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Grace and Truth

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CCU Review

The CCU Review of Books, Culture, Media, and Life, a values-driven journal of peer-reviewed scholarly and creative work, is published semiannually by the Office of the Chancellor and the Communications and Creative Services department. While emphasizing articles of scholarly merit, the CCU Review is a collection of reviews and essays that are informed by and further enhance the values of Colorado Christian University as outlined in our Strategic Priorities and our Statement of Faith. We welcome suggestions on reviews and essays that are centered on ideas of interest that further the mission of CCU as a Christian, liberal arts university.

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Everyone Has a Creed, What's Yours?



Dear Friends,

In this issue of *The CCU Review*, three of our book reviews are about or related to creeds. Why? There is a special reason. We are anticipating an important anniversary. In 2025, the Christian church marks the 1,700th anniversary of the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea (325). This council gave us what would eventually be called the Nicene Creed, which Christians still receive as authoritative today.

This creed affirms the divine nature of God the Son and His relationship to God the Father. At Nicaea, a small town not far from modern-day Istanbul, an assembly representing the whole church came together to affirm Christian faith in the one triune God. Many of the bishops and deacons attending had been recently persecuted. But things had changed, and Christianity was no longer an outlaw religion. At Nicaea, they gathered at the invitation of the Roman emperor Constantine the Great.

Have you noticed that everyone has a creed? We all believe in something, however, few acknowledge this reality. For some of us, it's "I believe in Wall Street," or technology; or the home team, or the big 'I.' Ray Kroc, the legendary founder of McDonald's, was known for saying, "I believe in McDonald's, my family, and God, and in that order."

What do you believe? From the beginning, Christians were people who believed certain things. Christianity has seen value in brief, intelligible expressions of our faith, not to explain away mysteries, but to articulate eternal truth! Consequently, through the centuries, Christians have affirmed their faith with various creeds and confessions.

Sound strange? The church actually took its cue from the Scriptures. The Bible itself contains short creedal statements. Looking to the Old Testament, one immediately thinks of the Shema of Israel — "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut.6:4-5). The New Testament also contains creedal statements in texts, such as 1 Timothy 3:16 and Philippians 2:6-11. Even the simple Bible statement, "Jesus is Lord," is a creed. The early Christian fish symbol was also a creed. The Greek word for fish (ixthus) was a secret code for Christians in a persecuted age. Each letter of that word made up the confession, "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior."

Perhaps the two greatest creeds of the universal church still used today are the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The Apostles' Creed, while not written by the apostles themselves, came from apostolic teaching as found in an old Roman Creed. The Nicene Creed emerged from discussions associated with the councils of Nicaea in 325 A.D. and Constantinople in 381 A.D.

Early on, these creeds were used for training those who were to be baptized. They were also used to correct misguided thinking about God. Both creeds are thoroughly Trinitarian, saying something important about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It reminds people that God is in touch with His world and that Christ really did take on human flesh in time.

You might ask, "But do we still really need creeds today? Don't we have the Bible? Isn't that enough?" Well, in one sense, yes. The Bible is God's sufficient Word. But in another sense, no. Most people will have a hard time memorizing the entire Bible, whereas memorizing the short Apostles' Creed is far easier. And it provides modern Christians with a summary statement of Christian truth that will help them make sense of the Bible and discern the false gospels which abound in our time.

It's often been said that the easiest prey for a cult or a radical ideology is an ignorant Christian. Perhaps many of us have embraced secular creeds without even knowing it!

We would be well served by coming to grips with the great Christian creeds and affirming our faith with the early church.

So, my friend, Tolle Lege (Take up and read),

Donald W. Sweeting

Donald W. Sweeting, Ph.D.
Chancellor
Colorado Christian University

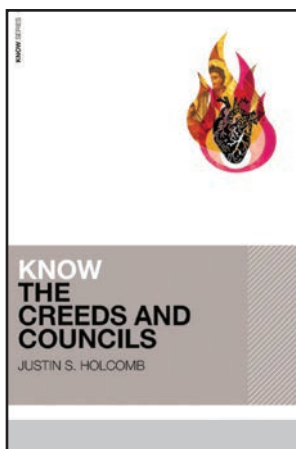


Know the Creeds and Councils

by Justin S. Holcomb

REVIEW BY REVEREND DONALD NWANKWO

Adjunct Professor of New Testament



The most vicious controversies of Christian history were fought on the battleground of doctrine — that is, what the church believes and teaches.

Know the Creeds and Councils presents a guided tour through major historical vehicles by which the church handed down her

articles of core belief. In 192 pages, Justin S. Holcomb takes us through the hallway of the Councils into the chambers of the Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms. Henceforth, I will refer to “the creeds, confessions, catechisms, and councils” as the 4Cs.

