

The Bible, New Life, and the Christian Historian

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Abstract

The Christian historian operates in the larger historical profession. This thesis begins to consider the influences of the Bible and new life on the Christian historian. It first looks at the historical profession, interpretations of history, and categories of Christian history. Such should promote a greater understanding of the position of the Christian historian. Then come explanations of a biblical worldview and new life aspects, both potential influences on Christian historians. Since the extent of their influence is potentially broad, this thesis narrows to looking at 1) the biblical metanarrative and 2) evangelism as part of new life. It considers how this metanarrative can inform value judgments in content. Second, and relatedly, this thesis proposes making certain value judgments in content for evangelistic purposes.

The Bible, New Life, and the Christian Historian

Historians possess a common task: “reconstructing and interpreting the past.”¹ Their profession includes using evidence and historical context.² It also involves standards such as “objectivity and honesty.”³ Though historians may have such similarities, throughout time their interpretations have differed. Among these interpretations, multiple schools of history can be identified. One is the Judeo-Christian school. Christian historians, who share similar big picture beliefs about history, have multiple, even differing, ideas about their profession, writing about moral judgments, their role in the Church, and God’s hand in history, among other things.⁴

In light of the debate among Christian historians, this thesis considers two influences common to them all.⁵ First, the Christian belief that the Bible is God’s word (and is thus truthful and authoritative) makes the Bible an important influence to consider when it comes to their work in history. Secondly, they would attest, Christians possess a life different than before conversion. They “have a new identity” with a “new purpose,” as one pastor put it.⁶ Christians, at least to some extent, believe God teaches them what their identity and purpose is in the Bible. So

1. Nathan A. Finn, *History: A Student’s Guide* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 26.

2. See John Fea, *Why Study History?: Reflecting on the Importance of the Past* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2013), 3, 7, 9.

3. See Liberty University History Department, “Biblical Worldview Principles,” <https://www.liberty.edu/arts-sciences/history/biblical-worldview-principles/>.

4. For an example of being a historian in the Church, see Robert Tracy McKenzie, “Don’t Forget the Church: Reflections on the Forgotten Dimension of Our Dual Calling,” in John Fea, Jay Green, and Eric Miller, eds. *Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian’s Vocation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 280-298.

5. For the purpose of this thesis, *Christian historians* are considered those whose Lord and Savior is Jesus Christ and who professionally present history.

6. Alan Kropp, “God’s People: Making the Gospel Available to All Peoples.” Sermon. North-Mar Church of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, August 13, 2017.

new life can be considered another influence in the life of a Christian historian. If the Bible is God's word, true, and authoritative, and if Christian historians do have a new identity and purpose, then in what way should these things affect their work?⁷

These questions, and “explorations” into them, are not new.⁸ For example, there are identity and purpose queries in *Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian's Vocation*.⁹ The goal of this thesis is, in some way, to consider historical work in light of the Bible and new life as influences. This thesis will give additional explanation of the profession and interpretations of history. Then, some biblical teaching relevant to both history and the historian follow, along with categories of Christian historical work. Finally, the breadth of the topic of influence demands a more nuanced approach. Therefore, the influence of the Bible is largely narrowed to the biblical metanarrative. The influence of new life is explored in evangelism. In light of the biblical metanarrative, then, this thesis will consider some potential value judgments in content choices – value judgments that may also have evangelistic purpose.¹⁰ Both making value judgments in content and having an evangelistic purpose come with dangers. But they also carry opportunity.

7. This question is similar to and likely largely derivative of those asked by the editors of *Confessing History* (xi).

8. *Explorations*: see *Confessing History*.

9. Miller specifically names identity as a category of essays in the book. Miller, “A Tradition Renewed?: The Challenge of a Generation” in *Confessing History*, 10.

10. C.f. Steven J. Keillor, *God's Judgments: Interpreting History and the Christian Faith*, Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007. In some sense, Keillor does a similar thing: “[T]his book focuses on God's judgments on the nations in history...” (13); “This book argues that Christianity is an interpretation of history (...an old fashioned metanarrative interpretation) far more than...” (15); and “[The] evangelical professional knowledge class...too, must be encouraged to press on to the risky end of Paul's sermon [in Acts 17]...for the gospel's sake” (15, c.f. 14, 18). However, my argument, though I may draw from Keillor, will be significantly different than his.

