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Martyria (formerly *The Heretic*) is the student-run undergraduate and early postgraduate Biblical Studies and Theology journal of the University of St Andrews School of Divinity. Established in 2019 and rebranded in 2025, it publishes original research in Biblical Studies, Theology, Church History, and Religion in relation to Politics and Science. The journal accepts submissions from undergraduates, recent graduates, and early postgraduates for inclusion in its annual peer-reviewed issue.

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FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

It is a great pleasure to present the inaugural edition of *Martyria*. A lot has changed since our initial founding as *The Heretic* in 2019.

This name change captures what the journal hopes to be. Taken from the Greek μαρτυρία (*martyria*; "witness" or "testimony"), *Martyria* seeks to publish work that *bears witness* to the continuing truth and vitality of divinity within the academy. At a time when theology and religion departments across Britain and worldwide face institutional uncertainty and declining undergraduate numbers, the rigour and substance of the papers submitted to the journal testify that interest in the Divine has not died out! On the contrary, these papers provide a witness to the enduring place of theology and religion in the intellectual life of the university.

Elise Falcon's exploration of Joshua 3 shows how communities standing at a threshold may find settlement through covenantal relationship with God—a theme deeply relevant in an age of instability and broken relations. Kirsten Spolar's reading of the submitting yet strategic Christ-like wife in 1 Peter 3 informs Christian families amid changing norms and reactionary responses to feminism. Vic Chua's account of theology as a Goethean science offers theologians a timely vision of their place within the university. Zach Miyazaki's classical theistic defence against the problem of divine hiddenness responds to pertinent philosophical challenges to the Christian faith. And Niamh Graham's overview of religion in geopolitical environments highlights the need to consider religion seriously amidst seemingly secular contexts.

I am deeply thankful to our Deputy Editor-in-Chief, Maria de Feo, who has spent countless hours planning the vision, structure, and execution of this newly organised endeavour. I also thank Sydney Gee for bringing her extensive copyediting experience to the table, and Dr William Hyland for his experienced guidance. I am especially grateful to our thirteen undergraduate and postgraduate editors for reading through dozens of submissions and sitting through long review meetings amidst busy weeks. Finally, I am particularly grateful to the team behind *Aporia: The St Andrews Journal of the Philosophy Society*—both for their guidance and for serving as an exemplary student journal as we reshaped the structure of *Martyria.*

Yours truly,

Wilson Sugeng
Editor-in-Chief, *Martyria*

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ARTICLE 1

JOSHUA 3:7–17, A SYNTHETIC EXPLORATION

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(Received 24 January 2026; revised 22 March 2026; accepted 21 April 2026; first published online 30 June 2026)

ABSTRACT
Joshua 3:7–17 can be constructed in a way that respects duly the intention of its authors and its position within the Hebrew Bible. The text can be divided into two sections which are investigated according to three conventions: the narrative's space-time setting, the characterization of God, and the utilization of the ark of the covenant as a literary device. Throughout, special attention is paid to the connection articulated between Moses and Joshua, as well as the relationship between Israel and YHWH. The greater process of textual de- and re-construction yields understanding as to how those circumstances antecedent to Josh 3 catalyse the events of the passage, while furthermore clarifying the necessity of Josh 3 to those events post-Josh 3. The essay concludes that Josh 3 ultimately acts as a preparation point wherein Israel's disposition in the wake of her wilderness-era is confronted and refined, that she might be theologically equipped for the events unfurled in the book's latter chapters.

The Joshua narrative acts broadly as the bridge between the Torah and the Nevi'im—working to culminate the legal writings antecedent to the book and provide exposition to the following prophetic ones.[1] Its position in Bible lends it well to this task; be it witting or not, Josh's method of textual unification works twofold—depicting the actualization of the Promised Land[2] while establishing the socio-political scene from which the DtrH stems. It is against the pseudo-success of Joshua's campaigns that Judges is felt all the more bitterly and that the subsequent rise and fall of the monarchy is framed.

The book plays frequently with a pattern of call and response that is most apparent throughout its initial half.[3] Within, the operation of Israel's military apparatus is directed as per divine instruction delivered through Joshua.[4] Beyond the first half of the book, this pattern takes

[1] Trent C. Butler, "The theology of Joshua," *RevExp* 95, no. 2 (1998): 203, https://doi.org/10.1177/003463739809500206. I would clarify that it seems to me the true culmination of the Torah (if indeed we can apply the notion of a culmination) is found in the formation of the Sinaitic Covenant. In writing "culminate" here, I mean to state in a holistic sense that Joshua brings to a general fruition the land expectation born of the Abrahamic Covenant in a way that is perhaps deliberately absent from the Torah.
[2] Speaking directly to the Abrahamic Covenant in its 4 iterations: see Gen 15:19; cf. Gen 15:16, 17:8, 22:17; Josh 3:15, 17:8, 22:17.
[3] See Josh chapters 1 (toward crossing and conquest: God commands, Joshua prepares), 5 (toward circumcision: God commands, Joshua executes), 6 (toward the battle of Jericho: God commands, Joshua executes), etc.
[4] Ann Gillian Chu, "Announcing God's presence through narration and dialogue: An exegesis of Joshua 3,"

on different from as the narrative moves from conquest to administration. The land's allotment (Josh 12–22), followed by Joshua's final address (Josh 23–24), recalls more directly the governing divine agenda.[5] As Gordon Wenham observes, these two dynamics are a manifestation of the book's greater thematic skew—its contents speak continuously to the relationship the covenant has stipulated between YHWH and the Israelites.[6] Framed by the book's opening and concluding chapters, this theme narrows to comment specifically on the necessity of Israel's obedience to the LORD, and the LORD's prevailing character in its absence. Where chapters 23 and 24 warn against transgression of the covenant, chapters 1 through 5 examine YHWH's redoubled dedication to the Israelites in the wake of their transgressions. It is the extent of this dedication and its stipulations that Joshua's author(s) seems so intent to explore.[7] Especially pre-conquest (chapters 1–5), the relational current between Israel and her God falls under constant tension and assessment. This makes sense—Israel therein finds herself on the cusp of great change.

The apparent centrepiece of these opening chapters—Josh 3:1–17—grants a better understanding of this relational dynamic and its intended extrapolations. Within, three motifs demand specific attention: the setting, both chronological and geographical; the characterization of God in interaction with Joshua and then the Jordan; and the nature of the ark. Respectively, these elements clarify the situation's significance, speak to the author's understanding of the LORD's disposition, and explore how Israel is made to interact with this disposition. Toward an orderly deconstruction of the text, the passage will be divided into a call (vv. 7–13) and a response (vv. 14–17), hereon Section I and Section II. Within the two, each motif will be traced, analysed, and reconciled.

SECTION I: JOSHUA 3:7–13

Concerning setting, it can be said that Section I's location proves particularly opaque compared to its counterpart's. Aside from the Jordan, v. 10's list of peoples appears the only geographically-pertinent element of the passage. As such, I would argue that vv. 7–13 lend themselves most intuitively to a chronological orientation. This is exemplified even in the

Resonance: A Theological Journal 4, no. 4 (2018): 62, https://www.academia.edu/37891181/Announcing_Gods_Presence_Through_Narration_and_Dialogue_an_Exegesis_of_Joshua_3.; Jonathan J. Routley, "The prophet Joshua? The neglected ministry of the prophet of the conquest," *JETS* 65, no. 1 (2022): 53, https://www.hdcsnepal.org/wp–content/uploads/2023/12/The_Prophet_Joshua_The_Neglected_Ministr.pdf.

[5] A non-exhaustive list of examples: 13:6, 15:13, 22:9, 23:3–5.

[6] Gordon J. Wenham, "The deuteronomic theology of the book of Joshua," *JBL* 90, no. 2 (1971): 141, https://doi.org/10.2307/3263755.

[7] Save for briefly, the matter of Joshua's authorship will not be discussed. Beyond this point, I have made the decision to refer to the authorial power behind Joshua as the book's "author," unless context demands otherwise. This is for the sake of consistency as well as personal preference.

section's exposition:

> The LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will *begin* to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I *will be* with you as I *was* with Moses" (Josh 3:7 NRSV, emphasis added).

In delineating a connection between Joshua and Moses, the passage depicts Joshua beside his predecessor, across time. Even without this prompting, the parallels between the two are obvious—so obvious as to seem to invite continual, informative comparison across their subsequent narratives.[8] This approach proves fruitful as the passage progresses; v. 7's direct connection between Moses and Joshua is repeated with subtle precision throughout the remainder of Section I.[9] In their dialogue with God, martial-esque appointment over Israel, and respective crossings, the actions and figures of Moses and Joshua appear largely inter-referential.[10] The demonstration of this connection calls to mind the progression of Israel's present journey, an objective duly supported by the verse's grammatical framework. Those words italicized above speak literally to the scene's chronological situation: Section I marks a mid-point on the timeline of Israel's liberation, flowing from Moses through Joshua. Indeed, Wenham states that, "It is clearly a fundamental concern of the editor to demonstrate that Joshua was the divinely appointed … successor to Moses."[11]

The reigning rationale in this appointment becomes evident upon further chronological orientation. In the articulation of the Moses-Joshua connection, a picture of the Josh 3 generation begins to emerge. Intertwined, I believe, is the question as to the narrative relevance of Joshua's exaltation. Considering its inclusion in the text, it appears necessary that Israel be made aware of God's continued relationship with her leader.[12] I would argue that this is due largely to three principal events: the crossing of the sea (Exod 14), the renewal of the covenant (Deut 29), and the failure to enter the Promised Land (Num 14). In examination of these passages, the image formed of Joshua's Israelites portrays a people removed from the profundity of the Exodus and left waiting on God post-Deut 29. As such, it's likely that the Josh 3 generation struggled with some combination of ignorance and doubt, ostensibly akin to Deuteronomy's "stubbornness."[13] This is entirely precedented—Moses ascribes as much to the

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[8] I.G. Matthews, "Expository studies in the Old Testament: IX. Joshua, the successor of Moses," *The Biblical World* 30, no. 3 (1907): 215, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3140585.
[9] Chu, "Announcing God's presence," 64.
[10] Respectively as paired, Josh 3:7, Exod 33:1–3; Exod 17:8, Josh 3:9–10 (implied); Exod 14, Josh 3:7–17.
[11] Wenham, "The deuteronomic theology," 145.
[12] Joshua himself is already aware of this connection (see Josh 1:5). The repetition of the connection in view of Israel implies a greater purpose in its public assertion.
[13] Deut 10:16, cf. 29:19. It bears saying that this "stubbornness" is not necessarily a present state—discerning such a thing falls beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, the present state of the Israelites at minimum risks developing

pre-Joshua generation, attributing Israel's ignorance to divine intention.[14] The effects of this state culminate in Num 14, the circumstance into which the Josh 3 generation has been born.

As per this position, it would follow that Israel's sight of the imperative Moses-Joshua connection would have been lost in the moment of Josh 3:7. This notion is all but proven in the direct imputation that the Israelites did not yet "know" of YHWH's continued work in Israel through Joshua.[15] From a literary standpoint, it is the chronological articulation of the Moses-Joshua relation that situates the continuity of God's work in the textual foreground.[16] In much the same way, it would appear as though the commencement of Joshua's exaltation (that is, those events both including and directly precluding the crossing of the Jordan) would have revealed the continuation of YHWH's activity to Israel (cf. Deut 29:6). Consequently, I would contend that the declaration of the Moses-Joshua connection would have functioned toward realigning Israel with her Sinaitic commitment, delivering her from any internal condition inhibiting her achievement of Deut 29's covenantal standard. In a sense, this process would engineer a reversal of Deut 29:4, engendering a sort of preventative "circumcision of the heart."[17] This realignment is made imperative in consideration of the conditions across the Jordan; if the present train of thought is to be followed, the process of Joshua's exaltation would have served to equip Israel for her role post-Josh 3.[18]

This concept is developed further through the characterization of God, observed in his interaction with Joshua. The predominance of dialogue within the section again reinforces the continuity of the divine in Israel, displaying in turn the LORD's willingness to speak and his expectation of response. The extent of this expectation is clarified in Joshua's commission:

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into something akin to "stubbornness" with all its requisite consequences. Taken in the context of the entirety of Deut 29, the designation of this parallel highlights the potential scope and severity of those repercussions that might stem from Israel's present disconnection with her theological obligations. It is in view of Deut 29 that the underlying *enjeux* of Josh 3 are revealed—Israel's success in the Promised Land hinges entirely upon her commitment to the agenda articulated in the Sinaitic Covenant.

[14] Deut 29:2–4. This condition (be it intentional or otherwise) is displayed repeatedly throughout the wilderness narratives, most famously in that of the golden calf (Exod 32).

[15] Josh 3:7.

[16] Routley, "The prophet Joshua?," 58. Later on this thought continues: Josh 14–22 (Joshua's allotment of the land west of the Jordan) is preceded by a record of Moses' allotment of the land east of the Jordan (ch 13), delineating the same chronological continuity from another angle. Cf. Josh 22:9 in synthesis of call/response and Moses-Joshua.

[17] As described in Deut 30:6. The role of the LORD in the circumcision of the heart within 30:6 places the state of being "circumcised of heart' against that of being divinely prevented from understanding the "signs and wonders" (Deut 29:3) of the wilderness as in Deut 29:4. As per this connection, I would argue the former might be taken as a true reversal of the latter even without outright statement.

[18] Expounded upon in the concluding section of this essay.

> You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, "When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan" (Josh 3:8).

John Beck describes this command as "a logistical nightmare"—a statement supported by both Biblical narrative and historical record.[19] In effect, Joshua is being asked to partake in an enormous act of trust: do not merely cross the Jordan, but *"stand still"* in its midst.[20] This notion is broadened in the connection of the section's dialogical scheme with the call-and-response throughout the book. Ann Chu contends that the communication-oriented dynamic between the LORD and Israel (in whatever synecdochic form she might appear) ultimately asserts "the unswerving authority of a monotheistic God who manifests himself through language."[21] When layered, the combination of Beck and Chu's perspectives underscores the greater thrust of v. 8. Upon no uncertain terms, the LORD has demanded Joshua perform a nigh-on-impossible task requiring complete reliance upon forces categorically beyond the notion of possibility. This is an inherently intimate, trust-demanding act.

Verse 9 includes the greater Israel in this process, depicting her (in a definitively non-synecdochic sense) as an active recipient of the LORD's words in v. 10:

> Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the LORD your God." Joshua said, "*By this you [Israel] shall know* that *among you* is *the living God* who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites" (Josh 3:9–10).

Portrayed clearly as the LORD's and conveyed in direct attention of and noted proximity to the people of Israel, the words parallel (and thus ratify, to a certain extent) the intimacy manufactured in the LORD's personal call to Joshua.[22] In v. 10, YHWH's presence is confirmed to be manifest in the logically absurd conquest to come; in the following declaration of his life and proximity to the Israelites, it is emphasized. Somewhat shortsightedly, J. Michael Thigpen argues that the phrase, "the living God," explicitly contrasts YHWH with Baal on the basis that Josh 3 is a polemic against Baal's supremacy.[23] Provided the weight of the chapter, such a stance feels too restrictive to be compelling. However, his observations as to the nuance of the phrase

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[19] John A. Beck, "Why do Joshua's readers keep crossing the river? The narrative–geographical shaping of Joshua 3–4," *JETS* 48, no. 4 (2005): 696, https://etsjets.org/wp–content/uploads/2010/06/files_JETS–PDFs_48_48–4_JETS_48–4_689–699.pdf; Carl von Clausewitz, *On war*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 532-33, as cited by Beck, "Joshua's readers," 697–98; 1 Chronicles 12:1–14: traversal of Jordan counted as military laud.

[20] From v. 8, italicized here for effect.

[21] Chu, "Announcing God's presence," 62.

[22] This can be seen in v. 9's, "Draw near and hear …" Cf. footnote no. 17: Once again, an idea has been revealed first to Joshua and then broadcasted to Israel.

[23] J. Michael Thigpen, "LORD of all the earth: Yahweh and Baal in Joshua 3," *TJ* 27, no. 2 (2006): 245–54, https://research.ebsco.com/c/twg5t6/viewer/pdf/pbhw76c7nf?route=details.

are interesting. He postulates that a correct translation emphasizes "the *living* God" rather than "*the* living God," thus qualifying "living" as an inherency rather than a title, and magnifying God's power by virtue of its immediacy and vigour.[24] This idea is sharpened by the remainder of v. 10 as well as v. 13's supplementary honorific, "Lord of all the earth." [25] This title not only invokes v. 10's martial declaration but, in the same vein as Thigpen's thought, elevates YHWH above the gods associated with v. 10's peoples. Simultaneously, he is presented as closely in relationship with Israel and ultimately powerful over all circumstances.[26] Israel's implied acceptance of this marks a departure from her wilderness ideology, yet again in preparation for the coming conquest.

It's here that the ark of the covenant becomes relevant. Referenced three times in the present verses (vv. 8, 11, 13) and thrice more in those antecedent (vv. 2, 6), each time it is accompanied by a unique appellation of the structure, "the ark [of the covenant] [of the Lord] [of all the Earth]" (Josh 3:8, 11, 13). In the interest of transparency, I feel it necessary to remark upon Morris Jastrow's interpretation of the lines at hand: Looking to obviate the variations in prose, he points to discrepancies between manuscripts, claiming that v. 11 was originally without the ark, reading, "… the Lord of all the earth is passing over …"[27] That being said, the text still emphasizes the power of the LORD, whether through the ark or outright, irrespective of the validity of Jastrow's conclusion(s).

Concerning the text's present, ark-in translation, George Coats recognizes two main points of interest: "1) the ark is to be carried by the Levites; and 2) the ark leads the procession …"[28] Point one is made relevant in symbol. In bearing the ark, the requisite faction of Israelite society (arguably another example of synecdoche) is made to support the covenantal embodiment upon their shoulders. In this, they simultaneously represent and fulfil the action they are carrying out, portraying an early but resonant and necessary adherence to the covenant. Coats' second point is duly apt. Beyond Josh 3, the ark sits rarely at the forefront of Israel's activities.[29] I. G. Matthews concludes that this stems from an inherent difference in circumstance between Josh 3 and those relevant passages which follow, contrasting crossing (miraculous) and

[24] Ibid., 246–47.
[25] The inclusion of "without fail" in conjunction with the list of peoples to-be-defeated asserts a complete and certain dominance.
[26] Interesting to explore, and perhaps related to this dichotomy, would be the commutability of the LORD's voice through Joshua (or whoever the relevant mouthpiece might be) as an indication and/or direct manifestation of his presence.
[27] Morris Jastrow Jr., "Joshua 3:16," *JBL* 36, no. 1 (1917): 55–57, https://doi.org/10.2307/3259275.
[28] George W. Coats, "The Ark of the Covenant in Joshua: A probe into the history of a tradition," *HAR* 9, (1985): 138, https://kb.osu.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/55ad3409–3e67–59c9–a524–b93840f1512b/content.
[29] Cf. Josh 6:8, for example: the ark follows the foreguard around Jericho.

conquest (divinely-sanctioned but Israelite-enacted).[30] I would argue that the discrepancy in placement indicates a difference in purpose. Unlike Joshua's campaigns which are expressly rooted in the spiritual and ethnic sterilization of Canaan, the crossing of the Jordan acts in explicit advancement of Torah's pursuit of rest, facilitated by Sinai's covenant.[31] Support for this can be found in vv. 8 and 13 as the words "still" and "rest," deployed in conjunction with the ark, juxtapose the Jordan's volatility and, more holistically, demonstrate a deliberate, quietly dominating opposition by way of the ark to that which was threateningly chaotic. This is in direct parallel to Num 10:

> So they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey *with the ark of the covenant of the LORD going before them* three days' journey, *to seek out a resting place* for them, the cloud of the LORD being over them by day when they set out from the camp. Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, "Arise, O LORD, let your enemies be scattered and your foes flee before you." *And whenever it came to rest, he would say, "Return, O LORD, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel"* (Num 10:33–36, emphasises added).

