

## #2: On The Knowledge of God The Two Books of Revelation Explored

*Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush aflame with God;  
But only those who see take off their shoes,  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

### Readings:

Assigned: WCF 1.1a

Highly Recommended: A. A. Hodge *Commentary*: Chapter 1, Section 1

If Desired: John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chapter 1-5

### Other

- Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, Chapter 5, "Christian Point of Contact"(p.67-95) and Chapter 6, "Christian Apologetics, The Problem of Method" (p. 96-105 [partial]) or
- Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, Section 1, Chapter 1 "The Gulf Is Fixed", Section 3, Chapt. 5 "How Do We Know It Is True?", , Section 4, Chapter 2 "Finding the Point of Tension, Section 4, Chapt. 2, "From the Point of Tension To The Gospel"
- John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, Chapter 1, "God, the Covenant Lord" (pp. 11-61)
- *Proper Confidence, Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship*, Lesslie Newbigin
- *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis
- *Severe Mercy*, Sheldon Vanauken
- *The Face of Truth, Lifting the Veil*, William Edgar
- *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, C. Plantinga

### A. Two Books of Revelation:

WCF 1-1. *Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation.*

Belgic Confession: 2. By what means God is made known unto us

*We know him by two means; first, by the creation, preservation and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely His power and divinity, as the apostle Paul says, Rom. 1:20. All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse. Secondly, he makes himself more clearly fully known to us by his holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to his glory and our salvation.*

### 1. Characteristic of Book 1: Temple Creation

*Psm. 19:1-4 The heavens are telling of the glory of God. And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech. And night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.*

○ **Universal and Common to All**

*Men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him... He has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead the excuse of ignorance.*  
John Calvin

Syllogistically Illustrated:

1. Descartes:

*The only alternative is that it is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me. And one certainly ought not to find it strange that God, in creating me, placed this idea within me to be like the mark of the workman imprinted on his work; and it is likewise not essential that the mark shall be something different from the work itself.* Descartes, *Meditations: IVs*

*The Ontological Argument (Argument from Being)*

1. I have an idea of God in my mind.
2. The idea of God is infinite and perfect
3. An infinite and perfect idea could only come from an infinite and perfect being.
4. God must exist in order to be the origin of the idea of God

2. Locke:

*Though God has given us no innate ideas of himself; though he has stamped no original characters on our minds wherein we may read his being; yet having furnished us with those faculties our minds are endowed with, he hath not left himself without witness; since we have sense, perception, and reason and cannot want a clear proof of him, as long as we carry ourselves about us. Nor can we justly complain of our ignorance in this great point; since he has so plentifully provided us with the means to discover and know him.*

John Locke, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Chapter 10.1

"Teleological Argument" (Argument from Design)

1. All design implies a Designer
2. Great design implies a great designer
3. There is great design in the world.
4. Therefore there must be a great Designer of the world.

**1<sup>st</sup> Point of Contact: An Epistemology of Participation in Temple Creation**

**Temple Creation:** *Where the knowledge of God is Awe-full!*

*We ought not to rack our brains about God: but rather we should contemplate Him in His works... no long or toilsome proof is needed to elicit evidences that serve to illuminate and affirm the divine majesty... we are called to a knowledge of God; not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart.* V.1.

John Calvin (c.f. See Calvin, 1.5.11-12)

*"In him we live and move and have our being" Isaiah 55:1*

*Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush aflame with God;  
But only those who see take off their shoes,  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.*

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## So why doesn't everyone believe?

*Rom. 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21 For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

### ○ **General Revelation, because of sin, is insufficient in itself**

*Although the Lord represents both himself and his everlasting Kingdom in the mirror of his words with very great clarity, such is our stupidity that we grow increasingly dull toward so manifest testimonies, and they flow away without profiting us. Calvin V.11*

*Seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand... as the Prophet Isaiah has said, "You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see but never perceive.*

*Matthew 13:13*

*They lack proofs, not because they are out of their reach, but because they will not use them; who, though they have riches and leisure enough, and lack neither parts nor other helps, are yet never the better for them. Their hot pursuit of pleasure, or constant drudgery in business, engages some men's thoughts elsewhere; laziness and oscillancy in general, or a particular aversion for books, study, and meditation, keep other from any serious thought at all. And some out of fear that an impartial inquiry would not favor those opinions which best suit their prejudices, lives, and designs, content themselves, without examination, to take upon trust what they find convenient and in fashion...*

*He that would seriously set upon the search of truth, ought in the first place to prepare his mind with a love of it. For he that loves it not, will not take much pains to get it; nor be much concerned when he misses it... And one may truly say, that there are very few lovers of truth, for truth's sake, even amongst those who persuade themselves that they are so.*

*John Locke Essay, Book IV, Chap.XX.6*

## Can we really "know" the true and living God without a moral reorientation?

### The "Noetic Effect of Sin"

1) Different Types of Knowledge—What we seek to know determines how to know it.

