engage the concept of “subversive fulfilment.” Perhaps such an engagement would have led him to move beyond a description of Kraemer and Newbigin simply in terms of discontinuity and to further struggle with the adjective “subversive” in order to distinguish it from the way he would modify that fulfilment. Moreover, maybe this engagement would have led to a further elaboration of his tantalising comment that the cross “contradicts” the way the religious longings are fulfilled in the world religions (187), a word that begins to move his position on discontinuity beyond transcendence toward the way that both Kraemer and Newbigin qualified fulfilment.

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Despite the many monographs that have been written concerning the law and Paul or the law and the New Testament, very little has been written that addresses specifically the theology of the Mosaic Law and the book of Hebrews. Barry Joslin endeavors to fill this gap in his book Hebrews, Christ, and the Law. His argument is that the work of Christ has transformed the law, and this transformation involves both its internalization and fulfillment in the new covenant; the law has forever been affected Christologically (2). Joslin identifies two broad categories of scholars who have articulated their view of Hebrews and the law: those who maintain that the law has no ongoing validity in the New Covenant era (8–14), and those who maintain that there is ongoing validity for the law in New Covenant era (14–20). To address these opposing views, a fresh exegesis of Heb 7:1–10:18 is offered, with the aim at producing a clear theological understanding of Hebrews and the Mosaic Law.

Chapter 2 addresses the broad issue of the law in the Second Temple Judaism
by focusing on five of the most important and relevant works of the period: the Old Testament Apocrypha, the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Josephus, Philo, and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QS and CD). The purpose of this chapter is not to advance the discussion of law in first-century Judaism, but rather to suggest some general thoughts regarding the law in this particular period. Joslin offers several conclusions (87–88): (1) The ancient literature demonstrates a high view of the Law of Moses and elevates this document to an elite status. (2) The term νομος overwhelmingly referred to the written Law of Moses or more specifically to the collection of commandments found in the Pentateuch. (3) The literature clearly indicates that the Mosaic Law had inherent authority because of the common belief that God himself was the author. (4) Evidence from several texts indicates that the commandments were authoritative in the day-to-day lives of Jewish laity. (5) Jewish piety of the period was directly related to the law; therefore, the righteous could expect blessings, while those who were unfaithful to the law of God would reap judgment either in this life, in the eschaton, or in both. Joslin contrasts the Second Temple period literature to the book of Hebrews and avers that the writer of Hebrews clearly believes that, in light of the Christ event, certain commands of the Mosaic Law are no longer valid.

Having addressed the cultural and theological backdrop in chapter 2, chapter 3 focuses on the literary structure of Hebrews with specific attention given to 7:1–10:18. After considering the structural proposals of scholars in the past century, this writer concludes that the more recent proposal of George Guthrie provides the most persuasive approach to viewing the structure of Hebrews (131). It is Guthrie’s emphasis on visually identifying the movement back and forth between exposition and paranesis that makes his work most compelling for Joslin.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are the exegetical and theological heart of the monograph, and in those chapters, Joslin states that the work of Christ has transformed the law and this transformation involves both its internalization and fulfillment in the new covenant. Chapter 4 centres on Heb 7:1–28, and specifically focuses on the question, “What does it mean for the writer of Hebrews that the law has changed?” Joslin argues that the writer of Hebrews means that the law has been transformed in the light of Christ, which does not mean “abrogation of the law in full,” but transformation of the law. He bases such conclusions on lexical, exegetical, and theological considerations. In Hebrews, one ascertains a certain level of dissatisfaction with the externality and weakness of the law and with what it produces, which is imperfect people. If the law has been “Christologized,” as Joslin suggests, then it opens the door to the law’s playing a role in the new covenant believer, which produces an obedient people who have a true knowledge of God.

Such is the basis for chapter 5 (Heb 8:1–13), with the topic of the law and the new covenant taking centre stage. Here the question is asked, “What does it mean
for the law(s) to be written on the minds and hearts if/since it has been changed?” New covenant believers relate to the law in a different way than do old covenant believers. Joslin suggests that believers should still look to the law as a signpost of the will of God and as a shadow that points to the reality that has come in Christ. Such a view does justice to the original intent of Jeremiah, as well as acknowledges the reality of the new and transformative work of Christ that the writer of Hebrews describes. The musical image that Joslin uses for the law’s transformation is that Heb 8 is Jeremiah 31 in a higher Christological “key.”

Chapter 6 (Heb 9:1–10:18) addresses the specific matter of the law’s having a shadow. The question asked is: “What does it mean that the ‘law has a shadow?’” Joslin concludes that Christ fills out the shadow of what the tabernacle, priesthood, and sacrifices outlined. The law’s cultus foreshadowed and prepared the people for understanding the good things to come that are now present in Christ, who is the reality to which they pointed and anticipated. Therefore, in this section one sees Hebrews’ complex understanding of the law that entails both negative and positive elements that yield both discontinuity and continuity. In the seventh and final chapter, Joslin summarizes and concludes the argument carried through these chapters. Here he offers to the reader a clearer picture of the Mosaic Law as it is understood by the writer of Hebrews.

Joslin’s careful ng of the text is exegetically and theologically sound. He has engaged scholarly debates on the subject of the law, particularly in relation to the book of Hebrews. Although Joslin submits a representative sample of five of the most important and relevant Jewish works from the Second Temple period, I believe that a section on this period’s literature from the Hebrew Bible may have strengthened his survey. Also, it would have been helpful in this chapter to suggest some possible theological movements of the view of the law during this era. To his credit, Joslin does not hold a simplistic view of the law that has been abrogated by a new covenant, but he explores levels of continuity and discontinuity between the two covenants. However, if Christ is the “filter” or “hinge” through which we view all the laws, as Joslin suggests, I wonder how this filter would change my perception of laws that deal with building a parapet around the upper floor of a building or that address removing leprosy from walls. Since Christ has come, do those laws fall under cessation, transcovenantal carry over, or reinterpretation? In other words, what does Christ’s coming have to do with gates and germs? The present study raises good questions but on some matters further refinement may be necessary. This significant contribution to New Testament theology will be a resource that many lay people and scholars will need to reckon with in the future.

