Perspective Digest has just released its fourth quarter 2011 online issue. It includes:

“Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament,” an examination by Richard Davidson of the OT principles upon which current Adventist policy and practice should be measured.

“Is the Theory of Evolution Scientific,” a truly scientific look by Leonard Brand at how most proponents of evolutionary theory underpin their interpretation of what they observe in the laboratory.

“The Debate Over Justification by Faith,” Norman R. Gulley’s insightful survey of efforts by the Catholic Church and some Evangelicals to draw closer together over a central issue.

“What Is Faith?” E. Edward Zinke’s apt bridge between Van Bemmelen’s “Justification by Faith” in the last issue of PD and Gulley’s “The Debate Over Justification by Faith” in this one.

“The Touch of Peace,” a consideration of what we mean when we greet one another with a wish for peace in the holiday season.

“John 8:42 and the Trinity,” Stephen Bauer’s close, succinct study of key scriptural passages that suggest for some an anti-Trinitarian interpretation.
Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament

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Is the Theory of Evolution Scientific?

Even in some Christian circles, more credence is given to contemporary scientific interpretations than to God's Word.

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The Debate Over Justification by Faith

Some Evangelicals and Catholics think they have reached agreement on this issue, but they're overlooking some essentials.

Norman R. Gulley
Divorce and Remarriage in the Old Testament

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The wide range of Old Testament passages related to the issues of divorce and remarriage includes at least six Hebrew expressions referring to divorce that occur altogether some 27 times, plus several references to remarriage. This article will limit itself to the most seminal passage dealing with divorce and remarriage, Deuteronomy 24:1-4. It contains far-reaching implications for understanding New Testament passages on the subject and for properly recognizing the interpretive relationship between Old Testament and New Testament divorce/remarriage legislation.

Crucial grammatical, syntactical, and intertextual features of the legislation have been largely overlooked in previous studies of the passage. Yet these features provide keys for understanding the continuity between the Testaments with regard to the subject of marriage and divorce.

Historical Background and Literary Context

The Book of Deuteronomy encompasses Moses' farewell sermon to Israel, given about 1410 B.C. on the borders of Canaan just before Moses' death and Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. The address is framed in the overall structure of a covenant renewal. It follows the essential outline of the international suzerainty-vassal treaties of the day.

Within this overall structure, Deuteronomy 24 is situated as part of the specific stipulations of the covenant, Deuteronomy 12–26. This whole body of material is arranged as an expansion and application of the Decalogue of Deuteronomy 5, with the various laws grouped within topical units that follow the content and sequence of the corresponding commandments of the Decalogue.¹

What is particularly noteworthy for our study at this point is that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is not placed in the section of the Deuteronomic law dealing with adultery, but in the section dealing with theft. This fact must be kept in mind in seeking to understand the underlying purpose of the legislation.

Translation

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 reads as follows: "[1]When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, [2] and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, [3] and the latter husband dislikes her and writes..."
her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies, who took her to be his wife, [4] then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring guilt upon the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance”’ (RSV, verses marked).

**Literary Form and Structure**

Some earlier English translations of this passage (e.g., KJV, ERV, and ASV) are misleading, because they have the actual legislative portion beginning already with verse 1: “Then let him write her a bill of divorcement” (KJV). If such were the correct translation, then God indeed would be sanctioning divorce in this passage. But it is now universally recognized that the form or genre of this law and the details of Hebrew grammatical structure lead to a different understanding.

In the legal portions of the Pentateuch, there are two major literary types of laws: demonstrable laws and case laws. In the former, there is an absolute command or prohibition: “Thou shalt . . .” or “Thou shalt not . . .” In the latter, the case laws, there is first the description of condition(s), usually beginning with Hebrew words best translated as “If . . .” or “When . . .” This is followed by the actual legislation, best signaled in English translation by the word “then . . .” Following the description of condition(s), a case law (as well as demonstrable law) sometimes has one or more motive clauses giving the rationale for the law.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is a case law that has all three elements just described. In verses 1-3 there are several conditions: the grounds and procedure for divorce (vs. 1), the remarriage of the woman (vs. 2), and the divorce or the death of the second husband (vs. 3). Only after describing all of these conditions in verses 1-3 does verse 4 include the Hebrew word for “not,” signaling the start of the actual legislation. The only legislation in this passage is in verse 4a, forbidding the woman’s former husband to take her back to be his wife under the circumstances described in verses 1-3.

The implication is clear: God is in no wise legislating or even sanctioning divorce in this passage. In fact, the whole passage may be expressing tacit disapproval, although the divorce is tolerated and not punished. This will become more evident in further detail.

Following the conditions and the legislation of Deuteronomy 24:1-4a is the third major part of the case law, the motive clauses of verse 4b, containing the multiple rationale for the prohibition: The woman has been “defiled,” it would be an “abomination” before the Lord, and “sin” should not be brought upon the land. These all call for attention in order to understand the purpose of the legislation.

**Circumstances of Divorce/Remarriage**

**Grounds for Divorce (vs. 1a).** Deuteronomy 24:1 describes two conditions that lead the husband to “send away” or divorce his wife. First, “‘It happens that she finds no favor [‘approval’ or ‘affection’] in his eyes.’”2 The phrase “to find” or “not to find favor in one’s eyes” is the ordinary
Hebrew expression for “like/dislike” or “please/displease.” It describes the subjective situation—the husband’s dislike, displeasure, or lack of approval/affection for his wife.

But the grounds for divorce are not limited to the subjective element. There are also concrete grounds for the disapproval: “Because he has found some indecency in her” (NASB). The Hebrew word may be translated literally as “nakedness of a thing.” But to what does it refer? This question has been widely debated among scholars, both ancient and modern. The correct interpretation of this Hebrew phrase was at the heart of the Pharisees’ test question to Jesus in Matthew 19:3: Being sent by the Father controls the understanding of what Christ is describing here. *Apostello* implies being sent on some kind of mission. With the context clearly indicating that Christ’s statements focus on His earthly mission, this statement about coming “from God” (vs. 42) seems best understood as a further comment about that mission. Hence, it is not describing an event prior to Earth’s creation back somewhere in the annals of eternity, but is describing Christ’s incarnational entrance into this. “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?” (NKJV). In Jesus’ day, two interpretations of Deuteronomy 24:1 vied for attention. The School of Shammai emphasized the word for “nakedness,” and interpreted the phrase to refer to marital unchastity, while the School of Hillel emphasized the word for “thing,” and interpreted the phrase to refer to any indecency or anything displeasing to the husband, even for such things as serving poor food in a meal.

The word for “nakedness” elsewhere in the Old Testament most often refers to the nakedness of a person’s private parts or genitals, which should not be uncovered or exposed to be seen by those who should not see them; and the uncovering of one’s nakedness usually has sexual connotations (Gen. 9:22, 23; Ex. 20:23; 28:42). The word can mean “word [speech, saying]” or “thing [matter, affair],” and in the context of Deuteronomy 24:1 surely means “thing” or “matter.”

This phrase occurs only once in the Old Testament besides Deuteronomy 24:1, and that is in the previous chapter, 23:15 (Eng. vs. 14). Here it clearly refers to the excrement mentioned in the previous verse that should be covered so that the Lord “may see no unclean thing among you, and turn away from you” (vs. 13). The “nakedness of a thing” is something that is uncovered that should have been covered, something that is repulsive, disgusting, or shameful when left exposed.

It appears that this phrase in Deuteronomy 24:1 has a similar meaning as in the preceding chapter, but refers to the “nakedness of a thing” with regard to a wife. It seems probable, given the preceding context, and the usual sexual overtones of the term when referring to a woman, that the phrase in Deuteronomy 24:1 describes a situation of indecent exposure (of private parts) on the part of the woman. Theoretically, the phrase could probably include illicit sexual intercourse (i.e., adultery), in parallel with the phrase “uncover nakedness,” describing such behavior in Leviticus 18 and 20.

However, since adultery (and other illicit sexual intercourse) received the death penalty (or being “cut off” from the congregation) according to the law (Deut. 22:22; Lev. 20:10-18), the indecent exposure referred to in Deuteronomy 24:1 must be something short of these sexual activities, but a serious sexual indiscretion nonetheless. The phrase in Deuteronomy 24:1 describes
some type of serious, shameful, and disgraceful conduct of indecent exposure probably associated with sexual activity, but less than actual illicit sexual intercourse.

What is the implication of this conclusion about the meaning of “shameful uncovering” in Deuteronomy 24 for the answer that Jesus gives to the Pharisees in Matthew 19 regarding the grounds for divorce? Jesus states only one legitimate ground for divorce: \textit{porneia} (vs. 9; 5:32). To what does this word refer when used without any qualifiers in the context? Its parallel usage (again without qualifiers) in Acts 15, and the intertextual allusions to Leviticus 17 and 18 in this latter passage, provide helpful guidance here.

Acts 15 lists four prohibitions for Gentile Christians given by the Jerusalem Council: “That you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality [\textit{pornea}]” (vs. 29, NKJV). Particularly striking is that this is the same list, in the same order, as the four major legal prohibitions explicitly stated to be applicable to the stranger/alien as well as to native Israelites in Leviticus 17 and 18. In these Old Testament chapters we find (1) sacrificing to demons/idols (Lev. 17:7-9); (2) eating blood (vss. 10-12); (3) eating anything that has not been immediately drained of its blood (vss. 13-16); and (4) various illicit sexual practices (Leviticus 18).

In this clear case of intertextuality, the Jerusalem Council undoubtedly concluded that the practices forbidden to the alien in Leviticus 17 and 18 were what should be prohibited to Gentile Christians in the church. The parallel of the fourth prohibition in each passage is unambiguous: what Acts 15 labels \textit{porneia} are those illicit sexual activities included in Leviticus 18. These activities may be summarized in general as illicit sexual intercourse—including incest, adultery, homosexual practices, and bestiality. The correlation between Acts 15 and Leviticus 17 and 18 seems to provide a solid foundation for determining what the early church understood by the term \textit{porneia}.

This inner-biblical definition of \textit{porneia} seems to be decisive in understanding Jesus’ “exception clause” regarding divorce on grounds of \textit{porneia} in Matthew 5:32; 19:9. Jesus’ “exception clause” is stricter than the grounds for divorce presented in Deuteronomy 24:1 (according to the interpretation of both the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel). Jesus’ “exception” for divorce is \textit{porneia}, which is not the exact equivalent of the “shameful uncovering” of Deuteronomy 24:1. \textit{Porneia} is a much narrower term, referring exclusively to illicit sexual intercourse, which in the Mosaic law called for the offender being “cut off” from God’s people (Lev. 18:29). As Roy Gane summarizes: “Jesus says that whereas Moses allowed for divorce for indecent exposure without illicit sexual relations, He permits divorce only if illicit sexual relations take place.”

Furthermore, in this light, Jesus’ “exception clause” in Matthew 5 and 19 does not contradict the Synoptic parallel accounts in Mark and Luke, which contain no exception clause. Mark and Luke do not mention any exception clause presumably because they do not consider the case of \textit{porneia}, the penalty for which was being “cut off” or death. It was assumed that the death penalty or being “cut off” from the congregation meant a \textit{de facto} dissolution of the marriage. Matthew apparently preserves the original intent of Jesus for readers after 30 A.D., when the death penalty for adultery was abolished.
R. H. Charles writes: “When we recognise that Mark’s narrative takes no cognisance of the case of adultery, but only of the other and inadequate grounds advanced for divorce, the chief apparent contradictions between Matthew and Mark cease to exist. What is implicit in Mark is made explicit in Matthew. Both gospels therefore teach that marriage is indissoluble for all offences short of adultery.

. . . Now, it was impossible to misinterpret the plain words of Christ, as stated in Mark, at the time they were uttered, and so long as the law relating to the infliction of death on the adulteress and her paramour was not abrogated. But, as we know, this law was abrogated a few years later. The natural result was that to our Lord’s words, which had one meaning before the abrogation of this law, a different meaning was in many quarters attached after its abrogation, and they came to be regarded as forbidding divorce under all circumstances, though really and originally they referred only to divorces procured on inadequate grounds “that is, grounds not involving adultery.”

Procedure of Divorce. According to Deuteronomy 24:1b, there were three major elements in the divorce proceedings. First, the husband wrote a "certificate of divorce," literally "document of cutting off." Other legal documents are mentioned in the Old Testament, and the certificate of divorce is also alluded to in other passages. Although there is no Old Testament example of the actual wording of such a document, it has been suggested that the central divorce formula is contained in Yahweh’s statement of divorce proceedings against Israel in Hosea 2:2: “‘she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband!’” Such a statement would mean the legal breaking of the marriage covenant as much as the death of the marriage partner. The document no doubt had to be properly issued and officially authenticated, thus ensuring that the divorce proceedings were not done precipitously.

The bill of divorce may have also contained what in Rabbinic times was considered “the essential formula in the bill of divorce,” i.e., “Lo, thou art free to marry any man.” This would provide for the freedom and right of the woman to be married again. The document would be indicating that although the woman had been guilty of some kind of indecent exposure, she was not guilty of adultery or other illicit sexual intercourse, and therefore not liable to punishment for such sexual activity. Thus she was protected from abuse or false charges by her former husband or others at a subsequent time.

Parallels from the Code of Hammurabi and the Jewish Mishnah indicate that the certificate of divorce would also contain mention of the financial settlement, unless the woman was guilty of misconduct, in which case no financial compensation was awarded her. Probably the latter (no financial compensation) was the case in Deuteronomy 24:1.

The second step of the divorce proceedings was to put “‘it [the bill of divorce] in her [the wife’s] hand’” (Deut. 24:1). She must actually receive notice of the divorce directly in order for it to be effective. The Mishnah tractate Gittim deals with various kinds of possible situations that might not qualify as actually putting the divorce certificate in the hand of the woman. The effect, again, is the protection of the wife by ensuring that she has access to, and concrete notification of, the divorce document.

The third step is that the husband “‘sends her out of his house’” (vs. 1). The Hebrew word for
"send" is elsewhere in the Old Testament the closest one to a technical term for divorce. Sending the wife away is intended to effectuate the divorce process. The break is final and complete.

