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The JTLL serves as a scholarly forum for the refinement and dissemination of research pertaining to interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary implications of transformative learning and its applications for leadership in diverse contexts.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE:
A BRIEF INTRODUCTION
TO TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING
Christopher Cone, ThD, PhD, PhD

INTRODUCTION

While the term *transformative* learning has been used to describe other education methods (particularly by Jack Mezirow and the model he developed), we are using the term extensively and with a different referent altogether. The model we are attempting to describe and utilize seems a better fit for the moniker, because the model we are describing (not developing) is *guaranteed* by its Designer to result in transformation. No other educational model would make such a claim. If this model promises so much, then it will be beneficial to understand exactly what this model is and why it is so valuable. It further invites educators to ground their understanding of human growth and development in the fundamental principles of this model, and thus to recognize that our descriptions of reality, how we arrive at them, and what we should do about them are largely shaped by these ideas. In short, transformative learning is a central component to an anthropology that reflects reality; it is what we are designed for, and it has glorious purpose and outcomes.

THE TERMINOLOGY

The Apostle Paul tells us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds,¹ to be filled with the Spirit, which results in walking in wisdom.² In earlier contexts Paul explains that every believer already has the Holy Spirit indwelling them,³ it is evident then that Paul isn't prescribing that believers somehow get more of the Holy Spirit, but rather that they would

¹ Romans 12:2.

² Ephesians 5:17-18.

³ Ephesians 1:13-14.

be filled with Him in the same way someone might be controlled with wine (which he prohibits, by the way). Paul adds that the written word of God is the sword of the Spirit,⁴ and it is by that we are prepared for battle. It is by that written word that we are taught, reproved, corrected, and trained so that we will be fully equipped for all that we are designed to be.⁵ We are directed to allow that word to dwell richly within us.⁶ Paul prescribes to Timothy that he should be diligent in handling that word accurately so that he will be a proven worker needing not to be ashamed.⁷

This word is central to the design and function of human life. Jesus Himself modeled responding to testing and difficulty by invoking the words, “It is written.”⁸ He spoke of how believers should abide in Him⁹ and how they are sanctified (continually grown and set apart) by the word of truth.¹⁰ There Jesus refers to the Father’s word. Paul adds that this word is Jesus’s word also.¹¹ Jesus,¹² Paul,¹³ and Peter¹⁴ explain how it is the Spirit’s word as well.

It is evident, then, that all three Persons – God the Father, Jesus the Christ (God the Son), and the Holy Spirit (who was sent by the Father and the Son¹⁵) – have worked together to provide us the incredible written word that has the power to renew our minds and is completely efficacious in any purpose for which it is sent.¹⁶ This is why I often refer to the Scriptures as *transformative literature* – because our Creator uses that literature in us to transform us and allow us to be who He has

⁴ Ephesians 6:17.

⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Ephesians 2:10.

⁶ Colossians 3:16.

⁷ 2 Timothy 2:15.

⁸ E.g., Matthew 4:4,6,7.

⁹ John 15.

¹⁰ John 17:17.

¹¹ Colossians 3:16.

¹² John 16:19.

¹³ Ephesians 6:17.

¹⁴ 2 Peter 1:20-21.

¹⁵ John 14:26, 16:7.

¹⁶ Isaiah 55:11.

designed us to be. There is no other recipe given in Scripture for ongoing human transformation, nor for the renewing of the mind which is the vehicle for that transformation.

There is, of course, the *positional* renewal and regeneration of the Holy Spirit,¹⁷ which is the new life given to all who believe in Jesus¹⁸ as an expression of the Father's grace, love, and sovereignty.¹⁹ That positional renewal is accomplished once and for all at the moment of belief,²⁰ and as illustrated by the principle of adoption as children of God,²¹ our position in Christ is certain and irrevocable.²²

With the joyous platform of that certain and eternal position, we are exhorted to walk in a manner worthy of our calling.²³ We are designed to do good,²⁴ and we have been adopted as children of our Heavenly Father.²⁵ The expectation is that we will be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we will be able to demonstrate what God's design (will) is.²⁶ This is the Biblical perspective on human education and growth. If it has indeed come from our Creator (and based on the recorded testimony of Jesus,²⁷ I believe it has), then it is *the*

¹⁷ Titus 3:5.

¹⁸ John 3:3, 6:47, see also Romans 4:2-5.

¹⁹ Romans 3:24, John 3:16, Ephesians 1:4-6.

²⁰ As in Genesis 15:6, Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:8-9, 2 Corinthians 5:17.

²¹ Ephesians 1:4-5, 1 John 3:1-2.

²² Romans 11:29.

²³ Ephesians 4:1.

²⁴ Ephesians 2:10.

²⁵ Ephesians 1:4-5.

²⁶ Romans 12:2.

²⁷ "Jesus' testimony in Luke 11:50-51 indicates that this basic structure of the Hebrew Bible as Genesis-Chronicles was recognized in Jesus' day. Although Chronicles is not chronologically the last book of the Old Testament (the events of Ezra-Nehemiah followed those of the Chronicles), it apparently was the last to be added to the canon. Note Jesus' observation: "The blood of all the prophets since the foundation of the world may be charged against this generation from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who was killed between the altar and the house of God" (Lk. 11:50b-51a). Abel was the first identified in Scripture (Gen. 4:8) to have been killed for his faithfulness; Zechariah, while not the last chronologically, is the last listed in Chronicles (2 Chr. 24:20-22), which

reality of human education and growth, and ought to be the subject of our inquiry and the basis of our educational endeavors.

A DEFINITION AND IMPLICATIONS

To distill the concept to its simplest idea, it may be beneficial to define transformative learning as *the model designed by our Creator for human growth, whereby people are transformed by the renewing of their mind as they are filled by and as they put into practice the transformative literature (Biblical text) authored and provided by our Creator.* Transformative learning, thusly defined, has implications for every area of human life as it is foundational for human understanding and conduct. One example is in what we might call transformative leadership, the application of transformative learning principles in the processes of assisting and guiding other individuals and communities in their own transformative growth.

Transformative learning as a theocentric rather than anthropocentric (or even biocentric) model allows us to

traditionally has been the final book of the Hebrew Old Testament. Jesus, therefore, by his statement emphasizes the present (at the time of His statement) generation's accountability for all the martyrs of the Old Testament...Further, Christ, in promising the coming of the Holy Spirit, identified His role in revelation and inspiration of New Testament writings (Jn. 16:12-15), and commissioned the apostles to bear witness of the truth He would reveal (Mt. 10:14, 15; 28:19; Lk. 10:16; Jn. 13:20; 15:27; 16:13; 17:20; Acts 1:8; 9:15-17; compare Ex. 4:15 and 1 Cor. 14:37; Rev. 22:19). Apostles, therefore, make authoritative claims for their writings (i.e., note Paul's claims in 1 Cor. 2:13; 14:37; Gal. 1:7-8; 1 Thes. 4:2,15; 2 Thes. 3:6, 12, 14). Those specifically referenced as apostles account for the greatest volume of New Testament writings...However, not all of the New Testament books were written by apostles. Those writers who did not have apostleship most certainly must have had the gift of revelatory prophecy (as identified in 1 Cor. 13:8-13), and each had significant ministries in direct association with the apostles." (Christopher Cone, *Prolegomena on Biblical Hermeneutics and Method*, 2nd Edition [Tyndale Seminary Press, 2012], 89-92.

contextualize learning properly, and helps us to recognize the core ideas (purpose, design, method, content, etc.) involved in human learning, so that we can engage that wonderful endeavor as our Creator designed and for the demonstration of His character and purposes.

THE LIFE AND THEOLOGICAL METHOD
OF LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER
Part 1 (Introduction and Historical Background)
David W. Gunn, PhD

INTRODUCTION

Although the extent of his contributions is not always acknowledged or appreciated, it would be difficult to imagine a figure more instrumental in shaping twentieth-century American evangelical Christianity than Lewis Sperry Chafer. The influence of dispensational theology and Dallas Theological Seminary played a crucial role in the development of modern American evangelicalism and fundamentalism. In turn, the development of dispensational theology and the legacy of Dallas Theological Seminary owe much to Chafer's efforts. Zachariades lists Lewis Sperry Chafer, John Nelson Darby, and C. I. Scofield as the three most famous and influential propagators of dispensationalism.¹ Walvoord identified Chafer's eight-volume magnum opus, *Systematic Theology*, as the "first consistently premillennial systematic theology ever written," and further asserted of the work, "For the first time modern Fundamentalism has been systematized in an unabridged systematic theology."² As the founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary, Chafer profoundly shaped DTS's identity and core values. And Chafer's direct influence on American evangelicalism is probably eclipsed by his indirect influence: many of his students—chiefly J. F. Walvoord, J. D. Pentecost, and C. C. Ryrie—imbibed Chafer's theological instruction and then proceeded to contribute significantly to the shape of American evangelicalism at both the popular and

¹ Doros Zachariades, "Dispensation," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, edited by Chad Owen Brand, Charles W. Draper, and Archie W. England (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 432.

² John F. Walvoord, "A Review of Lewis Sperry Chafer's 'Systematic Theology,'" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105, no. 417 (Ja–Mr 1948): 127.

scholarly levels. In all these ways, Chafer made a profound contribution to the development of American evangelical and fundamentalist thought.

At times, Chafer's influence has been minimized and his motivations misconstrued. Some would cast Chafer as simply a passive recipient and regurgitator of the Darbyite tradition.³ While Chafer was indeed deeply influenced by the teachings of prominent dispensationalists (chiefly C. I. Scofield), such a linkage of Chafer and Darby is overly reductionistic. This article will argue that Chafer is best understood first and foremost as a Biblicist, not as a defender of any theological system as such.

Joseph Boles takes a slightly different tack in his interpretation of Chafer. He writes, "Chafer's scheme is more rationalistic than biblical."⁴ (Strangely, this charge comes only one page after Boles discusses Chafer's self-restriction in the field of Anthropology to intra-biblical sources and his outright dismissal of theological theories based on extra-biblical sources; hardly the perspective of a rationalist.) While Chafer's approach to theology did adopt a foundationalist posture, his thoroughgoing suspicion of human reason in light of creaturely finitude and fallenness strongly undercuts any charge of a commitment to rationalism.⁵

³ See, e.g., Daniel P. Fuller, "The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism" (Th.D. Dissertation, Northern Baptist Seminary, 1957), 379; Michael D. Williams, "Book Review of 'The Promise of the Dawn: The Eschatology of Lewis Sperry Chafer,'" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 3 (S 1993): 417.

⁴ Joe R. Boles, "The Theology of Lewis Sperry Chafer in the Light of His Theological Method" (Th.D. Dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1963), 68.

⁵ The late R. C. Sproul memorably noted that a commitment to *thinking rationally* should not be equated with a commitment to *philosophical rationalism*: "If I espouse to be human, that doesn't mean I've embraced humanism. If I argue that I exist, that doesn't mean that I am an advocate of existentialism. And just because a woman is feminine, [that] doesn't make her a feminist. We want to be rational. To be rational is to think in a sound way. To be rational does not mean you embrace rationalism. ... The alternative to that is—everything else outside the category of the 'rational' is what? Irrational. We don't want that." [R. C. Sproul, remarks delivered at the 2012 Ligonier National Conference,

In his own time, Chafer was severely criticized by B. B. Warfield for his views on sanctification. According to Warfield, although Chafer's dedication to evangelicalism was beyond question, his views on soteriology were nevertheless overly dependent upon Keswick,⁶ Arminian, and Pelagian theology.⁷ In response, it should be noted that Chafer's views may have been influenced to some degree by Keswick teaching, but he never identified himself with that movement.⁸ Moreover, the assertion that Chafer (who insisted "We [Evangelical Theological College] are distinctly a Presbyterian institution. ... Our theology as well as the interpretation of the Scripture in every department is strictly Calvinistic"⁹) held to Arminian soteriology is outlandish.

Indeed, Chafer's work cannot be satisfactorily explained by positing any *a priori* commitment to Darby, dispensationalism, rationalism, or Arminianism. Chafer's writings do demonstrate consideration of and appreciation for the works of other scholars and theologians, but he also displayed a stubborn unwillingness to accept any position or conclusion that could not be directly substantiated by Biblical exegesis.¹⁰ Accordingly, this article will argue that Chafer was first and foremost a Biblicist, and that his theological system and conclusions developed chiefly from that foundational commitment. The outcome of this Biblicism was a theology characterized by dispensationalist contours and a central preoccupation with the grace of God.

Orlando, FL. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/conferences/the-christian-mind-2012-national-conference/question-answers2>]

⁶ Benjamin B. Warfield, "Book Review of 'He That Is Spiritual,'" *Princeton Theological Journal* 17 (April 1919): 322–23.

⁷ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Perfectionism*, edited by Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia, Penn.: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1974), 396.

⁸ Contra Marsden, who labels Chafer a "Keswick teacher." [George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 98.]

⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, cited in Stephen J. Nichols, "A Brief Exchange Between Lewis Sperry Chafer and J. Gresham Machen," *Westminster Theological Journal* 62, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 282.

¹⁰ John Walvoord noted this as a strength of Chafer's theology in "A Review of Lewis Sperry Chafer's 'Systematic Theology,'" 119–20.

CHAFER THE MAN: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

All men and women are, to one degree or another, products of the ages in which they live. Lewis Sperry Chafer was no exception. His theological thinking and articulation were significantly shaped by his upbringing and by various features of the period in which he lived and moved. This section will explore several important links between Chafer's background and the theological methodology he fashioned and employed. But first, an abbreviated biographical sketch of Chafer's life will be helpful.

