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Book Review

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Book Reviews

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Review of Susan Campbell, *Dating Jesus: A Story of Fundamentalism, Feminism, and the American Girl* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009).
Kathy J. Pulley

Susan Campbell's story is a memoir reflecting upon growing up in the Church of Christ on the northwestern border of the Ozarks (Webb City and Joplin, Missouri), about seventy miles from where I grew up (Springfield, Missouri); the road between us was Route 66. We grew up in middle America during approximately the same time period. In the 1960s and 70s, Churches of Christ in Joplin and Webb City were similar to those in Springfield.

Thinking that Campbell's experiences were going to be similar to mine, I was drawn to the book as soon as my sister showed me her copy. As Campbell talked about the church of her youth, it was so interesting that I found it difficult to stop reading. As I read page after page I found myself having several reactions. I was often thinking "Oh yes, I remember hearing about such things," or "Oh yes, I know exactly what she's talking about." For example, she describes her church splitting over whether to have one-cup communion or multiple cups, and her family went with the more progressive group: multiple cups. Our church must have been more progressive on this issue, because we had always had multiple cups. I only remember *hearing* about those churches that did not. To convey the strong emphasis placed on studying the Bible in her church, Campbell said, "We are teenage Talmudic scholars in the way we split hairs over Bible passages" (25). I knew exactly what she meant. We were people of the book, and like her teenage friends, our youth group also diligently dissected passages and took rigorous notes over every sermon as we sat together up front every Sunday morning and Sunday night. I related completely when she said,

> When my Catholic friends who are lackadaisical or worse about their Bibles call their church the "one, true church," I sit silently. If they knew their Bible, they'd know that that title belongs to my church, not theirs. I know they are in for a big surprise come Judgment Day, when graves will crack open and the wheat will be separated from the chaff, the lambs from the goats, the church of Christ from the sinners (30).

I became teary-eyed when she talked about the importance of her baptism. She so wanted to get it right that she was baptized twice, and commented, "At thirteen, you may not know a lot, but perhaps more than at any other time in your life, you know how to believe in something" (14). The purity of her belief—a kind of Kierkegaardian purity—tugs at the heart.

There is power in narrative. Campbell's religious memoir can both affirm and disturb our own faith narratives. Her story reveals much about the kind of fundamentalism that existed in many Churches of Christ in the middle of the last century, and it also speaks to the church's efforts to resist the barrage of cultural shifts that seemed to threaten the values of the faithful. Her story is also the story of a person—a person who grows up asking questions and searching for answers, who discovers, as many of us do, that life is complex. She has not completely purged herself of the "Church of Christ" inside her. At one point she mentions that she no longer attends church but " . . . every church service I have attended since leaving the church of Christ

has been an opportunity for me to critique the liturgy, the order of worship, the singing, the preaching, the prayers, to hold them up to my own church—the church I have, oddly, rejected—and still find them wanting. How sick is that?" (159).

The uniqueness of *Dating Jesus* is that it is the story of growing up as a faithful fundamentalist *female.* It's personal. At times it is in your face, and it is always remarkably honest. Although Campbell makes her case for the full participation of women in the life of the church by discussing the difficult scriptural passages and important historical people and ideas in Western Christianity, the strongest case she makes for women serving the church, as their individual gifts and interests dictate, is her own story. Gender issues permeate the text. It is never possible for her, or anyone, to separate her sex from her story. She excelled and loved sports, only to realize that there were a lot of injustices there. When she was ready to go to college she was told by her parents that the savings for college had been spent on her older brothers (100).

At church, Campbell became aware of limits at an early age. One early memory was being removed from her Sunday school class one Sunday because she persisted in asking the Sunday school teacher why a woman could not preach. (Apparently, her older brother began preaching at their church on Sunday evenings at a young age, and she felt every bit as qualified as he, if not more.) When she persisted with questions, the frustrated teacher sent her to the nursery where her mother helped with the babies. In what was likely sibling rivalry, her brother was also quick to assure her that the most she could hope for, in regard to serving the church, was marrying someone in the church and possibly teaching Sunday school to children under the age of accountability (23).

