Freed-Hardeman University’s brand statement, “Where Faith and Reason Create Christian Leaders,” provides the backdrop for this issue of Kingdom, particularly the relationship between faith and reason. Regarding FHU’s brand statement, I inquired about its origin as such and the rationale behind it with Bret Pharr, current chairman of the Board of Trustees for Freed-Hardeman University. With his permission, we will note some excerpts from his email which I received earlier in the year, “I believe the ‘and’ is intentional in our brand statement to emphasize compatibility. I know that our culture and many philosophical positions in history (and even in Christianity) have not taken that position.” He continues in his explanation of this brand statement to affirm that “a proper faith and reason foundation helps Christian leaders serve in any capacity,” whether it be secular work, with the family, in the community or in the church. He concludes by challenging our understanding in this way, “I believe our primary product should be delivering graduates who get this right.”

Brett offers the official, and justifiable, thinking of the Board of Trustees behind the introduction of the brand statement of FHU. This is one reason I have chosen part of the statement as the theme of this issue of Kingdom.

However, another reason I have chosen the theme for this current issue of Kingdom is because of my own interest in this area which, though going back as long as I can remember, reached the height of its interest when I took classes as a student at FHU with Thomas B. Warren. As Immanuel Kant said originally about David Hume, in a sense Dr. Warren “awakened me from my dogmatic slumber.”1 As a philosopher, I do not claim to be in the category of Kant, but the similarity is this: As a freshman at FHU, I had become lethargic and frustrated regarding the pursuit of any attainment of answers for some basic questions that were perennial in my thinking. I was a math major with a good science background from high school, and I had come to believe that faith and knowledge occupied separate realms which had little to do with each other. Dr. Warren’s class in Christian Ethics awakened me in a very positive way (Although on his first test I made a 68, I did better later).

Subsequent reflection on faith and reason in Christianity has led me to an integrative, compatibilist view. Variations of this compatibilist view are reflected in the following articles. Kirk Brothers surveys and critiques the four basic views concerning the relationship between faith and knowledge in Christianity. Caleb Colley was asked to write about Anselm...

and his views about the competing views *intelligo ut credam* ("I understand in order that I may believe") and *credo ut intelligam* ("I believe in order that I may understand"). In medieval philosophy the work of Anselm is critical in framing views of believers in Christ at that point in the history of Christendom. The articles of Bart Warren, Isaac Bourne, and Clay Leonard take us in more of a textual direction. Bart, who is an accomplished writer in his own right, is nonetheless a proud grandson of Thomas B. Warren. Bart has come to his own conclusions about faith and reason as he writes about how Jesus used the terms related to faith and reason. Isaac focuses on the Pauline epistles (plus some passages from Acts) to delineate Paul’s inspired linguistic expertise of reason and faith words. Clay Leonard was commissioned with the task of doing the same thing from the writers of non-Pauline New Testament epistles. Finally, we add a new dimension to this journal. Alan Groves reviews the book *We Look For a Kingdom: The Everyday Lives of the Early Christians* by Carl J. Sommer. The review of this book is appropriate because of the overriding concerns about the Kingdom of God endemic to our journal *Kingdom*. We hope you are blessed by reading these articles.
INTRODUCTION

The words spoken to Jesus by Pilate echo down through the centuries, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). He was not the first to struggle with this question, nor will he be the last. It is as relevant today as when first spoken in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. Today’s post-modern culture says that truth does not exist, or if it does exist, one cannot find it. Jesus states that one can find truth (cf. John 8:31–32), so this essay will proceed based on that basic assumption. Central to the exploration of the question of truth is deciding where one will go to find truth. Will one focus on the social or hard sciences? Will one focus on Scripture? Can one find truth in a combination of these? One must not only decide where he will go to find truth but how he will integrate the truth claims he discovers into a unified worldview. Integration is the process of “relating knowledge to knowledge.” All human beings do this naturally every day. They compare new knowledge with old knowledge and decide what will be rejected and what will be integrated into their worldview. In this article, I will delve into this process. I will specifically explore the relationship between human knowledge gained through scientific research (reason) and those truths gained through the study of Scripture (faith). Finally, I will explore the current positions of integration, the most appropriate model to choose, and the challenges this choice poses for ministry.

EXPLAINING CURRENT POSITIONS CONCERNING INTEGRATION

It is necessary to begin by summarizing the prominent positions on the integration of faith and reason. James Swindal uses four models that highlight the relevant positions. A brief discussion of his models can not only help one to identify the different perspectives on faith and reason but also can help one in the process of choosing which model is appropriate for the child of God.

THE CONFLICT MODEL

This model of integration sees “genuine rivalry” between faith and reason. Christian Fundamentalists resolve the conflict on the side of faith. An example can be seen in the following statement by Dave Hunt, “It is blasphemy to suggest that anti-Christians have been inspired to fill in a missing portion of truth that God himself declares He has already revealed in its fullness in His holy Word.” A similar, though less hardline, view can be seen in Lacy Couch’s review of the book Caring for Souls which is authored by Harry Shields and Gary Bredfeldt. Couch applauds the authors’ critique of the social sciences but laments the fact that they also use “limited and biased human theories” in their work when the Word of God is “sufficient.”

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2 Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the Updated New American Standard Version (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation 1995).


5 Ibid.

Others resolve the conflict between faith and reason on the side of reason (or science). Scientific Naturalists do not believe truth is found in faith (Scripture). One can see an example of this kind of thinking in statements by Richard Dawkins. He states, “Faith is the great copout, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.” The conflict model of integration says one must choose to either find truth in reason or in faith. This view sees faith and reason as enemies that cannot be reconciled.

**THE INCOMPATIBILIST MODEL**

The next model of integration is the Incompatibilist model. It does not see reason and faith in conflict because they deal with separate spheres. Those who hold this view believe that “compartmentalization” of each is possible. Those who hold this view would say that reason deals with the sphere of empirical truth and that faith deals with the sphere of divine truth. Swindal notes Ludwig Wittgenstein, for example, who would say that faith and reason are “different languages” and thus cannot be compared. Some would say that faith is trans-rational or above reason. Others would say that faith is irrational. In other words, it is not subject to rational justification. This model basically sees faith and reason as inhabiting two different worlds.

**THE WEAK COMPATIBILIST MODEL**

The weak compatibilist model sees a limited relationship between faith and reason. Those who hold this position believe “dialogue is possible between reason and faith, though both maintain distinct realms of evaluation and cogency.” The differences in evaluation, in spite of dialogue, can be seen in the fact that reason will include the use of the scientific method and faith will include the consideration of miracles. While Catholic scholars tend toward the compatibilist model, protestant theologians are more apt to lean in the weak compatibilist direction. Michael Anthony observes, “Though Protestant theologians acknowledge the contributions of natural theology, they believe that it is deficient in specificity about God…Experience, rational thought and philosophical speculations may have their roles to play; but they are far below the supremacy of Christ, the message brought to us through his prophets, and the written Word of God.” In summary, this view sees reason and faith as neighbors, but they do not live in the same house.

**THE STRONG COMPATIBILIST MODEL**

The strong compatibilist model sees faith and reason moving into the same house and living together. It says, “Faith and reason have an organic connection, perhaps even parity.” This position can be seen in Natural Theology and is adopted by many Roman Catholic theologians. Michael Anthony notes, “In keeping with Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), Catholics hold to a view that natural theology can construct a definable body of knowledge about God with its own sources, principles, and methods based on the application of reason to general revelation.” This view believes that faith can be demonstrated by reason. Examples of this can be seen in the cosmological, ontological, theological, and anthropological arguments for the existence of God. By way of summary, the strong compatibilists see faith and reason as equal or almost equal sources of truth.

**EVALUATION OF THE POSITIONS**

Having overviewed the current positions on integration, it is now appropriate to seek to choose the model that is best for determining truth and one’s worldview. Before choosing a model, it is necessary to critique the models and explore some of their assumptions.

**CRITIQUE OF THE CONFLICT MODEL**

The conflict model is inconsistent with both Scripture and reason. Christian fundamentalists assume that God put all truth in the Bible (special revelation). They forget that the same God who inspired the Scriptures also made the world and the human mind. Romans 1:18–22 makes it very clear that truth concerning God’s nature and power can be found in the created world. Arthur Holmes is correct in

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10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.


15 Though Catholics often fall into this category they “do not negate the priority of special revelation from God through Scripture,” Ibid.
asserting that while the Christian believes that the Scriptures contain truth, he “does not think of it as an exhaustive source of truth.”

Scientific Naturalists wrongly assume that faith is an absence of reason. Study and acceptance of Scripture does not involve an absence of intellect. One does not turn off the brain when he or she opens the Bible. One may not be able to put John 3:16 into a test tube, but it does not mean that intellect and reasoning are not required to accept this truth and its ramifications and apply them to one’s life. An evaluation of Paul’s sermon in Acts 17 finds Paul, who held the first century equivalent of a Ph.D. in Jewish Theology, using sound reasoning and argumentation in his efforts to persuade the Greek philosophers in Athens.

Scientific Naturalists also wrongly assume that any truth found outside the scientific method is not truth. Truth stands independent of the means one uses to find it. In fact, truth continues to be truth, whether human beings ever discover it or not. The law of gravity existed as a truth long before human beings catalogued it as such. It does not necessarily follow that something is not true if it cannot be discovered through the scientific method. Finally, Scientific Naturalists wrongly assume that one has to choose between faith and reason. Dr. Owen Gingerich, a scientist himself, notes, “[J]ust as I believe that the Book of Scripture illumines the pathway to God, so I believe that the Book of Nature…suggests a God of purpose and a God of design. And I think my belief makes me no less a scientist.”

CRITIQUE OF THE INCOMPATIBILIST MODEL

This model wrongly assumes that there is no relationship between faith and reason. While there are differences between faith and reason, there are also connections. Genesis states, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Genesis also reveals that God made human beings “in His image” (1:26–27). The same God who inspired the Bible is the God who made the natural laboratory in which science operates. The God who authored the Bible made every gene, cell, organism, and strand of DNA that is evaluated by science. He created the mind that authored every book that has ever been written. In light of this, to say that there is no relation or compatibility between what God revealed in general revelation (the world) and what God revealed by special revelation (the Word) is an unsound argument. University of Alabama professor David Masoner is right in stating, “All academic disciplines have their origin in the mind of God.”