Brief Biographical Sketch¹¹

Lewis Sperry Chafer was born in Rock Creek, Ohio, on February 27, 1871. His father, Thomas Chafer, was a Congregationalist minister who died from tuberculosis when Lewis was only eleven years old. Chafer's mother, Lomira, was a schoolteacher-turned-homemaker. Five years before his father's death, while under the training of his parents, Lewis professed faith in Christ. Then, two or three years after Thomas's passing, Lewis experienced a second spiritual turning point, during which he rededicated his life to God.¹² It was a

¹¹This sketch is a synthesis of germane information drawn from the following sources: Charles Fred Lincoln, "Chafer, Lewis Sperry, 1871–1952," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 109, no. 436 (O–D 1952): 332–37; George Gerald Houghton, "Lewis Sperry Chafer, 1871–1952," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128, no. 512 (O–D 1971): 291–99; John D. Hannah, "The Early Years of Lewis Sperry Chafer," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144, no. 573 (Ja–Mr 1987): 3–23; Charles C. Ryrie, "Lewis Sperry Chafer: Apostle of Grace," *Fundamentalist Journal* 2, no. 7 (Jl–Ag 1983): 34–36; and Jeffrey J. Richards, *The Promise of Dawn: The Eschatology of Lewis Sperry Chafer* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 11–45.

¹² There has been some confusion over precisely when Lewis Sperry Chafer converted to Christianity. Houghton identifies his age of conversion at seven and mentions Chafer's rededication under the preaching of an evangelist named Scott when Chafer was "a teenager of about fourteen" ["Lewis Sperry Chafer, 1871–1952," 292]. Hannah is in essential agreement with Houghton, but he assigns Chafer's conversion to his sixth year of life while under the instruction of his parents, and

decision he would take seriously, as he eventually spent his life ministering in evangelistic, pastoral, administrative, and academic capacities.

Chafer's formal preparation for evangelistic service took place primarily during his time at Oberlin College in 1888–91. Lest it be thought that Chafer drank deeply from the wells of Arminian theology while at Oberlin (perhaps lending some credence to Warfield's criticisms), it should be noted that his training there was exclusively musical in nature and included no theological curricula.¹³ It is therefore unlikely that these college years contributed much to the content or methodology of Chafer's theology. They were important years developmentally, however: at Oberlin, Chafer was equipped for his future work in music ministry. He was also introduced at that time to Ella Loraine Case, whom he would later marry on April 22, 1896.

Chafer had already begun fulltime evangelistic work while he was a single man, and his union with Ella (who had also been a music major) only served to enhance his music ministry. Later in 1896, Lewis became ill with tuberculosis—the same disease that had taken the lives of his father and of the evangelist Scott whose preaching had so moved Chafer years earlier. Lewis and Ella came to believe that the illness was a sign from God that Lewis should shift his ministry focus away from music and onto gospel preaching. Shortly after they made this commitment, Lewis was suddenly (and inexplicably) healed.

further explains that it was Scott's preaching that eventually motivated Chafer to enter the ministry ["The Early Years of Lewis Sperry Chafer," 9–10]. Lincoln, on the other hand, lists Chafer's conversion age as thirteen, pinpointing Scott's preaching as the impetus ["Chafer, Lewis Sperry, 1871–1952, 333]. Chafer himself recorded that his conversion took place when he was six years old [Hannah, "The Early Years of Lewis Sperry Chafer," 9n23]. The best explanation seems to be that Chafer first became a Christian at six years old, and later rededicated his life under the preaching of Scott when he was thirteen or fourteen years old. Unfortunately, there has sometimes been a tendency to conflate these two distinct events, resulting in biographical confusion.

¹³ Randall C. Gleason, "B B Warfield and Lewis S Chafer on Sanctification," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40, no. 2 (Je 1997): 242.

And so, Chafer became an itinerate gospel preacher.¹⁴ He was ordained in 1900 as a Congregational minister,¹⁵ and shortly thereafter moved to Northfield, Massachusetts, where he and his wife began participating in the annual Northfield Conferences. There, Chafer was exposed to the teaching of the nation's foremost fundamentalist thinkers—chiefly C. I. Scofield, who soon became a mentor to Chafer. This relationship, probably more than anything else, shaped Chafer's expositional and theological methodology and emphases. It also paved the way for Chafer's academic pursuits: Scofield felt that Chafer had significant potential as a Bible teacher and challenged him to dedicate himself to such a ministry. Chafer's first two books, *Satan* and *True Evangelism*, were published in 1909 and 1911—both with prefaces by Scofield attached.

In 1914, Scofield founded the Philadelphia School of the Bible. He secured significant involvement by Chafer, who not only signed onto the faculty but also assisted in writing the school's curriculum. Chafer had previously taught music at Moody's Mount Hermon School for Boys while living in Northfield, but it was at the Philadelphia school that he cut his teeth as an instructor in biblical and theological studies. This was a role he would embrace and in which he would excel for the rest of his life. In 1924, primarily through Chafer's efforts, Evangelical Theological College (now Dallas Theological Seminary) was founded, with Chafer serving as the first President and Professor of Systematic Theology.¹⁶ This position required Chafer to clarify and elucidate his positions across a

¹⁴ It should be noted that Chafer's views on evangelistic methodology stood in sharp contrast to those of American revivalism. For a helpful discussion of this contrast—and the controversy over Chafer's views in the 1940s—see Kevin Bauder and Robert Delnay, *One in Hope and Doctrine: Origins of Baptist Fundamentalism, 1870–1950* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2014), 313–26.

¹⁵ Three years later, Chafer transferred his ordination to the Presbyterian Church, U. S.

¹⁶ Initially, the position of Theology Professor was intended for W. H. Griffith Thomas. Sadly, Griffith Thomas died the year of the seminary's founding, so it fell to Chafer to fill the role. [Richards, *The Promise of Dawn*, 35.]

significant range of theological subjects and issues. The material that would later constitute his *Systematic Theology* was initially developed as classroom material as Chafer labored to provide his new students with a sound theological curriculum.¹⁷

During the remainder of his life, Chafer ministered in an impressive number of capacities. Not only did he continue to provide leadership and instruction at the seminary for many years, but he also had an extensive writing ministry and continued speaking in pulpits across the country. The most robust expression of Chafer's theological views was his *Systematic Theology*, which was written from 1937 to 47. The first edition sold out in the first six months of publication, and before the work had been in circulation for two years a third printing was necessary to satisfy the demand.¹⁸ Just five years after the completion and publication of the work, Lewis Sperry Chafer passed away on August 22, 1952, likely from complications following a heart attack in 1935 and a stroke in 1945.

The Impact of Chafer's Historical Background On His Theological Method

There are at least two major intersections between Chafer's historical background and the details of his theological method. First is his extensive service as an itinerate evangelist, and the prominent place that evangelism and soteriology occupied in his theological system. Second is the far-reaching effects of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy (including, among other things, Chafer's association with Scofield).

Evangelistic Background

Chafer *Systematic Theology* represents not only the perspective of a demandingly precise theologian, but also of a passionate evangelist. In his introductory comments on

¹⁷ Cf. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947–48), 1:xxxviii.

¹⁸ DTS Mosher & Turpin Libraries, "Celebrating 80 Years: Highlights from the History of Dallas Theological Seminary," <http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/80th.shtml>.

Soteriology, Chafer implored ministers to grant evangelism a central place in their pulpit ministries:

God's message includes the whole human family in its outreach, and since the great proportion are unregenerate, and since the gospel of salvation is the only word addressed to the unsaved, it is reasonable to conclude that, in a well-balanced ministry, gospel preaching should account for no less than seventy-five percent of the pulpit ministry.¹⁹

Additionally, it is worth noting that the themes of human fallenness, the atonement, redemption, and regeneration are not restricted to Chafer's treatment of soteriology, but feature prominently throughout all ten divisions of his systematic theology.

Chafer saw a critical connection between theological work and evangelistic work. According to Charles Ryrie, Chafer once said to his students, "Would that theologians were also evangelists, and would that evangelists were also theologians."²⁰ These words were not empty platitudes coming from Chafer, as he had carved a niche for himself in fulltime evangelistic work long before he turned his attention to exposition and theology. One also wonders if these evangelistic priorities were not further reinforced in Chafer's mind by his recurring brushes with tuberculosis. By all accounts, the loss of his father to tuberculosis deeply affected young Chafer,²¹ and the evangelist Scott under whose preaching Chafer dedicated his life to Christian ministry died of the same disease quite soon after his encounter with the teenaged Chafer.²² Moreover, as mentioned above, it was his own contraction of tuberculosis that motivated Chafer to become a preacher. It may be that these incidents impressed upon Chafer the fragility of human life and the

¹⁹ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:9.

²⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *Ryrie's Practical Guide to Communicating Bible Doctrine* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Pub., 2005), 28–29.

²¹ Hannah, "The Early Years of Lewis Sperry Chafer," 9.

²² Lincoln, "Chafer, Lewis Sperry, 1871–1952," 333.

inevitability of death, igniting in him a passion to preach the gospel to unbelievers before it was too late. That passion extended beyond Chafer's evangelistic ministry, and exerted a powerful influence on his teaching and theologizing as well.

Another possible connection between Chafer's years as an evangelist and his theological work may be seen in his commitment to the perspicuity of Scripture. Although Chafer held that rigorous study was necessary to produce a sound and effective exposition of the sacred text,²³ he also felt that its basic meaning was clear and accessible due to the simplicity of expression employed throughout: "No unaided human writer has ever been able to imitate the simplicity of the Bible language. The greatest truths God has spoken to men are couched in the language of children."²⁴ This may reflect an evangelist's perspective, for whom the most vital truths of God's word are also the most straightforward and to whom the task has been entrusted to preach the gospel to all, regardless of their educational achievements or intellectual sophistication.²⁵

The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy

The Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy was the single most significant issue gripping American Christianity in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Many of the most important dates in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy synchronize quite closely with the major dates in Chafer's life, particularly during his most personally and theologically formative years.²⁶ That being the case, these issues

²³ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:vi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:33. Cf. also 1:vii on the importance of English Bible study for spiritual edification as over against limiting oneself only to in-depth exegetical studies in Hebrew and Greek.

²⁵ That Chafer held to perspicuity also dovetails with his commitment to biblicism, given the connection between perspicuity and biblicism. See James Patrick Callahan, *The clarity of Scripture: History, Theology & Contemporary Literary Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 158.

²⁶ Note the following date overlaps:

being debated by Christians all across the country would have invariably colored Chafer's experience and understanding of Christianity.

Chafer's theological views on the fundamentals of the faith are all in precise alignment with those of the fundamentalist movement (specifically, with the more widespread premillennial wing of fundamentalism).²⁷ This is not unexpected, given the nature of Chafer's relationship to Scofield.

-
- 1880–93: The controversy over C. A. Briggs's teachings in the Presbyterian Church. Chafer converted to Christianity and dedicated his life to God during these years.
 - 1895: The "five points of fundamentalism" were formulated at the Niagara Bible Conference. One year later, Chafer was married.
 - 1901: C. I. Scofield and A. C. Gaebelein discussed the need to publish a study Bible and began work on what would become the *Scofield Reference Bible*. This is the same year that Scofield began mentoring Chafer.
 - 1910–15: During this time, Chafer's denomination adopted the five points of the 1885 Niagara Bible Conference (modified to remove the emphasis on premillennialism), and *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, edited by A. C. Dixon and R. A. Torrey, was published. These years coincided with Chafer's time at Northfield.
 - 1925: The Scopes Trial, at which (in the eyes of many) fundamentalism as a serious viewpoint was dealt a death blow. This occurred the year after Chafer founded Evangelical Theological College, during the period when Chafer was settling into his new position as college president and theology professor and was formally putting his theological views to paper with systematic rigor.

²⁷ It should be noted that although Chafer agreed with the foundational doctrinal viewpoint of the fundamentalist movement, he did not view himself as a member of that movement. In a 1930 letter to J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., Chafer wrote, "While we [Evangelical Theological College] stand for all the fundamentals of the Word of God, we are not identified with the fundamentalist movement as such. I have not been in sympathy with the movement from the beginning." [Letter, Lewis Sperry Chafer to James Oliver Buswell, Jr., Dallas, TX, 14 February 1930 (Dallas, TX: Lewis Sperry Chafer Papers), cited in John D. Hannah, *An Uncommon Union: Dallas Theological Seminary and American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 92.]

Additionally, several apparent influences of the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy on Chafer's theological methodology and presuppositions are noteworthy. Principal among them are Chafer's conception of the Church's relation to the world and the surpassing superiority of revelation over reason for plumbing the depths of ultimate truth.

Chafer conceived of the world as:

[A] vast system and order over which Satan is the prince ... and into which all unregenerate humanity is federated with its educational and entertainment programs, its governments, its jealousies, its armaments, and its warfare. Out of this world the believer when saved is rescued ... and from it he is to be preserved, though he, as a witness to it, must remain in it.²⁸

So, the evangelical theologian, whose task is "the noblest aim of human understanding,"²⁹ finds himself in the disadvantageous position of living and working in enemy-occupied territory. The very system that surrounds him and determines his context for theological expression, and with which he must interact as he sets out on the theological enterprise, has already declared war on him and all for which he stands.

This mindset will certainly affect one's outlook at he performs the task of systematic theology! It supplies a framework for conceiving of theology as both a defensive and an offensive task—defensive in that the world seeks to pollute the pure doctrines of the faith, and the theologian must withstand that polluting influence with all his might; offensive in that the theologian, as he expositis theological truth to the world around him, is launching an assault on the world system, which is intent on resisting God's revealed truth.³⁰ This conception of the Church-world relationship was very common in the thinking of

²⁸ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:358.

²⁹ John Dick, *Lectures on theology* (Philadelphia: Whetham, 1841), 6. Quoted in Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:16.

³⁰ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 6:180.

fundamentalism,³¹ and can only have been exacerbated by cultural trends in the aftermath of the Scopes Trial, in which it seemed American society (an expression of the world system) had chosen to reject Christian fundamentalism.