*As Christians we cannot begin speculating about knowledge by itself. We cannot ask how we know without at the same time asking what we know.... to say that we do not need to ask about the nature of reality when we ask about the nature of knowledge is not to be neutral but is in effect to exclude the Christian answer to the question of knowledge. (Cornelius Van Til, The Defense of Faith... p.,32, 33)*

2) Knowledge of God is Inherently moral because of who God is and our relation to Him as Creator/Lord.

*It is the sense of deity, even this knowledge of God, which Paul tells us (Romans 1:19-20) every man has, but which as Paul also tells us, every sinner seeks to suppress, that the Christian apologetic must first appeal.*

*Cornelius Van Til's The Defense Of The Faith p.85)*

*(See also: Calvin, 1.6.1-2)*

i.e. We must first appeal to the effect of sin upon our knowing. The problem of Sin starts with a problem of

affections! We don't WANT to know God as long as we want to be our own God—it is a moral problem less an intellectual problem!!

3) The Two Playing Fields—Faith seeking reason (Lordship of God is assumed). Or reason seeking faith (Lordship of humanity is assumed)?

*1 Cor. 1:21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not {come to} know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*

Two Playing Fields:

1. Faith seeking reason: God is the final court of appeal
2. Reason seeking Faith: Man is the final court of appeal

*Sin will reveal itself in the field of knowledge in the fact that man makes himself the ultimate court of appeal in the matter of all interpretation... Man has declared his autonomy as over against God. (Defense... p.35)*

*This is, in the last analysis, the question as to what are one's ultimate presuppositions. When man became a sinner he made of himself instead of God the ultimate or final reference point. And it is precisely this presupposition, as it controls without exception all forms of non-Christian philosophy, that must be brought into question. If this presupposition is left unquestioned in any field all the facts and arguments presented to the unbeliever will be made over by him according to his pattern. The sinner has cemented colored glasses to his eyes which he cannot remove. And all is yellow to the jaundiced eye. There can be no intelligible reasoning unless those who reason together understand what they mean by their words. (p.77)*

Notice what Paul does next in Acts 17: A Reorientation of Presuppositions to Faith seeking Reason

**24** *The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, **25** nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. **26** And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, **27** that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, **28** for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring."*

**29** *Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. **30** The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,*

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Point of Contact? Temple (Missional) Church**

1) Involves a suspension of judgment (Human Reason seeking faith) and Participate in God's Self-Authenticating Presence vis-à-vis the Word, Worship, Community.

- A concession that one can't prove or disprove God based on the modern science criteria and therefore a willingness to cease "the debate" and consider how then to establish a "burden of proof."

*It would appear, therefore that the truer, more effective and on all accounts more secure defense of Christianity and exposition of its essential content is not to take our starting point from those terms that will express the essential creedal confession of some of its most widely known historical deformations but rather from those terms that most fully express and give character to that redemptive religion which Christianity is. In other words, Christianity cannot receive proper understanding or its exposition proper orientation unless it is viewed as that which issues from, and is consummated in the accomplishment of, the covenant counsel and purpose of Father, Son and Holy Spirit."*  
Quoting John Murray in DOF p.71)

Illustration: Sheldon Vanauken's, *A Severe Mercy* (p. 94-96) Faith seeking Reason

*Christianity-- in a word, the divinity of seems probable to me. But there was a gap between the probable and the proved. How was I to cross it? IF I were to stake my whole life on the Risen Christ, I wanted proof. I wanted certainty...*