The Historical Profession

The historian researches, interprets, and presents the past.¹¹ Several understandings will help clarify their work. “For the historian,” writes Nathan Finn, “history is not the same thing as the past, but rather, history is the discipline of reconstructing and interpreting the past.” Another writes about how historical work involves a “selection of facts” from the past.¹² Secondly, historians use methods and standards in their work.¹³ Honesty, for example, is an important standard for historians.¹⁴ Stealing others’ ideas or falsifying the past is not befitting to any historian.¹⁵ A vital method is consideration of context, both for textual words and for events: John Fea writes, “Historians...analyze words in a given historical text as part of the message of the entire text,” and “any event...should be understood in light of the circumstances, settings, or belief systems in which it occurred.”¹⁶ So with professional methods and standards, and with a particular task, historians engage with the past to write history.

Broad Historical Interpretations

Historians have interpreted the past in different ways. These interpretations can be grouped into schools. Finn identifies several lists of “major schools,” and adopts one that includes five.¹⁷ He then describes and analyzes these cyclical, progressive, historicist, Marxist,

11. C.f. Fea, 3.

12. Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 9-10, 35.

13. C.f. Finn, 30. In this section, Finn writes specifically about context, which is presently discussed here.

14. See Liberty University History Department.

15. *Stealing*: see Finn, 59; *falsifying*: see Fea, 3.

16. Fea, 7-9.

17. Finn, 44. The historian he credits is David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Nottingham, UK: Intervarsity, 1979. Reprinted, Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College

and Judeo-Christian categories.¹⁸ Importantly, Finn notes that there are “variations within [all of] them.”¹⁹ What follows is largely a summary of Finn, to show each school’s basic conception of history and to give some indication as to when it was operational. Also noted for most is a general constant in the school.

The cyclical interpretation views history as repeating itself in cycles. Finn writes that this kind of historical interpretation typified the method of ancient civilizations like Greece and Rome, and it is still a view of history among “Many Eastern cultures.”²⁰ Like its name, its core or constant is cycles of repetition.²¹

Unlike the view of cyclical history, the progressive school holds there is, overall, a “primitive to...progressive” direction to history, with man being the primary cause for the advancement.²² This kind of historical view had an Enlightenment birth and “was...chastened by the atrocities of World War I.”²³ Increasing advancement is this school’s general constant.

Publishing, 1990). Finn keeps some of the school names Bebbington uses (“cyclical history,” “historicism,” “Marxist history”), but modifies others (“Christian history” to “Judeo-Christian history;” “the idea of progress” to “history as progress”). He also uses a slightly different ordering.

18. This list and the following summary keep Finn’s order of schools. In this section of his book, Finn also analyzes each school, noting “elements...[that] are...incompatible with a Christian worldview” (50) and most often noting elements that are good according to a biblical view.

19. Finn, 44.

20. Finn, 45.

21. See Finn, 45.

22. Finn, 46-47.

23. Finn, 46-47

In historicism, interpretation turns on the culture of the subject under study.²⁴

“Historicism,” Finn writes, “avoids any universal interpretations; all history is contextual.”²⁵

There is no universal standard of progress, for example. The constant feature here is that, again, interpretation aligns with the appropriate culture.

The Marxist interpretation began in the 19th Century. Human society is divided into classes by “different modes of production.”²⁶ In a broad historical view, there are social “stages,”²⁷ and lesser class versus “dominant class” conflict plays an integral role in transitions from one to the next.²⁸ Communism, the final stage, would be the exception, succeeding the previous “socialist stage” without class conflict.²⁹

The Judeo-Christian view sees history in light of the Bible: as “both linear and teleological.”³⁰ God created history, reveals (some of) and carries out his will in it, and “will bring it to the conclusion that he has planned”³¹ and foretold. In a way, this view of history began

24. Finn, 48.

25. Finn, 48-49.

26. See Bebbington, 123. This thesis does not cover Marxism fully.

27. Bebbington, 123; c.f. Martin, 166.

28. Martin, 166, 168. In sparking class conflict, there seems, in Bebbington’s description (123), to be another important factor that concerns production.

29. Martin, 166, 168. Socialist stage is Martin’s phraseology. Martin indicates that Marx saw communism as a kind of utopia: “...the utopian society which Marx called communism” (166), and he describes communism in that manner later on (168).