CRITIQUE OF THE WEAK COMPATIBILIST MODEL

The basic problem with this model is that it does not go far enough. It does not recognize the importance of reason in faith. The Psalmist proclaimed, “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1). Weak Compatibilists might be aware of this voice but it is only a faint whisper off in the distance to them. In Rom 1:18–22 Paul stated that the voice of the created world (general revelation) is so powerful that no person has an excuse for not believing in God, even if he or she has not read the Scriptures (special revelation). Richards and Bredfeldt summarize this reality when they say, “By a careful study of creation, the seeker will come to know something of God’s divine nature and his invisible attributes.”

CHOOSING A MODEL

The Strong Compatibilist model is the most appropriate model to choose. Frank Gaebelein notes, “There are areas of truth not fully explicated in Scripture and these, too, are part of God’s truth.” The basic premise of many of the writings of Arthur Holmes is “all truth is God’s truth, wherever it may be found.” This is consistent with Scripture. Psa 19:1–6 focuses on general revelation. The Psalmist states, “The heavens declare the glory of God.” In Psa 19:7 the focus turns to special revelation with the statement, “The Law of the Lord is perfect.” Holmes emphasizes that once one accepts the reality that “all truth is God’s truth,” then “the worlds of literature, philosophy, history, science and art become the Christian’s rightful domain.”

Truth found in general revelation will not contradict truth found in special revelation. Robert Harris stresses this when he says, “There is no conflict between God’s truth and other truth…The most common work in the faith and learning area is that of integrating apparently conflicting interpretations rather than apparently conflicting facts.” What seems at times to be conflicting truths are actually conflicting interpretations of truth. All truth is God’s truth.

There is a strong compatibility between faith and reason; yet caution is necessary. One must consider the influences

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22 Ibid.
prevalent in the social sciences and beware of the primacy of reason in the interaction between faith and reason.

SECULAR INFLUENCE

While both reason and faith originate with God, one must remember that those with a secular worldview do much of the research that is being done in the realm of science. In his powerful book, *The Christian Mind*, Harry Blamires defines the Christian worldview: “To think Christianly is to accept all things with the mind as related, directly or indirectly, to man’s eternal destiny as the redeemed and chosen child of God.” When research is conducted from an earthbound perspective it will have inherent flaws. Biologist Jonathan Wells notes the inaccurate representation of facts related to evolution that he has witnessed in numerous scientific textbooks. Research is always going to be open to the possibility of influence from the worldview of the researcher. Richards and Bredfeldt use Maslow’s hierarchy of needs in their book, *Creative Bible Teaching*. Yet, they offer a word of caution, “It should be noted that Maslow holds a humanistic worldview and that his theory is influenced by his humanistic presuppositions.” The authors rightly go on to say, “But to discard everything he says because he doesn’t factor in spiritual needs is to dismiss his valuable insight in categorizing physical and emotional needs.” In other words, there is much that can be learned from the social sciences but one must use them wisely with an awareness of the potential secular influence.

SCRIPTURAL INFLUENCE

There is a strong compatibility between faith and reason but there is no parity. They are not equal. Much of society views reason as more respectable than faith. This must never be the case. Scientist Henry Morris observes, “Other sources of information about God—in nature and in religious experience, for example—can supplement and illumine the biblical data, but only the latter are normative for Christian doctrine.” Paul made it clear in writing to the Corinthian brethren that human wisdom alone does not lead one to a true relationship with God (1 Cor. 1:18–25). There are weaknesses in human abilities to reason. Charles Siburt, of Abilene Christian University, is right when he says, “Where there is conflict between theology and psychology, then theology must dominate. Psychology needs to be a tool not a religion.” Frank Gaebelin adds, “The ultimate criterion of truth is found in the revealed Word, the Bible.” Jesus said of God the Father, “Your Word is truth” (John 17:17). All other truth claims must be compared to the Bible and not vice versa. The Bible must have primacy. To illustrate the relationship between faith and reason, one might view them as riding on the same theological bus but Scripture needs to do the driving.

CONCERN

It is appropriate at this time to express some concern over the imbalance between faith and reason that is becoming evident at some Christian universities. It is a well-known fact that many prominent universities (such as Harvard and Yale) started out as religious schools. Somewhere down the line they took a different path. All Christian universities must guard against secularization. Christian universities start with an emphasis on faith as revealed in Scripture. Yet, with the passage of time, change often takes place. Money and academics begin to drive the institutions. Educator Bailey McBride notes, “Whenever academic excellence, national reputation or athletics begin to be the principle concerns of trustees, institutions will gradually slip away from founding principles.” Gaebelin laments, “For it is a fact that in many a seminary the Bible has what amounts to a secondary place.” He stresses that many students know much about the social sciences but little about the Word of God. Accreditation may influence this move away from faith to reason. There is a danger of putting greater emphasis on professors having academic excellence rather than Scriptural excellence. A 50-year-old man with a bachelor’s degree in Bible, thirty years of experience in ministry, and the ability to quote massive portions of Scripture cannot teach as a full-time professor at the average Christian university. A 30-year-old man who has a Ph.D., yet does not know nearly as much Scripture, and has little or no ministry experience, can teach full-time. Here lies part of the problem in the relationship with faith and reason on our Christian college campuses. Accrediting bodies must reconsider how they evaluate who qualifies as a professor. Christians must wake up to the reality of these problems. Those with the degrees will have the greatest pull in bringing about this change.

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27 Ibid.
29 Charles Siburt, “Counseling for Church Leaders,” Graduate class lecture (Nashville: David Lipscomb University, Fall 2001).
33 Ibid.
APPLICATION TO MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

How does the strong compatibility view affect for how ministry is done? Ultimately, truth, whether from general or special revelation, must be put into practice if it is to be useful. Truth left on a dusty shelf has no power. How does the integration of faith and reason challenge ministry in the Church?

EXPOSURE TO GENERAL REVELATION

Ministers must expose themselves to general revelation. They must read widely in the social sciences. Ministry happens in the world God created. Evangelism requires changing minds and hearts. One can only be aided in this process by understanding all he can about the world God made and how humans think. Those ministering to youth can learn much from researchers like Chap Clark, Christian Smith, or Kara Powell. Those coaching others through emotional struggles can benefit from the writings of men like Charles Gerkin, Tim Clinton, Harry Shields, or Gary Bredfeldt.

Paul studied resources outside of the inspired text. He seems to be quoting Epimenides of Crete in Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12. Today’s ministers would do well to follow his example. In some religious circles there exists a bias against gaining “too much” academic education. One does not have to attain a degree from a Christian university to minister for God, but neither does one become a better minister by avoiding academic education. Two men who were highly educated for their day, Luke and Paul, wrote most of the New Testament.

EMPHASIS ON SPECIAL REVELATION

Having stressed the need to read widely, one must understand that the most important book to read is the Bible. Teaching and preaching ministers in the church must not become consumed with degrees and the social sciences. They should remember that the Bible is God’s self-revelation of His wisdom and truth. It is the best tool available in helping people face life. The Bible was helping people deal with life’s problems long before many modern psychological theories had begun. This does not mean that psychology cannot aid the minister. It just means that the Bible must never take a back seat. God is the God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3–5). The minister should never feel “unprofessional” for using God’s Word to counsel people. Charles Siburt offers wise words of caution, “Don’t trade the Gospel for the power of a degree. Use them together and not either/or. The Gospel has primacy. Don’t sell your birthright. Degrees are a tool in the tool kit, they are not your identity.”

CONCLUSION

Jesus declared that truth could be found in His Words (John 8:31–32). Yet, he also stated that He is truth (John 14:6). The Greek term ἀληθεία (aletheia) is found 25 times in the Gospel of John. The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament notes that in John the term refers to more than just information from Christ but involves an “encounter with Christ, who is truth.” Coming to Jesus for truth involves not only knowing His Words, but also experiencing a relationship with Him and living life in accordance with those words. It is a daily process of being transformed into His likeness, the likeness of truth (2 Cor. 3:18). Truth must transform. Jesus told Pilate that all who love truth would come to Him. Jesus was and is the source of truth. Pilate was asking for truth but his secular perspective prevented him from seeing that it was standing right in front of him in the person of Jesus Christ. May the child of God never reject any truth placed before him or her that can help one to know God more deeply and live like him more fully. Both faith and reason, with faith taking the lead, can help one to develop a world view that can help one to know truth and the source of truth.

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34 Charles Siburt, “Counseling for Church Leaders,” Graduate class lecture (Nashville: David Lipscomb University, Fall 2001).


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*Wilburn Kirk Brothers (Ph.D. from Southern Baptist Seminary) is a full-time faculty member of FHU’s School of Biblical Studies, co-ordinates the degree of Youth and Family Ministry at FHU, and preaches extensively.*
Christians not only have a positive feeling about Jesus, they also make theological knowledge claims. Much of the philosophical and theological writing on the subject of Christian epistemology—particularly on the issue of the relationship between belief and justification—has been inspired by the medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109).36 Two of his most important works are the Monologion37 (perhaps meaning “a speech made to oneself”) and Proslogion38 (perhaps meaning “a speech made to another”; the text is written as a prayer).39 These are especially relevant to the present concern about natural theology—specifically the question of whether/how human beings utilize their rationality in coming to belief in God.40 Two of Anselm’s stated positions have been codified, perhaps clumsily and unfortunately, into often-extracted “slogans”: “Fides quaerens intellectum” (“Faith Seeking Understanding”) and “credo ut intellectam” (“I Believe that I May Understand”). It is important to study these slogans in their context because they do make a biblical point, and because many people over the centuries and even to the present have drawn upon some interpretation of these slogans in forming their own views. In this paper I will discuss what Anselm meant by these statements and how they might be useful in contemporary discussions of connections between faith and reason, particularly in assessing how Millennials think about justification for beliefs.

A preliminary thought in studying Anselm’s view of the relationship between belief and reason is that one cannot avoid encountering his famous “ontological argument” for the existence of God. This argument is considered the hallmark of Anselm’s approach to belief and reason.41 Here is a brief overview of the argument: Anselm first says that God is that being greater than which none can be thought, i.e., God is the greatest thinkable thing. Then, Anselm says that it is greater for a thing to exist outside the mind than simply as an object of thought. He concludes, “Therefore there is no doubt that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.”42 Given that God is that being greater than which none can be thought, and that it is greater to exist outside the mind than merely inside the mind, he must exist outside of the mind. (Whether this argument is sound and valid is debated extensively and is beyond the scope of this paper.)