*One day later there came the second intellectual break-through: it was the rather chilling realization that I could not go back... the position was not as I had been comfortably thinking all these months, merely a question of whether I was to accept the Messiah or not. It was a question of whether I was to accept Him-- or reject him!. My God! There was a gap behind me too... Perhaps the leap to acceptance was a horrifying gamble-- but what of the leap to rejection? There might be no certainty that Christ was God-- but by God, there was not certainty that He was not... I could not reject Jesus, so there was only one thing to do, once I had seen the gap behind me. I turned away from it and flung myself over the gap towards Jesus... (participate) I choose to believe in the Father, Son and Holy Ghost-- in Christ, my lord and my God!*

## **2) Involves participating in God's presence in the midst of us ( Temple Church)**

*"God has an address"*

*Where the knowledge of God is full wherein Christ is found,*

*"The Fullness of him who fills all in all" Eph. 1:22-23*

*Speculative Schemes and systems have their intrinsic interest, but none will do justice to what occurred through Christ until we view it from within Christ, from that position in which a saving trust has placed us, a position created by the Holy Spirit in the presence of faith in accordance with that Word which the Holy Spirit himself inspired. In Christology, then, we can only philosophize from faith, not to faith, and our thought must resonate with what Christ reveals himself to be through Scripture with the revealed purpose of his coming and not with the ways we might like to see him as modern people. This means that to understand Christ aright, we must also know something about our own guilt. We must know ourselves to be sinners. We must have hungered and thirsted after righteousness. The New Testament, after all, was not written for the curious, for historians, or even for biblical scholars, but for those in all ages and cultures who want to be forgiven and to know God. David Wells, *The Person of Christ...**

*We are not to define the essence of Christianity in terms of its lowest but rather in terms of its highest forms. (p.71)*

God's temple body expresses the experiential transaction of our salvation by divine participation even as this infers an epistemology of participation vis-à-vis ecclesial conversion. Wherein justification, adoption and assurance is by faith alone such as to have the righteousness of Christ imputed to believers, conversion unto faith (efficacious calling), sanctification and perseverance is the gift of God by uniting himself in Christ to believers in the mystery of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. (c.f. Eph 1:15-22, 2:11ff)

In conversion for instance, wherein the covenant word aspect of Christian spirituality will emphasize declaration and assent such as to "receive" by faith the word of life, the temple bodily presence aspect of Christology applied suggests an experiential epistemology not often recognized. Alister McGrath, describing Blaise Pascal (and C.S. Lewis):

*"For Pascal, there was little point in trying to persuade anyone of the truth of religious belief. The important thing, he argued, was to make people wish that it was true, having caught sight of the rich and satisfying vision of reality it offered. Once such a desire was implanted within the human heart, the human mind would eventually catch up with its deeper intuitions."*

Concerning conversion in the early church, one theologian describes the journey to faith this way:

*Pagan converts to the [Christian] mainstream did not, for the most part, first understand the faith and then decide to become Christians; rather, the process was reversed: they first decided and then they understood. More precisely, they were first attracted by the Christian community and form of life... they submitted themselves to prolonged catechetical instruction in which they practiced new modes of behavior and learned the stories of Israel and their fulfillment in Christ. Only after they had acquired proficiency in the alien Christian language and form of life were they deemed able intelligently and responsibly to profess the faith, to be baptized.*

George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, p. 132.

### The necessity of an “ecclesial” strategy in apologetics/evangelism:

More than a source of mission, the carefully designed, apostolically-organized, church is the locus of mission and the very life giving and mediated presence of Christ. Just the church being the church with the whole world present is God’s missionary strategy to the world ([John 1:14, 20:21](#))! This makes our approach to evangelism and discipleship participatory and not simply declarative.

#### What to look for:

- An emphasis upon *participational* apologetics vs. just declarative apologetics wherein non-Christians participating in the life of the church and worship IS an evangelistic strategy.
- A confidence in the outward means of grace as a missionary strategy to our world (preaching, sacraments, community, prayers).
- A church that assumes a missionary mentality both locally and globally.

(c.f. Case Study: Addendum 1)

### **Qualification: Temple Means of Grace Awaits the Divine Evangelist As Agent of Grace (e.g. we are not “sacerdotal”—c.f. sacramental later in the course).**

*1Cor. 2:10* these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. **11** For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. **12** Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. **13** And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

#### WCF X: Effectual Calling

- I. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.