30. Finn, 54.

31. *Created*: see Rousas John Rushdooney, *The Biblical Philosophy of History* (Vallecito: Ross House Books, 2000 [reprint]), 4; also see Finn, 54. *Revealing of will*: see W. Den Boer, “Graeco-Roman Historiography in Its Relation to Biblical and Modern Thinking,” *History and Theory* (7, no. 1, 1968), 72-73. Here, Boer, directly or indirectly, writes that the “Biblical view” includes that “the will of God...reveals itself in history.” *God’s revelation as partial*; see Finn 69 and especially Green, 143-44. *Carries out his will*: see Rushdooney, 7 and Boer, 73. *Will bring...planned*: David Bebbington, in relating a list of what have “normally” been Christian “convictions about

with the Hebrews before Christ.³² The Bible shows, however, that Jesus, the central figure, gave a clearer understanding of the plan of God in history.³³ That God has fulfilled, is fulfilling, and will fulfil his word is a constant according to this view.³⁴

Christian Historians: Some Common Beliefs and Identity

Christian historians hold this last interpretation. They share other beliefs that derive from the Bible. The Bible teaches that there is a sovereign, righteous, redeeming God who seeks his glory. It shows the centrality of Christ; man's inherent value, sinfulness, and need for redemption; and the availability of redemption through faith in Christ. The Bible also teaches the existence of general revelation through creation and the linear nature of history: beginning with God creating, and ending with God judging and completing his redemption of creation.³⁵ These affirmed truths summarize a biblical worldview: an understanding of reality based on the Bible.

This Worldview Is Relevant to Historical Work

These beliefs are all relevant to Christian historians. For all the events they record took place within these realities. Fea writes, "The best historians tell stories about the past – stories that have a beginning, a middle and an end."³⁶ God, through his word, has revealed his

history," in *Patterns in History: A Christian View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 43; Finn (53) quotes this section of Bebbington's work, using the reprint noted above. *End*: also see Finn, 54. *Create, reveal, carry out will, end*: see also Martin, 40, where he writes about God as "Creator...Revealer...Redeemer...Guide...and...Coming Lord and King."

32. C.f. Bebbington, 43. Bebbington makes a similar point, but his description of Jewish historical beliefs does not include (at least explicitly) the element of God creating history.

33. See Boer, 73 and Rushdooney, 68.

34. C.f. Boer, 73. This is not to say that all in this school present the past in this way. See Finn, 69-72.

35. *Centrality of Christ*: Liberty University History Department, Biblical Principles; *completing his redemption*: see Finn, 75-76 ("completed").

36. Fea, 5.

metanarrative, an “overarching story” encapsulating every story they can tell.³⁷ Historians write about times during which God was carrying out his story. God has revealed the character in which he works. Historians deal with people. God has revealed the nature of man. Historians write within a universe God created. God has disclosed the purpose and state of that created order. What God reveals in his word, then, may be relevant and instructive to Christian historians. It sheds light on, perhaps, all of their stories’ core elements.

The Christian Historian Has New Life

The word of God is one influence in Christian historians’ work. Another influence particular to Christian historians – and an aspect of reality the word of God enables them to grasp – is their new life in Christ. Part of this is identity. They have a relationship with the LORD, the God who “is love” (1 John 4:8). He is their God, their redeemer, and their Father. They belong to him and are “beloved children” (Ephesians 5:1, English Standard Version) as well as “fellow heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17, ESV). They have “the Holy Spirit of God, by whom [they] were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30, ESV). So they have “hope of eternal life” and can hope in God’s daily faithfulness.³⁸

Another part of a Christian’s new life, given by God, is purpose.³⁹ For example, God redeems people “that [they] may proclaim [his] excellencies” (1 Peter 2:9-10, ESV). He has

37. *Metanarrative...every story*: Timothy Paul Jones in Live the Adventure Radio, “The Worldview of ‘Star Wars’ (Interview with Seminary Professor Timothy Paul Jones),” (podcast) *War of the Worldviews*, December 13, 2017, 3:00-3:17; 4:29-4:41. Accessed November 3, 2019, <https://www.livetheadventureletter.com/podcasts/the-worldview-of-star-wars-interview-with-seminary-professor-timothy-paul-jones/>. Jones’ definition/description of metanarrative also includes “a big story that ties together all of the smaller stories” (3:52-3:56).

38. *Hope of eternal life*: Paul used this phrase, i.e. Titus 3:7, ESV; *daily faithfulness*: consider Romans 8:28-32, Hebrews 13:8, and Luke 12:22-31.