The ark's ceremonial position as required in Josh 3:11 recalls Israel's greater Abrahamic goal.

In sum, Section I appears to be an establishment of (1) the LORD's ongoing involvement with Israel, (2) the LORD's ultimate capability, and (3) the necessity of Israel's commitment to the LORD's commands.

SECTION II: JOSHUA 3:14–17

In contrast to its partner, Section II is movement-oriented. As the response to the former's call, it opens in the midst of action, immediately satisfying v. 11's instruction:

> *When* the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, *the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people* (Josh 3:14, emphasis added).

This fulfilment continues throughout the section, which portrays a now-revitalized obedience to the LORD. This shift is present even in II's grammatical structure: the consistent participial conjugations impress a sense of continuous motion upon the reader, quickening the narrative's pace.[32] Keeping with this affinity, the passage emphasizes the physical reality of the crossing, highlighting the tangible nature of the endeavour. Much of this emphasis is concentrated in vv. 15–16, wherein the setting appears to be of particular importance. Verse 15's parenthetical

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[30] Matthews, "Expository studies" 219–221. That is, those passages where the ark is employed similarly.

[31] Wenham, "The deuteronomic theology," 143. See Deut 12:29–31. As established outright in Josh 1:13. It is worth contextualizing, I feel, that while indeed the first step into Cannan and thus towards Canaan's cleansing (to be blunt and politically incorrect), the crossing acted as a sort of chapter title within Israel's book, beneath which conquest's sub-heading would appear to depict a necessary piece in the process of Israel's book-spanning journey toward restoration.

[32] Chu, "Announcing God's presence, 65.

(italicized below) is the most obvious example of this. Understood as an "explanatory gloss" by Morris Jastrow, it heightens the situational tension by underscoring the severity of the Jordan's condition:[33]

> *Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest.* So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water … (Josh 3:15, emphasis added).

Thigpen concludes duly that the interruption works to generate tension and furthermore drive home the absurdity of the miracle, during which time the Jordan near Jericho would have been "altogether impossible for the people of Israel [to cross] …" This reading is supported even by the causational "so" in the latter sentence of v. 15, which is followed by the parting of the waters.[34] Read through from v. 14 through 16 while treating 15's clause as the parenthetical it appears to be, the Jordan's triviality, even despite its state, becomes abundantly apparent. When the parenthetical is omitted, the text reads something loosely akin to the straightforward, "The ark was in front, so the waters flew back."

Furthermore, in its juxtaposition to the water's parting, v. 15's parenthetical aids v. 16's description of the miracle's magnitude:

> … the waters flowing from above *stood still, rising up* in a *single heap far off* at Adam, the city that is *beside* Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were *wholly cut off*. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho (Josh 3:16, emphases added).

The description provided is accentuated with a sudden increase in excessive, adjectival language (italicized), as well as with repeated reference to specific locations. This latter tactic appears an attempt to add some level of credibility or physical quantification to the scene. Though congruent with the nature of v. 16, this effect is largely lost on the contemporary reader: There has been significant debate concerning the locations of both Adam and Zarethan, with Jastrow going so far as to say that the inclusion of Adam at all was a textual corruption as per its omission in the Greek text.[35] He is an outlier; others place the city near the ford of Damieh, some twenty miles north of Jericho.[36] This would make sense—the topography of this location might have (and has) impeded the water's flow.[37] That being said, where precisely this location

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[33] Jastrow, "Joshua 3:16," 54.
[34] Thigpen, "Lord of all," 249–50; C. F. Keil, F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the old testament IV: Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (T&T Clark, 1875), 46. This interpretation holds when applied to the Hebrew text.
[35] Jastrow, "Joshua 3:16," 53–62.
[36] Matthews, "Expository studies," 218; Kiel, Delitzsch, *Biblical commentary*, 46.
[37] Lieut.-Colonel C. M. Watson, "The stoppage of the river Jordan in A.D. 1267," *PEQ* 27, no. 3 (2013): 253–61, doi:10.1179/peq.1895.27.3.253; Matthews, "Expository studies," 218.

falls is of little importance to the ultimate narrative. Of greater concern (and remarkably little scholarship) would be the question as to whether the pointed inclusion/translation of these locations holds relevant metaphorical implication. For the sake of conjecture, one might wonder whether the names might invoke the "completeness" of the miracle, depicting the waters breaking from Adam (the beginning) to the Dead Sea (the end). If such an assumption were to be made (and perhaps even if it is not), the latter sentence in v. 16 would evolve from another depiction of activity to a representation of Israel's reactionary, summative movement in the wake of the LORD's path-paving. Such would adhere to, again, the call-and-response so characteristic of the greater book.

To interpolate thus would be to implicate external intention in even the geography of the miracle. I would argue that this is an entirely logical step.[38] This stance is supported perhaps most when it comes to Section II's development of YHWH. Even though he is referenced only once within vv. 14–17 (in v. 17), his presence is encountered continuously via the actualization of Section I's plan. In a sense, the author has depicted a photo negative wherein God's presence is defined by the result of his actions—this is his fingerprint, so to speak. Syntactically, this is represented in chiasm,[39] where the climatic phrase (v. 16) is flanked by the initiation and then completion of the crossing (chiastic climax italicized below). These supports accentuate v. 16 itself, wherein the aforementioned participle use, in conjunction with choice diction ("far off," "wholly cut off"), stresses YHWH's undisputed dominance over the Jordan:

> Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, *the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho.* While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan (Josh 3:15–17, emphases added).

In defeat of v. 15's conditions "as soon as" (v. 15) the ark enters the river, divine precedence is truly realized. Jastrow colours this idea with local intertextuality, surmising that v. 13 is fulfilled in v. 16.[40] Paul Saydon holds to a slightly different approach, writing instead that it is v. 14 that leads to v. 16a.[41] Regardless, God's presence is made clear in the Jordan's stopping, despite his literary absence. C. F. Kiel and F. Delitzsch summarize the situation in writing that this chiastic

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[38] So would: Thomas B. Dozeman, "The book of Joshua in recent research," *CurrBR* 15, no. 3 (2017): 270–88, https://doi.org/10.1177/1476993X16661918.
[39] Chu, "Announcing God's presence," 65–66.
[40] Jastrow, "Joshua 3:16," 54–55.
[41] Paul P. Saydon, "The crossing of the Jordan: Josue 3; 4," *CBQ* 12, no. 2 (1950): 200, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43720202.

moment "brings out in all its fullness the miracle … by the omnipotence of God," thus eliminating any doubt as to the true nature of the river's stopping.[42] It is in consideration of the Jordan's Hebrew translation ("descending") that this thought is made complete; there can be no denial of divine intervention when the Jordan is transformed instantaneously from raging downward force to upright wall.[43]

This moment is magnified again by the ark. Within Section II, focus falls specifically to what the device accomplishes, rather than what it represents. Coats speaks again to this, reaffirming the assertion that vv. 14–17 function as the ritual fulfilment of vv. 7–13, suggesting that the ark acts as the nucleus from whence the fulfilling conditions to the miracle are met.[44] While the ark's first mention is ancillary, reaffirming its place "before the people" (Josh 3:14), its second two references in v. 15 bear more weight, depicting its entrance into the Jordan. Interestingly, the ark itself does not touch the water to begin the miracle. Instead, it is at the moment when the *priests* meet the river that the waters are flung back:

> So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were *dipped in the edge of the water*, the waters flowing from above stood still … (Josh 3:15b–16a, emphasis added).

The author goes to lengths to show that the priests' interaction with the Jordan is minimal; it is only the most logically immediate part of their body that enters the barest bit of the river before the miracle is enacted. Undoubtedly, this emphasizes the sheer authority of Israel's God, acting immediately and successfully even in indirect contact with the victim of his power. This would be a satisfactory conclusion if it had not, by now, been underscored sevenfold.

Rather, in view of Section I's encouraging attitude toward any Moses-Joshua comparison,[45] I am convinced that a portion of the fullness of Section II is revealed only when held against Moses' own Section II-esque event—the crossing of the Red Sea. The following parallel between the two episodes are evident:

> Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left (Exod 14:21–22).

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[42] C. F. Kiel and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical commentary*, 46.
[43] Chu, "Announcing God's presence," 66.
[44] Coats, "The ark," 138–41.
[45] (And operating upon the undoubtedly reasonable assumption that the writer(s) of our text did not truncate the employment of their various devices in accordance with the Section I, Section II demarcation I've made.)

> While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firmly on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan (Josh 3:17).

In Josh 3:17's depiction of the Jordan's crossing, there is no "strong east wind"—or any such force at all—to drive back the Jordan.[46] It is in the absence of this force that the significance of the ark is revealed. Paired, the unit comprised of the ark and priests functionally replicates the work of Exodus' wind, clearing a way that Israel might pass "on dry ground," just as they did across the sea. This is monumental. Suddenly, what God has been proven to be able to do alone is made to be accomplished through the union of man and divine, manifested in the ark. This idea appears so integral to the narrative that an opportunity to reiterate the profundity of YHWH's power in direct recollection of the Red Sea has been deliberately sacrificed upon the altar of its inclusion.

In sum, Section II appears to be the affirmation of (1) the LORD's ongoing involvement with Israel, (2) the LORD's ultimate capability, and (3) the fruits of Israel's cooperation in what the LORD demands of her.

SYNTHESIS

In conversation with its surrounding texts, Josh 3:7–17 speaks profoundly to what it means to be in correct relationship with God as an Israelite. Its position in scripture situates the text at what is the debut of a new era for the Hebrews. No longer do they find themselves under Egypt or wandering in the unknown—Josh 3 effectively marks the first offensive step toward covenant actualization. This thought is apparent in the ways the author of the text has seamlessly integrated past themes with new precedents, crafting a narrative that places the victories to come in terms of those that have passed.

In textual terms, the passage marks the evolution from the passive Exod 14:4, "The LORD will fight for you, and … you have only to be silent," to the active Josh 1:7, "Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you." As Israel's position relative to her larger purpose changes, so do her instructions as to what it looks like to keep on in faith. In this post-wilderness chapter of the Hebrew biography, Josh 3 portrays a God that invites his people to take up arms with him in the covenant, depicting a new standard of obedience requisite to success.[47] This attitude can be traced to Deut 29 where emphasis is placed strongly on the necessity of obedience and exclusive

[46] Matthews, "Expository studies," 218. It is worth noting that in the entirety of Section II there is no such mentioned force.

[47] Cf. Josh 7:10–12, 15. Again, this "new standard" is a development of an "old" standard (continuity as seen in Deut 29) that has been in some senses modified for new times to produce new, relevant results in faith.

adherence to YHWH, at threat of abandonment.

This makes complete sense in view of the environment waiting on the other side of the Jordan. No longer will Israel enjoy the "safety" of the wilderness' ideological vacuum within which they might contend with their doubt. Rather, they will have to both metaphorically and literally take up arms against those faiths differing from their own, that they might resist the biblically reviled concept of syncretization. Extra-biblically, this tracks with the black-and-white nature of the passage. Obviously, the "liturgical conquests" of Joshua do not constitute "history" as we take the word today.[48] Instead, the passage most likely represents what was a gradual diffusion of the Hebrew people into Canaan over time, magnified to portray YHWH's dominance and demonstrate an archetypal cooperation between Israel and her God.[49] That is not to say that the entirety of the account has been falsified.[50] However, over time, the story would most likely have been ornamented and moulded into the "religious interpretation" of Josh 3 which stands today.[51] In a modern sense, this is a textual fault. From it, no proper conclusion as to the historical reality of the situation can be derived. I would argue, however, that the profundity of Josh 3:7–17 is derived precisely from this same drama that sacrifices objective truth. As far as the goal of the text goes, it is not designed to recount history, per se, but instead to record the symbolic process by which this history was accomplished.[52]

To those exilic and diasporic readers encountering the text, the narrative painted by 3:7–17 would have been far more impactful than a historical iteration of the occupation of Canaan. Dispossessed and wrestling continuously with glaringly existential questions of faith, an account of this nature would have sown hope from several angles as to the eventual restoration of "order" throughout Israel. Foundationally, it depicts a revival of God's presence within his people after a period outside of his graces, speaking directly into the diasporic question as to his abandonment. Beyond that, it displays what it looks like to obey God without a centralized place to worship, commenting symbolically on the weight placed upon guarding oneself against foreign faiths. On a more personal level, the text also speaks to God's invitation for man to work with him in pursuit of deliverance, whatever that may look like. Throughout the passage, God's own power is thoroughly underscored and then juxtaposed in the face of his evident desire for man to be a co-enactor (in a sense) in his divine plan. This not only provides reassurance as to

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[48] Coats, "The ark," 138.
[49] Coats, "The ark," 138; Marvin A. Sweeney, "The book of Joshua," In *TANAK: A Theological and Critical Introduction to the Jewish Bible*, (Augsburg Fortress, 2012), 189, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22nm69v.12.
[50] Indeed, Kaufmann raises the point that the boundaries of the land as depicted in Joshua may have kept with those historically accurate: Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The biblical account of the conquest of Palestine*, (Magnes Press, 1953), 47.
[51] Matthews, "Expository studies," 214; Jastrow, "Joshua 3:16," 61. Be it in an early oral tradition or the later written one.
[52] Matthews, "Expository studies," 219–21.

the LORD's desire for a reciprocal relationship with Israel, but furthermore reframes what it might look like for Israel to strive to maintain faith and hope in a time of upheaval.

In terms of the actual intent of Joshua's author(s), there are multiple stances. Considering its narrative similarity to Deuteronomy, some have argued that the book was at one point appended to its predecessors. This would render the Pentateuch the "Hexateuch."[53] While there is debate as to whether this thought is legitimate, the overlaps particularly within Josh 3/4 flirt with the conclusion that Joshua's formation is owed to multiple authors working with several sources in several revisionary stages.[54] There have been attempts to categorize each "section" of passage according to these sources in light of their alleged ideological undercurrents—they prove inconsistent. Saydon contends that the repetitions should be wholly written off, raising that the primary intention of any redactor must have been the preservation of the call-and-response motif, and thus the prioritization of the theme of obedience.[55] This is in line with the nature of the text; within, there exists an undeniable fascination with what exactly it looks like to cooperate with the covenant. In fact, the text is so taken with this notion that I would go so far as to state that the crux of 3:7–17 lies in its redefinition of the Israel-God relationship on these grounds.

CONCLUSION

Divided across the two sections of Josh 3, the development of the narrative's setting, the characterization of God, and the usage of the ark point to the evolution of Israel's relationship with YHWH as she enters a new phase in her history. Shifting in setting from a description of the timeframe of the crossing to a description of the event itself, the passage illustrates the unfailing potency of YHWH's presence, simultaneously upon Israel's leaders and wielded in her interest. His characterization progresses similarly, depicting first a communicative God and then a guiding God, who attends closely to his people on both internal and external fronts. Finally, the deployment of the ark embodies what it looks like for Israel to work rightly with her LORD. In both its preparation and its action, the device intertwines YHWH's people with YHWH's power in an awesome feat of victory on the road to restoration. On the whole, the passage beautifully constructs the notion that Israel is invited to partake with obedience in the plans of the LORD, given an active role in her future even as it's YHWH who holds the final say.

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[53] W. H. Bennett, "The book of Joshua and the Pentateuch," *JQR* 10, no. 4 (1898): 649–53, https://doi.org/10.2307/1450390; Wenham, "The Deuteronomic Theology," 148.
[54] Matthews, "Expository studies," 216–19; Saydon, "The crossing," 197–201.
[55] Saydon, "The crossing," 195–96.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Elise Falcon is a first-year undergraduate at the University of St Andrews studying Mathematics and Biblical Studies. She loves all things nature, art and music, and has a not-so-secret affinity for peanut butter. As far as studies go, she is particularly interested in investigating the creation accounts throughout the Hebrew Bible, as well as the Gospel of John's prologue. She harbours quiet hope that they will one day, somehow, render her maths degree relevant.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Originally written for an Old Testament module, this essay was inspired by a lovely sermon that I'd heard a few years ago on the significance of Joshua 3. Unsurprisingly, the sermon framed the passage that it might echo the story of Christ and God's actions therein. I wanted to know what the chapter had to say for itself. In writing about it, it became clear quite quickly that the workings of the passage were both more intricate and more interesting than I would have ever assumed. Over the next months I found myself adding to the paper—deadline long passed. Eventually, it found its way here. I do hope that you've enjoyed reading it as much as I have writing it.

EDITORS' NOTE

This article is an excellent in-depth analysis of Joshua 3:7-17, which investigates God's relationship with Israel in the new post-wilderness period. Elise Falcon attends to syntactical subtleties and the narrative structure of the text, situating Joshua beside the preceding Moses, and the subsequent fate of Israel through the Nevi'im. Specifically, she argues that three motifs exist in the passage: "the setting, both chronological and geographical; the characterization of God in dialogue with Joshua and the Jordan; and the nature of the ark." Falcon effectively synthesizes these themes—commenting on their profundity toward Israel's faith in between displacement and longed-for settlement.

Falcon presents stimulating, inspired arguments, supported by a marked understanding of the biblical text. her readiness to dive deep into the passage begets a wealth of compelling ideas regarding Israel on the cusp of the Promised Land. Cleverly, the article arranges itself as a sort of call and response: the call of God to act (discussed primarily in Section I) and Israel's response (covered in Section II). The article's structure pleasingly parallels the narrative progression of Josh 3:7-17—making for an engaging and comprehensible read. This is a highly commendable piece of biblical scholarship, and we greatly enjoyed preparing this piece for publication. The article indeed contributes to scholarship on Joshua, and the consequence of Israel's entrance into and inhabitation of the Promised Land. We are extremely pleased to see *Joshua 3:7-17, A Synthetic Exploration* published above.