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In his most recent edition of *New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, Bart Ehrman, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, continues to approach the New Testament (NT) from a historical and comparative perspective, emphasizing the diversity of the earliest Christian literature. Since this is the fourth edition, it may be helpful to consider the new features of this volume. Ehrman has revised his discussion of the history of Palestine and Judaism; an account appears early in the book (chapter 3) in order to provide students background on the development of early Christianity. He has also included new discoveries, such as the *Gospel of Judas Iscariot*, and other advances in scholarship. In terms of the book’s layout, Ehrman has a new photo essay on important Greek manuscripts of the New Testament and has included more than 100 vivid colour photographs. His material is supported by an extensive text box program (he has added ten new submissions), with a more engaging “What Do You Think?” text box title replacing the former “Something to Think About.” In this edition, the author has an expanded glossary, a revised epilogue, and updated suggestions for further reading. The power of this introduction to the New Testament resides in the readability of the material and in the expository creativity.

There is a vast array of possibilities for organizing a New Testament introduction. For Ehrman, the New Testament is not a well-defined field of scholarly or historical inquiry; therefore, he begins his investigation “by examining several examples of later forms of Christianity, before seeing how these are relevant to the study of the New Testament” (3). His emphasis is in situating the New Testament books within their broader literary context. Thus, the students using Ehrman’s text are given four chapters covering the literary, social, and religious background to the New Testament, before being offered a historical introduction to the canonical gospels. The first chapter (“What is the New Testament? The Early Christians and their Literature”) sets the direction of the book by featuring the diversity of early Christianity. Ehrman highlights the Adoptionists, the Marcionites, the Gnostics, and the “Proto-Orthodox,” and he concludes that “because the proto-orthodox group represented the party that eventually became dominant in Christianity (by at least the fourth century), Christians of all later generations inherited the proto-orthodox canon of Scripture, rather than the canons supported by their opponents” (7). It appears that Ehrman views the theological issues of early Christianity as a power struggle between
factions of Christian communities. This may be a contributing factor, but surely the ascendancy of creedal Christianity is more than a curious twist of history.

One of strengths of this study is its focus on the historical, literary, and religious milieu of the Greco-Roman world, including early Judaism (ch 2–4). Ehrman’s text commits eight chapters to the gospels (including Luke vol. 2 and Johannine epistles), which cover issues of genre; the synoptic problem; Jesus, the Jewish Messiah; virginal conception; and other topics arising out of the gospels. Before recounting the letters of Paul, Ehrman spends six chapters on questions surrounding Jesus, such as describing perspectives on Jesus from other gospel accounts (ch 13), presenting the problems of sources and methods of determining the historical Jesus (ch 14), and outlining the historian’s problem with miracles (ch 15). Concerning the issues related to the historical Jesus, Ehrman begins by setting Jesus in a historical context (ch 16), and he settles on the view that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet (ch 17). He concludes that “the earliest surviving traditions about Jesus portray him as an apocalypticist” (279). Having determined that Jesus taught an apocalyptic message, the next chapter argues that Christianity as we know it did not begin with the teachings of Jesus, but rather from the disciples’ later reflection on the meaning of his death (ch 18).

After the Apostle Paul is introduced (ch 19), his letters are explained beginning with 1 Thessalonians (ch 20) as a test case, thus preparing readers for the discussion of Paul’s other undisputed letters (ch 21–22). Maintaining Ehrman’s emphasis on a historical background of New Testament writings, his next chapters include—in conjunction with canonical books—the accounts of Paul’s alleged companions, Thecla, Theudas (with James, ch 23), Barnabus and later anti-Jewish literature (with Hebrews, ch 26), the Letters of Ignatius, the Martyrdom of Polycarp, and later apologetic literature (with 1 Peter, ch 27), the Didache, Polycarp, 1 Clement (with James, Jude, and 2 Peter, ch 28), The Shepherd of Hermas and the Apocalypse of Peter (with the Revelation of John, ch 29). Using this comparative approach, Ehrman invites the student to evaluate whether various writings can be harmonized, noting the distinctive positions of the biblical and nonbiblical authors. I found Ehrman’s approach of placing canonical texts alongside the noncanonical ones helpful. The Deutero-Pauline and Pastoral Epistles are discussed in chapter 24, and the difficult subject of the oppression of women in early Christianity is covered in chapter 25. The epilogue addresses topics such as the manuscript evidence of the New Testament, women and the manuscript evidence, and whether the doctrine of the Trinity has strong manuscript proof.

There is much to commend in this introduction to the New Testament. Ehrman’s style is clear; his discussions on difficult topics are understandable. This textbook successfully informs the reader on the historical questions and critical
issues. The beginning student will find the information boxes very helpful, the technical terminology frequently clarified, and the background information useful. Ehrman has fulfilled the task of giving a historical introduction to the early Christian writings by reflecting on primary sources and by alluding to much of the secondary literature. Since this is the fourth edition, one can be assured that this introduction to the New Testament will remain a valued resource for undergraduate use.

Ehrman clearly opposes a confessional approach to New Testament history; therefore, he spends little time on issues of inspiration and spiritual truth. Instead, he attempts an objective historical reconstruction of the period of earliest Christianity. As a possible support for his method, Ehrman states, for instance, that he will not “convince [the reader] to believe or to disbelieve the Gospel of John” (15). As with all “subjective” approaches, they are not innocent of presuppositions, agendas, and positions—Ehrman is no exception. In my view, in his attempt at placing noncanonical texts on equal footing with canonical writings, he may leave the reader with the impression that some works (Didache; Polycarp, To the Philippians; and 1 Clement) had a wider influence on early Christianity than they may actually have had. If pastoral reflections on passages or attitudes toward the theological significance of the New Testament are preferred, then Ehrman’s text may not serve the student or the teacher well, but could profitably be used in tandem with other texts, such as Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey (Mark Allan Powel). In sum, a judicious use of this introduction will be of great benefit in unveiling a penetrating and persuasive discussion of the early literature of the Christian era.

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When considering the acquisition of biblical research software, the crucial issue facing buyers today is not so much the inclusion of morphologically tagged original language texts—something that all major Bible software programs offer—but rather the functionality of a program’s user interface. Specifically, exegetes are looking for a powerful, intuitive, user-friendly interface that enables better and more insightful study of the biblical text. With this in mind, the following review will examine the Scholar’s Library: Gold (SL:G) PC edition of the Libronix Digital
The intention of this review is to assess *SL:G*’s functionality as a research tool within an academic setting. Accordingly, attention will be directed to *SL:G*’s aptness towards exegetical analysis, its breadth of primary and secondary literature, those features that are specifically conducive of research, and a critical evaluation of *SL:G*’s contributions and shortcomings.

