

Images of God



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From the Editor

If the way of worship forms God's Word in the lives of his people, then ensuring that that way is according to God's Word is critical. Part 2 of Glen Clary's "Image of God and Images of God: The Second Commandment and Semi-realized Eschatology" completes his excellent defense of the regulative principle and its proper interpretation.

David Noe presents the first of five parts of a new translation of "Chrysostom's Commentary on Galatians." The vivid language of this ancient church father is refreshingly colloquial, exhibiting the intense pastoral concern of Chrysostom.

I rarely publish negative reviews because I see the mission of OS as one of edifying church officers. On occasion, however, edification requires a warning against a dangerous error. David Bentley Hart's *That All Shall Be Saved* is just such a book. David VanDrunen gives us a thorough analysis of the many unbiblical ideas in this book in his review article: "Divine Justice, Sinful Humanity, and Eschatological Judgment: Considering David Bentley Hart's Argument against Hell."

Andy Wilson reviews Jonathan Landry Cruse, *The Christian's True Identity: What It Means to Be in Christ*. This excellent little book is a good companion to Wilson's March OS article which answers the question: Is homosexual orientation a legitimate category of identity? Cruse offers the positive biblical alternative to the humanity-distorting tendency of identity politics.

Judith Dinsmore reviews Janice Brown, *The Lion in the Waste Land: Fearsome Redemption in the Work of C. S. Lewis, Dorothy L. Sayers, and T. S. Eliot*. This book presents a fascinating study of the Christian imaginations of three well-known twentieth century Christian authors, Dorothy L. Sayers, T. S. Eliot, and C. S. Lewis.

Our poem in this issue is by John Milton (1608–1674), "Sonnet 9: Lady That in the Prime of Earliest Youth." This sonnet was written to a young woman to commend and encourage her to continue pursuing a serious Christian life. It is laced with biblical allusions. See if you can identify them. Then pass it on to a female teenager.

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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ServantPoetry

- John Milton (1608–1674), “Sonnet 9: Lady That in the Prime of Earliest Youth”

Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

Servant Truth

Image of God and Images of God: The Second Commandment and Semi-realized Eschatology, Part 2

by Glen J. Clary

In part one of this article, we examined the rationale for the prohibition of cultic images in the old covenant. Here, we will consider whether the incarnation of Christ has any effect on the second commandment's prohibition of cultic images. Our thesis is that the rationale for the prohibition of cultic images in the Law still applies to the church on this side of the incarnation. The incarnation, therefore, does not sanction iconic worship.

The Revelation of God in Jesus Christ

In the prologue of his Gospel, the Apostle John heralds the eternal Word who was with God in the beginning, who is of the same substance as the Father yet personally distinct from the Father, and who, with the Father, created all things (John 1:1–3). The prologue reaches a climax when John writes, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). In the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, the disciples beheld the glory of God. Moses longed to see the consummative revelation of God's glory that will be manifested at the end of the age. The disciples experienced a foretaste of that consummation-glory. Even though God spoke to Moses face to face and allowed him to behold the form of the Lord and catch a glimpse of the glory of the Lord, the revelation of God that Moses had, as glorious as it was, was inferior to the revelation of God in the incarnate Word.¹ John's prologue concludes by contrasting the revelation of God through Moses and the revelation of God in Christ. “For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known” (John 1:17–18).

This teaching stands behind the words of Jesus to Philip, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). When the disciples saw Jesus, they saw the image or icon of the invisible God (Col. 1:15), and they worshiped God in and through that image—not a dead image created by human hands but the true and living image, indeed, the eternal and uncreated image of God visibly and tangibly present with them in the incarnate Christ. Christ is the living icon of God that we are not only permitted to worship, we are commanded to worship. And in worshiping Christ, the image of the invisible God, we become like him; we are transformed from glory into glory, into the image of Christ

¹ Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 68–87.

himself, the eschatological Adam in whom the creaturely image of God has reached its state of consummate perfection.

There is an inseparable connection between the second commandment and the incarnation of Jesus Christ. “The fulfillment of the second commandment is the birth of Jesus Christ,” says Edmund Clowney.² Clowney adds, “The Father has offered us a true image to worship, and his jealousy is aroused if we choose anything but the incarnate Lord Jesus as the focus of our worship. Jesus is the true and only object of worship” (Clowney, 34). Greg Reynolds echoes this thought:

The image of God in Christ is the ultimate challenge to the worship of created images. All idols are counterfeit mediators. But now the true Mediator has invaded history. The Creator-Son has made Himself visible in history to draw sinners from among all nations away from idols.³

For the disciples, the ultimate revelation of God’s glory was when they saw the risen and glorified Christ. After his resurrection, Christ did not appear to everyone but only to a select few whom he had chosen to be eyewitnesses of his resurrection. That brings into view the unique role of the apostles in the foundational era of the church because one of the prerequisites for apostleship was seeing the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:21–22; 1 Cor. 9:1; Eph. 2:20). Seeing the risen Christ was not a privilege given to everyone in the New Testament church. In fact, there is a clear distinction in the New Testament between those who saw him and those who did not see him.

In the context of the revelation of Christ at the end of the age, Peter says to his readers “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). The apostle John, who more than any other New Testament author emphasizes the visible manifestation of God in the incarnate Son, frequently makes a distinction between those who saw Christ and those who did not see him and who *will not* see him until his return. Jesus said to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Jesus was looking forward to the time when he would no longer be bodily present with his disciples, which is the present state of affairs, one that will continue until his return. Only then will we see the face of Christ (Rev. 22:4; 1 John 3:2). According to David VanDrunen:

This present age is an age of not seeing Jesus; the eschatological age to come is the age in which the Christian will see Jesus. For now, the believer possesses only the eschatological hope of the “beatific vision”—seeing the glorified Jesus in the age to come. This present age is an age of Christ’s invisible presence in the Spirit, to be followed by an age of his visible presence which will commence when he reappears in glory (John 16:16). Furthermore, this present age is an age of walking by faith and

² Edmund Clowney, *How Jesus Transforms the Ten Commandments* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 28.

³ Gregory Edward Reynolds, *The Word is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 25.

not by sight (Rom. 8:24–25; 2 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:8). . . . We do not attempt to make Christ seen in the present because the present is not the time for seeing Christ.⁴

Indeed, the time is coming when we will see the face of Christ. That is the blessed hope of every believer (Heb. 9:28). The believer should long to see Christ and expect to see him at the consummation, but until that day, “we walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). The desire to see Christ with our eyes is appropriate. In fact, Christ prayed that we would see his glory (John 17:24). We refer to this vision of the glory of Christ as the beatific vision. The beatific vision is the consummate revelation of God’s glory in the person of the ascended Christ, the image of the invisible God, who is presently unseen. The apostle John tells us that we shall see Christ “as he is” in his state of perfected glory, and that vision of Christ will transform us into his image (1 John 3:2; 1 Cor. 15:49). That transformation will happen at the end of the age when Christ returns (1 Cor. 15:52–53). Perhaps, no one has expressed this teaching better than Jonathan Edwards:

It is the glorious sighting of Christ . . . radiating from his glorified body that effects a remarkable transformation of both the living and the dead saints. The living shall be immediately transformed, both body and soul, when they first see Christ as he is (1 John 3:2). All remnants of sin shall be eradicated in their souls and their natural bodies shall be transformed into spiritual bodies. Jesus Christ as the “light of life” shines on the dead, raising them to life in resurrection bodies by the means of his visible glory.⁵

The beatific vision is when we behold God in the person of the glorified Christ in the eschaton. With our physical eyes we will behold the glory of God in the glorified human nature of Christ, and we ourselves will become mirror reflections of that glory. We will not only behold the image of God but bear the image of God, not merely in the protological sense like Adam prior to the fall but in the eschatological sense like Christ after his resurrection. As perfected, eschatological image-bearers, we will experience for all eternity unceasing, consummative communion and fellowship with the Triune God.