Relatedly, Chafer displayed an attitude of extreme dubiety toward the competence of unaided human reason to grasp theological truths.³² This aspect of Chafer's method will be explored in more detail later; for now, it suffices to point out that this tendency, too, likely bears the imprint of the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy. The religious outlook of American modernism tended to be highly naturalistic, elevating the contributions of human reason and the process of intellectual discovery over reliance on special revelation from a transcendent God.³³ It was this very naturalistic, anthropocentric conception of religion that fundamentalists fought against so vigorously. As a result of this dimension of the conflict, fundamentalism began to be viewed as anti-intellectual.³⁴

And yet, for all his negativity toward the reasoning capacities of fallen humanity, Chafer was no anti-intellectual. He spoke highly of the efforts of scientists to uncover truth in their respective fields, tended to couch the theological task in scientific terminology,³⁵ and seems to have held the Baconian method in high regard. On the other hand, he also held that human reason alone, no matter how clever or ingenious, was not

³¹ Ralph W. Hood, Peter C. Hill, and W. Paul Williamson, *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism* (New York: Guilford Press, 2005), 52.

³² E.g., Lewis Sperry Chafer, *He That Is Spiritual: A Classic Study of the Biblical Doctrine of Spirituality*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 15–16; Lewis Sperry Chafer, *True Evangelism: Winning Souls Through Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), 22; Chafer, *Grace*, 339; Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:134.

³³ Bernard L. Ramm, *A Handbook of Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 68.

³⁴ Robert H. Krapohl and Charles H. Lippy, *The Evangelicals: A Historical, Thematic, and Biographical Guide* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999), 124.

³⁵ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:7–8.

up to the task of theology. After all, the rationalistic approach of the modernists had already utterly failed, in his view, to do Christian theology justice. This failure stemmed from the modernists' low view of Scripture, which Chafer felt was a wholly unsuitable foundation for one's theological system.³⁶ For Chafer, revelation is not unreasonable, but it takes epistemological priority over reason.

Furthermore, the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy by its very nature pointed up the need for a comprehensive systematic theology faithful to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, which need Chafer sought to fulfill with his eight-volume *Systematic Theology*. In Chafer's day, the dearth of emphasis upon systematic theology was palpable and, in his opinion, lamentable.³⁷ The reasons for this dearth are many, but at least two would seem to relate to the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy. First, among modernist seminaries, there was a tendency to, in Chafer's words, "substitute philosophy, psychology, and sociology for theology."³⁸ Second, where fundamentalists were concerned, the controversy demanded a narrowing of focus and of theological emphasis. Since the fundamentals of the faith were perceived to be under constant attack, it was not the right time to squabble over non-essentials of the faith. (This is why amillennialists like J. Gresham Machen and T. T. Shields could make common cause with premillennialists in the struggle against modernism.)

But while such a narrowing of focus may have been necessary for a season, Chafer held that it was dangerous over the long term, as it resulted in a sort of theological anemia. That is why he frequently decried not only the lack of emphasis upon systematic theology so prevalent in his day, but also the tendency, when systematic theology was taught, to settle for abridged studies of the subject.³⁹ Anything less than an unabridged, comprehensive course of theological study, in

³⁶ Ibid., 1:12.

³⁷ Ibid., 1:v.

³⁸ Ibid., 1:viii.

³⁹ Ibid., 1:x-xi.

Chafer's view, opened the door to theological defection and disaster:

In his years of classroom discipline, the theological student should be taken over the entire field of doctrine that he may be prepared to continue his research in every portion of the Bible throughout his ministry, being prepared to proceed intelligently in every phase of the divine revelation. Apart from such a complete introduction to doctrine, no preacher will be able to hold truth in its right proportions, nor can it be assured that he or his auditors will not drift into the errors of unscriptural cults, or into modernistic unbelief.⁴⁰

The result of Chafer's work in systematic theology was an expansion of premillennial fundamentalist doctrine to a comprehensive, unabridged scope. Walvoord wrote of Chafer's eight-volume work, "For the first time modern Fundamentalism has been systematized in an unabridged systematic theology."⁴¹

Chafer the Black Sheep Presbyterian

Before proceeding to an analysis of Chafer's theological methodology, one more item of a historical nature warrants mention as it has direct bearing on his foundational convictions. Since Chafer's soteriological positions were generally in harmony with Calvinistic Reformed theology, it is not surprising that he maintained membership and ordination (via transfer of credentials from the Congregational Church) in the Presbyterian Church in the United States. However, on at least two major points, Chafer believed he was forced to choose between his commitment to Biblicism and his denomination's commitment to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Those two points concerned the scope of the atonement and the relationship between Israel and the Church.

⁴⁰Ibid., 1:viii.

⁴¹Walvoord, "A Review of Lewis Sperry Chafer's 'Systematic Theology,'" 127.

On the scope of the atonement, Chafer raised several theological arguments in favor of unlimited redemption over against limited redemption.⁴² First, the limited redemption view is built on the false premise that the cross itself accomplishes salvation. Since the elect individual will spend some (or possibly even most) of his life in an unregenerate state, Chafer reasoned that the provision and application of salvation should be viewed as separate events.⁴³ Second, Chafer felt it was “perilously near to contradiction” to acknowledge Christ’s command for the Church to engage in universal gospel preaching while holding that He died only for the elect.⁴⁴ And third, Chafer explained that unlimited redemption did not undermine the sovereignty of God since it conceived of Christ’s payment as being *provided for* yet never *applied to* the sins of the non-elect.⁴⁵

But Chafer’s final and most cogent argument was more expository than theological in nature. He argued that limited redemption proof-texts (John 10:15; 15:13; 17:2, 6, 9, 20, 24; Rom. 4:25; Eph. 1:3–7; 5:25–27), when carefully interpreted, did not really preclude unlimited redemption, while a host of unlimited redemption proof-texts (John 3:16; Acts 10:43; Rom. 5:6; 2 Cor. 5:14, 19; 1 Tim. 2:6; 4:10; Tit. 2:11; Heb. 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:1; 1 John 2:2; Rev. 22:17) could only be reconciled with the limited redemption view by committing serious exegetical errors.⁴⁶ Thus, Chafer seems to have viewed his motivation for rejecting his denomination’s position on this subject as a matter of giving priority to the careful interpretation of Scripture rather

⁴² Chafer did not particularly care for this terminology since the debate entailed implications for reconciliation and propitiation as well as redemption, but he used the customary terms anyway for the sake of convenience. [Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:190–93.] In our day, this terminology has usually been replaced by other expressions, such as *definite atonement* or *particular redemption* on the one hand, and *general atonement* or *universal atonement* on the other.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3:193–94; Cf. Lewis Sperry Chafer, “A Love Story Infinitely True,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 105, no. 418 (Ap–Je 1948): 139.

⁴⁴ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:194–95.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:195–99.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4:201–5.

than to a cherished theological system or philosophical framework.

The second issue proved even more problematic than the first for Chafer's fellow Presbyterians. The clear dispensational distinction between Israel and the Church was a very important element of Chafer's theology. This he established on primarily inductive grounds: an analysis of Israel and the Church as they were presented in Scripture led to the conclusion that they were fundamentally dissimilar in terms of compositions, rules of life, divine purposes, and divinely-ordained destinies (Israel comprising God's "earthly people" and the Church comprising His "heavenly people").⁴⁷ This teaching was widely regarded in Presbyterian circles as incongruous with the Westminster Confession of Faith, which upheld an essential continuity between Israel and the Church based on the unifying Covenant of Grace.⁴⁸ The pushback began in 1936 with an article in *Evangelical Quarterly* by Oswald T. Allis that attacked the dispensational approach, mentioning Chafer by name.⁴⁹ Several other articles, similar in content and purpose, emerged from Presbyterian writers shortly thereafter.⁵⁰

Chafer did not deny that his view departed from Presbyterian doctrinal distinctives on this point, but he defended himself by appealing directly to the Bible. Since the authority of the Westminster Confession of Faith was subordinate to Scripture's authority, and since Scripture (as he understood it) overwhelmingly supported the dispensational view on this point, Chafer argued that the confession should be amended. Chafer's opponents were disinclined to engage him in an exegetical debate over the relative merits of the covenantal and dispensational systems, preferring instead to make adherence to the confession the litmus test of Presbyterian

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:xiv–xx; 4:33–35, 47–53.

⁴⁸ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 7.1–6.

⁴⁹ Oswald T. Allis, "Modern Dispensationalism and the Doctrine of the Unity of Scripture," *Evangelical Quarterly* 8 (1936): 22–35.

⁵⁰ Craig A. Blaising, "Lewis Sperry Chafer," in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, edited by Walter A. Elwell, 85–96 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 93.

orthodoxy.⁵¹ This sparked a call for an official statement on the unacceptability of dispensationalism within the Presbyterian Church in the United States. During the general assembly of 1940, a proposal for a formal investigation into the orthodoxy of dispensationalism was made, and the issue was referred to the Ad Interim Committee on Changes in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms (though Chafer's own good standing in the denomination was not directly threatened). Four years later, the committee submitted its report to the general assembly categorically rejecting dispensational premillennialism, as the committee found it to be incompatible with the Presbyterian Church's confessional standards.⁵²

Of all the historical intersections between the history of Chafer's life and the main features of his theological system, this controversy most clearly demonstrates Chafer's unwillingness to put ideological or denominational commitment ahead of a straightforward, inductive reading of the Scriptures. Chafer wrote, "It is a bad indication when, in any period, men will so exalt their confessions that they force the Scriptures to a secondary importance."⁵³ Many evangelicals would undoubtedly voice agreement with this sentiment, but Chafer, in publicly criticizing his own denomination's confession of faith, proved that he really meant it.

⁵¹ Ibid., 94.

⁵² Hannah, *An Uncommon Union*, 123.

⁵³ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4:262. See also similar remarks in Lewis Sperry Chafer, "Dispensationalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 93, no. 372 (O–D 1936): 395–96.

THE CREATOR/CREATION DISTINCTION:
AN ONTOLOGICAL BASIS FOR PROPER
TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP

Paul Miles, DMin

INTRODUCTION

The distinction between the Creator and His creation is a characteristic of the biblical worldview that sets it apart from other religions of the Ancient Near East. As such, it is the proper basis for transformative learning and leadership. In the alternatives, man deifies the cosmos and then mythologically depicts life being formed by gods and from gods. These two ontological schools of thought can be labeled *Creator/creation distinction* (CCD) and *continuity of being* (COB). The distinction between the biblical God and His creation has worldview implications beyond ontology as many differences in epistemology, ethics, and politics that are found in alternative worldviews can ultimately be traced to their presuppositions of continuity of being.

When a man accepts the CCD, he recognizes that the Creator's Word is the authoritative source of epistemological truth, that proper ethics come from the Creator, and that politics exists as a stewardship under the Creator. Continuity ontology diminishes authoritative epistemology, which compromises the basis for ethics and gives way to political strife where pagan kings try to make worldview ends meet by establishing their statuses as supermen through extensive propaganda. The COB worldview extends beyond the Ancient Near East and is the fundamental worldview of evolutionism today, which sees life evolving out of the same primordial substance as the cosmos. The subjectivity that comes with the COB worldview is evident

in current discussions of epistemology, ethics, and politics. If transformative learners are to have fruitful interaction with the world today, they must understand the difference between these two worldviews to relate more effectively as CCD advocates in a COB world.

CREATOR/CREATION DISTINCTION DESCRIBED

A Brief Definition

The CCD worldview sees a clear distinction between the Creator and His creation. This is the biblical worldview. In eternity past, before any acts of creation, God was the only thing that existed. When He created matter, He did not form it from Himself, but rather created everything to be entirely distinct from Himself. The doctrine of God's aseity speaks of His independence from anything else for existence.¹ Creation is subject to its Creator, so man must turn to God's revelation if he is to have a proper epistemological basis for his worldview. Therefore, the Bible sets the authoritative basis for ethics and politics.

Biblical Support

God is infinitely holy. The word *qâdôsh* (קדוש), often translated *holy*, means to be set apart or above as seen, for example in the words of Hannah: "There is no one holy [*qâdôsh*] like the Lord, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God" (1 Sam. 2:2). God's holiness is active in the creation narrative as He created the material of the universe *ex nihilo* (Gen. 1:1–8). Man was formed out of the dust that God created and he was resuscitated by God Himself (Gen. 2:7). Since

¹ John Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God, The Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 239–243.

the dust is distinct from God, man was not made of God material and since the resuscitation creation act was unique for mankind, man is a uniquely above the earth, plants, and animals (Gen. 1:28–30; 2:20) while remaining distinctly below God (Ps. 24:1–3).

God's ontology of holiness carries over to the nature of epistemology because God's Word is characterized by His holiness. Since holiness in its most fundamental sense is about division, it should come as no surprise that the author of Hebrews compares the Bible to a sword that divides (Heb. 4:12). Since God is immutable (Num. 23:19), His Word is immutable (Isa. 40:8).

An epistemology that is based on the Bible has ramifications in ethics and politics. Paul makes a clear statement about the Bible's relationship to ethics: "All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man *or woman* of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17). The Bible also gives the basis for human government in the Noahic covenant (Gen. 9:1–17) and the basis for national distinctions (Gen. 11:1–9), so that nations have governments that are led by fallen humans, but should be subject to one Holy God.

False views in Christendom

One of many ways how Christian theologians are compromising on CCD is through the false doctrine of panentheism, which John Feinberg describes:

...one of the hallmarks of panentheistic views, whether in process theology or elsewhere, is that God interpenetrates everything that exists. Transcendence is downplayed dramatically. ...since [God's] body is our

world, he not only empathizes with us when we suffer but actually feels our pains and rejoices in our joys. This is no remote, unattached, disinterested God.²

Feinberg rightly noted that panentheism was common among process theologians, but it is worth noting that since 2001 when his book was published, some trends have remarketed panentheism as the basis for Christian ecojustice.³ While the typical transformative learner may not have heard of process theology, he has almost certainly been pressured by a loved one to support ecojustice, so as worldly justice becomes more common, one should anticipate that evangelicals will increasingly drift toward panentheism and thereby compromise the distinction between God and His creation.

CONTINUITY OF BEING DESCRIBED

A Brief Definition

The COB worldview is an invention of man that sees nature and divinity as coming from a common source. Often there is believed to be preexistent matter which is deified. Then, through a series of acts, this god-matter is divided into other gods and bits of nature. Eventually, life comes from nature which ultimately has its common source in god-matter. Since there is an accepted plurality of gods with conflicting personalities, there is a constant struggle for authority. Since there is no clear and superior authority, the epistemological standard is lowered. Politicians under this worldview appeal to

² Ibid., 60.

