

All Things Hold Together in Christ

*A Conversation on Faith,
Science, and Virtue*

EDITED BY

JAMES K. A. SMITH

AND MICHAEL L. GULKER

B

Baker Academic

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

James K. A. Smith and Michael L. Gulker, eds., *All Things Hold Together in Christ*
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2018. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2018 by The Colossian Forum

Published by Baker Academic
a division of Baker Publishing Group
P.O. Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.bakeracademic.com

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Smith, James K. A., 1970– editor.

Title: All things hold together in Christ : a conversation on faith, science, and virtue / James K.A. Smith and Michael L. Gulker, eds.

Description: Grand Rapids : Baker Academic, 2018. | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017020095 | ISBN 9780801098987 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Church. | Christianity and culture. | Public worship. | Virtues. | Spiritual life—Christianity. | Religion and science.

Classification: LCC BV600.3 .A44 2017 | DDC 261—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017020095>

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Each chapter in this book has been reproduced by the permission of its original publisher. For the sake of consistency there have been alterations to punctuation and documentation. Cross-references that appeared in the original version, but are not pertinent in this context, have been removed herein.

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

James K. A. Smith and Michael L. Gulker, eds., *All Things Hold Together in Christ*
Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2018. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

Contents

Preface by Michael Gulker vii

Introduction by James K. A. Smith xi

Part 1 Creating a Community for the Conversation: Ecclesiology and Worship 1

1. The Church as Church: Practicing the Politics of Jesus 3
Rodney Clapp
2. Friends of God and Friends of God's Friends 17
Samuel Wells
3. Friendship and the Ways to Truth 43
David Burrell
4. Worship Is Our Worldview: Christian Worship and the Formation of Desire 51
James K. A. Smith
5. Common Prayer 57
Shane Claiborne, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, and Enuma Okoro

Part 2 Putting On Christ: Formation in Virtue 69

6. The Master Argument of MacIntyre's *After Virtue* 71
Brad Kallenberg
7. The Nature of the Virtues 95
Alasdair MacIntyre
8. The Church as a Community of Practice 115
Jonathan R. Wilson

9. Resistance to the Demands of Love: On Sloth 133
Rebecca DeYoung
10. Cultivating Gratitude: Pray without Ceasing 151
Paul Griffiths
11. Why Christian Character Matters 157
N. T. Wright
- Part 3 Come Let Us Reason Together: Tradition-Based Rationality 189**
12. The Rationality of Traditions 191
Alasdair MacIntyre
13. Aquinas and the Rationality of Tradition 209
Alasdair MacIntyre
14. The Epistemic Priority of Jesus Christ 227
Robert Barron
15. Reading Scripture with the Reformers 263
Timothy George
- Part 4 All Things Hold Together in Christ: Exploring God's World 275**
16. Come and See: A Christological Invitation for Science 277
Mark Noll
17. Encountering God's World: *Curiositas* vs. *Caritas* 295
Paul Griffiths
18. The Religious Path to Exclusive Humanism: From Deism to Atheism 311
James K. A. Smith
19. Natural Theology, or a Theology of Creation? 323
Stanley Hauerwas
20. Science, Stories, and Our Knowledge of the Natural World 339
Alasdair MacIntyre
21. Science for the Church: Natural Sciences in the Christian University 357
Jonathan R. Wilson
- Index 369

Preface

Talk to anyone who tracks how the church engages our culture today and you'll likely hear that the church in America has a *brand problem*. This problem is seen most readily in the shrinking of the church, its declining positive contribution to the wider culture, and millennials' flight from organized religion. One crucial part of our brand problem is that the church so often fails to engage divisive issues like origins, sexuality, immigration, or race in ways that "smell like Jesus." For a people claiming to follow the Prince of Peace, the polarization, fragmentation, and endless infighting seem especially problematic. It's tempting to think the "nones" and "dones" exiting the church may just be right.

Against this temptation, The Colossian Forum exists as witness to the belief that God has given us everything we need to be faithful. This is especially true in the midst of conflict. Whether one begins, as we do, with the cosmic hymn of Colossians 1:17—"In him all things hold together"—or with Jesus's prayer for unity in John 17, Paul's declaration that the dividing wall has been broken down in Ephesians, or 1 Corinthians 12 on unity amid difference, Christians have enormous theological warrant for believing that in times of conflict and polarization we, as the body of Christ, offer something to the world that can be found nowhere else. In the practices, confessions, worship, and traditions of the church, God in Christ has provided his church with all that we need to be faithful *if only* we would be faithful to what we've been given.

Thus, The Colossian Forum was launched to remind the body of Christ that *how* we seek the truth is integral to our witness. Called to pursue the truth in love, Christians must learn to engage controversial cultural issues in ways that are rooted in the gifts God has given us in Christ, mindful of the fact that "in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17).

In order to grapple with difficult questions that can often divide the body of Christ, it is crucial that we first "clothe" ourselves with those virtues that will enable us to have such conversations *well*: compassion, humility, patience, forgiveness,

and above all, love (Col. 3:12–15). The Colossian Forum equips churches and other Christian communities such as Christian colleges, universities, and high schools to create the productive, formative spaces in which to put on these virtues.

Attending to the formation of virtue creates the platform and hospitable space we need to then deal with difference and disagreement. And, as Jamie Smith has argued in *Desiring the Kingdom*, putting on the virtues takes practice. Most important, it requires being immersed in the practices of Christian worship (Col. 3:16).

For this reason, The Colossian Forum has sought to create spaces to practice the faith in the face of conflict as one way to faithfully receive these gifts, thereby equipping Christian leaders to transform messy cultural conflicts into opportunities for discipleship and witness. The goal: that the church become a place people run *to* rather than *from* in the face of conflict.

By situating cultural conflicts where they belong—in the presence of God and amid the worship practices of his church—we find that conflicts, like those between faith and science, can become gifts, a crucible by which Christ is formed in us. After all, what better way to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit like patience and forbearance than by spending time with another believer who tests your patience, whom you think may very well be leading the church off a cliff!

For the past five years, The Colossian Forum has had the privilege of spending time with such believers—saints holding vastly different theological perspectives while at the same time demonstrating deep patience and forbearance with one another in the midst of those differences. Saints who willingly place those differences at the foot of the cross to see what the Spirit might do with them—arguing vigorously yet doing so with the explicit goal of building up the church.

We've engaged believers of different ages and ideologies, on a variety of divisive topics. We've worked with high school and college students, faculty, administrators, college trustees and presidents, pastors, elders and youth, public intellectuals both famous and infamous. While there have been plenty of bumps and bruises along the way, we've repeatedly encountered stunning surprises—friendship where there was animosity; delight where there was anger; light where there had been only heat; and new avenues for exploration and investigation where there had been only deadlocks.

Of course, we've not overcome conflict in the church. Fear not, there's still plenty of opportunity to receive conflict as a gift! However, we have regularly encountered the power of the gospel right at the heart of conflict and experienced the truth that God has, indeed, given us everything we need to be faithful. For a church with a brand problem, this is good news indeed.

Because of these positive experiences, we have invested significant time and energy recovering and refining concrete practices of engaging, teaching, and reflecting on divisive issues in ways that display the truth of Colossians 1:17 as seen in the following initiatives:

- Through a partnership with Calvin College’s Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning, The Colossian Forum engaged high school teachers through the Faith and Science Teaching (FAST) Project, including creation of a website (www.teachFASTly.com) with resources developed by teachers to offer practices of teaching that cultivate virtue at the intersection of faith and science.
- A partnership with Bill Cavanaugh and Jamie Smith allowed The Colossian Forum to host scholarly colloquia rooted not in the competitive practices of the academic guild but in the prayers of Christ’s church. This effort produced a volume of essays entitled *Evolution and the Fall* (Eerdmans, 2017) by top theologians, biblical scholars, historians, and scientists that display new possibilities for progress in a debate that has been gridlocked since the 1925 Scopes Trial.
- Through multiple partnerships with national and local leaders, pastors, scholars, and youth, The Colossian Forum developed *The Colossian Way* (www.colossianway.org)—a small group leaders’ training program utilizing curricula on key topics like origins or sexuality to invite Christians into a way of using the practices of the faith in the midst of conflict to encourage spiritual growth and witness.

As the work of The Colossian Forum has taken root in churches, colleges, and high schools, there has been an increasing demand for us to share the theological undergirding that makes our work possible. Therefore, I am delighted that Jamie agreed to edit this volume as well as provide context for each section, shedding light on how The Colossian Forum has managed to turn conflict into opportunity.