That is what we have to look forward to in the age to come. But what about now? Are we currently cut off from communion and fellowship with Christ because he is no longer bodily present with us? Is the glory of the incarnate Word completely hidden from us? Must we await Christ’s return before we can behold his glory? Thankfully, although Christ is presently hidden from our eyes, God has not left us without a means of beholding his glory on this side of the eschaton. He has not left us without a means of communion with him. Even now, we behold the glory of Christ by faith when we look at the mirror of the gospel.

⁴ David VanDrunen, “Iconoclasm, Incarnation and Eschatology: Toward a Catholic Understanding of the Reformed Doctrine of the ‘Second’ Commandment,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6, no. 2 (April 2004): 144–45.

⁵ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Miscellanies, 833–1152*, ed. by Amy Pauw (Yale University Press, 2002), 461–62.

Beholding God in a Mirror

In 1 Corinthians 13:8–12, the apostle Paul employs the mirror metaphor to describe the present way the believer sees God.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. . . . For now we see in a mirror dimly,⁶ but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

Paul refers to various modes of revelation: prophecy, tongues and knowledge (i.e., the spiritual gift of “the utterance of knowledge” listed in 1 Cor. 12:8). Paul contrasts the partial, incomplete knowledge of God that we currently have by means of these temporary modes of revelation with the future knowledge of God that we will have in the age to come.

The phrase, “when the perfect comes” (v. 10), refers to the perfect state of affairs ushered in at the consummation with the return of Christ.⁷ At the consummation, our partial, fragmentary knowledge of God will be replaced by a complete knowledge of God.⁸ Paul says, “Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known” (v. 12). The contrast is between our knowledge of God in the present age and our knowledge of him in the age to come. But the contrast is also between two different ways of seeing God. Alluding to Numbers 12:8, Paul says, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12). Paul uses the same rare term *ainigma* (αἴνιγμα) that is used in Numbers 12:8 (LXX), where it is translated “riddles” and refers to the nature of the modes of revelation by which God spoke to the prophets of Israel in contrast to the manner in which he spoke to Moses (i.e., clearly, face to face, directly). The contrast in Numbers 12 is between two groups of people (Moses and the prophets), but in 1 Corinthians 13, it is between two ages, this age and the age to come.

According to Paul, a direct, face-to-face vision of God will not occur until the consummation “when the perfect comes” (1 Cor. 13:10). Until that day, we cannot behold God directly, face to face, but only indirectly as if we were looking at his reflection in a mirror. “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face” (12). The face-to-face vision of God in view here is the direct, unmediated sight of God’s glory that shines in the face of our Lord Jesus Christ in the beatific vision. That direct vision of God’s glory awaits the return of Christ, but even now, we see the reflection of that glory in a mirror.

In 1 Corinthians 13 (just as in Numbers 12), the mirror refers to modes of revelation: visions, dreams, tongues, and prophecy. These were modes of revelation given by the

⁶ “Dimly” translates *ainigma* (αἴνιγμα), which occurs only here in the New Testament and echoes Numbers 12:8 (LXX), “not in riddles.” *Ainigma* means “indirectly” or “in a riddle,” or perhaps both ideas are intended. See Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 658–60; David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 623–25; and Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1067–71.

⁷ See Richard Gaffin Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 109–12.

⁸ This should not be interpreted as a comprehensive knowledge because even in a state of glory, we remain finite while God is infinite.

Holy Spirit to the apostolic church on the Day of Pentecost when the ascended Christ poured out his Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17–18). In the absence of a direct, face-to-face, revelation of God in the incarnate Christ (which the church no longer has because Christ has ascended), Christ gave these prophetic modes of revelation to the church to function like a mirror in which the saints beheld his reflection.

In order to draw a conclusion from this teaching regarding images of Christ, we need to look once again at the grounds of the prohibition of images stated in Deuteronomy. Since you heard my voice but saw no form, do not make an image, said the Lord (Deut. 4:15–16). Using the mirror metaphor, we can state the grounds of the prohibition as follows: Since you did not see me face to face but only saw my reflection in the mirror of my Word (voice), do not make an image of me. After the ascension of Jesus and until his return, the church is like Israel at Mount Sinai. We cannot see Christ directly, face to face, but only indirectly beholding his reflection as in a mirror, namely, the mirror of his Word. And therefore, the rationale of the prohibition of images still applies today on this side of the incarnation. The incarnation of Christ does not render the grounds of the prohibition obsolete because, like the Israelites at Sinai, we do not see Christ. We only hear his voice. We only see him indirectly as if beholding his reflection in a mirror. In the age of the apostles, that mirror included various prophetic modes of revelation such as dreams, visions, tongues and prophecy. And although special revelation has come to an end—visions, tongues, and prophecy have ceased—there, nevertheless, remains a mirror in which we have an *indirect* vision of God, namely, the mirror of the gospel. Believers behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in the mirror of the gospel preached.

The Mirror of the Gospel

In 2 Corinthians 3:17–4:6, the apostle Paul explains that believers see the glory of God when they hear the gospel proclaimed. The key term is in 3:18, “we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord.”⁹ The point in using the mirror metaphor is that we do not have a direct, face-to-face, vision of the glory of God but only an indirect vision as if we were seeing it in a mirror. The mirror that Paul has in mind is the preaching of the gospel.

If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord. (2 Cor. 4:3–5a)

Unbelievers, whose minds are blinded, do not see the light of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God when they hear the gospel proclaimed. Believers do. By faith, we see it when we hear his Word. The gospel is the mirror that reflects his glory.

⁹ “Beholding as in a mirror” translates the word *katoptrizo* (κατοπτρίζω), which only occurs here in the New Testament. The term means to see indirectly or by reflection as in a mirror. This is another allusion to Numbers 12:8 (LXX); Moses “beheld the glory of the LORD.” See *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, ed. by Frederick Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 535.