The book provides an overview of the historical development of major affirmations and declarations of the Christian church. These emerged over time and set the universal church on the trajectory of biblical faith and interpretive unity on the core doctrinal guideposts of Christianity, especially as it faced the threat of subtle but heretical alternatives. In my judgment, a major strength of the book is that it effectively communicates the subject matter without the encumbrances that often attend historical lessons and ancient church language.

Holcomb does not assume that his readers would already know what each of the 4Cs means. So, his introduction defines them, explains the differences between them, and clarifies how the church applied each.

Holcomb noted, "[This] is not an academic book or only for 'educated lay readers.'"

The scope of the book stretches back from the first known creed of the (then) universal church, the Apostles' Creed, to the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, a recent confession declared in 1978. Within this span, Holcomb explores select, significant sets of 4Cs that marked decisive moments in the church's creedal history.

Nevertheless, Holcomb clarifies that his book is meant as introductory material to the subject and offers some suggestions for more thorough treatments.

In a book of this nature, style is valuable. As a pastor of a local church, I have found that our communication of these complex matters of church history is often hampered by a stiff organization of the material often coupled with a burdensome delivery of the content. Here, each chapter picks up a council (or councils with a common location), creed, confession, or catechism, and explores it in an accessible format. First, it provides the historical background, helping the reader understand the contextual impetus for that specific C. Second, it interacts with the content, clarifying the subject matter. Third, it discusses its relevance, explaining why the C was important, then and now. It concludes with discussion questions that provoke deeper reflection, enhance group discussion, and that can even foster a healthy dose of self-examination.



FRESCO OF FIRST COUNCIL OF NICAEA
WALL OF GELATI MONASTERY
MARTVILI CANYON, GEORGIA

I would recommend *Know the Creeds and Councils* as a resource for discipleship classes in church contexts. It offers meaty content for such “non-academic” yet substantive teaching opportunities. It is also arranged in a teachable format. The discussion questions at the end lend well to small group settings. When used in an academic school context, I see it serving best as an introductory overview.

Holcomb noted, “[This] is not an academic book or only for ‘educated lay readers’” (22). I agree. It was written for everyone with an interest in the matters at hand.

REVIEWER BIO



REV. DONALD NWANKWO

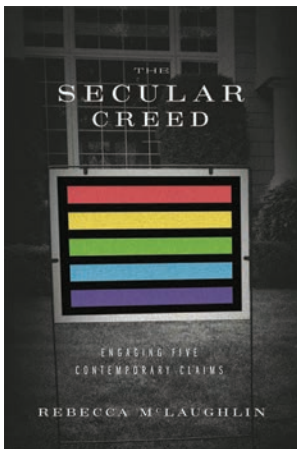
Donald Nwankwo (M.Div., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is an Anglican priest and pastor at a local church in Denver, Colorado. He also serves as an adjunct professor of New Testament at Colorado Christian University. He resides in Lakewood, Colorado with his wife and three children.

The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims

by Rebecca McLaughlin

REVIEW BY MS. JAIMIE ERKER

Director of Communications at the Centennial Institute



In this house, we believe...

Neighborhoods across America have been infiltrated with that now-iconic black yard sign with multi-color fonts, proclaiming various progressive truths. How are Christians to respond to this new “secular creed” our neighbors have adopted?

In *The Secular Creed: Engaging Five Contemporary Claims*, Rebecca McLaughlin provides a primer on how Christians should address five common progressive claims these yard signs promulgate: “Black Lives Matter,” “Love is Love,” “The Gay-Rights Movement is the New Civil Rights Movement,” “Women’s Rights are Human Rights,” and “Transgender Women are Women.”

Christians must understand that these issues are more complex than simple slogans. For instance, you would be hard-pressed to find a Christian who does not believe that minorities or women have inherent value. But how should a Christian respond to the corresponding liberal argument that Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor, so we must be accepting of all lifestyles – regardless of whether they are actively disregarding the moral law of Christ?

McLaughlin takes on the task of differentiating between Christian morality and progressive assertions with sweeping arguments centered on the Bible, not shying away from societal shortcomings. She breaks down each claim and explains how the church must approach each marginalized group with love for the individual without sacrificing biblical morality in the process.

McLaughlin’s chief criticism of these creedal statements is that they rest on a precarious foundation: If there is no biblical design for society, then everything is open to debate. No rights are guaranteed. Our understanding of the most fundamental truths is colored by stereotypes and personal interpretation – there is no such thing as objective Truth. And, without the Christian foundation, the secular creed will continue to falter on sinking sand.

Since McLaughlin is English, she falters in her understanding of race issues in America. While American society has traditionally been considered “Christian,” she uses this term to paint the picture that all American Christians – particularly white Christians – are to blame for our nation’s shortcomings. By not differentiating ideologies within the Northern and Southern churches nor citing the rise of the Christian-based abolitionist movement, her blanket condemnation gives way to white guilt rhetoric.

While there were severe failures within the Southern Christian community during the Antebellum and Civil Rights eras, it is inaccurate to portray all white Christians as guilty of these grave national sins.