But this volume contains more than information on the faith and science conversation. Each essay comes from a scholar who exemplifies theology as a practice rooted in the worship of the church. They display the kind of practice-based reflection The Colossian Forum exists to encourage—that form of theological reflection which takes up a contemporary conundrum in ways that don’t simply update the faith by discarding those bits “outdated” by the latest cultural up-and-comer (science in this case), but instead extend the gift of faith we received from those who came before us into the present so that it might be received as a gift by those who come after us. It is our hope that, by us pointing to a practice done well, others may not only know our minds, but come to imitate those master practitioners who have helped make our lives possible.

We believe this anthology could be productively put to use in a variety of ways:

- in undergraduate and seminary settings where concerned believers are looking for not only a robust theological frame, but also productive practices for engaging faith and science more effectively;

- by FASTly high school teachers seeking continuing education on how to teach at the often tense intersection of faith and science; and
- by church leaders following the Colossian Way and looking for a deeper understanding of how the practices of the church inform how we engage today's most divisive topics.

Special thanks to Jamie Smith for making this project possible and for all he has done to frame and further the work of The Colossian Forum over the past five years. Thanks also to Bob Hosack, our editor at Baker. Our gratitude also goes to The Colossian Forum team (past and present) as well as Brian Mattson, who helped pull this anthology together.

Michael Gulker
President, The Colossian Forum

Introduction

Taking Theology and Science to Church

.....

JAMES K. A. SMITH

This book is an invitation to join a conversation between theology and science, between the way of life that is following Jesus and the creaturely curiosity that propels us to understand the natural world. But since this book invites you to a very different *kind* of conversation between theology and science, it is also an invitation to a pilgrimage of sorts. Think of the sources collected in this anthology as an itinerary for reframing your imagination about *how* to navigate the interactions between theology and science. But doing so requires a *radical* reboot of this dialogue, asking fundamental questions at the *root* (*radix*) of the encounter between science and Christianity—questions too often left unasked and uncritically assumed in most cases. This book is like a course in how to work out, in fear and trembling, the conviction that in Christ “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17)—whether heaven and earth, or science and faith, or church and creation.

Science Takes Practice

The impetus to articulate an understanding of the natural world that resonates with (and is informed by) Scripture and revelation is as old as Christianity itself. For any community whose credo begins, “I believe in God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth,” there is a properly *theological* desire to understand the creation in which the Creator has placed us as his image-bearers. And thus, in many ways, the “theology and science” conversation is as old as Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill, in which the apostle proclaims an intersection between Greek metaphysics and

Christian confession: that in Christ we know the Creator in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

But the challenges and pitfalls of this endeavor are as old as the endeavor itself. As long as there has been a “theology and science” conversation, there have been tensions, missteps, temptations, and the necessity for careful discernment.¹ Natural philosophies and scientific theories are ambitious projects that can easily bleed into worldviews and rival confessions. Our empirical accounts of the penultimate can take on a tenor of ultimacy. That these tensions and rivalries have been amplified in modernity—in the wake of Darwin especially—is a point that hardly needs demonstration. We are all familiar with the way science and religion are construed as competing armies in a culture war.

This is why so many Christians have rightly sought to be peacemakers in the “science” theater of the culture wars. Recognizing that any posited dichotomy between the natural world and Christian confession is a rending of the Creator-creature relationship, and hence a denigration of the doctrine of creation itself, these reconcilers of science and theology have tried to quell the doubts of both scientists and theologians. But sometimes our well-intentioned reconciliation efforts end up (unwittingly) endorsing problematic understandings of both science and theology. Too often reconciliation projects accept a dichotomy that is itself part of the problem.

This anthology, which offers a set of paradigm-shifting sources to change this conversation, is animated by a conviction that, in many ways, the theology-science dialogue operates on the basis of a category mistake—that the regnant paradigms in science-and-religion or science-and-theology discourse have been playing with loaded dice such that the house (science) always wins. Or, to employ a different metaphor, we could say that the dominant paradigm in the theology-science dialogue has set up an uneven playing field that has put theology in the position of having to play uphill.

The primary category mistake stems from the fact that much of the science-theology conversation has operated on the basis of a certain positivism vis-à-vis “science,” and taken the “findings” of science as if they were pristine disclosures of “nature.”² Thus we constantly encounter familiar tropes: “we now know . . .,” “science shows us . . .,” “what science says,” and so on. This is the case whether we’re talking about “new atheists” like Dawkins and Dennett or theological voices like

1. In positing this long history of a conversation between “theology” and “science,” I am using the terms broadly and somewhat anachronistically. As Peter Harrison has carefully argued, in some ways the categories “science” and “religion” are relatively recent (i.e., modern) inventions. See Peter Harrison, *The Territories of Science and Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

2. This is why theological claims generated by the theology-science dialogue tend toward versions of a “natural theology.” For two robust—but very different—Christian critiques of the very project of natural theology, see Alvin Plantinga, “The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 15 (1980): 49–63; Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001).

Polkinghorne and McGrath. On both ends of the continuum, there is a similar assumption about the nature of science: it is either the pristine deliverer of the cold, hard, secular truth or the crystal-clear lens for disclosing the “message” in the book of nature.³ “Science” is too often reduced to its *products*, to its conclusions and findings. As such, it is taken to be an odd sort of transparent black box which simply discloses the “objective” features of *nature*. So while the “dialogue” is purportedly between “science” (roughly, a constellation of academic disciplines) and “theology” (roughly, another academic discipline), *in fact* or *functionally* the dialogue tends to assume that theology is a kind of human cultural product whereas science is merely the conduit for disclosing the cold, hard realities of “nature”—to which theology must answer, demur, or affirm. After all, who’s going to argue with “nature”?

So, like a schoolchild of years ago, we have to suck it up, lay out our hand, and bear the brunt of the strap. Theology needs to be *disciplined* by the findings of science and submit itself to the cold, hard realities of nature. If this turns out badly for some traditional or “fantastic” theological claims, then theologians have to take that as part of their whipping, and leave the principal’s office grateful that they’ve been chastised since this will make them more intellectually responsible. Science is a stern tutor, but also just a civil servant, since all he does is force the theologian to face up to the realities of “nature.” On this (admittedly cartoonish) account, the theologian brings his work to the desk of the scientist, who then determines what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, given the “realities” of nature, and the theologian leaves, hat-in-hand, grateful for whatever scraps of theological claims remain after the tutor’s red ink has shredded the student’s paper.

Framed this way, the theology-science dialogue is an asymmetrical relationship because of an equivocation about the nature of “science.” While the conversation claims to be a dialogue between “science” and “theology,” *functionally* it is taken to be a confrontation between *nature* and *culture*.

science :: theology
nature :: culture

But that is a category mistake. In fact, a dialogue between “science” and “theology” is always already a dialogue between “culture” and “culture,” both of which are confronted by, are constrained by, and answer to a certain “givenness” that we often describe as “nature.”

science :: theology
culture :: culture
nature

3. For a critique of the “hermeneutics of immediacy” that characterizes both of these efforts, see James K. A. Smith, *The Fall of Interpretation: Philosophical Foundations for a Creational Hermeneutic*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

In other words, the theology-science conversation has tended to ignore the fact that *science* is a *cultural* institution. By a “cultural institution” I mean first of all an institution that is a *product* of human *making*.⁴ Culture is the unfolding of potentialities that are latent or implicit in “nature,” as it were. So aspects of “culture” are the fruit of human making and unfolding; they are not “natural kinds.” A painting by Picasso, an elementary school, a Boeing 747, and a political constitution are all examples of “culture,” of human making. They are not “naturally occurring” entities that one would bump into if there weren’t human agents that unfolded them and brought them into being. Cultural institutions are networks of practices, habits, and material environments that are the product of human making. So a hospital is a cultural institution that is “unfolded” by a human community and is composed of both a particular built-environment (ER and ORs, ambulances and CAT scan machines, etc.) and networks of practices and traditions which are learned by apprenticeship (e.g., the “disciplines” of surgery and medicine, the traditions of care that define nursing, etc.). Hospitals don’t fall from the sky, nor do they simply crawl up from the lagoon in the La Brea Tar Pits. They emerge as products of human making—which means that they are essentially historical and contingent. They unfold over time, and they could have unfolded otherwise (or not at all).

Now, it seems to me that the science-theology conversation happily acknowledges that *theology* is a cultural institution. How could one not? Theology is a product of religious traditions and communities, which are themselves paradigmatic instances of “cultural institutions” that are historical, contingent, and certainly not “natural.” They have unfolded over time, have unfolded differently in different places, could have unfolded otherwise, and might even have not unfolded at all. Thus “theology,” as a cultural institution, is recognized as a kind of “hermeneutic” reality—it offers interpretations of the world, is shaped by different traditions and presuppositions, and represents a “take” on things. From the perspective of the regnant paradigm in the theology-science conversation, this means that theology is sort of one step back from “reality.” It is a cultural institution that ascribes “meaning” to reality/nature, whereas “science” is a conduit for disclosing the reality of nature *as such*.