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ARTICLE 2

THE SUBVERSIVE SUBMISSION OF WOMEN IN 1 PETER 3:1–6

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ABSTRACT
First Peter 3:1–6 presents a context-sensitive and theologically significant model of evangelism for first century Christian women married to non-Christian husbands. This article situates the passage within its historical and cultural context through examining the Roman honour-shame value system and the household codes (*oikonomiai*). It then places 1 Pet 3:1–6 within the broader thematic framework of the letter, looking particularly its emphasis on submission as Christian witness, and offers an exegetical reading informed by these insights. It concludes that 1 Peter does not reinforce Roman patriarchal norms, but instead affirms the moral agency of women, portraying their voluntary Christ-like submission as a strategic and faithful means of evangelism within a restrictive social environment.

> [1] Wives, in the same way, be subject to your husbands, so that, even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct, [2] when they see the purity and respect of your conduct. [3] Do not adorn yourselves outwardly by braiding your hair and by wearing gold ornaments or fine clothing; [4] rather, let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. [5] It was in this way long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by being subject to their husbands. [6] Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham and called him lord. You have become her daughters as long as you do what is good and never let fears alarm you (1 Pet 3:1–6; NRSV).

The First Epistle of Peter presents interpretive challenges to twenty-first century readers, particularly where it references—and, as complementarian theologian Wayne Grudem argues, reinforces—social and household structures from a pre-modern context.[1] One such passage is 1 Pet 3:1–6, where the author exhorts the Christian women of Asia Minor to submit to their husbands. Yet beneath layers of historical and cultural context lies immense value. This paper proposes an interpretation of 1 Pet 3:1–6 in which women are portrayed as agency-filled evangelists who subtly subvert cultural norms and uniquely reflect the image of Christ. This reading will be developed through detailing the historical context 1 Peter spoke into, situating 1 Pet 3:1–6 in the broader conversations surrounding submission in 1Peter, and interpreting the

[1] Wayne Grudem, "Wives Like Sarah, and the Husbands Who Honor Them," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), 253–272.

text within these contexts. It will also address interpretations that fail to properly contextualize this passage through Wayne Grudem's chapter in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (1991). This paper does not seek to construct a systematic theology of Biblical womanhood; rather, it presents an exegetical framework for 1 Pet 3:1-6 grounded in historical and literary context. Within this framework I seek to illuminate the theological and pastoral dimensions of 1 Pet 3:1–6, particularly its affirmation of women's agency in the context of Christian witness.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In discussing a passage regarding gender roles, it is important to have context regarding the Roman honour-shame value system which was key to the organization of households. Value systems do not ascribe value to right or wrong as moral systems do, but rather value is determined by whether something brings honour or shame. Honour and shame were gendered, and honour was the exclusive right of men. Ernest van Eck states that, [2] This does not mean women were inherently shameful, but that the Roman value system framed men's virtue as active, achieved through gaining honour, while women's virtue was passive, achieved through avoiding shame. This understanding limited women's moral agency: virtue could not be actively pursued but instead was maintained by avoiding vice which in Roman discourse is gendered as feminine. This value system is foundational to the household structures presented in *oikonomiai* (οἰκονομίαι).

Roman household expectations can be found in *oikonomiai*—Hellenistic codes for household management. [3] This paper will briefly utilize *oikonomiai* as a window into the household context of the first-century wives in the Roman Empire which 1 Pet responds to. Such texts depict women as both naturally inferior moral agents to men and as a potential threat to the success of a household, particularly if they deviated from religious norms. Xenophon's *Oeconomicus,* a popular *oikonomia,* depicts wives as less capable of moral agency, requiring instruction from their husbands on proper behaviour. [4] In the dialogue, Socrates explains this by comparing women to animals stating, " 'If a sheep,' replied Socrates, 'is in ill condition, we generally blame the shepherd; if a horse is mischievous, we impute the fault to the groom; and as

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[2] Ernest van Eck, *Galilee and Jerusalem in Mark's Story of Jesus: A Narratological and Social Scientific Reading* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 1995), 167.
[3] John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, Anchor Bible 37B (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 553.
[4] Xenophon, *Memorabilia and Oeconomicus*, trans. E. C. Marchant and O. J. Todd, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923); D. M., "Households and Householding," in The Classical Tradition, ed. Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis (2010). Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, is a dialogue with Socrates written in the early 300s BCE, and is an archetype of an *oikonomia* giving instructions on how a Greek man should organize his household—including good farming practice and marital relations. The influence of *Oeconomicus*, extended beyond the Greek classical era and into the Roman empire—being translated into Latin by Cicero 200 years later, and beyond that into the first century.

to a wife … if her husband does not teach her what is right and proper … would he not justly be visited with condemnation?""[5] Submission in Roman household codes reflects the broader cultural presumption that women had a reduced capacity for moral agency.

First Peter is addressed to Christians living in Asia minor under the rule of Rome in the first century. The text claims authorship by the apostle Peter predating his death in the 60s C.E. However, due to its emphasis on persecution, some scholars suggest it was written later, possibly during Domitian's reign in the 90s.[6] Assuming the later date, a possible reason for the persecution addressed in 1 Pet was Christian subversion of Roman household expectations regarding, in part, the role of women.[7] First Peter presents strong parallels to *oikonomiai*, particularly Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*.[8] The purpose of these parallels is not for 1 Pet to encourage Christians to conform to Roman society, and it is not a compromise so that Christians will face less persecution. Rather, it is a subtle subversion of Roman societal norms, not through overt rebellion, but by redefining submission in light of Christ's voluntary suffering and moral agency.

Within this framework, wives were also expected to worship the same gods as their husbands. A wife's decision to worship different gods was considered taboo and a possible threat to the well-being of the household.[9] Plutarch highlights this expectation in his *Advice to Bride and Groom*,

> A wife ought not to make friends of her own, but to enjoy her husband's friends in common with him. The gods are the first and most important friends. Wherefore it is becoming for a wife to worship and to know only the gods that her husband believes in, and to shut the front door tight upon all queer rituals and outlandish superstitions. For with no god do stealthy and secret rites performed by a woman find any favour.[10]

Christianity was chief among the religions deemed "strange and superstitious" in Rome, as it rejected all deities but the Jewish God.[11] This included rejecting the imperial cult, which could hold serious social and political repercussions, since participation in the imperial cult was a pillar of the Roman social world and a gauge of political loyalty.[12] A wife that converted to Christianity was a threat to the unity of her household, and the standing of her husband.

The Roman value system, household structure and religious expectations for women

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[5] Xenophon, *Oec.* 3.11 (Marchant and Todd, LCL)
[6] Greg W. Forbes, *1 Peter* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 1–4.
[7] Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds., *Women's Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 616.
[8] Elliott, *1 Peter*, 553.
[9] Elliott, *1 Peter*, 557–58.
[10] Plutarch, *Advice to Bride and Groom* 19, *Mor.* 140D, (Babbitt, LCL).
[11] Pliny the Younger, *Letters and Panegyricus*, vol. 2, *Letters, Books VIII–X and Panegyricus*, trans. Betty Radice (London and Cambridge, MA: Heinemann, 1969).
[12] N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 154–55.

form the backdrop against which 1 Pet 3:1–6 must be read, revealing the radical nature of this passage's pastoral strategy in addressing Christian women as moral agents within a system eliminating their autonomy.

LITERARY CONTEXT

In addition to an awareness of historical context, one must also understand the literary context in which 1 Pet 3:1–6 arises within the broader book. First Peter 3:1–6 is situated within a conversation about Christian submission to authority and Christian witness of Christ. Philip Chia highlights the connection between submission and the Christian witness through the term, *hypotassō* (ὑποτάσσω), which appears five times within 1 Pet. [13] He states, "Peter always connects the submission of believers to the Lord or Christ. Peter exhorts the believers to subject themselves to human institutions for the Lord's sake."[14] Across the audiences addressed, 1 Pet 2:12 introduces this theme by urging Christians to live honourably, so that even when they reject cultural norms for the sake of Christ, they may still retain a measure of respect. This theme shapes the following passage in 1 Pet 2:13–17, where submission to imperial authority is framed not as submission for its own sake, but as a means of Christian witness. The discussion then turns to the submission of slaves to their masters in the remainder of chapter 2. First Peter 3:1–6 continues this theme of submission as witness, focusing specifically on the context of marital relationships. The rest of chapter 3 then calls all Christians to pursue peace and goodness, virtues that, within this framework, are expressed through submission to authority structures. When approaching a passage that speaks to the submission of women, it is essential to recognize that it belongs to a larger conversation in 1 Pet about submission as a defining feature of Christian witness, modelled after Christ's own submission to earthly authority.[15]

INTERPRETATION

Having outlined the cultural and literary context of the passage, I now turn to its interpretation, focusing primarily on 1 Pet 3 verses 1, 2, and 6b, which most clearly capture the author's instruction to Christian wives.[16] Verse 1 begins with the phrase "likewise" connecting 1 Pet 3:1–6 to the earlier conversation about submission as witness. This verse continues instructing wives to

[13] 1 Pet 2:13, 18; 3:1, 22; 5:5.
[14] Philip Chia, "An Irresistible Beauty in 1 Peter," *Verbum et Ecclesia* (2021).
[15] It is important to note that 1 Peter is not downplaying the evil of domestic abuse through this line of argumentation. As the interpretation section will later show, he is actively concerned for women placed in dangerous family circumstances and is advocating for their safety within their witness, rather than diminishing the weight of their possible suffering.
[16] Further work must be done in interpreting verses 3-6a in light of the author's call for the women in 1 Peter to practice evangelistic submission. I will focus on 1, 2, and 6b viewing 3-6a as a clarification and justification to 1 Peter's instruction and its context presented in 1, 2, and 6b.

submit, *hypotassō*, to their husbands. As was previously noted, this term *hypotassō* has a strong connection to Christ within the literary context of 1 Pet. It is the same language of submission utilized by Roman household codes, but it is now redefined under the Christian value system where women are capable of moral agency. Just as Christ chose submission as a means of redemptive witness, women in this text are portrayed as participating in that same Christ-like pattern, choosing submission not out of inferiority, but as a form of self-giving love. Submission is then transformed from something women are obligated to by nature, to a way that women can voluntarily reflect Christ (1 Pet 2:21; 3:18). The voluntary nature of this submission is explicit as verse 1 directly addresses women. This stands in contrast to *oikonomiai*—which addressed husbands exclusively.[17] Douglas Harink notes that this text depicts that women have the choice to freely submit to social constructs just as Jesus freely submitted himself to becoming man.[18] A freedom to choose submission in this way frames it as evangelistically purposeful, not universally defined. The *hypotassō* of women encouraged in this text is not one done out of a choiceless obligation to nature, but rather an agency-filled submission to a human social structure for the purpose of reflecting Christ.

Another clear subversion of cultural norms is the type of woman addressed by the author of Peter. These are Christian women with non-Christian husbands. Verse 1 encourages women to submit to "[husbands] who do not obey the word" (1 Pet 3:1). These women are defying the *oikonomia* expectation of adopting their husband's religion. First Peter does not instruct them to submit to this social norm; rather, these women are to submit to their non-believing husbands for the sake of evangelism: "be submissive to your husbands, so that some … may be won without a word by the behaviour of their wives" (1 Pet 3:1). If the goal of 1 Pet were purely to promote Roman household norms, one would expect him to include a rebuff of Christian women who were not sharing the religion of their non-believing husbands. From this one can dismiss the assumption that the purpose of encouraging *hypotassō* in 1 Pet was for adherence to patriarchal norms. First Peter takes a different approach: it acknowledges the dangerous position of wives who reject their husband's religion and offers them a way to evangelize that is subtle, non-compromising, and theologically dignified, as it mirrors Christ's own redemptive work in hostile space.

The potential for danger is highlighted by verse 6b which instructs women not to fear. The phrasing of the Revised Standard Version translation simply states that wives should "let nothing terrify you" (1 Pet 3:1; RSV). John H. Elliot clears this ambiguity by stating that this fear

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[17] Elliott, *1 Peter*, 553.
[18] Douglas Harink, *1 & 2 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 87.

may be fear of marital abuse due to their faith.[19] If this understanding is proper, it can be assumed that the author encourages *hypotassō* as an evangelistic tool because of his awareness of the potential for domestic abuse that may stem from a wife rejecting their husband's religion for Christ. This tool would stand in place of witnessing with one's words as is highlighted by the phrase "without a word" in verse 1. I argue that rather than being a means to oppress women and hold them to social norms, 1 Peter's *hypotassō* is presented to women as a subtle and safer tool than words for evangelizing their non-Christian husbands. First Peter's strategic working of the social system demonstrates pastoral sensitivity to women's vulnerable position, and theological intentionality in modelling Christ's self-giving love through culturally intelligible means.[20]

COMPLEMENTARIAN READINGS

Contemporary complementarian readings, such as entries in Wayne Grudem's entry in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, utilize 1 Pet 3:1–6 as a defence of traditional household structures as a divine command. However, such interpretations often abstract the passage from its literary and cultural context, thereby diminishing the theological nuance with which 1 Pet frames submission as a Christ-like act of agency oriented toward witness.

Grudem defines submission in this text not as an evangelistically purposeful act, but as a general disposition, stating that "submission is an inner quality of gentleness that affirms the leadership of the husband."[21] While this definition is not incompatible with 1 Pet 3:1–6, it underemphasizes the passage's explicit evangelistic aim. In verse 1, wives are exhorted to submit "so that … they may be won without a word," situating submission within a missional framework (1 Pet 3:1). To derive a predominantly generalized definition of submission from this passage requires universalising an instruction that is addressed specifically to women with non-believing husbands. Grudem references some arguments for generalization may stem from certain translations of *kai ei* (καὶ εἰ; lit. "and if") but does not engage this debate in depth. Instead he presumes the text's universality in order to focus on the qualities of submission largely abstracted from evangelism.[22]

Furthermore, Grudem presents evangelism not as an act of agency on the part of the wife, but as a secondary outcome of obedience to a prescribed role. He writes, "Peter holds out one reward that wives are ordinarily to expect from this submission to their husbands: the

[19] Elliott, *1 Peter*, 574.
[20] This is reminiscent of hidden transcripts regarding anti-imperialism that pepper the New Testament, encouraging primary allegiance to God's kingdom through the rhetoric of honouring Rome.
[21] Grudem, "Wives Like Sarah," 256.
[22] Grudem, "Wives Like Sarah," 263.

unbelieving husband may be won to Christ."[23] Grudem attributes evangelism mentioned in 1 Pet 3:1-6 to an assumed, universal male affinity for female submissiveness, suggesting that such behaviour reflects a divinely inscribed recognition of the goodness of female submission in marriage. He assumes, "The attractiveness of a wife's submissive behaviour even to an unbelieving husband suggests that God has inscribed on the hearts of all mankind the rightness and beauty of role distinctions in marriage."[24] This reading shifts the emphasis away from the contextual and agency-filled nature of a wife's conduct in 1 Pet 3:1–2, where behaviour functions as a form of non-verbal witness within a restrictive social environment. In contrast to Grudem's interpretation a contextualized understanding depicts evangelism not as an automatic result of submission, but as its intended purpose. The text does not claim that all men are naturally drawn to submission, but rather that, within a specific honour-shame framework, such conduct could serve as a persuasive and intelligible witness. For an interpretation of 1 Pet 3:1–6 to focus on submission for submission's sake as Grudem does devalues submission from an agency-filled reflection of Christ's love to a natural obligation, something women must endure, even in potentially dangerous situations, that may passively result in their husband's salvation.

An essential element of 1 Pet is that submission to human social structures is not an end in itself for women. For submission to bear witness to Christ, it must be freely chosen for the sake of evangelism, just as Christ willingly submitted to suffering for the sake of redemption. If Christians are stripped of agency in choosing this evangelism, their submission no longer mirrors Christ's voluntary love and thereby risks becoming a distortion of the gospel. In addition, if submission is made an end in itself, the possibilities for manipulation and abuse broaden. The gospel of agentless adherence to social systems is not the message proclaimed by 1 Pet's author as he encourages women to stand firm in their faith and subtly evangelize in the face of possible domestic abuse.

CONCLUSION

First Peter 3:1–6 has been utilized as a proof text for complementarian theologies. Yet, when read within the broader narrative of 1 Pet and against the backdrop of Roman household expectations, this passage reveals itself to be a conversation about restoring moral agency to women, evangelism, and submission as a powerful means of reflecting Christ. First Peter addresses Christian women as active agents, capable of choosing Christ-like submission not out of divine mandate, but as a strategic and faithful method of evangelism within their vulnerable social position. This reading does not intend promote a divinely ordained vision of womanhood;

[23] Grudem, "Wives Like Sarah," 263.
[24] Grudem, "Wives Like Sarah," 265.

it invites all readers to consider how Christian submission, when filled with agency and modelled after Christ, can become a source of dignity within constraining social systems.

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AUTHOR'S BIO:
Kirsten Spolar is an undergraduate student at Gordon College studying Biblical Studies and Theology. She has enriched her theological training through classes at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a semester abroad studying in the University of Oxford. In her free time, she enjoys choral singing, watching anime with her brothers, and embroidery. Her academic interests include New Testament studies, early Christianity, liberation theologies, and the intersection of psychology and theology—particularly as these fields relate to neurodiversity and mental health. She hopes to pursue further study in theology at the graduate and postgraduate levels to contribute thoughtful scholarship that serves both the academy and the church.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:
This project began as an exegetical essay submitted during my second year of undergraduate studies, but it has since grown into a private research project that I am continuing to explore. I have long wrestled with the apparent tension between the call to submission found in 1 Peter and the gospel's affirmation of female agency and freedom from restrictive social conventions. I am delighted to publish a portion of the answer that has unfolded for me through sustained engagement with the text of 1 Peter 3:1–6 in its context, and I am deeply grateful for the encouragement I have received from professors, friends, and family throughout that process.

EDITORS' NOTE
This paper weighs into the debate about the perceived problematic attitudes towards women found in the New Testament. Kirsten Spolar argues that the claim made in 1 Peter 1-6, that women should submit to their husbands, is not an urge for submission but rather a subversive statement. This is justified by contextualising the letter with contemporary Roman views on gender. By examining it in this light, it is concluded that the verse is encouraging women to submit in a voluntary and Christ-like manner. This therefore contrasts the views of some, such as Wayne Grudem, who argue that the passage was written to reinforce the natural superiority of men.

The paper's argument is significant, as it provides a new interpretation of 1 Peter 3:1–6—which establishes early Christianity as potentially subversive and empowering for women in Roman society. The examination of the historical context of the letter emphasises that the Bible does not exist in a vacuum and therefore this kind of analysis is crucial for understanding verses which may appear problematic to the modern reader. The author acknowledges that while this verse does not conform to modern standards of gender equality, there is still a plausible explanation for the verses which establish them as more comprehensible and dependent on their context to be understood. This also creates a wider conversation surrounding whether passages should be treated as "outdated" and whether we should instead treat these as opportunities to understand the nature of the world in which they were written. Overall, the paper is a strong contribution to its field, providing a well-argued and insightful piece of analysis.