Christianity embodies racial and gender equality, and many historical advancements in these areas can be attributed to Christian individuals throughout the globe.

One issue that McLaughlin introduces but does not answer is at what point does empathizing with another's experience go too far, enabling the acceptance of a victim mentality for the marginalized and the suppression of others who do not struggle with racism, unplanned pregnancy, same-sex attraction, or gender dysphoria.

The Secular Creed encourages Christians to decipher how we should speak into these progressive ideals. It is a discussion starter – not a definitive guide or complete answer to modern issues. Nonetheless, it is an important work that opens the door to addressing one of the greatest threats facing our society today.

REVIEWER BIO



MS. JAIMIE ERKER

Jaimie Erker is the director of communications at the Centennial Institute. She previously worked at The Heritage Foundation and interned in the White House and the U.S. House of Representatives. She is currently pursuing her Master of Arts in History and Government at the University of Nebraska – Omaha.



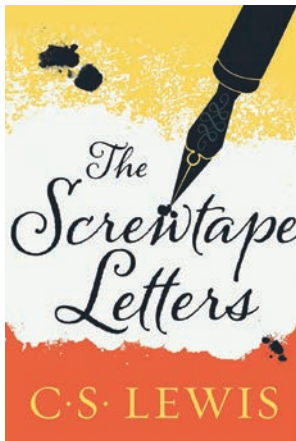
COLLAPSED WALL AT THE TOWER OF THE OLD VILLAGE CHURCH AT ECKA

The Screwtape Letters

by C.S. Lewis

REVIEW BY MISS ELISE BEISER ('25)

CCU Student



“The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn’t exist.” This line from the film *The Usual Suspects*, which Kevin Spacey ironically verbalized, is an unbelievably horrific truth. An even more unfortunate truth is that the Church seems to have fallen into this trap, claiming the devil does not exist or ignoring the

topic of the demonic altogether. Instead of acting out of ignorance or fear, C.S. Lewis does the opposite. In his book *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis uses a fictional conversation between two demons to explore biblical truth and human behavior, successfully using fiction to draw hesitant readers into theology while unorthodoxly presenting difficult concepts to keep the other, more experienced readers captivated.

From the preface, *The Screwtape Letters* is a noticeably odd work. The chapters are designated as letters. The characters have strange names. The protagonist is a demon. It is an off-putting idea coming from an established intellectual and apologist. Then again, it is only off-putting if one fails to understand his purpose. For some, theology is considered to be quite boring. Even Lewis’ *Mere Christianity* can be disregarded as a difficult slog to read. These accusations of impracticality can be applied to many theological texts,

but not to this book. *The Screwtape Letters* snatches the reader from that perspective using fiction, proposing the kind of government associated with the Kingdom of Darkness, their theories of the divine, and even their possible punishments for failure. The book even concludes with the shocking suggestion that Screwtape will eat Wormwood. Suddenly, the readers are so entranced by the storyline, they forget they are being fed theology. For instance, Screwtape explains, “Teach him to call it ‘real life’ and don’t let him ask what he means by ‘real.’” Within the story arc, it first seems to be a strategy session. After a few seconds of extra thought, the reader realizes Lewis is challenging their definition of what “real” actually means as opposed to what is often promoted by society. He has mashed up the medicine of theology, psychology, and philosophy and mixed it in with the dessert of supernatural fiction. It is this brilliant strategy that brings new Christians and hesitant readers in, demolishing their preconceptions of what “theology” actually is in the process.

In addition to the new readers, the theologically inclined will also find great value in this book, for its novel choice in protagonists flips their solidified perspectives on their heads. The best example of this is the ending of the book. (“Ending,” meaning the original ending of the text and not the added essay. On a side note, this later addition is enjoyable, but it is the only part of this work worth a genuine critique. The political tone and topics addressed, while intriguing, did not bring the story to a satisfying conclusion. The previous ending would have been preferable.) Throughout the piece, the

Student Spotlight

reader follows an unnamed man on his spiritual journey as he is being tempted by Wormwood, the narrator Screwtape's nephew. In some strange way, the reader gets attached to the man, when, in the last chapter, it is revealed he is killed by a bombing raid. It is shocking and heartbreaking, to say the least. However, instead of describing it as a tragedy, the demons take it as a defeat. The devil did not win; God did. A soul is now His that can never be taken away. Furthermore, the tormented is now free. Arguably, one of the most difficult questions for Christians to answer is why there is suffering and death in the world. Even the most experienced theologians struggle with it, because they, like everyone, must face it. Lewis, by taking on the perspective of the devil, forces the reader to have a new approach. Death does not have to be a loss. God, as the sovereign Lord that He is, can use even death as his instrument to bring about goodness in life. It is this dramatic shift in perspective that can provide even the most stubborn theologians with a new insight into how God's work is even greater than they could ever fathom.