One of Logos’ strengths is its ability to balance an impressive line-up of primary texts with an exegetically functional digital work environment. When working with a particular verse or passage, information about the pericope is gathered together and presented to the user through a series of customizable reports. One such report, the ‘Passage Guide,’ provides users with general information about the text under study (e.g., links to parallel passages, maps, etc.), as well as links to all the entries for that passage within any of the commentaries in the users digital library (among others, *SL:G* includes B. M. Metzger’s *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* and 12 of the 13 available NIGTC volumes[^1]). In addition, the ‘Passage Guide’ enables users to view their text in parallel with other texts in the *SL:G* library. For example, when studying John 18:33–40, users can view the NA[^2] alongside the nRSV, Syriac Peshitta, Latin Clementinam Vulgate, and even P52 (ca. 125 C.E., available in *SL:G* along with 68 other manuscripts from P. W. Comfort and D. P. Barrett’s *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts*). Similarly, users can compare Exodus 15:1–19 in the MT, nRSV, Clementinum Vulgate, Rahlfs’ LXX, and Aramaic Targumim (for this passage: Onqelos, Pseudo-Jonathan, Neofiti, and the Cairo Geniza Fragments MS FF and MS J).

Another report that users can direct Logos to prepare is an ‘Exegetical Guide.’ This report contains links that connect exegetes to syntactical diagrams, critical apparatus, lexicon entries for each word in the passage, and articles in grammars where each individual verse is referenced. Such ‘Exegetical Guides’ are not limited to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and New Testament alone but can be produced on passages in the Aramaic Targumim and Syriac Peshitta as well, complete with links to language-specific lexicons and grammars (some of which are included in *SL:G*). As one can see, the ‘Exegetical Guide’ is an extremely useful tool, so long as the user has the original language resources to make it useful. Though the *SL:G* package offers a good range of original language lexicons (note-
bly: *EDNT* and *TDNT* [unabridged]), the included grammars and critical apparatus are dated. For the purposes of biblical scholarship, users will undoubtedly want to upgrade in all three categories (at additional cost, Logos offers, for example, *BDAG*, *LSJ*, *HALOT*, *BDF*, *IBHS*, and various critical apparatus [including *NA*², *UBS*³, *BHS*, *BHQ*, *Rhalfs’ lxx*]).

Stemming from the ‘Exegetical Guide’ is the ‘Bible Word Study’ report, a new feature to Logos 3.0. When studying the Greek word φωνέω, for instance, in addition to providing lemma density graphs and links to lexicons, this report will also provide morphologically and even syntactically categorized lists of every New Testament occurrence.⁴ Additionally, this report will also generate a comprehensive, morphologically-categorized list of every instance of φωνέω in the *lxx* and Philo (included in *SL:G*) and also Josephus, the Old Testament Greek Pseudepigrapha, and the Apostolic Fathers (available for additional purchase).⁵ Furthermore, users can also search for φωνέω in the online Perseus database⁶ from within the Logos program itself, thus creating a seamless digital work environment for conducting detailed philological research.

Beyond Logos’ aptness for exegetical analysis, it is also a commanding portable library that facilitates research regardless of geographical locale (i.e., at home, at the office, or even at the local coffee shop). Of all the digital library packages that Libronix markets, *SL:G* is by far the most cost effective, offering more than $11,700.00 (USD) worth of resources for the regular price of $1,379.95 (USD).⁷ In addition to the original language texts mentioned above, as well as the many others that are either included in *SL:G* or which can be additionally purchased (e.g., Ugaritic and Coptic texts/resources⁸), the bulk of *SL:G*’s content is secondary source offerings.⁹ Most notably are the complete 91 volumes of *Semeia: An Experimental Journal of Biblical Criticism*, W. A. Elwell’s 4 volume *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, and all 41 volumes of the UBS Translator’s Handbook Series (Old Testament and New Testament). Additionally, *SL:G* also contains a rather large variety of pastoral and general Christian-living resources. In this way, the *SL:G* edition functions as a kind of “catch-all” that not only includes an excellent breadth of

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⁴ This same functionality is also available for the study of Hebrew and Aramaic words.
⁵ For Hebrew and Aramaic words, the generated list will feature occurrences in the *ot/hb* and Targumim (included in *SL:G*) and the DSS (requires additional purchase). For Syriac words, occurrences will be displayed for the Peshitta alone (included in *SL:G*).
⁶ [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu).
⁷ Academic prices are available for faculty and students, though specific prices are not published online.
⁸ A number of the Coptic (and other) resources advertised by Logos are categorized as “pre-publication,” which means that Logos has not yet produced an electronic version of these resources, though they are gauging interest by having consumers purchase these products ahead of time at a reduced rate.
⁹ A comprehensive list of *SL:G*’s contents can be found at [http://www.logos.com/gold](http://www.logos.com/gold), accessed on September 29, 2009.
academic materials, but also all of the popular level literature found in every other Libronix edition (e.g., all of the offerings in the family orientated Christian Home Library). Though a selection of these popular offerings might be of personal interest to some scholars, many of them will never be used within a scholarly setting (I actually uninstalled nearly half—171—of SLG’s 351 resources\(^\text{10}\)). Libronix would do well, then, to offer a more dedicated “academic” (or truly Scholars) library that substitutes the popular material for additional critical resources.

Breadth of secondary literature offerings is one thing, but functionality within a research environment is another; one of the strengths of Libronix is the way it integrates its digital library into the research process. For example, consider the common situation of reading a piece of secondary literature where notes are placed at the end of the book rather than in the foot of the page. In traditional print media, one has to flip to the back of the book to read the endnote; in most electronic media, these references are linked, thus causing the user to navigate away from the text with which they are working. In contrast, Logos’ “Auto-Look-up” tool displays the full text of any endnote alongside of the main body of the text being read, thus allowing users to consult these references easily without losing their reading location.