But this is exactly where the conversation has gone off course. It has failed to appreciate (even if it might officially concede) that science is also a cultural institution. “Science” is not a naturally occurring entity like igneous rocks or sea horses; that is, science is not something that either emerges from the swamp or falls from the sky apart from human making. Rather, science is a network of material practices, built environments (including laboratories, instrumentation, etc.), traditions of apprenticeship, and learned rituals that emerged over time, in particular configurations, in different places.⁵ So any conversation between

4. This should be a relatively noncontroversial claim. For a discussion of culture in terms of *making*, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 71–73; and Andy Crouch, *Culture Making* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008).

5. See Stephen Gaukroger’s magisterial history, *The Emergence of a Scientific Culture: Science and the Shaping of Modernity, 1210–1685* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

“science” and “theology” is never going to be simply a matter of getting theology to face up to “nature”; rather, it is always already a *cross-cultural* dialogue. It is a conversation between two different cultural institutions, each with its own traditions, practices, built environments, and meaning-systems. Because of its lingering positivism, the theology-science dialogue—at least as I’ve seen it—tends to operate in isolation from a vast (and growing) literature on science *as* culture, such as the social history of experimentation, the politics of the Royal Society, the material dynamics of apprenticeship, the economics of instrumentation and technological developments, the cultural embeddedness of medicine, and so on.

The point here is *not* a debunking project. The goal isn’t to point out that science is a cultural institution in order to dismiss it. Rather, the point is to situate science *as* a cultural institution in order to clarify the category mistake and thus level the playing field for reconnoitering the science-theology dialogue in a way that yields new possibilities.

One important implication of recognizing science as culture is a leveling of the playing field in the theology-science dialogue. While it might be the case that theology must rightly be constrained by the “givenness” of nature—the world that pushes back on our claims—that is not the same as saying that theology must bow at the feet of *science*. We need to recognize a distinction between science and nature, a distinction too often erased in the theology-science conversation. Science is not just a transparent magnifying glass or pristine conduit that delivers nature “as it really is.” Science is a cultural institution (or, better, a constellation of cultural institutions) that is, of course, especially attentive to nature, is interested in describing and perhaps even explaining nature, and exposes itself to nature’s pushback through the rigors and disciplines of experimentation and observation. But that doesn’t make science “natural.” It remains a cultural layer of human making. And in this respect it is in the same boat as theology (and literature and sociology and . . .).

Therefore theology should no longer feel that it has to defer to science *as if* it was thereby subjecting itself to nature or “reality” (as in, “science tells us . . .”). While theological claims are rightly disciplined by the ways in which the givenness of the world “pushes back” on our claims, this is not synonymous with being disciplined by science. In the vein of John Milbank’s manifesto regarding theology’s deference to the social sciences, we might also suggest that theology ought to drop the false humility and reassert itself as a cultural voice with the same epistemic standing as science.⁶ The asymmetry of the conversation so far has been predicated on a privileged place of science as a veritable divine postman, as the deliverer of nature’s truth who sets the rules of the game. But science is a player, not referee or judge.

6. See John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 1: “The pathos of modern theology is its false humility. For theology, this must be a fatal disease, because once theology surrenders its claim to be a metadiscourse, it cannot any longer articulate the word of the creator God, but is bound to turn into the oracular voice of some finite idol, such as historical scholarship, humanist psychology, or transcendental philosophy. If theology no longer seeks to position, qualify or criticize other discourses, then it is inevitable that these discourses will position theology.”

The theology-science conversation should also stop thinking of “science” as a static body of *findings* and instead consider science as a dynamic process of *finding*. The way the theology-science dialogue is usually conducted, one would almost guess that “science” existed only in journals. The “science” in the theology-science dialogue is a remarkably disembodied phenomenon—as if there were no laboratories, instruments, or communities. But science is not just the *results* of science, the data sets or images that get produced at the end of a very long process. Nor is science just a matter of *theory*. Rather, “science” is perhaps best identified as the *practices* that yield such fruit. This will require that we give up lingering perceptions of science as itself mechanistic or technicistic, along with theory-centric conceptions of science as the sort of thing best pursued by brains-in-vats. Science is a deeply social, communal project, composed of material practices and rituals that are handed on as traditions, absorbed as habits, and enacted in experimental performance that, literally, creates worlds.

How might the theology-science dialogue look different, if we not only recognize science *as* culture, but recognize it as a *community* with a set of cultural practices? This will require appreciating the central role of experimentation, along with all the rituals and traditions that inform it. Thus Robert Crease suggests that experimentation is a kind of “performing art.”⁷ Theories can’t do the work that experimental “art” does. This is because

a scientific entity does not show up in a laboratory the way an airplane shows up on a radar screen, a fully formed thing out there in the world whose presence is made known to us by a representation. Nor is a scientific entity like a smaller version of the airplane, which could be perceptible if only scaled up large enough. Nor, finally, is a scientific entity like some distant and unknown object on the radar screen that when closer becomes perceptible. A scientific entity becomes perceptible only in performance.⁸

So experimentation “is not merely a *praxis*—an application of some skill or technique—but a *poiēsis*; a bringing forth of a phenomenon.”⁹ While science seeks to be disciplined by nature, there is also a sense in which science *creates* its own phenomena. It constitutes its world through experimental performance which is a *learned* performance requiring its own set of virtues and skills, deft employment of instrumentation, and a kind of “know-how” that is not theoretical, and perhaps not even “intellectual.”¹⁰

Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, in his stunning philosophical history of the protein synthesis, notes the way in which the “stuff” of science—“epistemic things” or

7. Robert P. Crease, *The Play of Nature: Experimentation as Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), esp. 74–102. My thanks to Arie Leegwater and Matt Walhout for pointing me to this resource.

8. *Ibid.*, 85–86.

9. *Ibid.*, 82.

10. The point is that such know-how is more on the order of what Heidegger describes as the “understanding” or preunderstanding, or what Charles Taylor calls a “social imaginary.”

“research objects”—in some ways emerges because of experimental conditions that are created by “technical objects” (such as instruments). The epistemic things “articulate” themselves “through” a “wider field of epistemic practices and material cultures” which include both instruments and theories.¹¹ In important ways, the “epistemic things” that will emerge “usually cannot be anticipated when an experimental arrangement is taking shape.”¹² (So there are a lot more surprises in science than one would guess from the picture we get from the theology-science dialogue.) Thus “experimental systems are necessarily localized and situated *generators of knowledge*.”¹³ What science *finds* is determined not just by what science goes looking for but by *how* it looks. And that “how” is not primarily a theory but a constellation of practices that constitute an experimental system. As these systems build up over time and generate linkages with other experimental systems, there emerges what Rheinberger calls “experimental cultures” which “share a certain material style of research” or “laboratory style.” At that point, experimental systems begin to take on a life of their own.¹⁴ They generate epistemic things by generating microworlds—which are responses to nature but should not be identified with nature. Hence, once again, we see the importance of not mistaking science for nature. We also note Rheinberger’s concluding caveat:

To characterize science as practice and as culture does not amount, as far as I apprehend it, to determining the social influences hindering or furthering the sciences. It does not amount to a critique of ideologies of science in the traditional sense. Rather, it amounts to characterizing the sciences themselves as cultural systems that shape our societies and all the while trying to find out what makes the sciences different and confers on them their peculiar drive, not privileging them with respect to other cultural systems.¹⁵

This is not a rejection or diminishment of science, but it does reposition science. This reframes the theology-science dialogue by leveling the playing field. But that is only the beginning of our journey.

Discernment Takes Practice

The science-theology dialogue will look different if we appreciate that science is a constellation of practices. But the dialogue will also look different if we stop reducing Christianity to “theology.” What if Christianity is not just a set of ideas or body of doctrines or system of beliefs but a *way of life*? What if we also appreciated

11. Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things: Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 28–29.

12. *Ibid.*, 74.

13. *Ibid.*, 76, emphasis added.

14. *Ibid.*, 138–39.

15. *Ibid.*, 140.

that religion takes practice—and that before religious communities ever generate theologies and worldviews they engage in worship and prayer? How might we imagine the science-religion dialogue differently if, instead of seeing it as a confrontation of belief systems, we considered both as cultural institutions animated and defined by sets of practices? What if the resources we need for discernment are not just the knowledge and information that comprise “Christianity” but the practices and habits that comprise the church?

Here lies the other fundamental animating conviction of this anthology: faithful wrestling with challenging issues at the intersection of theology and science will not be settled by more information; rather, what’s needed is the *formation* of requisite virtues in order to enable us to discern what matters. You might call this “the Colossian way.”