The Screwtape Letters is a brilliant piece of literature, drawing novice and experienced Christians alike into a new mindset of what it means to walk with Christ. Lewis spins theology into something seemingly new. Although some may claim the devil is an oppressive tool of ignorance from the distant past, Lewis demonstrates his effect on the most modern Christians, using his own strategies of stealing, killing, and destroying against him, so we might face him ourselves, not with ignorance, but with truth.



MS. ELISE BEISER

Elise Beiser is a senior undergraduate at Colorado Christian University majoring in Biblical Studies with Languages. She is originally from the San Francisco Bay Area and moved to Colorado last fall to attend CCU. She is hoping to go into full-time ministry.

BOOK REVIEW

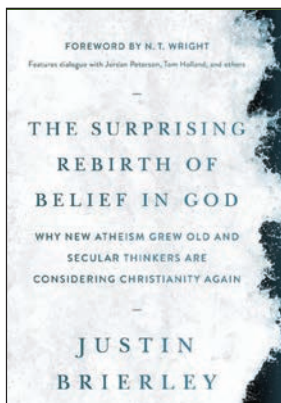
The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God:

Why New Atheism Grew Old and Secular Thinkers are Considering Christianity Again

by Justin Brierley

REVIEW BY DR. ANDREW "IKE" SHEPARDSON

Professor of Applied Apologetics



“There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.”

These were the words of the 2009 Atheist Bus Campaign in the UK, advertisements which sought to portray a more upbeat side of the atheist/agnostic/humanist movement.

Up to the present, many continue to accept, cheerfully or not, the

conventional wisdom of the secularization thesis which states that as societies continue to modernize, religion will recede more and more from public life.

In his fascinating new book, *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God: Why New Atheism Grew Old and Secular Thinkers are Considering Christianity Again*, journalist and Christian apologist Justin Brierley optimistically suggests that the situation may not be so dire. His key metaphor comes from Matthew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach,” which laments that “the Sea of Faith,” once full and powerful, is now in a “long, withdrawing roar.” Yet as Brierley documents, the “Sea of Faith is beginning to reach its farthest limit and that we may yet see the tide of faith come rushing back in again within our lifetime” (4).

Brierley examines the decline of the New Atheist movement and atheism’s inability to address the very public crises of meaning and mental health in the West today. He charts the spiritual evolution of key





thinkers who have yet to fully embrace Christianity, like Jordan Peterson, Tom Holland, Douglas Murray, and Louise Perry, but who all suggest in various ways that the Christian story uniquely provides the foundation for human flourishing. Because our modern notions of human dignity and equality come from Christianity's influence on the West, modern thinkers are considering the Christian faith afresh. Secular thinkers are also rediscovering the Bible's ancient wisdom and transformative message. One of the most fascinating stories is that of Cambridge University classicist James Orr, whose Christian conversion originated in his reading of the New Testament in Greek. Orr slowly realized that "these accounts were written to be understood as real historical records just as much as any of the histories and annals he was familiar with from Thucydides, Herodotus, and Plutarch" (114).

Brierley also documents the growing evidence from the sciences that confounds atheist explanations and points to a Creator, including how the first life arose, Big Bang Cosmology, the fine-tuning of the universe for the emergence of intelligent life, evidence for the soul, and the success of mathematics with its abstract concepts and laws which map perfectly onto the physical world.

At Colorado Christian University, we debunk atheism as a spent idea, and we should be encouraged by the weakening influence it has upon many secular thinkers. This book shows us not that

widespread revival is surely on the way but that God remains fast at work in the world around us, a world in which we are sent to be messengers of God. Readers will be encouraged by secularism's failures and emboldened to share Christ with a world that is opening up to the transformative love of Christ at the heart of the gospel.

REVIEWER BIO



DR. ANDREW "IKE" SHEPARDSON

Andrew Ike Shepardson (Ph.D., University of Toronto) leads the CCU programs in Applied Apologetics. He is author of Who's Afraid of the Unmoved Mover, coauthor (with Douglas Groothuis) of The Knowledge of God in the World and the Word, and coauthor (with Melissa Cain Travis) of the forthcoming Deconstructing Deconstruction.



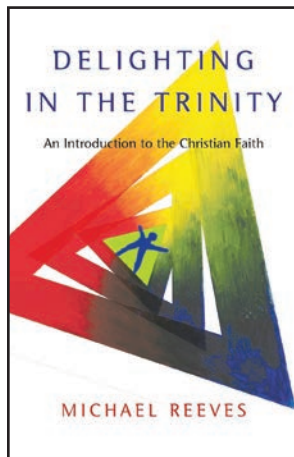
CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY,
SAN PEDRO DE ROCAS GALICIA, SPAIN

Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith

by Michael Reeves

REVIEW BY DR. JOHN WIND

Associate Professor of Theology



Who is God? In the Old Testament book of Job, Job is described by God Himself as “a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil” (Job 1:8). Yet who does Job know God to be? In *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith*, Michael Reeves sets forth the biblical portrait of God’s Triune

nature before creation, in creation, in salvation, and in the Christian life in order to stir the believer’s affections to delight more and more in the God who is Father, Son, and Spirit. Throughout the book, Job and his friends all speak rightly of God as the Creator and as the Sovereign Lord of His creation. Though Job regularly expresses his desire to meet personally with God, Job also believes that such a personal encounter with God is impossible, “for [God] is not a man, as I am, that I might answer Him, that we should come to trial together” (Job 9:32). Surprisingly, at the end of the book, God does come to Job personally, indicating that Job’s previous knowledge of God was incomplete. As Abraham discovered, God can be your “friend” (Isaiah 41:8). As Israel discovered, God can be your “father” (Isaiah 63:16).

In his book, *Delighting in the Trinity*, Michael Reeves works from the premise that one’s understanding of “who God is drives everything” (129). The Christian understanding has always been, “God is Triune” – that is, seven basic truths: 1) there is one God; 2)

the Father is God; 3) the Son is God; 4) the Spirit is God; 5) the Father is not the Son; 6) the Father is not the Spirit; and 7) the Son is not the Spirit. One God in three divine persons, blessed Trinity. Many join Reeves in recognizing that “the Trinity is a Scriptural truth,” necessarily arising from the biblical witness (13). Yet few recognize how crucial the Trinity is to all of Christian doctrine and life. Even fewer “delight” in the Trinity. Reeves’ goal is to move beyond the Trinity as merely biblical to the Trinity as fundamentally beautiful, delightful, and glorious.

Reeves is well-equipped to make this case, serving as the president and professor of theology at Union School of Theology in Bridgend, South Wales. Reeves builds his case in four phases: the Triune God *before creation*, the Father’s overflowing love *in creation*, the Son’s redemptive love *in salvation*, and the Spirit’s sanctifying love *in the Christian life*. This book was published in 2012, just before the Trinitarian controversies that surfaced in the English-speaking, evangelical theological world in 2016. For better or for worse, this allows Reeves to maintain his focus on his positive case for the delightfulness of the Trinity and to sidestep the controversy that was bubbling.

Is the essence of who God is His role as Creator or as Sovereign Lord of His creation? Reeves says “No,” for then God would be dependent upon creation to be who He is – no creation, no identity as “Creator” or as “Sovereign Lord” of creation (19). God’s essential nature must be who He is before creation. In John 17:24, Jesus prays, “Father, ... you loved me *before* the foundation of the world.” God was Father and Son (and Spirit) *before creation*. God eternally exists in a Triune relationship of love. Reeves declares, “God is love because God is a Trinity” (9).

If one is drawn to God’s love, one ought to be drawn to God’s Triune nature, for only a Triune God can be fundamentally loving, relational, and personal. By contrast, other monotheistic yet non-Trinitarian gods, such as the god of Islam, the god of the Greek philosophers, or the god of Deism, cannot be known in a personal, loving relationship. As Reeves states, “How can a solitary God be eternally and essentially loving when love involves loving another?” (40). Love is fundamentally giving, outgoing, and other-focused – which reflects God’s own Triune nature, that which is “essentially outgoing” (43). Jesus taught, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Why? Because the Triune God who eternally lacks nothing is nevertheless an eternal giver. When we give, we more fully reflect God’s own nature. Love is fundamentally giving to another. But only a Triune God fits the statement “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

Why, then, creation? Creation serves as a free and gushing overflow of intra-Trinitarian love, of God’s own nature. As Reeves describes it, “Creation is about the extension of that love outward so that it might be enjoyed by others” (43). What about humanity? We are God’s unique image bearers, reflecting His glorious nature outward as a mirror, “created to delight in harmonious relationship, to love God, to love each other” (65). Why, then, human rebellion? Because, though created as lovers of God and as givers, we turned our supreme affections away from our Heavenly Father to our Father’s gifts, His creation. We became self-serving takers instead of God-like givers. As Reeves observes, “Lovers we remain, but twisted, our love misdirected and perverted” (65). Our salvation? The Father gives the Son. The Son gives His own perfect life in our place. The Father and the resurrected Son give the Spirit. The Spirit gives us new life – abundant and eternal.

Reeves aims to stir up our delight in the Triune God that is at the center of our Christian faith. While God’s Triune nature is undoubtedly beyond full human comprehension, it is not merely an intellectual curiosity or an optional add-on to Christianity. It is instead “the vital oxygen of Christian life and joy” (18). Long before the coming of Christ, Job longed to know God in a loving, personal relationship. In Christ, God came to us, revealing His Triune nature, transforming our natures, and inviting us into His own eternal



relationship of overflowing love. Reeves is right. *That is delightful!*

REVIEWER BIO



DR. JOHN WIND

John Wind (Ph.D., Southern Seminary), associate professor of theology, is in his 10th year teaching at CCU. He is the author of Do Good to All People as You Have the Opportunity: A Biblical Theology of the Good Deeds Mission of the New Covenant Community (2019).