37 Composed at the Monastery of Bec, France, and completed in 1076 (Anselm, Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises [trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson; Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning, 2000], 1).

38 Composed at the Monastery of Bec around 1077–1078 (Anselm, Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises, 1).


40 For purposes of this paper, I am focusing narrowly on “belief,” which is included in Anselm’s idea of “faith.” However, it has been argued plausibly that Anselm also includes a volitional state of “love for God and a drive to act as God wills” in his idea of faith (Williams, “Saint Anselm,” Stanford University, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/anselm/#ArgPro [2007].) On this understanding, “fides quaerens intellectum” will mean something like “an active love of God seeking a deeper knowledge of God.” I believe this to be the correct understanding of both Anselm and the biblical doctrine of faith (Jas 2:14–26).

41 Williams notes that “We owe the curiously unhelpful name “ontological argument” to Kant. The medievals simply called it “Anselm’s” argument [ratio Anselmit] (“Saint Anselm,” bracketed item in orig.).

42 Proslogion, 7.
“FIDES QUARENS INTELLECTUM” AND “CREDO UT INTELLIGAM”

The original title of Anselm’s Proslogion was “fides quaerenintellectum,” “faith seeking understanding.” It is a common opinion that Anselm’s basic purpose in the Proslogion (which contains the famous ontological argument) and in other works is to help people who are already religious believers to understand what they believe, and not to provide rational arguments that should convince non-believers. Graham Oppy has gone so far as to say that Anselm’s ontological argument has no bearing in debates between theists and atheists. Let us call these opinions the “common” interpretation of Anselm. I will suggest below that some Millennials could find in the common interpretation support for their view of justification.

I disagree with the common interpretation not only because it gets Anselm wrong, but also because it lends support to the view that Christian faith is irrational or insufficiently supported by publicly available reasons. It need not follow that, since Anselm’s immediate goal was to help believers understand the content of their beliefs, that Anselm thought either (1) that human rationality operates independent of faith or should replace faith; or (2) that the fruits of human rationality’s exercise cannot lead the unbeliever to faith by providing him with sufficient evidence. In fact, the Monologion and Proslogion make clear that Anselm thought that reason may be a temporal preamble to faith and provide evidence to support faith. Let us call this second interpretation of Anselm the “rationalist” interpretation, for purposes of distinguishing it from the common interpretation. I will suggest below that some Millennials of another stripe could find in the rationalist interpretation support for their view of justification.

Consider the Monologion’s support for the rationalist interpretation. Anselm had sent his manuscript of the Monologion to his mentor and former ecclesiastical superior, Lanfranc, and the older Lanfranc responded by criticizing Anselm for “attempting to establish Christian beliefs about…God by reason alone.” This objection prompted Anselm to add a preface to the Monologion in which he defended his method. In this preface, Anselm says that his brothers had asked him to write a treatise with arguments based solely on rationality and not on scriptural authority at all. Indeed, Anselm takes this approach in the Monologion.

In the introduction of the Proslogion, Anselm discloses his original titles for the Monologion (“A pattern for meditation on the rational basis of faith”) and Proslogion (“Faith seeking understanding”). Here, Anselm describes why he revisited arguments for God’s existence which he had already set out in the Monologion:

I began to wonder…whether it might be possible to find a single argument that needed nothing but itself alone for proof, that would by itself be enough to show that God really exists; that he is the supreme good, who depends on nothing else, but on whom all things depend for their being and for their well-being…

In writing a sequel to the Monologion, Anselm sees himself not as engaged in merely helping believers to “collect their thoughts,” but rather as arming believers with an argument that should convince the unbeliever. The Proslogion’s ontological argument is aimed explicitly toward “the fool,” who believes “There is no God.”

43 Proslogion, vii.
49 Ibid., 1.
51 Proslogion, 3.
52 Proslogion, 7; Ps 14:1; 53:1.
Anselm editor Thomas Williams is a proponent of the rationalist view. Williams writes:

Anselm professes to offer proofs—the sorts of proofs that ought to be compelling to any rational and “moderately intelligent” (Monologion prol.) person—not only of the existence of God and the divine attributes, but even of the triune nature of God and the claim that human beings are reconciled to God through the self-offering of a God-man. Although some commentators find it difficult to take this claim at face value, there is abundant evidence in Anselm’s works that he took himself to be offering philosophical proofs, rather than merely working out the implications of revealed dogma or defending the coherence of Christian doctrine... For Anselm, the doctrines of the Christian faith are intrinsically rational because they concern the nature and activity of God, who is himself supreme reason (Monologion 16, 34) and exemplifies supreme wisdom in everything he does (Monologion 16, 32, 33, 34, 44, 48, 53, 60, 64; Cur Deus homo 1.15, 2.13). And because human beings are rational by nature, we can grasp those doctrines.

“Fides quaerens intellectum” refers to a believer seeking a greater understanding of what he believes, both in developing further arguments to support them and in understanding their content. Admittedly, Anselm’s immediate audience consists of monks and not atheists, but this situation does not prevent Anselm from making an argument that he believes should convince the nonbeliever.

Anselm uses “credo ut intelligam” in the first chapter of the Proslogion, where he prays that God will help him understand:

I am not trying to scale your heights, Lord; my understanding is in no way equal to that. But I do long to understand your truth in some way, your truth which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand in order to believe; I believe in order to understand. For I also believe that “Unless I believe, I shall not understand.” Therefore, Lord, you who grant understanding to faith, grant that, insofar as you know it is useful for me, I may understand that you exist as we believe you exist, and that you are what we believe you to be.

Immediately following this statement Anselm begins the ontological argument. He does not explain what he means by the “credo,” which is a quotation from Augustine’s interpretation of John 7:17 in light of Isa 7:9. Augustine was saying that there are some who cannot fully understand how Jesus could say, “My doctrine is not my own” in John 7:16. Jesus’ statement appears to be a contradiction to the reader who assumes a surface-level meaning. Only if a reader of the Bible understands some other Johannine doctrines concerning the relationship between the Father and Son, and has some openness toward a deeper meaning of the text, will he understand John 7:16. With this discussion in the background, the probable meaning of Anselm’s “credo” is that there are deeper theological truths that are accessible only to a believer. An atheist—so long as he stubbornly disbelieves—is in no position to access such information. In other words, Anselm seriously sees himself as “someone trying to raise his mind to the contemplation of God and seeking to understand what he believes.” The “credo” does not contradict the rationalist interpretation of Anselm.

**ANSELM AND MILLENNIALS**

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The above chart is the basis for the following discussion concerning Anselm and his influence on the Millennial generation. Anselm’s propositions have been applied variously. At times, Anselm’s propositions have been seen as epitomes of more traditional, “modern” thought, which placed confidence in logic to discover objective truth based on sufficient evidence. Anselm’s “credo ut intelligam” has even been cited as “the philosophy” for the Protestant Reformation. A mark of our postmodern age, however, is the disinterest in or disavowal of the view that publicly available evidence may

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56 Proslogion, 6–7.
58 Tractates, 17.
59 I am not alone in this interpretation of the “credo.”
60 Proslogion, 2.
61 Dawson McAllister, Saving the Millennial Generation (Nashville: Nelson, 1999), chapter 2.
provide logical support to justify objectively true propositions (especially theological propositions), so that logical reasoning is no longer considered necessary for knowledge (or for the positive disposition toward a proposition).62 A quintessential postmodern statement is “I believe X because it is true for me, though X may be false for you.” The postmodernist views truth not as a reflection of objective reality, but rather as a social construction. Millennials, those born in or after 1982, always have lived in an age influenced by postmodernism.63 Generalizing attempts have sought to describe what Millennials believe and how they come to belief.64 Millennials are not easily generalized, and I seldom find Anselm mentioned (let alone discussed) in literature about what Millennials believe.65 Yet the Anselmian slogans, interpreted by one or the other interpretive framework I discussed above, are fitting summary statements for movements that resonate with Millennials, along the lines depicted in the graph.

**MILLENNIALS AGAINST JUSTIFICATION**

The first approach to justification is in large measure an outright denial of the need for justification beyond one’s own feeling/opinion, and could be supported by Anselm as understood by the common interpretation. Millennials’ disregard for justification appears in a variety of contexts, but especially in two movements that are of concern to those interested in the kingdom of Christ. I will focus especially on the first of these, the postmodernist “emergent church movement”, as a way of limiting the scope of the discussion. This movement de-values having objectively true beliefs, and thereby abandons the need for justification. In emergent circles, faith is primarily emotional and relational (not rational) and the communal and narrative aspects of theology are emphasized.66 Millennials attracted by the emerging church may see statements such as “fides quærens intellectum” and “credo ut intelligam” as a call to begin a “faith journey” that leads to “deeper understanding” on the basis of experience, but does not necessarily start or end with or involve a rational belief in any truth beyond personal feeling or preference.67 Faith is about meeting temporal needs rather than about understanding and applying eternal truths, so reason may be almost totally replaced by feeling in an attempt to find what is thought to be a more authentic Christianity. For example, Rob Bell says, “It is not that passion and love and exhilaration are in one place and Jesus is somewhere else. Wherever you find those, you are finding God.”68 Pursuing

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67 D. A. Carson describes the emergent movement: [E]mphasis on feelings and affections over against linear thought and rationality; on experience over against truth…[I]t means not telling others they are wrong. It underscores the importance of narrative—both life-narrative (as believers and unbelievers alike tell their stories) and in Bible study and preaching (Becoming Convergent with the Emerging Church [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2005], 29–30, emp. added, parenthetical item in orig.). For an example of this emphasis on narrative, consider the words of one Millennial leader: “I can tell my own story, which studies suggest is an increasingly common one. I can talk about…doubting everything I believed about God, about loving, leaving, and longing for church, about searching for it and finding it in unexpected places. And I can share the stories of my friends and readers, people young and old whose comments read like postcards from their own spiritual journeys, dispatches from America’s post-Christian frontier. I can’t provide the solutions church leaders are looking for, but I can articulate the questions that many in my generation are asking. I can translate some of their angst, some of their hope…The truth is, I don’t even bother getting out of bed many Sunday mornings, especially on days when I’m not sure I believe in God or when there’s an interesting guest on Meet the Press. For me, talking about church in front of a bunch of Christians means approaching a microphone and attempting to explain the most important, complicated, beautiful, and heart-wrenching relationship of my life in thirty minutes or less without yelling or crying or saying any cuss words” (Rachel Held Evans, Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church [Nashville: Nelson, 2015], xii, xv; see also Jeff Cloeter, “On Millennials and Story,” Missio Apostolica 21 [2013]: 48–54).

this kind of thought to its logical end, some in the emergent movement have embraced a lightly veiled universalism, where one need not even believe in God to be saved (if being saved matters any longer or means anything more than feeling connected to something greater than oneself).²⁰

Another movement that has de-emphasized the role of rationality in justification is the theological presuppositionalist movement. Presuppositionalists, operating primarily in Calvinist circles, teach that faith is not the result of the appropriate operation of God-given rationality on publicly available data, but rather is the result of a direct-to-the-heart gift from God or derived from some spiritual experience.²¹ A presuppositionalist employing Anselmian slogans might say, “Believe the Bible without evidence, based only upon its claim to authority, and then you will be able to see why the Bible is inspired.” While presuppositionalism is the norm in many Reformed circles, it is not uniquely prevalent among Millennials, and I have criticized it recently elsewhere.²² So I will not dwell on it here.