Remarriage and the second divorce or death of second husband. The third condition specified in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 is that the divorced woman remarries, and then her second husband either divorces her or dies.

Raymond Westbrook seeks to establish that the grounds for the second divorce are not the same as those for the first divorce. The second husband is said to “detest” or “dislike” or “hate” her, which term is not employed in the grounds for the first divorce. The evidence Westbrook cites, however, actually militates against his conclusion, for he shows that in ancient Near Eastern sources and later Jewish material the formula “I hate my husband/wife” is a summary of the longer standard divorce formula “I hate and divorce my husband/wife.” Westbrook’s argument that “hate/dislike” in Deuteronomy 24:3 refers to divorce without objective grounds in contrast to divorce with objective grounds in verse 1, while plausible, is not persuasive. In light of the fact that this technical term is used elsewhere to summarize the grounds for divorce, whatever they might be, it seems preferable to take hate/dislike as summarizing the same situation as the first divorce mentioned in verse 1.

The divorce procedure is the same as described in verse 1: The husband writes his wife a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her away out of his house. Or, as an alternative situation, the second husband dies.

Legislation

After the lengthy statement of conditions, the legislation itself is short and simple: “‘then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled’” (Deut. 24:4). Though the legislation is clear, the rationale for this legislation is far less certain. Already in the legislation, however, one part of the rationale is given: “‘after she has been defiled.’” Two additional aspects of the rationale for the prohibition appear in the motive clauses.

Rationale for the Legislation: The Motive Clauses

The explanation: “‘After she has been defiled.’” The first indicator of the reason for this legislation comes in the explanation why the first husband is not permitted to remarry: “‘she has been defiled’” (vs. 4). The Hebrew for this clause is translated “to be or become unclean or defiled.” But the grammatical form employed in this verse is very unusual in the Hebrew Bible, used nowhere else in this way and only a very few times with a very few verbs. This form is passive, and it normally conveys the reflexive idea (“she defiled herself”). Deuteronomy 24:4 would probably best be translated as “she has been made/ caused to defile herself.”

This leads clearly to Leviticus 18, where we have not only the reflexive form of this word (vss. 24, 30), but the other two terms/concepts used in the motive clauses of Deuteronomy 24:4: the term abomination (vss. 22, 26, 29) and the idea of bringing defilement/sin upon the land (vss. 25, 27, 28). Leviticus 18 is the only other chapter of the Hebrew Bible that combines these three
terms/ideas in one context, and seems undoubtedly to be alluded to by Deuteronomy 24:4. It is crucial to note that in Leviticus 18 one defiles oneself by having illicit sexual relations with another (vss. 20, 24, including at least adultery, bestiality, homosexual practice). Deuteronomy 24:4 also probably alludes to Numbers 5:13, 14, 20, where the wife is specifically referred to as having “defiled herself” by having illicit sexual relationships with a man other than her husband.

The implication of this connection between Deuteronomy 24:4, Leviticus 18, and Numbers 5 is that the sexual activity of the divorced woman with the second husband is tantamount to adultery or some other illicit sexual intercourse, even though she does not incur the death penalty or other punishment as in the cases of Leviticus 18.

Various commentators have recognized this implication. “The second marriage of a divorced woman was placed implicitly upon a par with adultery.”⁷ S. R. Driver concurs that “the union of a divorced woman with another man, from the point of view of her first husband, [is] falling into the same category as adultery.”⁸

If the sexual intercourse of the woman with her second husband defiles her and is tantamount to adultery, why is she free from punishment? The answer seems to be found in the meaning of “has been caused to defile herself.” This apparently does not refer to the one she has had sexual intercourse with (i.e., her second husband) as the “cause” of defilement. By utilizing the passive reflexive form, another cause than the immediate defilement with her second husband seems to be implied. This is highlighted by comparing this occurrence with its other occurrences in the Hebrew Bible, where the same dynamic is functioning: The ultimate cause, seemingly implicit in this rare grammatical form, is the first husband. The legislation subtly implicates the first husband for divorcing his wife. Even though his action is not punished, and therefore is tolerated, the law makes clear that his action does not have divine approval. His putting away his wife has in effect caused her to defile herself in a second marriage in a similar way as if she were committing adultery.

Thus, while Deuteronomy 24:1-4 does not legislate divorce or remarriage, and even tolerates it to take place within certain grounds less than illicit sexual intercourse, at the same time within the legislation is an internal indicator that such divorce brings about a state tantamount to adultery, and therefore is not in harmony with the divine will.

Recognizing the correct translation of Deuteronomy 24:4 ("she has been caused to defile herself") throws light on Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:32: “I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality [πορνεία] causes her to commit adultery [presumably when she remarries]; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.” Just as in the other “I say unto you” sayings of Matthew 5, Jesus is not changing or adding something new to the Law, but showing the true and deeper meaning that is already contained in the Law, which had been distorted by later misinterpretation. Already in Deuteronomy 24:4 it is indicated that breaking the marriage bond on grounds less than illicit sexual intercourse causes the woman to defile herself, i.e., commit what is tantamount to adultery.

A further implication of this interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:4 is that Jesus, in pointing the
Pharisees away from the divine “concession” in verses 1-4 to God’s ideal “‘from the beginning’” (Matt. 19:8), was not arbitrarily shifting from the Deuteronomic law to the Edenic ideal. He was rather pointing to a conclusion that was already implicit in Deuteronomy 24:4: Verses 1-3 were a temporary concession to “hardness” of Israel’s heart, but they did not represent God’s divine ideal for marriage.

The reason: “‘It is an abomination.’” As already noted, the term abomination, occurring in context with the other two rationales found in verse 4, links unmistakably with Leviticus 18. As the various types of illicit sexual intercourse mentioned in Leviticus 18 are “‘abominations,’” so is a woman’s returning to the first husband after having been married again. If the woman’s remarriage after her first divorce is similar to adultery, remarriage to her former husband is even more so. P. C. Craigie writes, “If the woman were then to remarry her first husband, after divorcing the second, the analogy with adultery would become even more complete; the woman lives first with one man, then another, and finally returns to the first.”

Furthermore, it appears that the prohibition does in effect bring indirect punishment on the first husband for divorcing his wife. Even though his divorcing her is not directly censured, yet since she “has been caused [by him] to defile herself” through his action, he is indirectly punished by not being allowed to take her as a wife again. To do such would be an “‘abomination.’” Though the punishment for failing to follow this prohibition is not given in the text, it probably may be assumed that such an abomination would not just be similar to adultery, but treated as adultery and punished accordingly.

The command: “‘You shall not bring sin on the land.’” This last motive clause once again relates to Leviticus 18. The idea that illicit sexual intercourse defiles the land is mentioned three times in this chapter (vss. 25, 27, 28). Because the land is defiled, God says that “‘therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants’” (vs. 25).

This same concept is what is found in Deuteronomy 24:4, even though the noun iniquity is replaced with the verbal idea of “sin” being brought on the land. The verb “‘sin’” (“miss a mark,” “go astray”) may have been substituted to imply a somewhat less serious infraction than the “‘iniquity’” [“crooked behavior,” “perversion”] of Leviticus 18, but it also may here have been considered virtually synonymous.

A man is not to remarry his wife when she has been married again to someone else for the same reason that Israel is not to engage in other illicit sexual intercourse. As we have already seen, to commit this abomination defiles the land and will eventually lead to divine punishment as He causes the land to vomit out its inhabitants.

An important implication of this motive clause for the contemporary relevance of this legislation arises from the direct linkage of Deuteronomy 24:4 with Leviticus 18 in the defiling of the land by the iniquity/sin of the sexual abominations. The “‘abominations’” mentioned in Leviticus 18 (and reiterated in Leviticus 20) are forbidden not only for the native Israelite but also explicitly for the non-Israelite “stranger” or “alien” who sojourns among the children of Israel. Furthermore, these abominations caused the non-Israelite heathen who inhabited Canaan before Israel to be vomited out when they committed these acts. Therefore the “‘abomination’” and defiling quality of these acts
clearly are not simply ritual in nature, applying only to Israel, but timeless and universal, applying to anyone who practices them. Since Deuteronomy 24:4 is placed in the same category as the practices of Leviticus 18, it may be assumed that the prohibition against marrying a former wife who has been married again is universal and of contemporary relevance in its application. Disregarding such prohibition will not only bring defilement and sin upon the land of Israel which God was giving to them as an inheritance, but will also defile any land where such practice is carried out.

**Overall Purpose of the Legislation**

*Various suggestions.* There have been many suggestions as to the overall purpose of the legislation in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Some eight major views may be categorized and summarized:

1. To ensure the proper legal procedure of divorce. This assumes the translation of the KJV and other versions that place the condition in verse 1.

   The view is based upon a misunderstanding of the structure of the passage. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 neither legislates divorce nor sanctions it. The actual legislation deals only with the prohibition of remarriage to the first husband after an intervening marriage. In fairness to this view, however, it must be said that the very mention of the certain conditions in the divorce proceedings does at least indicate that these conditions would have to be met in order for the legislation to apply. In the very toleration of divorce under these conditions, some tacit recognition of a set procedure for divorce is made in the passage.

2. To discourage easy divorce. As Jay Adams puts it: “The whole point of the four verses in question is to forestall hasty action by making it impossible to rectify the situation when divorce and remarriage to another takes place.”

   This view has more to commend it. The mention of specific divorce proceedings in the legislation would have some tacit influence to this effect, but the actual legislation would have further underscored this point. When a divorce was contemplated by the first husband, he must reckon with the fact that such action would be final once his wife had remarried. He could never change his mind and try to woo her back. But Westbrook points out a weakness in this being the only purpose for the legislation: “the divorcing husband is hardly likely to have in mind the possible circumstances following the dissolution of a subsequent marriage by his wife.”

3. To inhibit remarriage. Craigie argues that the text treats subsequent remarriages as defilements similar to adultery. He regards the grounds for the divorce as possibly just some type of “physical deficiency in the woman.” The legislation restricts current divorce practices so that it does not become simply a “‘legal’ form of committing adultery.”

   The third view contains elements that find support in the text. Craigie is correct to argue that the remarriage of the woman (after a divorce on lesser grounds than extramarital sexual intercourse) is presented as tantamount to adultery in that she “defiles herself” (although she is not punished). He is also on the right track in seeing the legislation as curbing the excesses of divorce so that it becomes “legalized adultery.” But Craigie broadens the meaning far too much when he sees it
probably referring to a "physical deficiency" in the woman and not "indecent exposure." He also misses the implication that it is the first husband who is ultimately culpable for having caused his wife to defile herself by the second marriage relationship.

4. To protect the second marriage. Reuven Yaron suggests that the legislation inhibits the social tensions that might arise from a "lovers' triangle."14

This view also has merit. If the divorced wife who has married again knows that she cannot get back together with her first husband, she would certainly be discouraged from planning any intrigue against her second husband so he would divorce her. The first husband would likewise be prevented from trying to get his first wife back. Although these aspects seem to be part of what the law accomplished, Laney has correctly pointed out that this view "fails to explain why the rule would apply after the death of the second husband when the second marriage would no longer be in jeopardy."15

5. To prevent a "type of incest." Gordon Wenham argues that marriage creates a kind of indissoluble "kinship bond" between husband and wife, and thus after a divorce and remarriage to return to the first husband is a kind of incest, which is forbidden in Leviticus 18:6-18.16

This view does not have the weight of evidence of the text and context to support it. As Laney remarks, "The major difficulty with this view is that it seems to reach beyond what is clear to the reader. One wonders how many Israelites would have seen the connection between the 'one flesh' of the marriage union and the incest laws of Leviticus 18:6-18."17 Westbrook moves closer to the main objection to Wenham’s "type of incest" view, asserting that, "his analysis cannot possibly apply to the Deuteronomic law because it completely ignores the intervening marriage. The law does not, as Wenham assumes, prohibit remarriage as such, and there is no way that we can see of the second marriage being a factor in the creation of an incestuous affinity."18 The major problem of Wenham’s position, as hinted already by Westbrook, is that it is founded on an erroneous view of the marriage covenant. Wenham assumes that the "one-flesh" relationship in the marriage covenant is absolutely indissoluble, even by divorce and remarriage. Such a position is not supported in Genesis 1–3 or anywhere else in Scripture.

6. To "protect a stigmatized woman from further abuse by her offending first husband."19 "Deuteronomy deals not with a sinning wife but a sinning husband."20 In his view, the wife’s action was not a sexual offense at all but some "embarrassing condition," and the husband was "so hard-hearted that he cast the woman from himself" and "so unrepentant that he allowed her to be sexually coupled to another man."21

This view has many points that square with our exegesis. Luck is correct that the law implicates the first husband as the offending party.22 He states: "the stigma [of 'defilement'] of the woman in Deuteronomy 24:4 does not so stigmatize her that the moral guilt hangs about her marriages to men other than her former husband. The stigma instead reflects back upon the man who caused the problem, that is, her first husband."23 In emphasizing the first husband’s culpability, however, Luck has tended to trivialize the grounds for divorce by indicating that Deuteronomy 24:1 simply refers to
"embarrassing circumstances," instead of "indecent exposure."