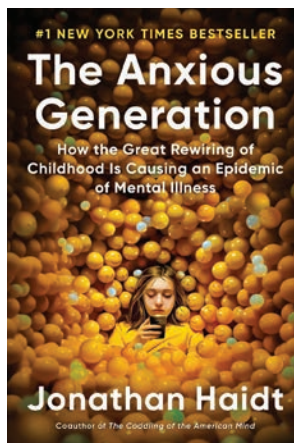
The Anxious Generation

How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness

by Jonathan Haidt

REVIEW BY MR. PAUL FAUST

Campus Pastor and Dean of Spiritual Formation



Several years ago, a local Christian high school barred students from having their phones visible during the school day. Like most schools, they had a longstanding policy that students could not use phones in class, but such rules are notoriously difficult to enforce. To remedy this, the principal made the unpopular decision to bar phones from visibility at all times during the school day. Unsurprisingly, the initial outcry was loud and persistent from both students and parents. Students feared disconnection from the outside world, thinking their school would suddenly feel more like a prison. Parents understandably feared for their children's safety and their ability to communicate with them should the unthinkable event of an active shooter occur. And, more benignly, parents were annoyed that it would now be more difficult to get news to or from their children should pick-up time change or practice get cancelled. The principal, despite the pushback, stuck by his conviction that his job was to do what was best for students, and over the subsequent weeks, something unexpected began to happen. One by one, notes started coming in from students, secretly and sometimes anonymously, thanking him. They said they felt like themselves again, and they realized quickly that their mental and relational health had improved, as

if a fog of distraction and anxiety had lifted. Jonathan Haidt's recent book, *The Anxious Generation*, outlines the research behind what he calls "the great rewiring of childhood," in which a play-based childhood has been replaced by a phone-based childhood. The statistics Haidt presents are staggering. One data set he presents shows an increase in major depression of 145% in girls and 161% in boys since 2010.¹ This increase, Haidt points out, was exacerbated by the COVID pandemic but began long before it. Haidt goes on to show similar increases in mental illness, anxiety, self-harm, mental health hospitalization, psychological distress, and alienation in school among teens all throughout what he calls "the Anglosphere" – what we traditionally think of as the developed world. Despite drastic differences in language, culture, and socio-economic status, the countries studied all have one thing in common – they are places where smartphones became available and were broadly given to teens at roughly the same time. In all of the countries studied, the decline in teen mental health happened shortly after the arrival of smartphones and social media.¹

Two key ideas carry Haidt's argument. First, he points out that, since the 1990s, parenting culture in the Western world has progressively elevated safety as a centerpiece of what it means to be a parent. In fact, British sociologist Frank Furedi points out that parenting has come to be defined as "the continual supervision of children," highlighting that this perspective "is a peculiarly Anglo-American one."² The upshot of this set of values, according to Haidt, is that

“My central claim in this book is that these two trends – overprotection in the real world and underprotection in the virtual world – are the major reasons why children born after 1995 became the anxious generation.” Jonathan Haidt

children are now dramatically overprotected in the real world. Their playgrounds, their friendships, and their games are all closely supervised by adults who intervene at the slightest mishap or transgression of the rules of play, often serving as mediators for even the slightest misunderstandings between playmates. My own experience as a young father confirms Haidt’s observations about parenting culture. One surprising early discovery I made was that, when I took my kids to the playground, I never saw kids playing with other kids. Even if there were 15 children present, each child was playing with his or her own parent, and rarely, if ever, interacting with another child. In such an environment, the harshest judgment a parent can experience comes when they simply sit back and allow their child to play rather than jumping in and engaging. Haidt gives example after example of the kinds of rules that have resulted from this fear-based parenting structure, including a school with a rule that “football can only be played if an adult is supervising and refereeing the game.”³ And in 2015, a Pew Research report showed that the average parent believes “children should be at least 10 years old to play unsupervised in their own front yard.”⁴ Unfortunately, this overprotection goes directly against the natural flow of childhood and the fact that children are naturally and by God’s design (in my view) “antifragile,” a term used to describe organisms that actually benefit from challenge and stress.⁵

Simultaneously, Haidt says, we have dramatically under-protected our children in the online world.

Though social media platforms technically require children to be 13 or older to create an account, the only actual roadblock to a child of any age creating and using an account is their willingness to check a box that says they are over 13. In practice, this is no roadblock at all, which is why social media accounts owned by children as young as 8 or 9 are commonplace.