³ For example, see Catherine Keller, *Political Theology of the Earth: Our Planetary Emergency and the Struggle for a New Public* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 142–148.

their gods for authority over man, but since the gods are subjective, so are their rulership and laws.

Examples From Paganism

The Egyptian creation myths feature Atum, a primordial water god, who creates the twin gods Shu and Tefnut,⁴ who go on to mate and produce the Ogdoad of eight Egyptian deities. The accounts are conflicting; in PT 527, Atum creates Shu and Tefnut through cosmic masturbation, while in PT 600, he sneezes and spits them into existence. The Memphite theology puts Ptah as the creator of Atum. Some have tried to reconcile the contradicting accounts among Egyptian texts,⁵ but the most likely explanation is simply that these accounts were thought up by perverse men over centuries who could not keep their stories straight.

Likewise, the Mesopotamian gods came from nature like humans, but they possessed superhuman powers. While they were superhuman, they were not characterized by attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, or immutability. They were ethically capricious; sometimes they were benevolent, and sometimes they were spiteful.⁶

The Egyptian creation myths bring the ideology of continuity into Egyptian politics. For example, one of the hieroglyphic titles for the king's wives was $\overline{\text{𓆎}} \text{drt ntr}$ which consists of two elements: $\overline{\text{𓆎}} \text{ntr}$, meaning *god*, and $\overline{\text{𓆎}} \text{drt}$, meaning *hand*, so that $\overline{\text{𓆎}} \text{drt ntr}$ means *hand of god*. This phrase is a

⁴ Joyce Tyldesley, "The Role of Egypt's Dynastic Queens," in *Women in Antiquity: Real Women across the Ancient World*, eds. Stephanie Lynn Budin and Jean Macintosh Turfa (London: Routledge, 2016), 275–276.

⁵ Ragnhild Bjerre Finnestad, "Ptah, Creator of the Gods," *Numen*, 23:2 (1976), 81–113.

⁶ Jeremiah Unterman, *Justice for All: How the Jewish Bible Revolutionized Ethics* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2017), 1–2.

reference to the masturbation act by which Atum created Shu and Tefnut.⁷ This title also put a responsibility on the queen to produce more god-kings: “It has long been recognised that the role of wife to a male god is one that allows the priestess to assume the role of a partner who stimulates the god, allowing him to regenerate.”⁸

Continuity Of Being Today

COB worldviews are still evident in religions of pantheism, polytheism, animism, etc., but as the Western world embraces atheism, one should understand that this too is a COB worldview. A short article from an atheist perspective says much:

Our solar system formed 4.5 billion years ago in much the same way dust bunnies amass and assemble beneath bed frames: A few errant bits stick together, eventually building up to form sizable clumps. Below the mattress, static cling is the glue; in the cosmos, gravity is. The first of these celestial scraps came from the big bang, which sent the five lightest elements careening into space to make early stars. Through those sparklers’ lives and explosive demises came enough stellar dust to create the heavier elements that comprise almost everything we run into in our day-to-day existence. Understanding this series of events has allowed scientists to trace the origins of atoms in our solar system to one or more cosmological phenomena.⁹

⁷ Joyce Tyldesley, “The Role,” 275–276.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁹ Sara Chodosh, “We Are Made Of Star Stuff,” *Popular Science*, 290:3 (Summer 2018): 104.

The “cosmological phenomena” are not acts of gods per se, but there is a continuity of existence which positions man at ontological oneness with his source. Thomas Aquinas built a logical argument from the CCD perspective that whatever the first mover is should be recognized as God¹⁰ and there is a parallel to Aquinas’ argument in modern atheism. The atheist recognizes the first mover as an impersonal force applied to preexistent (or self-appearing) matter rather than a personal God. It turns out that the atheist’s epistemological results are similar to those of the pagan: the primordial matter becomes the higher authority that is inaccessible unless it is explained by human sages who are recognized as the information authorities who have the responsibility to inform other men about their mythological origins.

WORLDVIEW RAMIFICATIONS OF DISTINCTION ONTOLOGY

Effects On Epistemology

Since the biblical God is absolute and His Word is absolute, the biblical worldview has an epistemology that can be stated in terms of absolutes:

Interpretive method is an integral factor in applying a Biblical epistemology. If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7), and if wisdom is knowable and discernable (Prov 1:2), then the fear of the Lord is knowable and discernable. If knowledge and understanding come from His mouth (Prov 2:6), and if knowledge and understanding are rooted in the fear of the Lord (Prov 9:10), then the fear of the Lord is discovered in His word. If these two syllogisms are valid

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.2.3.

and true, then the word of God (at least insofar as it considers the fear of the Lord) is knowable and discernible.¹¹

The biblical prescription may not always be easy to understand, but the shortcoming will always fall on the interpreter who reads the Bible, not on the God who wrote the Bible.

Effects On Ethics

Monotheistic CCD recognizes a single God who is the objective standard of authoritative truth; what God says is right and wrong is absolutely right and absolutely wrong. Moreland and Craig summarize the attributes of moral absolutism:

(1) Moral statements have truth values that make no reference to the beliefs of individuals or cultures. (2) There are objectively good/bad arguments for the truth of moral positions people take. (3) Nonmoral facts (e.g., persons exist) and moral facts (irreducibly moral properties like goodness) are relevant to the assessment of the truth value of moral statements. (4) When two moral statements conflict, only one can be true. (5) There is a single true morality. The main thing to keep in mind here is that this first understanding of *absolute* emphasizes the fact that we discover moral values, we do not merely invent moral beliefs. This is the most fundamental sense of the term used by moral absolutists.¹²

¹¹ Christopher Cone, *Priority in Biblical Hermeneutics and Theological Method* (Raymore, MO: Exegetica Publishing, 2018.), 215–216.

¹² J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 434.

The biblicist does not invent his ethics but derives ethics from the Bible which is authoritative because God gave His Word.

Effects On Politics

The least advanced form of State has a human monarch who is the absolute ruler over the land and the result is frequently despotism.¹³ From the COB perspective, pagan kings would frequently appeal to continuity to deify themselves to a higher level than their subjects; however, if a monarch would be subject to God, then his ethics would shift to one of personal accountability to an absolute higher authority. Such accountability is often the remedy to despotism as seen in the cases of Israel's kings who followed God.

Even good kings are still fallen, though, and so there is an eschatological hope of a coming kingdom where God Himself will rule as a righteous dictator over the world, but in the meantime, God has granted authority to human governments as a check against evil (Rom. 13:1–7). A good form of government has been demonstrated in classic American thought. The Declaration of Independence presupposes a distinct Creator has endowed men with certain rights, and so the American Constitution is framed in a way to protect human rights which align well with a biblical understanding of ethics and divine institutions.

Theological attacks against that which is considered conservative American thought are often rooted in faulty views of the biblical God. For example, in a recent publication, a liberation theologian renounced the personality of the Holy Spirit in favor of a view that sees the Holy Spirit as an

¹³ Arthur Christensen, *Politics and Crowd-Morality: A study in the Philosophy of Politics*, trans. A. Cecil Curtis (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche Books, 2001), 120.

impersonal attitude¹⁴ or attitudes that become manifest among different religions¹⁵ any time a movement of liberation occurs at a political level.¹⁶ This is only one of many examples of theologians trying to penetrate Christianity with woke political agendas, so there are many other doctrines at stake. At any rate, whenever a theologian tries to push the Leftist agenda into Christianity, he does so from a low view of God that carries over to a low view of Scripture that allows for enough of a subjective interpretation that the theologian is free to introduce any political agenda to the text.

WORLDVIEW RAMIFICATIONS OF CONTINUITY ONTOLOGY

Effects On Epistemology

Continuity ontology has immediate ramifications for epistemology. In pagan COB, ultimately “mankind becomes the architect of deity”¹⁷ since man is the author of pagan religious texts. COB lacks the clear boundary of authority that comes with distinction ontology, so COB relies on subjective and often contradictory texts that serve to teach man’s current agenda rather than absolute truth. Pagan prophets often were used for propaganda purposes:

Rather than predicting a future ideal king, the text [*The Marduk Prophecy*] was apparently written toward the

¹⁴ Mark Lewis Taylor, “Spirit,” in *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, 2nd ed., eds. William Cavanaugh and Peter Scott (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2019), 419.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 429.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 427.

¹⁷ Henry M. Morris III, *The Book of Beginnings: A Practical Guide to Understanding Genesis* (Dallas, TX: Institute for Creation Research, 2016), 24.

end of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I (1126– 1103 BCE) in order to serve as “a propaganda piece” to support his campaigns and to glorify his reign. As such, it is not comparable to the biblical prophecies of redemption which originate prior to the return to the land under Persian rule, even though those prophecies will look forward to agricultural increase and a just society.¹⁸

Likewise, Sumerian restoration lament texts depict conversations between lesser gods and greater gods, not men.¹⁹ The gods sat on a spectrum of varying degrees of greatness, but humans would be too weak to attempt an appeal to the greater gods. In reality, there is only one God and he is distinct from His creation, but He wants fellowship with man, so He overcomes the communication barrier Himself through divine revelation directly to unworthy man.

Effects On Ethics

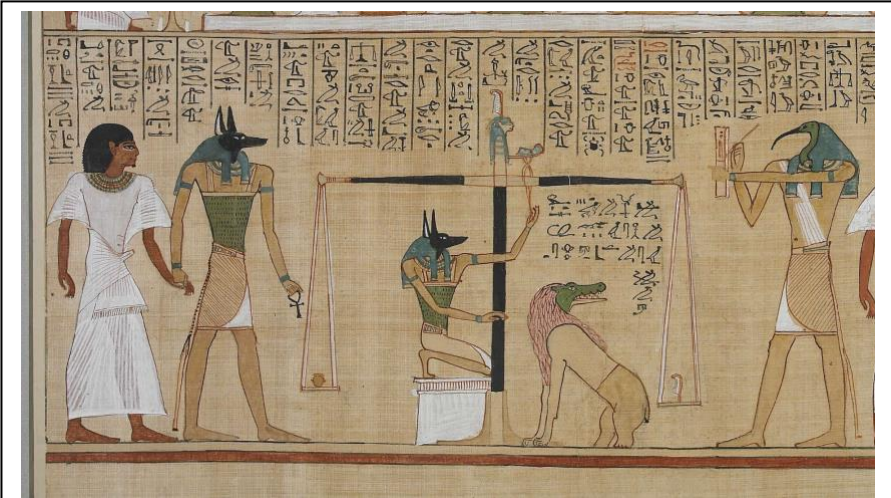
Since Egyptians did not have a singular God who was distinct, their soteriology was one of self-righteousness. Ma'at was both the goddess and personification of truth and the Egyptians believed that to live forever, their hearts would need to be lighter than the feather of Ma'at. To assist in these weighing ceremonies, the Egyptians would make confessions about their lives which became a source of ethical codes among the Egyptians.²⁰ Soteriology was a matter of doing good deeds, but more importantly about not doing bad deeds. On what grounds, though, could an Egyptian be good enough or bad

¹⁸ Jeremiah Unterman, *Justice for All*, 148.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

²⁰ For a recent example, see the door lintel that was published in Bassem Ahmed, “Old Kingdom Door Lintel of Isi at the Egyptian Museum,” *Egyptian Journal of Archaeological and Restoration Studies* 10:1 (2020): 23–27.

enough to determine his ultimate destiny? The system was entirely subjective. In contrast, even the most fundamental aspect of Christian soteriology—that man is saved by grace



Heart-weighing ceremony from *The Book of the Dead of Hunefer*, frame 3. The feather of Ma'at is on the right side of the scale and the container with a heart on the left. Notice how the continuity between pagan gods and nature is evident as the Egyptians combined parts of humans and animals to build their deities. Image from the British Museum.

through faith—is rooted in the CCD aspect of Christianity. Since God is infinitely holy and separate from that which is unholy, man cannot merit righteousness and so he can only be saved by God Himself. Some theologians have tried to syncretize COB ethics of ecojustice into a Christian soteriology, but the result is often a rejection of the biblical view of the atonement. Willis Jenkins is an ecotheologian who redefines the biblical message of the cross from a message that makes it possible to close the gap of holiness through faith to a message that has Christ appointing men to ecojustice:

Inhabiting the reconciliation accomplished by Christ, human relations with all creatures are restored and redeemed. When Christ sets the captives free, he frees them to restorative service in a land damaged by sin. The Christian mission to all the earth means becoming physician and healer to the earth, priests and ministers to all creation.²¹

Nobody is calling for the destruction of the environment, but certain forms of ecotheology, such as Jenkins' proposal above, by necessity redefine Christ's work on the cross and should be rejected as syncretism.

Effects On Politics

Pagan versions of COB politics relied on the divine authority of the king. In Hammurabi's case:

...the prologue and epilogue of *Hammurabi's* Code praise the King as representative of the Gods with the divine mandate to create justice among the people: The Gods had chosen him to be King of Righteousness. Therefore, serious breaches of the Code's penal provisions at the same time were acts of sacrilege against the Gods.²²

Whatever humans accept as the source of everything ultimately becomes the focal point of political discourse. Such is evident even today in America, where the division between blue and red

²¹ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 89.

²² Volker Krey, *About Death Penalty Reflections on Legal History: From the Code of Hammurabi and Sumerian Precursors up to Germanic Law, the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2019), 7.

is often framed as a fight on one side by Christians who maintain biblical distinctions, and on another side, which sees life evolving out of a primordial soup into a justice utopia. Laying aside the bipartisan tendencies in American politics, a reliance on Marxist ideology and practice is evident in Jenkins' work as he relates social justice to ecojustice:

Practices of social justice hitherto associated with humanitarian mission—practices like charity, simplicity, economic fairness, political solidarity, and compassion—turn out to be indispensable for rightly perceiving the natural world and doing justice to creation. We have to practice loving the weak and suffering with the oppressed, say ecojustice theologians, in order to understand how God loves creation.²³

Jenkins' quote goes full circle back to epistemology, as he requires service to the weak and oppressed "in order to understand how God loves creation." God's written revelation is deemed insufficient; understanding is only available to men who promote political agendas that are rooted in a COB understanding of ontology.