#### Ecclesial Conversion Illustrated:

Modern evangelicals will often reference the conversion of Augustine chronicled in his *Confessions* as illustrative of Christian conversion. Interestingly however, the reference is usually Augustine’s “garden” experience upon his reading of Romans 13:13-14 as told in Book 8. I say “interestingly” because this is the context where Augustine was, shall we say, converted to Christianity as a moral system. This ignores the fact that he was previously converted to Christianity intellectually as a philosophical system—from the dualism of Manicheism to Christian monotheism as told in “Book 7.” But more to the point, it also ignores what Augustine himself described about his conversion in related to being engrafted into Christ by Christian baptism. In Augustine’s own words (prior to his sacramental conversion, but after his moral conversion), he said, “thus in that depth I recognized the act for your will and I gave praise to your name rejoicing in faith. But this faith

would not let me feel safe about my past sins, since your baptism had not yet come to remit them"<sup>1</sup> The evening before Easter, April 24, 387, Augustine was baptized by Ambrose together with many others. And Augustine later reflected... "We were baptized and all anxiety as to our past life fled away."<sup>2</sup>

Those seeking conversion will need to be directed not only to a passage like John 1:12, but also Acts 2:38. For when a person once asked Peter "what must we do to be saved," Peter's response was "repent and be baptized...! And notice carefully, this is related to the gift of the Holy Spirit! Baptism is throughout the scripture related to the animating work of the Spirit in being miraculously born again into the life of God!<sup>3</sup> We should notice carefully the language depicting "mystic union" with Christ" that is employed by Paul in Romans 6:3-6 in such terms as "baptized into Christ" and "buried with him" and "united with Him"—all as related to the meaning of Christian baptism! Concerning then this passage, John Calvin notes:

By these words, he not only exhorts us to imitation of Christ, as if he had said, that we are admonished by baptism, in like manner as Christ died, to die to our lusts, and as he rose, to rise to righteousness; but he traces the matter much higher, that Christ by baptism has made us partakers of his death, in grafting us into it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, (Alfred A Knopf, Random House, NY, 2001) Book 9, chapter 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Book 9, chapter 6.

<sup>3</sup> See for instance, Titus 3:5, 1Peter 3:21, Gal.3:27, 1Cor.12:13, Mark 16:16, Acts 22:16, Rom. 6:3-4)

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries On The Epistle Of St. Paul To The Romans*

**Addendum 1: Case Study for a Conversionist Strategy in Cultural Engagement...**

Excerpt from a Pastoral Letter (Rev. Preston Graham Jr.) on the Issue of the supreme courts ruling on gay/lesbian marriage.

Dear CPC community,

Like the summer whirlwinds of a hot and humid storm, the ecclesiastical encyclicals, pastoral statements, pundit commentaries and personal innuendos have been churning and spinning ever since the recent “landmark” ruling by the Supreme Court concerning same-sex marriage.

The reactions have been as legion as they are varied, ranging between the polarities of ecstatic happiness to doomsday gloom. But as Wesley Hill observed in his Blog on June 27th, “for those of us who continue to believe that marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman... [we are] asking what it looks like to be faithful to Christian teaching now that the state’s definition of marriage diverges so widely from the church’s biblical and traditional definition.”<sup>5</sup>

Here again, we discover a bi-polar, if historically predictable, reaction by traditionalist Christians.

On one end, there is the position of strategic retreat. Now to be fair, the strategic retreat position (in varied manifestations) is not necessarily to acquiesce into a position of fortress entrenchment. Rather, it is more often affirmed as a missional, even cultural transformational, strategy of “church” as “city on a hill” in order to keep “the light of faith burning through the surrounding cultural darkness.”<sup>6</sup> The focus is less on legislation and more to do with personal conversion. As articulated once by Duke theologian Paul Griffiths about the same sex marriage (quoted by Wesley Hill),

*What the pagans need on this matter is conversion, not argument; and what the Church ought to do to encourage that is to burnish the practice of marriage until its radiance dazzles the pagan eye.*

The reaction on the other end is to engage the issue head on, politically and culturally, in the various legislative and cultural halls of the public square. As referenced by David Brooks,

*Several contributors to a symposium in [the journal First Things](#) about the court’s Obergefell decision last week called the ruling the Roe v. Wade of marriage. It must be resisted and resisted again. Robert P. George, probably the most brilliant social conservative theorist in the country, argued that just as Lincoln persistently rejected the Dred Scott decision, so “we must reject and resist an egregious act of judicial usurpation.”<sup>7</sup>*