Campbell does not answer the exhaustive question "Why does it matter so much to her?" Understanding the gender dynamics of social institutions, or understanding how gender issues are processed in a given individual's psyche is not easy in our culture, or in ancient cultures. Who knows? However, one cannot read Campbell's book without recognizing that in her controlled, yet emotive voice, it mattered! Clearly it has affected her whole life—like a sword that got plunged into the body, broken off, and never removed (161). The question is both complex and personal: how was "she," being who she was, going to respond to God, in her post-baptized life?

When I finished the story, I concluded that Campbell may still be struggling with this very question. She speaks of visiting her brother and his family as an adult, and going to church with them—though his family now goes to what I believe is an Independent Christian church. She wonders if she's going "to cry during yet another song service" and says, "I'm not crying because I'm moved by the possibility and the unrealized potential of my own faith. I'm crying because it's hopeless—isn't it?—to regain something you never had" (160). What was it she never had? Was it hope—hope that given who she was, she could be and do whatever God called her to be and do? She does not elaborate.

Early in her narrative it is clear that Jesus mattered most to her and the church was where her faith was nurtured and lived out. Her words about Jesus were: "He is the perfect boyfriend, asking little more than my fidelity . . . he will be my armor against all the confusion of adolescence, the modernity, the marijuana, the whole sex thing" (16). Thus, the title: *Dating Jesus.* But that Jesus got complicated because of how the Bible was interpreted to her and because of her inability to accept the "rightness" of the church's interpretations about women.

Late in the book, Campbell titles a chapter "Jesus Haunts Me." On the last page of her narrative she tells us about another moment in adulthood, when she wakes up in the night and realizes the Jesus she dated all those years ago, the one to whom she gave "her heart and soul," was the wrong one. That Jesus was false. "The real Jesus wouldn't have worried if I spoke out in Sunday school. He might have expected it—demanded it, even . . . The real Jesus wouldn't have loved me less because of my gender . . . He wouldn't have demanded I step into a box and nail that sucker shut . . . The real Jesus would have allowed me to mature naturally in my own good time . . . The real Jesus would have loved me for me" (204–205).

This ends part one of her story—the "arm-wrestling" with God still goes on (205). My main criticism of

the book is that it ends too soon—I want to know what happens when she leaves our Ozarks Hills, goes off to college and settles in New England. I want to know how it turns out with dating the new Jesus!

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Review of Stuart L. Love, *Jesus and Marginal Women: The Gospel of Matthew in Social-Scientific Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009).[1]*

Kindalee Pfremmer De Long

Stuart Love's 2009 book *Jesus and Marginal Women* offers a six-fold reading of the Gospel of Matthew. It begins with two chapters focused on women in private and public settings in ancient Palestine. This analysis sheds light on women within ancient households (private space) and on women in public settings, particularly public religious settings. It then turns to a reading of four scenes featuring women in Matthew's Gospel: (1) the intertwined scenes of Jesus' healing of a hemorrhaging woman and the restoration to life a young girl; (2) Jesus' dialogue with a Canaanite woman and his ultimate exorcism of a spirit from her daughter; (3) Jesus' interaction with a woman who anoints him with oil shortly before his death; and (4) the women who attend Jesus at the cross and discover his empty tomb.

As his primary method of investigation, Stuart Love draws upon social-scientific models for understanding the place of women in Matthew. Love's analysis uses a variety of anthropological models, as well as the more traditional tools of biblical scholarship.[2] His exegesis moves consistently back and forth between the time of Jesus and the time of Matthew's community. As a result, the book offers a sophisticated analysis of women and culture in Matthew that takes both the Bible and its cultural context seriously, revealing new and useful insights informative for the church today.