APPLICATION FOR TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERS

On The Tendency Toward Deconstruction

As the deconstructionism trend continues, transformative leaders must prepare their learners for the challenges in a world that urges them to apostasy. It would be impossible to list out every single attack on Christianity, and regardless, as soon as one falsehood is disproven another is bound to take its place. Instead of fighting individual challenges,

²³ Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace*, 68.

a proper response could be to develop a holistic worldview that emphasizes the distinction between the Creator and His creation.

That The Social Pressure Begins with Politics and Ethics

While the logical formation of a worldview begins on the levels of metaphysics and epistemology, social pressure usually occurs at the levels of politics and ethics. As seen by the examples above, politics and ethics are merely results of metaphysics and epistemology. If transformative learners can become well-grounded in biblical ontology, then they should be more resilient to the errors that the world promotes on the levels of ethics and politics where worldview conversations tend to occur.

That Transformative Leaders Must Teach Biblical Ontology and Epistemology

To protect young learners from the trend of deconstruction, it is necessary to teach biblical ontology and epistemology. The examples given above are mostly comparative to ancient pagan worldviews; this is a safe area to draw contrasts since nobody is worshiping the Egyptian gods today. Perhaps transformative leaders would be wise to teach the contrast between Christianity and ancient paganism as an introduction to worldview issues which can then be transferred over to contemporary issues which often have parallels. Also, there is a constant attack on the Bible that accuses the biblical authors of sharing worldviews with the pagans,²⁴ so having a better familiarity with ancient near eastern religions could be

²⁴ This line of thought is even penetrating evangelicalism. See for example Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 44–47.

helpful for defending proper hermeneutics from such accusations.

CONCLUSION

Worldviews develop from the way things are to the way things ought to be. The way things are can be expressed in terms of metaphysics and epistemology, with ontology being central to metaphysics. The way things ought to be can be expressed in terms of ethics and politics. The Bible declares an ontology of distinction between the Creator and His creation while alternative worldviews blur the distinction to have continuity between the source and the result.

More could be said and more examples could be given, but this framework of distinction versus continuity is a first step in the clarification of the biblical worldview, both against the contemporaries of the biblical authors as well as the contemporaries of the Bible student today. Developing a proper worldview should be a top priority for everyone – but especially biblicists – and transformative leaders should help in this development by studying and teaching the Creator/creation distinction.

THE IMPORTANCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF A
BIBLICALLY DERIVED INTERPRETIVE METHOD
AS MODELED THROUGH SYMBOLS
WITHIN THE BOOK OF REVELATION¹

John Oglesby, MA

ABSTRACT

A Biblically derived interpretive method² is founded upon the authority of God as revealed in the Scriptures and is foundational for a Biblical worldview³. The outcome of this approach is Traditional Dispensationalism as a framework⁴. The significance of the Biblically derived interpretive method may be most apparent whenever viewing the landscape of eschatological study. Within history, the church's view of end-times has driven their mission as an organization ranging from world domination⁵ to complacency⁶. The interpretations are vast and subcategories within eschatology are numerable. However, the method of interpreting symbols is an excellent case study for the

¹ This paper was formally presented at the 2022 Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, September 15, 2022, held at Southern California Seminary, El Cajon, California, and is published as presented.

² For clarification – the interpretive method itself is drawn from the Scriptures and modeled within.

³ Note: the interpretive method is not outside of the worldview, leading to a Biblical worldview but is a foundational aspect of a Biblical worldview.

⁴ Traditional Dispensationalism may have variations, as other systems of theology. I use this term in a general sense understanding there are differences of opinion within the system itself. It is also worth noting, this system of theology can be wholly found within the study of metaphysics and leads to a particular ethic, both individually and communally.

⁵ Dominion Theology is particularly in view here.

⁶ 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11.

importance of a biblically derived interpretive method.⁷ By identifying and interpreting the symbols found within the book of Revelation, one can understand the outcomes, implications, and significance of utilizing a Biblical hermeneutic model and is the aim of this study.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional Dispensationalism⁸ is the outcome of an interpretive method known as the literal grammatical historical hermeneutic⁹ which is consistently applied throughout the whole of Scripture¹⁰. This interpretive method is grounded upon the authority of God¹¹ as He has provided this method within

⁷ This study also shows the importance of the sufficiency of Scripture and may reveal the state of the church in their practice (or lack thereof) of this doctrine.

⁸ Traditional Dispensationalism may have variations from person to person, as is seen in other frameworks of theology. However, I use this term in a general sense understanding there are differences of opinion within the system itself. While I would conclude that there is one metaphysical reality as presented in Scripture and unity in accurate understanding amongst brothers and sisters is certainly attainable, there is also always room for growth in one's understanding of the truth. Where one has room for growth, one may find differences amongst other Traditional Dispensationalists.

⁹ Some variations are understood in the naming of the method. Some may prefer normative grammatical historical.

¹⁰ Louis Berkhof would seem to agree with this sentiment whenever critiquing dispensational premillennialism in his work, *Systematic Theology*, yet concludes that taking this approach in prophecy is "entirely untenable."

¹¹ The literal grammatical historical hermeneutic is founded within a Biblical epistemology. This epistemology presents the Biblical God as the source of authority and the Biblical text as His source of special revelation in this dispensation. God has communicated through general revelation, but is limited in what is communicated and interpretable (Rom. 1:18-20). God has also communicated through personal revelation (John 3:19), however, Jesus is no longer physically present. Therefore, the mode of communication which carries God's authority is the Biblical

the Biblical text.¹² To deviate from a Biblically supplied methodology without exegetical reason to do so strips the authority from God (in one's worldview) and gives it to someone or something else.

It is not the purpose of this paper to explore the importance of traditional dispensationalism as a theological system, but instead the importance of the foundation which traditional dispensationalism rests upon and the implications where those foundations lead, if applied consistently.¹³ Traditional dispensationalism should be understood as the metaphysical result of a Biblical interpretive method founded upon the authority of the Biblical God. This metaphysical framework then leads to a particular ethic, both individually and communally. This process can arguably be seen most clearly whenever looking at the book of Revelation due to the history of genre's assigned, supernatural nature of the events recorded within it and the figures of speech the author utilizes as he attempts to explain these spiritual realities, and the forward-looking nature of the book. Even further, the landscape of interpretations revolving around symbolism in the book provide

text. The focus of this paper certainly is not to discuss the validity of cessationism, but it should be understood this is the position this writer holds to be true.

¹² Christopher Cone, among others, has striven to show this through various projects. Cf. Cone, Christopher, *The Precedent for Literal Grammatical Historical Hermeneutics in Genesis*, drcone.com, <https://drcone.com/2017/08/26/precedent-literal-grammatical-historical-hermeneutics-genesis/>. Likewise, I have presented argument from the book of Revelation, modeling Cone's research method, and concluded that God intends to be understood in a normative, common-sense way. Abner Chou's work, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret the Scriptures from the Prophets and the Apostles* is also a great work striving towards a similar goal.

¹³ Many works have been published on the importance of Biblical hermeneutics and a Biblical epistemology. I hope to present the material in a unique way, taking a truly biblical approach, presenting a methodology that is presented in the Scriptures.

more clarity to the relationship of interpretive methodology and ethical/socio-political implications.

WHAT'S AT STAKE AND WHERE DOES HERMENEUTICS CONTRIBUTE TO THE DISCUSSION?

At the root of the discussion, authority of one's worldview is in focus and truth is at stake—not in the sense that one is correctly representing reality and one is not (although this is true), but more broadly, constructing a worldview based upon the wrong authority leads to falsehood in every category resulting in a wrongful understanding of reality and wrongful action¹⁴. Solomonic Literature presents this concept throughout as it focuses on wisdom and knowledge.¹⁵ Solomon begins the book of Proverbs by giving the prerequisite for proper knowledge and understanding—the fear¹⁶ of the Lord.¹⁷ He later reinforces this concept when discussing the acquisition of wisdom.¹⁸ It would seem, based on the context of Proverbs and the use of the term in other passages such as Deuteronomy 2:25, the fear would rightly result from a proper perspective of God. Solomon then continues in His writing to discuss proper living based on proper knowledge and understanding.

¹⁴ This can be seen clearly in passages revolving around the Jewish sect known as the Pharisees. Cf. John 5:37–40.

¹⁵ Particularly, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

¹⁶ Fear, or *יִרְאָה*, is not simply a reverence for something or someone. It refers to a terror or trembling of someone or something. For example, the same term is used in Deuteronomy as Moses is recounting the words which God had spoken to him. God tells Moses that He is going to put a dread, *תַּפַּח*, and fear of His people upon everyone under the heavens which would result in their trembling. Another example of this fear of God can be seen in Isaiah's encounter of God in Isaiah 6.

¹⁷ Prov 1:7.

¹⁸ Prov 9:10.

The concept of “fear of the Lord” is modelled clearly in Isaiah 6:1–7 as Isaiah “saw the Lord sitting on a throne.”¹⁹ His immediate response was woefulness as he recognized Who he was in the presence of and the condition in which he found himself. Isaiah’s proper view of God led to a proper fear.²⁰ This fear of God also places the authority in the hands of God as the giver of wisdom and understanding—particularly sourced from the mouth of God.²¹ Notice Isaiah’s fear of the Lord led to a particular action—his epistemology (and presumably his metaphysic) resulted in a particular ethic.²² Also note, after Isaiah was given a position of right standing before God, his action changed from trembling to a confident desire to serve the Lord.²³ This principle is echoed in Romans 12:1-2 as Paul concludes that, because of the reality presented in the previous chapters—namely, the gospel of Jesus Christ—every Christian

¹⁹ Isaiah 6:1, NASB. All Scriptural quotes will come from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

²⁰ Like Isaiah was forgiven, the believer in the gospel of Jesus Christ is cleansed. The body of Christ can now approach the throne of grace with confidence.

²¹ Prov 2:5-6.

²² This relationship between the “is” and “ought” of worldview is a particularly interesting discussion. David Hume popularized the idea that the correlation between the “is” and the “ought” is much more difficult and the gap between the two is much more difficult to cross than one may think. Modern philosopher, Jordan Peterson, posits the idea, in his Maps of Meaning course from the University of Toronto, that our actions are inherently linked to our value system, effectively linking axiology and ethics. However, Peterson then discusses the concept of subconscious values which lead to action. For instance, if one desires to play a game, but believes that games are a waste of time and shouldn’t be played in length, why do they have the desire to play the game? It could be that they are subconsciously valuing the rest, the pleasure of the game, or something else but is unaware of such a value. These are all fascinating discussions, and worth exploring further, but it seems logically, at the very least, our metaphysic leads to a particular action (again, pointing to Romans 12:1-2).

²³ Isa 6:8.

should present themselves as a living sacrifice,²⁴ for it is only logical to do so. The foundations of one's worldview predictively and consistently *should* lead to particular action as it defines one's understanding of reality.

The Relationship Between “Is” and “Ought” Modeled in Eschatological Studies

This concept can also be seen amongst modern theologians as various interpretations of the book of Revelation and their ethical implications are presented. By simply examining any of the three major schools of thought about the millennial kingdom, one can identify the relationship. At risk of over-simplifying, it seems beneficial to explore post-millennialism as an example.

Post-millennialism is an eschatological belief that Christ will return after the millennial kingdom, which some understand to be a literal thousand years²⁵, and some take a more allegorical approach²⁶. Either way, before Christ returns, the commission given in Matthew 28 will be successful, the nations will turn to Christ in belief establishing a Christianized

²⁴ Paul continues throughout the remainder of the book to present a proper ethic (how one can present themselves) based on the truths presented beforehand.

²⁵ Many would divide the time between the first advent of Christ and the second advent of Christ into two sections where in the first, the church is not triumphant, but are triumphant in the second period.

²⁶ In Sam Waldron's respond to James White's conversion from Amillennialism to Post-millennialism, he presents differences between the two systems but often makes statements such as, "It is this future golden age before Christ returns and in which we do not already live that distinguishes Postmillennialism from Amillennialism. Subtract this idea from Postmillennialism and you might as well call all of us optimistic Amillennialists postmillennial." Amillennialists, practically by definition, take the thousand years as a symbolic amount of time which we currently find ourselves in today.

world and golden age of righteousness, and then He will return. The Savoy Declaration of 1658 presents it this way:

As the Lord in his care and love towards his Church, hath in his infinite wise providence exercised it with great variety in all ages, for the good of them that love him, and his own glory; so according to his promise, we expect that in the latter days, antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the kingdom of his dear Son broken, *the churches of Christ being enlarged, and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed.*²⁷ [emphasis mine]

Sam Waldron, the President of Covenant Baptist Theological Seminary, a self-proclaimed amillennialist, writes in response to a recent conversion of a colleague from amillennialism to postmillennialism:

...Amillennialists are postmillennial with regard to the denotation of millennium, but they are not postmillennial with regard to the connotation of millennium. That is, we amils believe that Christ is coming back after the thousand years. We do not, however, believe that this thousand years is what the millenarians conceive it to be. *It is not a great golden age of happiness, peace, prosperity, and righteousness in which such blessedness*

²⁷ The Savoy Declaration, 1658, Ch. 26 para. 5.
<https://www.creeds.net/congregational/savoy/>.

*is the dominant tone of the world and in which evil is subdued under these things.*²⁸ [emphasis mine]

Waldron distinguishes postmillennialism and amillennialism by focusing on the success of the church and the golden age of the kingdom. Amillennialism, in Waldron's estimation, does not see the kingdom as a golden age (or a thousand years in its normative form) while postmillennialists do.