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ARTICLE 3

ICONIC CHRISTOLOGY: REIMAGINING SCIENTIFIC THEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT
To call theology a "science" is to call to mind a very specific constellation of aims, methods, and characteristics that have come to define modern science. Often, these traits seem to immediately disqualify theology from its ambit. It will be my contention, however, that theology can rightly be considered a science: the study of God in and through Jesus Christ, the Word enfleshed and Icon of the Father. Crucially, for my argument, this should not be understood in the regnant Newtonian sense of science—which not only casts theology in a pseudo-scientific light—but also consists in a posture anti-thetical to divine revelation. I will begin, therefore, by sketching an alternative portrait of modern science, as embodied by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. From Goethe I proceed to Hans Urs von Balthasar, who—deeply formed by the Goethean vision—transposed Goethe's contemplative science onto the theological plane. For Balthasar, the Crucified Christ is the centre of this revelation, in whom the God of Israel shows forth the majesty of His divine love in a wholly unexpected way. And in the face of His glory, the theologian must fall on his knees and pray. This "Iconic Christology," as Robert Barron coined it, is precisely the sort of posture that must be taken in a properly scientific theology.

> „*Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie, und grün des Lebens goldner Baum.*" (Gray, dear friend, is all theory, and green the golden tree of life.)[1]

To call Christian theology (hereafter, "theology") a "scientific" endeavour is to call to mind a very specific constellation of aims, methods, and characteristics that have come to define the modern empirical sciences today. Often, these traits seem to immediately disqualify theology from its ambit, pushing the discipline, perhaps along with (continental) philosophy, to the realm of the "subjective." Theology, in this reading, is a relic of a bygone age, and we simply tolerate its existence in a world that has moved onto greener pastures—quite literally with the study of plants, trees, rocks, animals, human beings, societies, economies, governments, international relations, astronomy, and the history of all of these things—things that we can feel, and touch, and see. At the risk of over-simplification, and for the sake of a convenient academic heuristic, we shall call this notion of science "Newtonian," after the ingenious trailblazer of the Scientific Revolution.

[1] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust I*, in *Goethe's Works*, Weimar Edition (WA), edited by the Grand Duchess Sophie of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1887–1919), vol. III, p. 63.

It will be the contention of this essay, however, that—apart from the oft-neglected philosophical presuppositions that undergird this Newtonian view of science, religion, and truth (which this paper recognizes but does not focus on)—theology might be seriously considered scientific, even empirically robust, when viewed from the important perspective of another 17th-century scientist who lived during the time of the Enlightenment and contributed to it: the German polymath Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832).[2] Specifically, Goethe's synthetic and phenomenological approach to *Wissenschaft* ("science") shall be sketched out in this essay as a means of broadening our conception of science and the scientific method, so as to reimagine the fittingness and validity of "scientific theology" at its roots. No doubt, similar attempts to recast theology in a scientific mould have been done by great modern theologians like Karl Barth (1886–1968), T. F. Torrance (1913–2007), Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928–2014), but it seems to me that their attempts could be bolstered and taken further by a challenge to the regnant Newtonian model of science from *within* the prevailing worldview of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, rather than from *without*, that is from the theological and post-Enlightenment standpoint. I begin with Goethe, then, retrieving from his *Theory of Colours* a notion of science as a properly contemplative endeavour, one in which the scientist must reverently observe nature without impatience or invasion. But how might this fresh notion of science be applied to theology?

From Goethe, then, I proceed to the prolific twentieth-century Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar, who, deeply formed by the Goethean vision, transposed Goethe's contemplative science onto the theological plane. For Balthasar, theology is the study of God in and through the form (*Gestalt*) of Jesus Christ, the *concretissimum* ("maximally concrete reality"). And just like the scientist must approach nature reverently for true knowledge, Balthasar argues that the theologian must always begin and end by his/her "letting-be" of the phenomenon that is given for study. Balthasar's conception of theology, I want to argue, is a potent point of departure for the way in which we might seriously theology as a "scientific" discipline, with "science" first retrieved in the manner of Goethe rather than Newton. For it seems to me inevitable that a scientific theology that continues to assume a Newtonian paradigm will not only keep casting theology in a pseudo-scientific light, but also betray a posture anti-thetical to the revelatory nature of Christian theology itself. This is important because for Balthasar, the concrete phenomena of the Christ-form must be kept in mind to ultimately be a divine person, not only an object for study but more importantly a *subject* before whom the theologian is invited to fall on his/her knees and pray. This, then, is what Balthasar's most outspoken champion

[2] See for e.g. the excellent discussion by Joseph Ratzinger in 'The Church and Scientific Theology', in *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. McCarthy, Mary Frances (Ignatius Press, 1987).

today, Robert Barron, calls an "Iconic Christology," one in which the study of God, that is theology, is conceived as a study of the phenomenological form of Christ that simultaneously invites worship in and through the reading of the Scriptures in the Church. Like an icon, God-in-Christ condescends to be encountered in a real way through a sacred human phenomenon, and cannot be properly perceived and understood without the contemplative posture of Goethe's synthetic science.

Reductio Ad Absurdum: Modern Science and Mechanical Philosophy

In our cultural encyclopaedia[3] today, the word "science" is usually associated with the strictly empirical study of nature;[4] that is, the realm of natural sciences including physics, biology, and chemistry, though this has also expanded to "social sciences" like psychology and anthropology. Such studies are often couched—consciously or sub-consciously—in a naturalistic or even positivistic worldview, and the phenomena therein approached in a manner broadly "mechanistic."

In the *Encyclopedia of Early Modern Philosophy and the Sciences*, Delphine Bellis defines mechanical philosophy as "a theoretical conception according to which natural phenomena should be accounted for by appealing to the structure of bodies made of chunks of extended matter in motion."[5] It was first coined by Robert Boyle in 1666 as a governing framework for the study of natural phenomena, then called "natural philosophy.[6] The key figureheads of natural philosophy included Francis Bacon (1561–1626), Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), René Descartes (1596–1650), and later Isaac Newton (1642–1727). All of these figures shared the desire and attempt to present comprehensive explanations of natural phenomena that they believed were far more simple and intelligible than various other explanatory frameworks, especially opposing the Aristotelian-Scholastic notion of hylomorphism (i.e. the view that substances are made up of the coinherence of form *and* matter). Retrieving the atomism of ancient Epicureanism, these thinkers proposed explanations of nature based completely on the "primary qualities" of size,

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[3] Concept borrowed from the modern theory of semiotics explained by Stefan Alkier and David M. Moffitt, *New Testament Basics: A Guide for Reading and Interpreting the Text* (Fortress Press, 2022), 182–185.

[4] Historically, this narrower view of "science" was known as "natural philosophy," revealing the organic connection between the study of nature and philosophy, or physics and *meta*-physics, before their fateful divorce in late modernity, perhaps owing to the way that nature began to be seen in itself as ultimate reality. For an example of the retrieval of this broader and more traditional view of science, see Alister E. McGrath, *Natural Philosophy: On Retrieving a Lost Disciplinary Imaginary* (Oxford University Press, 2023). That being said, even today "science" carries this more holistic meaning in regions like continental Europe (*Wissenschaft*).

[5] Delphine Bellis, 'Mechanical Philosophies', in *Encyclopedia of Early Modern Philosophy and the Sciences*, ed. Dana Jalobeanu and Charles T. Wolfe (Springer International Publishing, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31069-5_143., 1.

[6] Robert Boyle, *The Origin of Forms and Qualities according to the Corpuscular Philosophy* (in the version of Jonathan Bennet at www.earlymoderntexts.com, 2017), 3.

shape, and motion, while eliminating any "obscure" or "abstract" principles like form and attraction. As the French academic Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657–1757) applauded, "only clear ideas (were) admitted, that is figures and motions."[7]

It is worth noting, however, that the mechanical worldview was and is not a homogenous school of thought, nor one with a clear beginning and pioneer. As Sophie Roux explains in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy of the Scientific Revolution*, historians adopt two broad and different narratives of the rise in mechanical explanations of nature, with one side proposing that the central idea lay in an "ontology of machines," while others proposing it lay in the "mathematicised science of motion."[8] Nevertheless, Roux maintains that the term "mechanical philosophy" is still useful in referring to the works of "anyone who tried to *reduce* physical phenomena to corpuscles of different sizes, shapes, and motions,"[9] and it is this *reductionistic* understanding of the science and the world that Goethe found objectionable. Notwithstanding the clarity and contributions of mechanistic philosophy (including mechanics, calculus, and optics), Goethe was one of the minority of scientists who were wary of the trailblazers of the Scientific Revolution and their thought.

GREY IS ALL THEORY: GOETHE'S CONTEMPLATIVE SCIENCE

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), widely considered the most influential writer in the German language, is a pivotal yet underappreciated figure in the philosophy of science, bridging as he did the rationalism of the 18th-century and the Romantic movement of the 19th-century that attempted to restore balance, transcendence, and humanity to the modern worldview. Not only was Goethe a world-renowned author, poet, and playwright – with *The Sorrows of Young Werther, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, *Elective Affinities*, and especially his magnum opus *Faust*, all celebrated as literary masterpieces – but Goethe was also a seriously capable and dedicated scientist, having also published the *Metamorphosis of Plants* (1790) and his *Theory of Colours* (1810) alongside his more well-known literary works. This latter work of a more scientific character we shall consider in greater detail for the way it sheds light on an alternative conception of science that is at once rigorously empirical and deeply reverent.

Deeply sceptical of the mechanistic reduction of science outlined above, Goethe published his *Theory of Colours* in 1810, in which he sought not only to demolish Newton's prevailing wave-length theory but also to mount a more paradigmatic challenge to the

[7] Sophie Roux, 'What to Do with the Mechanical Philosophy?', in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David Marshall Miller and Dana Jalobeanu (Cambridge University Press, 2022), 81, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108333108.006.
[8] Roux, "What To Do With the Mechanical Philosophy," 75.
[9] Roux, "What To Do With the Mechanical Philosophy," 83. Emphasis mine.

Newtonian approach to nature.[10] In Goethe's perspective, Newtonian science was invasive and reductionistic. To him, the Newtonian scientist invades the realm of Mother Nature with his pre-conceived formulas in one hand and tools of dissection in the other, and after prying her children apart into dead pieces and fitting them into his infallible axioms—the scientist pronounces her riddles "solved."[11] In essence, Goethe hated this approach to science because it did not approach natural phenomena in a spirit of true observation, which for Goethe is essential to good science. For Goethe, Nature should not be compelled to fit the hypotheses that scientists bring to her, but instead be given the space and time to generate her own questions and answers—answers which often subvert human expectations. Proper science, then, begins with patient and reverent observation of Nature in her *givenness*—which, importantly for Goethe, appears as a whole form (*Gestalt*) instead of dissected parts.

In contrast, Goethe demonstrated an alternative approach in his *Theory of Colours*. Instead of using the analytic method of breaking things into parts and drawing conclusions without reference to the whole, Goethe's method was characteristically qualitative, phenomenological, and synthetic. Goethe first attended closely to the optical phenomena before synthesising these results into a working "theory" (though it must be said that Goethe was highly suspicious of the word.[12]) For Goethe, "theory" at its highest consists in the appreciation of the *factual*—one should not seek to "get behind" the phenomena.

For Goethe, Nature in her living beauty *is* theory, and true understanding must grow organically from her soil—not from the dusty shelves of an ivory tower. It was this unified and contemplative approach that deeply inspired the great twentieth-century Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar. Having begun his intellectual formation in *Germanístik* (German language and literature), the young von Balthasar was profoundly formed by his study of Goethe, and so resulted a fateful union of Goethe's contemplative science to the Patristic fire in which Balthasar was set aflame.

THE CRUCIFORM CENTRE: BALTHASAR'S THEOLOGICAL AESTHETICS

Formed holistically by both his study of Goethe and the Church Fathers, Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) was deeply sensitive to the proper disposition that a theologian had to take with reference to the object of his/her study. We begin by understanding what Balthasar took as the object of theology so that we might see its scientific analogies, then we ask the

[10] Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe, *Goethe's Theory of Colours: Translated from the German, with Notes*, 1st edn, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (Cambridge University Press, 2014), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107589438.
[11] See discussion in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics. Vol.5, The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 362–63.
[12] See epigraph.

question of how this fits into his understanding of the place of reason and revelation in the theological endeavour so understood.

The Form of Christ (1): Concrete Object of Theology

For Balthasar, the object of Christian theology is God—no doubt—but more fundamentally, it is the God who reveals Himself in *Jesus of Nazareth*, the "stubbornly particular"[13] first-century Jewish man who died on a cross, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven.[14] For Balthasar, as for the Church Fathers,[15] theology is founded upon the Cross of Christ, the central phenomenon of this science. This factual form of Christian revelation, unique and essential amongst world religions, is what Balthasar calls the *concretissimum* ("the supremely concrete thing/reality").[16]

The theologian, then, must begin by "seeing the form," [17] that is to start with true observation in the Goethean sense. Just as the scientist should sit and watch the plant in its natural environment instead of ripping it out of its soil and shoving it under the microscope in a lab, so should the theologian first kneel on the factual soil of Calvary and *ecce homo*—behold the (God-)man. In this Goethean spirit, Balthasar writes,

> The first desideratum for seeing objectively is the *"letting be"* of God's self-revelation, even if the latter is also "his eternal love for me." *This first step is not to master the materials of perception by imposing our own categories on them but an attitude of service to the object.* Theologically this means that the unspeakable mystery of God's love opens itself to reverence and adoration on the part of the subject.[18] [emphases mine]

Here we see Goethe's influence on Balthasar clearly, and what it meant to the latter to transpose the former's contemplative science onto the theological plane. For the first step for the theologian, according to Balthasar, is not for his/her mind to grasp the object under investigation, but to maintain a disciplined detachment – what Balthasar follows Goethe in calling a "*letting be*" – that allows the observer to see clearly at all, and then to "serve" reality rather than attempt to "master" it. There is a certain reverence befitting all *being* that is demanded

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[13] Robert Barron, *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (Baker Academic, 2021), 19.
[14] In this way, Balthasar comes closer to the views of scholars like Eleonore Stump, who argued that theology concerns itself with the "concrete particular" in contradistinction from philosophy which concerns itself with the "abstract universal." See Eleonore Stump, 'Athens and Jerusalem: The Relationship of Philosophy and Theology', *Journal of Analytic Theology* 1, no. 1 (2013), p. 50. https://doi.org/10.12978/jat.2013--1.041104181915a.
[15] See Robert Louis Wilken, "Founded on the Cross of Christ," in *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (Yale University Press, 2003), 1–24.
[16] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology I: The Word Made Flesh*, trans. A. V. Littledale (Ignatius Press, 1989), 162. Cited in Barron, *Priority of Christ*, 19.
[17] And so it is no accident that this became the title of the introductory volume to his Dogmatic Trilogy. See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol.1, *Seeing the Form*, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (T. & T. Clark, 1982).
[18] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *My Work: In Retrospect* (Ignatius Press, 1993), 81.

in even greater measure with reference to *Being Itself* – which is the essential claim of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, that is, to be the ontological bridge to the invisible God, the Icon of the Father (John 1:18; Matt 11:27; Heb 1:3; Col 1:15).

At the beginning (and end) of all theology then, is what Barron sees in Balthasar as the "priority of Christ," and more specifically, an *Iconic Christology*: [19] "one that takes seriously the dense particularity and spiritual complexity of the picture of Jesus as it emerges in the New Testament narratives."[20] In this, Barron "share[s] Balthasar's intuition that one must approach Jesus in a *Goethean spirit*, which is to say, in an attitude of contemplative love, allowing the object of one's contemplation to control the gaze of the mind."[21] Here Barron makes explicit for us the connection between a Balthasarian theological method and a Goethean scientific method, so to speak, both of which take reverent observation and loving surrender as the point of departure for true understanding. This disposition, as hinted at with Barron's use of love," is set in the context of the object of theology—the form of Christ—who is at the same time a *personal* subject, not just a *what* but more crucially a *who*, a master who calls the reader or hearer of the Scriptures into a living relationship with him. Crucially, then, Truth refers not (just) to the *idea* of Christ in the abstract, but to the *person* of Christ who beckons to the theologian to not become his observer—but his disciple and friend.

For Balthasar, then, Christ is the concrete and definitive revelation of the Triune God, and his Incarnate form (*Gestalt*) stands at the centre of Christian revelation.[22] As the Epistle to the Hebrews put it, "In the past God spoke in many parts and in many ways to our fathers through the prophets, but in these last days God has spoken to us in His Son … the radiance of His glory and the imprint of His essence" (Heb 1:1–3, translation mine).[23] In *this* Son the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell (Col 1:19); in *this* Son is the new Isaac and the Paschal Lamb who takes away the sins of the world (Gen 22, John 1:29); in *this* Son the apostles saw God's glory, glory as of the only begotten, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). And so it is from *this* Cruciform centre that the glory of the Lord (the Biblical *kabod-doxa-gloria*[24]) shows forth, calling the one who believes into communion with the Triune God.

In this way, Balthasar considered "theological aesthetics," understood in the preceding Goethean sense of a properly contemplative science, to be the indispensable starting point and

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[19] This evocative idea of "Iconic Christology," as well as the Goethean and Balthasarian motifs in this paper, are largely drawn from Barron, *The Priority of Christ*. See esp. pp. 19, 46–47, 157–58. It is to Barron that many of my ideas here must be credited as their source.
[20] Barron, *The Priority of Christ*, 19.
[21] Barron, *The Priority of Christ*, 19. On the contrast that Balthasar drew between a Newtonian and Goethean approach to Christ and theology, see also pp. 46–47, 157–58.
[22] Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 463.
[23] See Balthasar, *Seeing the Form*, 435.
[24] Balthasar, *My Work*, 82.

centre of all theological reflection.[25] Even the macro-structure of Balthasar's Dogmatic Trilogy, which begins with the Beautiful (*The Glory of the Lord*), moves to the Good (*Theo-Drama*), and only then moves to the True (*Theo-Logic*)—was meant to directly invert Kant's critiques of reason, ethics, and aesthetics. By prioritising aesthetics, Balthasar was doing nothing less (and nothing more[26]) than foregrounding the form of Christ, whom Balthasar saw as the Alpha and Omega of a rightly-ordered theology.

In this light, Balthasar was critical of both ancient and modern theological reflection, which he saw as having lost sight of Christ behind broader cosmological and/or anthropological systems of thought; the former (cosmology) he associated with the Patristic and Middle Ages, while the latter (anthropology) with post-Enlightenment theology.[27] Like Karl Barth, Balthasar had an axe to grind against the developments of modern theology, and in particular, against the other towering Karl – Karl Rahner. Just as Goethe saw Newton as emblematic of the way that science had gone awry, Balthasar saw Rahner as emblematic of the way that theology had been thwarted. In Rahner's attempt to reformulate the Christian faith for a new age, Balthasar saw philosophical credibility come at the expense of the domestication of God and the muting of the Biblical drama.