While reading the book, I became interested in how Love's work steers a middle course between two competing ways of understanding gender in Matthew, which disagree about whether the Gospel depicts gender counterculturally or not. The first way does not see any countercultural elements within the Gospel, and then brings forward certain ancient realities about gender, applying them directly to church practice today. Such an approach, for example, might see Jesus' choice of twelve male disciples as a model for modern practice.[3] The second way celebrates the Gospel's countercultural elements with regard to gender, but tends to read the realities of our modern, post-industrial, democratic world back into the time of Jesus. This approach characterized some of the work of feminist scholars in the 1970s and 80s and continues to have some influence today. Highlighting the important role played by women in the Gospel—as well as Jesus' obvious respect and concern for women as human beings—this second approach depicts Jesus as a radical egalitarian who gathered men and women in a discipleship of equals, where women found new respect, opportunities and roles, in contrast with the surrounding, patriarchal culture of early Judaism. But this egalitarian community began unfortunately to revert back to hierarchy even in the letters of the Paul,

1. * This printed review is the revised version of an oral review presented at the Seaver Faculty Colloquium, Pepperdine University, February 25, 2009 and at the 30th Annual Christian Scholars' Conference, Lipscomb University, June 4, 2010.
2. The social-science models used include advanced agrarian societies; marginality; honor and shame; non-Western healing; purity and impurity; prostitution; patronage; and status transformation. Stuart L. Love, Jesus and Marginal Women: The Gospel of Matthew in Social-Scientific Perspective (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 25–26.
3. For example, "Jesus was committed to obeying the will of God (John 6:38). Had the will of God included female apostles, Jesus certainly would have selected some, but He did not." Kim Pennington, "Able to Teach and Complementarian?"Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, https://www.cbmw.org/Resources/Articles/Able-to-Teach-and-Complementarian (accessed February 12, 2009).

so that the church lost this original ideal and practice of equality. The argument then goes that the original egalitarian community ought to be reclaimed in the church today.

This second approach—sometimes called the "myth of egalitarian origins"—has been criticized in two ways. First, later feminist scholars have offered an internal critique, pointing out the parallels between this approach and classical Protestant versions of early Christian history, in which an ideal early community of Christians overturns Jewish legalism and hierarchy by replacing it with grace and a Spirit-led leadership but then "subsequently 'falls' into the authoritarianism and institutionalism of . . . 'early Catholicism.'"[4] This "fall-from-utopia" storyline bears striking resemblance to the feminist "myth of egalitarian origins." In this internal critique, feminists noted anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish biases, as well as a non-nuanced portrait of early Judaism in Jesus' day.[5] Second, the "myth of egalitarian origins" has been critiqued from a social-science perspective, an objection central to Love's work. For example, John Elliott has argued that "Jesus was not an egalitarian." Rather the very idea of egalitarianism is a post-Enlightenment concept, which ought not be used anachronistically to describe anything in the ancient world.[6]

Aware of the problems in both of these approaches, Love's book represents a third way of reading women and culture in the Gospel of Matthew. The main pillar of his approach is the macro-sociological model of the advanced agrarian society. By using this model, he is able to set the discussion of gender in the very broad context of human cultures as they have developed over thousands of years.

Love's use of this model is helpful for thinking about gender—not only in Matthew but in any ancient text—because it reminds modern readers that the basic roles and expectations for men and women have been long held and only recently transformed in the wake of the industrial revolution. The model helps us avoid anachronistic thinking.[7] It also helps avoid the problem of anti-Jewish bias in the "myth of egalitarian origins" approach. Through the lens of the advanced agrarian society, it can be argued that if Jesus or Matthew viewed women in a countercultural way, then such views contrasted not with Jewish patriarchalism but with advanced agrarian, male-centered hierarchy, a social structure common to Jews, Romans and Greeks alike.

In Love's application of this model, he argues that there are both countercultural and non-countercultural views of women in the Gospel: both the new and the old.[8] For example, he demonstrates that in an advanced agrarian society women did not teach in *any* setting because teaching was an activity carried out in public (a realm in which women did not participate), teaching involved authority (something generally denied to women) and teaching relied on education (which women generally did not receive).[9] Given such a social context, it is not surprising that when Jesus chose twelve apostles, he chose men. In this sense, Jesus was not countercultural.

But in another sense, he was. Having set before the reader a clear view of the culture of Jesus' day, Love brings Jesus' countercultural choices into sharper relief. Women in Matthew's Gospel are accepted by Jesus as full members of an emerging community and welcomed as individual human beings, not through their attachment to male relatives. Moreover, Jesus' teaching, particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, "attacks the core structures of gender-specific power in advanced agrarian society by exposing rapacious

4. Mary Ann Beavis, "Christian Origins, Egalitarianism, and Utopia," Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion 23, no. 2 (2007): 27–49, 31. The scholars who told this story did not typically define this early equality as including women's equality.