**MILLENNIALS FOR JUSTIFICATION**

There is a second, more hopeful Millennial perspective of justification that fits better with the rationalist interpretation of Anselm, placing a priority on evidence to support claims about objective truth. Millennials are distrustful of claims made by institutionalized authorities, watchful for the fallacy of argument from authority.²³ Anselm’s propositions would summarize well the perspective of a Millennial believer such as myself, who wants to believe the truth regardless of whether any other relative or institution found it, by utilizing the publicly available evidence undergirding beliefs. It is not always easy to discern whether some Millennials are characterized more by a noble thirst for truth and justice, an egotistical sense of superiority toward establishments, or impatience with material provisions of existence, and justice, an egotistical sense of superiority toward establishments, or impatience with material provisions of existing institutions. Millennials’ wariness of shams motivates them to question longstanding convictions and sometimes to disregard them, with varying levels of critical thought. A 2010 Pew Research Center study suggests that Millennials are significantly less affiliated with organized religion than previous generations.²⁴

Whether Millennials are too hastily leaving the ground of previous generations’ norms in order to establish their own norms, or dispensing with grounds for norms altogether, some of them are pushing for almost totally unbiblical, totally open, or totally ambiguous boundaries in religion.²⁵ In going this far, Millennials forge ahead without Anselm’s support, and more importantly, without the Lord’s authority (2 John 9; Col 3:17).

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²⁰ E.g., Spencer Burke and Barry Taylor, *A Heretic’s Guide to Eternity* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass); Rollins, How (Not) to Speak.


JESUS’ USE OF FAITH AND REASON WORDS

Bart Warren

There are a number of different struggles taking place in regard to how one should view the concepts of faith and reason. The attacks and confusion come from both inside and outside the religious community. Numerous suggestions are given for how one ought to view the relationship between the two. The following will be a brief examination of the current situation, followed by a look at the pertinent words used by Jesus Christ in his teaching in this regard, and concluding with an analysis of how a disciple of Jesus should view the relationship between faith and reason.

The secular world, from prominent university professors to anonymous internet gadflies, is known to promote views and definitions of faith that are detrimental to Christianity. From a by-gone era, Mark Twain quipped, “There are those who scoff at the schoolboy, calling him frivolous and shallow: Yet it was the schoolboy who said ‘Faith is believing what you know ain’t so.’” Has the schoolboy enlightened us with some profound information? Or has he simply said out loud what others thought but were afraid to say? More recently, philosophy professor Peter Boghossian has echoed the words of Twain in his own definitions of faith. According to Boghossian, faith is either “pretending to know things that you do not know” or “belief without evidence.”

The significance of this definition is seen when one understands that the agenda for the said professor is to talk people out of faith and into reason. If faith and reason are seen as mutually exclusive, one will have a formula for turning believers into atheists. We shall look to Jesus for our definition of faith and compare.

Our linguistic examination shall focus on the families of Greek words used by Jesus that most commonly are translated as faith (πίστις), belief (πιστεύω) and know (οἶδα and γνώσκω).

FAITH / BELIEF

Matthew chapter 8 records Jesus using two of the words with which we are concerned. Verses 5 through 13 summarize the account of a special request made by a centurion in Capernaum. The commander of soldiers had a servant who was gravely ill and suffering. He did not ask Jesus to come all the way to his home; instead, he asked that Jesus simply say a word and heal him from a distance. Jesus was greatly impressed. “When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, ‘Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith (πίστις)’” (Matt 8:10). Jesus fulfilled the request to heal the servant. “And to the centurion Jesus said, ‘Go; let it be done for you as you have believed (ἐπίστευσας)’” (Matt 8:13).

Concerning πίστις, Spicq says the term “connotes persuasion, conviction, and commitment, and always implies confidence, which is expressed in human relationships as

“reason” with no “faith” or “faith” with no “reason.” On the one hand, for some their religion is too shallow. It is all head with no heart and compassion. It is cold formalism that has nothing to do with everyday life. On the other hand, some see religion as anti-intellectual. If they are told to check their critical thinking at the door, they would rather not even enter. Thus, for some inside the church, divorcing faith from reason has led to an abandonment of the institution. Again, we shall look to Jesus for our definition of faith and compare.

Confusion over the role that reason plays in relation to faith is not limited to skeptics and agnostics. Followers of Jesus are not immune to such perils. In the church, there is also a misunderstanding of the concept of biblical faith. Some among the millennial generation have abandoned their churches because they see one of two extremes. It is either

76 Twain, n.p.
79 Ibid., chapter 7, Kindle location 2141-2449.
fidelity, trust, assurance, oath, proof, guarantee.” According to BDAG, there are three major ways in which this word is used, ranging in meaning from subjective confidence to objective basis for confidence. It can mean “that which evokes trust and faith,” or it can be a “state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted,” or it can refer to “that which is believed, body of faith/belief/teaching.” Here in Matthew 8 the second meaning is most appropriate. The centurion has belief and/or trust in Jesus that he will be able to help in his time of distress. His confidence is based upon what Jesus has done in the past. The reputation of Jesus precedes him into Capernaum. The faith of the centurion is not blind. His faith is based upon the character and past actions of Jesus. His belief is founded on reliable testimony. His is a “state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted.”

Concerning πιστέυω, Fenlason says that the term “describes the act of believing or trusting something of the basis of its truthfulness and reliability.” According to BDAG, this is “to entrust oneself to an entity in complete confidence.” The Father and the Son are seen as objects of this type of faith which relies on their power and nearness to help, in addition to being convinced that their revelations and disclosures are true. Again, there is no blind faith here. The belief and trust come only after there is reason for such. Knowledge of a person or situation precedes the trust. Reason must be applied to the situation. The law of rationality states that we ought to justify our conclusions by adequate evidence.

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In Matthew 9, we have a record of Jesus healing a man who was paralyzed. Jesus explained why he performed this particular miracle. “But that you may know (εἰδῆτε from οἶδα) that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ – he then said to the paralyzed – “Rise, pick up your bed and go home” (Matt 9:6). He did this so that the audience might learn something, but this was no mere academic exercise. The result of their gaining this insight was that the crowd glorified God (Matt 9:8). Faith blossomed.

Garrett states that οἶδα “refers to the past act of seeing with the present effect of knowing what was seen.” Louw and Nida indicate that the term means “to comprehend the meaning of something, with focus upon the resulting knowledge.” The idea seems to be that it is expected that people will use their ability to reason and to process information, and then use that information in their future endeavors. Jesus healed a paralyzed man and then fully expected the audience to trust in him as the one who had the authority to forgive sins. The knowledge of what Jesus was able to do was to lead men to believe he was divine.

In Matthew 12, Jesus says, “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known (γινώσκεται from γινώσκω) by its fruit” (Matt 12:33). Jesus fully expects his audience to be able to distinguish good fruit from bad fruit. He expects them to know the difference between words that bring life and words that lead to judgment and condemnation. Thus γινώσκω can mean “to come to an understanding as the result of ability to experience and learn.”

Having looked at faith and knowledge separately, we note several occasions in the Gospels (it is beyond the scope of this paper to look at the balance of the New Testament) where either Jesus himself or Jesus’ audience joins the concepts of faith and knowledge. One such occasion is the powerful prayer of unity offered by Jesus in John 17. In verse 21 he says, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe (πιστεύονται from πιστεύω) that you have sent me.” Then, in verse 23, he says, “I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know (γινώσκῃ from γινώσκω) that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” Jesus desired for the world to believe that he was sent from the Father. Jesus desired for the world to know that he was sent from the Father. Faith does not preclude knowledge. Knowledge does not preclude one from having faith. In fact, the opposite is true. Knowledge is necessary for faith. As Dick Sztanyo has written, “Knowledge without commitment is disbelief (John 8:30-46; 12:42-43; James 2:19); commitment without knowledge is irrationality. Neither is a genuine option for a Christian.”

Other passages in the Gospel of John that teach this same concept of interconnectedness between faith and knowledge

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81 Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, BDAG, 818-20.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
85 Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker, BDAG, 817.
86 Ibid.
90 Ibid., 381.
would be 4:42, 6:69 and 17:8. In this vein, Rudolph Bultmann has written:

“...πιστεύειν and γινώσκειν are not simply to be differentiated as initial and final stages, and it certainly rules out any distinction into two kinds of Christians, the pistsics and the gnostics, as in Christian Gnosticism. In antithesis to Gnosticism, it is apparent that knowledge can never take us beyond faith or leave faith behind. As all knowledge begins with faith, so it abides in faith. Similarly, all faith is to become knowledge. If all knowledge can only be a knowledge of faith, faith comes to itself in knowledge. Knowledge is thus a constitutive element in genuine faith.”

Faith does not mean the absence of knowledge. Neither does faith mean the absence of literal sight. Thomas believed only after he saw (John 20:29). Many Samaritans believed in Jesus after they heard him speak (John 4:41). The fact that they saw him did not keep them from believing in him.