Haidt sums up his book by saying, “My central claim in this book is that these two trends – overprotection in the real world and underprotection in the virtual world – are the major reasons why children born after 1995 became the anxious generation.”⁶

Haidt, a self-proclaimed Jewish atheist, attributes this antifragility to evolutionary development. Haidt’s atheism makes his discussion of the importance of spirituality all the more fascinating.⁶

Haidt’s second big idea is the destructive impact of smartphones, and particularly of social media, on teens. The claim is nothing new, but Haidt drives it home by pointing out that the sales structure of social media and most smartphone apps makes it nearly impossible for companies to consider the health of the people who use their products. Simply put, app companies make money by keeping people’s attention — not by selling their apps — and the longer the app holds attention, the more advertising dollars the company makes. The end result is an entire economic category in which the product being sold is the attention of the user, not the product

itself. This fundamental change produces a set of circumstances in which preying on the developmental vulnerabilities of children becomes extremely profitable, and working for children’s good is costly.

Mercifully, Haidt’s book is not all doom and gloom, and in part four, he gives a host of remedies for governments and tech companies, schools, and parents that can turn the current trends around. Despite the “collective action” challenges inherent in turning around a phone-based culture that has now been building for over a decade, Haidt’s suggestions can be applied at both the individual and collective level, and his book’s place atop the New York Times Bestsellers list suggests a great thirst for its content. Groups applying his and similar principles of sane restrictions on smartphone use among children have popped up all over, and even governmental action regarding responsible restrictions have begun to take place. Smartphones are not going away, but it seems we have begun to learn their proper usage, at least in some corners of society.

Much damage has been done, but we now know decisively the cost of smartphone addiction, obsession, and distraction. Our work now is to undo the work that was too foolishly and too quickly taken on. Thankfully, as Haidt has pointed out, we humans are still antifragile.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin Press, 2024), 24.
- 2 Quoted in Haidt, *Anxious Generation*, 87.
- 3 Haidt, *Anxious Generation*, 90.
- 4 Haidt, *Anxious Generation*, 91.
- 5 Haidt, *Anxious Generation*, 72-73.
- 6 Haidt, *Anxious Generation*, 9.

REVIEWER BIO



PAUL FAUST

After serving for nearly a decade in the local church, Paul Faust joined the CCU community in 2021 as assistant campus pastor dean and now serves as campus pastor. He and his wife, Jenn, have been married 18 years and have four children: Bodie, Easley, Emery, and Breck.



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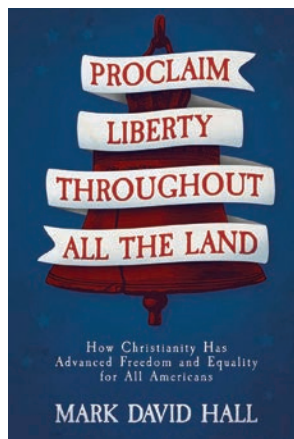
Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land:

How Christianity has advanced freedom and equality for all Americans

by Mark David Hall

REVIEW BY DR. KOTY ARNOLD

Assistant Professor of Politics



Many Americans today believe that Christianity and liberty are at odds. This is no less true of the “New Atheists” on the Left as it is of the traditionalist Christians on the New Right, who have increasingly begun to criticize America’s undue focus on individual freedom for hollowing out religion and community. A new book by the political

scientist Mark David Hall challenges this perspective by attempting to demonstrate that Christianity and freedom have, in fact, had a complementary, and not an adversarial, relationship throughout American history. *Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land* stresses that the Christian heritage of the American people has had a positive impact on democratic values, individual freedom, and social equality. Hall is careful enough as an author, however, to avoid making the claim that Christians are the only people who have advanced liberty in America, or that they have never taken stances opposed to the liberal currents of various times. Both claims would detract from the credibility of the book since it is obvious that they could not reasonably be supported. In the end, Hall’s book offers

a thoughtful defense of the role played by Christianity in elevating the nation’s life and character, though it is not without some important flaws.

Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land is organized into seven primary chapters, with the first five dealing broadly with American religious history and the last two discussing religious toleration today and the threats it faces, especially from the progressive Left. Hall’s first chapter details the Puritan settlements of the colonial era, stressing that the Puritans were not the tyrannical theocrats of the modern imagination, but instead contributed to the onset of democracy and the rule of law. Though Hall acknowledges they were no liberals, and that they believed — like most of their contemporaries — that the government had a role to play in promoting religion, he suggests that their virtues have been neglected and their vices magnified. Hall then moves to detail the role played by Protestant political thought in preparing America for the Revolution. He rejects readings of American history that contend that the Revolutionaries were animated by anti-Christian Enlightenment philosophy, and instead emphasizes that a long tradition of Protestant political thought — going back to John Calvin, John Knox, and Theodore Beza — prepared the American colonists to resist tyranny and to embrace government by popular consent. Hall has long been a leading scholarly voice for the claim that Protestant resistance theory made a major impact on the American



Revolution, and his expertise on the subject shines brightly throughout this chapter.