7. To recognize the "natural repulsion" or taboo against having sexual intercourse with a woman who has cohabited with another man. This view has found support in Calum Carmichael, who seeks to show evidence that such an attitude did exist in ancient Israel.24

This view does not stand up to a rigorous scrutiny. Westbrook concludes: "We would suggest that, far from there being a natural repulsion, both biblical and ancient Near Eastern sources find nothing untoward in a man resuming relations with his wife after she has had relations with another, even amounting to marriage, providing no other factor makes resumption of the marriage improper."25

8. To deter greedy profit by the first husband. Raymond Westbrook contends that this legislation is about property. In the first divorce (vs. 1) since there were moral grounds, the wife received no financial settlement, whereas in the second divorce (vs. 3) there were no moral grounds so the wife received financial remuneration. The legislation is to keep the first husband from profiting twice, once to divorce her (and give her nothing) and once to remarry her (and get her financial settlement from her second husband). Westbrook notes how this interpretation fits nicely with the structural placement of this law in the section of Deuteronomical legislation dealing with theft.26

This view points in a promising direction, although it appears to go beyond the evidence in its specifics. Westbrook’s distinction between two kinds of divorce functioning in Deuteronomy 24:1-3 finds its basis in a similar distinction in the Code of Hammurabi and the Mishnah, but really has no basis in the biblical text. As we have already seen, the divorce formula of verse 3 is probably an abbreviated version of the same type of divorce in verse 1. Westbrook’s view, in addition to being speculative, does not appear to take seriously enough the terms “abomination” and “sin on the land” (of verse 4). Furthermore, this view assumes that the first divorce is perfectly legitimate, contrary to what we have seen implied in the clause “she has been caused to defile herself.”

Aside from the weakness of Westbrook’s proposal in its details, he does seek to make sense out of the placement of this law within the section of Deuteronomy 12–26 dealing with “theft.” If it does not deal with theft in the way that Westbrook suggests, Westbrook must be credited with attempting to wrestle with the larger issue of the theological context for this legislation.

These considerations lead to an understanding of the relationship between this legislation and theft in a much larger perspective than Westbrook proposes. The law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 has prevented men from treating a woman as mere chattel, property, to be swapped back and forth at will. Her dignity and value as an individual person is upheld in this law, and the first husband who caused her to defile herself is implicitly shown to be at fault. The law is aimed, in its final placement within the larger context, to protect the woman from being robbed of her personhood.

This is reinforced by noticing the very next law in this section of Deuteronomy (24:5): “When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken.” This law clearly indicates that its ultimate purpose is to enable the newly wedded man to stay at home “and bring
happiness to his wife." The law protects against robbing the newly married couple of their intimacy and happiness, and especially protects the happiness of the wife.

This leads to an understanding of how Deuteronomy 24:1-4 fits into the progression of thought in the section of laws dealing with the eighth commandment or "theft." As Kaufman pointed out with regard to the organization of the various laws within the thought units of a given commandment, they "are arranged according to observable principles of priority." \(^{27}\) Kaufman’s analysis of the Deuteronomic laws arranged under the eighth commandment is insightful. He notes how there are six paragraphs in this section (which he labels A through F). The structure of the section begins with the theft of property (paragraphs A \([\text{Deut. 23:20, 21}]\), B \([\text{vss. 22-24}]\), and C \([\text{vss. 25, 26}]\). Then it moves to the theft of "life" in a metaphorical sense (paragraphs D \([24:1-5]\) and E \([\text{vs. 6}]\)). Finally it deals with the theft of the physical (kidnapping, paragraph F \([\text{vs. 7}]\)).

Kaufman has rightly pointed out how Deuteronomy 24:1-4 belongs together with verse 5 as one paragraph with a common theme: "Perhaps the current position of paragraph D within Word VII [the eighth commandment] offers an insight into the compiler’s (or author’s) understanding of the very essence of the two laws which comprise it. Both, like paragraph E and F that follow, were apparently seen as preventing the theft of nepeç—of the services and devotion of a groom to his bride, and of the self-respect of a divorced woman." \(^{28}\)

Therefore Deuteronomy 24:1-4, in its larger canonical context, serves to protect the rights of women, to protect their dignity and self-respect, especially in circumstances in which they may appear powerless. The law, in its self-expressed disapproval—although temporary toleration, of inequalities afforded women due to the hardness of men’s hearts—points toward the day when such inequities will be resolved by a return to the Edenic ideal for marriage.

**Implications for the 21st Century**

Although Deuteronomy 24:1-4 tolerated divorce on the grounds of indecent exposure on the part of the wife, at the same time within the legislation is a rare internal indicator that such a divorce does not meet with divine approval. The husband’s putting away his wife has in effect caused her to defile herself in a second marriage in a similar way as if she were committing adultery (although it is not punished as such because the blame is placed upon the first husband and not the wife). Thus already in verse 4 it is indicated that the breakage of the marriage bond on grounds less than illicit sexual intercourse causes the woman to defile herself, i.e., commit what is tantamount to adultery (when she marries again).

The correct translation of verse 4 ("she has been caused to defile herself") seems to illuminate Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:32: "'Whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality [illicit sexual intercourse] causes her to commit adultery [presumably when she remarries].'” Thus Matthew 5:32 is not an exception to the rule of Jesus’ “But I say unto you” statements in Matthew 5. Here, as elsewhere in the chapter, He is not changing the Old Testament meaning but recovering its full force from later misinterpretation.
The grounds for divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1 lie behind Jesus’ discussion with the Pharisees in Matthew 19. The School of Shammai interpreted “the nakedness of a thing” to mean “indecent exposure [including adultery and other illicit sexual intercourse since these did not often meet the death penalty by the time of his day]” and the School of Hillel interpreted the grounds to be any indecency even as trivial as a wife’s spoiling the husband’s food. Jesus’ “exception clause” is stricter than both Shammai and Hillel, including only porneia as legitimate grounds for divorce.

In light of the precise structural and content parallels between the prohibitions of Acts 15:29 and Leviticus 17–18, porneia in Acts 15 (and presumably also Matt 5:32 and 19:9) may be understood as referring to illicit sexual intercourse (as detailed in Leviticus 18, including at least incest, adultery, homosexual practices, and bestiality).

Jesus’ grounds for divorce (porneia) are the equivalent of those practices that in the Old Testament met with the death penalty or being “cut off.” Therefore it may be stated that Jesus’ exception clause in Matthew is not in contradiction to the lack of the exception clause in the other Synoptic gospels. Mark and Luke do not have the exception clause, presumably because such exception was assumed (via the death penalty or being “cut off” and thus de facto dissolving of the marriage) in Old Testament law. Matthew has the exception clause to preserve the meaning of Jesus’ words in a setting in which the death penalty for porneia was no longer in effect.

The legislative part of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which prohibited a wife to return to her first husband after she had subsequently married (and then the second husband had either died or divorced her), is linked by crucial terminology and concepts to the permanent and universal legislation of Leviticus 18, and therefore should be considered of contemporary relevance in its application today.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4, seen in its larger context in the Book of Deuteronomy, constitutes legislation to promote and protect the rights of women and their dignity and self-respect. In its tolerance of, but self-expressed disapproval of, inequities afforded women due to the hardness of men’s hearts, this law points toward the day when such inequities will be resolved by a return to the Edenic pattern for marriage.

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Richard Davidson, Ph.D., is the J. N. Andrews Professor of Old Testament at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and Chair of the Old Testament Department.

NOTES AND REFERENCES
2. Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural references in this article are from The New King James Version of the Bible.
5. Mishnah, Gittin, 9.3.

17. J. Carl Laney, op cit., p. 11.
20. Ibid., p. 62.
21. Ibid., pp. 59, 60.
23. Ibid., p. 59.

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Even in some Christian circles, more credence is given to contemporary scientific interpretations than to God’s Word.

Leonard Brand

Is the theory of evolution scientific? The search for an answer involves worldviews, data and its interpretation, as well as other issues. The easy answer is “Yes, it is scientific,” but before we understand what that means, we need to ask what makes any theory scientific.

Science and Religion

Science is a process of searching for answers. An idea may be labeled scientific if it can be studied using the scientific method. If we have an idea and would like to know if it is a good one, several approaches can help us decide if it is correct. First, we can use our own reasoning ability to decide whether we believe the idea to be true. We can also ask God to tell us if it is true. This approach, asking God or looking for an answer in the Bible, is religion. Finally, we can think of observations or experiments that may help determine whether the idea is correct. This approach is science. Let’s compare these three approaches.

If we just think about it, how do we know our conclusion is correct? We need to compare our thoughts against some kind of standard. If we have no such standard, our thinking is just a wild guess. If we wonder how many teeth a horse has, will it be more helpful to think about how many teeth a horse should have, or to open a horse’s mouth and count them?

We could ask God or search the Bible for the answer to the question about the number of a horse’s teeth. The problem is that the Bible was not given us to answer questions such as this—questions that we can easily answer for ourselves and that have no spiritual significance. The Bible was given to answer other kinds of questions, which we will consider shortly.

The scientific method may be described with the following sequence of events: A scientist develops an idea, called a hypothesis, and then thinks of observations and experiments that will test the hypothesis. The observations are made, the experiments are conducted, and the results may indicate the hypothesis is false, or may support it. Another possible outcome is that the answer will remain unclear, and different observations and experiments will have to be designed to test the hypothesis better. Of one thing we can be sure: Science will not provide us with absolute proof or disproof. We may think we have proof, but it is always possible that new evidence will change the picture. Only in TV commercials does science provide proof!

I sometimes tell my science students that half of what I am teaching is untrue, that we’ll have
to wait for new scientific discoveries to show us which half is wrong! Some years ago the scientific evidence indicated that there were 10 species of chipmunks in California, but new evidence showed the existence of 13 species. In molecular genetics, a concept once referred to as “the central dogma” was that each gene on our chromosomes directs the making of a single protein. New discoveries, however, have shown the process to be significantly more complicated. The list of such changes in scientific understanding is endless. Science makes many significant discoveries, but in its continual progress, it keeps showing us that things we once were sure of are actually incorrect. We just didn’t have enough evidence at the time to realize that our interpretation was not correct.

There are some ideas for which scientific study cannot offer us an answer because of their nature. They cannot be proved, no matter how much research is done. For example, when Jesus lived on earth, did He truly perform miracles? Try to devise an experiment to test that idea, and you’ll find it simply can’t be done. Jesus’ life on earth was long ago, and we were not there. Some of us are absolutely sure that He did actually perform miracles, but this belief cannot be proved with science. There is more to life and more to knowledge than just science. Science is an excellent way to discover many things, but it’s important to acknowledge the limits of what questions science can answer for us.

**Evolution**

Now back to our question about the theory of evolution. To give an answer that is not superficial, we need to consider the meaning of the word *evolution*. One basic definition of biological evolution is “change through time.” Animals and plants change as their genetic system allows them to adapt to different environmental conditions. There are complexities in the process that we don’t need to deal with here, but the essential part of the definition is the change that occurs in populations of organisms as time passes.

A simple example of this is the beaks of finches on the Galapagos Islands. The climate changed over a period of several years, resulting in changes in the finches’ food supply. Individual birds with beak sizes that didn’t allow the food to fit well had less chance of survival, and the average size of finch beaks changed to accommodate the available food. Then, as the climate shifted back to its previous condition, the available food also changed, and the average finch beak size returned to what it was before the climate shifts.* This is an example of microevolution, change within a species, which generally occurs through mutations and natural selection.

Another example occurs all the time in places like hospitals. For decades we have been using antibiotics to kill bacteria, but a few individual bacteria remain after the antibiotic kills off all the other bacteria. The result is strains of bacteria that are immune to our treatments, and thus very hard to control. This is also microevolution. Microevolution doesn’t really make any new types of animals; it just allows species of animals or plants to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

The theory of evolution includes another concept: the evolution of all life forms, through long ages of time, from a common ancestor. This part of evolution claims that toads, sparrows, worms,
cabbage, palm trees, lobsters, and scientists are all the result of evolution, that they evolved through time from a common, one-celled ancestor. We will simply refer to this as descent from common ancestors.

Can either or both of these ideas about evolution be studied by the methods of science? Yes. Many scientists conduct research on microevolution, observing how creatures change as the environment changes. They use observations and experiments to test hypotheses about these changes. They are studying processes that can be observed and documented.

What about the larger changes through time, descent from common ancestors? Can this be studied with the methods of science? Yes, scientists use many types of evidence to develop and test hypotheses about evolution from common ancestors.

Both types of evolution are scientific in the sense that they can be studied with the methods of science. There is a difference, however, between them. At least parts of the microevolution process can be observed, but descent of different types of animals from common ancestors in the distant past cannot be observed. Research on common descent does make use of scientific evidence, but it is much more dependent on assumptions in order to interpret that evidence.

The most important assumption that is generally accepted by scientists claims there have never been any supernatural acts in all of history. In other words, everything in nature can be explained by the laws of nature that have been discovered. This is the assumption of naturalism, the worldview that doesn't accept the possibility of creation or intelligent design. Whenever this assumption is made, scientists will always interpret evidence according to the theory of common descent through evolution. The evidence can be interpreted in various ways, but in the naturalistic worldview, the only interpretations that will be accepted are those based on descent of all organisms from a common ancestor through evolution.

Many of us want to know more, not just if the theory of evolution can be studied with science, but whether it is true. Sometimes the term **scientific** is used in a way that implies that if something is not scientific, it is not true. Since Jesus’ miracles can’t be tested by science, does that mean they are not true? That is not a reasonable conclusion. Science can’t show that Jesus’ miracles happened; neither can it show that they didn’t occur. Science simply has nothing to say about it.

What does this tell us about evolution? Can the assumption of naturalism be tested by the methods of science? If it could, it would no longer be an assumption. The supposition that there were no supernatural acts involved in the origin of life forms (i.e., no creation) is a belief about the past. It cannot be tested by observations or experiments. For this reason, the assumption is an arbitrary philosophical choice, not a choice that rests on science.

Considerable evidence is claimed to support evolution over millions of years, but different worldviews can lead to different interpretations of the evidence. The difference is in the interpretations, and in the assumptions on which those interpretations depend. Science can provide evidence for us to think about, but cannot show us how to understand that evidence.

We do experience some difficulty in explaining some of the evidence in biology and geology
according to a biblical view of creation; there are also many types of evidence, however, that are
difficult to reconcile with the theory of millions of years of evolution. Since we were not there and
don’t have all the evidence, science does not have definitive answers to origins, and it is wise to seek
God’s answers to these questions.

To illustrate this difference in worldviews and the resulting interpretations, consider this
example: Worms and scientists have the same biochemical processes occurring in the cells of their
bodies. Naturalistic scientists think this indicates they evolved from the same common ancestor, but
it could also mean that the same Creator designed both, using the same biochemical mechanism to
maintain life in their cells. The difference between those two interpretations, evolution or creation,
cannot be tested by the methods of science because they are based on assumptions about what
happened in the past.