Likewise, Boettner, an advocate for postmillennialism, states it this way, "But it does mean that evil in all its many forms eventually will be reduced to negligible proportions, that Christian principles will be the rule, not the exception, and that Christ will return to a truly Christianized world..."²⁹ It is the responsibility of the Church, in this view, to proclaim the gospel message which will grow more and more successful throughout time, impacting various aspects of culture, society, politics, etc. This view, taken to the extreme, leads to things such as Christian Reconstructionism where it is the responsibility of the church to infiltrate government, establish mosaic law, and reconstruct the world, establishing this period of prosperity.³⁰ In this more radical view, the church is not simply responsible for ushering in this time of prosperity through the successful spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ, but much more.

C. Peter Wagner, the leader of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), states this in one of his presentations after proposing that the Church *is* currently under a mandate to have

²⁸ Waldron, Sam, *#datpostmil? A Friendly (and Reluctant) Response to James White (and All My Postmillennial Friends)*, cbtseminary.org, March 22, 2021, <https://cbtseminary.org/datpostmil-a-friendly-and-reluctant-response-to-james-white-and-all-my-postmillennial-friends/>.

²⁹ Boettner, Loraine, *The Millennium*, (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ), 1991, p. 14.

³⁰ See R.J. Rushdoony's work, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, as well as Greg Bahnsen's, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*.

dominion over the whole earth, “Dominion has to do with control, dominion has to do with rulership, dominion has to do with authority and subduing and it relates to society...dominion means ruling as kings...*now the dominion mandate is another phrase for the Great Commission...it’s talking about transforming society [emphasis mine].*”³¹ It is the purpose of the church, in Wagner’s view, to transform societies and nations into Christian nations, establishing theonomies throughout the world. The position of Wagner involves much more than just postmillennialism, as can be seen in the above quote, but postmillennialism is also a keystone doctrine of this position. Shawn Nelson in a paper regarding the NAR states it this way:

The New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) can be characterized as a postmillennial restorationist movement which seeks to restore the so-called lost office of apostle and prophet with the goal of establishing the kingdom of God upon the earth. Six broad values and beliefs of the movement are evaluated in the following order: postmillennialism, restorationism, manufactured continuationism, reconstructionism, experientialism and pragmatism. It is argued [in Nelson’s paper] that postmillennialism is a weak biblical position and that NAR’s brand (“dominionism”) *wrongly places the responsibility of the kingdom on Christians rather than God.*³² [emphasis mine]

³¹ C. Peter Wagner, *On Dominionism, a Key Doctrine of the New Apostolic Reformation*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7WboWrp-Cwo>.

³² Nelson, Shawn, *Six Big Problems With the New Apostolic Reformation*, [isca-apologetics.org](https://www.isca-apologetics.org), <https://www.isca-apologetics.org/sites/default/files/papers/suntereo/Nelson%20-%20New%20Apostolic%20Reformation.pdf>.

It is the belief that the Church is responsible for establishing the kingdom on earth *before* Christ returns, and an understanding of a particular method the Church is to utilize in doing this which leads to restorationist and reconstructionist action or ethic/sociopraxy.³³

While one of many, embedded deep within this discussion is a more precise mechanism utilized to establish such an understanding of the millennial kingdom and the ethics/sociopraxy associated with that understanding; namely, the interpretation of symbolism. A symbol is an object which is utilized to represent a shared characteristic of the thing in discussion. For example, the sentence, “Satan is a roaring lion” does not intend to communicate that Satan is an actual lion, but the lion is the object which shares a common characteristic with Satan. Perhaps the shared characteristic is they are both fierce, looking to devour.

Because of the nature of symbols, simply based on definition, they can be difficult to interpret. However, not only is it the *interpretation* of symbolism that proves difficult, but simply the *identification* of symbolism. Before one can interpret a symbol, that figure of speech has to be present in the text. To misidentify something as a symbol leads to a wrong understanding of the passage. This can be seen clearly, again returning to our various views of the millennial kingdom, in Revelation 20:1-7. This passage explains a period of time where, after Jesus returns and conquers the nations³⁴, Satan shall be bound³⁵ and a group of people will be resurrected and reign with Christ³⁶. This period of time, from the binding of Satan to his

³³ It is worth noting: it is not my intention to show error in post-millennialism but instead use it as a case study displaying the relationship between theology/metaphysics and action/ethics/sociopraxy.

³⁴ Rev 19:11-21.

³⁵ Rev 20:2.

³⁶ Rev 20:4.

release, is described as a thousand years.³⁷ As Waldron comments in the above quote, all three camps, premillennialists, amillennialists, and postmillennialists, recognize and agree with the concept of a thousand years—to disagree with this would require one to eliminate Revelation 20 altogether. However, amillennialists and many postmillennialists see the thousand years as representative or symbolic to a large amount of time. While the premillennialist, and some postmillennialists, would interpret these passages in Revelation 20 as describing a time period of a literal thousand years, the amillennialist and the other postmillennialists would interpret this passage symbolically. The disagreement is founded upon different interpretive methods, but more specifically, the identification of something being a symbol.

The Time for Interpreting Symbolically

All those advocating for premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism take some scripture literal (in the strictest form of the word) and some symbolic. In fact, it has been a great endeavor in recent history for the “literalist” to define what is meant by literal. Those who hold to the LGH understand figures of speech exist, such as symbols, and therefore understand those symbols as symbolic. Those who hold to the loosest allegorical or symbolic interpretive methods understand some Scripture in a literal sense. Henry Virklir puts it this way, “Thus the differences between literalists and symbolists are relative rather than absolute, involving questions of ‘how much’ and ‘which parts’ of prophecy should be

³⁷ Rev 20:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7; I break these versus up individually as the term is used in each verse. Over the course of six verses, “thousand years” is utilized six times.

interpreted symbolically rather than literally.”³⁸ This use of literal is why it seems better to refer to the interpretive method as normative, taking into account figures of speech. However, the question then is this: “when should one interpret passages in a symbolic fashion?” The answer must be whenever a symbol is present—beyond that, you interpret the symbol symbolically, not the entire passage. To interpret symbolically in the absence of a symbol places the reader as the definer of meaning, not the discoverer of meaning. Interpreting something as symbolic even in the absence of a symbol is what makes an interpretive method a symbolic methodology—non-normative.

The next logical question seems to be, “How do you identify whether something is symbolic or not?” Is there a marker in the text which identifies things to be symbolic? Is there a general rule of thumb, so to speak, which is modeled in the Biblical text? These questions must be answered before you can rightfully muster the effort to interpret the symbol.

The Extent of Understanding God’s Communication

The last question that seems necessary before diving into the world of symbols in Revelation is, “Is every aspect of God’s communication purposed for understanding by the receiver of said communication?” As one approaches symbols, is it possible that the details of a symbol are meant to be obscure, lacking clarity?

This question is not to undermine the understandability of the text. God has certainly communicated with mankind³⁹, provided clarity and understanding through the text⁴⁰, and

³⁸ Virkler, Henry A., *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, Michigan), 1981, p 196.

³⁹ 2 Tim 3:16-17.

⁴⁰ 2 Pet 1:3; John 5:39.

holds humanity responsible for rightly understanding the text⁴¹. Paul, among other Biblical writers⁴², certainly seems to teach that truths presented by the Scriptures are to be understood and applied.⁴³ However, are there any examples where God communicates with an alternative purpose to clarity and understanding?

In Daniel 12:8-9, Daniel is being informed about the events which will take place in the end times. After revelation about how long the “wonders” will last, Daniel records, “As for me, I heard but could not understand; so I said, “My lord, what will be the outcome of these events?”⁴⁴ Daniel, being eager to understand what the Lord had previously revealed, asks a clarifying question. The answer Daniel was given was, “Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the end time.”⁴⁵ As Thomas Constable states, “The Lord reminded Daniel that much of what he had received would remain obscure until the end time (cf. v. 4).”⁴⁶ While clarity and increasing understanding would be achieved, it would not be until the end times. Some of the details of the communication given to Daniel would remain uncertain and obscure.

Another example of this is Jesus’ parables. After Jesus’ rejection as messiah in Matthew 12, Jesus begins to speak in parables. As the disciples are following Jesus, they recognize this shift in communication style. Naturally, they ask, “Why do you speak to them in parables?”⁴⁷ Jesus responds by stating, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of

⁴¹ 2 Tim 2:15.

⁴² David in Psa 1; Jesus in Rev 1:3; Luke in Luke 1:4; etc.

⁴³ 1 Tim 4:3; Col 2:8; Eph 6:14.

⁴⁴ Dan 12:8.

⁴⁵ Dan 12:9.

⁴⁶ Constable, Thomas, *Notes on Daniel*, Soniclight.com, 2022, <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/ot/daniel/daniel.htm>.

⁴⁷ Matt 13:10.

heaven, but to them it has not been granted.”⁴⁸ Jesus then continues to explain the parable to the disciples as they had been granted access to understanding. The purpose of parables was not to add clarity but obscurity.

This is not meant to be an argument obscuring confidence in the Scriptures, but it does seem that God purposes communication, at times, for obscurity and not clarity. These passages are certainly still useful, and humanity is held responsible for wrestling with them. It should, however, act as a warning to providing meaning to symbols which is not presented in the Scriptures. At the very least, those things which are not apparent in the context should be held as opinion, not certainty. A. Berkeley Mickleson recognizes this limitation when he states, “Where symbols are not explained or are explained only briefly, ambiguity may result. The interpreter is forced to be subjective. Even when an explanation accompanies the symbol, he may read more into the symbol than the explanation warrants.”⁴⁹

DOES THE BIBLE PROVIDE A MODEL FOR IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING SYMBOLS?

If one desires to approach the Scriptures with a Biblical methodology regarding symbolism, the question has to be asked, does the Bible provide a methodology for understanding symbols? E.W. Bullinger posits, “The assertion as to anything being a symbol of another rests entirely on human authority, and depends for its accuracy on its agreement with the teaching of Scripture.”⁵⁰ Bullinger is arguing that there are not any markers within the Biblical text that identifies something as

⁴⁸ Matt 13:11.

⁴⁹ Mickleson, A. Berkeley, *Interpreting the Bible*, (Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI), 1987, p 265.

⁵⁰ Bullinger, 769.

symbolic, leaving the identification of the symbol to rest completely on man's thinking and authority. However, the interpretation of said symbol must agree with the canon of Scripture. Is the identification of symbols reliant completely on the authority of man, or do the Scriptures provide aid in this arena? Where might one gather principles for interpreting symbols?

A CASE STUDY: REVELATION 1:9-20

Revelation 1:9-20 describes John's first visionary experience in the book of Revelation. As John hears Jesus commanding him to "write what you see and send it to the seven churches,"⁵¹ John turns around and sees Jesus speaking to him. John then proceeds to explain, and presumably write, what he sees. John explains the appearance of Jesus, using mostly similes⁵². There are two symbols present within this description—the lampstands which Jesus is standing among and the stars which are present in Jesus' right hand. The "sharp two-edged sword" coming from His mouth⁵³ is often described as a symbol, but as will be seen later, it seems to be describing an actual sword lacking representative characteristics in this context. Both symbols are describing what John is seeing, but representative of something else.⁵⁴ This is an important aspect

⁵¹ Rev 1:11.

⁵² Similes are a figure of speech comparing two things utilizing the modifier like or as. Both similes and symbols carry a representative and comparative purpose but differ slightly in grammatical function.

⁵³ With every other aspect of Jesus being described utilizing a simile, it is interesting that this aspect is not. There are not any significant variants within this section of the passage.

⁵⁴ Note the difference between simile and symbol here – John is utilizing simile to try and represent what he is seeing in an understandable fashion to his audience. The symbols are easily described but

of symbolism. While John is seeing lampstands, stars, and a sword, at least two of the three are representative of some other object(s). In Revelation 1:20, Jesus provides the objects which these symbols are representing. By Jesus providing this information, one can identify basic principles for identifying and interpreting symbols.

Within this case study, there are three principles that can be identified from the Biblical text. Each are modeled within the passage. These principles can be consistently utilized throughout the Biblical text regarding symbolism. While Biblical models do not necessarily result in prescription, it would seem viable to assert interpretive models found within Scripture should be followed whenever God is communicating Biblical truth⁵⁵. For example, Jesus is interpreting the symbols which are present, providing a model from God Himself.

Principle #1: Symbols Can Be “Mysteries”

Through a line of reasoning and historical attestation, E.W. Bullinger equates the term “symbol,” or *symbolon* in the Greek, with “mystery,” or *mysterion* in the Greek.⁵⁶ *Mysterion* identifies something unknown previous to special revelation. Bullinger submits that, “Μυστήριον (mysterion) means secret; and later it came to mean a secret sign or symbol... Thus it will be seen that symbol is practically synonymous with the latter use of mystery as meaning a secret sign.”⁵⁷ While this may be

representative and established by the author of the vision, not John himself.

⁵⁵ There are certainly descriptive sections of Scripture which would not lead to beneficial prescriptions. For instance, it would be poor for one to follow the interpretive model provided by the Pharisee’s due to the consistent indictment of misunderstanding given by Jesus.

⁵⁶ Bullinger, 769.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

true, it seems that in the Biblical text, symbol is a broader term than simply a mystery. There are seemingly many examples where a symbol, as defined as an object representing another, is not a secret, or something not revealed at an earlier time. In fact, as Bullinger later explains how a symbol is established, he states, “The stages by which a symbol is reached, therefore, are: (1) either by Metonymy or Metaphor, one thing is used to represent another; then (2) the one is used to imply the other; and finally (3) it becomes permanently substituted for it as a symbol of it.”⁵⁸ It would seem this process would *require* a symbol to be previously understood throughout establishing the representation as a symbol. It would seem then, that *symbolon* is a broader term than *mysterion*.

While it seems *symbolon* is certainly a broader term than *mysterion*, Revelation 1:20 shows that symbols can certainly be used whenever previously unknown by the audience. However, such a symbol requires interpretation for the audience to understand it. As Jesus utilizes both stars and lampstands to represent the messengers of the churches and the churches themselves respectively, He identifies and defines them as the audience would not have understood the vision otherwise.