By synthesising classical Christian doctrine with transcendental idealism, it seemed to Balthasar that the German master had thrown the baby out with the bathwater. For instance, in coining the terms "Anonymous Christian" and the "supernatural existential" to account for the universal yearning for the divine that patiently awaits the fulfilment of divine revelation, Balthasar saw the Cross of Christ—"stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23)—assimilated into an overly palatable and familiar mould that reduced the primordial offense of the Roman instrument of torture, and so blunted the surprising power of the Cruciform symbol of authentic Christianity.

Similar to Barth's critique, Balthasar saw that many modern theologians like Rahner had "pocketed away"[28] the Cross of Christ in the fog of their grand syntheses, "instead of seeing it always before them as a mystery worthy of their worship."[29] Instead, Balthasar was adamant that the theologian had to return again and again to the *front* of the Cross, and by seeing the Christ-form as if for the first time, allow the beauty of her Cruciform Redeemer—that beauty ever ancient and ever new—to shake her to the core once more and forever.[30] But what does this

[25] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible*, trans. D. C. Schindler (Ignatius Press, 2004), 11.
[26] If it must be said for those who accuse Balthasar's theology of a sort of "aestheticism."
[27] Balthasar, *Love Alone*, 10. Cf. Balthasar, *My Work*, 81.
[28] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Epilogue*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (Ignatius Press, 2004), 16.
[29] Balthasar, *Epilogue*, 16.
[30] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.27.38.

mean for the actual operation of a scientific theology so conceived? Did Balthasar think that such a theology founded on the Christ-form correspondingly precludes the use of reason, or philosophy, in its domain? How then does theology retain its scientific character? We shall now turn to address this final question.

THE FORM OF CHRIST (2): A YES/NO TO PHILOSOPHY

In his essay "Current Trends in Catholic Theology and the Responsibility of the Christian," Balthasar articulated his summary critique of Rahnerian theology which helps sharpen our inquiry:

> My main argument—not only against Rahner but against the entire transcendental school … is this: … It might be true that from the very beginning man was created to be disposed toward God's revelation, so that with God's grace even the sinner can accept all Revelation. *Gratia supponit naturam* ["grace [pre]supposes nature"]. But *if* God sends his own living Word to his creatures, he does so, not to instruct them about the mysteries of the world, nor primarily to fulfil their deepest needs and yearnings. Rather he communicates and actively demonstrates such unheard-of things that man feels not satisfied but *awestruck* by a love which he never could have hoped to experience.[31]

Here Balthasar takes up a delicate position between Rahner and Barth on the relationship between nature and grace, and by analogy and extension, reason and revelation, philosophy and theology. On one hand, Balthasar can be seen to agree to a certain extent with Rahner's stress on the continuity between nature and grace that enables sinful human beings to accept revelation in the first place. Balthasar grants the Thomistic axiom *gratia supposit naturam* ("grace [pre]supposes nature"). As he put it elsewhere, this means that philosophy cannot and must not be denied entry into the realm of Christian reflection, "for the Word of God has expressed itself in human words and concepts, and human speech and thought can be used by it further to bring out all its divine riches."[32] In other words, since the form of Christ is a human one, so the Church necessarily employs human language and concepts (i.e. philosophy) to understand this revelation. For Balthasar, this remains the case even if "the content of faith will itself constantly come to include more than reason apprehends."[33] As he writes in his essay 'Characteristics of Christianity', reason and mystery are not opposed, for "it is just when the logical process is correct that there is present in the conclusion something of the unknown mystery that was latent in one or both of

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[31] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Current Trends in Catholic Theology and the Responsibility of the Christian", *Communio International Catholic Review* 5 (1978): 80, https://doi.org/10.56154/m6. Emphasis original.
[32] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 178.
[33] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 179.

the premises."[34] Like St Thomas Aquinas, Balthasar holds that reason paves an authentic path that leads to the threshold of mystery—that "luminous darkness," as the Areopagite called it, before which the theologian must surrender to the Beatrician wings of grace and love if he should wish to go further. As Josef Pieper trenchantly put it, "he who fears the bold light of logic will never penetrate into the region of real mysteries … [T]he more intensely we pursue those ways of knowledge, the more is revealed to us—of the *darkness*—but also of the *reality* of mystery."[35] For Balthasar, then, rational inquiry remains the proper mode of inquiry for theology, making it philosophical by nature.

On the other hand, however, we see in the preceding passage that Balthasar was intent to foreground the *in-breaking* character of Christian revelation – the "unheard-of things . . . which [humankind] never could have hoped to experience."[36] As cited before, Balthasar maintained that "the content of faith will itself *constantly* come to include more than reason apprehends,"[37] like a fountain that "infinitely overflows the finite vessel into which it is poured, however authentic the [philosophical] vessel."[38] Granted, Balthasar was a generous engager of secular and philosophical thought, working as he did from the aforementioned Thomistic axiom that grace presupposes nature and perfects it. In other words, Balthasar affirmed the *semina verbi* ("seeds of the word") inherent in all *being*, all thought-forms. In particular, Balthasar saw it as a function of gratitude to the Creator to affirm that non-Christian traditions of transcendence were neither "mere *fabrica idolorum*"[39] nor "necessarily blasphemous,"[40] since God indeed imbued these capacities in mankind. But here Balthasar lays down his hammer.

Deeply influenced by Barth, and contrary to Rahner, Balthasar maintained that this gratitude must not remain at the level of conflating nature and grace but recognising that in God's revelation there is "something wholly new and other, crowning and perfecting man's attempts, precisely because it first *shatters* and *overturns* them."[41] The surprising and absolute nature of God's love in the Incarnation and Crucifixion, Balthasar thought, can never be taken for granted, and as such must always retain its overarching and condescending position. As Balthasar urged elsewhere,

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[34] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 179.
[35] Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas: Three Essays*, trans. John Murray and D. J. O'Connor (St. Augustine's Press, 1999), 35. Emphasis original.
[36] See n21 above.
[37] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 179. Emphasis mine.
[38] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 179.
[39] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 161.
[40] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 161.
[41] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 162. Emphasis mine.

> The simpler and clearer the fathomless depth of God's love becomes to us, indeed, the more incomprehensible to us the thought becomes that, in the face of such a mystery, man could be capable of something like a correspondence and following at all, the simpler will we be rid of the distorted and simplistic thinking that makes the Christian message so unbelievable today.[42]

In other words, there is a certain prideful and counter-productive folly, in Balthasar's opinion, when we try to assimilate Christian revelation, especially the incarnation of the Word enfleshed and the redemption of the Cross embraced, into rationally palatable philosophical systems like Kantian idealism. Even though reason is ontologically continuous with revelation, and can and must be used in the theological science, the accent on revelation can never be lost.

Contrary to Rahner, then, such a Balthasarian theology inherently resists becoming morphed into a so-called Christology "from below" which takes philosophical anthropology as its point of departure. As Balthasar insisted in his programmatic book *Love Alone is Credible* (1963), the "most fundamental phenomenon of revelation" is this: "[t]he majesty of absolute love"[43]—this is where the theologian must begin, and where he must end. As such, the distinction between theology and philosophy must be made clear if categories and conclusions are not to be mixed up in a way that performs disservice to both disciplines.[44] Equally crucial for Balthasar was this: any and all speculation about fundamental theology (the relationship between God and creation, nature and grace, faith and reason etc.) must never be performed on an abstract plane, but always on the concrete plane of Christology.[45] Here, then, we return full circle to the *concretissimus*,[46] the One who Balthasar maintains is the "only [given] synthesis"[47] between philosophy and theology and "the *analogia entis* in concrete form"—Jesus of Nazareth.[48]

CONCLUSION

> Throughout these chapters, I have been insisting on the embodied, the iconic, the incarnational. We know God and ourselves, I have maintained, through a particular first-century Jew who walked the hills of Galilee—and the saints who function as the living icons of Jesus up and down the centuries. Philosophy, ethics, and cultural forms do not position him; he positions them. To understand that reversal is to grasp the nettle of the Christian thing.[49]

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[42] Balthasar, *My Work*, 59–60.
[43] Balthasar, *Love Alone*, 56.
[44] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 162.
[45] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 162.
[46] See n9.
[47] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 177.
[48] Balthasar, *The Word Made Flesh*, 177.
[49] Barron, *Priority of Christ*, 341.

I began in this essay by arguing that theology might be properly considered a science, especially when we background the dominant Newtonian sense of the term and retrieve the approach to natural phenomena embodied and championed by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, one that is both robustly empirical and deeply reverent. Drawing on Hans Urs von Balthasar, I went on to show how this Goethean approach might be transfigured into a "scientific theology," which is most befitting of the proper object of theological science—the God-man Jesus Christ, and the Cross on which he was poured out for the salvation of humankind. In this shattering light, that is the enfleshment of God's absolute love in Christ, reason and philosophy must necessarily be employed (not least due to the incarnate form of revelation), but by equal necessity get out of the way when it comes to end of itself, since it never has either the first or the last word in the grace-wrought realm of Christian theology. In this way, I have offered an account of what Robern Barron coined as an *Iconic Christology*, as Robert Barron coined, that is a *kneeling science* that takes seriously both the true revelation and the true reverence of its object—an object that is at the same time a *subject* who invites the restless and seeking heart, saying: "Come, follow me."[50]

[50] Matt 4:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27 etc.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Vic Chua is a fourth-year MTheol student graduating from St Mary's College, University of St Andrews. His time there has been characterised by a wrestle with questions of fundamental theology: what is the relationship between Scripture and Tradition? Theology and Philosophy? Nature and Grace? Reason and Revelation? Science and Religion? This paper bears the mark of one such attempt to reconcile these dualities—aided by great thinkers like Barth and Balthasar who have left a deep mark on Vic during his undergraduate degree. Having finally submitted his dissertation entitled "The Divine Dialogue: The Synthesis of Subjectivity and Objectivity in Joseph Ratzinger's Theology of Revelation," Vic is happily catching up on Plato's dialogues and Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. In his free time, Vic enjoys walking in nature, organising his room, and writing on his substack—"Coffee with Augustine."

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This paper was inspired by an online lecture series by Bishop Robert Barron on the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, found on the Word on Fire Institute. Therein I was struck deeply by the contrast drawn between a "Newtonian" and "Goethean" approach to science and theology, and this paper bears witness to the inspiration I found there. And so I would like to thank Bishop Barron, first and foremost, for his characteristically simple and engaging presentations of complex and profound ideas, which in this case led me to see radiance and beauty of Balthasar's thought. Next, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to both the editors of this journal and the peer reviewers of my essay for their invaluable feedback and patience. This attempt has been greatly improved by their comments. Finally, I want to dedicate this piece to the place and the people who have forged my theological foundation with an indelible mark of truth and love—St Mary's College.

EDITORS' NOTE

The question of the relation between theology and other knowledge claims, such as those made by philosophy or the natural sciences is a pressing one, particularly for the modern theologian. While in the medieval past theology was seen as not only harmonious with other forms of study, but to be their culmination, as children of the Enlightenment we often assume a natural

antagonism between the two. For many the relationship between science and theology and their respective truth claims is at best troubled, at worst irreconcilable. Is theology, which concerns itself with knowledge gained from God's self-revelation, inherently un-scientific?

In this article, Vic Chua offers a perceptive answer to this question. Challenging the prominent "Newtonian" definition of science, Chua draws upon Goethe's view of science as study of the gestalt and von Balthasar's subsequent development of the idea within the theological realm, to move beyond a view of theology as existing contrary to or apart from other forms of knowledge. In doing, Chua opens a fresh avenue of inquiry into the nature of theology which neither alienates theology from other sorts of knowledge nor compromises its essential grounding upon the revelation of the Cross as the in-breaking of divine love. We are pleased to endorse this paper as valuable reading for the theologian seeking to reflect upon the nature of theology, its object and right end, considerations which may serve as a basis for dialogue within and across the academy.

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ARTICLE 4

ASYMMETRY IN DIVINE LOVE: A CLASSICAL THEIST RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS

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ABSTRACT

I argue that J. L. Schellenberg's argument from divine hiddenness, among other hiddenness arguments, rests upon an inadequate conception of perfect love—namely, the assumption that perfect love requires openness to conscious, reciprocal relationship. Through an analysis of paradigmatic human relationships, informed by an Aristotelian understanding of relational reciprocity, patristic articulations of the Trinity, and perfect being theology, I show that genuine loving relationships can exist without conscious reciprocity from one party and that this asymmetry reflects rather than contradicts the nature of divine love. Ultimately, I demonstrate that a Christian account of perfect love in the tradition of classical theism does not necessitate the kind of conscious reciprocal relationship that Schellenberg, among others, demands from the God-creature relationship.

The problem of divine hiddenness poses a genuine challenge to theistic belief. In one of its most influential contemporary formulations, developed by J.L. Schellenberg, the challenge is posed roughly as follows:[1] if God exists, then He is perfectly loving. If God is perfectly loving, then He would ensure that every person capable of relationship with Him is, at every moment, open to that relationship. Yet there are persons who, through no fault of their own, are unable to believe in God. For these persons, God seems, as it were, hidden. If a perfectly loving God would not permit non-resistant non-belief, yet such unbelief exists, then it would seem that God is not perfectly loving—a contradiction in terms. Therefore, God does not exist.

The force of this argument depends on two assumptions that deserve careful examination: first, that perfect love necessitates openness to conscious, reciprocal relationship; and second, that the God-creature relation is the kind where creaturely relationship with the Creator is not only available, but to be expected.

This essay argues that Christians formed in the classical theist tradition have cause to question the assumptions upon which Schellenberg's argument, and others like it, depend. Through an analysis of paradigmatic loving relationships—maternal love and enemy love—I will

[1] J.L. Schellenberg, "Divine Hiddenness and Human Philosophy," in *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief: New Perspectives*, ed. Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 13–32.

show that non-reciprocity and asymmetry are not deficiencies in a loving relationship but may be constitutive of what makes the relationship the kind it is. Indeed, non-reciprocity and asymmetry are not incidental to the God-creature relation, but fundamental to it. This is made clear through a participatory ontology in which creaturely love is shown to participate on the prior, unconditional, and asymmetrical love of God for His creation. Finally, drawing on the classical theist tradition from Aquinas through McCabe, I will suggest that what hiddenness arguments demand of God—namely His manifest disclosure and genuine availability for conscious reciprocal relationship—reflects a picture of God as being among beings, which this tradition explicitly rejects. On the classical theist account, divine hiddenness is not a failure of love but a consequence of the ontological disparity intrinsic to the God-creature relation.

PARADIGMATIC HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS: MATERNAL LOVE AND ENEMY LOVE

Schellenberg's argument assumes that perfect love necessarily involves openness to "positively meaningful and reciprocal conscious relationship." But do genuine loving relationships necessitate conscious reciprocity from both parties? A close examination of paradigmatic relationships suggests otherwise. Consider first the case of maternal love: As a fetus and as a newborn the child lacks the cognitive capacity to recognize the mother's love and consequently, to consciously reciprocate. In fact, neither the fetus nor the newborn is yet able to form beliefs about the existence of the mother. Despite the lack of conscious reciprocation on the part of the child, few would go so far as to deny the genuineness of a mother's love or question whether a real relationship exists. The asymmetry in maternal love does not render it deficient or less than genuine; rather this asymmetry is accepted as inherent to this kind of relationship. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle observes that mothers may love their children "even if their children, in ignorance of who their mothers are, may render to them nothing of what is proper to a mother."[2] The relationship remains genuine despite the absence of reciprocal recognition or response. Aristotle classifies this relationship as a "friendship based on a superiority"—relationships characterized by a disparity in capacity, merit, and power.[3] In such friendships, Aristotle argues that equality is not achieved arithmetically, but proportionally: "whenever the friendly affection accords with merit, at that point equality somehow arises."[4] The mother contributes according to the proportion proper to her role as a mother while the child contributes according to its lesser capacity. The situation of a mother and her nascent child is the

[2] Aristotle, *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1159a32–34).
[3] Aristotle, *Nicom.*, 1158b11.
[4] Aristotle, *Nicom.*, 1158b27–28.

extreme limit of Aristotle's principle, for although the child cannot contribute anything through conscious interaction with its mother, the authenticity of this relationship and the mother's genuine love are not thereby diminished. That Aristotle regards this relationship as authentic suggests that the absence of conscious interaction on the part of one party does not necessarily disqualify it from being genuine.

Aristotle's insight concerning the asymmetry inherent to certain kinds of relationships, challenges Schellenberg's assumption that perfect love necessitates conscious reciprocity. If genuine loving relationships can exist in the total absence of conscious reciprocity—as in the structure of maternal love, one of the most paradigmatic instances of human love—then conscious reciprocity cannot be necessary for loving relationships as such. The mother-child relationship demonstrates that the genuineness of love is not located in conscious reciprocity, but in each party giving in accordance with their nature and capacity—which may mean that one party gives nothing at all.

Yet Aristotle's account of friendships might seem potentially problematic for divine-human relationships so far as he argues that friendship becomes impossible when one party "is separated from the other to a great degree"[5] as is the case in divine-human relationships where the gods "exceed [human beings]' in all good things to the greatest degree."[6] For Aristotle, the impossibility of such a relationship is founded upon his understanding of a god who is a maximally great being outside the created order. By contrast, Christians understand God not as a being who possesses all good things to the maximum degree, but as Being Himself. While both the Aristotelian and Christian conceptions of divinity hold that God is transcendent, these conceptions understand transcendence differently. The Aristotelian portrayal of God as transcendent results in a kind of removal of God from the created order. He is indeed the first cause of creation, even its sustainer, but nevertheless operating alongside creation. In contrast, Christians, view God not as an impersonal first cause beyond and outside of creation, but as a creator who is intimately present *to* His creation—even entering into it through the assumption of a human nature.

Where Aristotle's account of *philia* (φιλία) reaches its limit, the Christian account of *agapē* (ἀγάπη) begins — presenting non-reciprocal love not merely as a peculiar case, but as a paradigmatic and profound form of love. Jesus commands: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" (Matt 5:44–45 NRSV). This command presupposes not

[5] Aristotle, *Nicom.*, 1159a4–5.
[6] Aristotle, *Nicom.*, 1158b36–37.

merely the possibility, but the actuality of non-reciprocation. In the case of enemy love, the beloved is actively hostile towards the lover. Yet such love is presented as revealing the Father's character: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). This paradigmatic form of *agapē* is thus presented as explicitly non-reciprocal. Indeed, non-reciprocal love is a profound, rather than deficient, manifestation of love. As St. Paul writes, "God proves His love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). Divine love towards humanity is directed toward those who cannot, or refuse to, reciprocate. If enemy love is possible, and if it shows the Father's own perfection, then Schellenberg's assumption that perfect love requires "reciprocal conscious relationship" inverts the biblical understanding of those who can be loved and the nature of love Himself.