The Colossian Forum was launched to remind the body of Christ that *how* we seek the truth is integral to our witness. Called to pursue the truth in love, Christians must learn to engage controversial cultural issues in a way that is rooted in the gifts God has given us in Christ, mindful of the fact that in Christ “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). In order to grapple with difficult questions that can often divide the body of Christ, it is crucial that we first “clothe” ourselves with those virtues that will enable us to have such conversations *well*. These include the Christlike virtues of compassion, humility, patience, forgiveness, and above all love (Col. 3:12–15), which are so crucial for the community of faith when working through matters that could divide us. Attending to the formation of virtue creates the platform and hospitable space we need to then deal with difference and disagreement. Certainly of late “science” has been a catalyst for disagreement—whether it’s matters of human origins, genetics, climate change, or technology. Over the past generation, science has often been a catalyst for vitriolic debates within the body of Christ. Too often we assume we disagree just because the “other side” lacks the information that “we” have. And thus we tacitly assume that that disagreement is caused by ignorance and will be solved with knowledge. But many of our disagreements are more intractable than that, and what’s lacking is not some bit of information but the spiritual formation we need to learn to live with difference in the body of Christ. That’s why, in this book that is ostensibly about “theology and science,” we devote significant space to talking about the virtues that characterize a community of Jesus followers who reflect compassion, forgiveness, and patience. A lot of the debates in the theology-science conversation are less about theology or science and more about what and Whom we love.

But we also need the requisite intellectual virtues—humility, patience, discipline, creativity—in order to imagine constructive ways forward. In short, we need the requisite virtues that make *discernment* possible. Otherwise we end up *confusing essentials and nonessentials*: Some individuals and organizations, burdened by the problems above, have rightly begun to address the perceived conflict between Christianity and science by showing that this is only a *perceived* conflict—that Christian faith need not be opposed to careful empirical attention to God’s creation

and that “science” does not conflict with the essentials of Christian faith. The problem, however, is that such approaches can quickly become hampered by a very narrow agenda, fixated on demonstrating and proving one particular scientific position as if it were *the* necessary and only viable Christian position on faith and science (particularly on issues of creation and evolution). Indeed, some confuse their particular position on scientific matters *as* orthodoxy—as a matter essential to salvation. Others, desiring intellectual respectability, defer too easily to regnant paradigms in science. They make hasty concessions to the supposed authority of “what science says” and thus treat rather flippantly the historic commitments to Christian orthodoxy, thereby trivializing the deeply held faith of the church and alienating believers. The result has been hostility between Christians in the name of minimizing the perceived hostility between science and Christianity.

On the other hand, Christians concerned about these issues can fall into *culture-war agendas*. Because issues of science and religion have become political footballs of both the left and right in American politics, Christians engaged in these discussions have sometimes fallen prey to partisan agendas. Thus, for example, the project of scientifically establishing “design” has been seen as a way of securing a particular *moral* agenda which could then be legislated. The perhaps unintentional result of such culture-war approaches to science and faith has been to advance particular political (and partisan) agendas rather than to serve the church. The result, in fact, is that the particularity of *Christ* tends to disappear from view and instead we get the more deistic “creator” of natural law, who seems more universally palatable. In such invocations of creation, we lose the cross.

The sources gathered in this volume reflect The Colossian Forum’s conviction that it is crucial to locate the center of gravity for these conversations in the nature and mission of the church as the body of Christ, rather than letting the center of gravity shift to the cultural issues and various “positions” associated with them. If the church has been unable to carry out constructive internal conversations about these hot-button cultural issues, it’s not simply because we lack correct beliefs or adequate information; it’s also and more importantly because we have treated the church as irrelevant to such “academic” issues. But the issue isn’t whether there can be a dialogue between faith and science; the issue is whether the body of Christ has the requisite *virtues* to sustain such a conversation.

So this volume is not primarily a conduit of more scientific information. This is because we believe that the church doesn’t need to *know* more, it needs to *be* differently, *act* differently. And we believe our actions flow from our character, from those habits and dispositions that we acquire. This is why the center of The Colossian Forum’s vision is an *ethical* conviction that resonates deeply with my argument in *Desiring the Kingdom*: we don’t need more information deposited in our heads that will help us come up with the answers; rather, we need to first undergo the *formation* of the Spirit, who, by grace and through practice, *makes* us the kind of people who are characterized by Christlike virtue—including

the intellectual virtues that enable us to pursue the truth.¹⁶ And we believe it is primarily in the community of practice which is the church that the Spirit forms us in this way.

What characterizes this “Colossian Way” is the conviction that *in Christ* “all things hold together” (Col. 1:17). Science, then, is not an autonomous sphere that has to be correlated to or reconciled with faith; rather, Christ is Lord of creation just as he is the head of the church. Christ is “firstborn over all creation; for by him all things were created.” Indeed, “all things were created through him and for him” (Col. 1:15–16). So the stuff of scientific investigation—the earth below us and the starry heavens above, the intricacies of our nervous system and the regularity of the water cycle—are features of *Christ’s* creation. As Lord of creation, Christ is also Lord of the world that science seeks to investigate.

In the same context as this claim, the apostle Paul immediately points out that Christ “is the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18). Church and creation are not two separate realms; indeed, it is not the case that Christ rules over the church while nature is an independent reality. *Both* subsist or hold together in Christ. And this is why God’s work of redemption also aims at a kind of unity—a *reconciliation* that reflects the unity of all things “in Christ.” The gospel announced by Paul is the message that God, in Christ, has reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:19; Col. 1:17).

Any constructive dialogue about science and Christian faith needs to be rooted in and formed by this “holding together.” In other words, the dialogue does not need to bring together (or integrate) Christianity and science. Instead, we need to begin with the unity that already exists in the lordship of Christ—which is incarnate in the church as the body of Christ. We will only begin to reconcile faith and science when we recognize that church and creation are *already* one in Christ. This anthology of readings is intended to exhibit a different way—a completely new paradigm for carrying out the dialogue between science and Christian faith.

The book is organized in four parts, reflecting the core themes of The Colossian Forum. The parts are organized with a *pedagogical progression* in mind: before students can begin to engage substantive matters at the intersection of faith and science, we need to first attend to more fundamental issues. (And material within each section of the book is also organized with a pedagogical progression in mind, beginning with more accessible selections, progressing to more advanced discussions.)

Part 1 demonstrates how and why the church and worship are the only proper seedbed for a distinctly Christian reflection on the world, including the natural world. Part 2 then shows the importance of the virtues for the pursuit of truth, and hence the need to consider the importance and nature of virtue formation—with a specific view to those virtues which are necessary for the church to have a

16. See Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*. For a more recent, more accessible articulation of the same argument, see Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2016).

constructive, charitable conversation about difficult issues in a way that does not compromise our witness to Christ. Part 3 builds on this to articulate an account of “tradition-based rationality,” drawing on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre but taking this specifically in the direction of considering how the Christian confessional tradition is both a gift and resource for contemporary conversations. This section will specifically consider the theological interpretation of Scripture as an expression of tradition-based rationality for the Christian tradition. Finally, only after that preparation, part 4 turns explicitly to matters of science, illustrating how this different frame leads us to ask different questions and pursue different goals. In particular, this framework recontextualizes science as itself a “tradition-based” form of rationality, which then reframes how we consider its relationship to theology and Christian faith. This final section will sketch the implications of a specifically *christological* engagement with science.

We’re looking for pilgrims to accompany us on this journey. Won’t you join us?

PART ONE

.....

Creating a Community for the Conversation

Ecclesiology and Worship

.....

JAMES K. A. SMITH

We tend to assume that the conversation between science and theology is an “academic” concern, and therefore, by default, we assume that it should be conducted in the environs of the university. But this hasty assumption misses a fundamental point: any wise, discerning, faithful work at the intersection of faith and theology requires participants with the requisite virtues to pull it off. And the incubator of such Spirit-given virtues is the church. So this first, and fundamental, section of the book—and hence our argument—begins in the body of Christ. We will be equipped to carry out a constructive conversation, and will know how to disagree *well*, just to the extent that we’ve been apprenticed to Jesus in those practices of worship that Craig Dykstra describes as “habitations of the Spirit.”

Mark Twain once quipped: “He who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can’t learn in any other way.” Twain’s point is that there is an irreducible know-*how* one acquires from the actual experience of carrying a cat by the tail. It doesn’t matter how many books about cat-carrying you might have read, or how

many lectures you've heard from other cat-by-the-tail carriers, there is something about this you can only know by doing. So too with the body of Christ: there is an understanding of the gospel that can only be "caught" in the body of Christ. Thus faithful scientists and faithful theologians should not only be attentive to the information they acquire in their disciplines; they should be equally concerned about the imagination formation they absorb in the practices of Christian worship and the unique apprenticeship to Jesus that is discipleship in the body of Christ. The chapters in this first part of the book unpack a picture of the church as a school of virtue.