Notice also that Paul says when we behold the glory of the Lord we are changed into the same image (icon) from glory into glory (3:18).¹⁰ Remarkably, our future glorification by means of seeing Christ in the beatific vision is something that has already begun. When we behold Christ's glory in the gospel, we are transformed into his image. We are transformed into what we behold. We become like what we worship. Even now, prior to the beatific vision, we are being transformed in the inner man (2 Cor. 4:16) from glory into glory when we behold the image of Christ in the mirror of the gospel. Although Christ is not bodily present with the saints on earth, we are not cut off from communion and fellowship with him. Through the preaching of the gospel, we already experience by the power of his Spirit a foretaste of what we will experience at the consummation. By faith, we behold Christ in his Word. As Calvin says, Christ, "the living image of God, is evidently set before our eyes in the mirror of the gospel!"¹¹ Calvin adds,

The ministry of the word, I say, is like a looking-glass. For the angels have no need of preaching, or other inferior helps, nor of sacraments, for they enjoy a vision of God of another kind; and God does not give them a view of his face merely in a mirror, but openly manifests himself as present with them. We, who have not as yet reached that great height, behold the image of God as it is presented before us in the word, in the sacraments, and . . . in the whole of the service of the Church . . . we walk by faith, not by sight. Our faith, therefore, at present beholds God as absent. How so? Because it sees not his face, but rests satisfied with the image in the mirror.¹²

That is the present state of affairs, which will continue until the return of Christ. Until then, we walk by faith not by sight, and our faith at present beholds him as absent because we see his true image in the mirror of his gospel.

We conclude, then, that the rationale for the prohibition of cultic images in the Law still applies in the church on this side of the incarnation. The incarnation of Christ does not sanction iconic worship. If Israel was forbidden from making images of Yahweh because they heard his voice but saw no form, then why would that prohibition not equally apply to us given that God's chosen mode of revealing himself to the church has not changed? It is through the administration of the Word of God written that we behold the glory of the Lord as in a mirror (2 Cor. 3:18). It is through the preaching of his gospel that we have true, Spiritual communion and fellowship with the triune God. That's true worship, which cannot be obtained by means of cultic images.

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¹⁰ The terms "glory" and "image" are used interchangeably. We see the same thing in 2 Cor. 4:4, "the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. by John De Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 70.

¹¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 202. Calvin is commenting on Genesis 32:30, Jacob's vision of God.

¹² John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 429–30. Calvin is commenting on 1 Corinthians 13:12.

ServantClassics

*The Commentary of John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople and our Father among the Saints, on the Letter to the Galatians*¹

by David C. Noe and Joseph A. Tipton

Galatians 1:1-3 “Paul an apostle, not from men nor through men, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead, and all the brethren with me, to the churches of Galatia: grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

This introduction teems with much passion and great fervor. In fact not only the introduction, but indeed the whole letter, so to speak, is like this as well. For those who always speak calmly to their students, when the students require sternness, this is characteristic not of a teacher, but of a corrupter and an enemy. Consequently even our Lord, though he often spoke gently with his disciples, sometimes used a more rough style, at one time blessing, at another rebuking. So when he announced that he will lay the foundations of the church on Peter’s confession, he said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon bar Jonah.”² But not long after these words he said: “Get behind me, Satan. You are my stumbling block.”³ And in another passage, again, he said “Are you also so completely foolish?”⁴ Moreover, he inspired them with such fear that even John said that when they saw him conversing with the Samaritan woman and reminded him about eating, yet: “No one dared to say to him, ‘What are you looking for?’ or ‘Why are you talking with her?’”⁵ Paul understood this, and following in the steps of his teacher he varied his speech with an eye to the need of his students, at one time cauterizing and cutting, and at another applying a gentle salve. Thus to the Corinthians he said: “What do you want? Should I come to you with a rod, or in love and the spirit of gentleness?”⁶ Yet with the Galatians he took a different tack, “O you foolish Galatians.”⁷ And not just once but even a second time he employed this sort of threatening. He upbraided them at the end of the work, saying, “Let no one cause me troubles.”⁸ And again he seeks to minister

¹ This translation is based on the text provided in *Sancti Patris Nostri Joannis Chrysostomi, In Divi Pauli Epistolam Ad Galatas Commentaria*, Oxford 1852, Field.

² Matthew 16:17.

³ *Ibid.*, v. 23.

⁴ Matthew 15:16.

⁵ John 4:27.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 4:21.

⁷ Galatians 3:1.

⁸ Galatians 6:17.

gently as when he says, “My little children, whom I again bring forth with labor pains.”⁹ There are in fact many such expressions as these.

But it is evident to all, even on a first reading, that this letter is full of passion. So we must explain what it was that had aroused Paul’s anger against his students. For it was no minor issue, nor something trivial, since Paul would not have employed such a marked thrust.¹⁰ Becoming angry in the face of misfortunes is typical of cowardly, cruel, and miserable men, just as losing nerve at major obstacles is the habit of those more sluggish and duller. But Paul is not such a person. So then, what was the particular sin that had stirred him up? It was something great and excessive, and something alienating them all from Christ, as he himself said a little further on: “Look! I Paul tell you plainly that if you submit to circumcision, Christ will do you no good at all.”¹¹ And again, “Whoever of you seek to be justified by the law, you have disqualified yourselves for grace.” So what in the world was this sin? We must identify it rather precisely: those of the Jews who had come to faith were at the same time both holding to their former commitment to Judaism and inebriated by empty doctrine. And wanting to arrogate to themselves the prerogatives of teachers, going to the people of Galatia they began to teach that it was necessary to be circumcised, and to keep sabbaths and new-moons, and not to tolerate Paul who was removing such practices. “For Peter, James, and John (the first¹² of the apostles who were with Christ),” they say, “do not forbid such practices.” And truly they did not forbid them. Yet in doing this they were not presenting it as authoritative teaching, but rather accommodating the weakness of the believers who came from the Jews. But Paul, because he was preaching to the Gentiles, had no need of such accommodation. Therefore, when he was in Judea, he himself also employed this sort of accommodation. But his opponents, in their deception, were not stating the reasons why both Paul and the other apostles were making an accommodation. Instead, they deceived the weaker brothers in claiming that they should not tolerate Paul. For he had shown up “yesterday and a moment ago,” while they had been with Peter. He had become a disciple of the apostles, while they were disciples of Christ. And he was by himself, while they were many, and the pillars of the church. So they were casting at him the charge of hypocrisy, alleging that he was himself abrogating circumcision, “though he has clearly made use of such things elsewhere, and preaches one thing to us, but differently to others.”

Therefore when Paul saw that the whole gentile world was aflame, that a troubling fire had been lit against the church of the Galatians, and that the whole structure was tottering and ran the risk of falling, he was gripped on the one side with righteous anger, and on the other with despair. He made this very clear indeed when he said, “I wanted to be present with you then, and to change my tone.”¹³ He is writing the letter to respond to all this. And from these opening comments he refers to that which they were saying while undermining his reputation, saying that the others were disciples of Christ, though Paul himself was a disciple of the apostles. Thus he began like this: “Paul, an apostle, not from

⁹ Galatians 4:19.

¹⁰ The vivid metaphor Chrysostom employs here is military. *καταφορά* (*kataphora*), prevalent in the Roman historians Polybius, Josephus, and others, is typically used to describe the sudden downward stroke of a sword.

¹¹ Galatians 5:2.

¹² *πρῶτοι* (*prōtoi*) indicates both chronological priority and preeminence.