To conclude this review, I would like to focus upon two final features of the Logos system, one that may constitute the program’s most significant contribution to scholarly research, the other that may be its most significant shortcoming. Concerning the former, Libronix is the first Bible software company to offer syntactically tagged biblical texts (both the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and New Testament). The contribution this makes to the electronic study of the Bible should not be overlooked, as it allows exegetes to search beyond the morphological level to also include syntactical constructions (e.g., one can search for every instance in the New Testament where \(\text{θάνατος}\) functions as the subject of \(\text{βασιλεύω}\)). To be certain, syntactical tagging can only be as accurate as are the compilers who create the databases. To Libronix’s credit, SLG includes two different New Testament syntactical databases (though only one for the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament), thus allowing users to test their search results against two sets of syntax coding. Though the search interface for these databases is quite complex, the capabilities of these tools go beyond anything else presently on the market.

Concerning the latter, though Logos is apt for detailed scholarly research, it is not always as intuitive as one might expect. As a reviewer, I have wrestled with the inclusion of this critique, since gauging a program’s intuitiveness is not easily quantifiable. That said, a simple example should suffice. When searching for a specific lemma within the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, for instance, one would intui-

\(^{10}\) These figures are based on the number of resources listed for SLG in the Base Products Contents Comparison Chart found at http://www.logos.com/comparison, accessed on September 29, 2009.
tively expect that the search bar would naturally default to a Hebrew font when searching a Hebrew text. This is not the case in Logos, which requires the user to select the search font that he or she wishes to use. Once one becomes familiar with this feature, it is very helpful (for example, it allows one to search for Hebrew words within English resources such as commentaries). However, the problem under consideration here is the fact that the need to change from an English to Hebrew keyboard or font is not easily discerned within the digital interface itself, thus requiring users to track down a solution. Additionally, though SL:G is incredibly option-rich, it can be overwhelming at times. Navigating through what seem to be endless drop-down menus, choosing from the plethora of tool options, and browsing through ongoing lists of resources can become more burdensome than empowering. As a result, on several occasions I found myself consulting the program’s help files and/or the more than 100 online training videos—the fact that Logos offers such a staggering quantity of these videos suggests that other users have had similar experiences to my own. To be certain, a learning curve is to be expected with any computer program; in Logos’ case, however, I cannot bring myself to say that ‘intuitive user-interface’ is a phrase that describes SL:G.

To summarize, Libronix’s SL:G is an extremely powerful tool for conducting biblical research. Its breadth of primary and secondary source offerings is comprehensive, and its functionality within a research environment is superb (even if the user-interface is cumbersome at times). Libronix has not only created a program apt to exegetical analysis, but they have also developed an entire digital research environment that enables the integration of foundation-level grammatical and philological analysis with higher-level hermeneutical and theological reflection. I would highly recommend the Logos 3.0 SL:G edition to anyone who is serious about using the computer to assist his or her academic research.

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11 This figure was achieved by doing a simple count of the training videos posted at http://www.logos.com/videos, accessed on September 29, 2009.

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Among Bonhoeffer scholars, Metaxas’ Bonhoeffer biography has not found much favour. For example, the well-known Bonhoeffer scholar and editor of the English critical edition of Bonhoeffer’s works, Clifford Green, has taken issue with the
simplistic—and liberal rather than evangelical—interpretive lens Metaxas applies to his retelling of Bonhoeffer’s life.

Green’s assessment that Metaxas’ book should be retitled “a hijacking of Bonhoeffer,” is surely correct from a scholar’s point of view, but my hunch is that the broadly evangelical, North American audience targeted by Metaxas will care little for these things for two main reasons. First, few people actually are acquainted with facts that are common knowledge among Bonhoeffer researchers. For example, how many know the eye-witness account of the Danish commercial attaché and resistance member Jørgen L.F. Morgensen, who has convincingly discredited the prison doctor’s narration of Bonhoeffer’s death that has become a required element in popular accounts of Bonhoeffer and is repeated by Metaxas? According to Morgensen, the location of the doctor’s barrack did not allow him to witness the execution, nor do the details of his narrative match normal procedures followed during executions. If anything, the received legend prettifies Bonhoeffer’s death by obscuring the cruel way he may actually have died. (For details, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer Aktuell: Biografie, Theologie, Spiritualität. Eds. Mayer and Zimmerling. Gießen: Brunnen Verlag, 2001, 92–93.)

The second reason for the likely success of Metaxas’ book, despite its historical errors, is that even if such discrepancies were pointed out, North American evangelicals would still be enthralled by this book because they can recognize themselves in this narrative that is constructed within a North American, evangelical framework—and that will be all that counts. Well, one should be fair. Metaxas often does capture the heart of Bonhoeffer’s theology, as, for example, when he identifies the incarnational Christology as the centre of Bonhoeffer’s engagement of culture. Metaxas also tries to do justice to the complexity of Bonhoeffer’s theology, when, for example, he writes that Bonhoeffer’s theology puzzled liberal and conservative Lutheran theologians alike. And yet, the evangelical rhetoric takes over when Metaxas describes Bonhoeffer’s deepening of traditional Lutheranism as “a Holy Spirit-led course adjustment” (261).

Aside from the slightly flippant tone of such summaries, readers of Bonhoeffer’s writing know that such charismatic flavour is not prominent in his theology. Yet in some ways, this colloquial tone is also the great strength of this book. As I said, Metaxas knows how to spin a good yarn, and what often comes across as flippance sometimes really works, such as his description of the Confession Church’s self-immolating, overly hesitant dealings with the Reichsbischof Müller and the Hitler regime as “hemmoroidal isometrics” (208), or his characterization of Goebbels as “vampiric Homunculus” (162). Sometimes, however, these pithy captions fail, as, for example, when Metaxas seeks to refresh the well-worn description of Karl Barth’s Romans Commentary by writing that it “fell like a smart bomb into the ivory towers” of liberal theology. Somehow updating this standard
phrasing of the commentary’s impact by adopting the image of a remote-con-
trolled warhead does not quite work. What does work is Metaxas’ selection of cita-
tions from Bonhoeffer, his friends, and his relatives; they are, in fact, a redeeming
feature of the book, for they allow Bonhoeffer and those who knew him best to
speak for themselves. The inclusion of Franz Hildebrandt’s sermon at Bonhoef-
ner’s memorial service is particularly powerful.