These philosophical and theological considerations illustrate that nonreciprocal love is perfect for the lover, even if the lover does not reciprocate consciously or at all. In the next section I will show that on a Christian understanding of divine love, contrary to Schellenberg's assumption that God's perfect love requires Him to be open to conscious reciprocal relationship, God could not fail to be open to relationship—even if this relationship is not conscious or reciprocal on the part of the creature. Specifically, I will argue that the possibility and very structure of asymmetrical love is explained by participatory ontology.

CREATURELY PARTICIPATION IN DIVINE LOVE

Participatory ontology holds that creaturely being and activity are not self-explanatory, but contingent upon God as their source and sustainer. Concerning love, 1 John asserts unequivocally: "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8). Love is not merely an attribute that God possesses but is identical with his very essence. Consequently, when creatures love, they do not autonomously generate love but participate in divine love. "Those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16). Importantly, this mutual indwelling is not pantheistic—creatures remain ontologically distinct from God. Yet creaturely love is utterly dependent on divine love as its ontological ground. Since all creaturely love participates in divine love, to observe authentic creaturely love—including non-reciprocal instantiations—is to know something true about the nature of divine love itself.

Because creaturely love is fundamentally participatory, it is fundamentally asymmetrical. Importantly, the possibility of reciprocal love between creatures is ontologically preceded by the asymmetry fundamental to participation: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he

loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). Indeed, we "love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). That is to say, creaturely love is a response to the initiatory, free act of divine love that generates and sustains creatures. God's creation of the universe *ex nihilo* is itself an act of asymmetrical love, for there was nothing other than God to reciprocate. Even as God sustains the universe, there are beings who are recipients of His love and do not recognize, acknowledge, or reciprocate it. Divine love is extended even, and especially, to those who are incapable of responding, who are actively hostile, who resist and reject. It is apparent then, that God's love is not contingent upon a creaturely response, but rather precedes, enables, and sustains creaturely capacity to love at all. Reciprocal love between creatures is made possible by the ontologically prior non-reciprocal love of God.

The ontological priority of divine love has profound implications for understanding the structure of creaturely love. Augustine's analysis of love in *De Trinitate* is particularly helpful in understanding creaturely love as caused and arranged according to the perichoretic relationship between persons of the Trinity. In every act of love, Augustine identifies a threefold structure: the lover, the beloved, and the love that proceeds between them. This structure is an articulation of Trinitarian life: the Father as lover, loves the beloved Son, and the love which proceeds between them is the Spirit.[7] Of course, none of these roles are *exclusively* restricted to particular persons of the Trinity, for while the persons are *truly distinct*, the distinction between persons does not entail compositional difference in the divine essence. When creatures love, they instantiate this Trinitarian structure: a human lover, a human beloved, and the love that proceeds between them, which is not simply a human emotion, but Love Himself. Thus, when a mother loves her non-reciprocating infant, it is not merely that she is exercising a maternal instinct, but rather, God who is Love is loving through her. The possibility of loving someone who cannot, or does not, love in return—whether infant or enemy—is grounded in the fact that divine love is sufficient in itself, requiring no reciprocity, yet enabling all creaturely love. Jesus' command to love enemies is possible because it is participatory in God's own mode of loving, extended to those who may not love Him in return. Therefore, every genuine act of creaturely love, regardless of reciprocation, participates in the self-sufficient divine love which is the ground of all relationship.

This participatory framework articulated in Trinitarian terms draws out Schellenberg's assumption that perfect love requires "openness to positively meaningful and reciprocal conscious relationship." Indeed, Schellenberg conceives of divine love as a maximal degree of a love that creatures possess in lesser measure (a limit simpliciter) while Christians take divine love

[7] Augustine, *De Trinitate* VIII.10.14.

to be the paradigm that all love participates in and according to which all love is measured (a limit case). I have taken this distinction between degree and quality from Barry Miller's articulation of the difference between a limit simpliciter and a limit case: "the former differs merely in degree from that of which it is a limit simpliciter, whereas the latter differs absolutely from that of which it is a limit case."[8] If divine love is a limit case, rather than a limit simpliciter, then creaturely love reveals the structure of divine love itself. Since genuine love can exist without conscious reciprocity as was earlier demonstrated, and since this love is participatory in divine love, conscious reciprocity cannot be essential to love as such. Thus God can be in authentic, perfect loving relationship with creatures who do not consciously recognize Him, similar to the way that a mother can be in genuine relationship with a nascent child or newborn. The nonbeliever, as a creature generated and sustained by God's love, even if he should not love anything at all, could not fail to be in relationship with God—ontologically, if not consciously. God's love is not only present as the grounds of the nonbeliever's being, but also the enabler of the nonbeliever's capacity to love as well as the recipient of all the nonbeliever's moral strivings (insofar as all goodness participates in God). While Schellenberg's argument assumes that the lack of conscious reciprocity indicates a failure of love and consequently, the absence of perfectly loving relationship altogether, participatory ontology reveals that regardless of conscious acknowledgment, creatures cannot fail to be in authentic loving relationship with God.

A proponent of the hiddenness argument, however, might object that while the notion of participation establishes an ontological relationship, it does not explain why God would choose to remain epistemically hidden when He could make Himself consciously known. To address this concern, we must consider whether there is something intrinsic to God's nature as God that accounts for a certain kind of hiddenness which is not merely compatible with perfect love, but intrinsic to the divine-human relationship.

A Classical Theist Picture of God and Creation

Schellenberg's argument assumes a sort of loose "theistic personalism." According to Brian Davies, theistic personalists conceive of God as essentially "a person without a body."[9] The danger of this view is equivocation—viewing God to be a person, albeit a maximally great person, among others less perfect. Although an atheist, Schellenberg assumes that God is a person among others and it is understandable then, that Schellenberg assumes the God-creature relationship to be one in which human persons relate to God as if He were *only* human. While

[8] Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Nature of God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 7.
[9] Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9.

God makes Himself intelligible to humans through revelation—the incarnation as the paradigmatic example of this—God is not merely a human person, but God. Schellenberg's demand for conscious reciprocal relationship makes sense if we related to God as if he were simply another person among others because persons relate to other persons through mutual recognition and conscious relationship. Yet God, though personal, and indeed a human person, is not simply someone with positive attributes to the maximal degree, but transcendent God. He is not a limit simpliciter, but a limit case. Following Aquinas and the broader patristic/medieval tradition, classical theists maintain that God is not a being among beings, but *ipsum esse subsistens*. Thus, "everything other than God is totally dependent on God for its existing and being as it is."[10] God is not existing alongside creatures as an entity, or as an individual within creation, but rather as the "constantly sustaining cause of the universe and all it contains."[11] If classical theism is correct, then the demand of Schellenberg's argument for "reciprocal conscious relationship" is misapplied to the God-creature relationship.

The classical theist understanding of creation suggests that God's creative activity is not an event in the past, but God's singular, continuous act which generates and sustains creaturely existence. "God brought it about that the universe *began* to exist," but His "creative work is just as much present in the continued existence" of creation.[12] As Herbert McCabe puts it: "God cannot *interfere* in the universe…To interfere you have to be an alternative to, or alongside, what you are interfering with."[13] God does not start the universe and interfere with it as time progresses, but generates it in a single eternal act. If God is understood as the cause of creation, rather than an agent within it or alongside it, then for God to enter into "conscious reciprocal relationship" in the way that Schellenberg envisions, would require God to be something He is not: namely, a being among beings.

The relationship between God and creatures is therefore fundamentally asymmetrical in a manner that transcends all human instances of non-reciprocal loving relationships. While a mother and a child are both creatures who participate in existence, God does not participate in existence—He *is* existence itself. While creatures genuinely relate to God (as ontologically dependent), God's relation to creatures is a fundamentally different sort of relation: changes in creation occur because of changes in creatures, not changes in God.[14] It is a mistake to think that since God causes creation He can be apprehended as an object within the world. He is the

[10] Davies, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion,* 3.
[11] Davies, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion,* 3.
[12] Davies, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion,* 3.
[13] Herbert McCabe, "*Creation*," *New Blackfriars* 61 (1980), as quoted in Davies, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 4.
[14] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q.13, 7.

ground of the world's being. God's "hiddenness" is not a withholding of Himself, but a necessary consequence of His ontological incommensurability.

There is scriptural basis for such thinking. For instance, Moses could not see God's face and Paul wrote that God dwells in unapproachable light (Exod 33:20; 1 Tim 6:16). God's unapproachability is not divine refusal but is an intrinsic feature of His ontology. Even in the beatific vision, God is not comprehended by creatures exhaustively. The inexhaustibility of God's nature does not reflect God's withdrawal, but rather is the result of creaturely limitation.

CONCLUSION

Schellenberg's argument presupposes that God is an agent who chooses to be more or less available to creatures. But on the classical understanding of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, God cannot simply make Himself available. To do so, would be for God to cease to be what He is. As the mother-child relationship is genuine despite the child's inability to recognize the mother, the God-creature relationship is authentically and perfectly loving despite the unbeliever's inability to consciously relate to God. Schellenberg's argument depends on a theistic personalist picture of God as a being among beings. The classical theism framework, however, affords a more comprehensive and coherent understanding of God, in which nonresistant nonbelief, if such a thing is possible, does not pose a threat to perfect love or divine existence.

Through an analysis of paradigmatic loving relationships—specifically, maternal love and enemy love—this essay has shown that non-reciprocity and asymmetry do not necessarily indicate deficiencies in a relationship but rather may be constitutive of that relationship as the kind it is. Notably, this asymmetry is not incidental. Participatory theology reveals that creaturely love—whether between creatures or creatures and their Creator—necessarily participates in the prior, unconditional, unreciprocated love of God for His creation. What hiddenness arguments typically demand of God—namely his manifest disclosure and genuine availability for conscious reciprocal relationship—are not necessary for perfect love, but criteria imported from creaturely experience and misapplied to God who relates to creation not as a being among others (which would be to consider God as if he were a maximally great creature), but as Being itself. Schellenberg's argument, along with other traditional formulations of the hiddenness problem, rests on assumptions about perfect love and divine personhood that classical theists may rightly set aside. On such an account, God could not fail to be in relationship with His gratuitous creation—and this relationship does not depend on the creaturely awareness or reciprocity for God's love to be considered perfect and His relationship with creatures authentic.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Zach Miyazaki is a third-year student in Baylor University and a visiting student in the University of St Andrews studying divinity, philosophy, and classics. He enjoys cooking, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, hiking, and playing guitar.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The problem of divine hiddenness was introduced to me in a module I took with Prof Andrew Torrance. Wrestling with this topic has forced me to examine my assumptions about what constitutes a loving relationship at all and what distinguishes relationships among creatures from the relationship between God and His creation. As I continue this research, I hope to engage more deeply with Schellenberg and familiarize myself with the broader literature on the topic of divine hiddenness.

EDITORS' NOTE

If God loves us so much, then where is He? The problem of divine hiddenness is a hotly debated topic in the contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. Often categorized as an argument against the existence of God, the problem aims to demonstrate that, given some people fail to believe in God despite their non-resistance towards faith, a perfectly loving God cannot exist. Ever since the problem was formalized by J. L. Schellenberg in his 1993 book *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, it has attracted interests from theists and non-theists, philosophers and theologians alike.

For some, divine hiddenness challenges the logical coherency of theism; for others, the philosophical and theological premises assumed by the problem require further scrutiny. In the following paper presented, Zach Miyazaki offers a theological response to the problem of divine hiddenness. Drawing from Aristotle, the Bible, and various theological sources both classical and

contemporary, the author creatively presents a theological framework based on classical theism that is alternative to the one underlying the debate of divine hiddenness—a framework which the author has acutely identified to be based on theistic personalism. We wish to highlight that Miyazaki's original contribution lies in his introduction of classical theism to the debate, which offers an alternative lens through which divine hiddenness can be viewed from a new angle, perhaps even dissolving the problem from a Christian standpoint. We believe Miyazaki has engaged skillfully with a meaningful and relevant topic in the philosophy of religion with an original approach that seeks insight from the field of theology. Miyazaki's approach, including the rigorous engagement with analytic philosophy, the retrieval of classical theology and, in particular, metaphysics, as well as the use of scripture, is an exemplar of contemporary philosophical theology.

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ARTICLE 5

SACRED POWER IN SECULAR STATES: THE RESURGENCE OF RELIGION IN THE POLITICS OF CHINA, THE UNITED STATES, AND ISRAEL

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the increasingly prominent role of religion in shaping political systems, leadership decisions, and national policies across three distinct geopolitical contexts: China, the United States, and Israel. Whilst secularization theory once predicted the declining influence of religion in modern governance, recent decades have demonstrated a marked resurgence of religious discourse and motivation in political spheres worldwide. Through comparative analysis, this study explores how religious ideology manifests differently across these three nations yet consistently exerts substantial influence over domestic and foreign policy decisions.

In China, the Communist Party's complex relationship with religion oscillates between suppression and strategic co-option, particularly evident in policies affecting Tibetan Buddhism, Islam in Xinjiang, and state-sanctioned Christianity. The United States exhibits a robust tradition of religious influence through evangelical Christianity's impact on the Republican Party, shaping policies on abortion, education, and international relations, particularly regarding Israel. Israel presents a unique case where religious identity remains inseparable from national identity, with religious parties wielding disproportionate political power and increasingly influencing settlement policies, civil law, and regional security decisions.

This analysis reveals that religion's political influence operates through distinct mechanisms in each context—ideological control in China, electoral mobilization in the United States, and coalition necessity in Israel–yet all three nations demonstrate that religious considerations remain central to contemporary governance. The findings demonstrate that comprehending the trajectory of modern political systems requires sustained scholarly attention to the mechanisms through which religious conviction shapes governance, policy formation, and the exercise of state power.

The conventional wisdom of twentieth century social science held that modernization, technological advancement, and increased education would inevitably lead to the privatization and diminishment of religious influence in public life. This secularization thesis—articulated by theorists from Max Weber to Peter Berger—suggested that religion would retreat to the margins of modern societies, particularly in their political institutions. The thesis held that as societies became more educated, scientifically literate, and economically developed, rational and empirical worldviews would displace religious ones, rendering religion an increasingly private matter

without significant bearing on public governance or political identity.[1] Yet the opening decades of the twenty first century have demonstrated the limitations of this prediction. Across diverse political systems and cultural contexts, religion has reasserted itself as a significant force shaping national policies, political movements, and governmental decisions. This resurgence manifests differently across various nations, reflecting unique historical trajectories, political structures, and religious traditions, yet the phenomenon appears sufficiently widespread to warrant systematic scholarly attention.

This essay examines the increasing influence of religion on politics through comparative analysis of three nations that represent distinct models of religious-political interaction: China, the United States, and Israel. These cases were selected for their diversity in political systems, dominant religious traditions, and historical relationships between religion and state, yet all three demonstrate clear trajectories of intensifying religious influence on governance. China, officially an atheist state governed by the Communist Party, paradoxically demonstrates increasing engagement with religion as both a threat to manage and a resource to deploy. The United States, with its constitutional separation of church and state, nonetheless exhibits substantial religious influence on electoral politics and policy formation, particularly through evangelical Christianity. Israel represents a case where religious and national identities remain fundamentally intertwined, with religious parties exercising influence far beyond their numerical representation in the electorate.

The comparative approach adopted here illuminates how religion influences politics through different mechanisms across varying contexts whilst identifying common patterns in this phenomenon. By examining these three nations, this analysis contributes to broader scholarly debates about religion's role in contemporary governance, the validity of secularization theory, and the implications of religious political influence for democratic institutions, human rights, and international relations. This essay argues that religion has not retreated from modern political life but has instead adapted and intensified, operating through distinct mechanisms in each national context to produce substantial and consequential policy outcomes.

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA

The relationship between religion and politics in the People's Republic of China presents a paradox. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officially espouses atheism and Marxist materialism, yet religion has become an increasingly prominent concern in Chinese political discourse and policy formation over the past two decades. This engagement reflects both

[1] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, 1st ed. (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 1990).

apprehension about religion's potential to challenge party authority and recognition of religion's utility in promoting social cohesion and supporting the party's legitimacy.[2]

Under Xi Jinping's leadership since 2012, the Chinese government has intensified efforts to bring religious practices under state control whilst simultaneously promoting elements of traditional Chinese religious and philosophical thought that align with party objectives. The policy of "Sinicization" of religion, formally articulated in 2015, requires all religious traditions in China to align with Chinese culture and socialist values.[3] This approach represents a shift from earlier strategies: in the Maoist era (1949–1976), the CCP pursued aggressive suppression of all religious practice, often violently, whilst the post-Mao reform period of the 1980s–1990s allowed a degree of religious revival under looser oversight. The Sinicization policy marks a new phase of active reformation of religious practices and doctrines to align them with state purposes rather than merely tolerating or prohibiting them. The Sinicization campaign has affected all major religious traditions in China, but its implementation has been particularly severe regarding Islam and Tibetan Buddhism, whilst more accommodating toward state-sanctioned Christianity and folk religions that can be framed as components of Chinese cultural heritage.

The treatment of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang province exemplifies how religious considerations shape Chinese domestic policy with far-reaching human rights implications. Beginning in 2017, the Chinese government dramatically escalated policies targeting Uyghur religious and cultural practices, establishing what authorities describe as "vocational education and training centres" but which numerous observers characterize as detention camps holding over one million people.[4] Government documents reveal explicit concern about Islamic religious practice as incompatible with party ideology and Chinese national identity. Policies have included prohibitions on religious dress, restrictions on mosque attendance, surveillance of religious education, and reported forced renunciation of Islamic beliefs. Whilst Chinese authorities frame these measures as counterterrorism and deradicalization efforts, the policies clearly reflect anxiety about religion's capacity to sustain alternative identities and loyalties that might challenge party control.

Similarly, Chinese policy toward Tibetan Buddhism demonstrates religion's central role in political calculations. The Chinese government's insistence on controlling the selection of the

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[2] Fenggang Yang, *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 77–104, https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/css067

[3] Xinhua, "Xi Jinping: Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," October 18, 2017, https://www.xinhuanet.com/english/download/Xi_Jinping's_report_at_19th_CPC_National_Congress.pdf

[4] Human Rights Watch, "'Eradicating Ideological Viruses': China's Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang's Muslims," September 9, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs

next Dalai Lama—including claims that reincarnation of living Buddhas must have government approval—represents an extraordinary assertion of state authority over religious doctrine.[5] This position recognizes that Tibetan Buddhism remains a potential rallying point for Tibetan identity distinct from Chinese national identity. The government has invested substantial resources in promoting party-approved interpretations of Tibetan Buddhism whilst restricting practices and teachings associated with the Dalai Lama or Tibetan independence.

Conversely, the Chinese government has shown increased interest in promoting Confucianism and selected elements of Buddhism and Daoism that can be presented as components of Chinese cultural heritage compatible with party rule. President Xi has frequently invoked Confucian concepts in political speeches, and the government has supported the establishment of Confucius Institutes worldwide as a tool of cultural diplomacy to promote Chinese culture and soft power internationally — demonstrating how religion and philosophical tradition directly shape China's foreign policy strategy.[6] This selective promotion of religious and philosophical traditions demonstrates the party's recognition of religion's potential utility in legitimating authority and promoting social values aligned with party objectives, provided religious authority remains subordinate to party authority.