¹³ Galatians 4:20.

men nor through men.”¹⁴ For those cheats were saying (as I mentioned before) that he was the last of all the apostles, and had been taught by them. For Peter and James and John were called first, and were the main leaders of the disciples. They received their teaching from Christ, and thus more obedience was owed them than him. They, moreover, did not forbid circumcision nor keeping the law. Thus making these claims and others like them, Paul’s opponents were seeking to diminish him, and were at the same time exalting the glory of the other apostles. This they did not in order to extol them, but that they might deceive the Galatians by inappropriately persuading them to pay attention to the law. So naturally he began in this fashion. For because they were treating his teaching with contempt, saying that it was from men, while Peter’s was from Christ, he immediately, from the introduction, set himself against this notion, stating that he was an apostle “not from men, nor through men.” For Ananias baptized Paul,¹⁵ but he had not freed him from error, and did not lead him to faith. Instead, Christ himself after ascending sent that astounding voice to him, through which the Lord caught him like a fish. For while Christ was walking along the sea, he called Peter and his brother, and John and his brother. But Paul he called after ascending to heaven. And just as the other men did not need a second voice but immediately, dropping their nets and all their other affairs, followed him, so Paul also from that first call ascended to the most important position, was baptized, and undertook an implacable war against the Jews. And it was in this respect most of all that he surpassed the other apostles. “For I labored more than they,” he said.¹⁶ But for the time being he does not argue this. Rather, Paul is content in claiming equality with the other apostles. For he was eager not to show that he surpassed them, but to refute the premise of the error. Thus his first statement, “not from men,” was common to all men. For the gospel has its origin and root from above. But the second statement, “not through men,” is particular to the apostles. For Christ did not call them “through men,” but of his own accord “through himself.”

Why did he not mention his call and say “Paul, called not from men,” but instead mentioned his apostleship? It is because his whole argument concerned this point. For his opponents said that the apostles had been entrusted with this teaching by men, and thus it was necessary for him to follow them. But Luke made clear that it was not delivered to him “from men” when he wrote: “And while they were worshipping and fasting before the Lord, the Holy Spirit said ‘Now set apart for me Paul and Barnabas.’”¹⁷ From this it is clear that the authority of the Son and the Spirit is one. For Paul says that in being sent by the Spirit, he was sent by Christ. And it is clear from elsewhere that Paul attributes the things of God to the Spirit. Thus when he is speaking to the elders of Miletus he says, “Keep watch for yourselves and for the flock over which the Holy Spirit has set you as pastors and overseers.”¹⁸ And yet he says in another letter, “Those whom God has established in the church, first apostles, second prophets, then pastors and teachers.”¹⁹ So

¹⁴ Ibid., 1:1a.

¹⁵ Acts 9:18.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:10.

¹⁷ Acts 13:2.

¹⁸ Cf. Acts 20:28ff.

¹⁹ Chrysostom has here conflated, whether deliberately or as a consequence of quoting from memory, two different passages: Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28. From the latter he took the words οὗς μὲν ἔθετο ὁ θεὸς ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ πρῶτον ἀποστόλους, δεύτερον προφήτας, (*hous men etheto ho theos en tē*

he uses this expression indiscriminately, saying that the things of the Spirit are of God, and those of God are of the Spirit. And in another way, he also stops up the mouths of heretics, saying “through Jesus Christ and God his Father.”²⁰ For because heretics say that this word was attributed to the Son as though he were lesser, see what Paul does: he uses the word in the case of the Father, thereby teaching us not to apply any principle whatsoever to an inexpressible nature, not to establish measures or degrees of divinity between the Son and the Father. For after he said “through Jesus Christ,” he added “God the Father.” If in mentioning the Father by himself he had said “through whom,” then they would have devised some sophism,²¹ saying that this expression “through whom” is applied to the Father, since the works of the Son reflect on him. And yet Paul mentions the Son and the Father at the same time; and in applying this expression to them jointly he no longer allows their argument any place. For he does not do this as though attributing now the deeds of the Son to the Father. No, he shows that this expression admits no difference in substance whatsoever. And what then would those say who, with respect to baptism, consider it somehow lesser because one is baptized into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit? For if the Son were lesser than the Father, then what would they say now that the apostle here begins with Christ then moves on to the Father? But we shall speak no such blasphemy. We must not in contending with them depart from the truth. No, even if they should rage ten thousand times, we must keep our eyes on the standards of piety. Therefore, just as we would not say that the Son is greater than the Father simply because he mentioned Christ first—for that would be the very height of absurd foolishness and consummate impiety—so neither would we say that because the Son is placed after the Father, we must suppose that the Son is lesser than the Father.

Next we read “who raised him from the dead.”²² What are you doing, Paul? Though you desire to lead the Judaizing men to faith, you do not bring before them any of those great and brilliant expressions such as you wrote to the Philippians. You said, for example, “Though being in the form of God he did not consider equality with God something to be laid hold of.”²³ You also later said to the Hebrews that “He is the radiance of God’s glory, and the express image of his nature.”²⁴ And then the son of thunder in his introductory words shouted forth that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”²⁵ Many times Jesus himself, when discussing²⁶ with the Jews, used to say that he is as powerful as the Father, and that he

ekklēsia prōton apostolous, deutron prophētas), while he finished the quote with a portion from Ephesians 4, namely ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους (*poimenas kai didaskalous*).

²⁰ Galatians 1:1b.

²¹ Chrysostom uses here the verb σόφιζω (*sophizō*), “to act like a sophist.” In this he alludes to a long tradition stretching back to Gorgias, Prodicus, and other opponents of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues who made the weaker argument the stronger.

²² Galatians 1:1c.

²³ Philippians 2:6.

²⁴ Hebrews 1:3.

²⁵ John 1:1.

²⁶ Chrysostom uses here the somewhat unusual participle φθειρόμενος (*phthengomenos*). This is done apparently *variationis causa*, since he has in previous sentences made use of a range of synonyms including γράφω (*graphō*), λέγω (*legō*), ἀναφωνέω (*anaphōneō*), and ἀναβοάω (*anaboāō*).

possesses the same authority.²⁷ But do you, Paul, not say here any of those things? Instead, omitting them all, do you mention Christ's dispensation according to the flesh, making his cross and death the main point? "Yes," he says. For if Paul were addressing people who had no grand conception about Christ, then saying those things would be called for. But since those who believe that they will be punished if they depart from the law are opposing us, Paul thus mentions the acts through which Christ abolishes the need of the law. I mean, to be precise, the benefit that arose for all from his cross and resurrection. For the statement "in the beginning was the Word," and "He was in the form of God" and "making himself equal to God" and all such—these would suit someone demonstrating the divinity of the Word, not someone adding anything to the present topic. But the statement "who raised Him from the dead" is characteristic of someone calling to mind the chief point of the kindness on our behalf, the very thing that serves Paul's purpose for the question under discussion. For many people are in the habit of not attending to words that represent God's majesty as much as they are to those that manifest his kindness toward men. Therefore, declining to say those kinds of things he spoke about the kindness that was done for us.

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²⁷ In his use of the terms δύναται (*dunatai*) and ἐξουσίαν (*exousian*), Chrysostom registers the long-held distinction between ability and authority and ascribes both to Christ. This distinction is perhaps more common to students of the Latin language, where it is represented by the terms *potentia* and *potestas*. Though the two do not mutually entail the other, in the persons of the Trinity the distinction is not consequential.

ServantReading

Divine Justice, Sinful Humanity, and Eschatological Judgment: Considering David Bentley Hart's Argument against Hell A Review Article

by David VanDrunen

That All Shall Be Saved: Heaven, Hell, and Universal Salvation, by David Bentley Hart. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019, 232 pages, \$26.00.