5. See, for example, the work of Jewish feminist Judith Plaskow, "Anti-Judaism in Christian Feminist Interpretation," in Searching the Scriptures. Volume One, a Feminist Introduction, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Shelly Matthews (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 117–129.

6. Instead, Elliott asserts, Jesus offered an alternative vision of a new family open to all. Love follows Elliott in this view, but he argues that this family should be thought of as matrilineal rather than patrilineal in nature, resulting in greater roles for women within it, Jesus and Marginal Women, 222–223.

7. Ibid., 27–31.

8. Ibid., 94.

9. Ibid., 37–41, 78–82.

male behaviors, reigning in male supremacy, and authorizing a different basis for male-female relations."[10] Turning his attention from the time of Jesus to the time of Matthew's community, Love argues further that faithful women characters serve as narrative foils to the disciples, who in turn represent the leaders of Matthew's community. By depicting female characters this way, Matthew challenges the leaders of his own community to maintain faithfulness to the high call of Jesus, which includes welcoming *all* persons regardless of their social status.

Love illustrates the challenge offered by female characters through his close analysis of the stories of four particular women. He sees the paired stories of a hemorrhaging, outcast woman and the dying daughter of an elite man as embedded in many ways in an androcentric culture yet also advocating a "social leveling" for Matthew's community. Similarly, the Canaanite woman speaks a wise correction to Jesus that challenges Matthew's community to welcome "outcast, non-Israelite women" in keeping with the "radical inclusion demanded by Jesus' new surrogate family."[11] Similarly, in telling the story of the woman who anoints Jesus with oil, Matthew prophetically challenges the leaders of his own community, who struggle with divided loyalties.

At the end of Matthew's story, female characters appear at a crucial moment in the action, when the male disciples have disappeared. Using the social-science model of status transformation, Love argues that when this happens, women take over the role of the male disciples, facilitating the disciples' transformation from learners to teachers. In so doing, the women also undergo their own "liminal pilgrimage" from the "social realities of an advanced agrarian society" to "radical inclusion" in a new kind of community.[12]

Commenting on this scene, Love underscores a tension that his work traces from the beginning of the book. Matthew depicts two cultures: the culture of kingdom of heaven and of the advanced agrarian society in which the kingdom is embedded. In the scenes at the end of the Gospel, the women represent the kingdom culture, which values status reversal ("the first will be last"), humility and a different kind of family. But the fleeing men represent the culture of the world, which values status and honor and hierarchy. They represent the constant temptation faced by male teachers in Matthew's community to lead not according to the culture of the kingdom but of the world. In other words, Jesus and Matthew inhabit two worlds that coexist, creating a constant challenge. As he puts it, "these two, equally real, social realities constitute a dynamic tension." Both realities must be in view if we hope to understand how Matthew's community could be at once alternative and also struggling to uphold this alternative vision.[13]

This tension might be explained, he argues, by the notion of liminality. In the liminal (or middle) stage of status transformation, standard distinctions and hierarchies are often dissolved.[14] If the disciples in Matthew are in this middle stage, then this liminality could explain why—even in the midst of an advanced-agrarian society—Jesus' community displayed what Love calls "deviant" characteristics, that is, a certain dissolving of hierarchy. But once the transitional, liminal stage was complete, the community would by necessity need to adapt somewhat to the social realities of an advanced agrarian society. At this point, I wondered whether Love is proposing the status-transformation model as an alternative way of imagining the "myth of egalitarian origins," with the caveat that "egalitarian" is not quite the right word.

If Love offers a third way for reading women and culture in Matthew, how does this apply to the contemporary church? He addresses this question at the end of the book, where he notes that as the church makes the leap from one culture to another, some biblical material may (1) automatically transfer, (2) be non-transferable, or (3) be transposed, as if into a new key.