Yet overall, at least for this reviewer, the narrative style and tone fail to do jus-
tice to the seriousness of the issues and the complexity of Bonhoeffer’s theological
position. The tone is, shall we say, irritatingly evangelical, geared mainly toward
engaging and soliciting emotions, and for this very reason, is largely incapable of
capturing intellectual depth and nuances. This is not only true of Bonhoeffer’s
theology but also of Nietzsche’s philosophy. Ignoring decades of Nietzsche schol-
arship on the simplistic and false appropriation of Nietzsche by the Nazis via his
sister’s editing of *The Will to Power*, Metaxas simply repeats the plug and play
approach of standard evangelical readings: Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* is Hitler’s Aryan
(168–69). Part of the power of Metaxas’ work derives from adopting the narrative
style of a historical novel: he clearly seems to know what Bonhoeffer actually
thought on various occasions. It would be more modest to add an occasional “may
have” in many places where Metaxas boldly asserts that “Bonhoeffer had many
reasons for” or “Bonhoeffer thought that” when no epistolary evidence allows for
such statements.

So what is the value of this new Bonhoeffer biography? Well, that is hard to say.
The book offers no new information, and when it tries, such as unearthing a sup-
posed engagement to Bonhoeffer’s distant cousin Elisabeth Zinn, it does so on no
real evidence (66). Most likely, the book will help to lead more evangelical Chris-
tians beyond the popular image of Bonhoeffer, the pious martyr, to Bonhoeffer,
the theologian, pastor, and cultural critic. Let us hope so. I am doubtful, however,
that this evangelical, North American account can do justice to the topic. It is a
little like the Hollywood depiction of operation Vallkyrie, the famous failed as-
signation attempt on Hitler: as little as the North American actor Tom Cruise can
convey the character of the German aristocratic officer von Stauffenberg, as little
does Metaxas’ narrative really capture Bonhoffer’s cultural and theological ethos.
Of course, the countless spelling mistakes of German words do not help the mat-
ter, although not Metaxas but his editor is to be blamed for this. German ears
cringe at “Gleischaltung” instead of Gleichschaltung (161, 176), “Sauüberung statt
Säuberung” (162) “Rechtswalter” statt Rechtsverwalter (219); not to mention miss-
ing Umlaute and many other infelicities, including some translation errors. None-
theless, even this cranky German reviewer confesses that, after putting the book
down, the usual spell Bonhoeffer’s personality and fate exerts on those who en-
counter him and his writings had once again asserted its presence trough Metaxas’
narrative. If the reader wants a recommendation for a more faithful biography (and yes, it is written by a German), but is afraid to tackle Eberhard Bethge’s massive tome, the best alternative is Ferdinand Schlingensiepen’s *Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906–1945: Martyr, Thinker, Man of Resistance* (T&T Clark, 2010).

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The political philosopher Leo Strauss once differentiated his field of study from that of political theology with this crisply formulated distinction: “By political theology we understand political teachings which are based on divine revelation. Political philosophy is limited to what is accessible to the unassisted human mind.” The “theologico-political problem,” or the tension between faith and politics, was uppermost in Strauss’ mind. Rightly or wrongly, Strauss doubted that political theology, whose defenders dared to speak in the name of God, could ever mediate this tension. In Strauss’ unforgiving view, which was heavily informed by Spinoza, political theology synthesized two realms which were best kept separate from each other. Whereas reason, in the form of political philosophy, properly defends the separation of faith and politics, political theology embraced two equally bad options: it subordinated politics to faith (theocracy) or faith to politics (Machiavellianism). In each case, faith and politics harmed each other.

Professor Doerksen’s study focuses on two political theologians from the Protestant tradition, John Howard Yoder and Oliver O’Donovan. As a Mennonite, Yoder eschews any political theology that allows the state to wage war against its enemies even in cases of self-defence: “it is the cross and not the sword—suffering, and not brute force—that determines the meaning of history” (71). In contrast, O’Donovan, an Anglican defender of the Just War tradition, embraces Old Testament-style monarchy, with its power to make war justly. Despite the dangers and failures associated with this regime, he is confident that “human monarchy can mediate God’s authority in a way that avoids idolatrous temptations” (66).

Although the sharp contrast between O’Donovan and Yoder may impress readers who are already sympathetic with their political theologies, it is hard to understand why Doerksen chooses these two men as the best representatives of Protestant political theology. In fact, even the sympathetic discussion which Doerksen provides of Yoder and O’Donovan only serves to confirm Strauss’ worst
fears about synthesizing faith and politics. Yoder comes across as wretchedly vague when his political theology is presented as one “which continually calls into being a community that intends to obey what it comes to understand as God’s call within its particular time and place” (23). Yoder presumably understands “God’s call” with great certainty, since he is sure that governments must reject any form of war. Although Yoder is not an anarchist, he might as well be, in light of his view that Augustine “borrowed too much from Cicero” and ignored the Gospels when he defended the idea of a state having the legitimate right to wage a Just War (137). Somehow, law rather than government will be the “appropriate unifying element in international order” even if governments abandon their use of violence to back up the law (60). Otherwise, it is pure “Constantinian” Christendom, the evil marriage of the two realms of Caesar and of Christ, that justifies the false teaching that war is often necessary in order to preserve human life. Yoder, of course, denies that he is a utopian defender of a “messianic pacifism” that fosters overconfidence among its avatars (173). Nevertheless, how Yoder’s pacifist church would even survive in a world where the strong wage war on the weak is never explained.

Unfortunately, O’Donovan’s defence of the Just War tradition does not fare any better than Yoder’s pacifism. Since he chooses monarchy as the regime best fitted to “avoid idolatrous temptations,” O’Donovan must take on the usual objections against monarchic love of power and hatred of opposition. Amazingly, the main counterargument that he offers against these worries is that the king “took on a role of double representation in that he represented God’s rule to the people, ensuring their obedience, and he represented the people to God, ensuring his favor” (56). O’Donovan seems to be insufficiently aware that kingly authority in the Hebrew Bible is always subject to contention, since prophets regularly question the monarch’s fidelity to the covenant, even though he recognizes the dangers of empire-building and the existence of a critical prophetic tradition (58, 66). The fact that not a single one of Israel’s monarchies survived internal strife or conquest fails to trouble O’Donovan. It is even more disturbing that he shows little awareness of the dangers in interpreting all of Israel’s military victories as God’s victories (65). The violent use to which this theology of chosenness has been put throughout history, a theology that justifies the extermination of those who are not “chosen” by God, does not receive the discussion that it richly deserves in this book.