Eastern Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart's *That All Shall Be Saved* is not the kind of book a person can read lightly, or soon forget. In part, this is due to the book's thesis that all human beings who have ever lived will in fact be saved, and thus that there is no everlasting punishment in hell. But it is also due to the stridency with which Hart argues his case: he claims repeatedly that the traditional Christian doctrine of hell is absurd and repulsive. And it is partly due to the flamboyance of Hart's writing style and his penchant for insulting those who disagree with him. Many books fail to get their readers' attention; this is not one of them.

The book is organized simply. Part I frames the book's question and casts doubt on the answers provided by proponents of the traditional doctrine. Part II consists of four "Meditations" in which Hart lays out his arguments for universalism. Part III provides a brief conclusion.

Hart does not advance a single argument that develops linearly through the book. Thus, I will not provide a chapter-by-chapter description of what he claims and then move on to evaluate his case. I think it best, instead, to identify three kinds of argument he uses and to offer some analysis along the way.

The Argument from Intuition

The first kind of argument is one of intuition, or perhaps, disgust. Hart begins Part I by recounting his experience as a fourteen-year-old when he read an old legend about hell and shortly thereafter, by coincidence, heard a sermon that referred to this legend. His initial reaction to the story was "a slight shiver of distaste" (12), and he says he has never really wavered from that intuition. He later describes himself as an "instinctive universalist" (65) and writes: "The whole question of hell is one whose answer should be immediately obvious to a properly functioning moral intelligence" (29).

Technically, I suppose, this is not an "argument." But it plays a role in Hart's case. Hart is convinced that the idea of an everlasting hell does not and should not sit well with a normal person. Revulsion is the natural and proper gut-reaction to the traditional doctrine of hell.

I am not so sure that every normal person feels such instinctive revulsion. I suspect that those who have suffered terrible wrongs in this life may have rather different instincts from those of us who enjoy relatively comfortable lives. Nevertheless, Hart has a point. Most serious Christians probably have, on some occasions, been troubled by the thought of an everlasting hell, perhaps when contemplating a loved one who died without professing Christ. Every autumn, I teach a course in which I lecture on hell on the last day of the semester. I never relish getting to this topic. It is my least favorite part of Christian doctrine to teach.

And yet we always need to test our intuitions. Sometimes our gut reactions are profoundly correct, but we sinners dare not trust them. And a moment's thought reminds us why our gut reactions about hell might be particularly suspect: why *wouldn't* a sinner feel revulsion at the claim that sinners deserve everlasting punishment? Wouldn't a chain-smoker experience "a slight shiver of distaste" upon hearing that cigarettes cause emphysema? Learning that something we love has profoundly bad consequences is never likely to make us comfortable.

Hart would surely not disagree that our instincts need to be tested, and he offers arguments meant to confirm our allegedly normal intuitions. Let us now consider them.

The Metaphysical Argument

What I call Hart's "metaphysical argument" is the core of his case. As explained below, this argument is much more important to Hart than his argument from Scripture. He spends his greatest effort explaining and defending a metaphysics (i.e., a philosophical theory of existence, causation, the good, and the divine). In this metaphysics, it is simply incredible—that is, not able to be believed—that God would punish anyone in an everlasting hell.

"The actual question," according to Hart, is whether it is possible to love a God who has made a world in which everlasting hell is even a possibility (12–13). The "primary question" concerns whether the God who could create such a world "can in fact be the infinitely good God of love that Christianity says he is" (17). Hart answers a resounding no to both questions. "If Christianity taken as a whole is indeed an entirely coherent and credible system of belief, then the universalist understanding of its message is the only one possible" (3).

One line of his metaphysical argument, found primarily in his First Meditation, concerns the nature of God. Hart argues that if we say God created all things *ex nihilo*, then at the end of history every created thing must be reconciled to God in perfect blessedness and nothing can be left behind. Were this not the case, evil would be part of God's intentions and dispositions, in which case God would not be the good as such. It is metaphysically impossible, in other words, to believe in an everlasting hell once we affirm (with traditional Christianity) that God is both the good itself and creator *ex nihilo*. According to Hart, this also implies that God does not condemn people to hell "solely as a demonstration of his power to do as he wishes," as proponents of double predestination claim, such as classical Thomists and (most consistently) Calvin (47–48).

A second line of Hart's metaphysical argument, contained primarily in his Third Meditation, focuses on what it means to be a human person. He appeals especially to the Eastern church father Gregory of Nyssa. Hart concludes that we cannot be saved as persons unless we are saved with all other persons. All must be saved, or no one is saved. Hart appeals to the continuity between our identity in this life and our identity in the life to come. If we have loved people in this world, we cannot simply forget about them in the

next world, and thus we cannot be truly blessed if we know that some of them are in hell. In fact, to know that *any* other human person is in hell would leave us unsatisfied with heaven.

A third and final line of Hart's metaphysical argument, enshrined especially in his Fourth Meditation concerns the rational will. Hart claims that every rational will *must* eventually exhaust the possibilities of rebellion against God and choose him as its ultimate good. According to Hart, this answers today's most popular (and benevolent) argument for an everlasting hell, namely, that God respects the rational freedom of his creatures so much that he allows them to resist him permanently. In such a scenario, everlasting hell is what rational creatures themselves freely choose. For Hart, "there could scarcely be a worse defense" of everlasting hell. "It makes no sense whatsoever" (34).

Why does it make no sense? Hart agrees that God made rational creatures to love him freely, but he denies that rational creatures who are *truly* free could reject God. People reject God here and now, indeed, but they do so because of ignorance, bad influences, or some other hindrance. There is no true freedom in this life. Mitigating circumstances always exist. And if those who reject God in this life do so without true freedom, then God would be unjust to punish them everlastingly. The punishment would be disproportionate to the wrong. Without unlimited freedom, there is no unlimited guilt. Conversely, a person is only truly free when he chooses well and thus chooses the good for which he was created. Jesus himself was a truly free person and was unable not to choose the good. For Hart, evil is nothing but the privation of the good, and thus has no power or substance to attract the free, rational person. Even if it takes countless ages after their death, all rational persons eventually must recognize God as the good and give up all attraction to evil.

One other aspect of Hart's metaphysical discussions is worth mentioning. He notes that many Christians, when trying to explain how a perfectly good and omnipotent God could create a universe that contains hell, appeal to the inevitable limitations of human knowledge when contemplating a transcendent and incomprehensible God. Hart dismisses such appeals as "a dissembling euphemism for the unresolved logical contradictions in their own systems of belief" (56). Affirming universalism is the only logically coherent route.

What to make of Hart's metaphysical claims? One remarkable thing is how utterly confident he is in his conclusions. He says he is just following standard Christian metaphysical ideas, and in a sense this is true. To the extent there is a Christian metaphysics, it must acknowledge God as the good itself, as the omnipotent first cause, and the like. And yet, with very few exceptions, no Christian theologian has thought that these ideas make the reality of everlasting hell *impossible*. Hart finds allies in Origen (!), Gregory of Nyssa, and a handful of obscure Eastern Orthodox theologians, while defying the diverse host of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox theologians who have professed the absolute goodness of God while also affirming everlasting hell as a necessary Christian doctrine. If universalism is as perfectly clear and logically compelling as Hart indicates, it is amazing that so very few have recognized it.