10. Ibid., 85.
11. Ibid., 165.
12. Ibid., 218–219.
13. Ibid., 94.
14. Ibid., 189–191.

For example, he argues that the restrictive gender roles of an advanced agrarian society (i.e., that the twelve disciples were male) are *not transferable* to a modern, democratic industrial society because the public/private distinction has broken down, women are educated and churches are accepting women in leadership roles. Given such change, it would be a breach of justice to deny women's participation in ministry. But the challenge of radical inclusiveness offered by Matthew must be transposed: the church must continue to struggle to "establish rich, thick, vertical demographic patterns of membership inclusive of ethnicity, race, and economic factors," including increased opportunities for women.[15] This assertion could summarize the application value of Love's book itself, for it challenges the modern church to transpose Jesus and Matthew's countercultural challenges into ever new keys.

15. Ibid., 239.

Review of Ron Highfield, *Great is the Lord: Theology for the Praise of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008).

In Dialogue with Biblical Theology: A Response to Ron Highfield's *Great is the Lord*

Thomas H. Olbricht

Ron Highfield's *Great is the Lord* is an impressive book. In fact, I will go so far as to say that it is the most remarkable book on the doctrine of God written by anyone in the two hundred-year history of the Stone-Campbell-Scott Movement. This work should be read and re-read by all those who affirm the Restoration Movement as their heritage.

The book is impressive first of all because Highfield declares that the outcome of theology should result in the praise of God rather than in arcane objective theology that ignores confrontation with the living God. It is a remarkable book second of all because of all the theologians from the last two thousand years that Highfield has brought into the discussion. He has neglected neither the church fathers, more conservative contemporaries, nor numerous theologians in between—especially Protestants of the post Reformation era. A "names" index to the work would have made this trait even more obvious. It is also imposing because Highfield has tried to treat theologians of every stripe accurately and with deference. He has achieved this goal in an unprecedented manner. His dialogue with biblical scholars is limited, but regardless his insights on the scriptures are evenhanded and insightful. This is a daunting work because Highfield has not bowed to the pressures of the current vogue, whether process theology or open theism. This book reads well because Highfield was trained as a mathematician and he knows how to present an argument and you know when he has brought it to completion, in contrast with some theologians I have read.

I have learned much from Highfield's book. I deeply appreciate his efforts to defend the trajectory he identifies as the traditional view of God. I think, however, that there are problems in the methodology of the book in respect to biblical theology, problems that require significant questions.

Methodology

My charge is to reflect on the compatibility of Highfield's insights with those of biblical theology. I have sometimes told my students that I am not a theologian, but a "methodologian." I therefore first take up Highfield's methodology both in respect to theology proper and to biblical theology.

Highfield's theological method is closely informed by a beginning point of reference, that is, the "traditional" doctrine of God, by which he means "the teachings about God that were held by almost the

whole church from the second to the twentieth century, those teachings that are still held by most believers: God is triune, loving, merciful, gracious, patient, wise, one, simple, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, omnipresent, immutable, impassible, and glorious" (xvii-xviii). These topics in this order serve as chapter headings in the book.

Highfield's theological method is therefore a dialogue between the traditional reflection on God and the scripture in respect to the doctrine of God. We can contrast his method with that of many other theologians. For example, Thomas Aquinas placed in dialogue Aristotle, Augustine and the scripture. Paul Tillich sought a correlation between culture and scripture in which scripture provided the answers to the questions raised by culture. Culture was assessed through existential, neo-platonistic and Jungian insights. Highfield, by his method, distinguishes what in tradition is compatible with scripture and what is not. At one place Highfield assigns to scripture the final court of appeal. "In this book I will quote Scripture as the authority by which to judge all theological statements, including my own" (19). Earlier, however, he suggests that he brings scripture to bear not so much to prove that tradition is biblical, but rather to show its compatibility with scripture. "I do not offer the Scripture section as *proof* that Scripture teaches the traditional doctrine. At a minimum, I wish to show that the traditional doctrine can plausibly be argued from Scripture" (xvii, 122). The long tradition of Christian theologizing plays a major role in Highfield's methodology. That is why he includes the reflections of so many theologians over the course of Christian history. Irrespective of his high regard for the tradition, he writes toward the end of his discussion of tradition, "We should treat tradition as a servant and a means of revelation, not as its master and content" (37).