I have no doubt that Doerksen has presented the ideas of these two theologians accurately. He also makes many legitimate criticisms of their deeply flawed theologies. Yet even his commentary at times cries out for more critique than he offers. The author too quickly accepts O’Donovan’s criticism of “historicism,” a doctrine that presumably understands God’s providence as moving and acting through history. God is “beyond” history, according to both O’Donovan and Doerksen (32, 161). Yoder then stands accused of being historicist for “ politicizing” the message of Jesus
Lost in this confusing mishmash of a discussion is a more straightforward understanding of historicism as the rational attempt to put biblical teachings into the context of their time. As far as I can tell, neither Yoder nor O’Donovan does this adequately. Yoder fails to see that pacifism is not always justified under all circumstances, especially if one is dealing with enemies whose consciences cannot be reached by the stirring sight of nonviolent passive resistance. O’Donovan in turn fails to understand that our modern democratic age may not find his prescription of returning to monarchy particularly relevant or desirable.

Perhaps these political theologies would not be so worrisome if Yoder and O’Donovan confined their ideas to the role of the church, separate from that of the state. Yet neither man is content to be apolitical in this sense. To be fair, Doerksen assures his readers that Yoder and O’Donovan have no interest “in making a case for hegemony of the church or some version of theocracy” (212). The author also makes clear early on that he rejects the authoritarian political theology of Carl Schmitt, who politicized Catholic doctrine in the service of right-wing political causes (10). Nevertheless, Doerksen never makes tolerably clear just how exactly the political and religious realms actually relate to each other in the theologies of Yoder and O’Donovan. What does Yoder mean when, according to Doerksen, he insists that secular power “simply exists as one of the worldly powers that serves the end of the church, not the other way around” (109)? What does O’Donovan mean when, according to the author, he believes that “secular power must do what it is called to do by the reality of the triumph of Christ” (178)? These vague assertions, whose implications Doerksen does not adequately develop, would rightly trouble any citizen who is not a Christian. Do Yoder and O’Donovan honestly believe that secular power must bend to their understanding of the church, even if the majority of citizens are not believers?

By the time the reader reaches the end of this study, he may be forgiven for thinking that Protestant political theologians still have a long way to go before they can satisfactorily address what Strauss calls the “theologico-political problem.” The tension between politics and biblical morality is too serious a matter to be suppressed simply by indulging in vague rhetoric about the subordination of secular power to the church. This political theology not only closes off politics to anyone who is uncommitted to Christianity in the first place. It also places the church above the secular, a hegemonic move that too quickly assumes the moral superiority of the first over the second. The bare facts of history refuse to cooperate with the assumption that the church has acted more faithfully and charitably than secular governments. Indifference to this truth dooms any Christian political theology to failure.

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Introduction

In the summer of 2000, I was invited to deliver a paper at the University of Utrecht in Holland and instead of lodging near the university, I decided to stay with a Dutch friend who lived an hour north by train in the quaint medieval town of Kampen. The conference ended on the Saturday and so I had the opportunity to accompany my friend to his Reformed church in Kampen. Now I have to admit that my Dutch was and remains very rudimentary and so I knew it was unfair for me to judge the quality of a sermon. But the delivery of this sermon was the stiffest I could ever remember. Later I would be offered two explanations for the lack of homiletical finesse. First, the sermon was not written by the elderly man who was painfully delivering it from the elevated pulpit. An ordained minister was unavailable to preach that Sunday in person and so, following protocol, the Consistory had requested a sermon be written by a retired minister one province over, and the head of the Consistory was required to read it word for word. Although I found this odd, it was actually the second explanation that I found more bizarre. The sermon, I was told, was actually not based on a biblical text but rather on an article of the Belgic Confession as was the regular practice of their congregation. As we came out from the service, in true Dutch fashion, half the congregation lit up their cigarettes (including the head of the Consistory who had just read the sermon). Nevertheless, it was not the secondhand smoke filling my lungs and stinging my eyes that intrigued me the most; it was that sermon on the Belgic Confession.

Creedal Expressions in Scripture

In the years since that Dutch encounter, I have increasingly noticed, to my surprise, the importance of creedal expressions for my own articulation of Old Testament theology. Professor Williams made this connecting point as he established a New Testament precedent for an accompanying apostolic tradition, noting texts such as 1 Cor 15:3–4; Phil 2:5–11; and Acts 2:22–36, 3:13–22, and 10:39–43, and describing them in this way:

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1 This paper began as a response to D.H. Williams delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association (University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SK, May 2007). With thanks to Shawn Keough for the invitation to and organization of the panel at the meeting.
these are reports about the transmission of the faith before it was rendered into text … and certainly well before there was any kind of codification of Christian texts. Although the earliest stages of the apostolic message do not contain a single structure or content, one does find a set of recurring themes that are based on the revelation of God in Christ as seen through his incarnate life; his servanthood through his crucifixion, death, and burial; and the remaking of creation through his resurrection and realized lordship.

Let me begin by offering further support from my own discipline for his argument, support that respectfully challenges the letter but affirms the spirit of Professor Williams’ passing claim that “the Israelite’s worship and approach to God were enshrined in the Ten Commandments.”

I would argue that throughout the Old Testament, at regular intervals, one finds two fundamental creeds that appear to encapsulate the theology of the community of faith. On the one side, there is what I call the “narrative creed,” showcased in what von Rad called “das kleine geschichtliche Credo.” This creedal expression communicated Israel’s Heilsgeschichte, those redemptive events that lay at the core of Hebrew faith, the kernel of which is the statement:

And us he brought out (yts’ Hiph’il) from there
So that he might bring us in (bw’, Hiph’il)
To give to us the land which he swore to our ancestors.

The appearance of forms of this creed in every major corpora and genre in the Old Testament suggests that it had captured the theological imagination of the community throughout its history (Deut 6, 26; Josh 24; 1 Sam 12; Ps 78, 105, 106, 135, 136; Neh 9; Jer 32; Ezek 20).