Both reactions are conceding what those of us living in Southern New England conceded many decades ago, that Christianity is in decline in America as we are now thoroughly entrenched in a “post-Christendom” reality (notice I said “post-Christendom” not “post Christian”—more on that later). As David Brooks has recently described it:

*The share of Americans who describe themselves as Christians and attend church is dropping. Evangelical voters*

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<sup>5</sup> “The ‘Benedict Option’ and the Dazzled Pagan Eye,” in [Spiritual Friendship: Musings on God, Sexuality, Relationships](#), *Posted by Wesley Hill , June 27, 2015.*

For biblical definition: By positive decree-- Gen 2:24, Mark 10:7-9, Eph 5:24-27, Heb 13:4. By negative decree-- Lev. 18:22, 24, 28, 30; cf. Lev. 20:13, Rom 1:26-27) 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

For traditional/confessional definition: *Westminster Confession of Faith* 24.1 and *Westminster Larger Catechism* # 139.

<sup>6</sup> Quote by Rod Dreyer, author of *taken from How Dante Can Save Your Life,*) taken from David Brooks in “The Next Culture War.”

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in David Brooks, *The Next Culture War*”



*make up a smaller share of the electorate. Members of the millennial generation are detaching themselves from religious institutions in droves... American culture is shifting away from orthodox Christian positions on homosexuality, premarital sex, contraception, out-of-wedlock childbearing, divorce and a range of other social issues. More and more Christians feel estranged from mainstream culture. They fear they will soon be treated as social pariahs, the moral equivalent of segregationists because of their adherence to scriptural teaching on gay marriage. They fear their colleges will be decertified, their religious institutions will lose their tax-exempt status, their religious liberty will come under greater assault.<sup>8</sup>*

...

The question is raised, what then should we do?

...

2) We must assume the posture of “resident alien” in our calling as missionary Christians living in the world, trusting that our greatest missionary asset is being not of the world! As resident *aliens*, their identity and values transcended the world yet in a manner that drew them to the gospel.

**1Pet. 2:11** *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.*

We know that the 1<sup>st</sup> century context for the recipients of Peter’s exhortation was that they suffered “various trials” (1 Peter 1:6). They were being “tested by fire” (1:7), maligned “as evildoers” (2:12), suffering “for doing good” (3:17) and “reviled” (4:14). And yet Christians were called to remain “in” the world but in a way that kept their identity in tact as being “not of this world,” whose home is in heaven (Heb. 13:10).

Without a doubt, the idea of “alien” implies a clear distance in relation to society, a distance from its values and ideals, from reliance upon its institutions and politics for the coming of the kingdom of God (the “of” of “Kingdom of God” is instructive, something only God in his power and methods can accomplish!). Reflecting on 1 Peter, Miroslav Volf has observed how “unlike models that call for a transformation of culture or a Christendom-like alliance of church and state, Peter expects the gospel to always be highly offensive and never completely embraced or accepted by the world. This is a caution to those Christians who hope to bring about an essentially Christian culture.

And yet the idea of “resident” implies that they remained engaged in culture. Volf likewise observes how Peter “nonetheless expects some aspects of Christian faith and practice to be highly attractive in any pagan culture, thus influencing people to praise. They were to be fully involved in its life, working in it and praying for it. At the same time, they were not to adopt its culture or lose their distinctive identity as God’s holy people..”<sup>9</sup>

As Christians, we must make our peace that we are going to be “fools” for Christ in a post-Christian world.(c.f. Paul’s “Fools Speech” in 2 Cor 11-12). We will be forced to re-evaluate our values and confidences even if “anti-American” wherein our trust is not in the power, prestige and privilege that can be gained by socio-cultural-economic appeasement but in Christ! And yet again, we must remain engaged in the world for the sake of the world (not a culture-war perspective). That is, we seek to serve the world, albeit again even if by values that the world doesn’t readily appreciate.

3) Finally, we must make the gospel first. That is, our first aim is not to make a Christian nation or culture, but to make Christians. We therefore set our focus on Christian conversions, knowing that the result will be the “re-conversion” of such divine institutions as the sanctify of life, sacredness of covenant based (vs. consumer based) marriage, multi-cultural equality (if not sameness), etc.

There is a very important order to salvation in scripture wherein justification proceeds sanctification.” It’s an order that is

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<sup>8</sup> The Next Culture War, NYT Op-Ed, June 20, 2015

<sup>9</sup> Miroslav Volf, “Soft Difference”

beautifully illustrated by Christ's interaction with the women caught in adultery.