How did this happen? Hart suggests that Christians embraced illogical notions and composed bad arguments for hell because this is the sort of thing that happens when people think they have to believe something that's false and then try to justify it. Hart has his finger on something important here. Christians have indeed felt obligated to believe in an everlasting hell, due to what Scripture teaches and the church confesses about it. This in turn has provoked some Christians to offer intellectual rationales (some better, some worse) seeking to explain how a perfectly good and sovereign God could will such a hell. It has also inspired many Christians to recognize the limits of their finite knowledge and to

acknowledge that we may not be able to construct a philosophically comprehensive solution to the problem of evil.

The order of thought is important: Christians have believed in an everlasting hell because of the testimony of divine revelation and *then* have tried to explain it metaphysically as best as they can. In contrast, Hart believes there is no fully satisfying metaphysical explanation for an everlasting hell, and *therefore* he rejects the traditional Christian doctrine. For Hart, the metaphysics comes first. The Christian faith he professes depends upon that.

Perhaps that sounds unfair, but Hart confirms such suspicions in the book's remarkable final paragraph. He notes that people ask him whether he would reject Christianity if he became convinced that Christianity required him to believe in an everlasting hell. Without hesitation, he says yes, that is the case. He will not "assent to a picture of reality that I regard as morally corrupt, contrary to justice, perverse, inexcusably cruel, deeply irrational, and essentially wicked" (208). He concludes by stating: "In the end, we must love the Good" (209). The *Good*, not the Christian God. He does think he loves the Christian God, but only because this God fits his metaphysical conception of the good.

The Biblical Argument

Hart gives some attention to Scripture, especially in his Second Meditation. As he says, somewhat humorously (at least to me), he is not "so recklessly speculative as to imagine that Christians are allowed to make any theological pronouncements in total abstraction from or contradiction of scripture" (92). He seems to know that he is recklessly speculative, but not *that* much.

Even so, Hart's view of biblical authority is rather weak. He does not think "the testimony of the Bible on doctrinal and theological matters must be wholly internally consistent" (92). Later, he says that Scripture is not a "system" of truth. Its texts "defy synthesis in a canon of exact doctrines" (161). How then does one know what parts of Scripture to heed? The answer, apparently, is that he grants "a certain presumptive authority . . . to whatever kind of language the Bible uses most preponderantly" (93).

One notices up front, therefore, that Hart has left himself some significant leeway. Even if *some* biblical texts teach the existence of an everlasting hell, it would not disprove his case. As long as he has a preponderance of biblical evidence on his side, his claims are secure. But despite this room to maneuver, Hart does not concede a single text to his opponents. Instead, he claims to recover the thought-world of Scripture and early Christianity, which has been "corrupted by centuries of theology written in entirely different spiritual and intellectual environments, and in alien tongues" (2). Readers familiar with the classical liberal theologian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) may sense a resemblance between Hart's quest and Harnack's program of recovering the kernel of Jesus's teaching by stripping away the husk of centuries of theological accretions.

Early on, Hart summarizes "the story of salvation" as he understands it, as taught by "the earliest and greatest of the church fathers"; We were all born corrupted, mortal, and in bondage to Satan, although "not guilty and damnable," and Christ came "to set us free, to buy us out of slavery, to heal us, to restore us to our true estate," but not to shed his "innocent blood . . . to assuage God's indignation" (26–27). These are familiar themes in Eastern Orthodox theology. Elsewhere, Hart summarizes his understanding of New Testament eschatology, which he draws especially from Origin and Gregory of Nyssa: The New Testament speaks of both the punishment of the ungodly and the final reconciliation of

all, but these are not “two antithetical possibilities tantalizingly or menacingly dangled before us, but rather two different moments within a seamless narrative, two distinct eschatological horizons, one enclosed within the other.” In short, God’s (corrective) punishment of the ungodly occurs within the “immanent course of history” while the reconciliation of all occurs at the “final horizon of all horizons” (102–3). For Hart, the “course of history” continues (at least for many) far beyond death. They may require a long duration of chastisement and persuasion. But in the end, all will be saved. What about texts that seem to describe an everlasting hell? Hart says that all of them use metaphorical images and should not be taken as “exact documentary portraits of some final reality” (94–95).

To make his case, Hart follows a twofold strategy. First, he simply quotes one New Testament text after another that speaks about the salvation of “all” or “the world,” but without actually exegeting the texts (95–102). (Later, he does comment on Romans 9–11 at some length, arguing that Paul clearly teaches universalism and only considers individual election and reprobation as a bleak hypothesis that he rejects [132–38].) He claims that those who qualify any of these “all” texts are explaining away the obvious.

Then, second, Hart discusses a number of New Testament texts that seem to speak about hell or everlasting punishment and explains why they don’t teach this. He basically dismisses evidence from Revelation, which he doesn’t think is a book about eschatology, but rather “a manifesto written in figurative code by a Jewish Christian who believed in keeping the Law of Moses” and who predicted “the inauguration of a new historical epoch in which Rome will have fallen, Jerusalem will have been restored, and the Messiah will have been given power ‘to rule the gentiles with a rod of iron.’” Revelation “is all a religious and political fable” (107–8). Well, so much for that. Hart takes evidence from the Gospels more seriously. But New Testament language about “the fate of the derelict . . . could scarcely be more evocatively vague” (112). The Gospels use various terms commonly translated “hell,” yet we cannot be certain what any of them really meant to convey. And the Greek term usually translated “everlasting” or “eternal” (*aiōnios* αἰώνιος) probably doesn’t mean either one. To whatever extent Scripture does teach some sort of judgment by fire, it refers only to the purgatorial correction of the wicked, to lead them toward their final reconciliation with God.

It is difficult to believe that Hart’s biblical arguments will persuade many people. He heaps up quotations of texts saying that God will save “all,” but those texts are not news to anybody. As Reformed writers especially have long noted, every affirmation of “all” comes in a context. If we read texts with even a little care, we recognize that “all” often does not mean every person who ever lived, but “all” those in a certain group or class. Just this morning, I happened to be reading Daniel 2. Daniel says that God had given into Nebuchadnezzar’s hand “the children of men, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them *all*” (2:38). The Babylonian empire was impressive, but Nebuchadnezzar did not rule over every single person, animal, and bird who ever lived, or even over all those that lived in his own day. We have to read each “all” statement in its own context. Piling up quotations proves nothing. It is interesting that Hart excoriates those who change the meaning of “all” within a single verse, Romans 5:18. Yet he does virtually the same thing with the verse from which he derives his book’s title, 1 Timothy 2:4. Just before Paul states that God desires “all” people to be saved, he commands Christians to pray for “all” people (2:1)—clearly not a command to pray for each and every person who

has ever lived. Competent Reformed writers have dealt with all the texts that Hart quotes, and I will say nothing more about them here.