On the other side, one can discern another creed that expressed Hebrew theology, and it is one focused on the enduring character of Yahweh, what Yahweh calls “my goodness” and “my name” (Exod 33:19). The most advanced expressions of this

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3 Williams, Evangelicals and Tradition, p. 179.
5 von Rad, Gesammelte Studien, p. 16; von Rad, Hexateuch, p. 8: identified an expansionistic trend in through what he called “freie Abwandlungen des Credo in der Kultlyrik” (free modification of the creed in cult-poetry; Exod 15; Ps 78; 105; 106; 135; 136; Neh 9).
6 Although minimizing its importance, Wright, God Who Acts, noted its presence. See also R. W. L.
creed are the examples found in Exod 34:6–7 and Num 14:18. However, its regular appearance again across the various corpora and genres of the Old Testament (Exod 34:6–7; Num 14:18; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3; Neh 9:17; 2 Chr 30:9) reveals that at its core lay the covenant love and compassion of Yahweh:

Yahweh, Yahweh, God of compassion and mercy
Slow to anger and abundant in covenant loyalty and faithfulness.

It is interesting that the early Christian creedal traditions appear to combine these two traditions, with elements of character and narrative interwoven, something understandable in light of some influence from these two traditions in the New Testament witness.

Embedded within the inscripturated tradition, then, is evidence of a creedal tradition that expressed the core of the faith of Israel. In the Hebrew tradition, it appears that the creedal tradition predates the canonical tradition, that the creedal tradition possibly gave rise to the canonical tradition (von Rad) or at the least existed alongside it. In the same way, Professor Williams highlights the evidence found within the New Testament canon of an underlying creedal tradition that is already existent as the canonical tradition takes shape. The discipline of Old Testament theology, I think, lends some support to Professor Williams’ larger project.

Evangelicals and “Confessions”

Although I did not make any connection at the time, I had spent the years leading up to my Dutch experience guiding a committee responsible for revising the statement of faith within my home evangelical denomination here in Canada. From this vantage point, I was able to observe the role and importance of creed within an evangelical denomination. Professor Williams identifies at least two approaches to creed among evangelicals, the one being those who “loathe contemporary statements of faith and thereby have little use for ancient ones” and another which views theology as “an elective of the Christian life, not necessary and too divisive for a religion of civility.” I would like to think that the ease by which the revised statement of faith passed at the General Assembly was due to my competent leadership. However, I had a sneaking suspicion at the time that what was at play was the second approach to creed that Professor Williams identifies in his book. For a community more tapped into Willow Creek and its

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7 Williams, Evangelicals and Tradition, p. 147.
8 Williams, Evangelicals and Tradition, p. 178.
missional agenda, creed and theology were irrelevant. Ruminating today on this experience has forced me to reflect on whether, in some way, those of us within the intellectual tradition of the church have contributed to this trend. It was Professor Williams who raised this thought in my mind when he wrote:

The most crucial point to make about the ancient tradition or a shared understanding of theological canonicity is that it was not a set of theoretical principles expounded in an atmosphere of intellectual detachment. Such concepts were, in practice, indissolubly hinged to the believing, worshiping, and responsive life of the churches.\(^9\)

Is it possible that one of the challenges in Evangelicalism is that “creeds” are considered “statements of faith” rather than “confessions of faith”? Creeds are more of an intellectual exercise than a liturgical experience with missional implications. As I have recited the creeds week in and week out on my own recent Canterbury trail, I have begun to realize that the creed is properly rooted in worship, that is, in the presence of God among the community of the faithful.

One finds precedence for this again in the Old Testament. The character creed in Exod 34 comes in response to Moses’ dangerous face-to-face encounter with Yahweh and once Yahweh had recited his “name,” the narrator interrupts the dramatic narrative for a moment to describe Moses’ worshipful response (v. 8), followed by Yahweh’s invitation to covenant (v. 10). The narrative creed of Deut 26 is recited as one offered the harvest of the land to Yahweh before the priest at the central shrine. God’s self-revealing or Israel’s theologizing is not the object of arid intellectual debate, but rather is the response of covenant partners.

**Theological Disciplines and Modernity**

This liturgical approach to creed and theology espoused by Professor Williams, which is also found in the Old Testament, challenges biblical scholars to reconsider their identity.\(^10\) The importance of this issue within the theological academy

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10 This reflection arises out of an interdisciplinary doctoral course I teach each year in our advanced degree program (MA and PhD), a course entitled Biblical Theology. In it, we discuss the role of the Bible within the theological enterprise and, in the process, our research students are invited to reflect on their vocational and disciplinary identity within the academy. My introductory lectures do not focus on the Reformation as a “Back to the Bible” movement, but rather on the later Gabler and his late 18th Century inaugural lecture, “An Oration on the Proper Distinction between Biblical and Systematic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each,” and those who have been identified by Christine Helmer, “Biblical Theology: Reality, Interpretation, and Interdisciplinarity,” in *Biblical Interpretation: History, Context, and Reality* (ed. Christine Helmer and Taylor G. Petrey; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), as his two 17th–18th Century dialogue partners: German Pietists like Spener and German Rationalists like Semler. It appears to many that Gabler was trying to etch out space for the voice of the biblical canon in the midst of creedal developments after the Reformation. One of the goals of the course is to discuss this development and its
today is highlighted by the 2005 Auburn Studies *Signs of the Times: Present and Future Theological Faculty*, which reveals:

Higher percentages of doctoral students are joining professional societies, attending guild meetings and making presentations at them. They are less likely than doctoral students ten years ago to say that Christian traditions dominate their programs and that their doctoral studies ‘should help strengthen students’ religious faith’; and, most significantly, they are more likely … to place themselves in the broad field of ‘religious studies’ than in ‘theological studies.’

If we each evaluate our own research partnerships or publishing ventures, even our class notes and assignments, we may be forced to say mea culpa. Where do we locate our identity as biblical, theological, and historical scholars? Is it in theology or linguistics, philosophy, and historiography?

By exposing us to the exegetical and theological rhythms of the early church, Professor Williams has provided a powerful model which addresses the present shape and practices of the academy. In this model, there is a challenge to the modernist assumption that church tradition not only competes with but even smothers the voice of Scripture. Dr. Williams is probably far too conciliatory when he writes:

Other steps of the new reform involve discovering in this post-Reformation age that the Bible is most faithfully understood not merely by the tools of literary, historical, and form criticism but through the lenses of the church’s canonical tradition…. Certainly, enormous strides have been made in the last century of biblical scholarship, but there have been losses as well.