In the study of microevolution we can often open the horse’s mouth and count the teeth. But
when we ask if we evolved from bacteria and worms, we are asking a question about ancient history
when no scientist was there to open the horse’s mouth. We can ask God for the answer, and in this
case, it is a spiritually significant question that the Bible does address. The only other option to
answer the question is philosophical in nature: We can think about the limited evidence we have and
decide that the assumption of naturalism is correct. Is this a satisfying approach? Does God obey
that assumption, or is He amazed at our naiveté?

My family name is Brand. My father asked an expert in genealogical study to trace our ancestry,
and he traced our history back to some prominent families in England. The problem was that the
expert had made a false assumption: the supposition that the last name had been used in a
consistent form through time. What he didn’t know was that grandfather Brandt, a German peasant
farmer, named his first half dozen offspring “Brandt,” but on the birth certificates of the last half
dozen, he named them “Brand.” Arriving at a correct genealogical interpretation of origins depended
on knowing that the history of the name had been changed by an intelligent choice. (I assume it was
intelligent, but nobody knows why he did it; and yes, there were a dozen.) Our name had not been
subject to the typical laws governing the descent of family names. So it is in science; if intelligent
choice or creation was involved in the origin of groups of animals and plants, science will not
recognize it if the scientists investigating this idea depend on a false assumption about origins.

**The Lack of Certainty**

Is the theory of evolution scientific? Yes, it is scientific in the sense that it can be studied by the
methods of science. Does this mean that it is true? Does its status as a scientific theory make it a
demonstrated fact?

Many books written by scientists stoutly assert that evolution is a fact, as much so as gravity.
Those claims are not realistic, however, if one accepts a proper understanding of the scientific
method. Parts of evolution, especially microevolution, are well-documented and seem essentially
ture, although there may still be much to learn before we understand even that part correctly. This
uncertainty is not unique to the study of evolution; in all of science the discovery of new phenomena keep improving upon or correcting scientific ideas.

Other parts of evolution—for example, its claims about ancient history and the origin of life forms—are in a different category. Science can study these claims and devise hypotheses, but those hypotheses can never be rigorously tested by science. We were not there, and our interpretations of the ancient past are only as good as our assumptions. The claims are not scientific, if “scientific” means that they are demonstrated to be true; however, that is not really what the term scientific means.

The level of confidence any one person places in the truth of evolutionary history (i.e., common descent of all organisms) directly reflects the degree of confidence they have that science is the surest way of finding truth in any topic, and/or the confidence they have in the assumption of naturalism.

Our confidence that God has spoken to us in His Word, the Bible, and has given a true history of life on earth is the basis of our Christian worldview. Thus, for many of us, the Word of God is a more reliable guide to understanding ancient history. God was there when life was created; we were not. In the case of origins, He “counted the horse’s teeth and reported the answer.” The Bible does address the topic of origins because it is important for us to know where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going.

The question “Do I know Jesus?” may not seem very scientific, and to some may not be considered relevant to our decision about evolution. However, it is the most important question of all. Do we give more credence to contemporary scientific interpretations than to God’s Word, or do we know Jesus well enough to have confidence in His communication to us through the Bible?

Leonard Brand, Ph.D., is Chair of the Department of Earth and Biological Sciences at Loma Linda University in Loma Linda, California.

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Some Evangelicals and Catholics think they have reached agreement on this issue, but they’re overlooking some essentials.

Norman R. Gulley

Paul says, “They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24, RSV), for “a man is justified by faith apart from works of law” (vs. 28, RSV), with even faith a gift. Humans are “justified by His blood” (5:9, NKJV). Calvary was the “one act of righteousness” that “leads to justification and life for all men” (5:18, ESV). “God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21, NIV).

Justification is found in Christ, and is received by faith. This has nothing to do with Christ’s faithfulness in the covenant that continues human membership in the covenant, as proposed by “New Perspectives on Paul” (NPP) scholarship. The NPP “movement” rose in the latter part of the 20th century as a challenge to long-held Lutheran and Reformed interpretation of Paul’s writings.

Justification explains how one gets in (not how one stays in) the covenant. Justification is an entry-level reality, having to do with how one is saved.

The word justify in Hebrew and Greek “never refer to the infusion of righteousness, that is the transformation of someone from being ungodly to being virtuous.”¹ Justification is the same throughout human history, in old and new covenant periods, because it is about the one eternal gospel. Hence, “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom. 4:3, RSV), or “counted” to him (ESV). The word translated as reckoned or counted is mentioned nine times in the chapter. This is a forensic term. It is about the great exchange that takes place in justification: Humans become members of the covenant on the basis of Christ’s substitutionary death for all humans.

The benefits of Christ’s death are available from before the beginning of sin, for “the Lamb [was] slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8, NKJV); “scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed’” (Gal. 3:8, RSV). For God chose us in Christ from before the foundation of the world. “The Lord our righteousness” (Jer. 23:6, NKJV) is already a focus in the old covenant. That’s why David said, “God counts righteousness apart from works” (Rom. 4:6, ESV). Here is a forensic statement, God declaring someone to be righteous.

At a deeper level, Christ was “delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification”
There is a post-Calvary dimension to God’s saving work that is often overlooked. Christ and the Holy Spirit both intercede in heaven for believers. The Book of Hebrews is like a fifth Gospel, and focuses on Christ’s post-ascension ministry, which is just as important as His ministry on earth (the subject of the four Gospels). If Christians had focused on all that Christ and the Holy Spirit are doing for us in heaven’s sanctuary, believers would not have been tempted to look to Mary and saints in intercessory work for which they have no qualifications. For there is only “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5, 6, ESV). Christ alone is qualified to intercede on the basis of His death.

Just as Adam’s sin is imputed to all humans, so Christ’s death deals with sin, and His righteousness is imputed to all who will receive justification. Christ’s righteousness imputed makes unnecessary any infusion through sacraments or works to merit righteousness. Reckoned righteousness finds the recipient always dependent on the imputed and imparted righteousness of Christ. By contrast, infusion of righteousness focuses on inherent righteousness and works that follow to merit more righteousness. Personal performance and the performance of other humans (Mary and saints) takes the place of sole dependence on Christ crucified, resurrected, and interceding before the Father at heaven’s throne. For only Christ Jesus has become “our righteousness, holiness and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30, NIV).

History

During the first 350 years of the Christian era, the doctrine of justification was not an issue like the Christological and Trinitarian debates. Nevertheless, seeds were sown in those formative years that bore fruit in the medieval period. For example, just as impassibility of God was a philosophical view that questioned God’s compassion, so self-power was a philosophical term introducing human autonomy to the doctrine of justification. Also the Greek word for “to receive one’s share” was translated by the Latin word for “to be worthy of something,” which brought the concept of merit into medieval theology, affecting the biblical doctrine of justification. So alien philosophical ideas distorted the biblical meaning of justification, contributing to the Roman Catholic concept of justification.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430). God’s call to Augustine to be clothed by Jesus Christ converted him and influenced his understanding of justification by faith. From Romans 3:20 he knew that justification doesn’t come through the law. Rather, justification is God’s gift through the Holy Spirit. So one is “justified freely by His grace” so grace may “heal” the will to enable one to keep the law.²

Throughout his writings Augustine glories in God’s grace, and justification is by grace, but it isn’t a “declared justification” but an “internal justification,” for in the context of justification, Augustine says God “works in His saints.”³ Augustine asks “For what else does the phrase ‘being justified’ signify than ‘being made righteous’—by Him, of course, who justifies the ungodly man, that he may become a godly one instead?”⁴ Augustine explains what “justifieth the ungodly” means: “the ungodly maketh pious.”⁵ “For when the ungodly is justified, from ungodly he is made.”⁶

Augustine tells us that he didn’t know Hebrew, and he disliked the difficulty of learning Greek.
He was therefore limited to the Latin word *justifico*. The etymology of this word means to “make righteous” rather than to “declare righteous.” As David Wright states, “There is general agreement that he took it to mean ‘to make righteous’ and held to this throughout his writing career.”

**Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).** Martin Luther called the medieval church the “Aristotelian church” for it depended on Aristotle more than on Scripture. Sacramental theology (systematized during 1050-1240) linked justification with the sacraments. This alleges that continuous justification is mediated through the church and its sacraments. In the late 12th century, the idea of merit for works of continuous justification entered Roman Catholic theology. There were five main schools of thought on justification in the late medieval period, and hence among Catholic thinkers (including early Dominican, early and later Franciscan, and medieval Augustinian), with considerable diversity that need not detain us. What is important is the unanimous view of medieval theology that justification is both an act and a process in which the status and nature of humans are altered.

The *Summa Theologica* is the theological system of Thomas Aquinas. “This brilliant synthesis of Christian thought has had a decisive and permanent impact on religion since the thirteenth century and has become substantially the official teaching of the Catholic Church.” A. G. Sertillanges says, “The Church believes today, as she believed from the first, that Thomism is an ark of salvation, capable of keeping minds afloat in the deluge of doctrine.” However, the system is a veritable source of church traditions and comments from philosophers, and it uses the Latin Vulgate, which is not always an accurate translation. Besides this, the system is written in typical medieval scholastic reasoning, which is difficult to comprehend for many readers. Although the Catholic Church believes the Bible is not easily understood, requiring the *magisterium* to interpret it, the church apparently and paradoxically believes this much more difficult writing is “an ark of salvation” for readers.

Aquinas claimed that God’s being is immutable, that He predestines persons to salvation and reprobation, and that the Holy Spirit dwells in humans and gifts them with “sanctifying grace.” However, sacraments of the Old Law “were ordained to the sanctification of man” (yet “they neither contained nor caused grace”), and sacraments of the New Law are for “the sanctification of man,” for they “contain grace” and are “an instrumental cause of grace.” Aquinas claims that, “The sacraments are signs in protestation of the faith whereby man is justified.” Aquinas believed the Holy Spirit and sacraments sanctify.

**Martin Luther (1483-1546).** Luther was an Augustinian monk. The Reformation was a protest on behalf of the gospel. Bavinck was correct when he said at “issue was nothing less than the essential character of the gospel.” Luther considered grace as rooted in predestination, then later, without retracting that view, came to emphasize grace in Christ, with salvation as a universal gift. Luther would devote more time to justification by faith than any other doctrine, except the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper.

Augustine and Luther were converted through reading Romans (13:13, 14 and 1:17 respectively). This caused Augustine to give up a profligate life; it brought Luther to victory over an internal struggle over salvation by works that nearly destroyed him. Luther said, “I hated the word
'righteousness’ in Romans 1:17, because he thought “God is righteous and punishes the unrighteous sinner.” Then he discovered that it meant that “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Luther said, “Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates.” Later Luther read Augustine’s *The Spirit and the Letter* and found that Augustine had a similar understanding of the text, “as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he justifies us.” Luther considered justification a doctrine taught in Scripture, so he reached back beyond the subjectivism of medieval theology to Augustine and Paul.

But did Luther’s view of justification change? Luther began lecturing on Romans at Wittenberg University in the summer of 1515. From his published notes of the time we gain two insights into his early understanding of righteousness by faith: (1) Outward justification is imputed by God to recipients, so the recipients are sinners (inwardly) but justified (outwardly), or as Luther put it they are “at the same time both righteous and unrighteous”; (2) God “has begun to heal him. . . . He will continue to deliver him from sin until he has completely cured him.” This is “the gift of grace, which begins to take sin away.”

Comparing the two insights, the first seems to do with an outward reckoning, but the second is an inward healing; the reckoning seems to be a present extrinsic fact, but the healing begins an intrinsic process that reaches into the future. In simple terms, Luther’s justification includes sanctification. Luther’s change also involves a departure from his earlier belief that human freedom made people capable of receiving justification without the need of God’s grace, but now Luther believed that such an acceptance is possible only through God’s grace that gifts faith to humans, and thus makes them capable of accepting justification. This new insight seems to have come while exegeting Romans in 1515. “Luther, following Augustine, did not make the distinction between forensic justification and progressive sanctification, that emerges in later Protestantism.” It was Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), Luther’s younger colleague at Wittenberg, who introduced the concept of justification as forensic.

Luther was the rugged leader who launched the Reformation, whereas Melanchthon was the systematizician who wrote down Lutheran thinking with precision. For example, in 1521 he wrote *Loci Communes*, which was the first systematic statement of Luther’s theology. He also wrote the Augsburg Confession (1530) and its Apology (1531). He complemented the bombastic Luther with his quieter nature and clarity of writing. It can be argued that Melanchthon’s word *forensic* to describe justification did not materially change the alien righteousness view of Luther, as both were speaking of a declarative or extrinsic righteousness imputed by Christ in distinction to being made righteous in sanctification.

*John Calvin (1509-1564).* Luther and Calvin were brought to Christ out of different experiences (which affected their understanding of salvation): Luther felt the curse of the law and was relieved when he understood forgiveness by faith alone; Calvin was reticent to leave the Catholic Church in response to the Reformation, but eventually responded to God’s will (basing salvation on God’s elective will in eternity).
Catholic theology claims that humans must work in order to be saved; Calvin’s theology claims that God must work (elect) for a few to be saved. Catholic theology says Christ died for all; Calvin’s theology says Christ died for a few. Even though in Roman theology Christ died to save all humans, this is called into question by human works as necessary for salvation. Reformed theology also calls into question Christ’s death by His alleged dying only for the elect. So Calvary suffers in both theologies.

On August 1, 1559, justification was finally placed in the “benefits” segment of Calvin’s system (Book 3), which focuses on the benefits of Calvary applied to Christians. Calvin is not interested in the order of salvation, which says justification precedes sanctification, which precedes glorification (chronological order; note the first two are reversed in 1 Corinthians 6:11); rather, Calvin says about the first two: “Christ . . . justifies no man without also sanctifying him,” adding “Though we distinguish between them, they are both inseparably comprehended in Christ. Would ye then obtain justification in Christ? You must previously possess Christ. But you cannot possess him without being made a partaker of his sanctification: for Christ cannot be divided.”