*Jesus said... Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more. (John 8:11)*

The order is likewise noted by John in his epistle wherein he observed how

*Perfect love cast out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. (1 Jn 4:18-19).*

The fact of the matter is that it is impossible to be sanctified without first being justified, since all good works done out of fear are not works of love but self-interest. The gospel therefore starts with the problem of "Sin" (capital "S") and the need to be reconciled to God, not to the exclusion of dealing with "sins" (small "s"), but dealing with "sins" in so far as there is the restoration of true faith, hope and love in Christ.

Another way to say this is that we need to preach and teach the whole counsel of God, but also in Godly proportions. What then is the overall focus of divine revelation in Scripture? Paul summarizes it as "Christ and him crucified." No, Paul doesn't preach and teach nothing but the cross, but he preaches and teaches everything as it must pass through the cross.

What does this imply about the topics we preach each Sunday, or the first order of conversation that we have with our non-Christian friends, or even how we would talk about such topics as sanctify of life and marriage? We are left with the privilege of framing everything in order to fit into the good news of the gospel. How would this change our conversations on the topic of marriage, for instance, as covenant based in order to preserve grace based marriage after the pattern of Christ and the church?

It's to this final point that I want to return to the previously noted statement by Paul Griffiths concerning the focus on "conversion" that leads to "re-conversion."

What the pagans need on this matter is conversion, not argument; and what the Church ought to do to encourage that is to burnish the practice of marriage until its radiance dazzles the pagan eye.

Wesley Hill, a professing "gay Christian"<sup>10</sup> and author of the highly recommended book *Washed and Waiting* offers then this powerful illustration of what such a conversion/re-conversion interaction might look like based upon a true story. About Griffith's idea, He starts out by admitting "on the surface of it, I'm not sure how that strategy would work. How is it that Christians' purifying of their own male-and-female marriages will work to convince, say, a happily satisfied pagan couple to give up their gay sex and convert to traditional Christianity? The story is told:

*Say you're a smart, capable American liberal, attending an Ivy League university. You may have some kind of nominal Christianity in your background, but still, by the time you're in your twenties, you're well catechized in modern mainstream American godlessness. Say, then, that you unexpectedly find yourself drawn to a midweek Eucharist at a nearby Episcopal church. You start going regularly, captivated more and more by the Gospel—the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—that you're hearing each week. Around the same time, you start taking the Bible more seriously, because, hearing it read in the weekly liturgy, you want to get to know better the Christ of whom it speaks and whom you're receiving each week in the Sacrament. And the more you study, the more you realize there is a canonical biblical theology of marriage. You start to see a coherence between the original creation of male and female (Genesis 1:26-28), the institution of marriage (Genesis 2:21-24), Jesus Christ's reaffirmation of that institution (Mark 10:2-12; Matthew 19:3-12), and the apostle Paul's insistence that it is a symbolic window onto the love of Christ for the church (Ephesians 5:21-33). And, before you know it, and cutting across the grain of your pagan past, you find yourself drawn in, captivated by this vision of Jesus, of discipleship to*

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<sup>10</sup> By "professing gay Christian" It is meant a Christian who recognizes his/her natural disposition of having same sex attraction, but as a matter of Christian sanctification a love motivated, and grace experiencing submission to God's design for marriage as traditionally-biblically defined between a man and a women.

*him, and of the meaning of marriage. Such, in brief, is the experience of the theologian Ephraim Radner, as he recounted it to me once, who now writes impressively in defense of traditional biblical sexual ethics. It happened to him. And it can happen again to people in similar places. Such is an example of what conversion might look like, how it might unfold.*

Conclusion:

Let's keep our focus. Let's trust in the "ordinary means of grace" that God has given us wherein his presence is mediated through gospel centered and missional prayer, sacraments, preaching and one-anothering in the life of his body, the church. Keep asking and bringing people.

Let's keep the faith. There is so much more that needs saying, so much about how we posture ourselves in our post-Christian culture, how we frame such conversations about life, race, sexuality, gender, marriage, war and on it goes by the logic and purpose of the gospel. But of everything that has not been said, what I think most needs to be said given the present age is the promise, even benediction of God to all who are by faith alone are his covenant people. And it is as simple as profound.

*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Mt 28:20)*