There are a great many other things one might say in response to Hart's treatment of Scripture. We may grant that *aiōnios* (αἰώνιος or the Hebrew *olam* עולם) does not always mean "everlasting," and yet the biblical writers use the same terms to describe *both* the blessedness of the righteous *and* the desolation of the wicked (e.g., Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46). Hart's theory demands the ultimate redemption of Satan, yet Revelation says God will throw him into the lake of fire "for ever and ever" (or, "unto the ages of the ages," as Hart might prefer, but it hardly changes the meaning) (20:10). And all human beings whose names aren't written in the book of life will join Satan there (20:15). Are the names of some people who will eventually be saved really absent from the book of life?

And as for texts Hart does not consider at all, we might think of Jesus's response to the question whether few will be saved: he urges them to enter through the narrow door, since many will seek to do so and be unable, but be cast out of his kingdom (Luke 13:22–30). Jesus also said that it would have been better for Judas not to have been born (Matt. 26:24), which makes no sense if Judas will one day enjoy eschatological blessedness. Or we might think of the urgency of the gospel call. In 2 Corinthians 6:1–2, Paul *implores* his readers to be reconciled to God because *now* is the day of salvation. For Hart, the day of salvation will go on for as long as necessary for everyone to repent. But of course, Hart's vision of repentance through countless ages after death is totally absent from Scripture. For Scripture, "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

The Justice of God

Despite Hart's protests, therefore, Christians are obligated to believe in an everlasting hell. But this review does not seem complete without offering a brief word in response to Hart's metaphysical arguments. I cannot address all of his claims, so I focus on one of the most important: Is God unjust to punish people in an everlasting hell? Another way to put the question is whether sins committed within our present history truly deserve an eschatological penalty.

If they do, our sins must be utterly heinous. A few of Hart's comments indicate that he doesn't think this is true of many sins, at least. For instance, he embraces the view that Adam and Eve sinned in "childlike ignorance" (43) and later refers to "the most trivial peccadillo, the pettiest lapse of plain morality" (132). Yet what seems trivial to us is ultimately an offense against *God*. Hart lambastes the argument that we should measure the seriousness of sin not according to our own finiteness but according to God's infinite character, but this argument can't be dismissed so easily. Surely we all recognize that a particular sinful action is more wicked when committed against a person of greater honor (as recognized in Westminster Larger Catechism 151). It is more heinous for a child to insult his parents than to insult his playmates. But to offend God (as all our sins do) is infinitely more heinous, since God's honor is infinitely greater than that of the most honorable human being. This implies that the just penalty for our sins is literally beyond our ability to measure. And if so, it is difficult to see how everlasting punishment is disproportionate.

We might supplement this argument with another consideration. What if God, from the beginning, held out eschatological blessedness as the goal for his human creation, as Scripture indicates (e.g., Heb 2:5–10) and as so many Reformed and other Christians have believed? Then, too, an everlasting penalty for our first parents' sin seems fitting. What

could be more proportionate to rejecting eschatological blessedness than receiving an eschatological curse?

These are weighty matters. I confess that I sometimes find it hard to affirm the justice of everlasting punishment. But I also trust that when I see the splendor of heavenly glory on the last day, without being blinded by the least sinful inkling, I will understand the gravity of human rebellion in a way I cannot now.

Concluding Reflections

There are many more things to say, but I conclude with three brief remarks. First, readers should understand just how radically Hart condemns the traditional Christian view of hell. This view represents “communal self-deception” (19) and “collective derangement” (19). It is “intrinsically loathsome and degrading” (202) and a “horrid notion” (204). Arguments in support of it are “manifestly absurd,” “*prima facie* nonsensical,” and “gibberish” (202). It portrays a God of “boundless cruelty” (50) and “unalloyed spite” (21). He is “viciously vindictive” and “monstrous” (166). Toward such a God one feels “a kind of remote, vacuous loathing” (23). Thus, in the name of (a tiny minority stream of) Christianity, Hart launches a scathing critique of traditional Christianity, and in so doing he arms the open opponents of Christianity with all sorts of ammunition to attack the faith.

Second, his critique of everlasting hell entails an equally strong critique of related doctrines, including predestination, original sin (particularly imputation of Adam’s guilt), and substitutionary atonement. Such doctrines are “degrading nonsense” (25), “a sickly parody of the Christianity of the New Testament” (27), “repellant,” and “wicked” (75). Late Augustinian theology rests on “catastrophic misreadings of scripture” and is characterized by “sheer moral wretchedness” (200). Calvinism’s doctrine of limited atonement is “nauseating” (162).

Finally, Hart is an intellectual bully. He not only tries to out-argue people but also taunts and insults them. To mention just two examples, he refers to the “manifest imbecilities” of one particular group of opponents (92) and dismisses a certain writer as one who “periodically insists on perpetrating theology, always with catastrophic results” (149). It is more than a little ironic that someone who attacks the doctrine of hell (in part) in the name of love and compassion can show such arrogance and contempt for fellow professing Christians. I wonder if Yale University Press would publish a book that engaged in such ridicule against a group *other than* traditional Christians.

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The Christian's True Identity: What It Means to Be in Christ *by Jonathan Landry Cruse*

by Andy Wilson

The Christian's True Identity: What It Means to Be in Christ, by Jonathan Landry Cruse. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019, x + 155 pages, \$14.00, paper.

To be human is to reckon with the matter of one's identity. People have always had to answer the question, "Who am I?" But in our day, this seems more complicated than ever. Proponents of identity politics claim that a person is defined by the racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and sexuality groups in which the person locates his or her identity. It is not surprising that this has contributed to the increasing fragmentation of our society. What is surprising, and troubling, is that a number of Christians are embracing the tenets of identity politics and seeking to apply them to life in the church.

We can be thankful that Pastor Jonathan Landry Cruse has written a book that sheds biblical light upon this situation. In *The Christian's True Identity*, he essentially unpacks what is expressed in the first question of the Heidelberg Catechism, where the Christian confesses that his only comfort rests upon the assurance that "I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ." As Christians, our identity is not rooted in our race, our ethnicity, or our gender. It is certainly not located in the struggles that we experience with sin and temptation. Instead, our identity is grounded upon the glorious reality of being "in Christ."

In ten chapters, Cruse explores various aspects of our union with Christ. While other books have been written on the subject of union with Christ, several features make this one stand out. In addition to being solidly grounded in the Reformed confessional tradition, it is compellingly written and accessible to ordinary Christians. Each chapter explains the Bible's teaching in a faithful and clear manner that connects with the world in which we live. This is reflective of the fact that the book is based upon material that was first delivered in the pulpit.

The opening chapter shows how the teaching of Scripture confronts the misguided yet popular assumption that true liberty means having the right to define your own conception of existence and identity. As Cruse explains, believers in Christ have "an identity that the world cannot offer and with which the world cannot compete. Nothing but an identity founded in Christ is sustainable through all the changes of life and will satisfy even into eternity" (15).