In other words, union with Christ gives one a saving relationship with Christ, which means a reception of justification and sanctification with little interest in the order of receiving these benefits. In the opening of Book 3, Calvin speaks of the Spirit of sanctification, and that through the Spirit Christ unites Himself to humans. As Berkouwer says, “Calvin’s thought is concentric—salvation in Christ.”

Alister McGrath. Alister McGrath’s book Christianity’s Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution, focuses on biblical interpretation by individuals instead of by a church, which McGrath considered a dangerous idea, resulting in the pluralism of Protestantism. McGrath traces a number of factors that led to the Protestant Reformation, for some leaders were not moved by the doctrine of justification by faith, as was Luther. McGrath rightly states that if justification is the reckoning of Christ’s righteousness to believers, what’s the point of purgatory? The doctrine also renders “the cult of the saints redundant.” “If Luther was right about justification—and his critics insisted that he was not—then the conceptual glue binding the [Roman] church’s rites, ceremonies, institutions, and ideas was fatally weakened. He [Luther] had shown that the complex edifice of salvation, largely constructed during the Middle Ages, lacked a solid foundation.”

At the beginning of the 20th century, Pentecostalism was launched, and now numbers half a billion members. There are recent churches in Protestantism that don’t see any reason to be defined by the past. McGrath claims that more Protestants become Catholics than vice versa, because evangelicalism lacks historical roots and institutional connection with the New Testament. (It is doubtful that McGrath factored into this the number of Catholics becoming Protestants in South American countries.) In a criticism of Luther, McGrath said: “His fundamental conviction was that the church of his day had lost sight of some fundamental themes of the Christian gospel. After all, the theology he had been taught at Erfurt now seemed to him to be heretical, amounting to the idea of ‘justification by works,’ the notion that humanity can achieve its own salvation by its moral or
religious achievements. Yet Luther is open to criticism here, in that he appears to have extrapolated from his own local situation to that of the entire Christian church throughout Europe.”

Earlier in his book, McGrath points out that Luther responded to indulgences. Indulgences were cause enough for reform, because they were a blatant repudiation of the free gift of the gospel's salvation, and indulgences were sold far beyond Wittenberg, throughout Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Norway, and Sweden. At least this seems to be far more than a local concern, and it gets to the heart of Catholic theology: the replacing of the divine by the human. This seems to be the fundamental issue that Luther faced, and deserves to be considered the primary reason for the Reformation. It was a fight for the true gospel. It seems reasonable that any effort to reintroduce the gospel would include justification by faith alone, to counter the Catholic emphasis on salvation by human works.

The Reformation’s decisive break from the medieval period was the distinction between justification and sanctification, yet Luther’s justification spilled over into initial sanctification and Calvin finds them as inseparable in Christ. In other words impartation is taken up after imputation in Calvin’s Institutes, or salvation supplied in Christ (objective side) is applied as benefits through the Holy Spirit (subjective side). Nevertheless, it can be argued that relationship with Christ and all that this means was of primary interest to Calvin. Put differently, imputation and impartation are received from Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Reformation’s doctrine of salvation.

Superficially this seems the same as Catholic theology, at least in the joining of justification and sanctification; but the major difference lies in Catholic infusion instead of Reformation imputation/impartation, with Catholic elevation of human nature producing works capable of merit (considered as ongoing justification) rather than a covenant relationship with Christ and the Spirit in Reformation theology. This crucial difference needs to be clearly in mind when evaluating contemporary Catholic-Evangelical attempts to unite on this doctrine.

**Catholic Response—Counter Reformation**

Catholic theologians made a dramatic change in the decade between Augsburg and Ratisbon. Their first response to the Protestant view on justification was to reject it as a novelty, not the same as what Catholic theology had taught for a very long time. Then, Catholic theologians made a sudden about-face, saying that the Protestant view on justification was the same as Roman theology had taught for a very long time, but held to faith as the one point of difference, couching it in vague, ambiguous terms, with the ability to interpret the words in different ways. Ratisbon demonstrated that one point ambiguously presented is sufficient to later neutralize all the concessions made.

The concessions didn’t hold. Just four years later, the Council of Trent was convened (1545-1563). It discussed the subject of justification for seven months in 1547, and totally repudiated the Protestant views with anathemas. Rome doesn’t change, even though she may make outward moves to win compromise. This history should cause pause in the contemporary consensus-seeking which is using the same methods.
The intent of Trent’s sixth session was to negate the “erroneous doctrine” of justification (their perspective) and to “strictly forbid” any teaching that did not agree with the present decree. Trent is clear that humans are born with original sin, that Jesus Christ came to redeem all humans through His death, and that the merit of His passion is bestowed on all who are born again.

Justification is a “translation” from the state of sin (through first Adam) to the state of grace (through the second Adam). Without any human merit, God’s “quickening and helping grace” enables adults to receive the call of God and they cooperate with grace that is received through hearing, and begin to love Him (not fear Him) and are moved against sin, to repent, do penance, and be baptized.

Preparation is followed by justification, which includes sanctification, for an unjust person becomes just, an enemy becomes a friend. The final cause of justification is the glory of God and Christ, and eternal life. The efficient cause is the merciful God who washed and sanctifies, the meritorious cause is Christ’s death, and the instrumental cause is baptism. The single formal cause is “the justice of God,” not that by which He Himself is just, but that by which He makes us just, not merely “reputed” as just but “receiving justice within us” through the Holy Spirit poured out in our hearts. In other words, forgiveness of sins, faith, hope, and charity are “infused at the same time.” For “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17, 20, KJV) and “faith. . . worketh by charity” (Gal. 5:6, KJV). Neither faith nor works “merit the grace of justification.”

All of this seems to present the gospel, and no doubt contributes to the contemporary debate that seeks to find similarities between Roman and Reformation views of justification. There are similarities, but the differences determine the extent of the similarity.

After the immediate relation between Christ and humans (above) seems to be replaced by a more mechanical means where the (1) infusion of original sin (guilt) from Adam is overcome by an (2) infusion of grace; and (3) deliverance is attained instrumentally through baptism.

The sixth session of Trent dealt with justification as the most important item on its agenda. Trent decreed that the Latin Vulgate version of Scripture was the official Bible, but this version doesn’t do justice to the Greek word dikaiosunē, which means “to declare righteous” for the Vulgate translates it by the Latin word iustificare, which means “to make righteous.” To be declared righteous has nothing to do with personal merit; whereas to be made righteous leads to works of merit. “The Greek verb refers to something outside of a person in question” whereas “the Latin refers to the qualities of the person in question.” This is why the Greek Orthodox Church never had a theology of merit as did the Latin church. The Greek (or Eastern) Church emphasized deification rather than justification (Western church).

According to Trent, justification “is not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inward man through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts whereby an unjust man becomes just and from being an enemy becomes a friend.” Faith, hope, and love are infused into the Christian. With the infusion of justification there begins a process of justification in which works merit further justification. This confuses the categories of justification and sanctification, and questions justification by faith alone, because works are included. Shedd is correct: “Men are justified
in order that they may be sanctified, not sanctified in order that they may be justified.”34 Furthermore, Catholic infused justification, or “physical justification,” is a state in which only a partial remission of sins is experienced, for there is still guilt and debt to be met by temporal punishment, even beyond this world in purgatory. This means there is no imputation of Christ who forgives all sin in this life. Remaining sin must be atoned for in purgatory. Catholic justification lacks imputation.

Scripture defines justification (or righteousness): “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:6, NIV). This text is the basis for the New Testament presentation on justification (Rom. 4:3; 9:22; Gal. 3:6; James 2:23).

**Contribution of the “New Perspectives on Paul” Movement**

No school of thought since the 16th-century Reformation, not even the Bultmann’s in the 20th century, has had such an impact on Pauline studies as the “New Perspectives on Paul” (NPP), contributed by E. P. Sanders, N. T. Wright, and James D. G. Dunn. Donald Hagner said NPP may be called “a Copernican revolution in Pauline studies.”35 D. A. Carson says “the new perspective is the reigning paradigm.”36 Even though there were other books before Sanders with his major thesis, his was a turning point because it was the first book following the Jewish Holocaust. Post-Holocaust times found a more friendly view of Jews. Though there are varying ideas that constitute the NPP, they oppose the old perspective that Judaism was a very legalistic system of works-righteousness.

Rudolph Bultmann considered Judaism to be a legalistic religion, totally devoid of grace, and believed that Paul was totally opposed to Judaism. In contrast to an earlier conception of Paul in corporate or cultic terms, Bultmann believed Paul focused on the individual. This was undoubtedly influenced by Bultmann’s preoccupation with existentialism (personal existence). As a Lutheran, Bultmann supported forensic justification in Paul’s theology, yet this was not an inner change but an “eschatological reality” experienced now by the believer. The NPP is a response to Bultmann.

Albert Schweitzer rejected justification by faith as central to Paul, accepting rather “being in Christ.” Schweitzer also presented Paul as fully Jewish, and not persuaded by Hellenism. Nevertheless, many scholars didn’t follow Schweitzer, believing Paul gained much from Hellenism rather than from Judaism.

W. D. Davies’s book *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (1948), “marks a watershed in the history of scholarship on Paul and Judaism,”37 and paved the way for the NPP because it was the first to present Paul’s positive acceptance of Judaism and the law, for his conversion was not from Judaism to a new religion. Christianity was not “the antithesis of Judaism” but “the full flowering of Judaism.” For Davies, justification by faith was considered peripheral to the centrality of Christ in Paul’s writings.

Krister Stendahl stated that justification by faith was Luther’s focus and not Paul’s. He critiqued the introspective conscience of the West (not found in the East, in the Orthodox Church) but found in Augustine’s Confessions and Luther’s struggle as an Augustinian monk. This was not Paul’s struggle in his conversion, for he had a rugged relationship to the law prior to his change of mission to the
Gentiles. Stendahl dismissed justification by faith as merely an Augustinian-Lutheran experience, but not a biblical experience.

In 1971, Ernst Käsemann, student of Bultmann, believed that justification is central to Paul’s writings, and to salvation history. Käsemann’s view of justification is corporate (rather than individual) and participatory, which basically questions its forensic reality. Käsemann said, “Nowhere else in Judaism is Hab. 2:4 ['the just shall live by his faith,’ KJV] seen in terms of attachment to a person.” He states this idea again as “a truth which transcends the individual and is directed toward a new world.” Here is a “primacy of christology over anthropology.”

E. P. Sanders’ book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977) launched the NPP movement. Sanders studied a “great bulk” of the surviving Palestinian material from 200 B.C. to 200 A.D. and discovered that election got one into the covenant, and commandment-keeping was a response to this prior election. “The Rabbis did not have the Pauline/Lutheran problem of ‘works-righteousness.’ The bottom line was that the rabbis understood obedience to be a response to God’s love for Israel. Sanders termed this “covenantal nomism.” Sanders concludes that because covenantal nomism was so pervasive during the four centuries studied (200 B.C.-200 A.D.) that it was “the basic type of religion known by Jesus and presumably by Paul.”

In the law-court setting, for N. T. Wright, righteousness is not about imputed or imparted righteousness to humans but God’s own righteousness (His covenant faithfulness). “Legal fiction” is a well-known Catholic analysis of imputed righteousness (merely reckoned to be righteous, when not in reality, as in Luther’s theology). So at this point, Wright seems to be close to the Catholic view. Wright says Paul’s gospel creates the church, whereas justification defines and sustains it.

James Dunn claims that behind the Catholic-Protestant debate (make righteous—declare righteous, respectively) is the more fundamental issue of Christianity’s relation to Judaism, or Paul’s gospel’s relation to his ancestral religion. Traditional New Testament scholarship considered Paul opposition to Judaism as similar to Luther’s opposition to the medieval church. But the NPP claims that Palestinian Judaism was grace-based, that their works were a response to grace to maintain their covenant membership rather than to gain entrance or earn merit. In this new context, justification by faith is the way Gentiles can be as acceptable to God as Jews. This is “one of the most vigorous debates in current NT studies.”

The immediate context of justification by faith is “the righteousness of God” (Rom. 1:16, 17). In Hebrew the word *righteousness* is a “relational concept.” For Dunn, God created humans, gave a call to Abraham, and chose Israel, and in so doing was righteous, and understood as faithful. So Dunn considers the verb *dikaio* means both “make righteous” and “reckon righteous,” which practically makes the Catholic/Protestant debates pointless. The NPP, like liberal theology before it, is rooted in the historical-critical method, which is much more interested in alleged sources. Why should second Temple Judaism be the hermeneutical basis for understanding Paul, when *sola scriptura* looks to the Old Testament, where Scripture interprets Scripture?

Second Temple Jews were engaged in “works of the law” to earn salvation, demonstrated by
Paul before his conversion. The traditional doctrine of justification was by faith, contrary to any works of law to merit salvation; but the new doctrine of justification (by the “New Perspectives on Paul” study) was to dismiss circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath as boundary markers to distinguish between Jews and Gentiles. Whereas the traditional doctrine of justification dismissed all law-keeping to earn salvation, the new doctrine of justification dismissed Jewish laws as unnecessary for Gentiles to become covenant members.

Proponents of the New Perspectives on Paul consider law-keeping, in second Temple Judaism, to be responsive works to God’s grace given in the covenant. Such works were a mark of covenant membership, and were never works to gain entrance into the covenant. Proponents allegedly substantiate this conclusion from the Qumran community. However, this conclusion is decisively called into question by J. V. Fesko: All the law is important and not just a subset of Jewish markers. The law is an entry requirement for covenant membership.

For example: “But when a man enters the covenant to walk according to all these precepts that he may be joined to the holy congregation, they shall examine his spirit in community with respect to his understanding and practice of the Law, under the authority of the sons of Aaron who have freely pledged themselves in the Community to restore His Covenant and to heed all the precepts commanded by him, and the multitude of Israel.”