The Chinese case thus reveals religion influencing politics through a distinctive mechanism: whilst lacking the electoral dynamics that characterize democratic systems, religious considerations shape Chinese policy through the party's assessment of religion as either threat or resource to its political monopoly. This dynamic has produced policies of simultaneous suppression and co-option that have profound implications for religious freedom, ethnic minority rights, and China's international relationships.

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE IN AMERICAN POLITICS

The United States presents a contrasting model wherein religion influences politics primarily through democratic participation, electoral mobilization, and the advocacy efforts of religious organizations and individuals. Despite constitutional separation of church and state, religious considerations have shaped American politics throughout the nation's history. The past five decades have witnessed particularly intensive religious engagement in political life, predominantly

[5] U.S. Department of State, "2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: China," June 2, 2022, https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/china/

[6] Xin Liu, "China's Cultural Diplomacy: A Great Leap Outward with Chinese Characteristics? Multiple Comparative Case Studies of the Confucius Institutes," *Journal of Contemporary China* 28, no. 118 (2019): 646–61, https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1557951

through the mobilization of evangelical and conservative Roman Catholic voters around social and cultural issues.[7]

The emergence of the Christian Right as a significant political force in the late 1970s fundamentally altered American politics. Organizations such as the Moral Majority—founded by Jerry Falwell in 1979—succeeded in mobilising evangelical Christians who had previously been politically disengaged.[8] This movement coalesced around opposition to abortion following the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, resistance to the Equal Rights Amendment, and broader concerns about secularization and moral decline. The Christian Right became closely aligned with the Republican Party—providing crucial electoral support whilst shaping the party's platform on social issues.

This alignment has produced substantial policy consequences. The appointment of Supreme Court justices committed to overturning Roe v. Wade became a central objective for religiously motivated voters, culminating in the 2022 Dobbs v. Jackson decision that eliminated constitutional protection for abortion rights.[9] This outcome represented the culmination of a decades-long religious political movement and immediately triggered state-level legislative action to restrict or prohibit abortion, demonstrating the concrete policy impact of religiously motivated political engagement. Religious conservatives have similarly influenced education policy, promoting voucher programmes for religious schools, challenging evolution instruction, and advocating for school prayer.[10]

Foreign policy represents another domain where religious influence on American politics has been particularly pronounced, especially regarding Israel. Christian Zionism—the belief that Christians should support the Jewish state for theological reasons related to biblical prophecy—has become influential among evangelical Christians who constitute a significant Republican constituency.[11] This religious motivation has reinforced American support for Israel—sometimes in ways that exceed strategic considerations. For instance, polling by the Pew Research Center in 2005 has found that white evangelical Protestants are among the strongest supporters of Israel of any American religious group—with a majority citing biblical prophecy as a reason for their support.[12] Evangelical support was instrumental in the Trump administration's decision to

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[7] José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[8] Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 103–30, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195340846.001.0001.
[9] Supreme Court of the United States, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. ___ (2022), https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf
[10] Ira C. Lupu, David Masci, and Robert W. Tuttle, "Religion in the Public Schools," Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, May 2007, https://www.pewforum.org/2007/05/03/religion-in-the-public-schools/
[11] Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion: Christians, Jews, and the Idea of the Promised Land* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 187–215.
[12] Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "American Evangelicals and Israel," April 15, 2005,

relocate the American embassy to Jerusalem and recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights—decisions that broke with longstanding international consensus and American policy.[13] The influence of Christian Zionism demonstrates how religious beliefs can shape foreign policy in ways that have significant international implications.

The 2016 and 2020 presidential elections further illuminated religion's role in American politics. Despite Donald Trump's personal history appearing inconsistent with evangelical values, white evangelical Christians provided overwhelming support for his candidacy—with approximately eighty percent voting for Trump in both elections.[14] This support reflected a transactional relationship wherein evangelicals accepted Trump's personal failings in exchange for policies advancing their priorities, including Supreme Court appointments, religious liberty protections, and support for Israel. This dynamic revealed how religious political influence operates through electoral calculations rather than necessarily requiring personal religious conviction from political leaders.

Recent years have also witnessed intensifying debates about religious liberty, particularly regarding tensions between anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ individuals and religious objections to same-sex relationships. Religious organizations and individuals have challenged requirements to provide services for same-sex weddings, include contraception in health insurance, or use preferred pronouns—arguing such requirements violate religious freedom.[15] These conflicts demonstrate ongoing debate regarding religion's proper role in a pluralistic democracy and the extent to which religious beliefs justify exemptions from generally applicable laws.

The American case thus illustrates how religion influences democratic politics through electoral mobilization, coalition formation, and sustained advocacy on specific policy issues. This influence operates within constitutional constraints but has nonetheless produced substantial policy outcomes aligned with religious conservative priorities, particularly regarding abortion, education, and support for Israel.

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https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2005/04/15/american-evangelicals-and-israel/

[13] John Fea, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 112–34.

[14] Pew Research Center, "In Changing U.S. Electorate, Race and Education Remain Stark Dividing Lines," June 2, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2020/06/02/in-changing-u-s-electorate-race-and-education-remain-stark-dividing-lines/

[15] George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, second ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), https://www.scribd.com/document/420104805/George-M-Marsden-Fundamentalism-and-American-Culture-New-Edition-2006

ISRAEL: RELIGION, NATIONALISM, AND POLITICS

Israel represents perhaps the most complex case of religious political influence among the three nations examined here, as religious and national identities remain fundamentally intertwined in ways that defy simple categorization as either secular or religious state. The declaration establishing Israel in 1948 defined it as a "Jewish state," which is a formulation that inherently links religious identity to national identity and citizenship in ways with profound political implications.[16]

Religious parties have participated in Israeli governing coalitions almost continuously since independence—exercising influence far exceeding their electoral support through coalition bargaining. This influence has shaped numerous policy domains, including family law, which remains under religious rather than civil jurisdiction, Sabbath observance regulations, dietary restrictions for public institutions, and educational policy.[17] The political power of religious parties has increased in recent decades, particularly as ultra-Orthodox parties have become crucial coalition partners for right-wing governments.

The role of religion in Israeli politics has been especially pronounced regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and settlement policy. Religious Zionism—which views Jewish settlement throughout biblical Israel as a religious commandment—has become increasingly influential in shaping territorial policy.[18] Religious settlers and their political supporters have successfully lobbied for governmental support for settlements in the West Bank—framing territorial expansion as fulfilment of religious obligation rather than merely strategic consideration. This religious motivation has complicated peace negotiations, as religious settlers often reject territorial compromise that would require evacuating settlements established on land they regard as divinely promised to the Jewish people.

The influence of religious parties reached new heights in the government formed in late 2022 under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which included several far-right religious parties holding key ministerial positions. This coalition has advanced legislation reflecting religious priorities, including efforts to expand rabbinic authority over conversions, increased funding for ultra-Orthodox educational institutions, and strengthened protections for religious

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[16] The Knesset, "Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People," July 19, 2018, https://main.knesset.gov.il/en/news/pressreleases/pages/pr13978_pg.aspx

[17] Pew Research Center, "Israel's Religiously Divided Society," March 8, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/03/08/israels-religiously-divided-society/

[18] Jonathan Rynhold and Dov Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza," *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 1 (2008): 11–37, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233571896_Ideological_Change_and_Israel's_Disengagement_from_Gaza

sensibilities.[19] Proposed judicial reforms that would weaken the Supreme Court's power to overturn legislation have been supported partly by religious parties seeking to reduce judicial intervention in religious matters and settlement policy.

Religious considerations also shape Israeli policy regarding non-Jewish citizens and residents. The Nation-State Law passed in 2018 declared that "the right to exercise national self-determination in the State of Israel is unique to the Jewish people," effectively enshrining a hierarchy between Jewish and non-Jewish citizens.[20] This law exemplifies how the relationship between Jewish religious identity and Israeli national identity produces policies that privilege one religious-ethnic group over others, with significant implications for Palestinian citizens of Israel and the broader question of whether Israel can simultaneously be both Jewish and democratic.

The tension between religious and secular Jews within Israeli society has also intensified—particularly regarding military service exemptions for ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students, government funding for religious institutions, and the authority of religious courts over personal status matters. These conflicts reflect broader questions about Israel's character and the proper role of religion in a state that defines itself partially through religious identity whilst maintaining democratic institutions.

Recent years have witnessed increasing international criticism of Israeli policies toward Palestinians, criticism that Jewish religious and political leaders sometimes characterize as antisemitism. This framing demonstrates how religion influences not only domestic policy but also international discourse, as criticism of specific policies becomes entangled with questions about religious prejudice and the legitimacy of a state defined through religious-national identity.[21]

The Israeli case thus reveals the profound complexity that emerges when religious identity becomes constitutive of national identity and citizenship. Unlike China, where the state seeks to control religion, or the United States, where religious influence operates primarily through democratic participation, Israel demonstrates how religion can become embedded in the fundamental structure and self-definition of a state in ways that shape virtually all policy domains.

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[19] Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 267–94, https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/35.3.620

[20] The Knesset, "Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People," July 19, 2018, https://main.knesset.gov.il/en/news/pressreleases/pages/pr13978_pg.aspx

[21] Yossi Shain and Aharon Barth, "Diasporas and International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 57, no. 3 (2003): 449–79, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818303573015

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

Examining these three nations comparatively illuminates both the diverse mechanisms through which religion influences politics and certain common patterns that transcend contextual differences. Each nation demonstrates a trajectory of increasing religious influence over recent decades, though from different starting points and through different pathways. This simultaneity across diverse contexts suggests that we are witnessing a broader phenomenon rather than isolated national developments.

The mechanisms of religious political influence differ sharply across the three cases. In China, the Communist Party manages religion as either threat or resource, producing authoritarian policies of suppression and co-option without any democratic participation. In the United States, religious influence flows through electoral mobilization, coalition formation, and advocacy within constitutional constraints. In Israel, religion is constitutive of national identity itself, with religious parties exercising disproportionate power through coalition bargaining—a mechanism distinct from both the American democratic model and Chinese state control. What unifies these divergent pathways is their shared consequence: religious considerations produce significant, concrete policy outcomes in each context.

Returning to the secularization thesis: the findings across these three cases demand a substantial revision of that framework. The classic thesis—as articulated by Weber and later Berger—assumed a linear relationship between modernization and religious decline. Yet China is one of the world's most technologically advanced states; the United States is among the wealthiest and most educated; Israel is a technologically sophisticated democracy—and in all three, religious influence on politics has intensified rather than diminished. This pattern supports the post-secular turn in scholarship, associated with theorists such as José Casanova and Jürgen Habermas, who argue that religion has not retreated from public life but has instead been "de-privatized," re-entering political discourse in ways the original secularization thesis failed to anticipate. The three cases examined here illustrate the diverse forms this re-entry takes, suggesting that future scholarship must abandon linear models of secularization in favour of contextually sensitive frameworks.[22] Despite these different mechanisms, certain common patterns emerge. All three nations demonstrate that religious considerations significantly shape policies with profound human rights implications, including restrictions on reproductive rights, religious freedom for minorities, and equality for LGBTQ individuals. Religious influence in each nation has contributed to intensifying political polarization, as religious and secular constituencies adopt increasingly divergent positions on fundamental questions about the proper

[22] José Casanova, Public Religions in the Modern World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 211–234.

ordering of society. Each case also reveals how religious influence on politics can complicate international relations, whether through Chinese repression of religious minorities, American policy toward Israel shaped by Christian Zionism, or Israeli settlement policy motivated partly by religious claims to territory.

The three cases also demonstrate that religious political influence need not correlate with high levels of religious observance among the general population. China remains predominantly secular in personal religious practice,[23] yet religion profoundly shapes policy. In the United States and Israel, religious political influence has increased even as some measures of traditional religious observance have declined. While scholarship on American religious history shows complex patterns of religious participation over time, with periods of both growth and decline in traditional denominational affiliation,[24] the relationship between such participation and political influence remains non-linear. This suggests that political religion may operate somewhat independently from personal religious practice.[25]

These findings have significant theoretical implications for understanding religion's role in contemporary politics. The secularization thesis predicted that modernization would reduce religion's political influence, yet all three nations examined here combine modernity with substantial religious influence on governance. This suggests that secularization theory requires substantial revision to account for religion's persistent, and in some cases increasing, political salience. Rather than inevitable secularization, we observe diverse patterns of religious influence adapted to different political systems and cultural contexts.

The findings also raise normative questions about religious influence in politics. Defenders of religious political engagement argue that religious citizens have equal rights to participate in democratic politics based on their values, that religion provides moral resources for critiquing injustice, and that excluding religious voices from public discourse impoverishes political deliberation. Critics contend that religious political influence threatens pluralism, imposes religious views on non-adherents, and undermines rights protections that depend on secular governance. The three cases examined here demonstrate the stakes of these debates, as religious political influence has produced outcomes ranging from civil rights legislation—such as

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[23] Pew Research Center, "Measuring Religion in China," August 30, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2023/08/PF_2023.08.30_religion-china_REPORT.pdf

[24] Robert Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, 2nd ed., ed. Rodney Stark (United States: Rutgers University Press, 2005), https://doi.org/10.36019/9780813541136

[25] David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 41–63, https://www.scribd.com/document/754359423/David-Martin-On-Secularization-Towards-A-Revised-General-Theory-2005

the US Civil Rights Act, influenced by religious leaders like Martin Luther King Jr.—to human rights violations.

CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis of China, the United States, and Israel demonstrates that religion exerts substantial and—in many cases—increasing influence on contemporary politics across diverse national contexts. Far from privatization or marginalization predicted by secularization theory, religion remains centrally engaged with politics—shaping policies on issues from reproductive rights to territorial disputes, and the treatment of minority populations. The mechanisms of religious influence vary across political systems, operating through authoritarian control in China, democratic participation in the United States, and the structural embedding of religious identity in Israel, yet all three pathways produce significant policy consequences.

Understanding contemporary politics requires taking religion seriously as a motivating force and analytical category. Political decisions that appear puzzling from purely strategic or economic perspectives often become comprehensible when religious motivations and frameworks are recognised. Chinese policy toward Uyghurs and Tibetans reflects not only ethnic management but anxiety about religious identity challenging party ideology. American support for Israel reflects not only strategic alliance but religious commitment among influential constituencies. Israeli settlement policy reflects not only security concerns but religious claims to territory.

The continuing, and in some cases intensifying, influence of religion on politics challenges both scholarly predictions and normative aspirations for secular governance. Whether one views this development positively or negatively, it represents a defining feature of early twenty-first-century politics that scholars, policymakers, and citizens must engage seriously. The diverse patterns examined here suggest that religion's political influence will continue adapting to different contexts whilst remaining a significant force shaping how nations govern themselves and interact with one another. Future scholarship must continue examining these patterns whilst remaining attentive to the normative implications of religious influence for democracy, human rights, and pluralism in increasingly diverse societies.

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AUTHOR'S BIO

Niamh Graham is a second year undergraduate at the University of St Andrews, pursuing a joint-degree in International Relations and Sustainable Development. Her academic interests span feminist research methodologies, Marxist theory, and Foucauldian analysis, which shape much of her critical engagement with global politics and social structures. Beyond her coursework, Niamh is an avid reader—enjoying literature both for leisure and for deepening her academic perspectives.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This piece grew out of my frustration with the way many nations insist on separating religion from politics, despite the clear entanglement of the two. I expected the research process to move quickly, especially given my interest in the topic, but I found myself navigating far more unfamiliar material than anticipated. That challenge ultimately strengthened the work, pushing me to engage with new perspectives and histories. A further source of inspiration was one of my

high school Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies teachers, whose enthusiasm for exploring religions beyond Christianity first encouraged me to think critically about how belief systems shape political life.

EDITORS' NOTE

In this paper, Niamh Graham analyzes the contemporary political state of China, the United States, and Israel. She argues that though it occurs in three distinct manners, religion has increasing influence in the political realm of each case study presented which displays the emergence of a broader phenomenon. This phenomenon calls into question the validity of secularization theory and has significant implications for human rights, democratic institutions, and international relations generally.

The case studies chosen by Graham are relevant and diverse—offering nuanced comparisons and contrasts that provide a strong foundation for her overall argument. Her writing is well-structured and clear, rendering important and relevant socio-political and religious topics accessible to a wide audience. Through an original analysis and synthesis of the three aforementioned countries, Graham uniquely contributes to the debate surrounding secularization theories.

The contribution of this paper comes from the relevancy of the topics discussed and the skill with which they are presented and analyzed. This topic, the countries chosen, and Graham's examination are increasingly valuable in the current global political climate. It is critical that religion and theology be included in socio-political and economic discussions and theses; Graham excellently executes and embodies this idea in her work.

EDITORS: Madeline McDermott, Leonie Grosse Osterdahl, and Arthur Zhang

PH Martyria

BOOK REVIEWS

REVIEW 1

***Martyria* 1 (2026): 67–70**
https://doi.org/10.15664/j9nn7d72

Micah M. Miller, *Origen of Alexandria and the Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 208 pp., £80.00, hardback (ISBN 9780198895749).

This book is a strong contribution to the study of early Christian pneumatology. Although Origen of Alexandria stands at the centre of scholarship on early Christian theology and Trinitarian discourse, his doctrine of the Holy Spirit has often been treated briefly, folded into broader accounts of his Trinitarian theology, or judged too quickly through later pro-Nicene categories. Micah M. Miller seeks to correct that imbalance by offering a sustained study of Origen's pneumatology across the extant corpus. The result is a learned and careful book that significantly advances discussion of Origen on his own terms.

The governing thesis is clear. Miller argues that, for Origen, the Holy Spirit is dependent on the Father and the Son for being and attributes, ranked below them yet above all other beings, and that this ontological ordering grounds the Spirit's salvific activity. In Miller's reading, Origen's pneumatology is not a loose collection of passing remarks but a coherent theological account shaped by scriptural exegesis. Jewish, philosophical, and earlier Christian traditions do enter the picture, yet they do so in the service of biblical interpretation rather than as an alternative to it. This framing is one of the book's great strengths, because it keeps Origen's pneumatology tied to the exegetical practice from which it emerges.

The volume has five chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1 treats the Father and the Son as necessary groundwork for understanding the Spirit's place within Origen's theology. Chapter 2 turns to the generation of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's attributes. Chapter 3 examines the unity and multiplicity of the Holy Spirit, particularly in relation to the sevenfold Spirit. Chapter 4 studies the Spirit's activity in giving gifts, sanctifying, interceding, and inspiring scripture. Chapter 5 considers the Spirit's role in salvation, above all in relation to Christ and the saints (pp. 10–11). The thematic arrangement is judicious. Rather than following a strict chronology, Miller gathers relevant passages from across Origen's corpus and thereby reconstructs a fuller account than would be possible through a narrow concentration on a few familiar loci.