In chapter 1, Rodney Clapp lays out the basis of a robust ecclesiology, particularly sensitive to explain this historic understanding of the church for those who find themselves in "free church" traditions, which tend to have a "lower" view of church. As Clapp explains, drawing on John Howard Yoder, Stanley Hauerwas, and others, the church is not just a club of Christians who gather to express their praise and worship of God. Rather, the church is a called people, gathered to encounter and be shaped by God into a "peculiar people."

This picture of a deeply communal endeavor in which others—even those we disagree with—are gifts given to us by God to mold us and (re)shape us is deepened in chapters 2 and 3 by Samuel Wells and David Burrell, respectively. The church is an invitation to friendship—to the remarkable, unthinkable vocation of being friends of God (John 15:15) and friends with God's friends. Such friendship, Aristotle points out (and Burrell reminds us), is essential to the life of virtue and wisdom. Created as social beings, there are no lone rangers of virtue, no lone wolfs of wisdom. Friends are gift givers that bind us to the Good. So any advancement in knowledge and wisdom about thorny questions of science and religion is going to take communities of friends bound to God and one another.

Chapter 4, by James K. A. Smith, shows the intimate link between the ideas of a Christian "worldview" and the practices of Christian worship. In a sense, Smith argues, we pray before we know; we worship before we worldview. What will eventually be articulated as theology and doctrine begins as the practices of prayer, confession, praise, and sharing the meal that is the Lord's Supper. And there remains a unique understanding of the gospel that is "carried" in the practices of Christian worship. Therefore, Christian worship is the "imagination station" that fuels faithful thinking and equips us with the understanding we need to discern what really matters.

Finally, chapter 5, a selection from *Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) serves a twofold purpose. It provides an introduction to the historic discipline of "fixed hour" prayer, especially for those unfamiliar with this practice. This way of praying the Scriptures with the church suffuses the mission and habits of The Colossian Forum precisely because we believe this is a way to baptize our imagination in God's Word. That's why we also hope the selection whets your appetite and serves as an invitation to take up the practice yourself.

1

The Church as Church

Practicing the Politics of Jesus

RODNEY CLAPP

Now that the long Constantinian age has all but passed, we Christians find ourselves in a situation much more closely analogous to that of New Testament Christians than to the Christendom for which some nostalgically long. The Bible, it turns out, offers abundant resources for living in a wildly diverse and contested world. With Constantine finally buried, theologians and biblical scholars find themselves able to reclaim, and present again to the church, the politics of Jesus.¹

Jesus's World

Perhaps the main reason that the Bible has, at least in recent centuries, seemed to offer scarce political or cultural guidance is that Christians have read a “rank

Originally published as “The Church as Church: Practicing the Politics of Jesus,” in Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 76–93. Copyright © 1996 by Rodney Clapp. Used by permission of InterVarsity Press, PO Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515. www.ivpress.com.

1. Obviously I borrow this chapter's subtitle from John Howard Yoder's influential work *The Politics of Jesus: Behold the Man! Our Victorious Lamb*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

anachronism” back into its text. The strict split between “religion” and “politics” belongs to centuries much later than the first. As N. T. Wright remarks, “No first-century Jew . . . could imagine that the worship of their god and the organization of human society were matters related only at a tangent.”²

Even the most rank anachronizer will not deny that there is much of the political, the physical, the social and economical throughout the Old Testament. Israel, after all, is a nation, an irrefutably political entity. And it is a political entity born of social, not merely psychological, rebellion—the revolt of slaves against what was then the world’s most powerful empire, Egypt. The story of the nation Israel is, like that of all nations, one of conquest (the vanquishing of Canaan), of hierarchy and its power plays (the kingdom of David), of hope and striving for justice as well as security. Israel’s story, furthermore, does not become apolitical the moment it loses its capital and its land and is sent into exile. The nation is scattered but still a nation, and now a nation whose prophets hope strenuously for the restoration of that capital and land. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Micah, and Zechariah all cite Zion as the place of God’s climactic (and clearly political) saving act.³ So: “Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd a flock’” (Jer. 31:10).

Yet even if all this is recognized, there remains a strong tendency to imagine that the political and social dimensions of faith fell away at, or with, the birth of the church. A moment’s pause reveals how untenable this assumption is. To make the earliest church asocial and apolitical is to suppose that suddenly the Jews of Jesus’s day ceased worshipping a God that, for hundreds of years, their people had considered eminently involved with history and politics.

In fact, Jesus proclaimed his message and gathered his disciples in a politically charged context. His was a society grinding under the oppression of a distant, colonizing empire, that of Rome. The Jews of Jesus’s day and place, although they were regathered in Palestine and had rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, considered themselves still in exile, “since the return from Babylon had not brought that independence and prosperity which the prophets foretold.”⁴ The Pharisees and other parties vying for control were in no sense “religious” in such a manner that their aims excluded the political, the social, and the economic. The political agendas of Jewish parties ranged from the most “conservative” (the Sadducees, most nearly allied with the occupying Romans and so least

2. N. T. Wright, “The New Testament and the ‘State,’” *Themelios* 16, no. 1 (October/November 1990): 11.

3. See Ben F. Meyer, *The Early Christians: Their World Mission and Self-Discovery* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1986), 61.

4. Roman occupation was “simply the mode that Israel’s continuing exile had taken. . . . As long as Herod and Pilate were in control of Palestine, Israel was still under the curse of Deuteronomy 29.” N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 141. See also his *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 268–72.

desirous of significant change) to the most radical (the dispossessed Zealots, who advocated violent revolution).⁵

To make good, faithful, and biblical sense of Jesus, we simply must take into account the world in which he lived and the problems he (or any other religious figure) was expected to address. Wright summarizes the situation: “Jewish society faced major external threats and major internal problems. The question, what it might mean to be a good and loyal Jew, had pressing social, economic and political dimensions as well as cultural and theological ones.”⁶ It is perhaps only the most affluent, socially stable people who can ignore social, economic, and political questions and concentrate on their abstracted inner well-being. Christian Science and other mind-cure groups so popular in the nineteenth century made no converts in Naples or Calcutta. Outside the United States, they appealed only to the English upper middle class. I doubt that Christian Science, or for that matter Christianity as it is now profoundly psychologized by many liberals and evangelicals alike, would have found many converts—or even have made any sense—among first-century Palestinian Jews. You might just as well have entered into an argument with them that the world was really round or that the earth was not the center of the cosmos. The anachronism, whether drawn from our physical sciences or our preoccupation with individualistic psychology, is equally rank.

Wright emphasizes that “the pressing needs of most Jews of the period had to do with liberation—from oppression, from debt, from Rome.” None of this is to suggest for a moment that Jewish (and Jesus’s) faith was exclusively political, whatever that might mean. But it does suggest that other issues “were regularly seen in this [political] light.” This context—the actual context of Jesus’s life and work—renders incredible Ernst Troeltsch’s confident assertion that the “values of redemption” preached by Jesus were “purely inward” and led “naturally to a sphere of painless bliss.”⁷ The hope of Israel was, as Wright puts it, not for “disembodied bliss” after death “but for a national liberation that would fulfill the expectations aroused by the memory, and regular celebration, of the exodus. . . . Hope focused on the coming of the kingdom of Israel’s God.”⁸

5. For a helpful survey of these options as theological and political, see Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*. Meyer comments that much theology (I would note pietistic evangelicalism and existentialist neo-orthodoxy) has misconceived the career of Jesus “as an individualistic call to decision, in almost complete abstraction from its Jewishness and from the intra-Jewish historical context of religious competitors for Israel’s allegiance (Pharisees, Zealots, Sadducees, Essenes, Baptists . . .).” Meyer, *Early Christians*, 43–44.

6. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 169.

7. Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Macmillan, 1931), 1:40.

8. All quotations from Wright in this paragraph are from *New Testament and the People of God*, 169–70.

Language Matters

Indeed, given such blatantly political language as *exodus* and *kingdom*, it can be difficult to comprehend how we have managed to so thoroughly privatize the New Testament faith. Of no less political provenance than *kingdom* is the term *gospel*, or *evangel*. In the Greco-Roman world from which the early church adopted it, “gospel” was a public proclamation of, say, a war won, borne by a herald who ran back to the city and, with his welcome political news, occasioned public celebration.⁹ Christian ethicist Allen Verhey suggests that Mark, in calling what he had written a “Gospel,” was meaning to evoke *evangel* as it was used within the Roman cult of emperor to refer to announcements of the birth of an heir to the throne, of the heir’s coming of age, accession to the throne, and so forth. If so, the writer of the Gospel is comparing the kingdom of God come in Jesus to the quite this-worldly and political kingdom of Caesar.¹⁰ It would not be amiss to translate “The Gospel according to Mark” as “The Political Tidings according to Mark.” In short, if Mark in his world had wanted to convey a privatistic and individualistic account of Jesus’s life and death, he could have thought of many better things to call it than a Gospel (Mark 1:1).