Moreover, the Halakhic Letter, one of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumran, supports the traditional view because legalistic works to earn salvation was a problem at Qumran. Romans 2:21-23 refers to the whole law and not merely to covenant badges. Legalism was a problem that Christ encountered (Matt. 5:17-20; 23:1-38; Luke 18:9-14), and He ministered during second Temple Judaism. Works-righteousness was the problem Paul encountered in Rome and in Galatia, and not covenant badges (or subset of the law; circumcision, food laws, and the Sabbath). To understand justification by faith, one must return to the traditional understanding because the New Perspective is at odds with Scripture, and with historical evidence from the Qumran community. Justification is not through works of the law (Rom. 4:25), but through faith (1:17; 3:28), which is a gift of God (10:17).

Catholic-Protestant Divide

The Fourth Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation convened at Helsinki, Finland, in 1963 to hammer out a current statement on the doctrine of justification by faith. Catholic observers were not the reason that the Lutheran leaders made changes toward Rome, because this was achieved through use of the historical-critical method of exegesis. Ernst Käsemann argues "that the historical-critical method is inseparable from Protestantism, is indeed its very genius." This exegetical method is the foundation for the work done between Catholics and Evangelicals in subsequent meetings. The same historical-critical method contributed to the New Perspectives on Paul, which also questioned justification by faith. Much later, in 1992, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Lutheran Church in America evaluated the Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue Report VII,
and said: "The abject capitulation to the historical-critical method . . . relativized the concept of pure doctrines well as the normative authority of Scripture and jeopardized the honest efforts of Lutherans and Roman Catholics to find any solid consensus on the article of justification. Also, 'new modes of thinking,' a kind of new logic, made doctrinal differences 'not necessarily divisive.'"46

The LCMS stated: "Having reviewed carefully the 'Commitment Statement' we have come to the conclusion that beneath the 'differences in theological formulation' often noted, there remain substantive differences between the churches which go to the very heart of the Gospel itself and are therefore divisive."47

Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) 1: The Christian Mission for the Third Millennium (1994).48 In the Catholic First Things: The Journal of Religion, Culture, and Public Life (1994), is an article titled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium." This was the conclusion of a consultation beginning in September 1992. It states: "We together pray for the fulfillment of the prayer of Our Lord: 'May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me,' (John 17). We together, Evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples."49 They concurred that "the scandal of conflict between Christians obscures the scandal of the cross, thus crippling the one mission of the one Christ."50 Within the one mission of the one Christ, they state, "We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ."51 On the surface this seems to be biblical and welcome. But more importantly, doesn’t the alleged daily re-crucifying of Christ in the Catholic mass radically call into question the one mission of the one Christ’s unrepeatable sacrifice at Calvary (Heb. 7:27; 9:26)?

In the book Is The Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism (2005), Mark A. Knoll and Carolyn Nystrom devote a chapter to "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." There was much evangelical criticism of ECT 1, particularly because it failed to express salvation as by grace alone through faith alone. The words alone were the contribution of the Reformation, dismissing all human means to salvation, as found in Catholic theology. ECT 2, in part, was a response to the criticism of ECT 1. In a later First Things journal is a report on post-ECT 1 study given to differences between Evangelicals and Catholics. In 1996, it was “determined that further progress depended upon firm agreement on the meaning of salvation, and especially the doctrine of justification."52

ECT 2: The Gift of Salvation (1997). After a full year of study, discussion, and prayer, a statement was released in New York City on October 6 and 7, 1997. It was headed by John 3:16, Christ as Savior of the world, a truth that Calvinists may not be able to accept, because they believe Christ died for the elect alone. The statement admits "serious differences" remain, but all agree that Jesus Christ is the Savior. They refer to biblical texts that Christ is the only Mediator between God and humans and that no one comes to the Father except through Christ. But how is this possible when Catholics believe that the church, Mary, and saints are also mediators between God and humans? Even though the statement says atonement was completed at the Cross, how does this
agree with salvation by works, and purgatory as necessary for atonement in Catholic theology? Evidently Catholics come to these texts and read into them their own traditions. In other words, the texts seem qualified by the interpretation of the church, rather than by Scripture interpreting Scripture.

What does the ECT statement say about justification? "In Justification, God, on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but to be his forgiven friends, and by virtue of his declaration it is so. . . . We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (sole fide)." They admit there are differences between declarative righteousness and transformational righteousness, and mention purgatory and devotion to Mary as among further subjects to study. But don’t these differences call into question the assumed unity they pronounce in the document? Furthermore, when it comes to the gift of salvation through Christ alone, isn’t this called into question by official Roman theology, which presents Mary and the saints as participants in human salvation? Also, because there are differences between declarative justification and transformational justification, how can justification be considered as a belief that unites Catholics and Evangelicals?

The end of the document declares: "As Evangelicals who thank God for the heritage of the Reformation and affirm with conviction its classic confessions, as Catholics who are consciously faithful to the teaching of the Catholic Church, and as disciples together of the Lord Jesus Christ who recognize our debt to our Christian forbears and our obligations to our contemporaries and those who will come after us, we affirm our unity in the Gospel that we have here professed." Note that Evangelicals believe in the biblical heritage of the Reformation and Catholics believe in the traditions of the church. This is what divided them in the 16th-century Reformation, so wouldn’t these differences still divide them, in spite of saying they teach the same gospel? Therefore it seems hollow when they say, "We reject any appearance of harmony that is purchased at the price of truth."

ECT 2 stated, "Justification is central to the scriptural account of salvation, and its meaning has been much debated between Protestants and Catholics. We agree that justification is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God’s gift, conferred through the Father’s sheer graciousness, out of the love that he bears us in his Son, who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead for our justification." Although this seems an advance over ECT 1, and in agreement with Scripture, the official Catholic view of justification is an infusion (not the Protestant impartation), and the infusion enables the recipient to merit further justification.

Pope John Paul II’s encyclical Ut Unam Sint ("that they may be one"), based on Christ’s prayer for Christian unity, issued May 25, 1995, gives insight into how differences are to be evaluated.

"The examination of such disagreements has two essential points of reference: Sacred Scripture and the great Tradition of the Church. Catholics have the help of the Church’s living Magisterium." The inclusion of tradition as equal with Scripture (see Vatican II) means the Catholic Church uses human ideas along with divine revelation in Scripture, and how can those who believe in sola scriptura accept resolution of differences based merely on the uninspired ideas of humans that often
ECT 3: Your Word Is Truth (2002). There are obvious differences between Protestants who place Scripture above the church and Catholics who place the church above Scripture—in a living tradition that adds to and takes away from Scripture, and the Majestierum that officially interprets Scripture for the church; whereas Protestants look to Scripture to interpret Scripture (sola scriptura). Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, who led out in organizing the ECT meetings, also edited a book, Your Word Is Truth (2002). In it, the Catholic theologian Avery Cardinal Dulles wrote, “While revering Scripture as containing the word of God in unalterable form, she [Catholic church] denies that Scripture is sufficient in the sense that the whole of revelation could be known without tradition.” By contrast, Protestants believe that Scripture interprets Scripture and doesn’t need human traditions to do so. Hence it doesn’t make sense for the joint statement to affirm, “that Scripture is the divinely inspired and uniquely authoritative written revelation of God; as such it is normative for the teaching and life of the church.”

The title Your Word Is Truth cannot mean “Catholic Tradition Is Truth” because it sometimes discounts biblical truths (such as the sacramental work of the church, Mary, and saints to obtain salvation), which are human additions that question the biblical truth that Christ is the only Savior. In other words, the official Catholic understanding of Scripture discounts the unofficial ECT 3 document. How can papal infallibility, the alleged re-crucifixion of Christ in the mass, and the numerous changes made to God’s Ten Commandments be the same as “Your Word Is Truth?” For these, Catholic traditions replace the truths of God’s Word, and replace Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God.

ECT 4: The Communion of Saints (2003). This document was published in another edition of First Things. Communion concerns union of beliefs as well as union in fellowship. Are Catholics and Protestants experiencing both? There are differences among Protestants and Catholics about the saints. One big hurdle is the Catholic belief in purgatory, which requires human intercession and human payments. There is a difference about the number of sacraments necessary for salvation, two (baptism and Lord’s Supper) for Protestants and five additional sacraments for Catholics.

Communion is a union or relationship that is impossible for Protestants in terms of sharing in the Catholic mass, where the priest allegedly re-crucifies Christ. Protestants believe in a once for all, not-to-be-repeated sacrifice at the Cross. Although all true Christians are in a relationship with Christ, who is the Head of the body that is the church, does it follow that there is only one true church? What about the following statement: “The church itself can be understood as a sign and instrument of grace instituted by the one mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ, and, through the gospel, mediating his grace to the world. While the ancient formula ‘Outside the Church no salvation’ may lend itself to misunderstanding, we agree that there is no salvation apart from the [Catholic] Church, since to be related to Christ is necessarily to be related, in however full or tenuous a manner, to the Church which is his body.”

The latest Catechism (1994) states, "The Church is catholic because Christ is present in her."
'Where there is Jesus Christ, there is the Catholic Church.' In her subsists the fullness of Christ’s body united with its head; this implies that she receives from him ‘the fullness of the means of salvation’ which he has willed: correct and complete confession of faith, full sacramental life, and ordained ministry in apostolic succession."61 In other words, "The [Catholic] Church is 'the universal sacrament of salvation.'"62 “The Church has been divinely sent to all nations that she might be 'the universal sacrament of salvation.'"63

Other churches are called “separated Churches” and not “sister churches” because the Roman Catholic Church calls itself the “mother Church.” Communion with these separated churches is described as follows: "For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church."64 In other words there is only one source for the fullness of grace; all other churches derive grace from that source, whether they know it or not. The Catholic Church reaches out to all humans to gift them salvation through the church. In fact, the mother church reaches out to gather all humanity into her embrace.

This replaces Christ as the only source of salvation, the fullness of which is found in Him alone, and not confined to any church. True communion of the saints is found in communion with Him. Carefully worded statements that seem to reflect, to some degree, the communion of saints, must always be interpreted against the unchanging official belief that the Catholic Church is the only church Christ established, and outside of that church there is no salvation. In other words, all the ECT documents must be understood within this end-time plan of the Catholic Church. While the Catholic Church claims to be the only source for the fullness of salvation, it dispenses non-biblical traditions as a means to God and salvation. By contrast, Christ said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6, NKJV).

Catholic priest Richard John Neuhaus argues that “justification by faith” is “a theological formula devised sixteen centuries” after the church; and claims "The Christian reality, comprehensively understood, is the Church. Surely it is the Church that judges the adequacy of theological formulations and not vice versa."65 This apparently overlooks the fact that justification by faith is presented in the Old Testament Book of Habakkuk (2:4), long before any Christian church was in existence.

Facing a common enemy (secularism, with its anti-family values, abortion, gay rights, and moral relativism), Catholics and Evangelicals have strained at hermeneutics to bury the anathemas of Trent and those of the Reformers, as if the contemporary attack on the gospel by secularism is more important than the medieval Roman attack on the gospel (another kind of secularism). It is recognized by some that there must be a consensus about justification, or there will be no other consensus. So Evangelicals and Catholics together focus on common points of agreement, and overlook the differences that remain, as if the differences today are not as valid as they were in the 16th century. There is one important difference between Catholic and Reformation understanding of justification—infusion (Catholic) and imputation (Protestant). Roman infused justification doesn’t do
justice to biblical imputation.

**Council of Trent Still Influential**

It is clear from the ECT documents that the anathemas of Trent and the Reformation hurled at each other in the 16th century have been dismissed through the justification debates. On the one hand, this seems that the stand of the Catholic Church against the Reformation made at Trent no longer exists. On the other hand, we must ask if there is evidence that Roman theology hasn’t essentially changed since the Council of Trent.

Many believe that Vatican Council II (1963-1965) marked a change in the Catholic Church. It is true the council focused on other denominations and religions, not done before. This was for ecumenical reasons, to bring the “separated brethren” back into the church, and reach out to other religions. In Vatican II the Catholic Church reached out as a player to achieve its global ambitions (see Revelation 13:1-4, 11-16; 17:1-18). However, consider evidence that the Council of Trent is still influential today:

1. Vatican II endorsed Trent: “This sacred council accepts the venerable faith of our ancestors . . . and it proposes again the decrees of the Second Council of Nicea, of the Council of Florence, and of the Council of Trent.”
2. Vatican II referred to “The Fathers of this sacred Synod, furthering the work begun by the Council of Trent.”
3. The “veneration of the saints, Marian devotions, and eucharistic adoration,” which Protestants revolted against in the Reformation, all continued after Trent. In fact, since Trent, Mary has been elevated to heights not endorsed at Trent.
4. Vatican II continued the focus on the infallibility of the Pope proclaimed in Vatican I. In Vatican II “there is in actuality no repudiation of Trent, or of the Vatican Council [Vatican I]. If anything, when Trent or the first Vatican Council are mentioned, the emphasis is never critical.” In fact, “notwithstanding the apparent pastoral tone and the cultivation of an ecumenical spirit, there can be little doubt that the documents of the second Vatican Council follow in the tradition of Trent and the first Vatican Council.” Those stressing discontinuity of Vatican II with Trent and Vatican I, “have occasionally forgotten that the Council [Vatican II] retracted nothing in the dogmas of Trent and Vatican I.”
5. With respect to Scripture and tradition, the view of Trent continued in Vatican II: “‘Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence’ (DV 9). This, of course, is a verbatim quotation from the Council of Trent in whose footsteps the Fathers of Vatican II have declared their intention to follow (DV 1).”
6. In the latest Catholic Catechism, justification is not an entry-level phase of salvation; it “is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.” This is the same as Trent. Eberhard Jüngel’s book *Justification: The Heart of the Christian Faith* (1999) evaluates the Joint Declaration saying it “promised so much.” But added, “In my judgment at least,
there were no sound theological foundations laid here." In fact, there are "pronouncements which almost without exception move in the area and on the level of the Decree Concerning Justification which the Roman Catholic Church had adopted at the Council of Trent in 1547 on the basis of, and more particularly against, the Reformers’ doctrine of Justification."\[^{73}\]

Paul Schrotenboer, general secretary for the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, noted in 1987 that Vatican II makes no new contribution to the debate on justification by faith, and concludes, "Apart from a new Roman Catholic confession on justification by faith, Trent remains a major barrier between the heirs of the Reformation and Roman Catholicism."\[^{74}\]

Rome seems to be the same, so who is changing? David Wells noted, "The evangelical world, in fact, is now coming apart because its central truths [like justification by faith alone], what once held it all together, no longer have the binding power that they once had and, in some cases, are rejected outright with no following outcry."\[^{75}\] Bruce McCormack said, “Theological confusion” among Reformation churches over justification by faith is “hastening the demise of Protestantism in the West.”\[^{76}\]

D. A. Carson adds that “paid masses to release souls from purgatory are still notoriously common in many parts of the Catholic world. As for the fundamental doctrinal issues that divided Reformers and Catholics half a millennium ago, although the polemic today is more courteous, the current pope [John Paul II] and strong voices in the Curia such as Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger [who superintended the 1994 Catholic Catechism, and is now Pope Benedict XVI], are strictly Tridentine [representing Council of Trent]. Read the Current Catechism on, say, justification."\[^{77}\] So Trent is still influential, and true union between Evangelicals and Catholics can be achieved only through embracing the biblical gospel with its salvation through Scripture alone, by faith alone, through Christ alone. The word *alone* in these terms is crucial in the quest for true union.