**ANALYSIS**

After looking at this small, but sufficient, sample of words used by Jesus as they relate to faith and reason, what conclusions are we to draw? Based upon what Jesus has said, it seems apparent that faith is not a blind leap into the dark beyond the evidence that has been provided. Biblical faith is not belief without evidence. On the contrary, it has been shown that faith and knowledge cannot be separated. Biblically-approved faith, also known as saving faith, requires evidence. Where there is no evidence, there can be no faith. Where God has not spoken or revealed himself, there can be no faith.

Objections to this way of thinking have been and will continue to be raised. Thankfully, there are sufficient answers to any and all criticisms. Kreeft and Tacelli offer a good summary. (1) To say that God’s ways, mind and nature are so far above us that we could never understand him is to depugn his ability as a teacher and in accomplishing his goals. While we cannot comprehend all things about an infinite God, we can know and understand what he has revealed to us. (2, 3) If we say we are being humble when we demean the powers of human reason, we are actually demeaning the work done by the one who created and designed us. (4) It seems daunting that so many brilliant thinkers found Christianity to be unreasonable. However, numerous brilliant thinkers have embraced Christianity. Additionally, it is sometimes the case that otherwise intelligent minds reject things that they simply do not want to be true. (5) Christianity can be seen as rationalizing—just looking for answers to confirm what is already believed. However, whatever the motive may have been, such does not invalidate the truth or the soundness of an argument. (6) Utilizing reason does not take away the merit or praiseworthiness of faith. A desire to rationally understand is not a weakening, but a strengthening, of trust.

We close with definitions and the constituent elements that make up saving faith. Roy Deaver offered this helpful insight into the components of biblical faith:

Biblical faith inherently involves: (1) the fact of the existence of God; (2) the fact of the existence of man; (3) the revealing ability of God to man; (4) the response ability of man; (5) the testimony of God to man; (6) man’s proper response to that testimony. Faith – in the Bible sense – means taking God at his word. It means doing just what God said to do, just because God said to do it. There is no biblical faith where there is no testimony of God.

Dick Sztanyo offers the following alternative definitions of faith: “the volitional commitment of an informed intellect...a willing commitment to a known truth...a joint act of the will and the intellect.” In none of these definitions do we approach the idea of pretending to know things that we really do not know. Rather, what we find is that we are to be in awe of the truth of the incarnation and plan of salvation (John 1:14; 3:3-5). We are to humbly submit to and trust in the one who is the truth (John 14:6). Faith involves a discerning intellect and it involves a trusting heart. With a clearer understanding of the relationship between faith and reason, fewer will abandon faith and fellowship. The schoolboy was wrong. Faith is not “believing what you know ain’t so.” Faith is being committed with the head and the heart to the one who is the truth.

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95 Sztanyo, 105-106.


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The Pauline Corpus can easily be characterized as the most influential writings of the New Testament, especially when it comes to the influence on normative Christianity. Paul touched on all areas of the Christian faith: salvation, ecclesiastical hierarchy, baptism, apostasy, spiritual gifts, etc. Paul’s epistles make up thirteen of the twenty-three epistles preserved in the New Testament, which is more than all others combined and is well ahead of the closest writer, John, who has four. As stated previously, much of normative Christianity looks to the Pauline Corpus in order to define what is “sound doctrine” (Tit 2:1; 2 Tim 4:3). In Paul’s writings, it is evident that the relationship one has with knowledge and faith are of extreme importance when it comes to the foundation and progression of his Christian walk. How does Paul view the relationship between knowledge, “γνῶσις,” and faith, “πίστις?” Is one dependent on the other? Can they co-exist independently?

KNOWLEDGE

The noun γνῶσις, “knowledge,” occurs 29 times in the New Testament with all but six of these instances coming from the writings of Paul (of those 23 occurrences, 18 are found in Romans and the Corinthian Correspondence). Defined, γνῶσις signifies comprehension or intellectual grasp, understanding, (Eph 3:19); the general knowledge of the Christian religion, (Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 1:5) and the deeper, more perfect and enlarged knowledge of this religion, such as belongs to the more advanced, (1 Cor 12:8; 13:2, 8; 14:6; 2 Cor 6:6; 8:7; 11:6) especially of things lawful and unlawful for Christians, (1 Cor 8:1, 7, 10). The verb ἐπιγινώσκω, “to have a knowledge of something/someone,” is also present in the writings of Paul: (Rom 1:32; Col 1:6). This verb also means “to ascertain,” (Acts 23:28; 24:11) and “to come to understand/know,” (2 Cor 1:13; Acts 25:10). For a deeper understanding Paul uses ἐπίγνωσις, “full knowledge/understanding,” which is found 20 times in the NT with fifteen of those found in the Pauline Corpus. This knowledge was precise and correct—used in the New Testament of the knowledge of things ethical and divine: absolute, (Phil 1:9; Col 3:10) with the genitive of the thing known, (Col 1:9; 2:2; Phlm 1:6) τῆς ἁμαρτίας, (Rom 3:20) with the genitive of the person known; — of God, especially the knowledge of his holy will and of the blessings which he has bestowed and constantly bestows on men through Christ: (Eph 1:17; Col 1:10) the true knowledge of Christ’s nature, dignity, benefits (Eph 4:13). Knowledge was an intricate part of the first century church. Paul even lists knowledge as a spiritual gift (1 Cor 12:4–11). It is interesting that knowledge would be needed in such a capacity as to be defined as a gift from the Holy Spirit. It is possible that the divine knowledge, which is only known through the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:10–12), needed to be imparted by the Spirit so the logic of God could be understood in the infant church. It is apparent that there was a need for such enlightenment while the early Christians wrestled with the application of the doctrine of Christ in a mixed racial and cultural setting (1 Cor 8). Those granted this gift were to share it with the congregation to edify them. It had its limitations because it was temporary (1 Cor 13:8) and it is only a dim reflection lacking the clarity that would soon be received (1 Cor. 13:12). In this context, the reference to knowledge is clearly in regard to its being a miraculous, spiritual gift; however, this is not the primary usage of “knowledge” in the writings and theology of Paul.

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
Knowledge was more than a spiritual gift quickly fleeting; it was the foundation of the Christian faith.

Foundational to the ideology of Paul is that man is without excuse when it comes to having knowledge of God. “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” So they are “without excuse” (Rom 1:19–20).

“Paul believes that God’s power and divine nature are exhibited so plainly in nature that every man has an instinctive knowledge of God.” Paul suggests that their inability to acknowledge something so fundamentally present led them down a path of foolishness and depravity, all while claiming to be wise (Rom 1:22). N. T. Wright suggests:

The problem of true knowledge is not merely that appearances deceive, or that people make wrong inferences, but rather that human rebellion against the one God has resulted in a distortion and a darkening of the knowledge that humans have, or still ought to have. Paul would want to say to the philosophers that wisdom is not simply a matter of learning to see…It is a matter of the one God piercing the darkness and bringing new light, the light of new creation and at the same time opening the eyes that have been blinded by ‘the god of this world’ so they can see that light.

Simply knowing and openly acknowledging God’s existence, unlike those who refused to acknowledge the existence of God, is still not enough in the mind of Paul. True knowledge of God encompasses much more than merely having a theoretical knowledge of him (Rom. 10:1–2; 1 Tim 1:13). True knowledge of God leads to the “recognition that the divine word applies to the person individually and demands his or her obedience.”

The knowledge of God manifested in the obedient Christ moves us to obedience: “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 6: 9–11). The knowledge of who the Creator is, what he has done in Christ, and our obedient response to that knowledge are what leads to the renewal of the mind: “…present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:1b–2; cf. 8:5–9).

True knowledge/comprehension of the riches that God has given to us through Christ Jesus will not allow us to turn away from our relationship with God; moreover, that is what Paul believes. “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?” (Gal 4:9) Paul cannot fathom the reality of someone “knowing” God and rebelliously turning back to the world. Paul took the opposite approach by “counting everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:10a). If someone claims to know God and then returns to the devil, did he ever really know God? Paul would say “no.” To “know” God is to know his will and to obey that will. Knowing/comprehending the love of Christ fills one with the fullness of God (Eph 3:19). In a time where the elite turned to the established philosophical schools of thought for pursuing education and knowledge, Paul, instead, turned to the knowledge of God through Christ as the ultimate enlightenment of the human experience (2 Cor 4:6).

Paul believed that some knowledge had just recently been revealed to the first century church which God had hidden as a mystery from the Jews for centuries (Rom 16:25; Col 2:2–3). The mystery was even hidden from rulers and kings (1 Cor 2:4–7). That mystery revolved around the Gentiles being able to be grafted into God’s chosen people through Christ (Rom 10:23–24; Eph 3:6).

Paul believes in various forms of knowledge. There is knowledge that man is not capable of understanding on his own. This knowledge is made manifest through the Holy Spirit as a spiritual gift. Some knowledge is hidden by God until he wishes for it to be made known, such as the knowledge of the Gentiles being grafted in through the Messiah. However, there is knowledge that man is responsible for obtaining through his own volition. This knowledge of God and his desire for his people was expected of man under the Old Covenant (Duet 11). This knowledge is also expected of the people of God under the New Covenant, and Paul made sure his readers knew that. Paul believes that personal information and doctrinal instruction can be transferred through the writing of epistles, and he expects those instructions to be carried out (Gal 3:7; Eph 5:5; 6:22; Phil 1:12).

Paul also issues some warnings about the danger of knowledge. People need to be on guard and make sure they have the proper knowledge and understanding of what God expects for his people. People in the first century, and many still today, are swept away by false knowledge that leads to apostasy (1 Tim 6:20). Paul’s words were prophetic, as the church would wrestle with false gnostic teaching for four hundred years based on secret knowledge. Even with proper

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99 All scripture is cited from the English Standard Version (ESV).
103 Moisés Silva, NIDNTTE 1:582.
bibilical knowledge, it is important to have humility as we share that knowledge with others (1 Cor 8:1, 7). “Gnosticism, [serves] as a warning against intellectual pride...Intellectual elitism is a danger always for those ‘in the know.’”104

**FAITH AND FAITH WORDS**

To Paul, faith is one of the three foundations of the Christian life (1 Cor 13:13). Being a foundation of Christianity, faith is naturally an important and often visited topic in his epistles. Paul uses the noun πίστις, “faith,” 142 times in NT (40 times in Romans, 22 times in Galatians, and 19 times in 1 Timothy). This is an astounding number considering the rest of the NT only uses πίστις 101 times. He uses the verb πιστεύω, “to believe,” 54 times (occurring 21 times in Romans, more than any other NT epistle, only the Gospel of John and Acts have more occurrences). Paul uses the adjective πιστός, “faithful/trustworthy,” 33 times (11 times in 1 Timothy—more than any other NT book). Paul uses it to describe both the faithfulness of God (1 Cor 1:9) and the faithfulness of humans (1 Cor 4:2).