In contrast with Highfield's carefully thought through theological methodology, I see little evidence that he has thought seriously about a method for doing biblical theology. I do not see how it is possible for the scripture to sit in judgment upon theology if the approach to the scripture is merely *ad hoc*, that is, citing specific texts without any overarching vision of biblical theology. Highfield does not carry on a conversation with or cite any biblical theologian of either the Old or New Testaments. In fact, he considers few works of any biblical scholars in his discussions of scriptures, especially of the last one hundred years. Highfield has training in biblical studies. He is not a novice when it comes to biblical interpretation. But clearly he does not call upon biblical scholars to inform his observations. In regard to the Old Testament, he dismisses the views of Jewish scholars on texts pertaining to the Trinity on the grounds that they presuppose already in the Old Testament "an abstract, philosophical monotheism that was developed only later in Neo-Platonism, and by medieval Jewish and Islamic scholars" (120). But Highfield's perspectives on the Trinity can be fortified by the insights of my own professor G. Ernest Wright, and Fuller Theological Seminary professor John Goldingay. I should perhaps hasten to add, however, that these two do not support Highfield's conclusions on omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience. In regard to the New Testament, Highfield could present a much stronger case for the Trinity by reading Gordon D. Fee's recent *Pauline Christology* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007).

Highfield most likely can pass muster for his theological method among contemporary theologians who are compatible with his major predilections. But for someone committed to Restorationism and the judgment of the scripture over all theology, I think the bar regarding the expectation that a theologian navigate the rivers of biblical scholarship must be placed much higher. In this regard I commend the work of Anthony C. Thiselton, who is something of a biblical theologian in his own right, having published a competent commentary on 1 Corinthians. In *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007) Thiselton writes, "I have placed considerably more emphasis upon the need for careful biblical exegesis than tends to characterize many works on Christian doctrine. A hermeneutics of doctrine cannot proceed without careful engagement with . . . the questions of biblical specialists and biblical languages" (xxi, xxii). In the later part of his work Thiselton demonstrates the value of biblical studies in taking up God, Christology, the Trinity, the church and a number of other subjects through intermingling theologians and biblical scholars.

Method in Biblical Theology

One discovers quickly through reading the biblical theologians that no one method prevails. This alone might therefore be the grounds for ignoring them. One can therefore dismiss the effort required to advance a method in biblical theology, but in my view a Restorationist who declares that the scripture judges all theology cannot simply dismiss such a task. So I will proceed with a proposal for method in biblical theology even though I might be plunging into territory where angels fear to tread. I believe that method in biblical theology must be determined by something from within the scriptures, not by something superimposed upon it from the outside. If the method of the tradition becomes the basis for constructing theology as it does in Highfield's *Great is the Lord*, that *modus operandi* is thereby a superimposition upon the theology of the scriptures. I think the presuppositions and structures of biblical theology are to be found in the repeated affirmations of what it is that those in Israel and in Christendom believe. For want of a better word I designate these materials "the credos."

In the Old Testament such credos may be found in Deuteronomy 26, Joshua 24, Psalms 105 and 106, but all the elements are included in Nehemiah 9, in which Ezra sets forth the fundamental beliefs of the newly revived people of God. In the New Testament these fundamental beginning declarations are found in 1 Corinthians 15, Romans 1, 1 Timothy 3, but especially in the apostolic sermons in Acts, with the most complete statement being located in Peter's sermon to the household of Cornelius in Acts 10.

From these credos one perceives that the scripture calls for belief in a God of love who acts mightily in and on behalf of all he has made (Psalm 134). The God of scripture elicits in return a similar loving response from what he has made, both for himself and for others (Neh 9). He is a God who enters into covenant relationships with both creatures (The Noachic Covenant, Gen 9) and with humankind made in his image (Deut 5). The covenant is freely given by God to humans who can live by the covenant or reject the gracious covenantal offer of God (1 Kings 11). Humans may in their freedom love and obey God. Or they may live on their own terms with their backs turned to God (Gen 3). God nurtures or punishes humankind in accordance with their decisions regarding him and his ways (Neh 9, Acts 10). God lives in constant relationship to what he has created. He dwells apart from creation, but he is never sealed off from it. Just as God lives in constant response in himself (Father, Son and Spirit), so God affects the created order and in turn he is deeply affected by it (Exod 32, Num 14). Highfield offers a well thought through argument for what he designates the traditional view that God is impassible. But I am not convinced. I do not see how that claim can be maintained in light of Hebrews 4.15–16: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin." Because of his covenant relationships God has committed himself to real give and take in his dealings with humankind.