39. “*New life*” and “*new purpose*,” including reference to and similar wording from 1 Peter 2:9: Kropp.

given his children these commandments: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39, ESV). Within these commandments reside more specific instructions that God gave through his apostles. For example, God’s people are to do everything for his glory (1 Corinthians 10:31), and are to forsake all practices of sin “and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24, ESV). Moreover, Jesus commanded his disciples to “make disciples of all nations” and to “serve one another.”⁴⁰ God, through his word, reveals these things, and the Holy Spirit bears fruit in Christians that enables them to live in this purpose.⁴¹ In their new life in Christ, a Christian has “new life,” which includes hope, and “new purpose,” which includes making disciples. But again, to what extent should such things influence their profession?

Christian Historians: Divergent Professional Beliefs

While what may be thought of as worldviews divide the schools of history, it is more beliefs about the profession that divide Christian’s presentations of history. Jay D. Green articulates and evaluates “five rival versions” of Christian historiography.⁴² His definition of “versions” is somewhat complex: “I do not mean to denote competing Christian ‘schools of interpretation’ or ‘philosophies history [sic],’ but rather the varied ways that faith is exercised, reflected, or demonstrated amid efforts to reconstruct the past.”⁴³ Green also affirms that the categories can overlap, may share historians, and have internal variety of both implementation

40. “*Make...nations:*” Matthew 28:19, ESV; “*serve one another:*” 1 Peter 4:10; Galatians 5:13, John 13:14.

41. See Galatians 5:22.

42. Jay D. Green, *Christian Historiography: Five Rival Versions*, Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015.

43. Green, 2.

and results.⁴⁴ Moreover, they are not “exhaustive.”⁴⁵ For example, although he focuses on these versions, he also acknowledges positions of skepticism, indifference, and “antagonism” concerning “the question of ‘faith and history.’”⁴⁶ Certain points of Green’s focus categories (in order) are summarized below.⁴⁷

“Historical study that takes religion seriously” includes Christians who relate to religious topics in two ways. First, they prefer working with them over other topics. Second, they “are more prone to treat past religious beliefs and experiences as...something real.”⁴⁸ Such empathy is in contrast to the trend “for well over a hundred years” of studying religion in a “secular ‘scientific’” way.⁴⁹ Some historians Green gives as exemplifying this kind of Christian study are Lewis W. Spitz, Samuel S. Hill, and David Emmons. Emmons wrote *The Butte Irish*, over which, writes Green, he was “gently criticized for treating his subjects with a ‘hermeneutic of affection’.”⁵⁰

“Historical study through the lens of Christian faith commitments” is a biblical worldview approach to the profession.⁵¹ According to Green, the historians W. Stanford Reid, M.

44. Green, 2-3.

45. Green, 3.

46. Green 4-6. Green uses the words skepticism, indifference, and antagonism, but in different tenses.

47. Partially designed to mirror the section on historical schools, this paragraph bears similarities in order and general content to Finn’s introduction of the broad “schools of history” (44).

48. Green, 11.

49. Green, 7, 12.

50. Green, 34. From Green, it seems Emmons’ “subjects” (above) were Christian. It seems that Green draws the quote from the following: David Emmons, “Homecoming: Finding a Catholic Hermeneutic,” in *Faith and the Historian: Catholic Perspectives*, edited by Nick Salvatore, 49-81. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.

51. Green, 37.

Howard Rienstra, Marsden again, and Mark Noll are among those who have operated in this category.

“Historical study as applied Christian ethics” is that which makes moral judgments in history. Biblical writers like the authors of 1 and 2 Kings and the book of Hebrews do so.⁵² For example, “And [Jehoiakim] did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done” (2 Kings 23:37, ESV). Richard T. Hughs and Roger Schultz are other example historians included by Green. Green shows that Schultz advocates for making biblically-based moral judgments.⁵³

“Historical study as Christian apologetic” determines to use history “to defend the [Christian] faith.”⁵⁴ Green gives two categories, dealing with “the historicity of the faith itself” and also the utility of Christianity.⁵⁵ He gives Edwin Yamauchi and John Warwick Montgomery as examples of the first use and others like Alvin J. Schmidt of the second. Yamauchi, notes Green, has written as a historian on Jesus’ resurrection.⁵⁶ He was also interviewed in that role for the book *The Case for Christ*.⁵⁷