What is interesting is not the terms that Paul uses, but how he uses them. “It is a distinctively Christian feature that the verb πιστεύω (to believe) is often followed by the preposition ἐπί (on) or εἰς (into), and Paul follows this usage (Gal 2:16).”105 “It is a striking departure from both ordinary Greek and the LXX (Septuagint).”106

The use of the verb πιστεύω with ὅτι, “to believe that...relates faith to a particular event in the history of Jesus (Rom 10:9; 1 Thess 4:14). It is significant for the linguistic usage of the Hellenistic church. It involves the incorporation of a specific historical content into the Christological confession.”107 Furthermore, it appears that Paul and the other NT writers used this construction and πιστεύω ἐπί/εἰς interchangeably.108

Also, Paul uses the article with πίστις to signify that “the faith” is exclusive; it is monadic. To place the article with πίστις to signify “the faith,” Paul and the other NT writers used this construction and πιστεύω ἐπί/εἰς interchangeably.109

**KNOWLEDGE AND FAITH**

Knowledge and faith are necessary for the maturation of each other.109 “Conversion to the Christian faith can be described almost technically as coming to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25).110 Fundamentally, faith must rely on knowledge. Paul stresses the importance of teaching those without knowledge of the truth because, “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). Faith and knowledge are not antagonists—faith must be derived from knowledge. The proper foundation of knowledge was the deciding factor of whether one’s faith was acceptable to God. The Jews had an astounding “zeal for God” (today we would equate that with faith), “but not according to knowledge” (Rom 10:2). In the next verse, Paul describes them as being “ignorant.” Proper faith/zeal must be built on the proper knowledge of God and his will.

Knowledge is not the final step but the building block. Paul does not believe that simply knowing God is sufficient, or the Jews would not have been condemned in Rom 10:1–4. Neither does Paul believe that sufficient faith is knowing virtue and living a humanistic life. For Paul, true knowledge and faith are centered on Christ Jesus:

Socrates might hold that knowledge and virtue are much the same, so that to know what is right leads people to do what is right, but Paul would not have agreed. For him faith implies both that we have come to see ourselves as sinful and also that we have come to recognize (know/or reason) that God has provided for our forgiveness through what Christ’s death has done for us.111

When true knowledge of what God has done for us in Christ convicts us to put that knowledge into practice, then true biblical faith occurs (Col 1:9–10). Paul sees knowledge as the first step and the building block to faith; however, Paul also believes that faith is key in

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104 Everett Ferguson, *Church History Volume One From Christ to Pre–Reformation: The rise and growth of the church in its cultural, intellectual, and political context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 100.


106 Moisés Silva, NIDNTTE 3:764.

107 Ibid. 3:764–5.


109 Clement of Alexandria, (ca.150–ca.215) *Stromateis* 5. In a time where Gnosticism was trying to exalt knowledge over faith and doctrine, Clement argued that the two were not in conflict but compatible.110 Schmitz, Dieter and Schiitz, “Knowledge, Experience, Ignorance,” *NIDNTT* 2:390–409.

the maturation and growth of our knowledge. The knowledge that has been revealed to mankind is limited. Even Paul, as an inspired apostle, acknowledged that the knowledge given to man is nowhere near the infinite knowledge of God (1 Cor 13:12). There are events that we know took place, even though we have never witnessed them (creation, virgin birth, resurrection, etc.). There are events we know that are going to take place (parousia, judgment, hell, heaven, etc.). Faith is built on knowledge, yet there are things we know solely on the basis of faith (2 Cor 5:7).

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Can faith and reason co-exist? From Aristotle’s “unmoved-mover” to Kierkegaard’s “leap of faith,” the relationship between logic and belief, however contentious, is well established in the writings of some of the most notable thinkers of the last two millennia. As postmodernism grows increasingly prevalent in the common mind of the Western world, the very parameters of a discussion concerning faith and reason may become blurry. Is it true that the relationship between faith and reason is a myth that only exists when one views these constructs through the lens of Western Enlightenment? Further, is it true, as Ratzinger often emphasized, that Christianity succeeded due to its organic ability to synthesize faith and reason? While one could argue that much of Christian thought is merely the amalgamation of the major streams from which it was born, namely the cultural and philosophical influences of first century Jews and Greeks, it is in the canon of the New Testament that we may observe the birth of Christian doctrine and philosophy. While the corpus Paulinum accounts for much of the doctrinal development of the NT, the general epistles play a role as well. In the following study, I seek to understand how the non-Pauline epistles in the NT depict faith and reason and their intersection. The primary methodology employed is the analysis of several Greek terms that convey the notions of faith/belief, knowledge/knowing, and logic/reason. As is the tendency with languages, several of the words considered here are derived from common roots. The following terms are considered, grouped together by their common roots: γινώσκω, γνώσης, γνωστός, οἶδα, λόγος, λογίζομαι, and λογικός, all terms used to convey the idea of knowledge/knowing or reason and logic. Terms that denote faith/belief/believing include πείθω, πίστις, and πιστεύω.

The speeches of Peter in the book of Acts are also considered; they are found in the following locations: 2:14–40; 3:12–26; 4:8–12, 19–20; 10:34–43. All three terms are derived from γινώσκω, an evolution of the primitive γνῶ. A perfect functioning as a present, it is originally from εἰδῶ, and is therefore closely related to sight/observation as a means of knowing or obtaining knowledge.

πίστις is derived from πείθω, and πιστεύω is derived from πίστις. In order to determine the occurrences of the selected terms in the selected texts, several resources were consulted. In addition to the traditional lexica (BDAG, LSI), the following was extremely helpful, due to the ability to search for the occurrences of terms within the canon: Maria Pantelia, et al., eds. Thesaurus linguae graecae: A digital library of Greek literature. Rev.ed. Irvine: University of California, 2009. Online: http://www.tlg.uci.edu.proxy.fhu.edu.

As represented in the chart, total occurrences of belief related terms = 84, while reason/knowledge related terms = 105. As is the tendency with languages, several of the words considered here are derived from common roots. The following terms are considered, grouped together by their common roots: γινώσκω, γνώσης, γνωστός, οἶδα, λόγος, λογίζομαι, and λογικός, all terms used to convey the idea of knowledge/knowing or reason and logic. Terms that denote faith/belief/believing include πείθω, πίστις, and πιστεύω.

While the data is helpful, it is also limited. For example, a final tally shows that by a thin margin, there are more occurrences of reason/knowledge related terms than belief related terms. What the data cannot show is how the terms are employed. Such is the case with faith in Hebrews. This concept is undeniably one of the more prominent theological themes in Hebrews, but one would not (and probably

**OCCURRENCES BY LOCATION**

SEE CHART BELOW

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112 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), 182–84. He states, “We can say that what turned Christianity into a world religion was the synthesis between faith, reason, and life.”
114 The speeches of Peter in the book of Acts are also considered; they are found in the following locations: 2:14–40; 3:12–26; 4:8–12, 19–20; 10:34–43.
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118 As represented in the chart, total occurrences of belief related terms = 84, while reason/knowledge related terms = 105.
119 See for example Dennis Hamm, “Faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews: the Jesus factor,” CBQ 52.2 (1990): 270–91. Hamm demonstrates especially the christological development of faith as it is presented in Hebrews.
could not) ascertain that by using the data alone. In fact, by the numbers, the occurrences of πίστις only account for 0.6% percent of the words in Hebrews. Further, the data do not reflect the variety of meanings that may be associated with these terms.

### FAITH AND REASON CONCEPTUALIZED IN THE NON-PAULINE EPISTLES

By considering the occurrences of faith and reason terms listed in the chart, one sees a broad picture of these concepts emerging from each of the selected bodies of material. In order to provide insight that the data cannot, examination is made of the relevant passages from each of the selected bodies of material, and where possible, the intersection of faith and reason terminology.

### CONCEPTUALIZED IN PETER’S SPEECHES IN ACTS

Because the book of Acts is a record primarily of the growth of the early church through evangelism and conversion, Peter’s speeches/sermons recorded therein are evangelistic in tone and content. This makes them unique in this set of literature, as the general epistles address converted audiences. In Peter’s discourses, knowledge is often directly linked with observation and/or proclamation. This is seen in the emphatic αὐτοὶ οἴδατε, “you yourselves know,” in the Pentecost sermon in chapter 2, and the similar phrase, ἑμεῖς οἴδατε, “you yourselves know,” in the proclamation in chapter 10. On both of these occasions, Peter appeals to preexisting knowledge of Jesus’ mighty works as a sign of the veracity of his message.

On another occasion, Peter and John heal a lame man in the name of Jesus. Peter addresses the Israelites at Solomon’s portico who observed the miracle, and makes this statement, “And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you [emp. added].” Here knowledge relates not to a particular truth or piece of information, but to knowing an individual. Once again, the knowledge is closely related to observation. In similar fashion to his sermons in chapters 2 and 10, Peter emphasizes this personal observation and knowledge for the purpose of authenticating his message; in this case, that faith in the name of Jesus made the lame man well.

Interestingly, Peter never uses the imperative form of πιστεύω in his Acts’ speeches. On the contrary, as he concludes the Pentecost sermon, he states in Acts 2:36, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know (imperative) [emp. added] for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” What is the basis for Peter’s command to know (not believe!) that Jesus is the God ordained Christ? The kerygma that he has just proclaimed! Thus for Peter in Acts, as he addresses Jews and Gentiles who are not yet converted, knowledge terms serve as invitations to accept the reality of Jesus’ crucifixion and his place as God’s Anointed. Peter uses faith terms when referring to the means of healing—physically (in 3:16–17) and spiritually (10:43, “everyone who believes in him [Jesus] receives forgiveness of sins). On the whole, Peter’s sermons assume that the hearer obtains knowledge through observation, as well as oral proclamation, and that said knowledge validates or even produces belief in Jesus (often with emphasis on his name).