One of the book's principal contributions lies in this comprehensiveness. Miller repeatedly shows that earlier scholarship has privileged *Peri Archon* 1.3 and sections of the

Commentary on John, with the consequence that Origen's pneumatology has often been reduced to a handful of themes: the Spirit's relation to the Father and Son, revelation, and sanctification (pp. 2–5). By widening the evidential base, Miller demonstrates that Origen's thought is both richer and more internally textured than such summaries allow. This broader reading also enables him to address tensions in the evidence without forcing them into artificial harmony. The book is particularly good at showing that ambiguity in Origen is not always a sign of confusion—at times it reflects the complexity of a theological project articulated across different works, genres, and textual states.

Another major strength is the book's methodological seriousness. Miller is properly alert to the textual difficulties involved in any study of Origen, especially the problems posed by the Latin translations and the possibility of doctrinal reshaping by Rufinus. His discussion of method is among the most useful parts of the volume. He neither dismisses the Latin evidence wholesale nor accepts it uncritically. Instead, he works with the Greek wherever possible, compares Greek and Latin witnesses where appropriate, and marks passages where the wording remains suspect (pp. 6–9). That procedure inspires confidence and makes the book more useful for future scholarship, since Miller shows what evidence can responsibly sustain his conclusions.

Closely related to this is Miller's refusal to read Origen primarily as a precursor to later orthodoxy. He insists, rightly, that Origen should first be understood within his own third-century setting. The repeated attempt to vindicate Origen against later charges of subordinationism has often obscured more than it has clarified. Miller's treatment is historically more exact. He shows that hierarchical language in Origen must be interpreted within a pre-Nicene theological world in which such ordering was not yet a marker of heresy in the later sense. This allows Miller to take Origen's language seriously instead of domesticating it, and it gives the book a historiographical sharpness that extends beyond the immediate topic of pneumatology.

The study is also impressive in the way it relates ontology and economy. Miller's account of the Spirit's activities—gift-giving, sanctification, intercession, inspiration, and assistance in the interpretation of Scripture—is not left as an appendix to a more abstract metaphysical argument. Rather, those activities are shown to follow from the Spirit's ordered relation to the Father and the Son. The conclusion in particular is effective in drawing together the book's central threads through the exegesis of John 1:3, Isaiah 11:2–3, and 1 Corinthians 12:4–6 (pp. 156–64). Here Miller makes a persuasive case that Origen's account of the Spirit's rank, multiplicity of gifts, and common operation with the Father and the Son forms a coherent whole. Even readers who may wish to press against particular points in the argument will have to reckon seriously with the

synthetic force of the case he presents.

The book also stands out for its scholarly positioning. Miller's survey of previous scholarship is concise but substantive. He identifies the older judgement, associated above all with Adolf von Harnack, that Origen had little room for the Holy Spirit in his theology, and he also distinguishes this from more recent attempts either to emphasize hierarchy too strongly or to soften Origen's language by reading him through later doctrinal categories. These pages do more than survey prior work. They frame the intervention of the book with precision and make clear why a fresh study is necessary. In that respect, the book succeeds not simply by collecting more passages, but by changing the terms in which the question is asked.

There are, however, a few limitations. The first is bound up with the very method that makes the book strong. Because the study proceeds thematically, questions of development across Origen's career necessarily remain somewhat subordinate. Miller acknowledges this difficulty and judges that Origen is, on the whole, fairly consistent, with only a few possible shifts in emphasis (pp. 6–7). That may well be correct, yet some readers will want a fuller testing of the claim, especially in relation to the dating of particular works and the comparative weight assigned to earlier and later evidence. The thematic approach is justified, but it leaves a residue of chronological questions that are not entirely resolved.

A second reservation concerns the book's wider patristic horizon. Miller is excellent at identifying antecedents and conceptual resources, but the broader afterlife of Origen's pneumatology is treated more briefly than some readers may desire. The conclusion does indicate how the book contributes to the history of trinitarian theology more broadly (pp. 156–64). Even so, a somewhat fuller account of how Origen's positions anticipate, diverge from, or are reworked by later fourth-century authors might have sharpened the significance of the study further. This is less a defect than a matter of scope, but it remains a point at which the reader may wish for more.

One might also question whether the language of hierarchy occasionally becomes so dominant in the exposition that other organising features of Origen's theology risk receding from view. Miller certainly does not ignore sanctification, scriptural inspiration, or the economy of gifts; some of the book's strongest discussions concern precisely those themes (pp. 101–55). Nevertheless, the argument is so tightly arranged around ontological ordering that one sometimes wonders whether alternative centres of gravity within Origen's pneumatology might have been explored more fully. That said, the pressure point may lie less in Miller's interpretation than in the evidence itself, and the fact that the question emerges is a sign of the book's seriousness rather than superficiality.

These reservations do not substantially diminish the book's achievement. *Origen of Alexandria and the Theology of the Holy Spirit* is a serious and persuasive study. It combines philological caution, doctrinal sensitivity, and historical discipline. For specialists in Origen, it will become a standard point of reference in work on pneumatology and trinitarian theology. For students of early Christianity more broadly, it offers a model of how to read a major patristic author across the whole surviving corpus, within the author's own intellectual and doctrinal context, and without surrendering either historical precision or theological acuity.

In sum, Miller has not merely filled a lacuna in scholarship; he has provided a persuasive framework for understanding the Holy Spirit in Origen as a coherent and scripturally grounded theological topic. The book deserves a wide readership among scholars of patristics, historical theology, and early Christian biblical interpretation. It is a book of real value, and it will likely shape future discussion of Origen's pneumatology for some time.

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REVIEW 2

***Martyria* 1 (2026): 70–72**
https://doi.org/10.15664/vw468q06

Alister McGrath, *Why We Believe: Finding Meaning in Uncertain Times* (London: OneWorld Publications, 2025), 272 pp., £18.99, hardback (ISBN 9780861549214).

This book sets out to argue "for the recalibration of the notion of 'belief', and a more nuanced understanding of the positive role this plays in the lives of individuals and communities" (p.6). In doing so he hopes to defend the importance of the notion of belief and its prevailing relevance in our modern world. He is largely successful as he succinctly explores different aspects of beliefs ranging from scientific to religious. Yet, a more nuanced, grounded and expanded comparison of the various beliefs would have benefitted the book.

The book's central focus is the innate human aim to find both certainty and meaning in life. Alister McGrath explains how the natural human capacity to search for answers to the big questions of life, those related to the meanings and aims of a good life, exists simultaneously with the human want for certainty and clarity (p. 11). However, as McGrath stresses throughout the book, it is impossible to find definitive responses to the meaningful questions in life (p.15). In the conclusion, McGrath draws on John Keats to note that the fact we cannot find certain

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proof in answer to existential questions is incredibly relevant, as it is precisely this openness that leaves space in human life for belief (p. 105). McGrath stresses that it is important for this uncertainty to remain as a system of belief should not be taken as hard and fast fact. Rather, it should be treated as a method of building purpose and significance into one's everyday life. Therefore, certainty, coming from evidential proof, is not possible in response to these questions of meaning. Instead, these questions can only be addressed through the application of systems of belief which formulate one's "big picture" worldview (p. 18). A "big picture" worldview can be defined as an individual's entire way of perceiving and interacting with the world that they are a part of. It is composed of the full range of beliefs one holds, all in dialogue, relation and interplay with each other. Namely, these beliefs can be used to address, although not to solve, the human quest for meaning and certainty.

Throughout the book, McGrath aptly compares a range of different beliefs which are used by individuals in their "big picture" worldviews. He draws heavily on Mary Midgley's strategy of "multiple maps" arguing that for a worldview to be successful it must be made up of multiple narratives or systems of belief (p. 28). This is because there is so much complexity present in human life that one sole system would not be sufficient to tackle all of life's questions. McGrath illustrates this complexity by referring to the question of the purpose of life and the question of the existence of gravity each of which require their own basis to be approached from. One must have multiple maps, each map being a different method or system of belief, to tackle the different areas of complexity. These maps come together to form each person's big picture worldview (p. 29). McGrath explores how different "big picture" worldviews lead to different interpretations and explanations of the world by aptly comparing a range of scientific, philosophical and religious beliefs.

The belief in focus throughout the book is Christianity and McGrath is careful to highlight that this is where his expertise lies, and so is attentive not to draw overly generalized points on religions or cultures less familiar to him (p. 34). Thus, McGrath moves through the different elements of the theoretical concept of belief, paying particular attention in the later chapters to the issues that can arise from belief. He explores the conflict and tensions that can exist within belief systems, specifically from the intersection of tradition and reform. He supports this with a brief examination of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism in 20th century China (p. 79). He also explores dogmatism and the issues of the polarization of belief, topics which are incredibly relevant in the modern world (p. 82). McGrath's treatment of the conflict that can arise from intersections or clashing of different beliefs is judicious: it leaves a reader wanting more. For example, the discussion on how to deal with contrasting beliefs would have

been strongly supported by an analysis of the place of religious language, language from the perspective of belief, in the public sphere. Disappointingly, this is a theme that is only very briefly touched on in the next chapter. Overall, this contributes to the overall argument that McGrath fails to go into the relevant level of detail to fully articulate and support his positions.

While McGrath often references or touches on a wide range of beliefs and belief frameworks, he often moves past them too quickly, leaving his arguments feeling unfinished. This can be evidenced in his discussion of Midgley's theory of maps, where he does not define these maps practically or tangibly as a reader would hope, leaving the theory dangerously abstract. One might argue that this is a running theme throughout the book: as McGrath attempts not to exclude any forms of belief, or on the other hand to prioritize any, he instead reduces all belief into almost meaningless conceptuality. McGrath's care not to expand too deeply on topics he feels he lacks knowledge of is justified. However, even with this in mind the content related to non-Christian modes of thought is convincing and when applied the reader is greatly aided in accessing a fully contextualized picture of the concept of belief; although this often leaves one wanting more discussion. For example, in chapter three the subject of colonial labelling of native cultural practices as religious belief, such as in the case of Hinduism, is an important aspect that would have been deeply compelling, had he discussed it further (p. 32).

To conclude, McGrath convincingly highlights the importance and centrality of belief in human life. He articulates how belief is both necessary and intrinsic, stating "my position is this: believing is not only intellectually defensible but existentially necessary" (p. 102). However, the book feels that it lacks the adequate detail and comparison to be convincingly informative, and it would have been worthwhile to discuss comparative cultural conceptions of belief across the world in greater detail. The impression that McGrath is labouring the same points while still providing them with little development leaves the reader feeling frustrated once they reach the conclusion.

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REVIEW 3

***Martyria* 1 (2026): 73–76**
https://doi.org/10.15664/bmws2954

R. B. Jamieson, *The Paradox of Sonship: Christology in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, United Kingdom: IVP Academic, 2021), 195 pp., £29.99, paperback (ISBN 9781789742848).

In this book, R. B. Jamieson tackles one of the fundamental Christological dilemmas in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "What does the author of Hebrews mean by calling Jesus the 'Son'? Is 'Son' a title given Jesus at his enthronement as Messiah, his session at God's right hand?[3] Or does 'Son' denote his eternal inclusion in the identity of the one true God?" (p. 1). In response, Jamieson suggests "we should answer 'yes' to both questions and [recognize] that the second is crucial for, not in tension with, the first." (p. 1) In other words, Jamieson sets out to advance what he claims "no modern author has offered a full-dress defence of the thesis that in Hebrews Jesus is *the Son who became Son*," and this by virtue of his incarnation state (p. 20).

More specifically, Jamieson advances the following three sub-theses that also form the logical backbone of the book:

1. 'Son' designates Jesus' distinct mode of divine existence (Chapter Two)
2. 'Son' *also* designates Jesus' appointed title at his enthronement in heaven (Chapter Four)
3. Jesus could only become the messianic Son because he is the divine son incarnate i.e. 'Messiah' is a *theandric* office (Chapter Five)

To paraphrase the third sub-thesis, Jamieson argues that "Jesus' divinity [sub-thesis 1] is a necessary though not sufficient condition for his exercise of messianic rule [sub-thesis 2]", because Jesus' *humanity* is also a criterion for his Messianic office. As such, Jamieson inserts a chapter on "The Son's *Incarnate* Mission" between the first two sub-theses which "bridges a gap both narrative and conceptual from Jesus' existence as divine Son to his appointment as messianic Son" (p. 76). In this way, the structure of Jamieson's book forms a sort of U-shaped narrative Christology that mirrors his goal set out in the introduction to follow the "[narrative] unfurling in Hebrews [from the 'narrative climax' of the exordium] as closely as possible and so to offer a satisfying account of who the Son is and how he became Son" (pp. 6–7) – this

[3] Jamieson's assumption that 'Son' is the name inherited in 1:4 (pp. 102-111; see esp. 102 note 5) is clearly the linchpin which, if false, severely damages his argument. It is the most obvious basis of the paradox of sonship as conceived by Jamieson, since he focuses the problem as found in 1:4-5. In this review, however, I grant his assumption because (notwithstanding the fact that I agree with it) I want to avoid losing the forest for the trees – or in this case even the 'soil' on which he constructs his case. As shall be seen, this is a potent analogy for my own challenge to Jamieson: I think he emphasizes the problem of Sonship in Hebrews at the expense of *Hebrews' own* central problem and inquiry: that of reconciling Jesus' royal Sonship and *high-priesthood*.

articulates Jamieson's key method in reading and interpreting Hebrews.[4]

In this way, Jamieson seeks to cut the Gordian knot of sonship in Hebrews, subverting its presupposition of a "zero-sum game" by extending the alternative both/and positions of scholars like Matera, Carson, and especially Silva (p. 7). Methodologically therein, Jamieson wants to demonstrate through his consistent employment of classical Christological concepts and reading strategies that: far from leading us away from the text (as modern biblical scholars often claim), church teaching actually "enables us to read *with the grain of the text* and to say coherently all that Hebrews says about who Jesus is" (p. 23, italics mine). Ultimately, Jamieson avers that "Hebrews and the creed tell essentially the same *story* about the same Jesus," in the sense that "the *soteriological narrative* that Hebrews both presupposes and elaborates is expressed in compact, schematic form in the ecumenical creeds" (p. 43).

I am strongly convinced by Jamieson that "the Son became the Son," and it seems to me that the reason Jamieson's study decisively moves forward the scholarship on this question unlike his forerunners is precisely because he brings in robust theological and logical concepts that biblical scholars usually shy away from or even methodologically preclude. Jamieson lends weight to his counterintuitive thesis argument by borrowing concepts and reading strategies from classical Christology like "partitive exegesis" (p. 24) by making a distinction—key to Jamieson's argument—between 'theology' (who Christ *is*) and 'economy' (what Christ has *done*), in a way that seems to tick with the logic of the text. This combination of philosophical rigour and text-centredness is an incredible methodological achievement and demonstrates the valid and vibrant benefits that modern biblical scholars might obtain in widening their horizon of exegetical possibilities.

More significantly, Jamieson's triumph is in clarifying for the reader (and the field) the scriptural backbone and corresponding '*dogmatic minimalism*' (a term borrowed from Oliver Crisp) of Chalcedon and conciliar Christology more generally (p. 151). He explains that the purpose of conciliar Christology was to avoid extreme errors and safeguard the essential *mystery* of Jesus of Nazareth's identification with the one true God of Israel, not primarily to define and exhaust the interrelation between Christ's divinity and humanity, of which as Jamieson reiterates – the council has nothing to say. This provides an important paradigm shift concerning the relationship between conciliar Christology and the New Testament, not least Jamieson's reminder that Hebrews' lack of justification for his identification of Jesus with the one true God of Israel (1:8, 10; 2:10; 3:3–4 etc.) provides one of the strongest challenges to a "basically evolutionary scheme of development" in and beyond the New Testament, starting from "low"

[4] Here Jamieson acknowledges Hays' "narrative substructure" but especially Moffitt's "proto-credal sequence" as the exegetical "jumping-off point for [his] whole project." (6n5-6)

human Christology then moving gradually towards "high" divine Christology in "full-fledged Nicene orthodoxy" (pp. 143–145). As Jamieson put it, "such careful coordination of divine and human realities [*a priori*] suggests not the rough edges of a new breakthrough but the orderly exposition of an achieved synthesis" (p. 145). But this is *precisely the problem* with Jamieson's claim that the paradox of Sonship is what Sanders calls the "central Christological conundrum" in Hebrews,[5] because what do we get instead in a more holistic reading of Hebrews as a whole, especially its central chapters? An exegetical (and legal!) justification of how the Son became *high priest* (see esp. 5:8–10, 7:14–15, 28).

Indeed, I propose that Jamieson ultimately overestimates the problem of sonship for Hebrews by failing to relate it to the more central paradox which drives Hebrews' "word of exhortation": not that Jesus somehow both *is* and *became* Son (that was the philosophical impetus of Nicene and Chalcedonian Christology), but the confession that Jesus is somehow both the Davidic Messiah (or "Son") and, at the same time and under the same law—also *high-priest*. If scholars like David Moffitt and Barry Joslin are right that the "doctrinal heart" of Hebrews is in fact the central chapters on Jesus as *high priest* in 4:14-10:23, and more specifically Melchizedek and the Mosaic Law in 7:1-10:18, then I think that Jamieson ultimately mislocates the 'central Christological conundrum' of Hebrews that serves also as its major theological construction – what might better be called the *Paradox of Royal Priesthood*. Key in this hypothetical challenge would be the priestly inclusio of 4:14-16 and 10:19-23, although the identification (perhaps for the first time in the homily) of Jesus as "Son of God" in 4.14 might suggest a closer link between the paradox of sonship and the paradox of priestly orders than presently proposed. This has major implications for what one takes to be the content of the "confession" (3:1, 4:14, 10:23) and the "solid food" (5:12, 14) that the author of Hebrews exhorts his audience to "hold fast."

This sadly undermines his secondary thesis for church teaching as an aid to read *with* rather than *against* New Testament texts, because if I am right, Jamieson's employment of conciliar Christology, though helpful for understanding how "the Son became the Son" in a logically consistent manner, ultimately detracts from the core "intra-Jewish debate" that Moffitt and others more compellingly propose as the way in which to read along the grain of Hebrews. In other words, the thrust of Jamieson's argument is anachronistic. Jamieson's mistake flows into what he conceives to be the primary question the audience of Hebrews was asking i.e. "Is it worth it to be a Christian?" and that Hebrews' corresponding one-word answer is "Christ" (p. 168). Rather, one might venture that the question is more accurately: How can we continue to faithfully hold fast to (i.e. both assent to and live out) our confession of Jesus as *high priest*? The

[5] At multiple points, Jamieson makes it clear that he thinks this paradox of Sonship is Hebrews' main problem and contention (e.g. 7n7, 147, 148).

two-word answer Hebrews seems to give is this: "indestructible life" (7:15).

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