“Historical study as search for God” is the name Green gives to providentialist history. This kind of study believes it can “[Narrate] God’s role in the human past” (outside the Bible),

52. Green, 67-68.

53. Green, 80-81.

54. Green, 99. The quote is from Green’s section about apologetics in general.

55. Green, 99; c.f. 122 for utility.

56. Green, 101.

57. Lee Strobel. *The Case for Christ* [Mass Market Edition]. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.

by drawing from the biblical doctrine of providence.⁵⁸ Both Augustine of Hippo and modern-day historian Steven Keillor wrote providentialist history.⁵⁹ In *God's Judgments: Interpreting History and the Christian Faith*, Keillor writes: "Between history's start and finish, God judges in specific events that advance his plan and deal with specific evils."⁶⁰ September 11, 2001 may have been one such judgment, he argues.⁶¹

Biblical Metanarrative

God (Christians believe) revealed his metanarrative through the Bible. Some have used seven to ten "C's" to summarize history in terms of the biblical metanarrative.⁶² This thesis uses eight: Creation, Corruption, Catastrophe, Covenants, Christ, Cross, Church, and Consummation.⁶³ These eight C's encapsulate and to some extent summarize all of history while showing the gospel (good news) and honoring Christ's centrality. They are used below as categories for summarizing a biblical metanarrative view of history.⁶⁴

58. Green, 125; *outside the Bible*: see Green, 129, 144, and Finn, 69.

59. Green, 128, 136.

60. Keillor, 68.

61. Keillor, 60. C.f. Keillor, 200, where he seems to write about God's judgment (as an earlier defined term) in 9/11 more certainly.

62. The "Seven C's of History" originated with Answers in Genesis (see, for example, Ken Ham and Stacia McKeever, "Seven C's of History," May 20, 2004. <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-history/seven-cs-of-history>). Similar lists either acknowledge Answers in Genesis or seem to draw from them. Others, like Finn (73-76), relate the biblical metanarrative using a shorter, yet similar, outline: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

63. Covenant and Church are not of the original 7 C's, but are included in other lists (for example, Tony Ens, "Sharing the '10 C's,'" Northern Canada Evangelical Mission. <http://ncem.ca/stories/sharing-the-10-cs/>). This thesis changes "Covenant" to "Covenants."

64. Ham and McKeever similarly use the "C's" as headings. Content does not necessarily derive from any of the "C's" sources, though Answers in Genesis has likely played some kind of influence, especially in the articulation of the first three C's.

Creation

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1, ESV). God created all things good, including the first human beings, Adam and Eve. These he made “in his own image” (Genesis 1:27, ESV). He gave them what has been called *the dominion mandate*: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over [all its creatures]” (Genesis 1:28, ESV). While God provided food for man through trees and in other plants, he commanded against eating from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”⁶⁵ Disobedience, he warned, would bring death.⁶⁶

Corruption

Being tempted by a serpent, Adam and Eve rebelled against God, disregarding his command. God pronounced judgment on all three.⁶⁷ In addition to having broken their relationship with God through rebellion (sin) – a spiritual death – Adam and Eve faced guaranteed physical death. Both deaths would continue through the human race.⁶⁸ Keillor writes of some aspects of judgment that began with Adam and Eve: “our mortality, the resulting transitory nature of our works and accomplishments and the hard toil required for survival are all God’s general, all-encompassing judgments on fallen humanity (Genesis 3:17-19).”⁶⁹ In some way also, the rest of creation faced a “corruption” (see Romans 8:19-23). The serpent also

65. *Provided...plants*: Genesis 1:29 and 2:4; *commanded against... “tree of the knowledge of good and evil:*” Genesis 3:11, 2:17, ESV.

66. *Disobedience...death*: Genesis 2:17.

67. Keillor’s book, *God’s Judgments*, has helped contribute to a perception of such judgments through the biblical metanarrative.

68. C.f. Romans 5:12, 17; 1 Corinthians 15:22.

69. Keillor, 68. See Genesis 3:16-19 for more aspects of judgment.

received judgment: “The LORD God said to the serpent... I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15, ESV).

Catastrophe

A number of generations passed. Man grew in number, but “every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5, ESV). God “determined to make an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them” (Genesis 6:13, ESV). Judging Noah righteous, God warned him and his family to construct an ark and to enter it along with representatives from all animal kinds.⁷⁰ Then God brought his judgment on the earth through a flood. “He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground.... Only Noah was left, and those who were with him in the ark” (Genesis 7:23, ESV). After rescuing Noah, his family, and the animals with them, God reiterated his command to man to have children “and fill the earth” (Genesis 9:1, ESV).