No less political is the language used to describe the church’s worship. Our word *liturgy* comes from the Greek meaning “work of the people,” or, as we might put it now, a “public work.” In Roman society, “to build a bridge for a public road across a stream on one’s private property would constitute a liturgy.” Military service at one’s own expense was an act of liturgy. The wealthy sought favor by sponsoring lavish “liturgies”—huge dramas for the entertainment of the citizenry. *Leitourgoi*, or, very roughly, “liturgists,” in the secular Greek usage of the time referred to government officials.¹¹ To modern, privatized Christian ears, *worship* too easily connotes escape from the world (we worship, after all, in a “sanctuary”), a removal from the political and the social. Yet inasmuch as we read such connotations onto the word in its New Testament context we are saying something oxymoronic like the “private public work” of the church. The New Testament Christians themselves, I submit, were not so confused.

No less cultural and political is the very word used to describe the new community of God. *Church* (the Greek *ekklēsia*) from the fifth century BC onward referred to an assembly of citizens called to decide matters affecting the common welfare.¹² The Hebrew *qahal* denotes a solemn, deliberative assembly of Israel’s tribes. The assembly par excellence, for example, was at Mount Sinai, where the Law was received (Deut. 9:10; 18:16). When the ancient Jews translated the Old Testament into Greek, *qahal* was rendered *ekklēsia*. This is the term Christians seized

9. Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 28.

10. Allen Verhey, *The Great Reversal* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 74.

11. Charles P. Price and Louis Weil, *Liturgy for Living* (New York: Seabury, 1979), 21; Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 206–7.

12. Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 34.

on to describe their own assemblies. Thus the “*Ekklēsia* of God” means roughly the same thing as what New Englanders might call the “town meeting of God.”¹³

Given all this, it is unsurprising that early observers of Christianity were not struck by its “religious” (in our privatized sense) qualities. What struck outsiders, says Wright, was the church’s “total way of life”—or in my terms, its culture.¹⁴ The Romans called Christians “atheists” (they refused cultic emperor worship) and classified Christianity as a political society. This classification meant that Christianity was under a ban on corporate ritual meals, much as many governments down to the present ban the “free assembly” of those considered subversive. Christians, says Wright, “were seen not just as a religious grouping, but one whose religion made them a subversive presence within the wider Roman society.”¹⁵ There can be no doubt that Rome consistently saw Jews and early Christians as a social and political problem and treated them accordingly.

Of course we know that the Romans misunderstood both Jews and Christians on many counts. Did they also grossly misconstrue their intentions here? The thoroughly political language adopted by the church suggests otherwise. The clincher is that if the early church had wanted itself and its purpose to be construed in privatistic and individualistic terms, there were abundant cultural and legal resources at hand for it to do just that. The early church could easily have escaped Roman persecution by suing for status as a *cultus privatus*, or “private cult” dedicated to “the pursuit of a purely personal and otherworldly salvation for its members,” like many other religious groups in that world.¹⁶ Yet instead of adopting the language of the privatized mystery religions, the church confronted Caesar, not exactly *on* his own terms but *with* his own terms. As Wayne Meeks summarizes the matter, early Christian moral practices

are essentially communal. Even those practices that are urged upon individuals in the privacy of their homes . . . are extensions of the community’s practice—indeed they are means of reminding individuals even when alone that they are not merely devotees of the Christians’ God, they are members of Christ’s body, the people of God. That was how the Christian movement differed most visibly from the other cults that fit more easily into the normal expectations of “religion” in the Roman world. The Christians’ practices were not confined to sacred occasions and sacred locations—shrines, sacrifices, processions—but were integral to the formation of communities with a distinctive self-awareness.¹⁷

13. Wayne Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 45.

14. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 120.

15. *Ibid.*, 350.

16. See John H. Westerhoff, “Fashioning Christians in Our Day,” in *Schooling Christians*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and John H. Westerhoff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 280.

17. Meeks, *Origins of Christian Morality*, 110.

The original Christians, in short, were about creating and sustaining a unique culture—a way of life that would shape character in the image of their God. And they were determined to be a culture, a quite public and political culture, even if it killed them and their children.

Biblical Faith on the Ground

What I am suggesting is that the Constantinian church, for many centuries, responded to the world in such a manner that it lost sense of itself as an alternative way of life. Most immediately, the late Constantinian and modern belief in some (preeminently scientific) truths as acultural and ahistorical made it seem as if there was a neutral, nonperspectival viewpoint available to anyone, anywhere who was rational and well-meaning. In that atmosphere, much of the church thought it necessary to divide Christianity into (1) private truths, or values, to be confirmed by individuals apart from any communal and political context, and (2) public truths, or facts, which consisted of Christianity translated into acultural and ahistorical truths, “essences” more or less instantiated in all viable cultures.

But this was distorting, since Christianity, like Judaism, is historically based. It concerns what has happened with a particular people, namely ancient Israel, and through a particular man who lived and died in a specific time and place, namely Jesus the Nazarene, “crucified under Pontius Pilate.” It is true that most religions posit a god who in no way can be pinned down or identified by time and place. But not so the religion of the Israelites. As Robert Jenson observes,

Other ancient peoples piled up divine names; the comprehensiveness of a god’s authority was achieved by blurring his particularity, by identification of initially distinct numina with one another, leading to a grandly vague deity-in-general. Israel made the opposite move. Israel’s salvation depended precisely on unambiguous identification of her God over against the generality of the numinous.¹⁸

The God of Israel simply is he who led Israel out of Egypt, established it in the promised land, abandoned it to exile, and promised someday, somehow, to end that exile. Thus Israel’s God can only be identified narratively, by the telling of this story. That is why “in the Bible the name of God and the narration of his works . . . belong together. The descriptions that make the name work are items of the narrative. And conversely, identifying God, backing up the name, is the very function of the biblical narrative.”¹⁹

Accordingly, when those not born into the heritage of Israel later come to know and worship Israel’s singular God, they can do so only through this same story—but now extended and made more encompassing by the life, teachings,

18. Robert W. Jenson, *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 5.

19. *Ibid.*, 7.

death, and resurrection of the Jew Jesus. Put bluntly, Christians “*know how* to pray to the Father, daring to call him ‘Father,’ because they pray with Jesus his Son.”²⁰

In modernity, this particularity was such a scandal that many Christians acted as if (and sometimes outright argued that) everyone of all and sundry faiths worshiped the same “God” and that the story of Israel and Jesus was secondary to knowing this “God.” Now in post-Constantinian postmodernity, all communities and traditions (including the scientific) are called back to their inescapable and particular histories.²¹ Christianity no longer need worry about its “scandal of particularity,” since it is recognized that particularity “scandalizes” everyone. The upshot for Christians is that the church does not have to aspire anymore to a supposedly neutral language and story; now we can freely speak our own language and tell our own story.

To phrase it only slightly differently, we can now embrace, more wholeheartedly than we could under the modern regime, what might be called the Bible’s narrative logic. Modernity pushed us toward a logic, or way of seeing and thinking, concerned to find “universal” and “reasonable” principles that could be embraced apart from any historical tradition. Modern “logic” is at work in Matthew Arnold’s eagerness to think that Greek philosophy, Jewish faith, and indeed “all great spiritual disciplines” move toward the same goal. All alike, says Arnold, now quoting Christian Scripture, aim for the final end “that we might be partakers of the divine nature.”²² Yet there have been and are many divinities worshiped and admired by humanity. What divine nature do we aspire to? Will we partake of Zeus’s caprice? The Mayan god’s lust for human blood? And how do “great spiritual disciplines” that claim no divinity (such as Buddhism) then partake of this selfsame divine nature?

Biblical logic, by contrast, does not search for disembodied, abstracted essences. It is historical through and through. It deals with particular characters and events unfolding over time, and as such it is narrative, or story based. Hence the God who will later elect Israel creates the heavens and the earth, then suffers its rebellion (Gen. 1–3). Spiritual, political, familial, and economic division and alienation ensue (Gen. 4–11). Now this specific Creator God decides to reclaim the world. Yet this God is not a very good modernist and so aims to reclaim the world not by calling the divided peoples to “principles” or “essences” that somehow reside within all of them. Instead God chooses a particular man, Abraham, and promises to make of him a “great nation” through which “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2–3).

The rest of the Old Testament is the story of this God’s refusal to give up on a chosen, if often fickle and unfaithful, people. Israel is that strange and great nation

20. *Ibid.*, 47, emphasis original.

21. For a fuller account on this point, see my *Families at the Crossroads* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 9–26, 174–79.

22. Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965), 164.

electd to wrestle with the strange and great God Yahweh down through the centuries. This election is often not such an appealing privilege, since the God who has chosen Israel will judge Israel when it departs from its covenant (Isa. 7:9). Yet God, even if God sometimes judges, will not relinquish a sure grip on the descendants of Abraham and Jacob. As Ben Meyer writes, “Though any generation in Israel might fall victim to catastrophic judgment, Israel itself will never go under.”²³ Once again biblical narrative logic is relentlessly particular. Thus most of Israel may stray, but God will snatch a remnant from the lion’s mouth (Amos 3:12) and make it “the new locus of election and the seed of national restoration.”²⁴

Ultimately confident in God’s election, Israel suffers its national ups and downs but persists in looking ahead to a new reign like glorious David’s (Isa. 11:1–9; Jer. 30:8–9; Amos 9:1–5). It hopes in a new and paradisaical Zion (Isa. 2:2–4; 28:16), a new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34), and vindication in the teeth of its national enemies (Ps. 137). So:

Listen to me, my people,
and give heed to me, my nation;
for a teaching will go out from me,
and my justice for a light to the peoples.
I will bring near my deliverance swiftly,
my salvation has gone out
and my arms will rule the peoples. (Isa. 51:4–5)

As N. T. Wright memorably puts it,

This is what Jewish monotheism looked like on the ground. It was not a philosophical or metaphysical analysis of the inner being of a god, or the god. It was the unshakeable belief that the one god who made the world was Israel’s god, and that he would defend his hill against all attackers or usurpers. To the extent that Israel thought of her god in “universal” terms, this universal was from the beginning made known in and through the particular, the material, the historical.²⁵

The New Testament in the Light of Jewish Politics

It was according to the rules of this narrative logic that Jesus understood his mission and the early church interpreted its Lord and its life.²⁶ Exactly twelve disciples, one for each of the tribes of ancient Israel, were chosen. This is but one sign that the church saw itself as Israel’s seed restored and that a crucial aspect of its early

23. Meyer, *Early Christians*, 46.

24. *Ibid.*, 47.

25. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 247–48.

26. Meyer: “Neither the primitive Christian proclaimer nor the point and function of his proclamation is intelligible in historical terms apart from this biblical and ecclesial legacy.” *Early Christians*, 47.

mission was to call on all Israel to claim its heritage.²⁷ The disciples were a flock (Luke 12:32) destined to be scattered (Mark 14:27; John 16:32) much as Israel had been scattered. But like Israel they would be regathered (Mark 14:28; John 16:17, 22) and enjoy kingly rule when God drew the world's drama to its end (Matt. 19:28; Luke 12:32).²⁸

Following the Bible's narrative logic, Israel and the disciple remnant within it are saved in even more specific terms. Everything depends on the single man Jesus, who takes onto himself the history and destiny of Israel. Thus, like Israel, Jesus was the one called out of Egypt (Matt. 2:15). Like Israel, Jesus wanders, is tempted, and is fed by God in the wilderness. Like Israel, Jesus cares for the poor, the orphaned, and the stranger.

Jesus of Nazareth, as he apparently understood himself and certainly as he is interpreted by the New Testament documents, was a living recapitulation of Israel's history. More precisely, Jesus did not merely copy the history of Israel but realized it afresh in terms of his own life and obedience. By so doing, he re-presented not only Israel's past but also its future, what it would come to be through Yahweh's mighty consummating works.²⁹ Hence Jesus (with and through his disciples) will build a new and unsurpassable temple.

Now it is crucial to recall how important the temple was to the biblical story. Within Israel the temple bore manifold social, spiritual, political, economic, and cultural importance. In contemporary America it would be the equivalent of the entire range of our iconic political and cultural institutions: the White House, Capitol Hill, the National Cathedral, Wall Street, and Hollywood.³⁰ More than this, Jerusalem, in a profound theological sense, was considered the center of the earth—the hill Yahweh would defend against all attackers. And at the center of Jerusalem was the temple, in whose inner chambers the King of the Universe was known to dwell with an especially awesome presence. To this temple's courts all the world would someday stream, bearing offerings and worshiping the earth's one true God—Israel's Lord (Ps. 96:8–10).³¹

In this light it is hard to overstate the significance of Jesus's climactic few days in Jerusalem. His entry on a donkey identifies him with the lowly and peaceable king of Zechariah 9:9. His attack on the temple, if so it may be called, simultaneously critiques Israel theologically, culturally, politically, socially, and economically. And since the temple was the center not only of Israel but indeed of the universe, the cleansing of the temple purifies not only Israel but the entire cosmos.³² Jesus and

27. *Ibid.*, 38–39.

28. *Ibid.*, 65.

29. See E. J. Tinsley, *The Imitation of God in Christ* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 177. As Tinsley eloquently puts it on the same page, Jesus was not simply “a copyist, but a creative artist, in relation to his nation's history.”

30. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 225n29. I have added Hollywood to Wright's list.

31. See Meyer, *Early Christians*, 60–61.

32. *Ibid.*, 64. See also Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 306–7.

the church together, furthermore, are the new temple, a temple whose splendor will exceed that of any built with human hands (Mark 14:58; compare 2 Sam. 7:4–17; Hag. 2:9).

But the new temple will be built in three days—the span of time between Jesus’s crucifixion and his resurrection—which means it can be built only through Jesus’s death. So Jesus proceeds to his death. Under covenantal dynamics, Israel is blessed when it responds obediently to God and cursed when it strays. Roman-occupied Israel, as I have noted, still considered itself in exile, under the curse. But Jesus the Christ (Messiah-King) represents Israel and so can take on himself Israel’s curse and exhaust it.³³ He perishes as King of the Jews, at the hand of the Romans, whose oppression is “the present, and climactic, form of the curse of exile itself. The crucifixion of the Messiah is, one might say, the *quintessence* of the curse of the exile, and its climactic act.”³⁴

Narrative logic, then, reveals the significance of Jesus’s resurrection. As David Hume was to observe many centuries later in impeccable modern terms, if Jesus was raised from the dead, that *in and of itself* proves nothing except that a first-century man in a backwater country somehow survived death. It is only within the context of Israel’s story that Jesus’s resurrection assumes its supreme significance. For this was not just any man who died, but a man who took onto himself Israel’s story. And within Israel’s story, resurrection had long functioned as a symbol for the reconstitution of Israel, the return from exile, and the crowning redemption. In the Israel of Jesus’s day, resurrection was seen as the divine reward for martyrs, particularly those who would die in the great and final tribulation and bring Israel to its own divine reward. The prophet Ezekiel, for instance, saw the return of Israel in the figure of bones rising and taking on flesh (37:1–14). Since at least Ezekiel, the symbol of corpses returning to life not only denoted Israel’s return from exile but also implied a renewal of the covenant and all creation. So Jesus’s resurrection was nothing less than the monumental vindication (or justification) of Israel’s hopes and claims. Israel has claimed throughout its history that its God is the single Creator God, and Jesus’s resurrection at last redeems that claim.³⁵

Recall one more time the Bible’s narrative logic. Israel’s God is universal, but is known as such only through the particular, the material, the historical. God elects Abraham, and from Abraham a nation, and from that nation Jesus. Now from Israel and Jesus flow God’s blessings on all the world. God restores Israel; then, building on this event, God seeks the Gentiles. As Meyer writes, “This scheme is recurrent in Acts. First, the word is offered to the Jews, who split into camps of believers and unbelievers. The believers by their faith constitute restored Israel,

33. God “sees that the only way of rescuing his world is to call a people, and to enter into a covenant with them, so that through them he will deal with evil. But the means of dealing with evil is to concentrate it in one place and condemn—execute—it there. The full force of this condemnation is not intended to fall on this people in general, but on their representative, the Messiah.” Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 239.

34. *Ibid.*, 151.

35. On the significance of resurrection, see Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 328–34.

heir of the covenant and promises. Now and only now may gentiles find salvation, precisely by assimilation to restored Israel.”³⁶

The early Christians saw themselves as continuing Israel’s story under new circumstances. The church “understood itself now as messianic Israel covenanted with her risen Lord” (Acts 2:38; 5:30–32).³⁷ It, with Jesus’s headship, is the new temple, the sanctuary of the living God. It in fact is nothing less than the firstfruits of a new humanity, reborn in the last Adam named Jesus. Thus the church was seen, by itself and others, as a “third race,” neither Jew nor Gentile but a new and holy nation or people (*ethnos hagion*, 1 Pet. 2:9). Narrative logic drives home to a theological conclusion that is unavoidably cultural and political.