7. The Pope commissioned the Council of Trent to come up with a different interpretation from the historicist view of prophecy, which the Reformers used to point to the Catholic church as antichrist. The Jesuits went to work, and eventually Luis De Alcasar suggested Preterism (past) and Francisco Ribera suggested Futurism (future), and both deflected attention away from the present, and hence away from the church. Futurism is widely accepted by Protestants, and so Trent still influences them to not discern the Catholic Church as antichrist.

8. Vatican II states that, "The Spirit guides the Church into the fullness of truth."\[^{78}\] Statements of the infallible Pope (speaking *ex cathedra*) are “irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.”\[^{79}\] This concept supports a basic continuity between Trent and subsequent doctrinal statements.

**Protestant Decline**

Lutheran pietists didn’t emphasize forensic justification (being declared righteous), because they were more interested in experience, concentrating on believers being made righteous. This reminds us of Orthodox theology with its desire to experience God mystically, which also has no
interest in justification by faith. Today, Protestants come to debate Roman theologians with a weakness that makes a difference, as noted by a number of scholars: “In our day, the doctrine of justification is widely ignored, rarely central, and not infrequently denied outright by Protestant—tragically, even evangelical—theologians and pastors. If the statistics cited above are in any way indicative of reality, 87 percent of American evangelicals are practicing medieval Roman Catholics in their view of how one relates to God. Today one can easily find theological professors at leading evangelical institutions who no longer find justification by faith alone to be true, much less necessary.”

“When we examine our own position today, it is astonishing to find how close we have come to the Roman view even in the Church of Scotland. How frequently, for example, we find that appeal is made to ‘Christian instinct’ or to ‘the mind of the Church’ over against the plain utterances of Holy Scripture, and often just at those places where the Word of God offends our will, opposes our habits, or cuts against the grain of our desire? And how massive is the effect of our several traditions upon the interpretations of the Bible? How easy it is to allow the Presbyterian tradition to determine our reading of the New Testament especially when it is a question of justifying our tradition before the critique of others! There can be no doubt that every one of the great Churches of the Reformation, the Lutheran, the Anglican, and the Reformed, has developed its own masterful tradition, and that that tradition today exercises massive influence not only over its way of interpreting the Bible and formulating its doctrine but over the whole shape and direction of its life. . . . It is high time we asked again whether the Word of God really does have free course amongst us and whether it is not after all bound and fettered by the traditions of men.”

“There exist real differences between Protestant and Roman Catholics over the matter of justification. . . . In recent years, there appears to be increasing sympathy for the view that these differences, although of importance in the Reformation period, no longer possess the significance that they once had. This is not to say that the Christian denominations are agreed on the matter of justification, for it is obvious that their respective teachings have a very different ‘feel’ or ‘atmosphere’ to them. It seems that in the modern period the Christian denominations have preferred to concentrate on their points of agreement, rather than draw attention to their historical disagreements.”

T. F. Torrance, of the University of Edinburgh, made a statement in 1965 that is still true: “Justification by Christ alone calls in question all systems and orders, and calls them in question because Jesus Christ alone is central and supreme in the one Church of God. In any true theological system, justification is by reference to Christ alone, for conformity to Christ as the Truth of God for us is the one ultimate principle of unity. Likewise justification in ecclesiastical order or polity ought to be through appeal to Christ alone. Our quarrel with the Church of Rome in doctrinal matters concerns the centrality of Jesus Christ, the primacy and supremacy of Christology which is so obscured and compromised by Roman doctrines of merit and tradition, and above all by Maryology.”

Protestant theologians have joined Catholic theologians in placing tradition above Scripture, and
this is the foundational reason for Protestantism’s decline. Both sides come to Scripture using critical tools, constrained by an external mission (to defeat secularism), but blind to their secular approach to sacred Scripture. The Bible fired the Reformation, exposing some Catholic doctrines as non-biblical. Today, that Protestant prophetic voice has been largely muted because of the de-construction of Scripture when Scripture alone can judge the authenticity of human theological conclusions. Today, a number of evangelical theologians question Scripture as revelation, relegating it to a mere witness to revelation.  

Conclusion

The New Perspectives on Paul (NPP), New Covenant Theology (NCT), and Federal Vision (FV) reject the doctrine of justification by faith alone (sola fide), the emphasis on which the church stands or falls (articula stantis et cadentis ecclesiae).

R. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said, “By this historic and crucial measure [Justification by faith, the article on which the church stands or falls] evangelicalism in its contemporary form is largely falling—and falling fast.” He concludes, “The drama of the gospel has not changed, but the audience for evangelical theology has changed—and not for the better. The emergence of these new systems of thought [New Perspectives on Paul and Federal Vision], neither of which is as new as its proponents suggest, indicates a dangerous and potentially fatal weakening of evangelical conviction and doctrinal discernment.”

Abraham Kuyper said in Scripture “justification occupies the most conspicuous place, and is presented as of greatest importance for the sinner.” It is “the very kernel of the Reformation, which puts this doctrine of ‘justification by faith’ oddly and clearly in opposition to the ‘meritorious works of Rome.’” He rightly urged “not to merge justification and sanctification.” The Reformed Church also rightly urged that there be no merging of justification and sanctification.

Protestants would do well to listen to Catholic apologist Robert Sungenis: “Between Catholics and Protestants lies a great divide concerning whether the Christian has imputed or infused righteousness. Indeed this difference is probably the most crucial in the ongoing debate, because it encompasses the most theological territory. In fact, the original motivation of the Reformation was to distance itself from the medieval concept of infused righteousness formulated largely by the theology of Augustine.”

Karl Barth adds: “[Trent] speaks of the good works of the regenerate man, who is only a little sinner and commits only tiny sins, and who is the happy position of being able to increase the grace of justification in cooperation with it, and even to augment the degree of his eternal bliss. The practical consequence of all this is that the misery of man is not regarded in any way as serious or dangerous either for Christians or non-Christians. The Reformation communions could not unite with a Catholic Church which held this doctrine, and they cannot accept the call to reunion with it today.”

“But with its doctrine of justification the Roman Church closed the door to self-reformation and
deprived itself of all possibility of seizing the initiative in uniting the divided Church. It was impossible for the Evangelical Churches to return to fellowship with Rome when the decisive point of dispute was handled in this way. They could not surrender truth to unity.⁸⁹

Barth’s statements need to guide the contemporary process, for arguably truth has been surrendered for unity, and that is too high a price to pay for the war against secularism, for only truth will overcome error. False theology is just as secular as any other secularism, but more insidious because it is in the church rather than outside.

Richard John Neuhaus stated the Catholic difference from Protestants: “For the Catholic, faith in Christ and faith in the Church are one act of faith.”⁹⁰ This is because Catholic theology identifies the church with Christ, for the church is alleged to be literally the “body of Christ” instead of metaphorically, as in Protestant theology. The debate over the doctrine of salvation between Evangelicals and Catholics has a deeper level in biblical ecclesiology. Christ as prophet, priest, and king cannot be confined within a church (as in Roman theology) because He is the head of the church. In fact, “the Church is only the Body of which He is the Head.”⁹¹

In other words, it is Christ who justifies, and not the church. In spite of all the work of ECT, there cannot be true union on justification unless the Catholic Church gives up its identity with Christ, because the church cannot be the extension of the incarnation. The church isn’t Christ, nor is Christ the church. The ascended Christ was addressed as God by the Father. He is exalted and seated at the Father’s right hand, and has all authority in heaven and earth. To be Christian, the church must remain submissive, humble, and under Christ’s authority—under the One who is truly infallible. Nor is it good enough to say bishops preside “in place of God over the flock”⁹² so that “the faithful must cling to their bishop,”⁹³ because the church is “the universal sacrament of salvation.”⁹⁴

This is not what Peter—the alleged first pope—said: “‘Salvation is found in no one else [besides Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved’” (Acts 4:12, NIV). Christians don’t need mediators to come to Jesus Christ, for He is the only mediator between God and humans: “There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5, NIV). He is the only authorized priest in the Christian era (Epistle to the Hebrews). “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16, NIV). The good news: Christ “is able to save completely those who come to God through him [not through a church, human priests, saints, or Mary], because he always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:25, NIV).⁹⁵

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**Norman R. Gulley, Ph.D., is Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.**

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76. Bruce L. McCormack, op cit., p. 83.
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85. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Afterword: A Change in the Audience, Not in the Drama," in *By Faith Alone: Answering the


89. Ibid., p. 626.


92. Vatican II, p. 40 (1.3.20).

93. Ibid., p. 52 (1.3.27).

94. Ibid., p. 79 (1.7.43).

95. This article is an adapted version of an article in the Journal of the Adventist Theological Society. More information will be provided in the final chapter of the author’s Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ. Salvation, volume 3 (to be published by Andrews University Press in 2012).
The Touch of Peace

Legends of the origin of the Christmas tree go back to Estonia and Germany. The Catholic St. Boniface and the Protestant Martin Luther are most often mentioned as originators of the Christmas tree tradition.

St. Boniface, a Christian missionary to the Frankish Empire in the eighth century, is said to have cut down the sacred tree of Thor in Geismar, in today’s Germany, replacing it with a fir tree, which some believe to be the first Christmas tree.

In another account, Martin Luther was on his way home late one evening when he noticed how beautifully the stars shone through the trees. To share this vision of beauty with his wife, he brought a small evergreen tree into the house. Placing small, lighted candles in its branches, he declared that the tree would make a fitting emblem for the Christmas season.

Holiday legends, whether they have any historical basis, often bring a richness of their own to the traditions that inform our lives. When it comes right down to it, does it truly matter whether these old stories actually happened? Do they not complement one another and deepen our appreciation for the spirit of the holiday season?

The Christmas tree, in fact, whatever its origin, is only one of many symbols and ceremonies that have sprung up in far-flung world cultures to celebrate Jesus’ birth. And every one of these provides a unique insight into the cosmically astonishing gift of God’s grace as it was revealed by the Incarnation.

In Christian churches in some areas of the Congo, for example, celebrants gather for a “March Around Offering.” After carols are sung, all form a procession around an altar on a raised platform, on which each lays a birthday gift for the Christ child. Those who cannot bestow money bring gifts from the work of their hands.

In some places in southern India, Christians place small clay lamps with cotton wicks along the edges of their low, flat-roofed houses. When non-Christians inquire about the significance of the twinkling lamps, it provides an opportunity to share the beautiful story of Jesus’ birth with neighbors and passersby.

Even in a country as hostile to Christianity as Iraq has been, Jesus’ birth has been celebrated in a profoundly simple way. At a quiet Christmas gathering, a church leader blesses one member with a touch. This member touches someone nearby, who, in turn, passes the blessing on to another, until all in attendance have received the “touch of peace” on Christmas Day.

Jesus said: “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

This is a promise that is surely needed now as much as it could ever have been in the past.
Earthquakes, hurricanes, cyclones, floods, forest fires, typhoons, tsunamis, drought—and these are frightening conditions we face that are only in the “acts of God” category. There is also poverty, starvation, pandemic, oppression, injustice, terrorism, violence, recession, and other uncertainties that the sinful condition of humanity has produced.

Furthermore, conditions are looking darker even over things imagined. George Gerbner, of the School of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, has coined the term “mean world syndrome.” From his research on television violence, he describes not so much a connection between violence on television and violence in real life, as a connection between violence on television—and fearfulness.

Author Barry Glassner sums up Gerbner’s findings in this way: “People who watch a lot of TV are more likely than others to believe their neighborhoods are unsafe, to assume that crime rates are rising, and to overestimate their own odds of becoming a victim.”

Interestingly, this sense of fearfulness comes at a time when several scholars are saying that humanity has never been safer. In a new book, The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined, Harvard Psychologist Steven Pinker makes the case that, statistically speaking, death and brutality are actually diminishing in the context of human history. “As we get smarter, we try to think up better ways of getting everyone to turn their swords into plowshares at the same time,” Pinker says. “Human life has become more precious than it used to be.”

Even the acts of non-state terrorist groups does not affect the statistics as much as one might think. “Terrorism doesn’t account for many deaths,” Pinker says. “September 11 was just off the scale. There was never a terrorist attack before or after that had as many deaths. What [terrorism] does is generate fear.”

Yet it should be recognized that, in a world of sin, fear in itself is—at its most elemental—a kind of gift. A proper measure of fear is a form of protection. “Our response to living in a dangerous world,” says Christian author Scott Bader-Saye, “ought not to be an attempt at fearlessness but an attempt to feel fear in the right way, at the right time, and to the right extent.”

In fact, Bader-Saye even suggests that a measure of proper fear may actually be a requisite for a more meaningful relationship with God. “I used to think,” he writes, “that the angels in the Bible began their messages with ‘Do not be afraid’ because their appearance was so frightening. But I have come to think differently. I suspect that they begin this way because the quieting of fear is required in order to hear and do what God asks of us.”