Covenants

Sometime after the flood, God called Abraham and established an eternal covenant with him. God promised to “make of [him] a great nation” (Genesis 12:2, ESV) and said, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates...” (Genesis 15:18, ESV). Moreover, God promised him, “in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed...” (Genesis 22:17, ESV). God began to fulfil his promise by blessing Abraham with a son. Abraham’s descendants multiplied and became “a great nation” – Israel.

⁷⁰. *Judging Noah righteous*: Genesis 7:1; *warned...constructing an ark*: Hebrews 11:7, ESV reads “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household;” *Enter...kinds*: Genesis 6:18-20 and 7:1.

They became slaves in Egypt. But God delivered them. He established a covenant with Israel through Moses and led them to conquer “the land he swore to give to Abraham....”⁷¹ “Yet,” writes the Psalmist, “they tested and rebelled against the Most High God and did not keep his testimonies” (Psalm 78:56, ESV).

There were times when Israel served the LORD, but they frequently turned to worship other nations’ gods. Even as they did, God continued revealing his plan, through prophets like King David and Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel. He foretold a ruler whom King David called “Lord” (Psalm 110:1, ESV),⁷² a future king from David’s descendants who “shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (Jeremiah 23:5, ESV), a servant of the Lord who would suffer for his people’s sins (Isaiah 53:5, 8), and “one like a son of man” who would receive “dominion and glory and [an eternal] kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him...” (Daniel 7:13-14, ESV). Because of their idolatry and wickedness, God gave Israel into the hands of Assyria and Babylon.⁷³ These nations also fell, and many Israelites returned to their own land. But after a while, Rome expanded its empire around the Mediterranean and many nations, including Israel, fell under its rule.

Christ

Then, during Octavian’s reign, God sent Jesus, the Christ: God incarnate. God did this in love, “that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, ESV). In Jesus, God fulfilled, is fulfilling, or will fulfil his promises of a descendant: Jesus is the

71. Genesis 50:24, ESV.

72. C.f. Matthew 22:41-46.

73. See 1 Chronicles 17:6-20.

descendant of Eve that would kill the serpent, Satan; he is the descendant of Abraham that would bless every nation;⁷⁴ he is the son of David who would reign as king. He is also the servant Isaiah said would die for his people's sins and the "one like a son of man" Daniel saw receive an eternal kingdom.

Cross

Jesus taught and performed miracles, becoming popular in the Palestinian region.⁷⁵ Israelite leaders arrested him and pushed for his death, which they secured under consent from the local Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. In his death, "[Christ] humbled himself" as a sin-offering to restore God's relationship with humanity, to rescue them from God's judgment.⁷⁶ Then, on the day he foretold, Jesus resurrected, and he appeared to his disciples multiple times.⁷⁷ He commanded them to "make disciples of all nations," and he ascended to God's right hand with the promise to return.⁷⁸

Church

After Jesus ascended, he gave his disciples the Holy Spirit, who worked through them to do miracles. The disciples made many more disciples. Moreover, Jesus chose Paul, a persecutor

74. Roger Schultz affirms, "In Jesus, all the nations of the earth are blessed – that's the promise to Abraham." Roger Schultz, "The Christian Philosophy of History" in *The Reformation of History* [Audio Series] (Powder Springs, GA: The American Vision, Inc., 2010), 16:30-37.

75. See, for example, Matthew 4:23-25.

76. "*he humbled himself*:" Philippians 2:8, ESV; *as...with humanity*: e.g.: Romans 3:25, 5:10; 1 John 2:2; *to rescue...judgment*: see Keillor, 17, and Romans 5:9.

77. *Appeared*: see, for example, Matthew 28:9, Luke 24:15, 31, 36, Acts 10:40-41.

78. *Disciples*: Matthew 28:19, ESV; *God's right hand*: Mark 16:19; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; *promise*: Jesus predicted his return multiple times, but even at this time, God sent angels to remind his disciples (see Acts 1:11).

of the disciples, and commissioned him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles.⁷⁹ This Paul did. The Church continued to multiply, despite various persecutions.