The book's treatment of the doctrine of election is especially noteworthy for how it focuses our attention upon the fact that our election is in Christ. Cruse writes, "God was thinking of us not in and of ourselves, and certainly not in and of our sin, but truly in and of His Son. We are in His Son in the sense that we were the people given to His Son" (28). This is what makes election a source of immense comfort instead of a subject that generates incurable anxiety. As John Calvin put it,

If we are chosen in Christ, we shall find no assurance of election in ourselves; nor even in God the Father, considered alone, abstractly from the Son. Christ, therefore, is the mirror, in which it behooves us to contemplate our election; and here we may do it with safety.¹

Cruse relates justification and sanctification to union with Christ in a manner that avoids common pitfalls, such as rejecting the logical and theological priority of justification to sanctification, or making our justification dependent on our sanctification. His exposition of sanctification emphasizes how our growth in grace is the working out of the new identity and standing with God that we already possess by virtue of our union with Christ. The book concludes with chapters dealing with how our union with Christ delivers us from the world, the flesh, the devil, and death, and how the outward and ordinary means of grace function to deepen our communion with Christ.

This book would be an excellent resource for an adult Sunday school class or book study. It could also be used in ministry to high schoolers or college students, many of whom may be especially vulnerable to our culture's false assumptions and assertions about identity. Study questions are included at the end of each chapter.

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¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.24.5.

The Lion in the Waste Land *by Janice Brown*

by Judith M. Dinsmore

The Lion in the Waste Land: Fearsome Redemption in the Work of C. S. Lewis, Dorothy L. Sayers, and T. S. Eliot, by Janice Brown. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2018, 216 pages, \$45.00.

In *The Lion in the Waste Land*, Janice Brown, who taught literature at Grove City College for two decades, draws together the prominent works of literary giants and contemporaries Dorothy Sayers, C. S. Lewis, and T. S. Eliot, and considers them in context of these themes: Christ, conversion, angelic interference, redemptive suffering during World War II, pilgrimage, and redeeming the times. “I believe that the key ideas of Lewis, Sayers, and Eliot are most powerful when considered simultaneously,” she writes on the last page of the book. Given the breadth and variety of the three authors’ output, Brown’s work is ambitious and her transitions from the ideas in one work to the next occasionally seem contrived, but she does ably demonstrate, especially in her line-by-line expositions, the shared Christian imagination that fired these three. And by so doing, she fires our own.

Brown first describes the actual relationship of the three authors, which is a story quickly told. They ran in different circles. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) was an Oxford professor and author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* but also numerous apologetic essays and a science fiction trilogy. Dorothy Sayers (1893–1957) began as a writer of detective fiction but, during World War II, became known for her Christian drama—most famously, *The Man Born to Be King*. (Sayers was the sole subject of Brown’s previous book.) T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) was a poet and literary critic living in London as an American expatriate. Sayers and Lewis became friends and correspondents, but Sayers venerated Eliot only from afar, and Lewis in his early career mocked Eliot’s modernity. Alluding to the first lines Eliot’s famous 1915 poem “Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” Lewis wrote, “For twenty years I’ve stared my level best / To see if evening—any evening—would suggest / A patient etherized upon a table” (10). After Eliot’s conversion to Christianity, however, their relationship, always professional, grew warmer.

As Brown records, the tempest of the Blitz and World War II shook all three out of the shelves they likely would have perched on indefinitely. It was the “crucible in which the prophetic function of Lewis, Eliot, and Sayers was refined and focused” (162). They became apologists for the faith, in print and on the radio.

Though Lewis, Eliot, and Sayers made no claim to speak for the church in any official capacity, their words rang with authority. The essays and lectures they produced in response to the war were not precisely “theological” in nature, yet they were shoring up and rebuilding something that had been crumbling into ruin—Christian witness in the midst of a secular culture. (170)

This came at a personal cost: The Blitz pulled T. S. Eliot, the consummate gentleman of letters, onto the streets as an air raid warden to patrol London on foot all night before heading to the office in the morning. (What he saw on patrol fed the images that later

appeared in “Little Gidding.”) Lewis’s wartime writing and speaking on religion, which was not his subject of study, “meant the loss of the approval of his Oxford colleagues” (200). He was never given the promotion to full professorship that he deserved, Brown claims.

These three were apologists for the faith out of compulsion, each in their own way crying out against a culture gone wrong. But their vocation was always art. Brown draws out that difference: “Their apologetic effectiveness was the greatest the modern world had seen; yet . . . to point people to Christ through pictures, symbols, and stories was their highest calling” (62).

In explaining how these authors’ texts are drenched in biblical imagery, Brown is at her best. For example, she demonstrates how one angelic being in Sayers’s play *The Zeal of Thy House* carries out duties of account-keeping and calculation-making that is similar to the angel measuring the house of God in Ezekiel 40–47 and the angel measuring Jerusalem in Zechariah 2. “The angels’ painstaking verification of physical dimensions indicates God’s familiarity with minute details,” Brown writes (120). For another example, Brown connects a scene from C. S. Lewis’s *Perelandra* in which the *eldila*, an other-worldly being, is attempting a form that the mortal protagonist can handle and appears as rolling concentric wheels (135–36) with the angelic beings in Ezekiel 1:16, “their appearance and construction [is] as it were a wheel within a wheel,” and then with Eliot’s *Murder in the Cathedral*: “that the wheel may turn and still / Be forever still” (140). “Eliot’s wheel imagery harmonizes with the imagery of Lewis and Ezekiel, in which wheels represent the relentless and inscrutable purposes of God” (140).

Calvinists will quibble with Brown’s soteriology. She seems to push too hard to see conversion in the texts as “choosing to be the chosen of God” (88–91).

What do these authors matter to us now? Their apologetic works are exemplary and still worth reading, to be sure, although written for a different era. But I don’t think Brown wrote *The Lion in the Waste Land* to display anything but the incredible Christian imaginations of Sayers, Eliot, and Lewis. Their images, built on their not-slight knowledge of biblical imagery and Christian tradition, bring the unseen spiritual conflict all around us within our ken. The Waste Land of the modern world, Christ as a fearsome Lion, Christ as a wounded surgeon, conversion as being devoured by three white leopards (103), angels as troubling guests at a cocktail party (149), our lives as a pilgrimage—all these images ripple with meaning and help us to truly see, silencing the images that scream falsehoods from our screens and our earbuds. They speak powerfully to the horror-struck or broken-hearted. Pastors and teachers do well to imagine well: “Although preaching is a didactic form of rhetoric, seeking to teach and persuade through reasoned argument, preaching may also employ the imaginative devices of poetry, like metaphorical language and pictorial images” (34).

World War II came unexpectedly and terribly to England in 1940; we don’t know what will come unexpectedly and terribly to us, personally or nationally. When it comes, we need, not just the terms *redemptive suffering* or *perseverance of the saints*, but also the lines “*three trees on the low sky*” and “*no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, / With an alien people clutching their gods. / I should be glad of another death*” (218).

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ServantPoetry

John Milton (1608–1674)

Sonnet 9: Lady That in the Prime of Earliest Youth

Lady that in the prime of earliest youth
Wisely hast shunned the broad way and the green,
And with those few art eminently seen
That labor up the hill of heavenly Truth,

The better part with Mary, and with Ruth,
Chosen thou hast; and they that overween
And at thy growing virtues fret their spleen,
No anger find in thee, but pity and ruth.

Thy care is fixed and zealously attends
To fill thy odorous lamp with deeds of light,
And hope that reaps not shame. Therefore be sure

Thou, when the Bridegroom with his feastful friends
Passes to bliss at the mid-hour of night,
Hast gained thy entrance, virgin wise and pure.