This “quieting of fear” is probably another way of saying “revere” or “show reverence for,” which are more accurate interpretations of the word “fear” in such scriptural references as “‘Fear God and give glory to Him’” (Rev. 14:7) or “Fear God and keep His commandments” (Eccl. 12:13) or “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10).

This “quieting of fear” also sounds as if it could be very similar to the “touch of peace” shared by Christians in Iraq during the Christmas holiday time. There are at least two kinds of peace that are most familiar to us. The one most commonly assumed is the formal cessation of hostilities
between or among warring parties. But there is also peace of a personal nature: the sense of
spiritual joy and well-being that comes from knowing Jesus as our Savior. In Jesus’ words: “‘These
things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation;
but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world’” (John 16:33).

Here again is the clear connection between peace and the expulsion of fear. Our wish should
always be—in whatever culture we find ourselves—to receive the touch of peace during the holiday
season and to be guided by the Holy Spirit to pass it on to the desperately fearful among us.

NOTES AND REFERENCES
1. All Scripture references are quoted from The New King James Version of the Bible.
4. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 59.
When students of Scripture adopt a theological idea contrary to mainstream understanding, they sometimes invest texts with novel interpretations. These often strain the simple meaning of the text to lay claims to biblical support for their unique beliefs.

Such is the case with some anti-Trinitarians. In their view, Jesus “proceeded out” of the Father’s essential being prior to any divine act of creation. Their position can be illustrated to some degree by observing that as a clone is preceded by the parent cell, so the Son is preceded temporally by the Father. The essential nature of the Son is thus derived from the Father. The process of the Son literally coming out of the Father into a separate, personal existence is equated with the idea of being “begotten.” In their parlance, then, Jesus was begotten, but not created or made. Thus, even back in eternity, Christ was quite literally God’s Son.

One text that is used to support these claims is John 8:42. It reads: “Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me’” (John 8:42, ESV, italics supplied). In English, the key phrase is “came from God.” In the Greek text, this phrase is comprised of the preposition ἐκ, used in conjunction with the genitive form of the noun for God and a verb for departing. This phrase is interpreted by some as Jesus’ statement that, back in eternity, He very literally came out of the Father’s being. Hence, they say, who can argue with Jesus’ teaching about Himself?

While it is true that this interpretation may be one possible way to understand the text, the Greek phrase can have more than one possible meaning. According to Greek grammars, though ἐκ has varying nuances, the core meaning is driven by the idea of separation from something. This word can connote either coming out from inside something (like exiting a city) but more often expresses separation, increasing the distance between one thing and another. How, then, to deduce which nuance John intended? The context of John 8 provides several reasons for rejecting the anti-Trinitarian interpretation of verse 42.

John 8 opens with the confrontation between Jesus and the Jewish leaders over the woman caught in adultery. The rest of the chapter continues, recording an ongoing debate that appears to have been launched by the incident with the adulteress. Jesus claims to be the light of the world (8:12), then challenges the Pharisees that they do not know where He came from or where He is going (vs.14). Jesus reiterates and expands this point: He was “sent” (ἀποστέλλω) by the Father (vs. 18), will go where the Jewish leaders cannot go (vss. 21, 22), and is from above while they are from the world below (vs. 23).

Being sent by the Father controls the understanding of what Christ is describing here. Apostello implies being sent on some kind of mission. With the context clearly indicating that Christ’s
statements focus on His earthly mission, this statement about coming "from God" (vs. 42) seems best understood as a further comment about that mission. Hence, it is not describing an event prior to Earth’s creation back somewhere in the annals of eternity, but is describing Christ’s incarnational entrance into this world. As such, then, though the Greek grammar may be capable of supporting the anti-Trinitarian assertion, the context makes it clear that the text is not discussing some kind of begetting of Christ in eternity. It is, rather, describing His incarnation into human existence and earthly life. This conclusion is bolstered by the fact that we find the same elements and focus in John 6.

In John 6:38, Jesus states that He came down from heaven (ἀπο). Three verses later, “the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven’” (vs. 41), and they repeat this phrasing again in verse 42. It is interesting that the Jews restate Christ’s use of the preposition ἀπο with the same grammatical construction found in John 8:42, namely ἐκ in conjunction with a genitive noun form, in this case “heaven.”

Jesus uses spatial language describing His spatial separation from heaven in order to come to earth. By rephrasing ἀπο with ἐκ, the Jewish leaders show that ἐκ is being used in the same way, namely geographical movement and distancing from something. Jesus clearly ties His separation from the Father to His coming to this earth. As in John 8, this passage makes no statement about some kind of emergence from the Father’s being prior to the creation of the universe. Additional comments of Jesus further bolster this point.

As we have seen, Jesus said He came out (ἐξερχομαι) from (ἐκ) God (8:42), while in John 16:27, 28, He twice says He came (ἐξερχομαι) from (παρα) God and from (παρα) the Father. Para fundamentally points to being spatially beside something or someone; ἐξερχομαι is to leave or depart a place. Thus, in John 16, Christ uses spatial language to describe His coming from the Father to earth in His incarnational form, but in so doing, He creates a parallelism to the ἐκ clause in John 8:42, much as the Jews did in John 6.

Christ’s parallel statement to that of the Jews provides yet another reason to conclude that John 8:42, which is clearly spatial in nature and that the act of departing from the Father is, again, pointing to His incarnation and mission on the earth. The fact that Jesus mentions coming from the Father to the world, while announcing an imminent departure from the earth to return to His Father (16:28) clinches the point. Jesus is not describing a primordial event back in eternity.

Further justification that “coming out from” the Father is referencing Christ’s coming to earth in incarnate form comes from Jesus’ vocabulary used in the promise that He was about to leave and return to (προς) God. Προς is likewise geographic language, signifying direction (toward) or proximity to (near) something. Hence Jesus says He came away from (παρα) God and is going back to (προς) God. The symmetry of Jesus’ statement is clearly based on a difference of spatial position between heaven—where God is—and earth, to which Christ came. Thus, Jesus’ use of positional language in John 16 strongly suggests that John 8:42 is to be understood the same way: as describing a spatial movement of Christ from His pre-incarnation position beside the Father in Heaven, to His
incarnational position with us on earth. The text says nothing about events in eternity past, and thus the anti-Trinitarian exposition of John 8:42 strains common-sense interpretation and the context.

Some anti-Trinitarians might object to this analysis by noting that there is one use of *exerchomai* that is clearly related to begetting: Hebrews 7:5. Hence, they might argue that *exerchomai* in John 8:42 should be also understood this way.

Such an assertion, however, cannot withstand scrutiny. This is because the text in question clearly uses *exerchomai* in a genealogical context, which is shown by its attachment to "loins": the Levites come out of the loins of Abraham. But John 6, 8, and 16 give no such evidence of a genealogical intent or use. Rather, multiple evidences point, not to a genealogical context, but to a spatial motif. Jesus relocates from heaven and God to earth and humankind, eventually to return to heaven and God. Thus, there is no evidence in John 8 or its context to support the idea that Jesus was begotten back in eternity. John’s record addresses only the earthly mission of Jesus and His coming from the Father to us in the incarnation.

It seems evident that the context of John 6, 8, and 16 is not agreeable to the anti-Trinitarian position. There seems to be great danger in ignoring the obvious to grasp at relatively minor points in the text to justify one’s view. This approach to the text diminishes biblical authority, leaving the impression that one can play games with the text to make it say what one wishes. At some point in that process, human interpreters supersede Scripture in authority. This should remind us of the importance of being careful to see what is in the text and let the text calibrate our perceptions and desires, instead of reading our desires and perceptions into the text.

**NOTES AND REFERENCES**

1. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this column are from the English Standard Version.
2. The actual Greek word in the text is a form of *exelthon*. *Exelthon*, however, is a second-aorist form of *exerchomai*. Second aorist forms change the spelling of the stem, often with no resemblance to the main verb stem. Hence, *exelthon* is a form of *exerchomai*. The prefix, *ex* (from *ek*) remains unchanged between forms.
Faith played a key role in the lives and preaching of each messenger of God. Since faith had such an important factor for these God-ordained individuals, it is vital for us to understand what faith is.

We could analyze faith from a human standpoint to develop a definition. In our attempt to discover its nature, we could explore the faith of a historian in forming a thesis, of a scientist in developing a hypotheses, or of a banker in granting a mortgage.

Historians analyze their sources, determining their probable reliability and the way that they relate with other pieces of data such as that provided by archaeology, dating, climatology, etc. After evaluating the data, they interpret them in terms of their own historical frame of reference and worldview. Based upon such interpretation, historians make a “faith” statement regarding the reality and significance of some event.

Scientists likewise collect data in the laboratory, analyze it, and then interpret it according to “known” facts. They then develop a hypothesis, a faith statement, on how new pieces of data will fit into the current scientific model.

Bankers do a careful analysis before they approve a loan, studying such factors as the applicant’s age, sex, health, payment history on prior loans, net worth, and income. They test each criterion by current banking experience. The banking official may conclude, based upon the combination of such factors, that there is a 99.8 percent chance that the applicant will repay the loan as agreed. Using such information, and relying upon their skills as an analyst, bankers have enough “faith” to be willing to grant the loan.

Each example grounds faith upon the evidence of the data collected and interpreted by the particular model of the historian, scientist, or banker. The interpretation then leads to a conclusion—a faith statement. Such a method of defining faith uses a humanistic, or human-centered, approach to knowledge. The humanistic approach to faith places confidence upon the foundation of human ingenuity, upon people’s ability to collect, analyze, and interpret the evidence.

The biblical concept of faith, however, is quite different. Faith is not a human creation. It is, rather, the gift of God that rests upon divine power instead of human achievement (Eph. 2:8; 1 Cor. 2:5). “Faith that enables us to receive God’s gifts is itself a gift.”¹ “No man can create faith. The Spirit operating upon and enlightening the human mind, creates faith in God. In the Scriptures faith is stated to be the gift of God, powerful unto salvation, enlightening the hearts of those who search for truth as for hidden treasure.”²

Faith is itself the ground, the assurance, the conviction of things not seen (Heb. 11:1). As the basis of knowledge, it is through faith that we understand (vs. 3). And as the key of knowledge,³ it
enables us to discern between truth and error. The humanistic approach states that we must find a foundation, the criterion for faith; whereas the biblical approach states that faith is the foundation, the criterion.

According to the Bible, faith does not come by our humanistic analysis of the data of the natural world, but by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). “Our assurance and evidence [for faith] is God’s word.” The attempt to found our faith in the Bible as the Word of God upon data interpreted through reason is to doubt that which God has already declared. It is similar to the temptation Satan offered Christ in the wilderness, namely, to doubt His Sonship after the Word of God had already affirmed it. “Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures.”

To base our faith in Scripture upon the description of a historian or a geologist indicates that we have not yet come to biblical faith. “In order to have true, abiding faith in Christ, we must know Him as He is represented in the word.” The Spirit and the Word work together.

“The Spirit operating upon and enlightening the human mind, creates faith in God.” Biblical faith comes through the Word under the work of the Spirit.

The faith that God gives us is powerful. Reinforcing and building upon itself, it is contagious, for we can share it with others.

The context of the faith chapter (Hebrews 11) also contains a warning: “Do not cast away your confidence” (Heb. 10:35, NKJV). Doubt is also powerful, building upon itself. And it is contagious, for it can be transmitted to others.

The contemporary humanistic way of thinking begins with doubt. People question everything in order to determine what is truth. That which survives the fire of cross-examination they accept as rock-solid knowledge, something on which to place one’s faith. Some apply the same method to the Bible, calling everything into question from a scientific, historical, psychological, philosophical, archaeological, or geological perspective to determine what is truth in the Bible. The very method itself begins with and builds upon doubt in the veracity of Scripture. Christ asked, “‘When the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?’” (Luke 18:8, NKJV).

Ellen White raises questions about humanistic methods that begin with a presupposition of doubt: “God has permitted a flood of light to be poured upon the world in both science and art; but when professedly scientific men treat upon these subjects from a merely human point of view, they will assuredly come to wrong conclusions. It may be innocent to speculate beyond what God's word has revealed, if our theories do not contradict facts found in the Scriptures; but those who leave the word of God, and seek to account for His created works upon scientific principles, are drifting without chart or compass upon an unknown ocean. The greatest minds, if not guided by the word of God in their research, become bewildered in their attempts to trace the relations of science and revelation. Because the Creator and His works are so far beyond their comprehension that they are unable to explain them by natural laws, they regard Bible history as unreliable. Those who doubt the reliability of the records of the Old and New Testaments, will be led to go a step further, and doubt the existence of God; and then, having lost their anchor, they are left to beat about upon the rocks of
It would be nice if we could go back and rewrite biblical history. It would begin like this: "By faith, when confronted by the serpent in the tree in the garden of Eden, Eve was victorious through her allegiance to the Word of God. She responded to Satan, ‘It is written, you shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.’" Instead, Eve responded with methodological doubt in the word of God. By also starting with doubt, the contemporary process of learning continues the same method Eve used in the garden.

A major difference exists between the belief of God’s messengers and that of those who rejected God’s leading. Eve, the antediluvians, and Israel at Kadesh-barnea wished to found their beliefs humanistically—upon the evidences of their senses, logic, philosophy, observation. They wanted a reasonable belief. Instead of founding their human study upon the God’s revealed intention for their best, they sought to test it by their human study. By contrast, Noah, Abraham, Caleb, Joshua, John, and Christ accepted God’s leading by faith—they had a belief based upon His expressed instruction and therefore accepted the God who revealed Himself instead of the idols of human making.

God is calling not only for conversion of the heart, but also conversion of the mind. He urges us to think biblically rather than humanistically. Just as Noah called the people of his time into his ark, so God is looking for us to be His messengers today to preach His Word, summoning others to prepare to meet Him at His second coming. Choose you this day whom you will serve.

REFERENCES
5. Ibid., p. 243.
8. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, op cit.