Still within “Church,” the current time in history lies between the cross and the last “C”: “consummation,” when Christ Jesus will reign over all nations; ultimately purify and bring his bride, the Church, to live with him in eternity; and finally judge demonic forces and the wicked. In this intermediate time, God is still active, working to “draw all people to [himself].”⁸⁰ While much may remain uncertain about God’s work outside the biblical account and also past the Apostolic Age, certain truths from his word do carry over and can help illuminate this part of God’s metanarrative.⁸¹

Consummation

Christ will return. Satan, his demons, and the wicked “will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:41, 46, ESV). Creation will be redeemed. And the Church will reign with Christ in eternity and worship him forever, “to the glory of God the Father.”⁸²

79. Acts 26:16-17.

80. See John 12:32, ESV; c.f. Keillor, 94: “This Son of Man [Jesus Christ] has an irresistibly attractive power for his love to the death draws people of all nations to him.”

81. The idea that truths carry over is derived from an article including some of Saint Augustine’s thoughts about history, according to Athanasios Papanicolaou, “The Educational Principles of Saint Augustine,” *Theologia* 1, no. 36 (1971): 442, accessed October 22, 2019, http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/press/theologia/material/1971_1_37_Papanicolaou.pdf. See note 91.

82. *Church to reign in eternity*: see Matthew 25:34, 46 and Revelation 22:5; *to the glory of God the Father*: Philippians 2:11, ESV.

Value Judgments in Content

Since it is not possible for historians to write about everything, they must prioritize certain topics or events over others.⁸³ Referencing one author, R. J. Rushdooney wrote that “history has as its mainstream the Messianic purpose of Jesus Christ.”⁸⁴ Roger Schultz, referring to Colossians 1, says, “Now if the Scripture is true and all things have been created for Christ: all thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities, and a historian doesn’t emphasize the person and work and kingdom of Jesus Christ, then the historian has missed the most important part about history.”⁸⁵ Should Christ’s centrality, both in historical importance and in comparison with the creation, affect topic decisions? This represents one possible consideration. Another (the one pursued here) concerns prioritizing aspects of God’s work during this “C” (Church) of history.⁸⁶ It eventually ties back in with Christ’s centrality.

Might one value judgment be to prioritize identifiable acts of God’s providence and miracles? The Bible shows various things God has done, i.e. rescuing righteous Noah, collapsing Jericho’s walls, extending King Hezekiah’s life, staying deadly animals, predicting the future with accuracy, and raising the dead. But what he did outside of his word is more difficult to know. A number of Christian historians see theological or other problems with providentialist

83. According to Finn (65), “[George] Marsden argues his faith affects the topics he chooses to study.” For this and other points he references Marsden’s “What Differences Might Christian Perspectives Make?” in *History and the Christian Historian*, ed. Ronald A. Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 15-16.

84. Rushdooney, 16, referencing Robert Rendall, *History, Prophecy, and God* (London: Paternoster Press, 1954), 62.

85. Schultz, 14:30-53.

86. Topic choice and value considerations here stem, in some way, from a conclusion to an earlier paper, whether or not it is as emphatically true as stated: “Teleological differences between the Christian’s view of history and the view of Carr will lead to major differences in interpretation, focus, and even content.” Joshua Toth, “*What is History? Philosophy Paper*” (HIST-300 class paper, Liberty University, 2018), 3.

history.⁸⁷ For example, Nathan Finn points both to “human finiteness” and to human presuppositions in interpretation.⁸⁸ In discussing the former, he writes “...[W]e do not see into God’s mind and discern God’s ways unless he reveals them to us (Deut. 29:29; Rom. 11:33-36). God has certainly provided us with the ‘big picture’ of history in the Scriptures [biblical metanarrative]. Yet in the case of nonbiblical history, God has not told us how to interpret individual events that occur.”⁸⁹

Redemption as Identifiable Providence?

What if, however, there were some things in nonbiblical history that could be identified as God’s work – based on what God *has* revealed?⁹⁰ For example, might God’s redemption of specific humans fit in this category?⁹¹ This could be exciting, as redemption is part of God’s metanarrative that is being carried out in this “C” of history. To connect this with value judgments, choosing topics of individual redemption accords with the value the biblical metanarrative places on redemption. Writing biographies or other accounts that include such redemption also provides opportunities to point readers to Jesus.

87. Robert Tracy McKenzie, “The Moral of the Story: Writing for Audiences Outside the Ivory Cellar,” *Fides et Historia* 46, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2014), 37; Finn, 69-70.