Somewhat less successful, unfortunately, are his next two chapters discussing “evangelical” political activism during the lead-up to the Civil War. Hall’s basic claim, it should be emphasized, is not incorrect. He contends that many Christians were profoundly motivated by their faith to improve the quality of life for Native Americans, African-Americans, and women. This is more than defensible and could be well-supported. Unfortunately, Hall’s use of supporting evidence is flawed and misleading. He relies on figures such as Lucretia Mott, Charles Finney, and Frederick Douglass to make the case for the evangelical presence in the anti-slavery and reformist movements of the mid-19th century. And yet, not one of these figures was even an evangelical Christian, at least not if we accept that evangelicalism entails a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible, justification by faith alone, and a commitment to the divinity of Jesus Christ. Lucretia Mott, known in her time as a “brazen infidel,” drifted away from her liberal Quaker heritage and not only affiliated with but preached sermons in Unitarian congregations. Charles Finney, a major revivalist of the time, rejected such elementary Christian teachings as original sin, justification by faith alone, and the atonement of Christ, leading many of his critics to refer to him as a heretic and a Pelagian. And even Frederick Douglass, who is often revered in the

American memory for his anti-slavery leadership, was far more hostile to traditional Christianity than many have recognized. In an 1883 speech, Douglass proclaimed that “It is men, not God or the prayers of men, that brought about change in the world,” and he argued that, with neither “angels to help him nor devils to hinder him,” man is left to be “his own Savior or his own destroyer.” Influenced later in life by the materialist philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach — a bust of whom adorns the historic Douglass home to this day — there is evidence that Douglass even turned to atheism. A knowledgeable student of American religious history could critically analyze Hall’s book and pose a question to him: Were these men and women truly moved by their faith in the Bible to become social reformers? Or was it instead their liberalism in politics that led them to distort and even abandon traditional Christianity? Perhaps this section could have been improved if Hall had focused not on liberal activists whose Christianity was doubtful but instead on the anti-slavery beliefs of more orthodox believers, such as Elijah Lovejoy.

The next four chapters speak to the theme of the separation of church and state. Chapter five argues that the origins of the idea are not in the Constitution or the Bill of Rights but instead are located in the anti-Roman Catholic nativist movements of the late 19th century. Many nativist Protestants proposed a strict separation between church and state to marginalize

Roman Catholicism and prevent its beliefs from being propagated in private schools that were given some government funding or support. Hall's portrait of Protestantism in this era is, by his own admission, much less flattering in this chapter than it is in the earlier chapters since it speaks not to the intrinsic liberalism of Protestantism but instead to its occasional sympathy for nativism and bigotry. The chapter is very helpful in documenting that the historical practice of the separation of church and state has historical origins in nativism that should make many modern humanists uncomfortable. That said, Hall does ignore that the separation of church and state was ultimately not invented by 19th century nativists, but instead has roots in the ideals of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Neither perfectly applied their separationism in practice, and yet the secularist implications of their teachings were not lost on many of their sternest critics during the Founding Era. Hall could have improved his argument somewhat by discussing the Protestant debates about religion and the separation of church and state during the 1800s.

Hall's final chapters discussing religious liberty, the threats it faces today, and the reasons for Christians to continue to defend the principle are some of the most interesting in the book. He shifts his focus away from history and more to constitutional law in these chapters, describing the oscillating position of the Supreme Court on religious freedom throughout the 20th century, as well as the disturbing attempts by the Barack Obama and Joe Biden administrations to crack down on religious exemptions for believers. As Hall rightly notes, there is a long and bipartisan tradition of support for religious liberty in America, but this support seems to be fading. As the progressive Left's position on social issues such as abortion and homosexuality has radically hardened, they have become far less interested in religious liberty than were even Democratic icons such as Bill Clinton and John F. Kennedy. Hall even quotes several scholars and pundits who openly discuss eliminating religious toleration for Christians. Not only Christians but even other non-Christian faiths, such as Islam and Judaism, have been targeted by secular activists, showing that this issue of religious freedom is one which should unify and motivate Americans of all faith traditions.

Hall's *Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land* is an accessible, readable, and interesting account of the relationship between Christianity and political liberty

Douglass proclaimed that "It is men, not God or the prayers of men, that brought about change in the world."

throughout American history. At times, the history is overly simplified, and there were several places where better evidence could have strengthened his argument. He never says that every evangelical Christian was on the "liberal" side on issues such as slavery and women's rights. And yet, his book does point a little too much in that direction, due to its somewhat selective historical evidence and its lack of engagement with the more conservative Protestants of the antebellum and Revolutionary periods. That said, *Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land* is a powerful reminder to the American people about the value of religious liberty and the importance of Christian political engagement. The liberties we take for granted as believers, and that have — throughout history — allowed many people of faith to make a positive influence on the nation's politics, could very easily be lost to us if we are not vigilant and valiant in our defense of constitutional government. In offering this reminder to his readers, Hall's book will hopefully spur Christians to organize themselves politically in defense of their God and their country.

REVIEWER BIO



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