Consider Ephesians 2:11–22. Here the Gentile addressees of the letter are reminded that before Christ they existed in the political status of “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel” and as a consequence were “strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (v. 12). But now by the blood of Christ the Gentiles—we members of disparate nations among whom Israel was sent as a light and an example—have been made part of the same humanity as Israel (vv. 13–15). Christ has broken down the dividing wall between the Hebrews and the Gentiles, for “he is our peace” (v. 14). This is not a peace of mere inner, psychological tranquility; it is the peace of two reconciled peoples, a peace made possible by the change wrought “through the cross” (v. 16), a change of nothing less than the political and cultural status of the Gentiles from “aliens” to “citizens with the saints” (v. 19).

Christian faith, far from being a matter solely between the individual and God, amounts to being grafted into a new people. For the apostle Paul, those who are justified are justified because they believe the gospel and through it become God’s covenant people. Gentiles, through baptism, are incorporated into the body and life of God’s particular, historical people. Baptism is initiation into a new culture, a culture called church that now, exactly as a political and social entity, is poised at the pivot point of world history. As theologian John Milbank puts it, “The *logic* of Christianity involves the claim that the ‘interruption’ of history by Christ and his bride, the Church, is the most fundamental of events, interpreting all other events.” The church claims to “exhibit the exemplary form of human community,” and as such “it is *most especially* a social event, able to interpret other social formations, because it compares them with its own new social practice.”³⁸

In short, the church understands itself as a new and unique culture. The church is at once a community and a history—a history still unfolding and developing, embodying and passing along a story that provides the symbols through which its people gain their identity and their way of seeing the world. The church as a culture has its own language and grammar, in which words such as *love* and *service*

36. Meyer, *Early Christians*, 96. See also Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 93, 96; Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 150–51.

37. Meyer, *Early Christians*, 43.

38. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 388, emphasis original.

are crucial and are used correctly only according to certain “rules.” The church as a culture carries and sustains its own way of life, which includes

- a particular way of eating, learned in and through the Eucharist
- a particular way of handling conflict, the peculiar politics called “forgiveness,” learned through the example and practice of Jesus and his cross
- a particular way of perpetuating itself, through evangelism rather than biological propagation

In its existence as a culture, the church is eminently Jewish. Only in certain Constantinian, and peculiarly modern, terms could it regard its mission as acultural, its gospel as ahistorical, its existence as apolitical. Instead, what political scientist Gordon Lafer says of the Jewish nation and its witness is true as well of the church:

[The Jewish emphasis on] social solidarity . . . helps to make sense of the concept of a “chosen people,” which will be a “light unto the nations.” The example that Jewish law seeks to set is one aimed not at individuals but specifically at other “nations.” The institutions of solidarity that mark off Jews’ commitments to one another from their more minimal obligations to outsiders are not designed to be applied as universal law governing relations among all people, but rather to be reiterated within each particular nation. This, then, is the universalist mission of Judaism: not to be “a light to all individuals,” . . . but *rather to teach specific nations how to live as nations*.³⁹

The Individual: A Modern Mystification

So, the church as what I am calling a culture is a manner and mode of church that is, as George Lindbeck says, “more Jewish than anything else. . . . It is above all by the character of its communal life that it witnesses, that it proclaims the gospel and serves the world.” And such is why “an invisible church is as biblically odd as an invisible Israel.”⁴⁰ Biblical narrative logic simply demands a specific, visible people, a society or societal remnant, a *polis*.

I realize all this will strike many readers as exceedingly strange. I too, after all, have been reared and shaped in late modernity, taught to conceive of persons and Christianity in liberal, individualistic terms. So I understand that what I am calling for is an arduous retraining of the imagination, the learning and practice of a new grammar or logic. But perhaps it will ease the difficulty to remember that much of this grammar is new only to us. In historical perspective, it is our individuated, isolated self that is exceedingly strange.

39. Gordon Lafer, “Universalism and Particularism in Jewish Law,” in *Jewish Identity*, ed. David Theo Goldberg and Michael Kraus (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 196, emphasis added.

40. See George Lindbeck, “The Church,” in *Keeping the Faith*, ed. Geoffrey Wainwright (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 193, 183.

As rhetorician Wayne Booth notes, the self as “in-dividual” (literally “un-divided one”) is barely more than two centuries old. The in-dividual was invented by a succession of Enlightenment thinkers and became, in its most extreme but perhaps also its most widespread interpretations, a view of the self as “a single atomic isolate, bounded by the skin, its chief value residing precisely in some core of in-dividuality, of difference.” Thus it remains popular—almost second nature—to think we get at our “true self” by peeling away social ties like the skin of an onion. The “real me” is not my membership in the worldwide church, my shared kin with Clapps around the country, nor my connection—with three million other people—to the geography and culture of Chicago. The “real me” is my unique, in-dividual, core self. The in-dividual self values itself most for what is supposedly utterly different and unconnected about it. But, objects Booth, such an understanding of self is incoherent. Can we really believe that we are not, to the core, who we are because of our kin, our occupations, our political and social situations, our faith or philosophical associations, our friendships? And if our “true self” is whatever stands apart from those around us and is altogether unique about us, most of us are in trouble. The bizarre modern, liberal notion of the self means even the greatest geniuses have only minimal worth. “Goethe,” says Booth, “was fond of saying that only about 2 percent of his thought was original.”⁴¹ Truly, as Philip Slater remarks, “the notion that people begin as separate individuals, who then march out and connect themselves with others, is one of the most dazzling bits of self-mystification in the history of the species.”⁴²

In fact, Booth continues, “people in all previous cultures were not seen as *essentially* independent, isolated units with totally independent values; rather, they were mysteriously complex persons overlapping with other persons in ways that made it legitimate to enforce certain kinds of responsibility to the community.” In these settings, persons were not “‘individuals’ at all but overlapping members one of another. Anyone in those cultures thinking words like ‘I’ and ‘mine’ thought them as inescapably loaded with plurality: ‘I’ could not even think of ‘my’ self as separated from my multiple affiliations: my family, my tribe, my city-state, my feudal domain, my people.”⁴³

Are the biblical cultures part of the “previous cultures” Booth here remarks on? Scholars have again and again noted the Hebrew conception of “corporate personality,” the understanding that families, cities, tribes, and nations possess distinctive personalities and that individuals derive identity from and so might represent these social bodies.⁴⁴ We need no new frame when we extend this picture.

41. Wayne Booth, “Individualism and the Mystery of the Social Self,” in *Freedom and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara Johnson (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 81, 87–88.

42. Quoted from Philip Slater’s *Earthwalk* (New York: Anchor, 1974) without further attribution in Lawrence Stone, *The Past and the Present Revisited* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 325.

43. Booth, “Individualism,” 78, 79.

44. For a classic statement, see H. Wheeler Robinson, “Hebrew Psychology,” in *The People and the Book*, ed. A. S. Peake (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), 353–82.

Writing on the concept of personhood in New Testament times, Bruce J. Malina notes, “The first-century Mediterranean person did not share or comprehend our idea of an ‘individual’ at all.” Rather, “our first-century person would perceive himself as a distinctive whole *set in relation* to other such wholes and *set within* a given social and natural background.”⁴⁵

When Paul spoke of the church as a “body,” he borrowed the metaphor from a fable widely used in several cultures of antiquity. Just as “Israel” could serve as the name either of an individual (Jacob) or of a community (the nation), so could Paul use “Christ” to refer to an individual (Jesus of Nazareth) or a community (the church). In the words of New Testament scholar Charles Talbert, “‘Members’ . . . is Paul’s term for the parts of the body through which the life of the body is expressed (1 Cor. 12:12, 14–26; Rom. 6:13). Paul is saying then that individual Christians in their corporeal existence are the various body parts of the corporate personality of Christ through which the life of Christ is expressed.”⁴⁶

It is no simple matter to “translate” ancient understandings of self (or anything else) into our later, quite different setting. Yet I think this is another task that is made more feasible by our post-Constantinian, postmodern setting. As Booth comments, the in-dividuated self has been criticized from its beginning, and “it has been torn to pieces and stomped on by almost every major thinker in this century.”⁴⁷

Furthermore, freed from its distorting Constantinian “responsibility,” the church no longer must support a view of the self as in-dividuated and able to determine the good apart from all “accidental” ties of history or community. We can reaffirm that just as there can be no individual Americans apart from the nation America, so can there be no Christians apart from the church. We can be like the apostle Peter, who “did not learn God’s will by Socratic questioning and rational reflection, but as the member of a group who had been with Jesus ‘from the beginning in Galilee.’”⁴⁸ We can be like the early followers of Christ the Way, who trained fresh imaginations and became a new humanity by devoting themselves “to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). After Constantine, on the other side of modernity, we can regard and embrace the church as a way of life.

45. Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 54, 55, emphasis original.

46. Charles Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 31.

47. Booth, “Individualism,” 79.

48. Meeks, *Origins of Christian Morality*, 6.