88. Finn, 69-70.

89. Finn, 69.

90. Keillor ventures toward this by considering the judgments of God.

91. An idea that is likely of foundational standing to considering redemption as identifiable providence in the current era of the biblical metanarrative is found in Athanasios Papanicolaou, 442. The idea lies within his description of how Augustine of Hippo saw history in a Christian education. That idea is that events of history, subsequent to New Testament divine revelation, like Christian martyrdom, fulfill promises of that revelation. Papanicolaou does not seem to mention individual redemption among the examples. But he does mention redemption more generally, or broadly as something to which Augustine pointed. Additionally, Paul Otto connects individual redemption and “God’s providential work.” While he does not seem to be a providentialist, it is unclear whether, as a historian, he would present individual redemptions as such. Paul Otto, “Christian, Providential, or Ecclesiastical?: Charting Christian Perspectives on History,” *Fides et Historia* 46, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2014): 64.

WWII bombardier Jacob DeShazer, though some conceivably could disagree, was redeemed by God through faith in Jesus Christ. The faith he professed, and the life he lived before and after conversion testify to this.⁹² An argument for writing about his story from a providential perspective could be as follows: We know God is working to redeem people. This is what happened. So we have motive and effect. God is the only one who can redeem. So we have necessary cause. Therefore, God as cause can be assumed. So to redeem DeShazer is one way God was working during the Pacific War – not the only way, certainly – but one visible, identifiable way.⁹³

However, while Christians might believe and understand his story to be providential, such a belief is dependent on a biblical worldview. Therefore, explicitly arguing for providence in front of secular readers and hearers may not be beneficial. In other words, audience may affect presentation. For both Christian and secular audiences, perhaps Christian historians could detail events and experiences of “the redeemed of the LORD” (Psalm 107:2, ESV) and include their subjects’ interpretations of redemption, rather than making their own.⁹⁴ In such an event, the audience may be more willing to ponder the implications of what they read.

This method allows for a kind of pointing to Jesus and the gospel. When explaining stories that include Christian conversion, the subjects’ thoughts, beliefs, mindset, and changes in life can be described. The authors of *Return of the Raider: A Doolittle Raider’s Story of War and*

92. The idea of DeShazer’s life testifying to a redemption may derive in some measure from Ron Toth in a personal conversation, summer, 2019.

93. God could be doing a thousand things at once in an event.

94. The idea came from reading parts of *Return of the Raider: A Doolittle Raider’s Story of War and Forgiveness* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2010) which includes a number of long quotes from DeShazer. The text, however, does not shy from showing an/the authors’ belief in at least some of the things DeShazer believed.

Forgiveness include some or all of these in their work on DeShazer. While their intentions may or may not be evangelistic, their book contains the gospel and a case study – if you will – of a man who encountered Jesus. Thus it is possible that God could use this book to draw people, in whole or part, to himself.⁹⁵ To “make disciples” is one of the commands Jesus gave at his ascension. It is then part of a Christian’s “new purpose.” Since presentation of such accounts can be evangelistic, it could be considered a good value judgment for Christian historians to include them in their content choices.

Conclusion

Using historical methods and standards, historians engage in “reconstructing and interpreting the past.” After describing several interpretive schools, this thesis focused on the Judeo-Christian school. Its historians have much in common, things which potentially can influence their work: many biblical beliefs, a “new identity” and a “new purpose.” And they have dissimilarities as well, such as in their positions on providentialism. The biblical metanarrative, summarized in Creation, Corruption, Catastrophe, Covenants, Christ, Cross, Church, and Consummation, is a story God has been and is fulfilling in history. Focusing on “Church,” the time which includes the last nearly two thousand years of past events, this thesis considered value judgments in making content choices. Individual redemption should be taking place in this part of the biblical metanarrative. The bombardier, Jacob DeShazer, arguably serves as an example of being redeemed by the Lord. Such stories that include individual redemption

95. Maybe move to main text: It is important to consider, however, that conversion accounts could also drive someone away from Christ. The Christian in the account may hold an unbiblical belief or beliefs or sometimes act in ways that are not Christ-like. The prospects of using history to evangelize are limited. History cannot replace the Bible; the need will ever exist to compare a Christian’s actions and beliefs with the Bible.

can, conceivably, convey the gospel in the subject's own words. Though Christian historians may focus on many topics, individual redemption stories may be worthwhile for their evangelistic potential.

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