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120 Peter appears to assume that the knowledge his audience gained from observation and through word of mouth communication is equally valid. Of course, as an eyewitness of the events himself, Peter has no reason to doubt the authenticity of Jesus’ miracles.

121 Acts 3:16 NRSV

122 BDAG definition 1b.

123 Unless noted otherwise, translations are from the ESV.
CONCEPTUALIZED IN HEBREWS

While Peter’s speeches in Acts provide a small sampling for theological development, the grand theological treatise known as the letter to the Hebrews offers significant development, particularly with reference to epistemology. The author of Hebrews shares this with Peter in Acts: the primary form of communication for both is hortatory. Unlike Peter in Acts, Hebrews addresses a post-conversion audience. How does the now anonymous author employ faith and reason terms in this lengthy sermon addressed to believers?

In a discussion of faith and reason, even the individual vaguely familiar with Hebrews could probably deduce that faith-related terms are more prevalent. The vast multitude of faith term usages occur in chapter 11, where the author repeatedly employs the formula “by faith.” Specifically, Hebrews presents faith as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Concerning the epistle’s presentation of faith, Bacon writes, “In Hebrews…Faith becomes the power of penetration to the ideal. It approximates dangerously to the Buddhistic-gnostic conception of ‘enlightenment’ or gnosis.” While Bacon may not be entirely correct, to some degree his observations cannot be ignored. The author of Hebrews certainly employs knowledge terminology in a way that makes it difficult to demarcate faith from knowledge. For example, in 10:34, in a discussion of things yet to come, he states to his readers, “you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one things yet to come,” stating, “Abraham reasoned [λογισάμενος] that God would give back the child as a sign, so God would have Abraham believe in His Word (λόγῳ) “brought us forth,” an allusion to Genesis 1, but also a reference to the new birth of a Christian. Thus, in James the primary vessel of imparting knowledge, the λόγος, is also instrumental in creating new faith beings (Christians). Furthermore, in the discussion of working faith in 2:20, James employs γνώσις as an aorist infinitive (γνώναι), which contextually means, “Do you need convincing [emp. added]?” The NIV translates this phrase as “Do you want evidence?” For James, faith not only is completed by works, but also knowledge (through the word) produces faith and supplements it.

CONCEPTUALIZED IN 1–2 PETER

While 1–2 Peter assume the same voice as the speeches in Acts, the audiences are obviously distinct. Regardless of whether or not one accepts Petrine authorship of the epistles (or that the speeches in Acts represent Peter’s authentic voice, for that matter), it is clear that some period of time has passed between the two, allowing for doctrine to mature as the church developed. While Peter employs faith and knowledge terms evangelistically in his Acts discourses, in 1–2 Peter he employs them for post-conversion audiences. The emphasis on faith as a key element to spiritual wellness remains (see 1 Pet 1:5–9, where πίστις occurs in 5, 7, and 9),

125 While there is very much discussion about the precise identity of the audience of Hebrews, scholars nearly unanimously agree that the addressees are Christians.
126 Gr. Πίστει. Of the 32 occurrences of πίστις in various forms in Hebrews, 19 are formulated as the dative feminine singular.
127 11:1
129 Other occurrences of knowledge terms refer to knowing God (8:11; 10:30), knowing facts in the life of an OT personality (12:17), and knowing the condition of an unseen brother (13:23).
131 NIV
132 Of the 16 occurrences of πίστις in the letter, only three are not found in ch. 2, and of the 13 occurrences in ch.2, 11 fall within vv.14–26.
134 Jas 2:26
136 This is not to take away from the Spirit’s role in inspiring Peter and his message, but rather to recognize that the Spirit understood the value of revealing the depths of doctrine over the course of time as Christians matured.

CONCEPTUALIZED IN JAMES

Considering its brevity, the epistle of James contains a fairly substantial number of faith term occurrences. The bulk of these are found within the framework of James’ discussion of working faith in 2:14–26. The general nature of faith as presented by James is no mystery; in an effort to correct the false doctrine “that faith could be a static, inert, inanimate assent to the facts” the early church leader declares unequivocally that “faith apart from works is dead.” The apostle also ties this working faith to the “word of truth” in 1:18, 22–23; he states that God through the instrument of the word (λόγῳ) “brought us forth,” an allusion to Genesis 1, but also a reference to the new birth of a Christian.
but there is a more secular element to γνώσις. This is not to say that Peter has developed a different view of knowledge, but that as he addresses Christians, he speaks of different aspects of knowledge. This is seen in both 1 Pet 3:7 and 2 Pet 1:5–6. In both cases γνώσις likely refers to both secular and religious knowledge. As Selwyn states with reference to 1 Pet 3:7, “this practical understanding and tact...is to extend to the whole of married life.” He goes on to elaborate about the “intellectual element involved in γνώσις,” and the understanding that Christians can use “practical philosophy” when attempting to fulfill Peter’s imperative in 1 Pet 3:7.

In other words, as Peter addresses Christians in 1–2 Peter, he uses knowledge terms in a broader manner than in his sermons in Acts. Peter’s use of λόγος also reflects a more developed doctrine. He states in similar fashion to Jas 1:18, “you have been born again...through the living and abiding word [λόγον] of God.” But he also uses λόγος with a more intellectual slant in 1 Pet 3:15, exhorting his readers to “make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason [λόγον; emp. added] for the hope that is in you.” Addressing post-conversion audiences, Peter employs faith and knowledge terminology in a manner distinct from his evangelistic sermons in Acts while remaining consistent, insofar as faith still involves knowledge, and knowledge remains a building block of faith (cf. 2 Pet 1:5–6).

CONCEPTUALIZED IN 1–3 JOHN

In 1–3 John, the number of knowledge-related terms dwarfs the number of faith terminology occurrences. John demonstrates a very fluid understanding of the concept of “knowing.” He writes of knowing in at least four ways: 1. Knowing God (1 John 2:3; 3:6; 4:2, 6, 7), 2. Knowing truth (1 John 2:21; 2 John 1:1), 3. Knowing love (1 John 3:16; 4:16), 4. Knowing (all) things/things yet to come (1 John 2:20; 3:2, 20). In some of these cases, the source of knowing is self-evident (1 John 2:18, truth is known through observation), while in others it is more obscure (knowing things yet to come, even though “what will be has not yet appeared,” 1 John 3:2). As in Hebrews, some of John’s uses of knowing seem to indicate fully convinced faith. In fact, John nearly states as much in 1 John 4:16 in one of only eight uses of “faith” in the epistle, “we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us [emp. added].” And again in 1 John 5:13, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life [emp. added].” For John, the concept of knowing may represent the fullness or maturity of belief (1 John 5:13), or it may be the avenue of gaining faith (1 John 4:16).

Faith and knowledge in the non-Pauline epistles and Peter’s Acts sermons are two sides of the same coin. The authors demonstrate fluid understandings of both concepts, but also often present them in ways that indicate a basic understanding that knowledge builds up faith, and faith builds up knowledge. Of course, to some degree, the manner and method of use depends on the setting and purpose of the communication. This is most noticeable in the differences between Peter’s usage of the terms in evangelistic speeches and in epistles to Christian audiences. In no case do the non-Pauline authors present a tension between faith and knowledge. On the contrary, the source of failure to believe (obey) is considered to be a failure of true knowledge (1 John 3:6).

These Spirit-led authors did not conceive that a person could fail to believe if that person truly had been exposed to the knowledge of God. Perhaps the church today would do well to possess such confidence in God’s truth and its role in developing and strengthening faith.

WORKS CONSULTED


137 The reader of an English translation alone would likely miss γνώσις in 1 Pet 3:7 because nearly all of the newer translations render it as something like “live with your wives in an understanding way,” while in this case the KJV provides a more word-for-word rendering, “dwell with them according to knowledge.”


139 1 Pet 1:23

140 Due to the scarcity of faith and reason terminology in Jude and its affinity with 2 Peter, the 460-word epistle does not receive treatment in this article.


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BOOK REVIEW:  
WE LOOK FOR A KINGDOM—  
THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS

Alan Groves

PURPOSE AND INTRODUCTION

The title of this work will inevitably appeal to devoted kingdom-seekers, especially those interested in the restoration of primitive Christianity. The author, Carl J. Sommer, asserts that history, though complex, can reveal certain truths about the human condition and is thus a valuable tool in shaping our understanding of the past and molding our attitude toward the present and the future (ix). He rejects the postmodern approach to history, which shrinks from the challenge of historical interpretation by treating the past as unknowable and its lessons as lost to time. The postmodern approach, in his words, “reduce[s] the role of the historian to that of a student of curiosities” (xi). Sommer’s confidence in the accessibility of truth stands in stark contrast to postmodern historical interpretation and biblical exegesis. In fact, the author’s methodology reflects more closely the organizing principles of the Restoration Movement.

However, if one were to pick up this book and expect a detailed manifesto for how to return to primitive New Testament Christianity, disappointment would surely follow. The author does, in fact, place in high esteem those closer in temporal proximity to Jesus and his apostles. “We should at least consider the possibility that they understood the teachings of the New Testament better than we do today (xvii),” he says. But by self-admission the author notes that his primary focus is “not on the New Testament church, but rather on the two hundred years following the death of the last apostle” (xvii). Sommer’s work is more of an exploration of the beliefs and practices of the second and third-century church (concluding with Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 313 C.E.), than an exploration of first-century Christianity.

Before proceeding, two cautionary observations must be made. First, the author freely states that, while his book is academic in nature, it is “directed to a non-scholarly audience” (xviii). With only 323 pages of reading content, many important details are relegated to the roughly 50 pages of endnotes, which could potentially frustrate meticulous fact-checkers. Considering Sommer’s targeted audience, however, this is understandable and deserves no serious criticism. Secondly, the author openly identifies as Roman Catholic. This will trouble many readers. However, the real tension for non-Catholic readers will not be the author’s identification of Catholic beliefs and practices in early church history, but rather their precise dating and the extent of their authority. Readers may dispute the “when” and “how” of these theological shifts, but there is no question that at some point Catholic ideas came to dominate the spiritual landscape of the empire. If the author’s style can be properly understood and his self-professed bias overlooked, much can be gleaned from the book’s rich scholarship of Christian history.