God is in fact a God who creates the new, according to Isaiah 43.18–19. The deity of the tradition has always been that he will forever be. He is the changeless one. But the God in scripture led his people through the sea onto dry land. He permitted his only begotten Son to die on a cross at Golgotha. At the end of history as we know it, God will bring down the new Jerusalem so that heaven and earth will be one forevermore! He is the one who creates anew!

Implications of Biblical Theology

These are the topics that merit primary chapters in a theology of God that lives under the judgment of the scriptures. Because Highfield pursues the traditional theology it is no accident, I think, that the significance of and implications of covenantal theology are ignored in his book. I don't recall a single reference to covenant, a mutual relationship, in *Great is the Lord,* and there is no entry for "covenant" in the index. I propose that the very concept of covenant throws light on God's freedom and human freedom and cannot be ignored if one claims to give attention to the biblical insights about God. The great theological tradition lets

the covenant drop out in the discussion of God, but one cannot grant a theology that is biblically informed the license to dismiss covenant theology. In a sense covenant theology does enter Highfield's book, almost as an afterthought when he discusses the need to keep the commandments of God. This discussion is relegated to the last part of the book (III, 401), and only when Highfield takes up the topic of ethics.

I believe that the very outline employed by Highfield in *Great is the Lord* manifests a Hellenistic approach to theology. The Greeks were particularly interested in epistemology, that is, how humans know what they know. There is no real discussion of epistemology in scripture. The scriptures proceed to convey insight without these Hellenistic preliminaries. Highfield, however, proceeds with the tradition Hellenistically informed, since his first topic addresses the question of theology and reason and the resources of revelation, scripture and tradition. He then follows with proofs for the existence of God. He mentions the proofs first brought together by Aquinas and inspired by Aristotle. Highfield has good reflections upon these proofs, but he gives little attention to which of the arguments point more profoundly to the biblical God. Highfield follows with the attributes of God. The questions raised and the answers in regard to these attributes seem to stem more from Hellenistic thought than from comments or views obvious in the scriptures. Biblically, God is perceived more from his actions than from ontological states in his inner being. These attributes, as Highfield presents them, come out more as beads on a string than as the biblical God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Biblically, the recommended order in a theology is to focus upon God as love (which Highfield also proposes), then go on to see how love is related to and sheds light on each of the other attributes.

After fifty years of trying to understand the God of the Bible, it is my considered judgment that it was the Hellenists of the ancient world who depicted the ideal God as self-contained and who concluded that a God who reacted to human actions in history was somehow an inferior deity. Hellenism too posited a God who lives beyond activities in his universe; he is a God upon whom new events make no impact whatsoever—for example, creation, the exodus, the cross, the coming down of the new Jerusalem. The biblical affirmation is that these are not only real events in the universe; they are real events in the life of God. In the biblical account, humans are responsible for their freely chosen actions and are rewarded or punished accordingly. In the biblical account, God is in continual struggle with humankind. These struggles often result in disappointment, regret, anguish and distress in the inner being of God. In this manner the scripture depicts the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as "suffering" as the result of the human-divine relationship. He is not the impassible God!

In conclusion I appreciate Highfield's efforts to explain God according to the Hellenistic mindset. He has disclosed insights that are not immediately obvious and given explanations that help show that the traditions are not as counter to the scripture as they seem on first appearance. Nevertheless, it is clear to me that God experiences within himself real events in respect to the universe he has created. I am convinced, however, that some of the primary presuppositions in traditional theology are more informed by the Hellenistic world into which Christianity entered than by the scriptures. I am well aware that unwarranted claims have been made regarding the Hellenization of Christianity, but I am still convinced that Highfield too readily dismisses the dependence of traditional theology upon the Hellenistic mindset and the differences between the two (369–375).

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