Reading modernist historically- and sociologically-driven treatments of Scripture (even my own), I often have the sense that we have missed the point. That is, we

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11 Barbara G. Wheeler, Sharon L. Miller, and Katarina Schuth, *Signs of the Times: Present and Future Theological Faculty* (Auburn Studies 10; New York: Auburn Theological Seminary, 2005), p. 16. Further: “Ten percent more now than ten years ago say their field is ‘religion’ rather than ‘theology.’ The change may signal a shift in the orientation and content of doctoral studies in the programs that train the majority of theological faculty. Almost all these programs are located in institutions that have religious affiliations and/or offer training for professional ministry. Our Panel was concerned that these doctoral programs may not be as supportive of theological studies as they are of religious studies. Theology, in the broad sense, is what binds together the segments of a theological school’s curriculum. If theology ceases to be the framework for the doctoral studies of prospective faculty, theological education will, most members of the Auburn Panel believe, be adversely affected,” Wheeler et al., *Signs of the Times*, p. 19.

overlook that these texts were written for a community that accepted them theologically and spiritually. They were indeed words of life given by the Spirit. In this way, then, I answer yes to Professor Williams’ question: “What better place to hear the exposition of biblical meaning than within the faith, nourished and structured according to the Bible?”

But to answer this affirmatively leads to the uncomfortable conclusion voiced by Professor Williams: “To accept the authority of the tradition is to embrace the principle that biblical interpretation ultimately belongs in the church, not in the academy.” I would like to hear Professor Williams’ guidance for all of us as we struggle with identity within the academy and church.

Hermeneutics and the Diversity of Inscripturated Witness

These reflections on the social location of the interpretation of Scripture echo recent debates over hermeneutics. Professor Williams’ leveraging of early church tradition shows how this was anticipated long before the postmodern turn:

Being schooled in the creed was the first step not only in learning what the Bible meant but also in preparing candidates to read the Bible with insight.¹⁴

This approach to tradition accentuates the positive role that a communally shaped interpretive framework or grid can play for interpretation. Rather than seeing tradition as something to be feared and renounced so that one can “objectively” read the text, this tradition is to be passionately embraced as the appropriate lens through which the text can be truly understood. There is a sense in which this answers the fear of “polysemy,” that endless hermeneutical circle that finds in the text what an individual wants to find there.

The only problem is that this merely extends the crisis from the level of an individual with modern perspective to a community with ancient perspective. Williams claims:

Scripture was the authoritative anchor of tradition’s content, and tradition stood as the primary interpreter of Scripture.¹⁵

But the problem with this is that it appears that the only acceptable access to

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¹³ Williams, Evangelicals and Tradition, p. 181.
¹⁴ Williams, Evangelicals and Tradition, p. 89. Further: “As its own history attests, Scripture is never really ‘alone.’ The church’s tradition, reason, and experience are all legitimate resources that played teaching roles in the interpretation of Scripture. While these resources may not share the same authority as Scripture, the notion of Scripture alone was never meant to construct the Bible as an island, as if it were a solitary resource for faith and practice,” Williams, Evangelicals and Tradition, p. 97.
¹⁵ Williams, Evangelicals and Tradition, p. 93.
this “anchor” is through the tradition. Although he consistently assures us that tradition, as well as experience and reason, “may not share the same authority as Scripture,” in many ways Scripture is at a considerable disadvantage because it is mediated through reason, experience, tradition, and community. In this scenario does Scripture really exist apart from the tradition?

The evangelical tradition has often focused on Scripture’s role in limiting theological possibilities. Yet it is interesting that in Professor Williams’ theological prolegomena, it is Scripture that may be providing the greater breadth of tradition than the (at times) elusive “apostolic tradition.” That is, there appears to be more conversation and diversity in Scripture than the traditions encapsulated in the rule of faith.

This diversity in Scripture has been highlighted for Old Testament theology; for instance, it appears in Walter Brueggemann’s articulation of “dispute” and “advocacy” that stands against the “testimony” so closely associated with the creedal kernel we have already introduced above.\(^{16}\) What this suggests is that the foundational canonical traditions provide a place for discussion and dialogue within the revelatory witness. Was there room for such dialogue, ambiguity, and even dispute within the hermeneutic of the early church? Do biblical scholars play a role in providing Scripture “voices” apart from the rule of faith, a role that is essential to our enduring theological task?

**The Spirit, the Creeds and the Worldwide Church**

I was intrigued by Professor Williams’ description of creedal expressions:

> No one of the major creeds of the early church was meant to be comprehensive in its teaching, nor was any one of them meant to stand alone, as if it were the final word on the subject of Christian faith…. Creeds are by no means all-inclusive in their teaching…. They were not totalizing formulas for calculating the entire mystery of Christian identity.\(^{17}\)

Yet it appears to me that the creeds have been adopted in the West as totalizing formulas and since they are the major resource for accessing this “tradition” of which Professor Williams writes, it seems to me that their character needs to be articulated very carefully. What I have in mind is what I would consider (as one who recites the Nicene–Constantinople creed each week in church) the poverty of pneumatology in the early creeds. Especially in light of the recent demographic

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\(^{17}\) Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition*, p. 146.
shift in the Church worldwide over the past half century, a shift dominated by the explosion of Charismatic and Pentecostal communities both inside and outside the West, one burning question is: what then is the role of the contemporary church to enhance, expand, and contribute to this rule of faith to offer direction in an age with different crises than those faced by the early church?  

Conclusion

The “conversion” (or better “reversion”) to Roman Catholicism of former ETS President Francis Beckwith (as well as some of my former students from the evangelical tradition) suggests that Professor Williams’ broader project is not just an insignificant agenda of an early church historian passionate for and hoping to gain interest in his discipline. Instead, it shows that this project may have serious implications for evangelical theology and identity. Dr. Beckwith’s journey back to Rome began, in his own words on his blog, by “reading the Early Church Fathers.” He ended that journey with this conclusion: “I thought it wise for me to err on the side of the Church with historical and theological continuity with the first generations of Christians that followed Christ’s Apostles.” So in closing, one final question: does “reading the Early Church Fathers” highlight for many evangelicals that uncomfortable sense that our reformation forefathers orphaned us from the mother church and its tradition?  

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18 Possibly the resources provided by Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1991) need to be considered more carefully.