Principle #2:

Immediate Context May Identify and Define Symbols

Within any exegetical endeavor, it is the primary role of the immediate literary⁵⁹ context to define meaning within the passage being examined. The immediate context in any situation defines words, provides insightful information for the passage being examined, and identifies many different grammatical and syntactical structures in the passage under

⁵⁸ Ibid, 770.

⁵⁹ Literary context here is pointing to the immediate context within the text itself as opposed to the historical context.

examination. Jesus' explanation in Revelation 1:20 shows this to be true regarding symbolism as well. This concept is also seen very clearly in Revelation 17 as the "mystery" is given in verses 3–6 and the explanation provided in verses 8–18.

Principle #3:

Far Off Context May Identify and Define Symbols

There are certainly symbols within the book of Revelation which are not defined immediately surrounding the use of the symbol. An example of this is the use of Babylon the Great in Revelation 14, 16–18.⁶⁰ If Babylon the Great is to be understood symbolically, it doesn't seem there is an apparent interpretation of that symbol in the immediate context. However, Babylon the Great does share a common description of "great city" with the city of Jerusalem.⁶¹ One could argue that the context in Revelation 11 would give reason to identify Babylon the Great as symbolic for the city of Jerusalem.

Another example of this can be seen in Revelation 1. The sharp two-edged sword can be identified as non-symbolic. Of course, this, among those things which are symbolic, represents what John is seeing in these visions. However, later context helps to understand that the sword should be understood as representing just that – a sword. Revelation 19 records the second advent of Christ as He returns in judgement of the world. In verse 5, John records, "From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations..."⁶² The sword

⁶⁰ There have been those who believe Babylon is a symbol as well as those who would disagree with this position. Andy Woods presents, in his book *Babylon: The Bookends of Prophetic History*, an argument that Babylon the Great should not be understood symbolically, but understood in a normative fashion, representing a literal Babylon which will be rebuilt. This would certainly give reason for absence of an explanation.

⁶¹ Cf. Rev 11:8, Rev 16:19, 17:18, 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21.

⁶² This is also seen in Rev 19:21.

is the instrument Christ will be using for judgement and war. It would seem fitting that John sees Jesus with the sword in Revelation 1. While the far-off context does not identify the sword in Revelation 1 as symbolic, it does seem to identify the sword as non-symbolic.

CASE STUDY: REVELATION 5:6

In Revelation 5, John is in the throne room of God⁶³ and has previously witnessed an incredible scene with God sitting on His throne being worshipped by four creatures and twenty-four elders.⁶⁴ After this, John “saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.”⁶⁵ Only one was found worthy to open the book and break the seals, “...a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.”⁶⁶ Much like the previous case study, there is an identification and interpretation of some symbols in the immediate context—the seven horns and seven eyes. However, it seems that there is a symbol in this passage which is not defined in the immediate context—the Lamb as if slain.

Principle #4:

Previously Established Symbols Can Be Utilized Without Explanation

The first symbol—the seven horns and seven eyes—are defined in the immediate context but are not identified as being a mystery. The symbolism of the lamb is not defined or identified in the immediate context. However, through distant context, one

⁶³ Rev 4:2.

⁶⁴ Rev 4:3–11.

⁶⁵ Rev 5:1.

⁶⁶ Rev 5:6.

can quickly conclude the Person whom the “lamb” object is representing. In John 1:29, John the Baptist announces the arrival of Jesus proclaiming, “Behold, The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” In Revelation 5:9, it can be seen that this Lamb is one Who has “purchased for God with your blood from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” The connection between the descriptors of the Lamb seem to provide reason for identifying the symbol of a lamb as representative of the Person of Jesus Christ. This is not to say that the symbol represents the same thing in every context, but other contexts can give clues and helpful insights as to the nature of the symbol in the context being studied.

CASE STUDY: REVELATION 7:1-8

The beginning verses of Revelation 7 present the sealing of 144,000 men from the tribes of Israel. These are presented as the bond servants of God from Israel, 12,000 from each tribe. These are later described in Revelation 14:1-5 as those who “have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.”⁶⁷ If understood non-symbolically, during the time of God’s wrath on the earth, angels will seal 144,000 Israelites, 12,000 from each tribe, for the service of the Lord and they will be those who are chaste.

Exegetically, the context does not seem to provide any reason for understanding such a passage as symbolic. In fact, this passage provides reason for the sealing, a detailed list of who will be sealed, and a purpose for the sealing. The later passage in Revelation 14 then provides further clarity as to the

⁶⁷ Rev 14:4.

condition of those being sealed. There is nothing obscure or absurd that would lead one to believe such a passage is symbolic and there also is not any interpretations provided in the immediate or distant context.

Some theologians, however, understand the passage as symbolic due to an external genre assigned to the book of Revelation; namely, the apocalyptic genre.⁶⁸ Within the apocalyptic genre, many argue the books are symbolic throughout and numbers are typically representative of something else. Therefore, the 144,000 should represent all of God's elect because, "It's not to be taken literally. It's 12 x 12 x 1,000: 12 being the number of completion for God's people (representing the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of the Lamb) and 1,000 being a generic number suggesting a great multitude."⁶⁹ The assertion is based on a particular genre assigned to the book and a theological precommitment.⁷⁰ The implications are vast as the interpretation by DeYoung and others places all of God's elect on earth during the time of the tribulation (although DeYoung, as an amillennialist, would assert the tribulation is not a time period of seven years where God pours out His wrath on a churchless world, but a much longer period of time where the church is present). It is this same concept that drives many to symbolize the thousand-year reign

⁶⁸ See Kevin DeYoung, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-144000/>; Leland Ryken, *Symbols and Reality: A Guided Study of Prophecy, Apocalypse, and Visionary Literature: Reading the Bible as Literature* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁶⁹ Kevin DeYoung, "Theological Primer: The 144,000" The Gospel Coalition, Accessed August 30, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-144000/>.

⁷⁰ Both DeYoung and Moises Silva make a case for the theological hermeneutic which identifies one's theological system as a presupposition to any text being studied.

of Christ found in Revelation 20, as has already been discussed. Likewise, in Revelation 20, there is not any exegetical reason to symbolize the time period given to Christ's reign on earth prior to the establishment of the new heaven and new earth as found in Revelation 21.

CASE STUDY: REVELATION 17-18

Revelation 17 begins by an angel carrying John into the wilderness to be given a vision regarding "...the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality."⁷¹ After John is shown the vision in verses 3-6, John "wondered greatly."⁷² Seeing this, the angel asks John why he stares in wonder *at the mystery* and then offers an interpretation, in Revelation 17:7-18, of what has just been seen. A similar situation is found in Revelation 1 where a mystery is seen and then immediately explained.

Principle #4:

Previously Established Symbols Can Be Utilized Without Explanation

Immediately following this vision and interpretation of the symbolism within, the same symbols are utilized in Revelation 18 without further clarification. For example, Revelation 18:3, "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality." There is not any need for explaining again the context in symbols found

⁷¹ Rev 17:1-2.

⁷² Rev 1:6.

within the great harlot because they were just explained in the previous context.

CONCLUSION

Symbolism can be difficult to identify and interpret. The Bible, however, provides guidance for approaching the topic. While the four principles provided in this paper are far from comprehensive, they do provide a Biblical foundation for approaching symbolism throughout the Biblical text and hopefully provide a starting point for further research. Some further questions which should be further studied are: 1) Are there any exegetical markers which provide further clarity on the identification of symbols? 2) What are the symbols presented in the book of Revelation and what are their interpretations based on Biblical data alone? 3) Are there any symbols within Revelation which we are unable to understand before the end times?

It is the responsibility of the exegete to wrestle with the Biblical text utilizing a Biblical methodology. Symbolism is a difficult aspect of that interpretive practice. If symbolism – especially in the book of Revelation – is approached wrongfully, the consequences are dire. Let us endeavor to rightly divide the word of truth in all areas including symbolism.

THE APPLICATION OF ADULT LEARNING PRINCIPLES IN EFFECTIVE PREACHING

Part 1 – Section 1: Introduction to the Study¹

Randall C. DeVille, EdD

INTRODUCTION

Lecture is the method of choice for higher education course instructors in the United States (Butler, 1992; Omatseye, 2007). Carlson (2001) provided some reasons as to why the lecture method is a popular method of instruction. According to Carlson, any group size can be taught with only one instructor with some degree of effectiveness. The need for few additional instructional materials makes lecture attractive to teacher and administrator alike (Carlson, 2001). Lecture allows the teacher flexibility in influencing the delivery of the material with their style or preferences (Carlson, 2001). There are, however, difficulties with the lecture method that the instructor must overcome. During a lecture, the learner tends to become passive and unmotivated (Carlson, 2001).

The effectiveness of teaching, especially lecture, is not only connected to a teacher's mastery of content but also to their understanding of adult learning concepts and communication. These three characteristics of an effective teacher form what McCroskey, Richmond, and McCroskey (2002) described as a "three legged stool" where effective communication is as critically important as the other two legs (p. 384). Researchers have examined the role of communication in instruction,

¹ This paper is adapted from the introductory first section of Randall C. DeVille, "The Application of Adult Learning Principles in Effective Preaching," (Ed.D dissertation, Walden University, 2012).

focusing on the concepts of immediacy and relevance (Anderson, 1979; Christophel, 1990; McCroskey & Richmond, 1992). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the strategies preachers can employ in an effort to increase effective communication.

I used focus groups, as well as personal interviews, in an attempt to capture the perceived effectiveness of a sermon from the listener's perspective and to gain insight into what the speaker experiences. It was hoped that the open-ended qualitative questions would provide insight into participants' perceptions associated with teaching as they relate to adult learning principles and communication. I focused on finding out the kind of sermon that delivers a message that changes adults' lives. The perspectives of the churchgoers, along with my observations, provided data to evaluate the preacher's view of elements that comprise effective sermons.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Preachers in the early 21st century may lack knowledge on the components of sermons that affect their listeners' lives. It is this lack of understanding of how to facilitate adult learning that may explain why churchgoers attend and hear lessons for many years, yet the lessons learned in the sermons are not reflected in their day-to-day lives. Barna (2002) found that only half of church-going adults left church feeling challenged to change. The Barna Group (2002) reported that believers are exposed to many sermons using state of the art technology in a seeker-friendly atmosphere and still are not experiencing any significant change in their personal behavior. Knowles (1984) and Mezirow (1991) argued that learning is indicated by change in behavior; therefore, it appears that churchgoing adults are not learning because their behavior is not changing. This

problem of not changing behavior as prompted by church lessons impacts the congregation, minister, and the community at large. The congregation becomes complacent, the minister discouraged, and the community confused when there is no growth or change in the lives of the churchgoers (Knowles, 1984; Morgan, 2002; Strangway, 2004).

There are many possible factors contributing to this problem, among which are attitudes toward adult learning found within the church, moral relativism prevalent in U.S. society, and ministerial training that may lack classes on the educational process and adult learning (Tanner, 1994). Even though Barna (2002) stated that nearly half of churchgoers leave church without being inspired to change, Barna did not explain why churchgoers felt uninspired to change their lives based on sermon lessons. Knowles, (1980) Tanner (1994), and Carter (2009) indicated that preachers are often unaware of the educational realities associated with preaching. While teachers of adults need to understand and facilitate adult learning, specific suggestions directly related to preaching are lacking in the literature (Brookfield, 1986; Lai, 1995; Murugiah, 2005). This gap in the literature relates to the practice of preachers in many churches throughout the United States who are not aware of adult learning and communication concepts that could enhance their ability to inspire and educate their listeners. Consequently, I investigated the extent to which preachers use and churchgoers benefit from concepts from adult learning. This study may contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by exploring the experiences and observations of ministers and churchgoing adults as they relate to what they perceive is missing in the preaching process.

NATURE OF THE STUDY

The case study design used in the qualitative study included one-on-one interviews with pastors. Focus groups made up of church-going adults were also used to inform the study. The study involved participants who fit the description of consistent church-going adults, that is, adults who attend church services on a weekly basis. Pastors were interviewed to probe their experiences concerning their training, perceptions of the congregants, and their views on the elements that comprise an effective sermon. I focused on the perceptions and experiences of church-going adults at their churches, thus supporting a qualitative research design (Knowles, 1984). The focus groups and personal interviews were conducted face-to-face in an effort to capture a description of the participants' experiences. This strategy was chosen because it offers a focus on the essence of the participants' experiences in connecting to the message of a sermon. Interviews and focus groups, while they are the source of indirect information, also give a description of the participants' experience while giving the researcher an opportunity to probe the historical context of the participant's experience (Creswell, 2009).

I consulted with a panel of experts to develop the interview and focus group questions to address concerns regarding the validity of the interview and focus group planned (Appendix A and B). The findings were analyzed with an understanding that I only addressed techniques in the presentation of content, not the spiritual condition or maturity of the participants. I attempted to identify factors and techniques of preaching that are perceived to make a difference in the effectiveness of the sermon.

The conceptual framework provided a resource in interpreting the findings. Data collection took place by using

focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and field notes. Each participant was reminded of the purpose and nature of the study prior to the interview or focus group. The goal was to encourage participants to ask questions regarding procedures quickly but thoroughly before beginning the focus group discussion. The focus groups lasted no longer than 60 minutes. I collected the data with the help of field notes and audio recording. I did not invite my congregation to participate in the study to avoid bias and undue influence on the participants.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted with a focus on statements made by participants and descriptions of their experiences. The data were analyzed for both the generic and specific processes and were subsequently organized and coded (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) advocated analyzing the data in a way a that can yield codes concerning expected subjects, suprising concepts, and concepts that suggest a broader application of the study data.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overarching question in this study was how do church-going adults perceive the sermon? There were three sub-questions for the study:

1. In the experience of churchgoing adults, how do the principles of adult learning, communication theory, and ambient teaching make a difference in the effectiveness of sermons?
2. What perceptions do preachers have about the effect of relevance and immediacy techniques on the effectiveness of their sermons?