PART I: LIFE IN THE ROMAN WORLD

The first 100 pages (roughly a third of the book) provide a general survey of life in the Roman Empire. The brevity of this section will by no means satiate the professional philosopher’s hunger and thirst for knowledge of the Roman world, but as a survey for a “non-scholarly audience” this material is invaluable.

Sommer introduces the reader to the cultural landscape of the Romans by highlighting common religious beliefs, such as the honoring of lares (or the spirits of ancestors) and

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141 Carl J. Sommer, We Look For a Kingdom (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007).

the worship of the emperor’s genius (or divine spirit). These pages emphasize the paradoxical nature of Roman culture as simultaneously traditional and wildly adaptable. The religion and social customs of the Roman Empire were deeply rooted in historical experience, but the practical desire for political order ironically demanded a level of social adaptability that left these common beliefs and practices wide open to the influence of cultures conquered by the Roman military. Religious and cultural diversity could be maintained, and was even encouraged, so long as one’s ultimate allegiance was to the emperor and his empire. Sommer observes how the Romans forcibly imposed this social tolerance at all costs, successfully foreshadowing the incompatibility between an exclusivist, Christian religion and a tyranny of tolerance.

This technique of foreshadowing the relevance of certain historical facts to the development of Christianity is used to introduce the various aspects of life in the Roman world throughout Part I. For instance, when discussing family dynamics in the empire, Sommer emphasizes the family as an institution which reflected the values of authority, hierarchy, and loyalty, but in which the vices of abortion, infanticide, divorce, infidelity, and rampant concubinage often quenched even the faintest flame of love or moral legitimacy. “The heat and dryness of Greco-Roman culture,” he says, made the Christian conception of the family as a “school of love” exceptionally attractive and desperately needed (45).

The author similarly introduces topics such as the nature of slavery in the Roman Empire, life in the Roman army, and the origins of gladiatorial contests in ways that foreshadow either the rise or subsequent persecution of the Christians in the empire. These opening chapters are richly informative in terms of historical context. The common reader might not be aware that slaves comprised between 10% and 30% of the population, or that Roman slavery differed drastically from American slavery, in the sense that masters were much more likely to free their slaves (48–49). One might not understand that joining the Roman army was one of the surest ways for a non-citizen to obtain Roman citizenship, but that along with a life full of the legal and social benefits that citizenship entailed came the expectation for Roman soldiers to make sacrifices in worship of the Roman emperor’s genius at least once per year (61). The reader will even learn much about the sickening customs surrounding the gladiatorial contests, which continue to capture and confound the popular imagination. For all the interest these chapters inspire, however, the author’s technique of constant foreshadowing may frustrate some readers who are eager to delve into the spiritual applications of the book. Many times the author will touch on issues of obvious spiritual significance, but will then immediately withdraw. Part I is littered with statements like, “We will examine Justin’s theory [about mystery religions] in greater detail in a future chapter” (30), or “We will explore that attitude [about Christians serving in the military] later in this work” (65), or “As we shall see, there is some evidence that Christians would use these [public] baths on occasion” (97). Again, this may cause some irritation in readers prepared to make spiritual applications who perhaps are already familiar with secular Roman history. However, there is no doubt that for the common reader Part I successfully sets the backdrop for the rise of the Christian faith in the empire.

PART II: CHRISTIANS AS SALT AND LIGHT IN THE ROMAN WORLD

For his research in Part II, Sommer draws most heavily from what he calls the four earliest “church manuals”—The Didache (ca. 90–110 C.E.), The Apostolic Tradition (ca. 215–230 C.E.), The Didascalia Apostolorum (ca. 250 C.E.), and Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (ca. 375 C.E.). He also quotes extensively from various writings and letters of the early church fathers. Readers who do not possess a general familiarity with these writings will be confused by the fact that Sommer often references them without reminding the reader of the year in which the work was allegedly written. Complicating the matter even further, Sommer invokes these sources frequently and interchangeably, as if they all possess the same textual legitimacy and theological authority. Though this ambiguity is somewhat mitigated by the appendices, which provide summaries of the church manuals and the lives of early Christian teachers, the common reader will likely grow wearisome by the page turning that this stylistic oversight necessarily induces.

Nevertheless, kingdom-seekers should thoroughly enjoy these last two-thirds of the book, which confirms many teachings cherished by Christian heirs of the Restoration Movement. Part II provides detailed evidence that the early Christians believed that baptism was the point at which one received the free gift of salvation (119-127), that the Lord’s Supper was originally observed every Sunday (136), that one can fall from grace by living an unrepentant life (123), that women had important roles but were not involved in the sacramental ministries of the early church (207), and that bishops were elected by popular assent (170). Sommer even admits the possibility that the words presbyteros (elder) and episkopos (bishop) are used interchangeably in the Didache—a significant concession, but one which the author’s Catholicism will ultimately not accept. The assertion of these other points, however, should be very encouraging to kingdom-seekers, who might otherwise find little else in common with believers of the Catholic persuasion.

That being said, there are also many places in Part II that highlight the origins of Catholic teaching in the early church. For instance, Sommer seems to think that the development of human creeds was a very natural and legitimate spiritual practice of the early church in response to the immediate needs of their historical context. To Sommer, “the beginning of the systematic Roman persecution in A.D. 64 changed everything” (116). In a time when Christians, especially elders
and deacons, were being targeted for their religious beliefs, some Christian communities introduced catechisms as a way to ensure that inquisitive outsiders were not actually Roman imitators and that they truly did understand Christian teaching.

In similar fashion, Sommer explains how the veneration of the saints “naturally” evolved from a common respect and deep admiration for the martyrs of the second and third centuries. Though non-Catholic readers may disagree with the author’s conclusion that prayers to the saints for intercession are justified, they will still greatly benefit from reading a portion of Eusebius’ account of the Gallic martyrs in the spring of 177 C.E., which is quoted by Sommer at length (233–39). These heart-wrenching stories will both grieve and inspire the soul of the modern Christian. One must not feel compelled to pray to the great cloud of witnesses in order to appreciate their sacrifices and be encouraged by their faith.

Perhaps the biggest problem that heirs of the Restoration Movement will have with Sommer’s work is its insistence on the legitimacy of infant baptism and his theory on the evolution of church organization. However, the evidence Sommer presents for these two positions is so weak that many readers (including myself) found his evidence to weigh more heavily on the side of the arguments the author intends to oppose! Sommer’s greatest evidence for the practice of infant baptism depends on statements in The Apostolic Tradition (one of the latest and most textually disputed church manuals), as well as statements by Origen (who was later excommunicated for his heretical teachings), and the negative evidence of Tertullian, who opposed infant baptism (indicating, supposedly, that the practice was widespread). Sommer also notes that an ancient catacomb inscription indicates that a child of less than two years had “received grace on the 8th day before the Kalends (the first day of the Roman calendar month)” before her passing. However, this inscription dates to the third century—hardly a clincher for those seeking first-century precedent.

In the same way, Sommer’s evidence for the evolving nature of the ecclesiastical structure is oddly counter-intuitive. He alleges that from the beginning there were three sacramental church offices: a head episkopos (bishop), a council of presbyters (elders) who ruled under him, and finally diakonoi (deacons). While it may be that elderships did eventually come to appoint one elder as the head “bishop,” Sommer dates this practice all the way back to the late first century. To arrive at this conclusion, he terribly misunderstands I Clement, a letter from the church in Rome to the church in Corinth, making all kinds of faulty assumptions and hasty conclusions. I Clement does not even mention a singular “Bishop,” but only hegoumenoi (leaders) and episkopoi (bishops), which are used interchangeably throughout the letter—a fact that ironically supports the theory of the church being ruled by a plurality of bishops, rather than one. Furthermore, Sommer says that the mere fact that the church at Rome is writing to the church at Corinth “inevitably” leads to the conclusion of Roman primacy in the church (183). The author’s analysis of the role of deacons is less troubling, but he continues his misunderstanding of the role of elder, attempting to show how elders gradually evolved from assistants to the bishop into their present “priestly” function. Time and space do not permit a detailed account of the evidence presented, but the reader should be aware of its weakness and potential to be used to support the exact opposite conclusions at which the author has arrived. If his claims of centralized authority and Roman primacy bear any legitimacy, they have no origin or universal acceptance in the first century.

For all the criticism leveled at Sommer’s book, it must be said that (for the most part), the author should be applauded for the honesty of his scholarship. In his attempt to justify certain Catholic teachings and practices in Part II, he is quick to identify gaps in the evidence or counterpoints to his own arguments. For example, Sommer admits that even some modern Catholic scholars do not believe that a singular “Bishop” governed the first-century church (164). He admits that there were not universal ecumenical councils (besides the one recorded in the New Testament in 49 or 50 C.E.) until the fourth century (174). For a Catholic, Sommer even makes startling concessions about Mary, such as his statements that there are few references to Mary in the early church (152), and also that “we have no proof of the dogma of the Assumption in the literature of the very early Church” (155). Many unfair assertions Sommer makes are at least accompanied by fairly honest qualifiers such as these.

Of course, there are many other interesting subjects discussed in this short book of Christian history. The confines of this review prevent a thorough exploration of Sommer’s comments about Christian attitudes towards military service or slavery, for instance; but chapters on these topics are equally intriguing.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

In its final consideration, We Look for a Kingdom is a thought-provoking piece of Christian scholarship from a Catholic perspective. While not a comprehensive analysis of either secular or spiritual life in the Roman world, it is nevertheless a good primer for a general audience on the changes and continuities of the early church. Readers should be judicious in their consideration of the evidence by utilizing the Notes and Appendices provided at the end of the book, and should allow this work of scholarship to be a jumping off point rather than a final destination in their exploration of early Christianity.

Books whose purported purpose is spiritual restoration, such as Sommer’s, deserve an intelligent response from various individuals and institutions dedicated to Christian scholarship. Authors who still believe in the accessibility of truth and the human ability to find relevant meaning in historical,
and, most importantly, religious texts ought to be applauded. Only when we meet on that common plane, can we fairly and compassionately begin a dialogue on the interpretation of the evidence we find in our mutual quest to seek first the kingdom of God.

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