3. How do the views of preachers and churchgoers align on the topic of elements that comprise effective sermons?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this case study was to better understand the characteristics of a sermon that enhance learning for churchgoers in Christian churches. By exploring the experience of listeners, elements needed to increase the effectiveness of sermons can be identified. I attempted to discover concepts relating to adult learning or communication that exist in and thus may increase the effectiveness of sermons. In the design, I integrated research on preaching with research on teaching. I considered the resources and research in education and communication theory, seeking to come to a better understanding of the characteristics of effective adult preaching to adult listeners (i.e., lecturing, effective). I used focus groups with church-going adults and personal interviews preachers.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concepts of adult learning, communication, and ambient teaching are the concepts that guided the study. A more detailed analysis of the concepts is presented in Section 3.

Adult Learning Concepts

Adult learning perspectives are used to explore how adults learn and use what they learn and make meaning. Murugiah (2005) stated that “all levels of learners who engage in the practice of learning have certain unspoken (tacit) beliefs about life and how to apply them in life” (p. 899). Proponents of adult learning perspectives challenge the traditional teacher-

centric or “monologue” adult education methods and encourage interaction or “dialogue” between student and teacher (Brookfield, 1990; Knowles, 1984; Vella, 1994). Knowles’s (1984) andragogical principles and two other adult learning concepts were used to develop the issues surrounding the methods or techniques used to teach adults.

Andragogy: Knowles

Knowles (1984) summarized experience and research about the adult learner in the principles of adult learning. Knowles attached the Dutch word *andragogy* to instructional practices to indicate that the learning activities are guided purposefully to produce a change in adult students. The principles of andragogy provide guidelines for adult educators seeking to connect with their students. Knowles suggested the following four guidelines for educators to effectively teach adults: (a) give adults the reason for learning the lesson before the lesson begins, (b) take into account the great and diverse experiences that adults have, (c) realize that adults are ready and excited about learning which will help them deal with real life, and (d) understand that adult learners are primarily intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically (Knowles, 1984).

Transformative learning: Mezirow

Mezirow (1991) viewed adult learning as the teacher encouraging students to be critically reflective of social norms and cultural conduct. The goals of this kind of learning are (a) to help the learner evaluate and understand why they see the world the way they do and (b) to empower the adult learners to discard some of the restrictive perspectives they have held previously. Mezirow challenged adults to reflect on the effects that their perspectives are having on their interaction with

other individuals and ideas. Murugiah (2005) described Mezirow's theory this way, "Transformative learning is defined as a process by which we question our taken for granted frames of reference in an effort to make them more integrative, so that they become more justified in guiding our action" (p. 899). The theory describes the role of adult educators as those who are committed to helping their students become more imaginative and critically reflective of previously held ideas.

Murugiah suggested that certain traits should be considered when approaching adult education. Adult learners have a wealth and variety of life experiences, a desire for problem-centered learning, a capability for self-directed learning, a need for varying presentations according to their learning styles, and a need for continuous learning.

Behavior modification theory: Wertheim

Behavior modification is a theory that is used to understand human behavior and on how people react to certain stimuli. Behavior modification theorists attempt to capitalize on observable outcomes (Wertheim, 2000). Some of the foundational assumptions of this theory are (a) all complex behavior is learned, shaped, and subject to observable laws; (b) a person can change behavior through rewards and punishment; (c) behavior is determined by the environment; and (d) part of what individuals learn results from observing others and the consequences of their actions.

Wertheim (2000) argued that previous assumptions can be applied to learning in the following ways. First, adults learn more rapidly if they are allowed to actively participate in the process, especially when the process includes repetition. Second, feedback, whether positive or negative, aids the student learning and guides their actions. Next, the student who is rewarded needs to know exactly what action is being rewarded

so that there is no possibility that any inappropriate or undesirable behavior is reinforced. Finally, nonresponses of a teacher are often misunderstood so student reactions should be monitored (Wertheim, 2000).

Communication

Communication is the process by which thoughts, data, and feelings are shared (Hybels & Weaver, 2007). Some of the earliest researchers who studied the role of communication in instruction were focused on the concepts of immediacy and relevance (Anderson, 1979; Christophel, 1990; McCroskey & Richmond, 1992; McCroskey et al., 2002). The terms immediacy and relevance can be defined as a connection between the one speaking and the one listening.

Immediacy is the verbal and nonverbal things that allow a speaker to connect emotionally with the listener (Olenowski, 2000; Simmons, 2007). The emotional connection can be facilitated verbally or nonverbally. In the emotional bonding theory, Olenowski (2000) focused on the emotions found in the communication process. Olenowski stated that words have emotion and thoughts connected to them, therefore speakers would do well to consider their choice of words and the emotion and thought they communicate. Olenowski explained, "Creating this "common ground" involves imaging, painting and clarifying our interior emotional lives" (p.10). Olenowski advocated the use of metaphor, illustration, humor, storytelling, and self-disclosure to create a common ground between speaker and listener. Nonverbal immediacy has also been shown to affect cognitive learning and to promote favorable outcomes in learners (McCroskey et al., 2002). Learners interpret nonverbal immediacy in an instructor as being caring, understandable, and indicating better instructors than those who are less immediate (McCroskey et al., 2002). Nonverbal immediacy is nonverbal

behaviors that communicate approval, fondness, or positive affect to others.

Relevance is described as communication that connects in a practical way with the listener. It is the practice of presenting a lesson in a way that helps the listeners to visualize it as the story of their lives (Daggett, 2005; Furman, 1992; Luntz, 2007; Olenowski, 2000; Strangway, 2004). Being practical or giving the “how to” after teaching spiritual principles or truths was also suggested as characteristic of adding relevance (Furman, 1992; Luntz, 2007; Strangway, 2004).

Ambient Teaching

Ambient teaching is described as the use of a space and the characteristics and conditions of the space to enhance the oral message and thus support learning. Knowles (1984) observed that the climate for adult learning is impacted by the physical characteristics of the space in which it is to take place. Environmental features are important because they have a direct and powerful impact on learning (Colanduno, 2007; Kennedy, 2002). White (1972) approximated that one fourth of learning is dependent upon the effects of the physical environment. Adult students are more likely than children to be affected by the physical learning environment with an increase in their motivation due to sufficient space, attractive decoration, and functional furnishings (Lane & Lewis, 1971). Ambient teaching is not just the way a speaker uses the space, but it is the way the space is perceived, felt, and reacted to by the learner. There are four areas of concern that are elements in evaluating adult learning environments (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). *Anthropometry* means the dimensions of the human body (Colanduno, 2007). Adults are found in different shapes and sizes. These dimensions are important to consider when designing learning spaces (Colanduno, 2007). Hiemstra and

Sisco (1990) posited that the choice of chairs, their size, padding, shape, and arrangement are areas of concern. Another concern is *ergonomics* which deals with bringing comfort to those who occupy a space or use an instrument (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). The size and shape of the classroom influence the philosophy or expectation that a teacher may have for the instruction within that space (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; Kennedy, 2002). *Proxemics* includes gestures, touch or avoidance of touch, eye behavior, and posture (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990). Teachers who are sensitive to these student dynamics are better prepared to connect with a diverse student body.

Sociofugal and *sociopetal* are two different kinds of settings that affect the use of that space for adult learners. Sociofugal settings are used in environments where interaction among the students is discouraged, and attention is primarily forward towards the lecturer. This arrangement creates a status distinction where students see themselves as nonspecial and having no distinct identity compared with the instructor (Colanuno, 2007; White, 1972). Sociopetal settings are environments which encourage interaction and can facilitate conversation by having the learners seated facing towards one another (Colanuno, 2007; Fulton, 1991). *Synaesthetics* involves the study of how students are affected by the simultaneous use of several of their senses. Comfort concerns can be noted in temperature and humidity levels as well as in the availability of suitable chairs, bathrooms, and refreshments (Vosko, 1991). Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) and Knowles (1980) indicated that much more research needs to be done on the relationships between the human senses such as touch, smell, and taste the outcomes adult learners experience in an adult learning environment. Colanduno (2007) investigated learning space design and its effect upon academic success. Colanduno demonstrated that students' attitudes towards learning were

directly influenced by the design of the learning spaces. It is important for teachers to understand how the physical learning environment impacts the students' senses in ways that enhance student participation and productivity (White, 1972). Hiemstra and Sisco suggested that the physical environment "enhances learner commitment" (p. 246). Since environmental features have an impact on learning, preachers can use the space and characteristics of the space in which they preach to enhance their sermons and thus support learning.

The frameworks of adult learning, communication, and ambient teaching guided the approach, design, and interpretation of data for the study in the following ways. The adult learning concept of self-direction influenced the qualitative design using focus groups and guided the choice of questions that were to be used. Communication concepts were integrated into an instrument that I designed for the observations of preacher participants in the study. The concepts of ambient teaching concerning the characteristics and conditions that support the learning environment were used to guide the development of an instrument to assess the physical learning environments found in the churches involved in the study.

Operational Definitions

Ambient teaching: The use of the space and the characteristics and conditions of the space that enhance the message of the oral communication and support adult learning (Lynch, 2010).

Andragogy: "An organized and sustained effort to assist adults to learn in a way that enhances their capacity to function as self-directed learners" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 199).

Communication: The process by which thoughts, data, and feelings are shared by people (Hybels & Weaver, 2007).

Effectiveness: The measure by which the teacher nurtures perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991).

Immediacy: The verbal and nonverbal things “that allow a speaker to bond emotionally with the listener” (Olenowski, 2000, p. 11).

Preaching: The passionate explanation of the message of the Bible in practical terms for personal use (Furman, 1992).

Relevance: The quality of a lesson that describes whether or not the teacher connects the lesson to be learned with the real life situations of the students (Brookfield, 1990; Robles, 1998).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations

Assumptions

1. The questions used in this study accurately captured the concepts necessary for understanding if effectiveness was achieved in the preaching identified.
2. Participants were candid and truthful in their responses.
3. The concepts of comprehension and challenge to change are terms that can be used to describe the effectiveness in sermons.
4. A sermon can change an adult listener’s behavior for the better.

Limitations

Limitations of this study included the following five points: First, the study was limited to a group of five preachers and nine of each of their listeners. Only consistent church-going adults and a small group of preachers were the focus for the study. Next, the meaning of effective was limited to the quality of a lesson which describes how well it is comprehended and whether it challenges the listener to change. I examined only the factors that contributed to meaningful communication and

predictable reaction. Third, the focus groups, interviews, and observations provided the sole data for the research. Some participants may not have been able to adequately verbalize their experience if the questions did not connect to their particular background and experience. Fourth, I only addressed techniques while not considering spiritual condition or maturity in the participants. The participants brought much more to the study than what was probed, leaving some contributing factors neglected. The fifth limitation in this study was the research design. I focused on the subjective and interpretive experiences of participants. The purposeful discovery of the subjective experiences of participants means the findings could be subject to other interpretations.

Delimitations

There were three delimitations for the study. The number of respondents was 45 adult church-goers in five geographically distinct areas. In addition, five pastors representing several denominations were interviewed for a total of 45 respondents for the study. The scope of the study was narrowed by interviewing and observing only the five churches from five different denominations. A second delimitation was the limited amount of time spent in the interview and focus group process. The limited number of locations constituted the third delimitation. I observed only one worship service at each church. It was further delimited by restricting the time of interviews and focus groups to only 60 minutes.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Barna (2002) reported that only half of sermons delivered in churches were effective in challenging churchgoers to change. This study was significant for two reasons: (a) I filled a gap in

the scholarly literature on effective preaching by determining the elements of adult learning practice and principles that constitute an effective sermon, and (b) positive social change may be achievable as a result of this study. Churchgoers might have their values challenged in educational opportunities where equality, justice, democracy, and freedom are critically discussed along with consistency in living according to these principles.

Knowledge Generation

Updated research on effective preaching may give preachers a better understanding of the dynamics involved in educating, motivating, and transforming the thinking of others so as to affect change in their lives. Preachers may discover that there is a need for change in their sermon preparation and delivery (Knowles, 1980). Preachers can draw upon seminaries, seminars, and professional publications to support and inform curriculum that can be used to educate aspiring religious communicators. Hopefully, it will encourage them to embrace that truth by itself may not always persuade and that preachers are called to be more than “mere pulpit disc jockeys playing God’s records” (Morgan, 2002, p. 4).

Social Change

The beneficiaries of the study are those who find themselves in places of worship where effective preaching is practiced. It is also hoped that churchgoers will no longer simply attend religious services and receive a spiritual buzz, but have their values challenged and evaluated to assess their consistency in living according to them (Knowles, 1984). It is also hoped that the churchgoers in congregations where effective preaching is practiced will be challenged by participation in educational opportunities where equality, justice, democracy,

and freedom are critically discussed (Mezirow, 1991). The results of this study may be a resource other congregants can use for choosing a church or teacher that will meet their needs most (Knowles, 1980).

I assumed that if speakers understand the key elements and practices that make up effective sermons, they may change the way they lecture and potentially stimulate a life change in their listeners (Mezirow, 1991). While I focused on a religious or faith-based topic, the emphasis was on the skills and characteristics that can be employed in order to achieve desired results in lecture as well as preaching (Brookfield, 1987; Merriam, 1991).

SUMMARY

In Section 1, I introduced the research problem which focuses on the experience of church-going adults while listening to a preacher's sermons. The purpose of the study was to explore the experience of listeners of sermons in an attempt to discover concepts relating to adult learning or communication that exist in and thus may increase the effectiveness of sermons. The theoretical and conceptual framework that guided the study were drawn from the adult learning perspectives of Knowles (1980), Mezirow (1991), and Wertheim (2000). In Section 2 the literature review is presented as a means to support the research purpose, methodology, and questions. The section also includes an analysis of the literature related to the methodology for this study. The review of literature provides an analysis of adult learning concepts as well as an exploration into the role of relevancy and immediacy in aiding the listener to gain a deeper level of meaning (Daggett, 2005; Luntz, 2007; Mezirow, 1991). In Section 3, I present the justification for the study using a qualitative design. I also present details concerning the

population, how the interviews were administered, and the data analysis. The findings are presented by themes and subthemes in Section 4 and the interpretation of the findings as well as conclusions and recommendations are found in Section 5.

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